# When do apology gifts work?

The influence of type of gift, transgression severity, and relationship closeness on the effectiveness of apology gifts

Master thesis

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## Abstract

Exchanging gifts is a common activity in present society. People exchange gifts for various reasons, including the reason to apologize for harm done. Apology gifts differ from other gifts in the sense that they are given in a context where previously something negative (a transgression) has occurred between the giver and the receiver. The current study looks at the effect of type of gift (materialistic vs experiential), transgression severity (less severe vs severe) and relationship closeness (less close vs close) on the effectiveness of an apology gift. To do this, two 2 x 2 between subjects experiments were conducted. Results showed that apology gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity when the transgression is less severe compared to when the transgression is severe. Also, experiential gifts were more positively evaluated than materialistic gifts, but experiential gifts were not more effective in restoring relational equity than materialistic gifts. These results add to the limited literature on apology gift giving and suggest that contextual factors influence the effectiveness of an apology gift, and suggest that gift evaluations do not directly influence gift effectiveness. Recommendations for further research include studying other contextual factors that might influence the effectiveness of apology gift and further investigating the contradicting findings on gift evaluation.

# Table of contents

# 1. Introduction

Exchanging gifts is a common activity in present society. The gifting market in America totals more than $130 billion (Unity Marketing, 2006), and gifts account for more than four percent of the household budget (Gino & Flynn, 2011). People buy others gifts for different reasons, including to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays or holidays, to thank someone, to show appreciation, or to apologize (Goodwin, Smith & Spiggle, 1990). Gifts can therefore have different functions, depending on their context (Belk, 1979). In general, people like to receive gifts: receiving gifts produces positive affect (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994).

Yet, people may not like to receive apology gifts. Apology gifts relate to the by Belk (1979) identified function of gifts of 'establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations': the person who presents the gift has usually done harm to the receiver, and presents a gift to compensate for the harm done. The context in which an apology gift is given is likely a context associated with negative emotions such as anger or sadness in the receiver. Emotions have been shown to affect product evaluations; individuals in positive mood states have been found to evaluate products more positively than individuals in negative mood states (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). This makes the context of an apology gift different from a celebratory gift setting such as birthdays. Therefore it can be expected that the experienced anger by recipients causes more negative product evaluations and therefore reduces the effectiveness of the apology gift. In the present study, an apology gift is considered to be effective if it is able to restore the relational equity. If there is relational inequity, the recipient believes that the ratio between outcomes and inputs in the relationship is smaller for himself than for the giver (Adams, 1965). This means that the recipient believes that he has given more than he has received. There is indeed preliminary evidence that suggest that apology gifts might not be as effective as is generally thought (Straeter & de Hooge, 2016).

It is however likely that the effectiveness of apology gifts is also determined by the gift itself. It is sometimes said that simply giving a gift is enough, and that the gift itself does not matter: "it's the thought that counts" (Zhang & Epley, 2012). However, with the gift the giver communicates more about himself than just the desire to give (Anthony, Cowley, & Duhachek, 2013). Certain gifts can be considered by the recipient to be more appropriate to restore relational equity than others. For example, taking your wife out for a dinner at a restaurant probably sends a different message than giving her a DVD, and the effect of the gift is therefore likely to be different. It can be expected that materialistic and experiential gifts differ in their effectiveness as apology gift.

Also, certain gifts may be more appropriate in certain situations: the present study hypothesizes that the type of transgression also influences the effectiveness of the apology gift. The type of transgression refers to the severity of the transgression: what was it that the giver did? More severe transgressions lead to more severe reactions from the receivers (Jones, Dacin, & Taylor, 2011), and people use the perception of the severity of the transgression in the process of forgiveness (Waldron and Kelley, 2005). It is logical to assume that if someone has done something terrible, such as cheating, different compensation is needed than when someone accidentally forgot a lunch appointment.

Lastly, the effectiveness of apology gifts is also likely to be influenced by the type of relationship that the giver and recipient are in. An important goal of givers is to choose a gift that expresses the relationship with the recipient (Anthony et al., 2013). In general, consumers expect to get better gifts from friends than from strangers (Zhang & Epley, 2012). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that recipients expect better gifts from people they have close relations with compared to people they know less well. These expectations may influence the actual liking of the apology gift; if the gift is worse than expected, it is less liked by the recipient. If the gift is less liked, it is likely to be less effective.

This research will investigate the effectiveness of the use of apology gifts as a way to restore relational equity. In addition, the effectiveness of different types of gift (materialistic vs experiential) will be studied and the interaction of this with the type of transgression (not severe vs severe) and the type of relationship (close vs not close) are studied. This is relevant because the existing literature on the subject of apology gifts is very limited, while apology gifts are often used to restore relational equity. This study adds to the limited literature on apology gifts with testing the effectiveness of apology gifts and studying the interaction with type of gift and relationships. There is also a practical relevance in the sense that it could provide people with better strategies concerning apology gifts; it could even help in picking the best apology gift.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical background of the study. First, the concepts of relational equity and apology gifts are discussed. After that, the hypotheses are explained and the conceptual model is presented.

### 2.1 Relational (in)equity

When there is relational equity, the ratio between one person's outcomes to inputs and the other person's outcomes to inputs is equal. This means that the relationship is balanced. Adams (1965) visualized this in a basic formula, where $Oa$ is person A's outputs and $Ob$ is person B's output. Outputs can be defined as the positive and negative outcomes of the relationship (Walster, Berscheid, and Walster, 1975). $Ia$ and $Ib$ are respectively person A and B's inputs in the relationship. Inputs can be defined as the person's contribution to the exchange, and can be either negative or positive (Walster et al., 1975). The formula is shown below.

$$\frac{Oa}{Ia} = \frac{Ob}{Ib}$$

A transgression takes place when a relational norm is violated, which disrupts the stability of the relationship (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). Relational inequity exists when a person perceives that the ratio between his outcomes to inputs and the other person's outcomes to inputs are unequal (Adams, 1965). Relational inequity can be caused when someone has done you harm; by this you can think of all kinds of wrongdoings, from forgetting an appointment to betraying your trust. When there is relational inequity the formula mentioned before will change, since the ratios are not equal any more. I will illustrate this with an example. Imagine a relationship between Lisa and David, where Lisa is person A, and David is person B. They make a lunch appointment, but David does not show up and leaves Lisa having lunch alone. This decreases David's inputs in the relationship (Ib) as well as Lisa's output of the relationship (Oa). This is visualized in the formula below:

$$\frac{Oa - x}{Ia} \neq \frac{Ob}{Ib - x}$$

The formula shows that by forgetting the lunch appointment David disturbed the relational equity. There is now relational inequity: Lisa perceives the ratio between her inputs and outputs to be smaller than David's. One way to restore this relational inequity is by using apology gifts. Presenting an apology gift increases the inputs of the giver (time, effort and possibly money is spent in selecting, buying, and presenting the gift) and the outcomes of the receiver. If, in this example, David decides to buy Lisa a gift, this could increase his inputs (Ib) and increase her outputs (Oa). This is shown in the formula below.

$$\frac{Oa + x}{Ia} \neq \frac{Ob}{Ib + x}$$

## 2.2 Apology gifts

Relational inequity leads to dissatisfaction and unpleasant emotional states (Adams, 1965), such as anger or sadness. Apology gifts can be used as a way to restore this relational equity, since this increases the recipient's outputs and the givers inputs. Apology gifts can be defined as gifts that are given after relational inequity is experienced. Therefore the situation is most likely associated with the before mentioned negative emotions such as anger or sadness.

In other gift settings, such as birthdays or other occasions, the context is usually positively valenced. Birthdays and Christmas are usually associated with positive emotions such as joy, graduations with emotions such as pride, marriages with emotions such as hope, and anniversaries with emotions such as affection (Ruth, 1999). In such gift settings products are most likely positively evaluated. However, this could be caused by the so called positive cognitive loop, in which positive material is made more salient when one is in a good mood (Isen, Clark, Shalker, & Karp, 1978). With this is meant that the context produces positive emotions for the individual, which leads them to more easily recall positive aspects of the product and therefore evaluate the product more positively. However, since the context of

apology gifts is associated with negative emotions, this positive cognitive loop does not exist. It is logical to assume that there could be a negative cognitive loop: because of the negative emotions negative product attributes become more salient to the receiver. This might lead to decreased product evaluations by the receiver and therefore may reduce the effectiveness of the apology gift.

