The Friendly Taking Effect: How Interpersonal Closeness Leads to Seemingly Selfish Yet Jointly Maximizing Choice

YANPING TU
ALEX SHAW
AYELET FISHBACH

This research documents “the friendly taking effect” in choosing consumption packages for the self and others, interpersonal closeness leads to a preference for a self-benefiting package when this package also offers greater total benefit to the self-other collective (studies 1 and 2). We propose that a friendly intention (i.e., concern for the total benefit) underlies the friendly taking effect; therefore, people both take more from and give more to a close (vs. distant) other when doing so offers greater benefits in total (study 3), and people are cognitively tuned in to (e.g., acquire, remember) information about the total benefit more when choosing a package for themselves and a close (vs. distant) other (study 4). Moreover, the importance people place on the total benefit mediates the impact of closeness on people’s preference for self-benefiting packages (study 5). We explore boundary conditions (study 6) and implications for marketers of consumption packages (study 7).

Keywords: choice for self and other together, interpersonal closeness, self-other overlap, total benefit

Consumers frequently choose consumption packages for the self and other together, jointly considering the benefits for both. For example, they decide which airline to fly with for a joint trip so that both they and others will receive mileage benefits. Or when selecting gifts for others, consumers sometimes receive bonuses that hinge on which gift they buy. Under these circumstances, their choice again involves consideration of both the benefit their gift recipient gets (from the gift) and the benefit they get (from the bonus). Consumption packages are not created equal—some provide greater self-benefit and some provide greater other-benefit. In addition, consumption packages vary by the total benefits for the self and the other.

In this research, we study consumers choosing between a consumption package that offers significantly more self-benefit and a consumption package that offers slightly more other-benefit. In this situation the self-benefiting package also offers greater total benefits. Building on research on interpersonal closeness (Fitzsimons and Kay 2004; Kurt, Inman, and Argo 2011; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011; Winterich and Barone 2011; Winterich, Mittal, and

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Ross 2009), we explore the possibility that consumers would be more likely to choose a self-benefiting package when the other person is close rather than distant. In other words, consumers would be more likely to take away some benefit from a close (as opposed to distant) other in exchange for a lot more benefit for themselves. We base our prediction on research showing that closeness is characterized by mentally representing the self and other as a self-other collective (Aron et al. 1991; Cialdini et al. 1997), rather than separate entities, and we argue that closeness would lead to a greater concern for the total benefit for this self-other collective, which in turn increases preference for the self-benefiting package when it also offers greater benefit in total. We dub this effect “the friendly taking effect” because an inherently friendly intention (i.e., concern for the total benefit; a we-oriented intention) underlies this overt taking behavior.

INTERPERSONAL CLOSERNESS: WHEN YOU AND I BECOME “WE”

Interpersonal closeness is a multifaceted construct that has a variety of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive consequences. For example, at the behavioral level, closeness is revealed as the frequency and diversity of interactions (Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto 1989). At the emotional level, closeness is shown as an increased liking of the relationship partner (Rubin 1970). At the cognitive level, closeness manifests as the overlapped mental representation of self and other (Aron et al. 1991) that goes by various names in the literature, including self-other merging (Batson et al. 1997), cognitive interdependence (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), and oneness (Cialdini et al. 1997). Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) measured the self-other overlap via a set of Venn-like diagrams, each of which consists of two circles—one representing the self and one representing the other—that overlap to different degrees, from not at all to completely. The closer someone feels to a relationship partner, the more heavily overlapped circles they choose, revealing a greater degree of perceived overlap between the self and the other. Thus at the cognitive level, closeness blurs the boundary between self and other and makes people more likely to view the self and the other as overlapped entities that are parts of a self-other collective (Aron et al. 1991).

The salience of the self-other collective in close relationships could result in mentally sharing each other’s status including traits, knowledge, achievement, and resources. For example, in the seminal work by Aron and colleagues (1991), respondents were slower to identify a trait word that did not describe themselves when it described a close rather than a distant other, suggesting they incorporated more of a close other’s traits into the self. Likewise, Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) found that participants perceived themselves as more caring, sympathetic, and helpful after they observed another person with whom they felt a strong sense of merged identity offering help, again providing evidence that people mentally share the traits of a close other. Furthermore, the heightened sense of the self-other collective also gives people access (actual or illusory) to desirable outcomes of close others, such as information, consumption, knowledge, moral credentials, and success (Kouchaki 2011; Tesser 1988; Tu and Fishbach 2015; Wegner 1987; Wegner, Erber, and Raymond 1991).

In addition to sharing a close other’s status mentally, the heightened sense of the self-other collective can also lead people to expect close others to share their own statuses. For example, people egocentrically assume their partners share their own traits and values (Murray et al. 2002). Similarly, in tasks that require perspective taking, people perform worse when the other person is close rather than distant because they have more difficulty realizing the close other does not really have access to their perspective (Savitsky et al. 2011).

Together, these results suggest that experiencing self and other as one coherent unit, rather than as separate entities, characterizes interpersonal closeness. It follows that in decision making, increased closeness will result in a greater sense of the self-other collective, which will lead participants to choices that increase the total benefit to the self and other.

ALLOCATING RESOURCES FOR THE SELF AND THE OTHER

The concern for the outcome of the self-other collective in close relationships influences resource-allocation decisions. For example, whereas people are willing to give resources to complete strangers (Batson 1991; Camerer and Thaler 1995), they are much more likely to give them to close others (Clark 1983). Although this increased giving to close others is partially caused by an increased desire to meet the needs of close others and to care about close others’ benefit, it certainly also follows from the increased concern for the self-other collective caused by the blurred self-other boundary, and the perception that “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours.” As Wegner (1980) commented, willingness to give to others may “stem in part from a basic confusion between ourselves and others” (p. 133). Consequently, giving to a close other can feel like giving to the self (Aron et al. 1991; Batson et al. 1997; Cialdini et al. 1997; Clark 1983; Jarymowicz 1992). Indeed, research on communal versus exchange relationships documents that people are less concerned with reciprocity in communal relationships (in which the norm is to give to meet others’ needs, or to show concern for the other person) than in exchange relationships (where the norm is to give with the
expectation of getting comparable repayment in the future; Clark and Mills 1979, 1993). Presumably, the blurry self-other boundaries in closer, communal relationships imply people benefit from helping their partner and focus on the total benefit rather than being paid back.

We propose that interpersonal closeness might also increase *taking* from a close other for the same reason it increases giving—a greater concern for the total benefit for the self-other collective. Specifically, we predict people should be more likely to take from a close rather than distant other when doing so can increase the total resources for the self-other collective (e.g., if by taking away one chocolate from the other, one can get three chocolates for the self). We dub this effect “the friendly taking effect” because such overt taking behavior is actually rooted in a friendly intention, that is, concern for the total benefit.

Notably, because in our paradigm, greater self-benefit is associated with greater total benefit, concern for self, rather than total, could drive choice of the self-benefiting package. Thus the “friendly taking” hypothesis demands two critical tests. First, people should take from their close other only when doing so increases the total benefit. When taking reduces the total benefit, we predict a decrease in taking from—or, stated differently, an increase in giving to—a close other. That is, closeness should lead people to be more willing to give to (not just take from) close others as long as doing so increases the total benefit.

Second, if closeness increases concern for the total benefit, we should find traces at the cognitive level, such as information acquisition and retention. For example, in terms of information acquisition, people may be more likely to acquire information about the total benefit to aid their decision when the other person is close rather than distant. In addition, when choosing for the self and closer others, people may find information about the total benefit more sufficient for making the decision, and they do not acquire information about the specific allocation for the self and other. In terms of information retention, if people in closer relationships indeed focus more on the total benefit when processing the choice options, we should expect them to retain the total-benefit information better and show better memory for it when unexpectedly tested later. We empirically test these predictions in our research.

