

Is it okay to treat yourself? A brief exploration of self-gifting

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When we think of gift-giving, we tend to think of our family, friends, and coworkers. We think of special events like birthdays or anniversaries which need to be celebrated. We purchase gifts to establish connections and to communicate our feelings to others. But, what about self-gifting? Are we able to purchase gifts for ourselves the same way we do for others? Many research articles have expressed that gifting to others evokes more self-happiness than gifting to oneself. This research paper aims to explore the various notions surrounding self-gifting. We will first reiterate the benefits of gifting to others on the giver's happiness and review the idea of "self-care" within the mainstream media and its importance within the health domain. Then, we will explore the terms self-indulgence, self-nurturance, and self-control when it comes to self-gifting. Lastly, we will look over self-gifting behaviors.

The benefits of gifting to others and self-care

A recent study by O'Brien and Kassirer found that repeated gifting to others provided individuals with more happiness compared to gifting to oneself. This was found to be due to the reinforcement of our social connection (O'Brien, & Kassirer, 2019). Additionally, in terms of health, spending money on others, also known as prosocial spending, was found to have strong positive effects on cardiovascular, demonstrating low blood pressure (Whillans, Dunn, Sandstrom, Dickerson, & Madden, 2016). Both of these studies emphasize the importance and the healthiness of having social connections. This is because we are social beings and we are inherently social.

On the other hand, how about self-care? Self-care has always been present but has become increasingly more popular with the rise of mainstream media. According to the Pew Research Center, millennials were reported to make more improvements to their lifestyle than any generation before them, spending twice as much on self-care products (e.g. exercise and therapy). It was suggested that this was due to the accessibility of the internet with the ability

to ask the internet for self-care strategies (Rennis, McNamara, Seidel, & Shneyderman, 2015). As mainstream as it may seem, self-care is primarily significant to one's physical and mental health. Self-care can be defined as the ability to care for oneself through awareness, self-control, and self-reliance in order to achieve, maintain or promote optimal health and well-being (Martínez, et al., 2021). Having good self-care strategies encourages better coping mechanisms for daily stressors and promotes the idea of self-love. However, a common misconception surrounding self-care is its misunderstanding as self-indulgence.

Self-indulgence, Self-nurturance, and Self-control

According to Merriam-Webster, self-indulgence is defined as an “excessive or unrestrained gratification of one's own appetites, desires, or whim” and nurturance is defined as “affectionate care and attention.” Self-indulgence can be seen through impulsive consumption in which happiness is “quickly” fixed, whereas self-nurturance is the prolonged action of maintaining happiness. This is not to say that we cannot treat ourselves, but there is an emphasis on self-control and moderation. According to Bernecker & Becker, the combination of self-indulgence and self-control guarantees greater outcomes through hedonic goal pursuit as it represents a “largely neglected but adaptive aspect of self-regulation (2021).”

Additionally, Seltzer suggested that our lack of self-nurturance had to do with our belief system. He believed that from childhood, our parents did not nurture us to the amount we craved. He suggested that this, in turn, makes us conclude that we are not worthy of certain attention or things. Thus, to be successful when treating ourselves, we must learn to “see ourselves as worthy of all the things (2008).”

We shouldn't depend only on others when it comes to gifting, and to rather think of it as “a gift from me to myself”. Through self-control and the idea of deservingness within

self-nurturance, we are able to treat ourselves moderately to our happiness and well-being. But what types of self-gifting behaviors are there?

Treating yourself

There are two types of self-gifting behavior: therapeutic and reward self-gifts (Heath, Tynan, & Ennew, 2011). Therapeutic gifts tend to occur after negative events occur to help one feel better, similar to self-medicating, whereas, rewarding gifts tend to occur due to accomplishments revolving around the belief of deservingness. One is not more deserving or healthier than the other but demonstrates the different scenarios we may purchase self-gifts.

Furthermore, there are two other categories of self-gifts within therapeutic self-gifting behavior. The first is escaping self-gifts which is encouraged when one wants to escape a stressor or problem. This helps relax the individual and serves as a distraction. The other is loving oneself self-gifts which are used to strengthen and support an individual's self-esteem. Interestingly, loving oneself self-gifts seems to center itself around our idea of self-nurturance, that we deserve a gift. Yet, escaping self-gifts seems to fall more into self-indulgence, a form of distraction. All forms of self-gifts hold meaning and value that are important to the self, but it is important not to get carried away. The specialness behind gift-giving is its interaction between the recipient and the giver through the gift but if not careful, this could be lost if we were to over-indulge or over-gift ourselves.

Conclusion

We are able to see the importance of gift-giving, especially through social interaction and connection when it comes to gifting to others, as it makes us happier. However, as we start to understand the significance of self-care and the reasons why we treat ourselves, we see that through self-control and self-nurturance that it is okay to treat ourselves. As much as

gifting emphasizes our desire for healthy connections, we need to develop healthy connections with ourselves first through the gift of self-love. Yet, as mentioned towards the end, we must make sure not to confuse treating ourselves with over-indulgence and over-gifting, especially when it comes to certain self-gifting behaviors as this loses the meaning behind the interaction.

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