Yet, we hypothesize that apology gifts can be effective in certain conditions. When looking back at the formula for relational equity mentioned in the previous section, it seems logical to assume that the effectiveness of an apology gift to restore relational equity can be influenced by other variables. The first variable is the type of gift that is given; certain gifts may result in a bigger increase in outputs or inputs than other gifts. A second variable is the severity of the transgression, not every wrongdoing likely causes the same decrease in outputs or inputs. The last variable that is taken into account is the relationship the giver and recipient are in; using a gift to apologize might be more appropriate in certain relationships. The role of those three factors, namely the type of gift, the severity of transgression, and the relationship between giver and recipient, on the effectiveness of the apology gift are discussed in the next sections.

## 2.2 Type of gift

Some might say that the more you spend on a gift, the more it will be appreciated. However, previous studies have shown that this is not the case (e.g. Flynn & Adams, 2009). The question remains what type of gift works best. A distinction can be made between experiential gifts, such as concerts and vacations, and material gifts, such as cars and gadgets (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009).

Research has shown that experiential and materialistic goods can have different effects on the receiver. Experiential purchases make people happier than material purchases (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). A reason for this could be that material purchases are more critically evaluated: consumers have been found to be more likely to

examine alternatives when it comes to material goods compared to experiential goods (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). This leads to less satisfaction with the product for the buyer or receiver when it comes to material goods compared to experiential goods. Another reason for this could be that experiences are more central to one's identity (van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Also in gift-giving situations differences can be found between experiential and materialistic gifts. Compared to materialistic gifts experiential gifts make recipients feel closer to the giver, regardless if the gift was consumed together (Mogilner & Chan, 2014). It seems likely that, when experienced together, experiential gifts can be considered as being an investment in the relationship: the giver and recipient spend time together doing something, instead of the recipient receiving a material object. This could make a gift more effective, since an effort is done to spend time on the relationship

Because experiential gifts will make the recipient happier and feel closer to the giver than material gifts, it can be expected that experiential gifts increase the outcomes of the relationship of the recipient more than material gifts, and therefore contribute more to restoring the relational equity. We therefore hypothesize that experiential gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity than materialistic gifts.

**H1: Experiential apology gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity than materialistic apology gifts**

### 2.3 Severity of the transgression

Yet, the effect of apology gifts may also depend on the severity of the transgression. If the transgression is more severe, the responses of recipients are also more severe (Jones, Dacin, & Taylor, 2011). To illustrate this with an example, someone's response is likely to be more severe when he is cheated on by his partner compared to when the partner forgot a lunch appointment. People make decisions to forgive or not based on the severity of the relational transgression (Waldron & Kelley, 2005).

Research has indeed shown that the circumstances of a gift can influence the perception of the gift. Hyllegard and Fox (1997) found that the same gift was perceived to be more efficient when given on Valentine's day than during the December holidays. They suggest that this could be caused by the different, lesser, expectations people have for gifts on Valentine's Day compared to gifts during the Christmas holidays. This shows that the context in which the gift is given and the expectations that come with it can affect the evaluation of the gift and therefore logically the effectiveness.

The transgression forms the context of the gift: the gift is presented because something has happened between the giver and recipient. When the transgression is more severe, there is more relational inequity. It is logical to assume that when there is more relational inequity, it is harder to restore this relational inequity with a single gift. Therefore it is expected that apology gifts are more effective when the transgression is less severe.

**H2: Apology gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity when the transgression is less severe compared to when the transgression is severe.**

Logically, more is expected as compensation when the transgression is more severe: there is more relational inequity. Therefore experiential gifts might be more suitable after severe transgressions, since these gifts make recipients happier and feel closer to the giver (Mogilner & Chan, 2014). This makes it more likely that the recipient perceives the relationship to be balanced again after receiving an experiential gift than after receiving a material gift. Material gifts might not be suitable in those situations. After less severe transgressions less compensation is needed, and therefore material gifts might be more suitable and therefore more effective than in the case of a severe transgression.

Therefore it is hypothesized that materialistic gifts are only able to restore relational equity when the transgression is less severe, and not when it is severe.

**H3: Materialistic apology gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity when the transgression is less severe compared to when it is severe.**

## 2.4 Relationship between giver and recipient

The effectiveness of a specific apology gift is likely to be mediated by the relationship the giver and recipient are in. The closer a relationship is, the less gifts in those relationships resemble economic transactions, and the purer the feelings accompanying those gifts are (Komter & Vollebergh, 1997). The same transgression could cause different relational inequity because of the relationship the giver and recipient are in. It is likely that transgressions in a close relationship cause bigger relational inequity because more is expected from the other person: the relation between giver and recipient is more personal.

When keeping the transgression constant, it can be expected that in less close relationships the transgression causes less relational inequity, because less is expected from the other person. The closer the relationship is, the more relational inequity is caused by a transgression. Therefore the same apology gift can be more effective in less close relationships compared to close relationships, because it is easier to restore smaller relational inequity.

**H4: Apology gifts are more effective in restoring relational equity when the relationship between the giver and recipient is less close compared to when the relationship is close.**

Not all gifts are appropriate for all relationships; research has shown that for example money as a gift is not considered to be appropriate for all relationships, but only for some (Burgoyne and Routh, 1991). Also, intimacy of a relationship affects how much is spent on a gift (Webley & Wilson, 1989). People expect worse presents from others they do not have close relationships with compared to others they have close relationships with (Zhang & Epley, 2012). Therefore it is logical to assume that people expect better gifts from friends than from

people they know less well. Because of these expectations, it is likely that worse gifts are more acceptable to receive in less close relationship than in close relationships.

Earlier it was discussed that experiential gifts are expected to be more effective apology gifts than materialistic gifts (hypothesis 1). It is hypothesized that when the relationship between the giver and recipient is less close, that less is expected from the giver after a transgression. This makes it likely that the recipient is more easily satisfied with the apology gift. Therefore it can be expected that, in the case of less close relationships, both materialistic gifts and experiential gifts may be effective, because in this case less is expected from the giver. This does not hold for close relationships, since in these cases more is expected from the giver. Therefore materialistic gifts are expected to be more effective when the relationship is less close than when it is close.

**H5: Gifts that are materialistic in nature are more effective in restoring relational equity when the relationship between the giver and recipient is less close compared to when the relationship is close**

## 2.5 Conceptual framework

All five hypotheses are visualized in Figure 1. The effectiveness of the apology gift here is the dependent variable. There are three main effects; the type of gift (hypothesis 1), the severity of the transgression (hypothesis 2) and the relationship between the giver and recipient (hypothesis 4). The severity of the transgression and the relationship between giver and recipient also moderate the effect of type of gift (hypothesis 3 and 5). Because no interaction effect between the transgression severity and relationship closeness on effectiveness of the apology gift is expected, it is decided to run two separate experiments. Study 1 has a 2 (type of gift: materialistic or experiential) x 2 (transgression severity: less severe or severe) between-subjects design. Study 2 has a 2 (type of gift: materialistic or experiential) x 2 (relationship closeness: less close or close) between-subjects design.
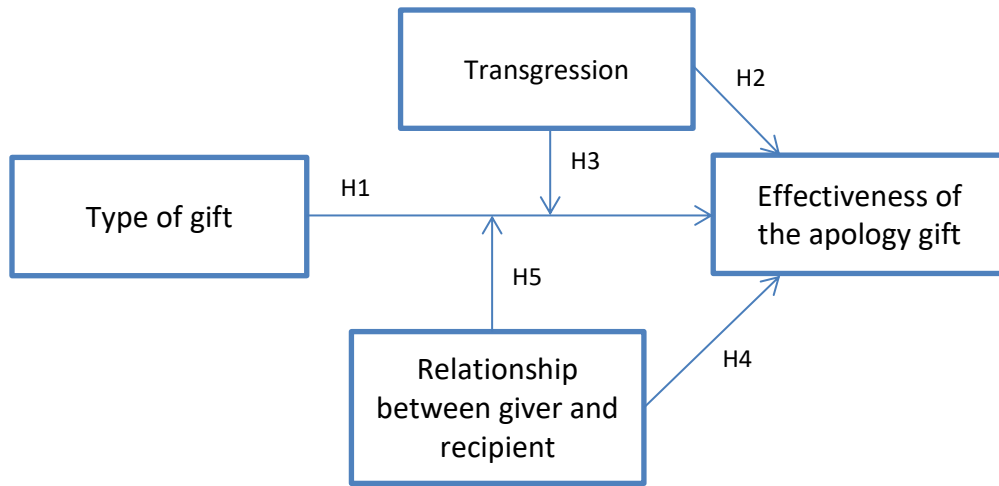
*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework*

# 3. Study 1

To examine the influence of transgression severity and type of gift on the effectiveness of an apology gift, a 2 (type of gift: materialistic vs experiential) x 2 (severity of transgression: less severe vs severe) between subjects experiment was conducted. In this chapter, the samples and designs of the questionnaire will be described, as well as the procedures for approaching the data. After that, the results of the study are discussed.

