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Overindividuation in Gift Giving: Shopping for Multiple Recipients Leads Givers to Choose Unique but Less Preferred Gifts

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This research examines how the social context in which gifts are selected influences gift choices. Six experiments show that, when givers select gifts for multiple recipients, they tend to pass up gifts that would be better liked by one or more recipients in favor of giving different gifts to each recipient, even when recipients will not compare gifts. This overindividuation does not seem to arise because givers perceive recipients' preferences differently when they consider them together versus separately: although givers' gift selections differ between a one-recipient and multiple-recipient context, their perceptions of which gifts would be better liked do not. Rather, overindividuation seems to arise because givers try to be thoughtful by treating each recipient as unique. Consistent with this, givers are more likely to overindividuate when they are encouraged to be thoughtful. Focusing givers on recipients' preferences reduces overindividuation and can help givers select better-liked gifts.

People are often put in the difficult position of making decisions on behalf of others. Whether making plans for a date or grocery shopping for a household, people not only must consider others' preferences but also must often make decisions for them without their input. Perhaps the most ubiquitous case in which this occurs is gift giving.

Indeed, gift giving can be a challenge: it can be hard to find an affordable item that a recipient is sure to love. Sometimes, this challenge is further compounded by having to choose gifts for multiple recipients at once, as when doing

holiday shopping for a long list of recipients. Having multiple recipients in mind not only means that more gifts are needed but may also change how people select those gifts.

We suggest that people who are selecting gifts for multiple recipients may not necessarily select gifts that are most appropriate for each person in an absolute sense (i.e., what gift might be most liked by each recipient), but rather may select gifts that seem appropriate for each person relative to the others (i.e., what gift might be uniquely suited for one recipient relative to other recipients). For example, consider someone giving magazine subscriptions to two friends, both of whom are avid sports fans, but one who has a secondary interest in technology. Instead of getting both recipients a sports magazine, the giver might select a sports magazine for the friend who likes only sports and a technology magazine for the friend who likes both sports and technology, even though the second friend might have preferred a sports magazine and even though the giver might have given that friend a sports magazine if he were the only recipient. Or, consider someone giving magazine subscriptions to two sports fans, one who has a secondary interest in technology and one who also likes to travel. In this case, the giver might even pass up the better-liked sports magazine for both recipients and instead select a technology magazine for the first friend and a travel magazine for the second. Thus, givers may consider recipients in relation to each other, selecting gifts by deciding which recipient is the big-

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gest sports fan, which is the most avid reader, or which has the best sense of humor, rather than by focusing on what each would like the best overall. Such behavior can lead to “overindividuation,” as givers may pass up gifts that they believe would be better liked by one or more recipients in favor of giving different gifts to each recipient.

Before turning to the empirical work, we first briefly review the literature on social decision making, namely how people make choices on behalf of others, and the literature on how such decisions may be influenced by the social context in which they are made. We then consider two reasons why, when choosing gifts for multiple others, overindividuation may arise.

DECISION MAKING IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

In this article, we examine how people make decisions for others (i.e., when buying gifts for them), and we examine how those decisions are shaped by the social context in which they are made (i.e., by who else is on the giver’s mind). Our research thus builds upon recent research that has shown that specific aspects of the social context can affect consumption and purchase. For example, consumers make different choices when they are shopping with another person versus alone (Kurt, Inman, and Argo 2011), when their choices are public versus private (Ariely and Levav 2000; Ratner and Kahn 2002), when they observe others’ consumption choices before choosing (McFerran et al. 2010), and when they intend to consume products publicly (Berger and Ward 2010; Graeff 1998). They also evaluate products differently when they compare others’ decisions to their own (Dahl, Argo, and Morales 2012) and when they share the consumption experience with others (Bhargave and Montgomery 2013). We suggest that consumers’ choices may be affected not only by the people who are actually accompanying them but also by the people who are only figuratively accompanying them, in their minds.

Our work also builds upon recent research that has explored how people make choices on behalf of others and how those choices compare to choices made for the self (Beisswanger et al. 2003; Garcia-Retamero and Galesic 2012; Jonas, Schulz-Hardt, and Frey 2005; Kray 2000; Laran 2010; Lu, Xie, and Xu 2013; Polman 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Polman and Emich 2011; Pronin, Olivola, and Kennedy 2008; Stone and Allgaier 2008; Stone, Yates, and Caruthers 2002; Ubel, Angott, and Zikmund-Fisher 2011; Zikmund-Fisher et al. 2006). One relevant theme that emerges from this work is that differences in perspective between decision makers and the “others” for whom they are deciding can lead decision makers to make choices that differ from what those others would have chosen for themselves—and that are, at times, suboptimal.

Specifically, in the domain of gift giving, givers are much more aware of the inputs into their gifts than are recipients, and this perspective difference can lead givers to invest resources into gifts that fail to have the intended effect on

recipients. For example, although givers believe that investing more thought or money into a gift will increase recipient appreciation, recipients are generally unaffected by the thought or money invested (Flynn and Adams 2009; Zhang and Epley 2012). Furthermore, although recipients appreciate solicited gifts more than unsolicited gifts (Gino and Flynn 2011), givers assume that both solicited and unsolicited gifts will be equally appreciated. More generally, when choosing a gift, givers may show an egocentric bias (Epley et al. 2004), in that they focus too much on information that is available to them but not to recipients and fail to sufficiently consider recipients’ perspectives. In this article, we examine how givers may focus on the other recipients for whom they are simultaneously shopping, information that is available to givers but that may be completely irrelevant to recipients.

OVERINDIVIDUATION IN GIFT GIVING

We specifically suggest that considering multiple recipients may lead people to select gifts that differentiate recipients from each other, rather than gifts that will be liked best. There are at least two reasons why this may occur. The first is that givers may perceive recipients’ preferences differently when they consider them together versus separately: thinking about multiple recipients may trigger social comparisons and may change givers’ views of which gifts recipients would like the most. A very different reason is that, even if givers’ views of recipients’ preferences do not change when they consider them together, a multiple-recipient context may highlight the desire to convey an understanding of each recipient’s unique identity and may change givers’ views about which gifts are the most thoughtful. That is, the multiple-recipient case may prompt givers to use existing differences between recipients to select individuated gifts that acknowledge what makes each recipient special and that therefore feel more thoughtful. We suggest that this latter mechanism, the desire to be thoughtful, drives overindividuation.