Our research also explores several alternative explanations for this friendly taking effect. One alternative explanation is *reallocation*; people may be more likely to take from close others by choosing the self-benefiting consumption package because they think they are more likely to be able to reallocate the resources they take at a later point with close others rather than distant others. Hence people do not intend to take from close others—they merely intend to increase the size of the pie that will be redistributed at a later point in time. To address this alternative, we use resources that cannot be reallocated after the experiment (e.g., self and other eat chocolates in the lab).

Another possible alternative explanation is *future reciprocity*; close others would have more opportunities than distant others to interact and pay back their relationship partner in other ways in the future. To address this alternative, we test whether perceived closeness will increase taking from close others even if there is no opportunity for future interaction and payback, for example, when the relationship is temporarily formed in the lab with an anonymous partner online. Notably, closeness does not necessarily increase reciprocity, and people in closer, more communal relationships actually anticipate less reciprocity (and bookkeeping) than those in exchange relationships. Therefore, if expected reciprocity is driving our hypothesized effects, one could predict more taking from a distant other (i.e., more exchange-based relationship) as opposed to close other (Clark and Mills 1979, 1993).

A third cluster of alternative reasons is psychological; people may (1) anticipate more forgiveness from close others *(anticipated forgiveness)*, (2) be less concerned with impressing these close friends *(impression management)*, and (3) feel more comfortable using greater total benefit to justify selfish allocation *(justification)*. To address the *anticipated forgiveness* account, we test whether people are always more likely to take from a closer other or, as we predict, this tendency holds true only when doing so increases the total benefit. To address the *impression management* account, we explore contexts in which the other is unaware of the choice options and thus cannot form any impression based on the outcome. To address the *justification* account, we investigate whether closeness is associated with greater attention to total benefits even before the person knows who will benefit from maximizing the total.

Next, we report seven experiments that document the friendly taking effect in the context of choosing consumption packages for the self and other together, and provide support for the proposed mechanism (i.e., attention to total benefits). Because closeness is a multifaceted construct, any single operational definition of it may introduce some confounds. Hence across studies, we adopt a variety of manipulations, including asking participants to recall a close versus distant other, manipulating closeness in existing relationships, and manipulating closeness in temporarily formed relationships in the lab. We summarize our manipulations and main findings in Table 1.

**STUDY 1: TAKING MORE FROM A CLOSE OTHER**

Study 1 tested whether people would be more likely to take from a close versus a distant other. We asked participants to recall a friend, manipulated the perceived closeness toward the friend, and then asked them to choose between a chocolate truffle sampling package that provided larger self-benefit and one that provided larger other-
benefit. These choices were consequential; some participants received their selected package. We ensured the self-benefiting package also increased the total benefit (a precondition for the friendly taking effect) and predicted that, compared to those in the distant condition, participants in the close condition would be more likely to choose the option that provided the larger self-benefit, taking more for themselves at the expense of the other.

Method

This study employed a one-factor (closeness), two-level (close vs. distant) between-participants design. Sixty-three University of Chicago undergraduate students (28 men, 35 women) who sat in a common area participated in the study.

Participants began by recalling the last same-sex friend they ran into before taking the study and wrote down that person’s initials. To ensure their involvement and the authenticity of information they provided, participants read they and the friend they listed would be entered into a raffle to win a reward. Next, we adopted the procedure by Fitzsimons and Kay (2004; see also Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012) to manipulate perceived closeness: we asked participants to write five sentences to describe their relationship with the friend they recalled, in the format of either “We . . .” (close condition) or “He/she and I . . .” (distant condition). We provided one example in each condition: “We met each other on the school bus” (close condition) or “He/she and I met each other on the school bus” (distant condition). Previous research has shown that this manipulation reliably influences closeness (Fitzsimons and Kay 2004).

Participants then read that if they won the raffle, they would have an opportunity to sample gourmet chocolate truffles in our lab later that quarter with the friend they had listed. They further read that several different types of gourmet chocolate truffles would be available, all rated very positively by consumers, and that because the experimenters were interested in the tasting experience of sampling different combinations, they created two types of sampling experiences:

Package “A” (self-benefiting/higher total benefit): “7 truffles for yourself and 3 truffles for your friend (10 truffles in total).”

Package “B” (other-benefiting/lower total benefit): “2 truffles for yourself and 4 truffles for your friend (6 truffles in total).”

The package labels—self-benefiting, other-benefiting, higher total benefit and lower total benefit—were not shown to participants either here or in subsequent studies. The self-benefiting package allowed the participant to take a significantly larger share of the truffles at the expense of the other, and the other-benefiting package provided a slightly larger other-benefit at the expense of the self.

Participants then read they would not be able to share the chocolate truffles during the sampling phase of the

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<td>Participants were more likely to choose the self-benefiting chocolate sampling package in the close (vs. distant) condition.</td>
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experiment. We added this stipulation so participants would not choose the option with the larger total benefit because they were planning to share the windfall with the other participant. So although the self-benefiting option provided a larger total benefit, participants would not be able to redistribute the additional value. Participants then made a choice and received the raffle ticket for their selected sampling package.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, more participants in the close condition (63%: 20/32) chose the self-benefiting sampling package than in the distant condition (35%: 11/31; \( \chi^2(1) = 4.60, p = .032 \)). That is, participants were more likely to take away a little benefit from a close other rather than a distant other in order to get a lot more benefit for themselves.

Results from study 1 confirmed our basic hypothesis that people are more likely to take from close others as compared to distant others. We believe this effect emerged because close others were more focused on the total amount of resources the self and other receive, which was larger in the self-benefiting package. However, expectation of future reciprocity might also explain our effect (Converse and Fishbach 2012). Specifically, participants may have taken more from close others because, in naturally occurring relationships, people have more opportunities to interact and reciprocate with close others in the future. Although close relationships do not necessarily mean more anticipated reciprocity, and might actually suppress exchange norms (Clark and Mills 1979, 1993), nevertheless, in study 2, we more explicitly ruled out this alternative by manipulating closeness between participants and an anonymous confederate with whom they would not expect any future interaction.

**STUDY 2: TAKING MORE FROM AN ANONYMOUS YET CLOSER OTHER**

Study 2 investigated whether people take more from close others than distant others in a new domain, using a closeness manipulation that eliminated the possibility of future reciprocity. Specifically, we followed the Relationship Closeness Induction Task (RCIT; Sedikides et al. 1999), which requires participants to engage in self-disclosure with others in order to induce a temporary relationship and feeling of closeness (Altman and Taylor 1973; Berg and Clark 1986). In this study, we manipulated closeness by asking participants to engage in different degrees of mutual self-disclosure with an online confederate. Because the communication was online and personally identifiable information was limited, participants had no reasonable expectation of being able to pay back this online confederate. In addition, study 2 used participants’ idiosyncratic preferences to create packages that offered a larger subjective value for either the self or other. We predicted that participants in the relatively close condition would be more likely to choose the self-benefiting package than those in the relatively distant condition.

**Method**

This study employed a one-factor, two-level (closeness: close vs. distant) between-participants design. Eighty-four University of Chicago undergraduate students (40 men, 44 women) participated in the study for monetary compensation and a gift.

We adapted the RCIT (Sedikides et al. 1999) as the closeness manipulation. Participants completed the study on a computer. They read that we were interested in how people communicate with others online and that they would be randomly paired with another student as their study partner. In reality, the study partner was a same-gender confederate. Participants read they should have an online conversation with their study partner in a naturalistic manner by taking turns answering a few questions from a list provided to them. Participants in the distant condition exchanged answers to 19 questions including the 11 from the distant condition and an additional 8 deeper questions (e.g., “If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be?” [see full list in appendix A]). The deep questions gradually escalated in level of closeness. We gave confederates their responses in advance and included the most common answer to each question, based on a pilot study. Therefore, we eliminated the potential for different conversation content from the “study partner.”

