

How Romantic Partners Prefer to Be Gifted: Exploring the Motivations Behind Wanting to be Asked and Wanting to be Known

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Introduction

\$300 billion are spent annually on gifts in close relationships. People mostly value gifts that match their preferences, as they carry symbolic meaning (Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). The most effective method for accurately predicting others’ preferences is asking them (Perspective Getting; PG); nevertheless, this strategy is often undervalued (Epley & Eyal, 2019). A study from our lab (Mann, Alatawne, & Eyal, 2025) have found that 26.7% preferred their partner would ask what they would like (PG). However, the majority (51.2%) preferred their partner would rely on prior knowledge (PK) about them. The current study investigated the motivations underlying gift receivers’ preference for PG vs. PK, by examining five key motivations: feeling understood, feeling cared for, avoiding personal effort, avoiding embarrassment, and the desire to see partner’s effort.

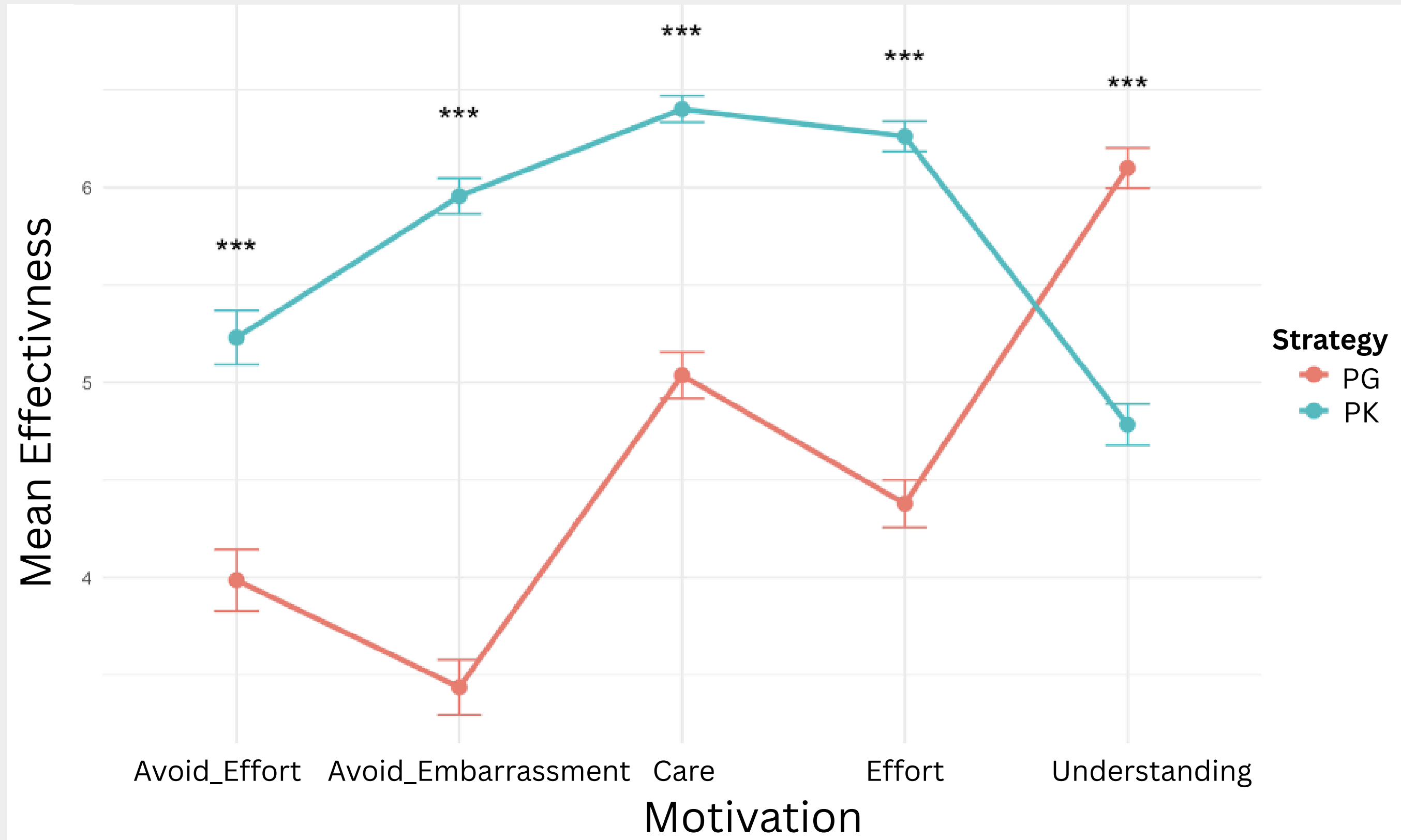
Method

Participants: 222 participants (165 women 56 men 1 other, Mage = 29.3, SD= 10.8, Range = 17-83), in a romantic relationship (M = 6.2 years, SD = 8.8, range 3 Months - 65 Years) completed an online survey. The sample size was determined to achieve a medium effect size ($f = 0.3$) with statistical power of 0.8.