Perceptual Reasons for Differentiating Recipients

One reason why givers may give different gifts when considering recipients jointly, versus in isolation, is that the multiple-recipient context may change givers’ perceptions of recipients’ preferences. Consistent with this possibility, past research shows that considering stimuli together versus separately can highlight attributes that are easily comparable and can lead to preference reversals (Bazerman, Loewenstein, and White 1992; Bazerman et al. 1994; Hsee 1996, 1998; Hsee et al. 1999; Hsee and Zhang 2004). People sometimes choose options that they end up enjoying less because they fail to recognize that their preferences when considering the alternatives together (e.g., in a store) may differ from their preferences when experiencing the chosen option independently (e.g., in their living room; Hsee and Zhang 2004). For example, participants who compared a 15-gram chocolate to a 5-gram chocolate overestimated the additional

enjoyment they would get out of the 15-gram chocolate, compared to participants who experienced only one of these rewards. Consequently, a majority of participants chose to participate in a negative task with the larger chocolate reward over a positive task with the smaller chocolate reward, apparently assuming that the pleasure from the extra chocolate would outweigh the displeasure from the task. However, participants who only experienced the negative task with the larger chocolate rated the total experience as worse than did those who experienced only the positive task with the smaller chocolate. Thus, comparisons made salient in the joint-evaluation case led to decisions that proved worse for people's isolated experiences.

Likewise, juxtaposing recipients may highlight differentiating features of each recipient's preferences, making certain gifts temporarily seem more appropriate than they would seem in isolation. Consider again a person selecting gifts for two friends who are both avid sports fans, one who has a secondary interest in technology and the other who occasionally travels. When considering these recipients together, the giver may focus disproportionately on the differentiating aspects of each recipient's preferences and overestimate the extent to which the first friend would like a technology magazine and the second friend would like a travel magazine. In contrast, when considering either recipient individually, the giver may be more likely to focus on each recipient's primary interest and predict that each would like a sports magazine most. In sum, the context in which givers select gifts (joint evaluation) may distort their views of what the best-liked gift might be.

Differentiating Recipients Seems More Thoughtful

Alternatively, overindividuation may arise because, although givers' perceptions of recipients' tastes do not change in the multiple-recipient setting, their views of which gifts are most thoughtful may change. When givers select a gift for one person, the gift that the recipient will like the best may seem like the most thoughtful one. However, when givers must select gifts for multiple people, other considerations may become salient and may change which gifts seem most thoughtful. In particular, it may seem more thoughtful to give individuated gifts that convey an understanding of each recipient's unique identity than to give less personalized gifts, even if those less personalized gifts may be liked better overall. This seems especially likely to be an issue when one gift may be best liked by multiple people: givers may (rightly or wrongly) feel that getting the same gift for multiple recipients is "taking the easy way out," and they may individuate their selections in an attempt to be more thoughtful. Givers may lose sight of the fact that recipients would rather receive the item that they like best over an item that individuates them from another recipient who happens to simultaneously be on the giver's mind. Givers may also lose sight of the fact that individuation may not be necessary if recipients will not compare gifts or will

not be aware that other recipients even exist. Givers may thus egocentrically focus on their own perspectives (e.g., "This gift seems thoughtful *to me* because I know that it is uniquely appropriate for this particular recipient") rather than the recipient's perspective (e.g., "This gift will seem thoughtful *to my recipient* because it is what she would like the most").

In support of this view, researchers have suggested that givers want to select gifts that acknowledge what makes a recipient special, in large part because doing so shows that they know and understand the tastes, preferences, and identity of the recipient (Belk 1996; Schwartz 1967). Gifts that successfully convey this understanding can strengthen the relationship between the giver and recipient (Mauss 1924), and gifts that do this unsuccessfully can offend the recipient, embarrass the giver, and undermine the relationship (Sherry 1983; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993; Wooten 2000). Indeed, evidence suggests that givers at times gravitate toward distinctive gifts: for example, givers buying a gift for a friend who is both an avid skydiver and an avid tennis player are more likely to give a book on skydiving than on tennis because the former is more distinctive (Nelson and Miller 1995). In addition, givers are willing to pay more for a customized product designed for someone else than for themselves, suggesting that they place special value on personalization in gift giving (Moreau, Bonney, and Herd 2011).

We suggest that considering multiple gift recipients simultaneously may highlight these individuation motives and lead givers to focus on being thoughtful by treating each recipient as unique. Givers may select different gifts for different people not because they perceive recipients' preferences differently when they are presented together, but rather because they think it is more thoughtful to give different, individuated gifts to each person. Returning again to our example, even if the giver is aware that both recipients would like a sports magazine best, he might nonetheless choose the technology and travel magazines because treating each recipient as unique feels more thoughtful. In sum, we predict:

- H1:** Givers who are selecting gifts for multiple recipients (vs. a single recipient) are more likely to overindividuate gifts, that is, to pass up better liked gifts for one or more recipients in favor of giving different gifts to each recipient.
- H2:** Givers overindividuate gifts in an attempt to be thoughtful and are thus more likely to overindividuate when they try to be especially thoughtful.

PILOT EXPERIMENT: WHAT ARE GIVERS' MOTIVES?

Although we suggest that the process of giving to multiple recipients may highlight the motive to convey an understanding of each recipient's unique identity, it is worth considering whether givers think that doing so is more impor-

tant, overall, than giving a gift that will be liked the best by the recipient. Thus, we conducted a pilot experiment ($N = 84$) via Amazon Mechanical Turk in which we asked participants to rate how important various considerations were when choosing gifts on a scale from 1 = not at all important to 7 = extremely important. We manipulated between subjects whether participants were asked to imagine choosing gifts for one or multiple recipients. As table 1 shows, collapsed across conditions, givers rated "choosing a gift that the recipient will like the most" more important than any other consideration (all $p < .01$). The rated importance of these considerations did not vary based on whether givers imagined choosing gifts for a single recipient or multiple recipients (all $p > .05$).

Thus, even in a multiple-recipient context, people consider giving the most-liked gift to be the most important criterion—certainly a more important criterion than giving a differentiated gift. However, when faced with the actual prospect of selecting gifts for multiple recipients, people may lose sight of this priority, especially if selecting the most-liked gift would lead to selecting the same gift for more than one person. People in such a setting may feel a tension between giving the best-liked gift and giving what seems like the most thoughtful gift, and this may lead some of them to select gifts that differentiate recipients.

Of course, there are situations in which it truly is important to give gifts that are unique to each recipient. When recipients will compare gifts, it may be important for a giver to distinguish recipients who vary in relationship type and closeness, both to signal relational intimacy and to communicate to recipients how much they are valued (Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth 2004). In such cases, giving identical gifts to multiple recipients may be seen as impersonal and may undermine the degree to which the gifts convey the giver's special understanding of each recipient.