We pretested this procedure among another group of participants from the same population (n = 41) and found that participants indeed reported feeling closer to the “study partner” in the close condition (\( M = 3.25, \) standard deviation [SD] = 1.07) than in the distant condition (\( M = 2.33, \) SD = 1.20, \( t(39) = 2.58, p = .014 \)). This procedure has also been shown to increase the sense of the self-other collective as measured by Aron et al.’s (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale (Sprecher, Treger, and Wondra 2013).

Upon finishing the online communication, participants answered several filler questions regarding the communication experience. Next, the experimenter informed participants that they and their study partner each would receive an additional gift. The experimenter presented five gifts on a desk: a file folder, a blue Paper Mate ballpoint pen, a yellow Sharpie highlighter, a bluebook, and a 3M 3 × 3 100-count Post-it pad. Participants read that their task was to rank the gifts in order of preference “to give us some information on preparing gifts for participants in future studies.”
They then read that the computer program would randomly generate some gift sets for them and their study partner. They further read that, “In your condition, you are the person to choose a gift set for you and your partner. The gift sets below will also be shown to your study partner when he/she views your responses. Your study partner will receive the gift you select and will know that you made the choice.” In fact, all participants chose between the same two gift packages (titles in parentheses were not shown):

Package “A” (self-benefiting/higher total benefit): “You receive your 1st favorite gift and your study partner receives his/her 3rd favorite gift.”
Package “B” (other-benefiting/lower total benefit): “You receive your 4th favorite and your study partner receives his/her 2nd favorite gift.”
Participants then made a choice and received the corresponding gifts for themselves.

Results and Discussion

In support of the prediction, more participants in the close condition (77%; 33/43) chose the self-benefiting consumption package (i.e., the one that offered their favorite and the other’s third-favorite gift) than in the distant condition (54%; 22/41, \( \chi^2(1) = 4.95, p = .026 \)).

Results from study 2 provided evidence that people are more willing to take from a close other than from a distant other when the self-benefiting option maximizes the total benefit and when there is no expectation of future reciprocity. Participants in our study had never met their online interaction partner. Indeed, they were overall more selfish than participants in study 1, who knew their interaction partner. Indeed, they were overall more selfish than participants in study 1 who knew their interaction partner (65.5% of the participants here and 49% of the participants in study 1 chose the self-benefiting package).

However, participants in this study again displayed the same pattern of behavior, being more willing to take a larger share of resources for themselves from a close other than a distant other.

Of course, we have not yet demonstrated that our effect is at all dependent on the existence of a larger total benefit. People might feel more licensed to take from close others because they anticipate more forgiveness for their selfishness when taking from close others rather than distant others (McCullough et al. 1998; McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal 1997), or they might feel more comfortable taking things (e.g., help) from close friends as compared to casual friends because they are less concerned with making a good impression (Beck and Clark 2009). In our next study, we tested these alternative explanations by examining whether people give to, rather than just take from, close others more than from distant others. This experiment also helps remove a potential confound from studies 1 and 2, namely, that we conflated larger total benefit with larger self-benefit.

STUDY 3: TAKING FROM AND GIVING TO A CLOSE OTHER

If people in closer relationships focus on the total benefit, they should be more likely to take as well as to give to another, as long as by doing so they would maximize the total benefit for the collective. Thus we manipulated the beneficiary of this choice option (self vs. other). We predicted people in closer relationships would be more likely to choose the greater-total-benefit option regardless of whether it benefits them (friendly taking) or the other (friendly giving).

We tested our prediction in the context of a referral program. We invited people to sign up for our lab’s participant pool and refer another person (either a close friend or an acquaintance) in return for entering a lottery prize of a $30 Amazon gift card for each member of the pair ($60 in total). Participants chose between two options that varied by waiting time for the delivery of the lottery prize (e.g., Your prize is delivered in X days; Your friend’s prize is delivered in Y days). We chose time of delivery as the target resource because people are generally impatient and would like to receive their prize as soon as possible, and because sharing delivery time (i.e., reallocating) is impossible. Thus if the pair wins, both people get the money but at different times.

We manipulated the set of two options from which participants chose, which varied by who got the prize sooner (they or their friend) and the combined waiting time (i.e., one of the options had in total a sooner delivery time). We predicted participants would be more likely to choose the shorter total waiting time option when the other was close rather than distant, regardless of whether it is self-benefiting (in which case they take) or other-benefiting (in which case they give).

Method

This study employed a 2 (closeness: close vs. distant) \( \times \) 2 (the overall-sooner option is self- vs. other-benefiting) between-participants design. A total of 103 University of Chicago students (62 mens, 39 women, 2 unreported) who sat in a common area participated in the study.

We invited people to join the email list of our behavioral research lab and also refer a friend. Participants received a flyer (see appendix B), specifying that in return for signing up, the referring person and the referred person would each enter a lottery for a $30 Amazon gift card. Those who agreed to sign up for the referral program first listed their own contact information (name and email address) and then the contact information of a same-sex person at the same university. Specifically, they had to list the contact information of either their “closest friend” (close condition) or “a casual friend—an acquaintance you interact
with from time to time, but not close enough to count as your closest friend (e.g., a classmate you have recently met)” (distant condition).

We tested this closeness manipulation among another group of participants (N = 145) and found it increases the sense of blurred self-other boundary. Specifically, participants in the close condition indicated greater perceived self-other overlap on the IOS scale (7 point scale; M_close = 4.82, SD_close = 1.64; M_distant = 1.32, SD_distant = 1.32; t(148) = 7.24, p < .001), indicated they were more likely to use the term “we” than “you and I” to describe their relationship (7 point scale; M_close = 4.79, SD_close = 1.87; M_distant = 3.03, SD_distant = 1.62; t(148) = 6.15, p < .001), and reported a stronger sense of “oneness” with the person they listed (7 point scale; M_close = 4.25, SD_close = 1.73; M_distant = 2.40, SD_distant = 1.22; t(148) = 7.54, p < .001).

Participants in the main experiment next read that we would email the referred person an invitation on their behalf, at which point that person would decide whether to join the email list and would have the right to decline, in which case we would never use their email address.

Next, participants chose the delivery times for the lottery gifts. We ran this study over the course of a week, and participants read the experimenter would run the lottery on the following Monday. They further read that “If you or your friend wins the lottery, we will send you your prize via email some days after the drawing. You have two delivery options for you or your friend in the event that one of you wins. Please choose one option.”

In the condition in which the overall-sooner option was self-benefiting, option A minimized the wait time for the self, as well as the total wait time for the pair. The two options were as follows:

“A” (self-benefiting/higher total benefit): “Your prize is delivered in 3 days; your friend’s prize is delivered in 50 days. (Total waiting time: 53 days)”

“B” (other-benefiting/lower total benefit): “Your prize is delivered in 50 days; your friend’s prize is delivered in 13 days. (Total waiting time: 63 days)”

In the condition where the overall-sooner option was other-benefiting, option A minimized the wait time for the other, as well as the total wait time for the pair (we switched the outcomes for “self” and “other”). The two options were as follows:

“A” (other-benefiting/higher total benefit): “Your prize is delivered in 50 days; your friend’s prize is delivered in 3 days. (Total waiting time: 53 days)”

“B” (self-benefiting/lower total benefit): “Your prize is delivered in 13 days; your friend’s prize is delivered in 50 days. (Total waiting time: 63 days)”

Next, participants rated how familiar they were with the referred person (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much), how close they felt toward the referred person (1 = We are just acquaintances, 7 = We are closest friends), and how long they had known the referred person (in months). Finally, to assess participants’ reasons for making their selection, we had them answer an open question on how they made the delivery-time choice.