## 3.1 Method

### 3.1.1 Participants and recruitment

The target group of this study consisted of Dutch consumers. Participants were approached by e-mail or via social media by the researcher. These messages were sent to friends/family of the researcher and were shared in several groups on Facebook. In this e-mail or social media message participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and to share the link with others. The aim was to have at least 50 participants for every condition, so in total 200 participants. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions.

Study 1 had a total of 235 participants. 59 participants were assigned to the materialistic-less severe condition, 61 participants were assigned to the experiential-less severe, 57 participants were assigned to the materialistic-severe condition, and 58 participants were assigned to the experiential-severe condition. 77.4% of the sample was female, and 22.6% was male. The mean age of the sample was 28.2 years old (SD = 12.16).

### 3.1.2 Design

Study 1 had a 2 (type of gift: materialistic vs experiential) x 2 (severity of the transgression: severe vs not severe) between subjects design. Online questionnaires were used to collect the data. This method was chosen because it is rather easy to obtain large amounts of data while keeping costs low (Steenbekkers, 2001). It was decided to publish the questionnaire online because in this way also non students could participate. The language of the questionnaire was Dutch. The questionnaire was created using the online survey program Qualtrics.

### 3.1.3 Measures and procedures

After clicking the link, participants were shown an introduction and informed consent page. This page showed some practical information about the task ahead, such as the estimated time completing the questionnaire would take. Furthermore, the participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers, that their answers were anonymous and would not be shared with third parties, and that they could stop with completing the questionnaire at any time. They were thanked for their participation.

On the next page, participants were asked to read a story and to imagine that this story was real. This story differed per study and condition but the general story line was as follows: a good friend did something bad to the recipient (either forgetting to cancel a cinema appointment or lying about being sick to cancel a cinema appointment) and presents a gift to apologize (either a DVD box or a dinner in a restaurant).

This experiment contained two independent variables: the type of gift and the severity of the transgression. The type of gift could have two values: either the gift was materialistic or the gift was experiential. In the different conditions the monetary value of the gift was held constant: both gifts were worth the same in monetary terms (€25). Materialistic gifts can be defined as objects for the recipient to keep, while experiential gifts are events for the recipient to live through (Mogilner & Chan, 2014). In this study, the chosen materialistic gift was a DVD box and the chosen experiential gift was a dinner at a restaurant, both worth €25.

The severity of the transgression was the second independent variable. The transgression could be either severe or less severe. This was manipulated by showing the participants a story about something that someone did to them, and participants were asked to imagine that this story was real. In the less severe conditions, the giver had a small bike accident and therefore forgot to cancel the appointment he/she had with the recipient to go to the cinema, which led the recipient to wait for hours at the cinema. In the severe conditions the giver lied

to the recipient about being sick so he could cancel the cinema appointment to go to a party. This is likely to be perceived to be more severe, because it is, as opposed to forgetting a cinema appointment, intentional.

After reading the story, participants were asked to judge the relational balance. The dependent variable in this experiment was the effectiveness of the apology gift. This was measured by the extent to which the gift is able to restore the relational equity. To measure this, Hatfield et al.'s (1979) global equity measure was used. This measure asks respondents to consider "how much you and your partner put into this relationship and how much you and your partner get out of it". Respondents were able to indicate the situation on a seven point scale with options ranging from "I am getting a much better deal than my partner" to "My partner is getting a much better deal". For the present research, this equity measure was adapted because not in all of the conditions the receiver and the giver were partners. The word partner was therefore replaced with the name of the giver, in this study "Robin". This name was chosen because this name can be used for females as well as for males. In addition, participants were asked to judge the relationship in terms of how much they received compared to how much they put into the relationship. Lastly participants were asked if they felt that they had received what they deserved. Those three items together were expected to form one scale to measure relational equity. Factor analysis showed a clear one factor solution (see Appendix III for the factor loadings). The scale had an eigenvalue of 2.48 and explained 82.7% of the variance. Reliability analysis showed that this scale was reliable ($\alpha = .89$).

Also other dependent variables were added, because following the reasoning of the hypotheses it would be logical that those variables would be influenced as well. Respondents were asked to indicate which emotions they would experience in this situation (anger, happiness, disappointment, sadness, surprise, satisfaction, and thankfulness) on a 7 point scale ranging from 1 'not at all' to 7 'very'. Respondents were also asked how they would feel

about the relationship after the situation (1 = worse, 2 = better), how they would feel about the giver (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive), what influence the gift would have on the relationship between them and the giver (1 = very negative influence, 7 = very positive influence), and lastly how likely they would be to regift the gift (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely).

Participant's gift evaluation was measured by making use of the gift evaluation scale of Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooge (2015). This scale asked respondents to indicate how much they appreciate the gift, how grateful they are, how thankful they are, how pleased they are, and how much they like the gift (for all items: 1 = not at all, 7 = very). Factor analysis showed a clear one factor solution (the factor loadings can be found in Appendix III). The scale had an eigenvalue of 4.03 and explained 80.6% of the variance. Reliability analysis showed that this scale was reliable ($\alpha = .94$).

The next set of questions for the participants regarded gender, age, and educational level. Those questions were included to make sure that participants in different conditions did not differ in terms of age, gender, or level of education. The questions regarding educational level and gender were multiple choice, and age was an open question with possible answers all numbers between sixteen and hundred.

The last set of questions consisted of attention checks. To make sure that participants read the story and remembered what was in the story, attention checks were added for both variables; the perceived severity of the transgression and the perceived type of gift. Participants were asked what it was that the giver did and what gift they got from the giver.

After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation and there was room to leave comments. All questions can be found in Appendix I (in English) and Appendix II (in Dutch).

### 3.1.4 Analysis

The data was analysed by using the program SPSS. The scales will be tested by using factor analyses and reliability analyses. The hypotheses will be tested by using two-way ANOVA's.

## 3.2 Results

### 3.2.1 Attention check

Before looking at the data, it is necessary to look at how participants responded to the two attention checks. In the less severe transgression conditions, all participants responded correctly to the attention check question on transgression severity. However, in the severe transgression conditions 11 out of the total 118 participants in these conditions responded incorrectly to the attention check question on transgression severity. This is likely caused by the fact that in those conditions both answers could be considered as applicable, however one answer was more fitting. Because of that it was decided not to exclude those participants from the data, because it cannot be determined for sure if they did not read the question thoroughly or if the question should have been formulated more clearly.

In total 3 participants responded incorrectly to the attention check question on the gift they had received. This indicates that those three participants did not completely read the story or did not pay enough attention to the story. Therefore those participants were excluded from further analysis. This leaves the before mentioned number of 235 participants.

### 3.2.2 Findings

**Relational equity.** It was expected that the gift would be more effective in the experiential gift conditions than in the materialistic gift conditions. In other words, the relational equity was expected to be higher in the experiential gift conditions than in the materialistic conditions. Also, it was hypothesized that the relational equity would be higher in the less severe conditions than in the severe conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of the transgression) ANOVA with relational equity as dependent variable showed that the data only partly supported the hypotheses. There was no significant main effect of type of gift [$F$ (1,

231) = 0.029, p = .87]. There was a significant main effect of severity of the transgression, with relational equity being higher (M = 4.15, SD = 1.1) in the less severe conditions than in the severe conditions (M = 2.50, SD = 1.04) [F (1, 231) = 138.91, p < .001].

There was no significant interaction effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression [F (1, 231) = 0.641, p = .42], which does not support hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 expected an interaction effect between type of gift and transgression severity where a materialistic gift would be more effective in the less severe conditions than in the severe conditions, however the results do not support this.

**Gift evaluation.** It was hypothesized that gift evaluation would be higher in the experiential gift conditions compared to the materialistic gift conditions and higher in less severe conditions compared to severe conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of the transgression) ANOVA with gift evaluation as dependent variable supported the expectations. There was a significant main effect of type of gift on gift evaluation, where the experiential gift was more positively evaluated (M = 4.0, SD = 1.51) than the materialistic gift (M = 3.45, SD = 1.61) [F (1, 231) = 11.88, p = .01]. There also was a significant main effect of severity of the transgression on gift evaluation, where the gift was more positively evaluated in the less severe (M = 4.71, SD = 1.22) than in the severe conditions (M = 2.71, SD = 1.22) [F (1, 231) = 163.01, p < .001]. There was no significant interaction effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression [F (1, 231) = .042, p = 0.84].