However, we focus on situations in which it is clear to givers that the recipients are unlikely to compare gifts. This is likely to be the case when the recipients are individuals from different social circles who are unacquainted with one another: friends from different stages in life, friends who share different interests, friends who live in different locations, family members who do not know one's friends, and colleagues who know neither one's friends nor family, to name a few. In such cases, gifts that are better in an absolute sense are likely to be better liked than gifts that are better on a relative dimension. This is especially true because the gift that is relatively better suited to a particular recipient is inherently dependent on the others to whom the recipient is compared. If our predictions are supported, then the gift that a recipient receives will depend on who else happens to be on the giver's mind, and givers who try to select a gift that is uniquely appropriate for a particular recipient relative to others may underweight other important aspects of a gift, such as how much the gift will be liked.

TABLE 1

RATED IMPORTANCE OF GOALS IN GIFT GIVING	
Goal	M (SD)
Choosing a gift that the recipient will like the most	6.38 (.79)
Choosing a gift that seems thoughtful	6.11 (.88)
Choosing a gift that conveys how well I understand the recipient	5.99 (1.02)
Choosing a gift that is uniquely personalized to the recipient	5.56 (1.38)
Choosing a gift that the recipient would have chosen for herself/himself	5.54 (1.21)
Choosing a gift that the recipient will use often	5.43 (1.20)
Choosing a gift that costs the right amount	5.07 (1.52)
Choosing a gift that is different from what I have given to other people	4.61 (1.50)
Choosing a gift that I myself would like	3.48 (1.75)

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Six experiments explore how the social context in which a gift is selected affects gift selections. Experiment 1 tests hypothesis 1, examining whether givers overindividuate when selecting gifts for multiple recipients, that is, whether they pass up better-liked gifts in favor of unique gifts. It also examines whether givers overindividuate despite believing that the chosen gifts will be less well liked. Experiment 2 further examines hypothesis 1, exploring whether overindividuation extends to real gift decisions and persists even when givers believe that recipients will not compare gifts.

Experiments 3–5 test hypothesis 2, examining the competing explanations for overindividuation. Experiment 3 suggests that overindividuation does not happen primarily because givers' views of recipients' tastes change when recipients are considered jointly. Experiment 4 shows that overindividuation is exacerbated when givers put extra thought into their selections, consistent with the hypothesis that overindividuation may be rooted in an attempt to be thoughtful. Experiment 5 suggests that overindividuation is not simply due to a preference for variety in and of itself. Finally, experiment 6 explores how givers may be nudged to select gifts that may be better appreciated.

EXPERIMENT 1: SELECTING UNIQUE BUT LESS APPEALING GIFTS

Experiment 1 tested hypothesis 1, that givers who are selecting gifts for multiple recipients, instead of a single recipient, may pass up items that would be better liked by one or more recipients in the service of selecting individuated items. In this study, givers selected a birthday card for one recipient (Rob or Pete) or two unacquainted recipients (Rob and Pete). In a picture, Rob was shown laughing, suggesting that he had a better sense of humor than Pete, who was simply shown smiling. Four cards were available; pretesting showed that one card was considered much fun-

nier and was better liked than the others. We predicted that givers in the one-recipient conditions would choose the better-liked funny card regardless of who the recipient was. However, in the two-person condition, we predicted that, rather than get both recipients the same card, givers would tend to get different cards for each friend and would get the better-liked funny card for Rob (who was shown laughing) but not for Pete. Thus, we predicted that givers would over-individuate by selecting a different but less appealing card for Pete.

Method

Participants. Undergraduates ($N = 67$) at the University of Florida participated in exchange for extra course credit.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: participants were asked to imagine that they had a friend named Rob, a friend named Pete, or two friends (Rob and Pete) whose birthdays were coming up, and that they had decided to mail their friend(s) a birthday card. In the two-recipient condition, the order in which Rob and Pete were presented was counterbalanced, and to suggest that recipients were unlikely to compare cards, the instructions stated, "Pete and Rob live in different cities from each other and from you."

The recipients' Facebook profiles were provided to convey that each had a sense of humor and to provide individualizing information about the friends. Rob listed *Old School*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, and *Dodgeball* among his favorite movies, and Pete listed *The Hangover*, *Happy Gilmore*, and *Zoolander*. Rob was pictured laughing, to suggest that he had an especially good sense of humor. Pete was simply pictured smiling. A pretest on 45 undergraduates at the same university confirmed that the majority (76%) perceived Rob as having a better sense of humor than Pete when asked to choose between the two ($\chi^2(1, N = 45) = 11.76, p = .001$).

Participants were told that there were four available birthday cards. In the two-recipient condition, the instructions stated, "You may select different cards for each friend or the same card for both friends." The target card was pretested to be funnier and better liked than the other cards. This funny card had the message "[Front] Happiness is like peeing in your pants. Everyone can see it, but only you can feel its warmth. [Inside] It's your birthday. Let your happiness show." The other cards were a sarcastic card with the message "[Front] It could be worse, you could be dead. [Inside] happy birthday," a card with an image of bubbles with the message "[Front] celebrate. [Inside] the happiest of birthdays," and a card with an image of a fish and the message "[Front] Happy birthday. [Inside] You're one of a kind."

In a pretest, 40 undergraduates at the same university were asked to rate how funny the cards were on a scale from 1 = not at all funny to 7 = very funny. Participants rated the funny card as funnier ($M = 5.15$) than the sarcastic card ($M = 3.62; t(39) = 3.69, p = .001$), the bubble card ($M = 1.35; t(39) = 15.45, p < .001$), and the fish card ($M = 1.68; t(39) = 13.21, p < .001$). Eighty-three percent of participants rated the funny card as equally or more funny than any of the other cards.

In another pretest, 40 undergraduates at the same university were asked to imagine receiving several birthday cards and to rate how much they liked each on a scale from 0 = not at all to 5 = very much. Pretest participants liked the funny card substantially more ($M = 3.75$) than the sarcastic card ($M = 1.68; t(39) = 5.56, p < .001$), the bubble card ($M = 2.04; t(39) = 6.26, p < .001$), and the fish card ($M = 1.88; t(39) = 6.25, p < .001$). Eighty-five percent of participants liked the funny card as much or more than the others. Thus, the funny card seems to have been preferred overwhelmingly over the others.

On the last page of the main experiment, participants were asked to choose which birthday card(s) they would get for their friend(s) and to predict how much their friend(s) would like the card(s) they chose for them on a scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 6 = very much.

Participants were just as likely to give the funny card to Rob (who was shown laughing) in the two-person condition as in the one-person condition (67% vs. 75%; $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = .38, p = .54$). Pete also was overwhelmingly likely to receive this card when he was alone, but participants were much less likely to give Pete the funny card in the two-person condition than in the one-person condition (26% vs. 70%; $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 9.03, p = .003$). For this and all other experiments, full choice share data for all gifts appears in table A1 of the online appendix.