Results and Discussion

In support of the manipulation, participants in the close versus distant condition reported feeling more familiar with the referred person (M_close = 6.14, SD = 1.10 vs. M_distant = 5.35, SD = 1.55; t(100) = 2.96, p = .004) and closer to him or her (M_close = 5.90, SD = 1.20 vs. M_distant = 5.19, SD = 1.52; t(100) = 2.60, p = .011). Interestingly, these conditions did not vary by the time participants had known the referred person (M_close = 24.08 months, SD = 16.22 vs. M_distant = 24.54 months, SD = 44.69; t(101) = .07, p = .94).

In support of the hypothesis, more participants in the close condition (86%; 44/51) chose the option that maximized the total benefit by minimizing total wait time (i.e., option A) than did those in the distant condition (56%; 29/52; χ²(1) = 11.61, p = .001), regardless of whether this option benefited the self or the other (see Figure 1).

Specifically, in the condition in which the option that offered overall-sooner delivery benefited the self, more participants in the close condition (80%; 20/25) chose this option A than did those in the distant condition (38%; 10/26; χ²(1) = 9.08, p = .003). That is, participants were more likely to take from closer others. In the giving condition in which the overall-sooner option benefited the other, marginally more participants in the close condition (92%; 24/26) chose this option A than did those in the distant condition (73%; 19/26; χ²(1) = 3.36, p = .067). That is,
participants were more likely to give to (i.e., less likely to take from) closer others. Notably, the difference between these simple (taking and giving) effects is not significant, as indicated by a nonsignificant interaction ($b = .37$, standard error [SE] = 1.07, $\text{Wald}(1) = .12$, $p = .730$), suggesting a similarly strong preference for taking and giving in close (vs. distant) relationships.

Next, we analyzed participants’ reasons for making their selections. We had two coders, who were unaware of the hypothesis, first identify the unique reasons and then count the number of times each reason was mentioned (we note that a few participants listed two reasons and we coded both). The coders worked independently before meeting to discuss and resolve a few coding differences. The most frequently mentioned reasons were prioritizing total benefit (e.g., “I simply went for a lower total wait time;” mentioned by 24%), prioritizing self-benefit (e.g., “I just wanted to get my gift as soon as possible;” mentioned by 16%), low valuation of self-benefit (e.g., “Delivery time doesn’t matter for me;” mentioned by 13%), prioritizing other-benefit (e.g., “Since I got her into this I’d want her to be rewarded ASAP;” mentioned by 10%), liking the friend (e.g., “I like her enough to let her have her present first;” mentioned by 7%), random choice (e.g., “By random;” mentioned by 7%), self deserves earlier delivery (e.g., “I signed up my roommate and I’m doing the work, so I should get the earlier delivery;” mentioned by 4%). Less than 7% of the responses mentioned other reasons. A few participants (13%) provided no answers or seemed to answer a different question. As for “prioritizing total benefit,” we find that in the condition in which the option that offered overall-sooner delivery time benefited the self (taking), participants listed total benefit descriptively more often in the close condition (7 times) than in the distant condition (4 times); in the condition in which this option benefited the other (giving), participants listed total benefit descriptively more often in the close condition (9 times) than in the distant condition (8 times). These patterns are consistent with our prediction, although the sample is too small to produce statistically significant differences.

Importantly and in support of our hypothesis, we find prioritizing total benefits (overall-sooner delivery time) is the most frequently mentioned reason. Moreover, only one participant (of 103) who chose the other-benefiting option mentioned reciprocating past favors (i.e., “Reciprocating a favor”) and only one participant who chose the self-benefiting option mentioned anticipated forgiveness (i.e., “We know each other well so he will forgive me”), suggesting people were not—at least not explicitly—using reciprocity or expected forgiveness as the dominating decision rules.

Overall, in the context of a referral program, study 3 finds that closeness is associated with greater taking and giving when, by doing so, the participant can increase the total benefits for the collective. Interestingly, in this study (as well as study 1), people are generally generous, likely because even the distant others in our studies were still friends and acquaintances of our participants (except for study 2), which probably increased the extent to which the participants cared about the other’s welfare and thereby reduced selfishness. In support of this idea, in study 2, our one study that did involve strangers, we saw much lower rates of generosity.

Collectively, the results from studies 1, 2, and 3 are consistent with the idea that people are more focused on total benefits when making decisions about how to allocate resources between the self and a close other at the behavior level (i.e., choice). Our next study provides a direct process measure of such a focus.

STUDY 4: CLOSENESS INCREASES CONCERN FOR THE TOTAL BENEFIT

In study 4, we assessed information acquisition and information retention to examine directly whether interpersonal closeness indeed leads to greater concern for the total benefit. In terms of information acquisition, we predicted that those in a closer relationship are (1) more likely to acquire information regarding the total benefit when they can only have one piece of information from the choices of “self-benefit, other-benefit, and total benefit” (study 4A) and (2) less likely to acquire information about the exact allocation of the total benefit (i.e., who gets what) when making the decision (study 4B). In terms of information retention, we predicted that those in a closer relationship would remember the total-benefit information better because they pay more attention to the total-benefit information when information about the self-benefit, other-benefit, and total benefit is simultaneously available (study 4C).

Study 4A: Acquiring Information About the Total Benefit

Method. The study employed a one-factor (closeness), two-level (close vs. distant) between-participants design. A total of 117 Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers from the United States (79 men, 38 women, $M_{age} = 31$) participated in the study.

Participants began by recalling a same-sex person who was either their closest friend (close condition) or a casual acquaintance with whom they interacted from time to time (distant condition) and writing down that person’s initials. They next read a scenario in which they and the recalled person were eligible for a free massage and had two massage packages from which to choose. Participants further read that for each package “there are three pieces of information: (1) The duration of massage for you (in minutes); (2) the duration of massage for [recalled person’s initials] (in minutes); and (3) the total duration of massage for you and [recalled person’s initials] (in minutes) (i.e., the sum of duration for you and duration for [recalled person’s initials]).
They saw a table summarizing the information, with two rows (for package “A” and “B”) and three columns (duration for self, duration for other, total duration). All the cells were marked by question marks, indicating the information was unknown. The participants’ task was to choose which single column they wanted to reveal in order to choose between the packages.

Results and Discussion. The type of information participants chose to view differed significantly across conditions, $\chi^2(2, 117) = 14.62, p < .001$ (see Figure 2 for results of studies 4A–4C). Specifically, participants in the close condition were more likely to acquire information about the total benefit (62%; 36/58) than those in the distant condition (42%; 25/59; $\chi^2(2, 117) = 4.55, p = .033$). We also found that participants in the close condition were less likely to acquire information about the self-benefit (14%; 8/58) than those in the distant condition (46%; 27/59; $\chi^2(2, 117) = 14.26, p < .001$). Finally, participants in the close condition were marginally more likely to acquire information about the other-benefit (24%; 14/58) than those in the distant condition (12%; 7/59; $\chi^2(2, 117) = 2.99, p = .084$). These results are consistent with our argument that closeness increases focus on the total benefit. Participants were concerned more about the total benefit with close as compared to distant others—shifting their focus from the self to the self-other collective.

Study 4B: Acquiring Information About Exact Allocation of the Total Benefit

Method. The study employed a one-factor (closeness), two-level (close vs. distant) between-participants design. A total of 117 MTurk workers from the United States (43 men, 74 women; $M_{age} = 36$) participated in the study.

