

The Agony of Gift-receiving

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Abstract

The most prevalent form of prosocial consumer behavior is the process of gift exchange. These processes help prevent individuals from becoming self-centered. On average, Americans spend \$998 on gifts, holiday items, and other expenses. This may indicate altruism, in that gift-givers intend to help others at the cost to the self. While this may resonate with some, others permit selfish motives to influence their choices i.e., using gift-giving as a manipulative ploy. On one hand, for givers who possess altruistic motives, their anxiety around gift-giving stems from the expectation of an exaggerated positive reaction from the receiver to show their appreciation for the giver's effort, and receiving bad gifts angst stems from how valuable the gift will be. On the other hand, there are several possibilities as to why gift-receiving can cause distress: 1.

Unleashing control, 2. Fear of intimacy, 3. Strings attached dilemma, 4. Remorse associated with selfishness, 5. The burden of reciprocation. Furthermore, in extreme cases some experience doronophobia which is an irrational fear of opening gifts. Individuals suffer from feeling deeply uncomfortable opening gifts due to the fear of not knowing what lies inside, making them avoid any situation, object, or even thoughts that could potentially be triggering them to go down that path. Both physical and psychological symptoms are listed to specify when a person has doronophobia. Treatment methods that are perceived to be beneficial are discussed.

Keywords: gift-giving anxiety, gift-giving stress, gift-receiving anxiety, doronophobia, fear

The power imbalance between gift-giving vs gift-receiving

In 2021, US consumers spent on average \$998 on gifts, holiday items, and other expenses (Probasco, 2021). Anxiety around gift-giving is an extensively researched area of human psychology, however gift-receiving? Not as much. In order to understand the importance of giving, it is necessary to account for receiving. The belief that is dignified to give than to receive has been reiterated several times throughout people's lives. To eradicate the thought processes of laser focusing on how to benefit from any situation, gift exchange serves as a safeguard towards becoming self-centered (Amodeo, 2014). The ability to maintain compassion by identifying others' needs, respecting their feelings, and acknowledging those who are less fortunate shields people from the rampant narcissism that encapsulates their lives (Amodeo, 2014).

Everyone has most likely experienced anxiety around gift-giving at least once in their lifetime. This transpires from the feeling of anxiety associated with the whole gifting custom. Gift-giving stress is triggered by the idealistic expectation of the receiver's exaggerated delightful reaction, whereas gift-receiving anxiety emerges from the gift's value and usefulness throughout its subsequent ownership. Yet, that is not the only reason why people on either end experience anxiety. Given that individuals are familiar with receiving gifts, accepting help, and obtaining compliments being used as a means of exploitation, it is difficult to accept them graciously.

Possibilities linked to gift-receiving anxiety

Receiving bad gifts can be a greater burden to carry than gift-giving. Individuals find it immensely difficult to even acknowledge a compliment directed at them causing immense gift-receiving anxiety. They silently struggle when someone extends a kind word or a gift leading one to think am I a bad gift receiver? It is worthwhile to contemplate where and how these

thoughts and feelings surface. People often wonder “why do I feel bad receiving gifts?”. The following are some potential reasons why these feelings may take root (Amodeo, 2014):

1. **Unleashing control.** Receivers may be caught in a susceptible position, wherein they find themselves giving in to the demands of the givers simply because of the obligation to concede, despite experiencing contradictory feelings.
2. **Fear of intimacy.** The practice of gift exchange inadvertently incites an intimacy and connection that is feared by people particularly if they are not ready to further the relationship or simply want to end it.
3. **Strings attached dilemma.** If growing up one was only acknowledged via a gift for their accomplishments, this may be triggered when receiving a gift into adulthood. Therefore, leading people to equate gifts as a source of their actions versus who they really are causes distrust between individuals.
4. **Remorse associated with selfishness.** Receiving has been paralleled with selfishness and shame, making people question whether they really deserve it. Some people have self-esteem issues, so they feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed to be in the middle of such a situation.
5. **Burden of reciprocation.** The uneasy feeling of indebtedness arises when receiving a gift. By presuming that gifts serve as a route for control and manipulation, people already get into self-protection mode from the sense of obligation and reciprocity of opening themselves to the gift.

Doronophobia

There exists a phobia for everything which inadvertently feeds off fear settling into anxiety and possibly depression. It inhibits people's daily activities leading them to put a limit on them. Individuals suffering from phobias intentionally steer clear of putting themselves into situations that could potentially be triggering (Brookins, 2021).

One such phobia is Doronophobia. It is the unfounded fear of opening gifts. The phobia stems from opening gifts wherein they experience a feeling of anxiety opening the gift because it is so uncomfortable. There have no ill-intentions when rejecting gifts but rather dread knowing what they will find inside (Peters, 2019). They possess an irrational fear of the item possibly being used to cause them to harm making it potentially dangerous in their minds (Peters, 2019). Not only do they avoid the situation or objects but in severe cases, the thought processes surrounding it. The individual does not have to even be in the specific situation to experience the symptoms of panic, rather just the fearsome reactions to the thought can induce it (Brookins, 2021). If the problem is not addressed early, it can destruct the social lives of people who are oblivious that they suffer from this condition.

Generally, phobias fall under the category of anxiety disorders. Everyone is unique hence the severity of the phobia varies across individuals. It is not only on holiday occasions and birthdays that these individuals avoid opening a gift but also on packages that arrive in the mailbox even if it does not belong to them (Peters, 2019). Due to the unknown contents of the package, they do not want to spiral into playing the guessing game. There are both physical and psychological symptoms associated with those undergoing doronophobia (Brookins, 2021).

Physical symptoms

- Perspiring
- Shuddering

- Hot flushes or chills
- Shortness of breath or struggling to breathe
- Rapid heartbeat (tachycardia)
- Ache or tightness in the chest
- Nausea
- Headaches and dizziness
- Feeling faint
- Numbness or pins and needles
- Confusion
- Hyperventilation
- Increase in blood pressure

Psychological symptoms

- Fear of losing control
- Fear of collapsing
- Feelings of dread
- Fear of dying
- Fear of harm or sickness
- Remorse, disgrace, self-blame
- Retracting from others
- Feeling miserable
- Feeling detached
- Confusion, trouble concentrating
- Anger, irritability, mood swings

Treatment

Therapy is helpful and effective at treating doronophobia. Talking to a highly trained professional about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can help come to terms with them. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) utilizes strategies to confront and overcome the phobia by talking about it recognizing the negative thoughts, and feelings, and attempting to change the pattern of thinking (Brookins, 2021). For temporary solutions medications may be recommended by a professional, however, usually, therapy is considered quite effective in prevailing fears. In addition, educating oneself about the phobia may change the way it is looked at and consequently better handle it.

Being patient and mindful helps people gain a better understanding of the anxiety enclosing gift-receiving. Rather than mistrusting people's motives from the get-go, being attentive to the warm and positive feelings associated when receiving a gift can go a long way. Concentrating more on the positive feelings by acknowledging the giver's effort, may change people's outlook toward receiving a gift with compassion.

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