Results and Discussion

Despite this, participants recognized that both recipients would enjoy other cards less than the funny card. Participants who selected another card for Rob predicted that he would like the chosen card less than did those who selected the funny card ($M = 4.64$ vs. $M = 5.30; F(1, 43) = 3.95, p = .05, \eta^2 = .08$). This effect was not qualified by an interaction with condition ($F(1, 43) = .03, p = .86, \eta^2 = .001$). Likewise, participants who selected another card for Pete predicted that he would like that card less than did those who selected the funny card ($M = 4.35$ vs. $M = 5.10; F(1, 43) = 7.12, p = .01, \eta^2 = .14$). Again, this effect was not qualified by an interaction with condition ($F(1, 43) = .71, p = .40, \eta^2 = .02$).

Most givers in the one-person condition gave the card that was funnier and better liked regardless of who the recipient was. However, in the two-person condition, most givers gave the funny card to the recipient who was shown laughing, and only a minority gave this card to the other recipient. Instead of giving both recipients the more appealing card, givers overindividuated by giving one recipient a card that was different but less appealing. Givers did this despite recognizing that both recipients were more likely to enjoy the funny card than any of the other cards. This suggests that overindividuation did not arise because participants in the multiple-recipient condition changed their views

of what recipients would like, but rather that they nevertheless tried to select cards that were uniquely appropriate for each individual.

Two conceptual replications support the robustness of this overindividuation tendency (see the online appendix for full descriptions). Experiment 1B explored whether overindividuation would emerge in a different context and whether it could even lead to gift selections that would be less likely to please both recipients. In this study, givers selected a DVD for one recipient or two unacquainted recipients. Both recipients preferred animated movies but had different second-most preferred genres. The available DVDs included movies from many genres but included only one animated title (which could be given to either recipient or to both). Givers were reliably less likely to give either recipient the animated movie when there were two recipients than when there was only one. Givers did this despite believing that the recipients would enjoy an animated movie more than a movie from a different genre.

Experiment 1C examined whether overindividuation would occur even when givers explicitly recognize that recipients do not know each other. In this study, givers selected a book to give to one or two recipients. Givers were told that the recipients neither knew each other nor had any friends in common. Both recipients were described as liking TV shows and movies featuring vampires, and the gift options included a novel about vampires (which could be given to either recipient or to both). Givers were reliably less likely to give either recipient the vampire novel when there were two recipients than when there was only one, even though they thought that each recipient would like the vampire novel best and even though they acknowledged (via a separate measure) that the recipients did not know each other.

Together, these experiments provide converging evidence that givers overindividuate when selecting gifts for multiple recipients. To show that overindividuation extends beyond the hypothetical realm to choices with real consequences, in the next study, participants were invited to select actual gifts for one or two actual friends.

EXPERIMENT 2: OVERINDIVIDUATION IN A REAL-WORLD CONTEXT

Experiment 2 further tested hypothesis 1 by examining whether the tendency to overindividuate gifts for multiple recipients would emerge in a real-world context. In this study, givers selected gift cards for a friend who was a student at their university or for two friends, one who was a student at their university and one who was not. The available gift cards were for Amazon.com (a gift card that was pretested to be the most well liked), the university bookstore (a gift card that was uniquely appropriate for a student at the university but that was less well liked), or Play It Again Sports. We predicted that givers in the one-recipient condition would choose the better liked Amazon.com gift card for their recipient (who was a student at their university). However, we also predicted that givers in the two-

person condition would tend to get different gift cards for each friend and would get the better-liked Amazon.com gift card for the recipient who was not a student at their university and the uniquely appropriate but less well liked university bookstore gift card for the recipient who was. That is, rather than get both recipients the more appealing gift, givers in the two-recipient condition would overindividuate by giving one recipient a uniquely appropriate but less appealing gift.

Method

Participants. Undergraduates ($N = 227$) at the University of Cincinnati participated in exchange for course credit.

Procedure. Participants were invited to get a head start on their holiday shopping by picking out \$25 gift cards for one or two friends. Participants were told that one participant in the study (whoever came closest to guessing the correct number of jelly beans in a jar) would have their chosen gift card(s) sent to their intended recipient(s) in time for the holidays.

Participants were first instructed to choose their recipient(s) and write out the first name of their recipient(s). Participants in the one-recipient condition were told that the recipient should be a friend who was a student at their university. Those in the two-recipient condition were told that recipient 1 should be a friend who was a student at their university and that recipient 2 should be a friend who was not a student at their university.

Then, on the same page, participants were invited to select which of three \$25 gift cards they would like to give their friend(s) for the holidays, making a separate choice for each friend. All participants were told, "Try to be thoughtful—that is, put some time and thought into your choice(s)!" The available gift cards were for Amazon.com, the university bookstore, or Play It Again Sports. A pretest among students at the same university ($N = 185$) showed that most students (74%) liked the Amazon.com gift card best, 23% liked the university bookstore gift card best, and only 3% liked the Play It Again Sports gift card best. At the end of the task, participants in the two-recipient condition were asked to indicate whether or not they thought their recipients would compare the gifts they received.

Results and Discussion

The tendency to overindividuate gifts for multiple recipients extended to these gift decisions with real consequences and occurred even among givers who believed that the recipients would not compare gifts. Most givers in the two-recipient condition (81%) selected the better-liked Amazon.com gift card for the recipient who was not a student at their university. However, although 72% of givers in the one-recipient condition selected this gift card for the recipient who was a student at their university (and 24% chose the university bookstore gift card), only 55% of givers in the two-recipient condition did so (and 43% chose the uni-

versity bookstore gift card; $\chi^2(1, N = 227) = 6.60, p = .01$). In other words, in the two-recipient condition, givers overindividuated by giving the recipient who was a student at their university a gift card that was less appealing but uniquely appropriate for that recipient. Overindividuation emerges even if we restrict our analysis to those who thought that the recipients would not compare gifts (72% vs. 51%; $\chi^2(1, N = 210) = 9.82, p = .002$), suggesting that overindividuation is not simply due to concerns about recipients comparing gifts. A replication conducted at a different university corroborated these results (see the online appendix for a full description).

Having established that givers who are shopping for multiple recipients are more likely to pass up gifts that would be better liked in favor of gifts that are unique to each recipient (hypothesis 1), we next examine why overindividuation occurs (hypothesis 2). One possibility is that givers may perceive recipients' tastes differently when they consider them together versus separately. Another possibility is that, even if givers' perceptions of recipients' tastes do not change, givers may nonetheless differentiate gifts because it feels more thoughtful to select gifts that acknowledge what makes each recipient unique. Experiments 3 and 4 examine these mechanisms.

EXPERIMENT 3: DO GIVERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RECIPIENTS' TASTES CHANGE?