We operationalized closeness as in study 4A. Participants read a scenario in which they had a choice between two massage packages for self and the recalled other: “180 min massage in total for you and [recalled person’s initials]. One person gets 60 min, and the other gets 120 min.” And “150 min massage in total for you and [recalled person’s initials]. One person gets 50 min, and the other gets 100 min.” Importantly, in both packages, participants did not know who would get the larger share of the package (self or other). Participants further read that they needed to make a choice and could make it either based on available information or ask to find out the allocation of the massage time (i.e., who gets what) first. However, if they chose to view the exact allocation to remove the uncertainty about “who gets what,” we would deduct 10 minutes of the massage from each of them (e.g., for the first option, instead of 180 min in total, they would receive only 160 min in total, and “one person gets 50 min, and the other gets 110 min”). This paradigm contained an embedded cost for acquiring information; thus participants needed to decide whether they were willing to pay for it. We measured whether participants chose to acquire information about the exact allocation of the total benefit at the given cost.

Results and Discussion. We find that fewer participants in the close condition (12%; 7/58) chose to pay to view the allocation than did those in the distant condition (31%; 18/59; $\chi^2(1, 117) = 5.92, p = .015$) (see Figure 2). This result is consistent with our suggestion that information about the total benefit, rather than the exact allocation of the total benefit, leads to more acquisition of information about the total benefit.
benefit, is a more prominent concern for those choosing a consumption package for the self and a close other rather than the self and a distant other.

Study 4C: Memory for the Total Benefit

Method. The study employed a 2 (closeness: close vs. distant; between-subjects) × 2 (memory: self-benefit vs. total benefit; within-subjects) mixed design. A total of 132 MTurk workers from the United States (80 men, 52 women; M_{age} = 34) participated in this study.

Participants began by listing the first same-gender and similar-age acquaintance from their cell phone contacts (from top to bottom) and wrote down that person’s initials. To manipulate perceived closeness, we further asked them to list five reasons that might make them feel closer to that person (close condition) or five reasons that might make them feel more distant to that person (distant condition). Following this step, participants completed a massage-package choice for the self and the listed other. The two options were (1) self-benefiting/higher total benefit: “Package A: You get a 50-min massage and [listed person’s initials] gets a 30-min massage (Total time: 80 minutes),” and (2) other-benefiting/lower total benefit: “Package B: You get a 30-min massage and [listed person’s initials] gets a 40-min massage (Total time: 70 minutes).” To assess memory errors, they then worked on some filler tasks that involved numbers (e.g., matching the customer ratings or sales information of different products) for about five minutes. The numbers in the filler tasks were intentionally close to the numbers in the allocation task to increase the probability of misremembering the numbers. Next, we had participants complete a surprise memory task, which asked them to recall how many minutes of massage they and their listed person could get in total (i.e., total benefit) and how many minutes they could get (i.e., self-benefit) in their chosen option.

Results and Discussion. We first confirmed that indeed a larger percentage of participants chose the self-benefiting option in the close condition (58%; 38/65) than in the distant condition (40%; 27/67), χ²(1, 132) = 4.36, p = .037. To assess memory error, we then calculated the absolute difference between the recalled time and the actual time (e.g., if the actual time is 70 minutes, recalling either 60 minutes or 80 minutes would be coded as an error of 10 minutes). Larger numbers indicated larger memory error. Note that we asked participants to recall both the total time and the time for self, and we used the recalled time for the self as a control to rule out the possibility that participants in one condition had better memory in general. A 2 (closeness: close vs. distant; between-subjects) × 2 (memory error: total benefit vs. self-benefit; within-subjects) repeated-measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded a main effect of type of memory error (F(1, 130) = 17.51, p < .001), which meant that participants made smaller memory errors when reporting their self-benefit as compared to the total benefit. We found no main effect of closeness (F(1, 130) = 2.00, p = .16). In support of the hypothesis, we found an interaction effect (F(1, 130) = 12.83, p < .001; see Figure 2). Planned contrasts showed memory error for total benefit is less in the close condition (M = 5.00 min, SD = 11.73) than in the distant condition (M = 10.75 min, SD = 16.10, F(1, 130) = 5.47, p = .021). This result suggests participants in the close condition focused more on the total benefit than people in the distant condition. Importantly, we found no differences in memory errors for self-benefit in the close condition (M = 4.46 min, SD = 8.84) as compared to the distant condition (M = 3.81 min, SD = 7.54, F(1, 130) = .21, p = .647). This lack of difference in memory errors for self-benefit ruled out the possibility that participants in the close condition were more focused in general than people in the distant condition. Also, notably, participants across conditions had good memory for self-benefit, which suggests that whereas concern with total benefit is higher in close than in distant relationships, concern with self-benefit is generally high, regardless of closeness. Thus by attending more to total benefit, those in close relationships do not attend to self-benefits less (although notably, in study 4A, participants in the close condition were less likely to seek information about their self-benefit).

We note that because participants recalled only their selected option, which varied across conditions (with more participants choosing the self-benefiting option in the close than in distant condition), the memory effect might have been caused by differences in the total benefit value, which was potentially more memorable in the self-benefiting versus other-benefiting option (i.e., remembering 80 min was easier than remembering 70 min). We argue that this explanation is unlikely because whereas memory error for total benefit is smaller in the close condition than in the distant condition, it is actually not smaller for those choosing the other-benefiting option (total benefit was 70 min; M = 8.36, SD = 14.86) than for those choosing the self-benefiting option (total benefit was 80 min; M = 7.46, SD = 13.92, t(130) = .36, p = .72).

Discussion

Together, studies 4A–4C lend support to our proposed mechanism that closeness increases concern for the total benefit. Specifically, we find people asked more often for the total benefit information, deemed total benefit more sufficient, and showed better memory for the total benefit information when deciding for the self and a close other. We next measure people’s concern for the total benefit and test whether a greater concern for the total benefit can account for people’s increased willingness to take from close others.
STUDY 5: CONSIDERATION OF THE TOTAL BENEFIT AS A MEDIATOR

In study 5, we further investigate the claim that the consideration of total benefits prompts people to take more from close others, by measuring people’s reported importance of the total benefit and examining whether the value they put on the total benefit mediated the influence of closeness on taking from another person. We predicted that people in close relationships identify the total benefit as more important than those in distant relationships and that this increased consideration of the total benefit leads to more taking.

Additionally, in study 5, we wanted to provide a more concrete demonstration that people are willing to take from close others, by explicitly framing the action as such (Keysar et al. 2008). Specifically, participants faced a decision to redistribute massage time, such that every minute they took from the other would be converted into three minutes for themselves. That is, by taking from the other, participants could increase the benefit to the self. We predicted people would take more in the close condition than in the distant condition and that reported importance of the total benefit would mediate this behavior.

Method

This study employed a one-factor (closeness), two-level (close vs. distant) between-participants design. A total of 114 MTurk workers from the United States (74 men, 40 women; $M_{age}$ = 32) participated in the study.

Participants began by recalling the last same-sex friend they ran into before taking this study and then wrote down the friend’s initials. We then manipulated perceived closeness by imposing a low versus high closeness standard (Fishbach and Dhar 2005) and retrieval ease (Schwarz et al. 1991). Specifically, participants read that friends usually share resources (e.g., books, seats). We then asked them to list, as specifically as possible, either 3 things (close condition) or 15 things (distant condition) they and [friend’s initials] had shared. Because (1) the 15-things condition implied a higher social standard for closeness (i.e., close friends should have shared at least 15 things) than the 3-things condition, and (2) coming up with 15 items is more difficult than coming up with 3 items, we assume the 15-things condition should make participants infer they have not shared enough with the other and must be less close to the other as compared to participants in the 3-things condition.