**Emotions.** 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of transgression) ANOVA's with dependent variables the different emotions revealed that all emotions were significantly different in the severe and less severe conditions. In the severe conditions respondents reported to experience less positive emotions, they reported they would be: less happy [F (1, 231) = 90.23, p < .001], less satisfied [F (1, 231) = 101.17, p < .001], and less thankful than in the less severe conditions [F (1, 231) = 116.71, p < .001]. In the severe conditions participants reported to experience more

negative emotions, they reported they would be: more angry [F (1, 231) = 152.93, p < .001], more disappointed [F (1, 231) = 104.93, p < .001] and more sad than in the less severe conditions [F (1, 231) = 87.35, p < .001]. Lastly, participants reported to be more surprised in the severe conditions than in the less severe conditions [F (1, 233) = 10.89, p = .001].

Type of gift only had a moderately significant effect on the reported satisfaction (F (1, 231) = 3.47, p = .06), with participants in the experiential gift conditions reporting higher satisfaction (M = 3.37, SD = 1.55) than participants in the materialistic gift conditions (M = 3.05, SD = 1.5). Type of gift did not have an effect on the other emotions (all F's < 1.18, all p's > 0.28).

There was a significant interaction effect between severity of the transgression and type of gift on the reported surprise (F (1, 231) = 6.83, p = .01). This was only significant for experiential gifts: participants reported significantly higher surprise in the severe conditions (M = 5.62, SD = 1.31) compared to the less severe conditions (M = 4.51, SD = 1.75) [F (1, 231) = 17.74 p < 0.001]. For materialistic gifts, the severity of the transgression had no effect (F (1, 231) = 0.24, p = .63). The rest of the interaction effects were not significant (all F's < 0.71, all p's > .4).

**Regift intention.** Following the hypotheses, it would be logical to expect that regift intention would be higher in the materialistic and severe conditions (compared to experiential and less severe conditions) because gift evaluation is also lower there. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of transgression) ANOVA with dependent variable regift intention showed that only one of those differences was significant. There was no significant main effect of type of gift on regift intention [F (1, 231) = 1.387, p = .24]. There was a significant main effect of severity of the transgression on regift intention; participants in the severe conditions reported significantly higher regift intentions (M = 3.32, SD = 1.77) than participants in the less severe conditions (M = 1.85, SD = 1.41) [F (1, 131) = 49.79, p < .001]. There was no significant interaction

effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression on regift intention [F (1, 131) = 0.41, p = .69].

**Effect on relationship.** It was expected that the gift would have a better effect on the relationship between giver and receiver in the experiential and less severe conditions, compared to the materialistic and severe conditions. A 2 x (type of gift) x 2 (severity of transgression) ANOVA with dependent variable effect on relationship showed that the data supported the expectations. There was a significant effect of type of gift, where participants in the experiential conditions reported a more positive effect (M = 4.24, SD = 1.24) on the relationship than participants in the materialistic conditions (M = 3.5, SD = 1.44) [F (1, 231) = 23.2, p < .001]. There was also a significant effect of severity of the transgression, where participants in the less severe conditions reported a more positive effect (M = 4.52, SD = 1.19) on the relationship than participants in the severe conditions (M = 3.21, SD = 1.27) [F (1, 231) = 72.21, p < .001]. There was no significant interaction effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression [F (1, 231) = .35, p = .56].

**Feelings about giver.** Following the hypotheses, it would be logical to expect more positive feelings in the situations where the relational inequity is bigger. Therefore we expected more positive feelings in the experiential and less severe conditions compared to the materialistic and severe conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of the transgression) ANOVA with dependent variable feelings about the giver partly supported our expectations. There was a marginally significant effect of type of gift [F (1, 231) = 2.98, p = .09], with experiential gifts producing more positive feelings about the giver (M = 3.70, SD = 1.62) than materialistic gifts (M = 3.41, SD = 1.59). There was a significant effect of severity of the transgression on feelings about the giver: participants reported more positive feelings (M = 4.58, SD = 1.27) in the less severe conditions compared to the severe conditions (M = 2.49, SD = 1.17) [F (1, 231) = 173.33, p < .001]. There was no significant interaction effect between type of gift and

severity of the transgression on feelings about the giver [$F_{(1, 231)} = 0.06$, $p = .80$]. This means that the effect of type of gift on feelings about the giver was the same for the severe and less severe transgressions.

**Changed feelings about relationship.** Following the reasoning behind the hypotheses, it would be logical to expect more positively changed feelings in the experiential and less severe conditions compared to the materialistic and severe conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (severity of transgression) ANOVA with dependent variable changed feelings about the relationship showed that there was no significant effect of type of gift [$F_{(1, 231)} = 0.23$, $p = .63$]. There was a significant effect of severity of the transgression, with participants in the less severe conditions reporting more positively changed feelings ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.18$) than participants in the severe conditions ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.01$) [$F_{(1, 231)} = 180.37$, $p < .001$]. There was no significant interaction effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression [$F_{(1, 231)} = 0.01$, $p = 0.91$].

*Table 1. Overview of results of study 1*

| | Materialistic gift | | Experiential gift | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not severe | Severe | Not severe | Severe |
| *Relational equity* | 4.22(1.31)$^A$ | 2.46(1.03)$^B$ | 4.07(.86)$^A$ | 2.53(1.06)$^B$ |
| *Gift evaluation* | 4.42(1.39)$^A$ | 2.46(1.15)$^B$ | 4.99(.97)$^C$ | 2.96(1.25)$^D$ |
| *Emotions* | | | | |
| Anger | 3.10(1.64)$^A$ | 5.53(1.34)$^B$ | 3.21(1.39)$^A$ | 5.33(1.23)$^B$ |
| Happiness | 3.59(1.32)$^A$ | 2.09(.87)$^B$ | 3.48(1.22)$^A$ | 2.16(1.11)$^B$ |
| Disappointment | 4.27(1.45)$^A$ | 6.07(1.22)$^B$ | 4.07(1.66)$^A$ | 5.97(1.14)$^B$ |
| Sadness | 2.97(1.49)$^A$ | 4.74(1.61)$^B$ | 2.85(1.3)$^A$ | 4.71(1.57)$^B$ |
| Surprise | 5.2(1.42)$^A$ | 5.33(1.2)$^A$ | 4.51(1.75)$^B$ | 5.62(1.31)$^A$ |
| Satisfaction | 3.83(1.35)$^A$ | 2.25(1.18)$^B$ | 4.23(1.32)$^A$ | 2.47(1.22)$^B$ |
| Thankfulness | 4.51(1.51)$^A$ | 2.37(1.28)$^B$ | 4.51(1.45)$^A$ | 2.67(1.39)$^B$ |
| *Regift intention* | 2.02(1.41)$^A$ | 3.4(1.95)$^B$ | 1.69(1.4)$^A$ | 3.24(1.58)$^B$ |
| *Effect on relationship* | 4.19(1.28)$^A$ | 2.79(1.25)$^B$ | 4.84(1.0)$^C$ | 3.62(1.17)$^D$ |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Feeling about giver* | 4.42(1.34)$^A$ | 2.37(1.08)$^B$ | 4.74(1.2)$^A$ | 2.6(1.24)$^B$ |
| *Feeling about relationship* | 3.88(1.26)$^A$ | 1.96(1.02)$^B$ | 3.97(1.1)$^A$ | 2.98(1.46)$^B$ |

*If on one row two boxes have the same letter (e.g. $^A$) it means that there is no significant difference between those two conditions. If two boxes on the same row have a different letter in superscript, it means those means are significantly different.*

### 3.2.3 Discussion

The results of study 1 confirm our expectations that apology gifts are more effective in situations where the transgression is less severe than when it is severe. Also, participants reported to experience more negative emotions and less positive emotions in the severe conditions compared to the less severe conditions. Furthermore, in the severe scenarios participants reported higher regift intentions, a more negative effect on the relationship between them and the giver, more negative feelings about the giver, and more negative feelings about the relationship, compared to the less severe scenarios.

However, the results do not confirm the hypotheses regarding the type of gift. Experiential gifts were not more effective in restoring relational equity. There were also no differences between materialistic and experiential gifts regarding experienced emotions, regift intention, and feelings about the relationship. However, experiential gifts were evaluated more positively than materialistic gifts, which is in line with the existing literature on experiential gifts. Also, the experiential gift was reported to have a more positive effect on the relationship and on feelings about the giver than the materialistic gift. Also, the expected interaction effect between type of gift and severity of the transgression was not supported by the results, which means that the found effects for type of gift were the same in the severe and less severe conditions, and the other way around.