Experiment 3 examined a perceptual account for why givers favor unique gifts over better-liked gifts when shopping for multiple recipients: juxtaposing recipients may change givers' views of what recipients would most prefer. In this study, givers either chose a gift for one person, chose a gift for two people, or considered two people but chose a gift for only one of them. If givers overindividuate because they perceive recipients' preferences differently when they are presented together versus separately, then givers who consider two people but only choose a gift for one of them should behave like those who choose a gift for two people: they should pass up better-liked gifts in favor of individuated gifts because they are seeing and comparing two individuals simultaneously. In addition, we manipulated whether participants gave an item or predicted which item the recipient(s) would choose for themselves. If givers perceive recipients' preferences differently when they are presented together, then predictions of what recipients would choose for themselves should mimic gift selections and should differ when two recipients are considered instead of one.

Method

Participants. Participants ($N = 168$) were recruited to complete an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were permitted to participate. The surveys took about 2 minutes to complete, and partic-

ipants were compensated with \$0.15 credit toward Amazon.com products.

Design. Participants were asked to imagine that they had a cousin (Steph) or two cousins (Steph and Sarah). Participants were randomly assigned to choose a DVD for Steph (*alone* condition), to consider both cousins but only choose a DVD for Steph (*alongside* condition), or to choose DVDs for both cousins (*both* condition). In addition, we manipulated between subjects whether participants gave a DVD or predicted which DVD the recipient(s) would choose for themselves, leading to a 3 (recipient presentation: alone, alongside, or both) \times 2 (choice mode: give or predict) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were told to imagine that they do not see their cousin(s) very often, so they keep up with her (them) on Facebook. Participants were then told to examine their cousin's (cousins') Facebook profile(s) and take note of things like her (their) hometown(s) and favorite movies. Participants in the *alone* condition were asked to consider Steph's profile. Then, they read that Steph's birthday was coming up. Participants in the *alongside* and *both* conditions saw profiles of Steph and Sarah and were asked to consider both. Then, participants in the *alongside* condition read that Steph's birthday was coming up, and participants in the *both* condition instead read that both Steph and Sarah's birthdays were coming up.

The recipients' favorite movies were provided via their Facebook profiles. Sarah's favorite movies included only animated movies, and Steph's favorite movies included five animated movies and two sci-fi/fantasy movies. The available DVDs included 10 movies categorized into six genres: one family/animated movie (*Up*), two sci-fi/fantasy movies, two thrillers, three comedies, one action/adventure movie, and one romance. To suggest that recipients were unlikely to compare gifts, participants who saw both cousins read that one was from their mother's side of the family and the other was from their father's side.

Next, participants in the *give* conditions read that they had decided to give their cousin(s) a DVD as a gift (DVDs as gifts) and were asked which DVD(s) they would give the recipient(s). Participants in the *both* condition were explicitly told that they could give the same DVD to both recipients or different DVDs to each. Participants in the *predict* condition read that they had decided to give their cousin(s) a gift certificate for a DVD (gift certificates for DVDs) and were asked which DVD(s) they thought the recipient(s) would choose. Finally, on a separate page, participants were asked to predict how much their cousin(s) would like each of the DVDs on a scale ranging from 1 = very little to 7 = very much.

Results and Discussion

Recall that both Sarah and Steph mainly liked animated movies, but Steph had a secondary interest in sci-fi/fantasy movies. Thus, when participants considered Steph alone, we

predicted that an animated movie would seem like a good choice for her. However, when participants had to choose gifts for both Steph and Sarah, we predicted that Sarah (who did not have a secondary genre) would be likely to receive an animated movie, and recipients would select something different (e.g., a science fiction movie) for Steph.

Indeed, as shown in figure 1, when choosing which DVD to give, givers differed in how likely they were to choose *Up* for Steph based on condition ($\chi^2(2, N = 84) = 15.21, p < .001$). A contrast analysis (Rosenthal and Rosnow 1985) indicated that givers were less likely to give Steph *Up* when they selected gifts for both Steph and Sarah (43%) than when they considered Steph alone (86%) or considered both Steph and Sarah but then selected a gift for Steph only (82%; $z = 3.88, p < .001$). Thus, givers in the two-recipient condition were much more likely to overindividuate by giving Steph a DVD that was not from her favorite genre.

However, when predicting which DVD the recipients would choose for themselves, givers predicted that Steph would choose *Up* for herself regardless of condition ($\chi^2(2, N = 84) = .42, p = .81$): 79% of participants predicted that Steph would choose *Up* when they predicted only Steph's choice; 75% of participants predicted that Steph would choose *Up* when they predicted both Steph and Sarah's choices; 82% of participants predicted that Steph would choose *Up* when they considered both Steph and Sarah but predicted only Steph's choice.

Givers recognized that Steph would enjoy other DVDs less than *Up*. Participants who selected another DVD for Steph predicted that she would like that DVD less than did participants who selected *Up* ($M = 8.63$ vs. $M = 9.57$; $F(1, 155) = 15.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$). Predicted liking was not affected by the *alone*, *alongside*, or *both* manipulation ($F(2, 155) = 1.08, p = .34, \eta^2 = .01$), by the *giving* or *predicting* manipulation ($F(1, 155) = .64, p = .43, \eta^2 = .004$), or by any interaction between these factors (all $p > .05$).

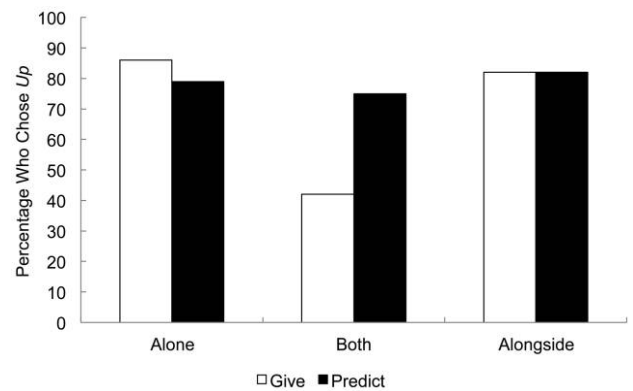
Our findings suggest that overindividuation does not arise because recipients appear to have different tastes when they are presented together instead of alone. Although givers predicted that the target recipient would choose a movie from her preferred genre regardless of condition, participants were nevertheless less likely to give her a movie from that genre when they selected gifts for two people compared to when they considered her alone or considered two people but chose only for the target. Next, we examine an alternative possibility for why overindividuation arises: givers might differentiate gifts for multiple recipients in an effort to be thoughtful.

EXPERIMENT 4: ARE GIVERS TRYING TO BE THOUGHTFUL?