Participants then read the following scenario: “Suppose that you and [friend’s initials] can enjoy a free massage for 10 minutes in total. Currently it is unknown how much time you and [friend’s initials] each could get. Our computer program will make an allocation decision for you two. Please click ‘>>’ to see the allocation results.” Participants then clicked the “>>” button and saw the computer program assigned 0 minutes of massage to the self and 10 minutes of massage to their friend. Participants further read they could redistribute the massage time by taking as many minutes as they wanted from their friend, and that each minute they took would be converted into 3 minutes of massage for themselves. In this allocation structure, by taking resources from the other person, participants could increase the self-benefit as well as the total benefit. Participants received some examples in the text and saw a chart that showed the relationship between the number of minutes they could take and the number of minutes they would get, the time the other person would get, and the total time (see Figure 3). Participants read that (1) the more they took, the larger the total benefit would be, and (2) their friend would know their decision. They then indicated how many minutes they would like to take from the other person.

After making this decision, participants rated the importance of (1) maximizing the total time, (2) maximizing their own time, and (3) maximizing their friend’s time (1 = Not important at all, 7 = Very important) in making the redistribution decision. Finally, we measured perceived closeness (“How close do you feel to [friend’s initial]?” 1 = Not close at all, 7 = Very close; “To what extent do you feel that you and [friend’s initial] are one unit?” 1 = We are not “one unit” at all, 7 = We are definitely “one unit”) as a manipulation check.

Results and Discussion

We averaged the measures of closeness and oneness ($r = .65$, $p < .001$). In support of the manipulation, participants felt closer to the recalled other in the close condition ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.52$) as compared to the distant condition ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.27$; $t(112) = 2.29$, $p = .024$).

In support of the hypothesis, participants took more minutes from the recalled close other ($M = 3.02$ min, $SD = 2.29$) than the recalled distant other ($M = 2.10$ min, $SD = 1.70$, $t(112) = 2.40$, $p = .018$). Participants in the close condition further reported that maximizing the total time (for the self and other) was important for them ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.79$), compared to those in the distant condition ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 2.13$, $t(112) = 2.90$, $p = .004$). However, participants in the close versus distant conditions did not differ in the importance of maximizing their own time ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.80$ vs. $M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.70$, $t < 1$) and the importance of maximizing the other person’s time ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.37$ vs. $M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.38$, $t < 1$). We note we should interpret null effects with caution, partially because participants in study 4A were less likely to acquire information about the self-benefit in the close condition than in the distant condition.

We next tested whether concern for the total benefit mediated the effect of closeness on taking. We found
closeness increased reported importance of total benefit ($\beta = 1.07$, $p = .005$) and taking ($\beta = .92$, $p = .018$). Reported importance of total benefit, in turn, increased taking ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .042$), and the inclusion of reported importance of the total benefit in the analysis reduced the effect of closeness on taking ($\beta = .71$, $p = .074$). A bootstrap analysis revealed the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (−.61 to −.03), suggesting a significant indirect effect of reported importance of the total benefit (MacKinnon, Fairchild, and Fritz 2007). Thus concern for the total benefit mediated the relationship between closeness and taking.

In addition, neither reported importance of self-benefit nor reported importance of other-benefit mediated the effect of closeness on taking.

Results from study 5 showed people will take more from a close other than from a distant other, and they provided a direct test for the proposed mechanism—consideration of the total benefit, which mediated the effect. Interestingly, participants in this study took far from the maximum from their close friend. One reason they may have failed to take everything from the other is the concept of diminishing utility (e.g., Stigler 1950); after one has received 20 minutes of a massage, an extra 10 minutes is not clearly a greater benefit to oneself than 5 minutes of massage for someone who has received no massage at all. Further, maximizing total benefits may not have been their only concern. First, participants may have had an aversion to extreme inequality (Mitchell et al. 1993; Shaw 2013; Shaw and Knobe 2013), which would result from maximizing total benefit. The results offer some support for this suggestion because participants chose allocations that got each person roughly the same number of minutes. Second, people do have concerns for the welfare of others that go beyond merely maximizing the total benefits to the self-other collective (Batson 1991). Whereas interpersonal closeness increased the emphasis on the total benefit, it did not eliminate participants’ concern for self-benefit or other-benefit. Indeed, in some cases, if the increase in the total benefit is relatively small, concern for the other may outweigh concerns with the total benefit. Following from this analysis, we designed our next study to test for two boundary conditions for the friendly taking effect: the presence of equal allocation and marginal increase in total benefits.

STUDY 6: EQUAL ALLOCATION AND MARGINAL TOTAL IMPROVEMENT AS BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

So far, we have demonstrated the friendly taking effect in different situations and provided evidence for the proposed mechanism. In study 6, we explore two boundary conditions of the friendly taking effect. First, people have a preference for equal outcomes, and this preference can sometimes conflict with maximizing other-benefits (Mitchell et al. 1993; Shaw 2013; Shaw and Knobe 2013). In our previous studies, we reduced concern with equality by intentionally excluding an equal-allocation option. In study 6, we introduce the equality condition, in which we pit an equal allocation against an unequal allocation with greater total benefit. We expect the friendly taking effect to be weakened (or disappear) in this case because participants may default to choosing the equal option when it is present.
Second, research shows people do care about the benefits of others, especially when the other is close (Batson 1991; Clark 1983). In some circumstances, this concern for other-benefit can also conflict with maximizing the total benefit. In our previous studies, we increased the attractiveness of the greater-total-benefit option by making the marginal benefit of taking relatively large (i.e., taking from the other led to a large total benefit increase) to encourage people to be more willing to “take” from the other. In study 6, we introduce the small-total-benefit-increase condition, in which the benefit of taking from the other to the self-other collective is relatively small. We expect the friendly taking effect to be weakened (or disappear) in this case because participants may not think that the small increase in the total benefit is worth the cost imposed on the other.

In addition, to further distinguish our proposed process (i.e., focus on total benefit in close relationships) from impression management (i.e., need for impression management is lower in front of closer others and thus people take; Chen and Berger 2013), in study 6, we attempt to eliminate participants’ concerns with impression management. Specifically, we asked participants to assume (1) their friend will never know the benefit they receive and (2) their friend will never know the options they are choosing from, such that their friend cannot form any impressions of them based on the outcome. We predicted our proposed effect would hold even when impression management was not a concern.

Method

A total of 151 University of Chicago undergraduate students (85 men, 66 women) who sat in a common area participated in the study. This study employed a 2 (closeness: close vs. distant) × 3 (choice set: standard condition [without equal allocation + large increase in total-benefit option] vs. equality condition [with equal allocation + large increase in total-benefit option] vs. small-total-benefit-increase condition [without equal allocation + small increase in total-benefit option]) between-participants design.

We first asked participants to recall either a same-sex close friend or distant friend as in studies 3 and 6. We then asked them to imagine we were going to send both them and the friend they listed earlier in this survey a box of Lindt Lindor chocolate truffles as gifts to celebrate the beginning of summer. Participants saw a picture of the chocolate truffles and two choice options.

In all three choice-set conditions, we held one option (option A) the same and varied the other option (option B). Specifically, option A (the self-benefiting option) was “You receive a box of 10 chocolate truffles; your friend receives a box of 6 chocolate truffles.” In the standard condition, option B was “You receive a box of 8 chocolate truffles (Total: 14 chocolate truffles);” in the equality condition, option B was “You receive a box of 7 chocolate truffles; your friend receives a box of 7 chocolate truffles (Total: 14 chocolate truffles);” in the smaller-total-benefit condition, option B was “You receive a box of 7 chocolate truffles; your friend receives a box of 8 chocolate truffles (Total: 15 chocolate truffles).” We further asked participants to suppose “(1) We will deliver the chocolates to each of your home addresses, so that your friend will never know how many chocolate truffles you receive; (2) your friend will never know which options were available to you; and (3) because the chocolate truffles will be delivered to your homes, you and your friend will not share them.”