As explained before, not only the severity of transgression is expected to have an effect on the effectiveness of the apology gift: also the closeness of the relationship between the giver and receiver is expected to play a role. Therefore a second study was designed. This second study

has a similar design as study 1. However, for that study the variable relationship closeness was included instead of the severity of the transgression. Materialistic and experiential gifts were again included to further explore their effect on gift evaluation.

# 4. Study 2

To examine the influence of relationship closeness and type of gift on the effectiveness of an apology gift, a 2 (type of gift: materialistic vs experiential) x 2 (relationship closeness: less close vs close) between subjects experiment was conducted. In this chapter, the samples and designs of the questionnaire will be described, as well as the procedures for approaching the data. After that, the results of the study are discussed.

## 4.1 Method

### 4.1.1 Participants and recruitment

Participants were recruited in the same way as for study 1, only in this case participants had a chance to win a bol.com gift card. This was done to speed up the process of data collection.

Study 2 had a total of 164 participants. 44 participants were assigned to the materialistic-not close condition, and 40 participants were assigned to the other three conditions. 87.2% of the sample was female, and 12.8% of the sample was male. The mean age of the sample was 28.12 (SD = 12.75).

### 4.1.2  Design

Study 2 had a 2 (type of gift: materialistic vs experiential) x 2 (relationship closeness: close vs not close) between subjects design. Data was again collected using an online questionnaire and participants were recruited via social media and e-mail. In addition, for this study participants were told that by completing the questionnaire they could win a bol.com gift card worth €10.

### 4.1.3 Measures and procedures

The introduction page was the same as in study 1. On the next page, participants were asked to read a story and to imagine that this story was real. This story differed per study and condition but the general story line was as follows: someone (either a good friend or a colleague) did something bad to the recipient, and presents a gift to apologize (either a DVD box or a dinner in a restaurant.

The first independent variable was the type of gift and this was manipulated in the same way as in study 1. The second independent variable was the relationship between the giver and the receiver. This was either a close relationship or a less close relationship. In this experiment, the relationship between the giver and recipient in the receiver in the close conditions was explained as close friends since childhood, and in the less close conditions the relationship was explained as a colleague from work which the recipient did not know so well.

After reading the stories, participants were asked to answer the same questions as in study 1. Also in this study factor analysis showed a clear one factor solution for the relational equity scale, the factor loadings can be found in Appendix IV. The scale had an eigenvalue of 2.04 and explained 67.9% of the variance. Reliability analysis showed that this scale was reliable ($\alpha$ = .76). For the gift evaluation scale factor analysis also showed a clear one factor solution, the factor loadings can be found in Appendix IV. The scale had an eigenvalue of 3.78 and explained 75.4% of the variance. Reliability analysis showed that this scale was reliable ($\alpha$ = .92).

An attention check for the perceived closeness of the relationship was added: next to asking what gift they received participants were asked what relationship they had with the giver. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation and there was room to leave comments. There was a box in which participants could leave their e-mail address if they wanted to win the bol.com gift card.

### 4.1.4 Analysis
The data was analysed by using the program SPSS. The scales were tested by using factor analyses and reliability analyses. The hypotheses will be tested by using two-way ANOVA's.

## 4.2 Results

### 4.2.1 Attention checks

Before looking at the data, it is necessary to look at how participants responded to the two attention checks. In the materialistic gift conditions 3 participants responded incorrectly to the attention check on type of gift. In the experiential gift conditions, 2 participants responded incorrectly to the attention check for type of gift. Because this indicates that participants did not fully read the story (since they did not remember what kind of gif they received), they were excluded from further analysis.

Only one participant responded incorrectly to the attention check question on relationship closeness. This indicated that the participant did not completely read the story and therefore this participant was excluded from further analysis. This leaves a total of 164 participants.

### 4.2.2. Findings

**Relational equity.** It was hypothesized that relational equity would be higher in the experiential conditions compared to the materialistic conditions and higher in the less close relationship conditions compared to the close relationship conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA with dependent variable relational equity showed that the results did not support our hypotheses. There was no significant difference between the materialistic and experiential gift conditions [$F_{(1, 160)} = 1.71$, $p = .19$]. There was also no significant difference between the less close and close relationship conditions [$F_{(1, 160)} = 1.56$, $p = .21$]. Also, there was no significant interaction effect of type of gift and relationship closeness on relational equity [$F_{(1, 160)} = 0.06$, $p = .81$]. Hypothesis 5 predicted an interaction effect between the type of gift and relationship closeness, where materialistic gifts would be more effective in less close relationships, so this hypothesis is not supported by the results.

**Gift evaluation.** It was expected that gifts would be better evaluated in the less close vs close relationship and that experiential gifts would be better evaluated than material gifts. A 2 (type

of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA showed that the expectations were not supported. The difference in gift evaluation for materialistic (M = 2.82, SD = 1.1) and experiential gifts (M = 3.17, SD = 1.36) was marginally significant [F (1, 160) = 3.39, p = .07], where experiential gifts were evaluated more positively than materialistic gifts. The difference in gift evaluation for less close and close relationship was also not significant [F (1, 160) = .04, p = .85]. There was also no significant interaction effect on gift evaluation between type of gift and relationship closeness [F (1, 160) = .37, p = .54], so the effect of type of gift on gift evaluation was the same in the close relationship as in the less close relationship.

**Emotions**. 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA's with dependent variables the different emotions, showed that between the materialistic and experiential gift conditions there were no significant differences regarding emotions (all F's < 0.78 , all p's > 0.38). Between the close and less close relationship conditions there was only for two emotion a significant difference, namely for the emotion disappointment and sadness. Participants reported to feel more disappointed in the close conditions than in the less close relationship conditions [F (1, 160) = 8.61, p < .01]. Participants also reported to feel more sad in the close conditions than in the less close conditions [F (1, 160) = 12.05, p = .001]. There were no significant interaction effects between type of gift and relationship closeness for any of the emotions (all F's < 2.01, all p's > .16).

**Regift intention.** It was expected that regift intentions would be higher in the materialistic gift and close relationship conditions compared to the experiential gift and less close relationship conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA with dependent variable regift intention showed that our hypotheses were not supported. The difference for regift intention between materialistic and experiential gifts was not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.12, p = .73]. The difference for regift intention between close and less close relationship was also not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.04, p = .85).

**Effect on relationship.** It was expected that participants who received an experiential gift would report a more positive effect on the relationship than participants who received a materialistic gift, and that participants who were in a less close relationship with the giver would report a more positive effect on the relationship than participants who were in a close relationship with the giver. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA showed that not all differences were significant. The difference for effect on relationship between materialistic and experiential gift was significant, with participants in the experiential gift conditions reporting a more positive influence on the relationship (M = 3.50, SD = 1.28) between them and the giver than participants in the materialistic gift conditions (M = 3.08, SD = 1.15) [F (1, 160) = 4.83, p = .03]. The difference between close and less close relationship was not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.17, p = .68]. The interaction effect on effect on relationship between type of gift and relationship closeness was not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.17, p = .68].

**Feelings about giver.** Following the reasoning behind the hypotheses, more positive feelings about the giver were expected in the materialistic conditions compared to the experiential gift conditions and in the less close relationship conditions compared to the close relationship conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA with dependent variable feelings about giver showed that the differences were not significant. The difference in scores for feelings about giver for the materialistic and experiential gift conditions were not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.41, p = .52]. The difference between the close and less close conditions was marginally significant [F (1, 160) = 3.56, p = .06], with participants in the close conditions reporting more positive feelings (M = 2.61, SD = 1.15) than participants in the less close conditions (M = 2.31, SD = 0.88). The interaction effect between type of gift and relationship closeness was also not significant [F (1, 160) = 0.21, p = .65].

**Feelings about relationship.** Based on the hypotheses, more positive feelings about the relationship were expected in the materialistic gift and less close relationship conditions

compared to the experiential gift and close relationship conditions. A 2 (type of gift) x 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA with dependent variable feelings about relationship showed that these differences were not significant. The difference in feeling about relationship between the materialistic and experiential conditions was not significant [F (1, 160) = .19, p = .66]. The difference in feeling about relationship between the close and less close conditions was marginally significant [F (1, 160) = 2.86, p = .09], with participants in the close conditions reporting more positive feelings (M = 2.09, SD = 1.01) about the relationship than participants in the less close conditions (M = 1.85, SD = 0.77).