Whereas experiment 3 suggested that overindividuation does not arise for perceptual reasons, experiment 4 investigated hypothesis 2, that this effect might instead be driven by a desire to be thoughtful. As we suggested earlier, the

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE CHOOSING THE BEST-LIKED MOVIE (*UP*), EXPERIMENT 3



gift that seems most thoughtful may differ between the single-recipient and the multiple-recipient contexts. When there is just one recipient, the gift that the recipient will like the best may seem like the most thoughtful one. However, in the multiple-recipient case, it may feel impersonal or less thoughtful to give the same gift to two people, even if such gifts might be liked best and even if recipients will not compare gifts. Thus, there may be tension between the best-liked and the most thoughtful gift in the multiple-recipient case that does not exist in the single-recipient case. Despite givers saying in the abstract that their highest priority is to maximize recipient liking, this tension may lead some givers to pass up better-liked gifts for individuated gifts in an effort to be thoughtful.

Indeed, an exploratory experiment (see the online appendix for a full description) suggested that givers' perceptions of which gift seems most thoughtful differ between the single-recipient and multiple-recipient contexts. Participants imagined that they were shopping for a recipient who had a main interest in animation and a secondary interest in science fiction. Participants indicated whether an animated movie or sci-fi/fantasy movie would be more thoughtful, would be better suited to the recipient, and would convey a better understanding of the recipient. Half of the participants considered this choice in isolation, and the other half considered this choice in the context of having already chosen to give the animated movie to another friend. When only one recipient was considered, almost all givers thought that the animated movie would be more thoughtful, better suited to the recipient, and better at conveying an understanding of the recipient than the sci-fi/fantasy movie. However, when givers were also giving the animated movie to another recipient, about half of the participants considered that very same gift to be less thoughtful, less suited to the target recipient, and worse at conveying an understanding of the target recipient. Instead, the sci-fi/fantasy movie seemed like the more thoughtful choice.

Thus, in experiment 4, we examined whether the desire to be especially thoughtful might motivate givers to pass up better-liked gifts for individuated gifts. Givers were encouraged to make their gift decisions either as thoughtfully and carefully as possible or as quickly and easily as possible. To ensure that participants did in fact put more or less thought into their gift decisions, participants were given a larger or smaller amount of time in which to make their selections. We predicted that participants would be more likely to overindividuate gifts when they put special thought into their gift decisions than when they did not.

Method

Participants. Participants ($N = 71$) completed an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were permitted to participate. The surveys took about 2 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with \$0.15 credit toward Amazon.com products.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine that they were shopping for birthday gifts for their two cousins, Steph and Kate. As in experiment 3, participants read that one of their cousins was on their mother's side of the family, and the other was on their father's side of the family. In addition, they read, "Because your cousins are from different sides of your family, they do NOT know each other nor do they have any friends in common."

Participants were told that, on the next page, they would browse through an assortment of DVDs and choose a DVD to give to each cousin as a birthday gift. They were told that they could select the same DVD for both cousins or different DVDs for each. Participants were encouraged to make their gift decisions either as thoughtfully and carefully as possible or as quickly and easily as possible. To reinforce these instructions, participants were instructed to spend either at least 110 seconds or no more than 40 seconds considering the gift options. (This represented approximately one standard deviation above or below the average amount of time participants spent making their gift decisions in a pretest conducted on Mechanical Turk.) Specifically, participants read the following instructions:

More-thought condition: IMPORTANT: You want to get each of your cousins something they will like, so you feel like you need to put a considerable amount of time and thought into your gift choices. It is important to you to do your gift shopping as thoughtfully and carefully as possible. After all, it is impossible to overthink decisions such as these! To make sure that you put a considerable amount of time and thought into your gift choices, you will be required to spend AT LEAST 110 seconds considering the gift options.

Less-thought condition: IMPORTANT: You want to get each of your cousins something they will like, but you do not feel like you need to put a whole lot of time or

thought into your gift choices. It is important to you to do your gift shopping as quickly and easily as possible. After all, it is easy to overthink decisions such as these! To make sure that you do not overthink your gift choices, you will be required to spend NO MORE THAN 40 seconds considering the gift options.

On the next page, participants saw a list of each recipient's favorite movies and the available DVDs listed by genre. The cousins' favorite movies and the available movies were the same as in experiment 3: Steph liked mainly animated movies but also liked science fiction movies, and Kate liked only animated movies. Participants were told that the screen would automatically advance when their time was up, and a countdown clock depicted time remaining. Participants read that they would make their final selections on the next page.

On the next page, participants selected a DVD for each recipient. Then, on the final page, participants indicated how much they thought each recipient would like the gift she received. Participants also indicated whether the recipients knew each other. Finally, to examine whether participants were able to comprehend the recipients' preferences equally well across conditions, participants were asked to indicate which of three movies were not listed among each recipient's favorite movies (Steph: *Finding Nemo* [yes], *Return of the Jedi* [yes], and *When Harry Met Sally* [no]; Kate: *Wall-E* [yes], *The Bourne Identity* [no], and *Toy Story* [yes]).

Results and Discussion

Almost all participants comprehended the recipients' preferences regardless of how much time they were given: only three participants did not respond to the comprehension check, and only one participant responded incorrectly. The number of participants who did not respond or responded incorrectly did not vary reliably between the more-thought and less-thought conditions (3% vs. 8%; $\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 1.00, p = .32$).

We predicted that participants would overindividuate more when they put more, versus less, thought into their gift decisions. As predicted, Steph, who mainly liked animated movies but also liked science fiction, was less likely to receive *Up* (the movie from her preferred genre) in the more-thought condition than in the less-thought condition (31% vs. 58%, $\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 5.19, p = .02$). This result holds even if we restrict our analysis to those who correctly indicated that the recipients did not know each other and who correctly comprehended recipients' preferences (31% vs. 67%; $\chi^2(1, N = 62) = 7.78, p = .005$). Kate, who liked only animated movies, was just as likely to receive *Up* in the more-thought condition as in the less-thought condition (86% vs. 86%; $\chi^2(1, N = 71) = .002, p = .96$).

Participants who selected another DVD for Steph predicted that she would like it less than did those who selected the animated DVD ($M = 5.83$ vs. $M = 6.03$), but this difference did not reach significance in this study ($F(1, 64) = .77, p = .38, \eta^2 = .01$). This trend was not qualified

by an interaction with condition ($F(1, 64) = .10, p = .75, \eta^2 = .002$). Participants who selected another DVD for Kate predicted that she would like the DVD less than did those who selected the animated DVD ($M = 5.00$ vs. $M = 6.20$; $F(1, 64) = 15.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$). This effect was not qualified by an interaction with condition ($F(1, 64) = 1.15, p = .29, \eta^2 = .02$). The pattern of results is the same if we restrict our analysis to those who correctly indicated that the recipients did not know each other.

