

**Compassionate Actions towards Friends, Strangers, and Ourselves: We Give Differently**  
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**Introduction**

“Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive (Dalai Lama, 1992).”

Compassion is generally defined as a feeling state that one experiences in response to the suffering of themselves or others. It is usually described as a feeling of warmth accompanied by a desire to alleviate suffering (Strauss et al., 2016); therefore a compassionate action is an expression of warmth-in-action with the intent to alleviate suffering (which according to Buddhism and other religious traditions is a general condition of being human).

We suggest that although individuals are willing to offer compassion to the self and others, the types of compassionate actions, or ways compassion is offered, may vary as a function of the receivers relatedness to the giver (are we giving to a friend, stranger, or ourselves).

**Method**

**Participants**

Eighty-six students from State University of New York – Potsdam.

**Procedure**

Participants were given a Qualtrics Survey asking them their likelihood to give compassionately to a friend, themselves, and a stranger. If they indicated any likelihood of giving we asked them to state the action and to categorize it according to Chapman’s five love languages (1992).

**Chapman’s five love languages (1992):**

Material Gifts, Gifts of Service, Quality Time, Physical Touch, and Words of Affirmation

**Results**

3 (Receiver: Self, Friend, Stranger) x 5 (Category: Love languages) Chi-Square Test of Independence  
 $\chi^2(8) = 40.45, p < .0001$

**Most offered compassionate Action**

Self – Quality Time (*N* = 41)

e.g., taking a long drive, listening to music, artistic expression, self care and pampering

Friend – Quality Time (*N* = 37)

e.g., spending time together, offering support and advice

Words of Affirmation – (*N* = 22)

e.g., smile, compliments

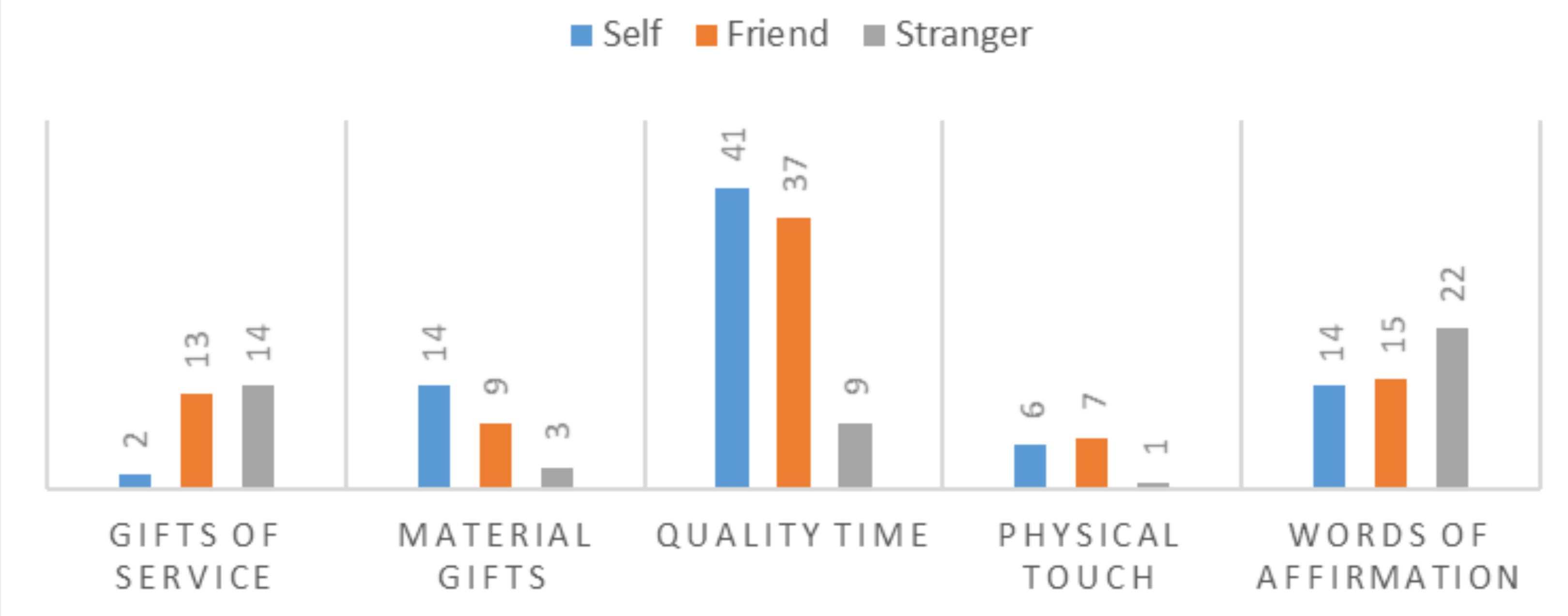
**Least offered compassionate actions**

Self – Material Gifts (*N* = 3)

Friend – Physical Touch (*N* = 7)

Stranger – Physical touch (*N* = 1)

**COMPASSIONATE ACTIONS OFFERED AS A FUNCTION OF GIVER TO RECEIVER RELATEDNESS**



**Discussion**

Previous work shows individual’s are most likely to act compassionately towards friends than themselves and less so towards strangers. Current findings show participants also give differently depending on degree of relatedness.

**Degree of Relatedness and Physical Touch**

Participants were least likely to offer it to strangers.

**Degree of Relatedness and Words of Affirmation**

Words of Affirmation (compliments) and Gestures (smiles and holding doors, picking up fallen objects) were most often offered to strangers  
 These actions can be performed at a distance, whereas physical touch requires closeness  
 These physical distances correspond to the degree of relatedness

**Quality Time and Degree of Relatedness**

This action was most likely to be offered to friend and to the self. The sharing of one’s physical space is related to degree of closeness – it was only offered to friends and to the self  
 Friend Quality Time actions consisted of time spent in the form of “hanging out,” but also for support and advice whereas Self Quality Time consisted of actions that may also be categorized as hedonically pleasurable (e.g., self care and pampering, taking a long drives, reading a books, and artistic endeavors)

**Hedonic Pleasure vs. Eudemonic Pleasure**

The combination of hedonic pleasure (concerned with in the moment pleasures) and quality time, might be at the seat of eudemonic pleasure (concerned with an individual’s quality of life; their overall happiness derived from health, wellness, and fullness of experience).

**References**

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