There was also no significant interaction effect on feelings about relationship between type of gift and relationship closeness [F (1, 160) = 1.78, p = .18].

*Table 2. Overview of results of study 2*

| | Materialistic gift | | Experiential gift | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not close | Close | Not close | Close |
| *Relational equity* | 2.27(.86)$^A$ | 2.48(.72)$^A$ | 2.48(.98)$^A$ | 2.63(1.02)$^A$ |
| *Gift evaluation* | 2.89(1.0)$^{AB}$ | 2.74(1.2)$^A$ | 3.13(1.38)$^{AB}$ | 3.21(1.37)$^B$ |
| *Emotions* | | | | |
| Anger | 5.36(.99)$^A$ | 5.47(1.11)$^A$ | 5.5(1.2)$^A$ | 5.6(1.03)$^A$ |
| Happiness | 2.25(1.1)$^A$ | 2.05(.71)$^A$ | 2.22(1.31)$^A$ | 2.25(1.01)$^A$ |
| Disappointment | 5.86(1.07)$^{AB}$ | 6.2(.79)$^{AC}$ | 5.75(1.15)$^B$ | 6.3(.79)$^C$ |
| Sadness | 4.5(1.42)$^A$ | 5.18(1.01)$^B$ | 4.4(1.71)$^A$ | 5.25(1.39)$^B$ |
| Surprise | 5.48(1.02)$^A$ | 5.7(.97)$^A$ | 5.52(1.09)$^A$ | 5.75(1.26)$^A$ |
| Satisfaction | 2.48(.93)$^A$ | 2.23(1.05)$^A$ | 2.55(1.41)$^A$ | 2.48(1.24)$^A$ |
| Thankfulness | 2.98(1.34)$^A$ | 2.65(1.12)$^A$ | 2.58(1.28)$^A$ | 2.8(1.22)$^A$ |
| *Regift intention* | 3.23(1.79)$^A$ | 2.93(1.62)$^A$ | 3.07(1.85)$^A$ | 3.28(2.1)$^A$ |
| *Effect on relationship* | 3.16(1.1)$^A$ | 3.0(1.24)$^A$ | 3.5(1.3)$^A$ | 3.5(1.28)$^A$ |
| *Feelings about giver* | 2.3(.77)$^A$ | 2.53(1.04)$^{AB}$ | 2.32(1)$^{AB}$ | 2.7(1.27)$^B$ |
| *Feelings about relationship* | 1.73(.66)$^A$ | 2.15(.95)$^B$ | 1.97(.86)$^{AB}$ | 2.03(1.07)$^{AB}$ |

[*] *If in one row two boxes have the same letter in superscript (e.g. $^A$) it means that there is no significant difference between those two conditions. If two boxes on the same row have a different letter in superscript, it means those means are (marginal) significantly different.*

### 4.2.3 Discussion

The results of study 2 do not support the hypotheses. There was no effect of type of gift on relational equity, experienced emotions, regift intention, feelings about the giver and feelings about relationship. Type of gift had a significant effect on the gift evaluation: experiential gifts were evaluated more positively than materialistic gifts. Also, type of gift had a significant effect on the reported effect on the relationship: participants who received the experiential gift reported a more positive effect on the relationship than participants who received a materialistic gift.

There was no effect of relationship closeness on relational equity, gift evaluation, regift intention, and effect on relationship. There was a significant effect of relationship closeness on feelings about relationship and feelings about the giver: participants in the close relationship reported more positive feelings about relationship and the giver than participants in the less close relationships. Interestingly, there were significant effects of relationship closeness regarding emotions: participants in the close relationship scenarios reported to feel more disappointed and more sad than participants in the less close relationship scenarios.

# 5. General discussion

Previous research has focused on gift giving in general, for example on what motivates people to exchange gifts and what the effects of different type of gifts are. The current study specifically focuses on apology gifts and on factors affecting the effectiveness of an apology gift. The results of this study show that the type of gift, materialistic or experiential, does not influence the perceived relational equity (study 1 and 2) but experiential gifts were more positively evaluated than materialistic gifts (study 1 and 2). Also, in both studies experiential gifts were reported to have a more positive effect on the relationship between them and the giver than materialistic gifts.

Also, the effectiveness of an apology gift appears to be influenced by the severity of the transgression (study 1). The relationship between giver and receiver does not appear to influence the effectiveness and evaluation of the apology gift, but in close relationships more sadness and disappointment is experienced after the same transgression (study 2). However, also more positive feelings about the relationship and about the giver were experienced in the close relationships compared to less close relationships.

These findings show that contextual factors play a role in the effectiveness of apology gifts and that gift evaluations are not directly linked to the effectiveness of an apology gift.

## 5.1 Theoretical and practical relevance

Not much research has been done on the subject of apology gift giving. Existing literature has focused on gift giving in general, and not specifically on apology gifts. The current study adds to this limited literature by taking a new look at the effectiveness of apology gift giving, assuming and testing that various factors can influence the effectiveness. Our study empirically tested the effectiveness of apology gifts and found that the context of the gift plays a role in its effectiveness in restoring relational equity. This finding presents the possibility that there are likely more contextual factors that could play a role, which provides ideas for new research on this subject.

The current study also combines the theories on experiential and materialistic gifts with the situation of apology gift giving. The current study confirms that experiential gifts are evaluated more positively than materialistic gifts. However an interesting finding is that in both studies a significant difference was found between materialistic and experiential gifts for product evaluation, but not for relational equity. This indicates that however the experiential gift was significantly better evaluated, this did not lead to a higher effectiveness of the apology gift. So, a more positive evaluation of the gift does not necessarily lead to more relational equity, as was assumed when formulating the first hypothesis. This could indicate that the evaluation of a gift does not influence its effectiveness, which indicates that the product that is given does not matter, but that it is more about the symbol of offering a gift.

The current study further adds to the literature by showing that the effectiveness of an apology gift depends on the context in which the gift is given, in this case the severity of the transgression. This indicates that the same apology gift might not be effective in every situation, or at least more effective in some situations than in others. An interesting direction for future research would be to investigate under which conditions apology gifts can be effective even after severe transgressions.

Besides theoretical relevance, this study also has practical implications for consumers and marketers. Consumers should look critically at the situation they are in before giving an apology gift. If the transgression is severe, an apology gift might not be sufficient to restore the damage that is done. However when the transgression is less severe, a gift might be helpful for consumers to restore the relational equity. This is also relevant for marketers. If a consumer gives a gift to someone to apologize, but the gift is rejected it might affect product evaluations. Therefore when marketing a product as an apology gift, the details of the apology situations should be taken into account. For example, flowers should not be marketed as a

way to apologize for something severe, such as cheating, but only to apologize for something less severe, such as forgetting an appointment.

## 5.2 Limitations and future research

Some observations can be made regarding the current study. A few participants commented that they did not find the scenarios used in the questionnaire realistic. They felt that it was unrealistic that someone would present them with a gift after simply forgetting to cancel an appointment. This could have affected the results, in the way that participants felt that a gift was not necessary in the less severe conditions. A suggestion for future research could therefore be to make the less severe situation also more severe, so that the gift is more suitable. Another option would be to change the value of the gift, so that the gift matches the situation better. However, previous research has shown that costly apologies are perceived to be more sincere (Ohtsubo & Watanabe, 2009) so this last suggestion could also have the opposite effect in the sense that a more costly gift could be less effective.

Also, the question on regift intention was not always clear to the participants, especially for participants who read the experiential gift scenarios. Participants had trouble imagining regifting a dinner. This is understandable, since the situation did not mention receiving a voucher for a dinner but simply a dinner with the giver. This is hard to regift, if not impossible. For this question, the use of a voucher or different experiential gift (such as concert tickets) would have been better, since this can be regifted. This would make the results regarding regift intentions more reliable.

It was hypothesized that the same transgression would lead to more relational inequity in close relationships compared to less close relationships, and that apology gifts would therefore be more effective in less close relationships. However no difference was found in the current study. There might be an explanation for this finding. The results show that the same transgression does indeed lead to more experienced disappointment and sadness in close

relationships compared to less close relationships, which could indicate more relational inequity. However people might be more inclined to forgive someone they are in a close relationship with (compared to a less close relationship), because the relationship is more important to them. This could increase the effectiveness of the apology gift because people are more motivated to forgive the giver when they are in a close relationship with him/her. This can however not be seen in the results of the current study, because relational equity was only measured once: after the gift was presented. It is possible that no effect of relationship closeness was found because for less close relationships there is less relational inequity in the first place, and for close relationship the apology restores the relational equity more. So, relationship closeness could still play a role in the effectiveness of apology gifts. Future research should measure relational inequity at two moments: after the transgression and after the gift is offered. This could lead to more clarity regarding the role of relationship closeness.