Experiment 4 shows that encouraging givers to put special thought into their gift selections increases overindividuation. Givers who were instructed to select gifts as thoughtfully as possible were more likely to pass up a gift that would be better liked (i.e., bypassing *Up* for Steph) in favor of giving different gifts to each recipient than were givers who were instructed to select gifts as quickly as possible. These findings suggest that givers may, paradoxically, get worse gifts the more they try to be especially thoughtful, as their focus on giving individuated gifts may make them lose focus on getting the best-liked gifts.

EXPERIMENT 5: ARE GIVERS SEEKING VARIETY FOR ITS OWN SAKE?

Apart from thoughtfulness motives, a possible explanation for the overindividuation observed in the present research is that givers may choose a variety of gifts simply because they derive value from making varied rather than consistent choices (Drolet 2002). Already, our data suggest that simple variety seeking is not the only thing driving the overindividuation that we have observed, inasmuch as overindividuation was exacerbated when participants were encouraged to be more thoughtful. One might not expect moderation by thoughtfulness if variety seeking were the main mechanism driving our effects. Nevertheless, experiment 5 more directly examines the possibility that overindividuation is simply due to a preference for variety in and of itself and without regard for recipients' preferences. In particular, we presented participants with recipients who had either the same or different preferences. If givers individuate because they are trying to be thoughtful and are trying to acknowledge what makes each person unique, then participants should primarily individuate gifts when the recipients truly are different and have different preferences. If, however, givers simply prefer to choose a variety of options, then givers might individuate gifts for multiple recipients regardless of whether those recipients have different or the same preferences.

Method

Participants. Participants ($N = 156$) were recruited to complete an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were permitted to participate. The surveys took about 2 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with \$0.15 credit toward Amazon.com products.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine that they had two cousins (Steph and Sarah) whose birthdays were coming up and that they had decided to mail each cousin a DVD. In the different-preferences condition, the Facebook profiles, favorite movies, and available DVDs were the same as in experiment 3. In the same-preferences condition, Steph's favorite movies were identical to Sarah's but were presented in a different order. Participants were asked to select DVDs for their cousins and to then predict how much their cousins would like those DVDs on a scale ranging from 1 = very little to 7 = very much. Finally, at the end of the task, participants were asked to indicate whether or not the recipients knew each other.

Results and Discussion

In the different-preferences condition, both Sarah and Steph mainly liked animated movies, but Steph had a secondary interest in sci-fi/fantasy movies. Our overindividuation effect would entail that Sarah would receive an animated movie and that Steph would receive something different. We predicted that, when Steph and Sarah no longer had different preferences, this individuation effect would be attenuated, such that Steph would now be more likely to receive the animated movie than before.

Indeed, givers were more likely to overindividuate gifts when the recipients had different preferences. The majority of participants gave Steph *Up* when her preferences were the same as Sarah's, but reliably fewer did so when she and Sarah had different preferences (66% vs. 46%; $\chi^2(1, N = 156) = 6.75, p = .009$). This pattern persisted even when we excluded participants who mistakenly thought that Sarah and Steph were acquainted or who skipped this question (65% vs. 47%; $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 5.16, p = .02$). Sarah, who only listed animated movies among her favorites, was equally likely to receive *Up* in either condition (70% vs. 68%; $\chi^2(1, N = 156) = .06, p = .81$). Thus, it does not seem like givers only give different gifts "just for the sake of it" or because they prefer to select a variety. Although variety seeking might account for some of the overindividuation effect, our findings suggest that overindividuation is exacerbated when giving different gifts would allow givers to acknowledge something unique about each recipient.

EXPERIMENT 6: HIGHLIGHTING RECIPIENT LIKING IMPROVES GIFT CHOICES

Whereas experiments 1–5 explored whether and why overindividuation arises, experiment 6 explores how to encourage givers to select gifts that recipients are more likely to enjoy. Although givers in our pilot experiment claimed that "choosing a gift that recipients will like best" was their most important consideration, our findings suggest that givers may lose sight of this goal when they are actually selecting gifts for multiple recipients. Focusing givers' at-

tention on recipient liking may make this goal more salient and may encourage givers to select better-liked gifts. Highlighting the recipients' perspective may also remind givers that recipients, who are unaware of the other recipients, will not have the same context for evaluating the gift (and its ostensible thoughtfulness) that givers have. Thus, in experiment 6, givers selected gifts for two recipients, but half first predicted which items their recipients would choose for themselves. We predicted that givers who first predicted recipients' choices would be less likely to overindividuate and more likely to select gifts that they believed would be better liked by recipients.

Method

Participants. Participants ($N = 73$) completed an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an Amazon Mechanical Turk approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were permitted to participate. The survey took about 2 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with \$0.15 credit toward Amazon.com products.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine that they had two cousins, Steph and Sarah. The cousins' Facebook profiles, favorite movies, and the available movies were the same as in experiment 3. Participants were told that the holidays were coming up soon and that they had decided to mail each cousin a DVD as a gift. To highlight recipient liking, participants in the predict-first condition were instructed, "Please browse through the available DVDs and guess which DVD Steph and Sarah would pick. Keep in mind that they might both pick the same DVD, or they might pick different DVDs." Then, on a separate page, they were instructed, "Please browse through the available DVDs and choose a DVD to give to each of your cousins. You may select the same DVD for both of your cousins or different DVDs for each of them." Participants in the control condition selected gifts without first predicting their cousins' choices.

Results and Discussion

Participants who first predicted what the recipients would choose for themselves recognized that both recipients would prefer *Up*: 79% predicted that Steph would choose *Up*, and 95% predicted that Sarah would choose *Up*. More important, encouraging givers to consider what recipients would choose for themselves reduced the overindividuation tendency for participants to give Steph (who had a secondary interest in science fiction) something other than *Up*. Givers were more likely to give *Up* to Steph in the predict-first condition than in the control condition (76% vs. 54%; $\chi^2(1, N = 73) = 3.93, p = .048$). Givers were just as likely to give Sarah (who only expressed an interest in animated movies) *Up* in the predict-first condition as in the control condition (95% vs. 86%; $\chi^2(1, N = 73) = 1.71, p = .19$).

This study shows that focusing givers' attention on re-

ipient liking, by prompting them to predict what recipients would choose for themselves, can lead givers to select gifts that are more likely to satisfy their goal of giving the best-liked gifts. We found that givers who were selecting gifts for multiple recipients were less likely to overindividuate gifts, and more likely to give DVDs from the recipients' preferred genres, when they predicted which gifts recipients would choose for themselves before making gift selections.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research shows that the social context in which gifts are selected affects gift choices. When people select gifts for multiple recipients versus a single recipient, they pass up gifts that would be better liked in the service of getting different gifts for each recipient. Overindividuation emerged in all six experiments, occurred in both hypothetical and real gift decisions, replicated among different recipients and gifts, and persisted even when givers believed that recipients would not compare gifts.