Procedure: Participants first read about two strategies that people often use when choosing a gift for their partner: prior knowledge (PK) and perspective getting (PG). They rated the effectiveness of PK and PG in achieving each of five motivations: show partner’s understanding, care, and effort, avoid self effort, and avoid self embarrassment (1 = not effective at all, 7 = very effective). Then, participants chose the strategy they preferred their partner would use when selecting a gift for them. Finally, participants indicated the main motivation underlying their strategy choice. In addition, participants rated how similar they feel to their partner, known by their partner, enjoy surprises, and are satisfied with gifts previously received from their partner (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

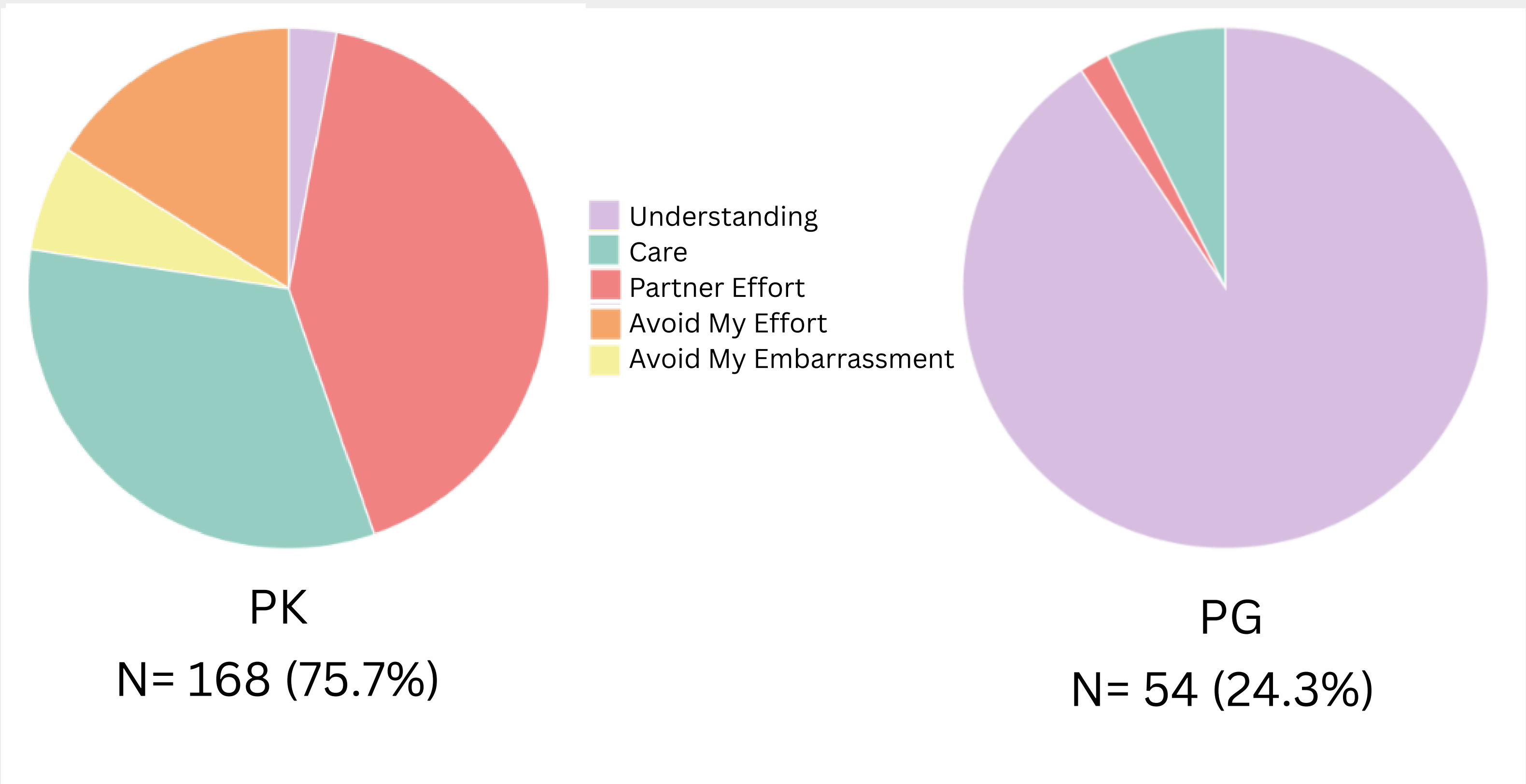
Results

Perceived Effectiveness of PG vs. PK by Motivation



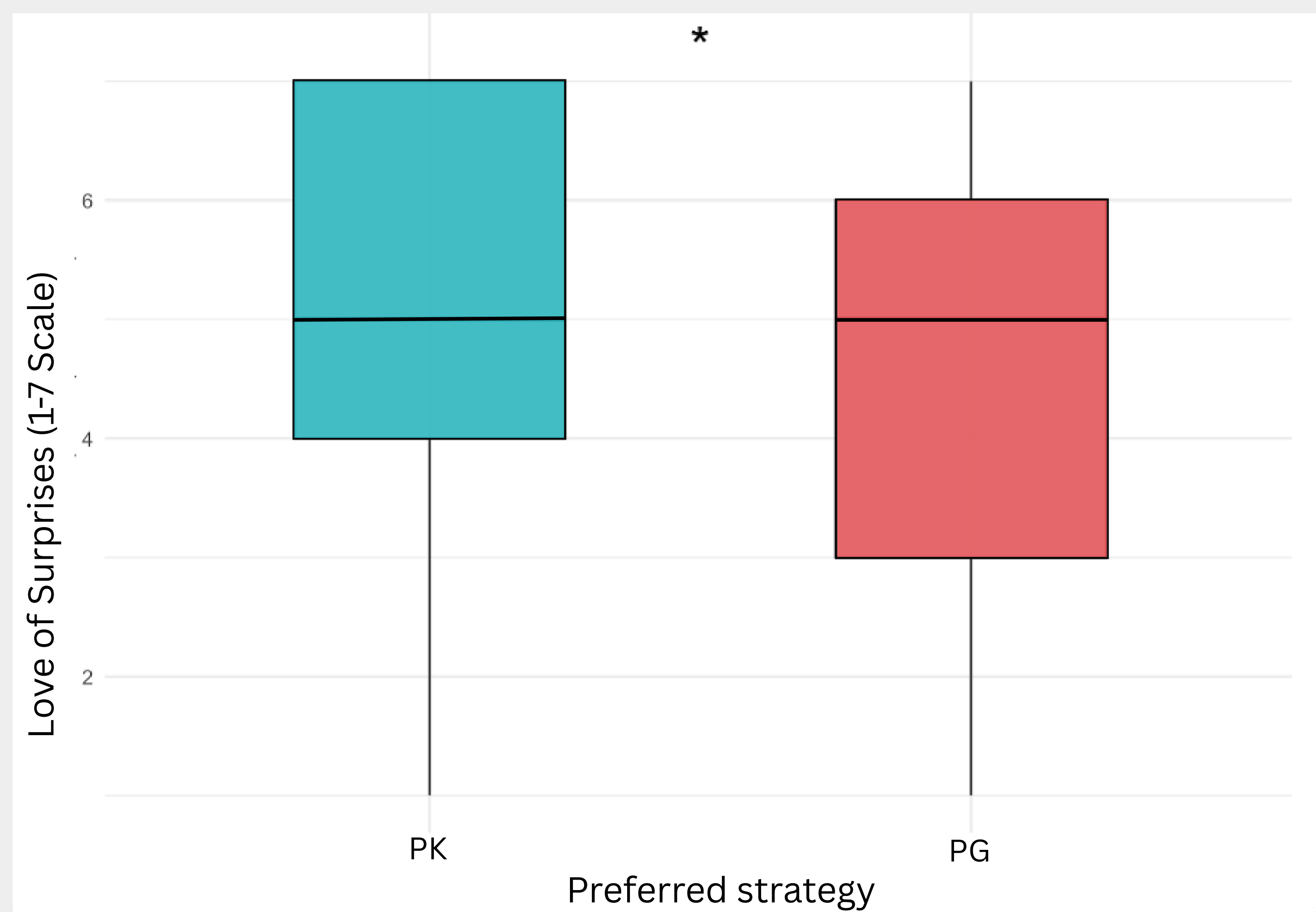
Effectiveness ratings varied by motivation, $F(4, 884) = 73.66$, $p < .001$. PG was most effective for understanding; PK for care, effort, and avoidance-related motivations.

Motivation Distribution for Choosing PG vs. PK



Understanding was the main motivation for choosing PG, while showing partner’s effort, care, and avoid self effort were the main motivations for choosing PK.

Love of Surprises by Strategy Preference



Preference for PK was associated with greater love of surprises compared to PG. $t(220) = 2.22$, $p = 0.029$.

Discussion

Participants in a romantic relationship preferred their partner to use PK over PG when choosing a gift for them. This preference was primarily motivated by the desire for the partner to put effort in choosing a gift, perhaps reflecting that they truly know them and care for them. Future research could examine whether a match between the strategy preferred by the receiver and the one actually used by the giver is associated with relationship satisfaction.

References:

Epley, N., & Eyal, T. (2019). Through a looking glass, darkly: Using mechanisms of mind perception to identify accuracy, overconfidence, and underappreciated means for improvement. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 60, 65-110.
Ward, M. K., & Broniarczyk, S. M. (2011). It’s not me, it’s you: How gift giving creates giver identity threat as a function of social closeness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 164-181.