Also, it is possible that simply for those two scenarios (e.g. good friend and colleague) there is no difference in relation equity or that the scenarios were not elaborate enough to emphasize this relationship. Therefore, future research could focus on different types of relationships, for example romantic relationships or family versus friends. It is possible that romantic relationships show new differences regarding restoring relational equity.

Lastly, another interesting direction for future research is other contextual factors that might affect the effectiveness of an apology gift. The results of this study suggest that the severity of the transgression affects the influence of an apology gift, so there is some evidence that contextual factors play a role. Therefore it is possible that other contextual factors also play a role. Future research should investigate whether other factors such as time between transgression and apology (McPherson Frantz & Bennigson, 2005) also play a role in the effectiveness of an apology gift.

## 5.3 Conclusions

Exchanging gifts is a common activity in present society. Many gifts are exchanged every day for various reasons, and are important in establishing and strengthening relationships among people (Sherry, 1983). However, still not much is known about gift giving and especially not about apology gifts. This study suggests that the same gift might have different effects in different situations. So, in some situations it might be better to think twice before spending money on a gift that will not help you to restore the balance in your relationship.

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# Appendix

## Appendix I. Questionnaire questions English

**Introduction and informed consent**
Thank you for participating in this study for my master thesis.

Completing this questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers, please answer what comes first to mind. As participant of this research you will remain completely anonymous.

There are no risks or benefits attached to the completion of this questionnaire. At any moment you can decide to quit without further consequences. If you however decide to quit before the end, your answers cannot be used for the study. If you have any questions, you can contact me at cecile.starrenburg@wur.nl.

By clicking 'yes', you declare that you have read and agree with the text above.

**Scenarios study 1**

*Please imagine the following.*

You sometimes go to the cinema with your good friend Robin. Last Thursday you made plans to go to the cinema with Robin. When you arrived at the cinema, Robin was not there yet. After waiting for half an hour, you decided to call Robin. Robin did not pick up the phone and after waiting for an hour in total you decided to go home.

Today Robin told you that he/she had a small bike accident on Thursday and that is why he could not come. Because of those circumstances Robin forgot to let you know that he/she could not make it. Robin apologizes and gives you a DVD box of one of your favourite TV shows worth €30 OR takes you out to dinner at a restaurant worth €30.

OR

You sometimes go to the cinema with your good friend Robin. Last Thursday you made plans to go to the cinema with Robin. When you arrived at the cinema, Robin was not there yet.

After waiting for half an hour, you decided to call Robin. Robin did not pick up the phone, and after an hour you decide to call again. Robin picks up and tells you he/she is sick and cannot come to the cinema. You tell Robin to get well soon and decide to go home.

At home, you see on Facebook that Robin was at a party with friends. So Robin was not sick, and he/she lied to you. Today you see Robin again. Robin apologizes and gives you a DVD box of one of your favourite TV shows worth €30 OR takes you out to dinner at a restaurant worth €30.

**Scenarios study 2**

*Please imagine the following..*

You sometimes go to the cinema with your good friend Sam. You have been friends with Sam since your youth and you often see each other. Last Thursday you had planned to go to the cinema with Sam. When you arrived at the cinema on Thursday, Sam was not there yet. After waiting for half an hour, you decided to call Sam. Sam did not pick up the phone and after waiting for an hour in total you decided to go home.

At home you saw on Facebook that Sam was at a party with friends and apparently forgot about your cinema plans. Today Sam tells you that he/she totally forgot the appointment. Sam apologizes, and gives you a DVD box of one of your favourite TV shows worth €30 OR takes you out to dinner at a restaurant worth €30.

Or

You sometimes go to the cinema with your colleague Sam. You do not know Sam so well, you have been working at the same company for a few months and do not see each other much outside of work. Last Thursday you had planned to go to the cinema with Robin. When you arrived at the cinema on Thursday, Sam was not there yet. After waiting for half an hour, you decided to call Sam. Sam did not pick up the phone and after waiting for an hour in total you decided to go home.

At home you saw on Facebook that Sam was at a party with friends and apparently forgot about your cinema plans. Today Sam tells you that he/she totally forgot the appointment. Sam apologizes, and gives you a DVD box of one of your favourite TV shows worth €30 OR takes you out to dinner at a restaurant worth €30.

**Questions**

How would you feel in this situation?

[scale 1 - 7] 1 = not angry at all, 7 = very angry

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = not happy at all, 7 = very happy

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = not disappointed at all, 7 = very disappointed

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = not sad at all, 7 = very sad

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = not surprised at all, 7 = very surprised

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = not satisfied at all, 7 = very satisfied

How do you see the balance in the relationship between you and Robin?

[scale 1-7] 1 = I give more than I get in this relationship, 7 = I get more than I take in this relationship

The way I view the relationship between me and Robin is:

[scale 1 - 7] 1 = I am getting a much better deal than my partner/colleague, 7 = My partner/colleague is getting a much better deal than I am

Do you feel like that you have received what you deserve in the relationship with Robin?

[scale 1-7], 1 = I have received less than I deserve, 7 = I have received more than I deserve

After this situation, would you feel the same about your relationship with Robin/Sam as before the situation?

[scale 1-7], 1 = the relationship is worse than before the situation, 7 = the relationship is better than before the situation

How do you think you would feel about Robin in this situation?

[scale 1-7] 1 = very negative, 7 = very positive

The next questions are about the gift that you have received from Robin/Sam

What impact would this gift have on your relationship with the giver?

[scale 1-7] 1 = a very negative impact, 7 = a very positive impact

Would you in this situation appreciate the gift that Robin gave you?

[scale 1-7] 1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely

Would you in this situation be thankful for the gift that Robin/Sam gave you?

[scale 1-7] 1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely

Would you in this situation be grateful for the gift that Robin/Sam gave you?

[scale 1-7] 1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely

Would you in this situation be pleased with receiving the gift that Robin/Sam gave you?

[scale 1-7] 1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely

Would you in this situation like the gift that Robin/Sam gave you?

[scale 1-7] 1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely

In this situation, how likely would you be to regift the gift?

[scale 1-7] 1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely

_____

What is your gender?

[male – female]

What is your highest level of education?

[primary school, high school, mbo, hbo-wo bachelor, wo masters]

What is your age in years?

[scale 16-100], 16 = 16 years, 100 = 100 years.

___

What was it that Robin  wanted to apologize for?

[forgetting to call to cancel a cinema appointment, lying about being sick to skip a cinema appointment, forgetting your birthday ]

What was the relationship between you and Robin?

[good friends, colleagues, partners]

What was the gift that you received?

[a dinner, DVD box, a watch]

## Appendix II. Questionnaire questions Dutch

**Introductie**

Fijn dat u mee wilt doen aan dit onderzoek voor mijn master scriptie.

Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal ongeveer 5 minuten duren. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, wilt u invullen wat als eerste bij u opkomt? Als deelnemer aan dit onderzoek blijft u geheel anoniem.

Er zijn geen risico's of voordelen verbonden aan het invullen van de vragenlijst. U kunt op ieder moment beslissen om te stoppen met invullen, echter zijn alleen volledig ingevulde vragenlijsten te gebruiken voor het onderzoek. Voor eventuele vragen kunt u contact opnemen met Cecile Starrenburg (cecile.starrenburg@wur.nl).

Door op 'ja' te klikken geeft u aan dat u bovenstaande hebt gelezen en ermee instemt;

**Scenarios study 1**

*Stelt u zich het volgende voor..*

U gaat soms naar de bioscoop met uw goede vriend(in) Robin. Afgelopen donderdag had u afgesproken om met Robin naar de bioscoop te gaan. Toen u donderdag bij de bioscoop aan kwam, was Robin er nog niet. Na een half uur wachten besloot u Robin te bellen. Robin nam niet op, en na totaal een uur gewacht te hebben besloot u naar huis te gaan.