Across multiple experiments, we present converging evidence to suggest that overindividuation does not arise because givers perceive recipients' preferences differently when they consider them together, but rather because givers attempt to be thoughtful by differentiating recipients. In experiment 1, givers who passed up better-liked gifts in favor of specialized gifts recognized that recipients were less likely to enjoy those individuated gifts. In experiment 3, givers who considered two people but chose a gift only for a target recipient were more likely to choose a gift from the recipient's preferred category than those who selected gifts for both people. Givers also predicted that the target recipient would choose an item from the preferred category regardless of whether they considered recipients together versus separately. Thus, although it is certainly possible that some cases of overindividuation arise because givers perceive recipients' preferences differently when they consider them together, the overall pattern across these experiments points toward another cause for overindividuation. Experiment 5 rules out another possible alternative explanation: variety seeking. Givers were more likely to differentiate gifts when recipients had different preferences than when they had the same preferences, suggesting that the desire to be thoughtful by treating each person as unique has effects above and beyond the desire to choose variety for its own sake.

Our findings suggest that overindividuation arises because givers want to seem thoughtful and to convey their understanding of recipients' unique identities, and because what seems most thoughtful differs between the multiple-recipient case and the single-recipient case. Gifts that seemed especially thoughtful in isolation appeared much less so when another person would also receive that gift, suggesting that many givers think that it is more thoughtful to give individuated (vs. nonindividuated) gifts. Indeed, in experiment 4, encouraging givers to put special thought into their gift selections exacerbated overindividuation.

Although gift givers in our pilot survey reported that getting a gift that would be best liked by the recipient was

most important, givers in our experiments typically made choices that reflected considerations other than the recipients' liking of the available options. In experiment 6, we found that focusing givers' attention on recipient liking improved gift selections.

Theoretical Implications and Directions for Future Research

This research contributes to the study of consumer judgment and decision making by examining how people make decisions for others and how these decisions are influenced by the social context in which they are made. Specifically, this research provides insight into social context effects, egocentrism, and gift giving.

Social Context Effects. The present work demonstrates effects of the social context in which consumers shop by showing that consumers' decisions are affected by how many people they are shopping for, leading to choices that are, at times, suboptimal. Thus, the definition of "social context" can be expanded beyond just the people who are actually accompanying the consumer to the people who are only figuratively accompanying her, in her mind.

Beyond the immediate social context, the broader cultural context in which consumers make decisions is also bound to influence those decisions. The motivation to select gifts that are uniquely suited to recipients is likely to be rooted in social norms and may be moderated by the cultural values and traditions surrounding gift giving. Givers may be more prone to individuate gifts in Western than Eastern cultures since Western values emphasize individualism and Eastern values emphasize conformity (Bond and Smith 1996). Within a given culture, givers may be even more prone to individuate gifts associated with occasions celebrating specific individuals (e.g., birthdays) than those associated with general holidays (e.g., Christmas). Furthermore, given that the desire to differentiate recipients is rooted in the norms of gift giving, it remains to be seen whether it extends beyond the realm of gift giving, for example, to advice giving.

Egocentrism versus Perspective Taking. Our findings add to a growing body of research showing that people tend to be egocentric when making choices for others and that they often fail to recognize that their own perspective may differ from the perspective of those for whom they are choosing. Just as givers overweight the value of the time and money they invest into choosing gifts (information that is salient to them but not to recipients; Flynn and Adams 2009; Zhang and Epley 2012), we find that they also overweight comparisons between recipients who are unaware of each other and who are unlikely to compare gifts. Although past work has expressed pessimism as to whether givers can overcome this giver-recipient perspective gap (Flynn and Adams 2009), our findings suggest a possible solution: encouraging givers to consider what recipients themselves would choose can make salient the recipients' perspectives

and help givers to select gifts that recipients are more likely to enjoy.

Gift Giving. Although researchers in marketing have long been interested in the dynamics of gift giving, prior work on gift giving has been mostly descriptive in nature. This article shows how the social context dictates when the motivational considerations identified by prior work guide givers' choices and illustrates the often ironic consequences of these considerations. We find that the considerations that givers report being most important to them (i.e., choosing gifts that recipients will like the most) do not necessarily map onto the considerations that actually drive their decisions. In addition, well-meaning motives, like the desire to be thoughtful, can have the perverse effect of making givers less likely to choose gifts that please recipients.

In future research, it would be interesting to examine how givers balance the many competing gift-giving motivations, such as the motive to make calibrated distinctions between recipients and the motive to treat equally valued recipients equally (Lowrey et al. 2004). Although givers in our experiments only had the option of horizontally differentiating gifts (i.e., by choosing different items of equal value: e.g., *Up* or *Star Trek*), givers also often have the option of vertically differentiating gifts (i.e., by choosing similar items of differing values: standard or collectors' editions of *Up*). Vertical differentiation provides a means by which givers can distinguish between recipients without resorting to less-liked items, but it is likely to be utilized only under certain circumstances. Whether givers differentiate gifts horizontally or vertically may depend on the relative closeness of the recipients: givers may differentiate horizontally when recipients are equally close to the giver so as to treat each recipient as unique but equally valued, and they may differentiate vertically when one recipient is considerably closer to the giver than the other so as to reflect relational intimacy.

Practical Implications

Gift giving constitutes upwards of \$66 billion in spending annually in the United States (Waldfoegel 2009). And yet, recipients generally value gifts 10% to 33% less than the prices paid by givers, suggesting that approximately \$12 billion is wasted on unwanted gifts each year in the United States and \$25 billion worldwide (Waldfoegel 2009). Thus, gift giving is an important aspect of consumer behavior to understand, and there seems to be room for improvement when it comes to helping consumers give better gifts. This research has practical significance for gift givers and retailers alike by identifying when givers are most likely to pass up gifts that would be better liked and by suggesting interventions for helping givers to choose gifts that may be better appreciated. Retailers who wish to help gift givers select gifts that are less likely to be returned may consider encouraging givers to consider one recipient at a time or providing givers with alternative means of satisfying their individuation motives, such as customization. In addition, as

demonstrated in this research, encouraging gift givers to focus on how much recipients will like potential gifts can lead to gift selections that are more likely to satisfy recipients.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author collected data for studies 1C and 3–6 via Amazon Mechanical Turk between fall 2010 and summer 2012, supervised the collection of data for studies 1, 1B, and 4B by research assistants at the University of Florida Behavioral Lab between spring 2010 and fall 2011, and supervised the collection of data for study 2 by research assistants at the University of Cincinnati Consumer and Marketing Insights Lab in fall 2012. The second author supervised the collection of data for study 2B by research assistants at the University of Florida Behavioral Lab in fall 2012. The first author analyzed the data for all studies, and the first and second authors jointly analyzed the data for study 3.

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