After reading this information, participants made a choice for themselves and the friend they listed in the survey. In addition, participants also rated the strength of their preference (1 = I strongly prefer A, 4 = I am indifferent, 7 = I strongly prefer B).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (closeness: close vs. distant) × 3 (choice set: standard condition vs. equality condition vs. small-total-benefit-increase condition) logistic regression with choice for the self-benefiting/higher-total-benefit option as the dependent variable yielded a significant interaction, \( b = 1.25, \) \( SE = .42, \) \( Wald(1) = 8.65, \) \( p = .003 \) (see Figure 4). The main effect of closeness \( (b = 2.67, \ SE = .91, \ Wald(1) = 8.60, \ p = .003) \) and the main effect of choice set \( (b = 2.12, \ SE = .68, \ Wald(1) = 9.73, \ p = .002) \) were also significant. In support of the hypothesis, in the standard condition, participants chose the self-benefiting option (i.e., option A) more often in the close condition (73%; 19/26) than in the distant condition (36%; 9/25), \( \chi^2(1) = 7.08, \ p = .008. \) In the equality condition, we found participants chose the self-benefiting option equally frequently in the close condition (44%; 12/27) and in the distant condition (46%; 11/24), \( \chi^2(1) = .01, \ p = .921. \) In the small-total-benefit-increase condition, we found participants chose the self-benefiting option equally frequently (and directionally less frequently) in the close condition (32%; 8/25) and in the distant condition (54%; 13/24), \( \chi^2(1) = 2.46, \ p = .117. \)

For stated preference for the self-benefiting/higher-total-benefit option (i.e., option A across all the conditions), we first reverse-coded the responses so that the higher the number, the greater the preference for the self-benefiting/higher-total-benefit option. A 2 (closeness: close vs. distant) × 3 (choice set: standard condition vs. equality condition vs. small-total-benefit-increase condition) ANOVA with stated preference for the self-benefiting option as the dependent variable yielded a significant interaction, \( F(2, 145) = 3.13, \ p = .047. \) The main effect of closeness \( (F(1, 145) = .002, \ p = .967) \) and the main effect of choice set \( (F(1, 145) = .186, \ p = .830) \) were not significant.
In support of our hypothesis, in the standard condition, participants preferred the self-benefiting option (i.e., option A) more in the close condition ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.52$) than in the distant condition ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 2.07$), $t(49) = 2.11$, $p = .04$. In the equality condition, participants preferred the self-benefiting option equally in the close condition ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.96$) and in the distant condition ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 2.51$), $t(49) = .27$, $p = .786$. In the small-total-benefit-increase condition, participants preferred the self-benefiting option marginally less in the close condition ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.47$) than in the distant condition ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 2.04$), $t(49) = 1.69$, $p = .098$.

Results from study 6 replicated our proposed effect in the standard condition and identified two important boundary conditions. First, the availability of an equal allocation dampened the friendly taking effect, suggesting that one’s concern for equality could triumph over one’s concern for the total benefit in certain contexts. Second, the small-total-benefit-increase condition dampened the friendly taking effect, suggesting that when the total benefit increase is negligible, maximizing total benefit is no longer a concern. Interestingly, this condition directionally reversed the friendly taking effect; however, this unpredicted effect is nonsignificant and thus we will not interpret it. Importantly, the replication of our effect in the standard condition occurred in a circumstance in which participants were told the recipient would not know what they chose, suggesting the friendly taking effect does not depend on people explicitly reasoning about impression management. We conducted our next and final study with the goal of expanding the external validity of our effect.

**STUDY 7: FRIENDLY TAKING WITHOUT EMPHASIZING TOTAL BENEFIT**

We conducted study 7 with two goals in mind. First, we wanted to test for our effect in more natural consumption scenarios, such as when friends travel together and need to choose between an airline mileage program that benefits one versus the other, or when friends share a cab and need to choose the route that is faster for one than for the other. Second, in the studies reported thus far, we presented total-benefit information for each choice, and we wanted to test whether explicitly mentioning total-benefit information is necessary (we predicted it would not be).

**Method**

A total of 165 MTurk workers from the United States (103 men, 61 women, 1 unreported, $M_{age} = 33$) participated in the study. This study employed a 2 (closeness: close vs. distant) × 2 (scenario: shuttle routes vs. flight tickets) between-participants design.

Participants first recalled either a close friend (“a same-sex person who is a very close friend of yours” in their university) or a distant friend (“a same-sex person who is a casual acquaintance; i.e., “someone you interact with from time to time but is not as close as your closest friend” in their university), and described the types of relationship (e.g., coworker, neighbor) between them. They then read either a shuttle-routes scenario (decision on allocating time) or a flight-tickets scenario (decision on allocating a resource, i.e., miles). In both scenarios, participants considered whether to switch from a default option that benefited...
their friend to a new option that benefited themselves while also improving the total benefit for the collective.

Specifically, the shuttle-routes (decision on time) scenario read as follows: “Suppose the person you listed above and you are sharing a shuttle from the airport (flat fee). The shuttle driver offers you the route below.

Route A (other-benefiting/lower total benefit): Take 25 minutes to get to (the person you listed above)’s place first; then take another 15 minutes to get to your place.

You are familiar with this route but also have another one in mind (route B):

Route B (self-benefiting/higher total benefit): Take 15 minutes to get to your place first; then take another 20 minutes to get to (the person you listed above)’s place."

They then answered the question, “Would you suggest the shuttle driver to switch to route B, thereby (the person you listed above) will have a longer ride but you will have a shorter ride?” (yes/no).

The flight-tickets (decision on miles) scenario read as follows: “Suppose you are in charge of booking airline tickets for a trip you plan to take with (the person you listed above). You are a frequent flyer of United and (the person you listed above) is a frequent flyer of American. You search for tickets online and find two available seats with American. You put them on hold. The miles you and (the person you listed above) will get from this trip are listed below:

Flying American (other-benefiting/lower total benefit): you earn 0 miles; (the person you listed above) earns 755 miles.

The next day, just when you’re about to purchase the tickets, you see a promotion from United for bonus miles and your search reveals they offer a similar flight (in terms of timing, duration, and price) with two available seats. The miles you and (the person you listed above) will get from this trip are listed below:

Flying United (self-benefiting/lower total benefit): you earn 955 miles; (the person you listed above) earns 0 miles.”

They then answered the question, “Although American was your original choice, you are now considering whether to switch to United. Would you switch to United, thereby taking some miles from (the person you listed above) but increasing the miles to yourself?” (yes/no).

After indicating their choice, all participants rated how close they felt toward their listed other (1 = Not close at all, 7 = Very close).

Results and Discussion

In support of the manipulation, participants felt closer to their listed other in the close compared to distant condition (for the shuttle scenario: $M_{close} = 6.10$, $SD = .98$ vs. $M_{distant} = 4.05$, $SD = 1.23$; $t(77) = 8.18$, $p < .001$; for the flight scenario: $M_{close} = 5.84$, $SD = .97$ vs. $M_{distant} = 3.67$, $SD = 1.60$; $t(84) = 7.57$, $p < .001$).

In support of the hypothesis, in the shuttle scenario (allocating time), participants were more likely to switch to the self-benefitting option in the close condition (53%; 21/40) than in the distant condition (26%; 10/39; $\chi^2(1) = 5.98$, $p = .015$). Further supporting the hypothesis, in the flight scenario (allocating miles), participants were more likely to switch to the self-benefiting option in the close condition (70%; 30/43) than in the distant condition (37%; 16/43; $\chi^2(1) = 9.16$, $p = .002$).