Vandaag vertelt Robin u dat hij/zij donderdag een klein ongelukje had gehad met de fiets en daardoor niet kon komen. Door de omstandigheden was Robin vergeten aan u te laten weten

dat hij/zij niet meer kwam. Robin biedt zijn/haar excuses aan en geeft u een DVD box van een van uw favoriete series ter waarde van €30.OF

U gaat soms naar de bioscoop met uw goede vriend(in) Robin. Afgelopen donderdag had u afgesproken om met Robin naar de bioscoop te gaan. Toen u donderdag bij de bioscoop aan kwam, was Robin er nog niet. Na een half uur wachten besloot u Robin te bellen. Robin nam niet op, en na een uur wachten besloot u nog een keer te bellen. Robin nam op en zei dat hij/zij helaas ziek is en daardoor niet kan komen. U wenst Robin beterschap en besluit naar huis te gaan. Thuis aangekomen zag u op Facebook dat Robin op een feestje was met vrienden. Robin was dus niet ziek en had tegen u gelogen.

Vandaag ziet u Robin weer. Robin biedt zijn/haar excuses aan en geeft u een DVD box van een van uw favoriete series ter waarde van €30.

**Scenarios study 2**

U gaat soms naar de bioscoop met uw goede vriend Robin. U bent al sinds uw jeugd bevriend met Robin en jullie zien elkaar vaak. Afgelopen donderdag had u afgesproken om met Robin naar de bioscoop te gaan. Toen u donderdag bij de bioscoop aan kwam, was Robin er nog niet. Na een half uur wachten besloot u Robin te bellen. Robin nam niet op, en na totaal een uur gewacht te hebben besloot u naar huis te gaan.

Thuis aangekomen zag u op Facebook dat Robin op een feestje was met vrienden en jullie bioscoop afspraak schijnbaar totaal was vergeten. Vandaag vertelde Robin u dat hij/zij de afspraak totaal was vergeten. Robin bied zijn/haar excuses aan en geeft je een DVD box van een van je favoriete series ter waarde van €30 OF trakteert je op een etentje bij een restaurant ter waarde van €30.

OF

U gaat soms naar de bioscoop met uw collega Robin. U kent Robin niet zo goed, jullie werken pas sinds een paar maanden bij hetzelfde bedrijf en zien elkaar niet veel buiten het werk om.

Afgelopen donderdag had u afgesproken om met Robin naar de bioscoop te gaan. Toen u donderdag bij de bioscoop aan kwam, was Robin er nog niet. Na een half uur wachten besloot u Robin te bellen. Robin nam niet op, en na totaal een uur gewacht te hebben besloot u naar huis te gaan.

Thuis aangekomen zag u op Facebook dat Robin op een feestje was met vrienden en jullie bioscoop afspraak schijnbaar totaal was vergeten. Vandaag vertelde Robin u dat hij/zij de afspraak totaal was vergeten. Robin bied zijn/haar excuses aan en geeft je een DVD box van een van je favoriete series ter waarde van €30 OF trakteert je op een etentje bij een restaurant ter waarde van €30.

**Vragen**

Hoe zou u zich in deze situatie voelen?

[scale 1 - 7] 1 = helemaal niet boos, 7 = heel erg boos

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet blij, 7 = heel erg blij

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet teleurgesteld, 7 = heel erg teleurgesteld

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet verdrietig, 7 = heel erg verdrietig

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet verbaasd, 7 = heel erg verbaasd

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet tevreden, 7 = heel erg tevreden

[scale 1 – 7] 1 = helemaal niet dankbaar, 7 = heel erg dankbaar

Hoe ziet u, na deze situatie, de balans in de relatie tussen u en Robin?

[scale 1 - 7] 1 = Ik krijg minder dan dat ik geef in deze relatie, 7 = Ik krijg meer dan dat ik geef in deze relatie

Hoe ziet u de relatie tussen u en Robin na deze situatie?

[scale 1-7] 1 = De relatie levert mij minder op dan Robin, 7 = De relatie levert mij meer op dan Robin

Heeft u het gevoel dat u heeft ontvangen wat u verdient in deze relatie?

[scale 1-7] 1 = ik heb minder ontvangen dan dat ik verdien, 7 = ik heb meer ontvangen dan dat ik verdien

Zou u zich na deze situatie hetzelfde voelen over uw relatie met Robin als voor de situatie?

[scale 1-7] 1 = de relatie is slechter dan voor de situatie, 7 = de relatie is beter dan voor de situatie

Hoe zou u zich in deze situatie voelen over Robin?

[scale 1-7] 1 = zeer negatief, 7 = zeer positief

De volgende vragen gaan over het cadeau dat u heeft gekregen van Robin

Wat voor invloed zou het cadeau hebben op de relatie tussen u en Robin?

[scale 1-7] 1 = een zeer negatieve invloed, 7 = een zeer positieve invloed

In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie het cadeau van Robin waarderen?

[scale 1-7] 1 = helemaal niet waarderen, 7 = heel erg waarderen

In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie dankbaar zijn voor het cadeau van Robin?

[scale 1-7] 1 = helemaal niet dankbaar, 7 = heel erg dankbaar

In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie erkentelijk zijn voor het cadeau van Robin?

[scale 1-7] 1 = helemaal niet erkentelijk, 7 = heel erg erkentelijk

In hoeverre zou u zich in de omschreven situatie verheugd voelen door het ontvangen van het cadeau?

[scale 1-7] 1 = helemaal niet verheugd, 7 = heel erg verheugd

Hoe leuk zou u het cadeau dat u van Robin hebt gekregen vinden?

[scale 1-7] 1 = helemaal niet leuk, 7 = heel erg leuk

Hoe waarschijnlijk is het dat u het gekregen cadeau ongebruikt door zou geven aan iemand anders?

[scale 1-7] 1 = zeer onwaarschijnlijk, 7 = zeer waarschijnlijk

⎯⎯⎯⎯

What is uw geslacht?

[man, vrouw]

Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding?

[basisonderwijs, voortgezet onderwijs (LBO/VBO/VMBO/MAVO/HAVO/VWO), mbo, hbo-

wo bachelor, wo masters]

Wat is uw leeftijd in jaren?

[scale 16-100], 16 = 16 years, 100 = 100 years.

___

Waarvoor wilde Robin zijn/haar excuses aanbieden?

[voor het vergeten van een afspraak om koffie te drinken, voor het afzeggen van het concert

en het liegen over de ziekte, voor het vergeten van je verjaardag]

Wat was de relatie tussen jou en Robin?

[collega's, partners, buren,]

What was het cadeau dat je kreeg van Robin?

[een etentje in een restaurant, een DVD box, een horloge]

**Slot**

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan het onderzoek.

Klik op het pijltje naar rechts om de vragenlijst in te sturen.

## Appendix III. Factor loadings scales study 1

Factor loadings  relational equity items

| | Component 1 |
|---|---|
| Hoe ziet u, na deze situatie, de balans in de relatie tussen u en Robin? | 0.935 |
| Hoe ziet u de relatie tussen u en Robin na deze situatie? | 0.87 |
| Heeft u het gevoel dat u heeft ontvangen wat | 0.922 |

| | |
|---|---|
| u verdient in deze relatie? | |

Extraction method: principal component. 1 component extracted.

Factor loadings gift evaluation items

| | Component 1 |
|---|---|
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie het cadeau van Robin waarderen? | 0.932 |
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie dankbaar zijn voor het cadeau van Robin? | 0.914 |
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie erkentelijk zijn voor het cadeau van Robin? | 0.848 |
| In hoeverre zou u zich in de omschreven situatie verheugd voelen door het ontvangen van het cadeau? | 0.910 |
| Hoe leuk zou u het cadeau dat u van Robin hebt gekregen vinden? | 0.885 |

Extraction method: principal component. 1 component extracted.

## Appendix IV. Factor loadings scales study 2

Factor loadings  relational equity items

| | Component 1 |
|---|---|
| Hoe ziet u, na deze situatie, de balans in de relatie tussen u en Robin? | 0.852 |
| Hoe ziet u de relatie tussen u en Robin na deze situatie? | 0.856 |
| Heeft u het gevoel dat u heeft ontvangen wat u verdient in deze relatie? | 0.761 |

Extraction method: principal component. 1 component extracted.

Factor loadings gift evaluation items

| | Component 1 |
|---|---|
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie het cadeau van Robin waarderen? | 0.876 |
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie dankbaar zijn voor het cadeau van Robin? | 0.892 |
| In hoeverre zou u in de omschreven situatie erkentelijk zijn voor het cadeau van Robin? | 0.891 |
| In hoeverre zou u zich in de omschreven situatie verheugd voelen door het ontvangen van het cadeau? | 0.892 |
| Hoe leuk zou u het cadeau dat u van Robin hebt gekregen vinden? | 0.788 |

Extraction method: principal component. 1 component extracted.