These results illustrate, across two common consumption dilemmas, how interpersonal closeness increases the likelihood of taking from a friend. They further demonstrate that no emphasis on the total benefit is required to obtain the friendly taking effect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Consumers frequently make joint consumption decisions for themselves and others. Whereas past research has studied choice for others (Baskin et al. 2014; Choi et al. 2006; Laran 2010) and choice for the self with knowledge of what others chose (Ariely and Levav 2000; Berger and Heath 2007; Salganik, Dodds, and Watts 2006), research on what considerations are involved when consumers make decisions for both the self and the other together is scant. In this research, we document the friendly taking effect—interpersonal closeness leads to a preference for a self-benefiting consumption package when it also offers greater total benefit to the self-other collective; that is, people are more likely to take from a close other than from a distant other. We further show this tendency is rooted in a friendly intention of trying to maximize the total benefits for the self-other collective (the joint pie). Across studies, we used widely different operational definitions of closeness. Whether we used measured closeness in naturally occurring relationships (studies 3, 4A, 4B, 6, and 7), manipulated closeness in existing relationships (studies 1, 4C, and 5), or manipulated closeness in temporarily formed relationships in the lab (study 2), we observed the friendly taking effect, suggesting it is not the result of any specific type of closeness manipulation.

When Closeness Decreases versus Increases Taking

We show the conditions under which people take more from close others, which may appear to contradict the well-researched and intuitively plausible notion that interpersonal closeness should decrease taking because people care more about close versus distant others (Batson et al. 1997; Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000). Indeed, past research has shown increased closeness can lead people to
treat others better, which seems to imply increased giving and decreased taking (Clark 1983; Rusbult et al. 2004). For instance, people behave more prosaically toward closer others, offering more support (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, and Schultheiss 1996) and making more personal sacrifices (Agnew and Etcheverry 2006; Impett, Gable, and Peplau 2005; Powell and Van Vugt 2003). Most related to the current research, some research suggests people sometimes take less from close others when deciding how to allocate resources (Aron et al. 1991). On the surface, these findings appear to be at odds with our reported experiments.

Our research does not deny that closeness increases the concern for others—it merely suggests that another concern guides how people share, which is also influenced by closeness. In line with past literature, we argue that two major considerations (beyond one’s own self-interest) influence people’s decisions about how to allocate to others: concern for the other’s benefit and concern for the total benefit to the self-other collective (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Lurie 1987). Both of these concerns—for the other and for the self-other collective—intensify with increased closeness. Concern for the other should decrease people’s willingness to take from others in some contexts; concern for the total benefit predicts increased taking from others in some contexts. The confluence of these two concerns influences people’s final decisions. For example, for situations in which the total benefit is fixed—such as in a dictator game (Camerer and Thaler 1995)—a concern for the total benefit is irrelevant, and concern for the other’s benefit should play the major role. As a result, people should take less from close others (Liebrand 1984). However, for situations in which the total benefit is not fixed and taking increases the total benefit, concern for the total benefit should prompt increased taking from close others. Thus our research pits concern for the other-benefit and concern for the total benefit against one another and, in this context, the concern for the total benefit overrides consideration of the other-benefit, leading to the increased taking behavior. In fact, in study 3, we systematically manipulated whether taking increases versus decreases the total benefit, and found increased taking from close others only in the former condition. Just as selfishness can sometimes override concern for close others when these two values conflict, a concern for the total benefit can also override people’s concern for a close other in some contexts. In neither case do we deny the existence of a concern for the other, and instead we recognize close relationships routinely involve compromises between doing what is good for the self, the other, and for the total benefit (Hui et al. 2014), as well as making tradeoffs between pursuing equality (Messick and Schnell 1992) and relative advantage (Loewenstein, Thompson, and Bazerman 1989; Shaw, DeScioli, and Olson 2012). Future work should investigate how these sometimes contradictory factors interact to influence people’s decisions about how to share with others.

We also note the spectrum of closeness is wide, ranging from closest friend to casual acquaintance, stranger, and even enemy. In this work, we focused only on two points on this spectrum—close friend (close condition) and casual acquaintance (distant condition)—and found people are more likely to take from the former than from the latter. However, people are also very likely to take more from a stranger and an enemy than from a casual acquaintance, although the underlying motive might be very different. Concern for increasing self-benefit (selfish taking) might be the main driver of taking from a stranger, and concern for decreasing other-benefit (malicious taking or social comparison) might be the main driver of taking from an enemy. Neither of these concerns is focused on maximizing total benefits, but both are interesting. Further research should explore the divergent motivations underlying the same overt taking behavior.

Implications and Conclusion

This research has several implications for marketers and consumers. Marketers often use bundles to increase sales; for example, marketers use referral programs in which the referring consumer gets a reward in return for the referral, and they create gift packages whereby the gift giver gets something too. A general suggestion based on our research is that marketers should consider the depth of the relationship between the target consumers of these bundles. The closer these consumers (e.g., the referring individual and the person they referred, the gift buyer and gift giver) are, the more sensitive the choosers would be to the total benefits in the package and the less sensitive they would be to the specific distribution between them and the other (i.e., who gets what). For example, in marketing communication, marketers should highlight total benefit (e.g., by rewarding the giver and thereby creating a win-win allocation) when targeting consumers choosing for a close other (e.g., romantic partner, family member) than for a distant other (e.g., a business partner).

Beyond consumption packages, based on our results, although consumers generally spend more on gifts for close others (i.e., more giving to close others), they might also be more influenced by discounts, sales, and other saving opportunities when purchasing a specific gift for a close other as opposed to a distant other. The reason is that when the recipient is closer, the consumer is more likely to consider the total benefits—the value for the recipient minus the cost for the giver. Thus whereas people may generally spend more money on gifts to closer others, they might be more responsive to discounts when buying a gift for a close other because the giver benefits too (e.g., prefers a $150 item that currently has a $50 discount to a $100 item).

To conclude, relationships often involve give and take, and expecting people to give more to and take less from close others than from distant others is intuitive. The friendly taking effect suggests people do not always take less from
closer others; when taking is beneficial to the self-other collective, people are more likely to take from closer others.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

Study 1: The first author supervised data collection by research assistants at the University of Chicago Decision Research Lab in the summer of 2013.

Study 2: The first author supervised data collection by research assistants at the University of Chicago Decision Research Lab in the winter of 2013.

Study 3: The first author supervised data collection by research assistants at the University of Chicago Decision Research Lab in the winter of 2015.

Study 4: The first author managed data collection on MTurk in the spring of 2014.

Study 5: The first author managed data collection on MTurk in the winter of 2013.

Study 6: The first author supervised data collection by research assistants at the University of Chicago Decision Research Lab in the spring of 2015.

Study 7: The first author managed data collection on MTurk the winter of 2015.

All the authors jointly analyzed and interpreted the data.

APPENDIX A

CONVERSATION TOPICS (STUDY 2)

List of shallow questions in distant condition:
What is your first name? What is your gender? How old are you? Where are you from? What year are you at the University of X? What do you think you might major in and why? What made you come to the University of X? What is your favorite class at the University of X and why? What are your hobbies? What would you like to do after graduating from the University of X? What would be the perfect lifestyle for you? What is something you have always wanted to do but probably never will be able to do?

List of additional deep questions in close condition:
If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why? What is one strange thing that has happened to you since you’ve been at the University of X? What is one embarrassing thing that has happened to you since arriving at the University of X? What is one thing happening in your life that makes you stressed out? If you could change anything that happened to you in high school, what would that be? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be? Do you miss your family? What is one habit you’d like to break?

APPENDIX B

FLYER (STUDY 3)

Decision Research Lab (DRL) @ Chicago Booth

😊 Friendship has its rewards 😊

Win $30 for yourself and a friend by signing up for our email list

Gift for you (email delivery) $30.00

Gift for your friend (email delivery) $30.00
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