

Social Influences on Dyadic Giving over Time: A Taxonomy from the Giver's Perspective

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Most gift-giving research focuses on how aspects of the giver, recipient, or their relationship impact gift exchange. This longitudinal study of the Christmas giving of five informants demonstrates that givers strategically incorporate, or allow themselves to be influenced by, third parties when selecting gifts for recipients. Moreover, givers' motivations for incorporating these influences can change over time. Thus, seemingly personal gifts to recipients actually reflect givers' relationships with others in the social network. Our taxonomy of 10 social influences on givers' behavior, as well as givers' motivations and the relational processes associated with each, broadens the scope of current gift-giving research and begins exploring how social relationships impact gift exchange.

Sherry (1983, p. 158) argues that charting gift-giving behavior over time, "as one's social network expands and contracts," would illuminate the ways gifts symbolize, and are used to manage, social relationships. Yet most ensuing research narrowly interprets Goffman's (1967, p. 248) assertion that gifts are "relationship signs" by focusing on what gifts communicate about giver/recipient relationships. In short, regardless of whether gifts are understood as economic, social, or agapic offerings (Belk and Coon 1993), most scholars have explored how characteristics of the giver, the recipient, or their relationship impact gift exchange.

In this article, we broaden the focus of gift giving beyond the giver/recipient dyad and present a taxonomy of 10 ways givers either strategically incorporate, or allow themselves to be influenced by, others in their social networks when selecting gifts for recipients. We demonstrate that, over time,

givers' motivations for incorporating these influences may remain stable or may change, even when the recipients and third parties remain the same. Consistent with the literature on interpersonal relationships, we use the term "third party" to refer to the individual (or individuals) in the social network who influences one or both of the primary actors in the dyad (in this case, the giver and the recipient). "Social network" refers to the array of associates with whom givers or recipients have relationships (Milardo and Helms-Erikson 2000). Our investigation of these social influences reveals that gifts symbolize not only aspects of the giver/recipient relationship but also givers' relationships with others in the social network. Thus, our research confirms that, within the realm of gift giving, "the personal is social" (Milardo and Wellman 1992, p. 339).

Although prior gift-giving studies acknowledge that gift exchange is embedded in a social context, they do not systematically or comprehensively examine how third parties within the giver's social network can influence dyadic giving. Early anthropological research (e.g., Mauss 1954) acknowledges that gift giving enabled clans both to form alliances and express rivalries but does not describe how such collectives shape individual gift-giving behavior. More recently, Yan's (1996, p. 116) ethnography of gift giving in a rural Chinese village describes how gifts strengthen family networks as well as those with friends and neighbors with whom villagers share a "practical kinship." Demonstrating that such collective influences are evident in urban parts of Eastern cultures as well, Joy (2001, p. 242) observes that college students in Hong Kong draw "on a gift continuum that calibrates relationships from the most affective to the least . . . [of] close friends, good friends, and just friends,"

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as well as romantic others. Yet neither study explores how givers' perceptions of friends and family outside the dyad might impact givers' choices for particular recipients.

Some studies of giving in individualist cultures hint that third parties may play a role in givers' behavior toward particular recipients. Caplow (1984, p. 1313) describes how givers seem to follow "scaling rules" that reflect the relative worth of gifts offered to friends and family. Likewise, Cheal (1988) graphically depicts the relationship ties that exist between givers and their various recipients. However, neither examines how third parties influence gift exchange within a particular giver/recipient dyad. In a more transparent indication of social influence, Belk and Coon (1993) describe how a recipient ended a relationship after discovering her boyfriend had delegated his gift-giving tasks to his secretary. Similarly, one giver in Areni, Kiecker, and Palan's study (1998, pp. 96-97) reports: "During my quest for the perfect ring, I always had one of my friends go with me. I did not want to buy the ring without somebody telling me I was making the right decision." Finally, Wooten (2000) demonstrates that givers are more anxious and pessimistic about how their gifts will be received when multiple participants act as givers and witnesses to ritual gift exchanges.

In sum, the existing literature provides evidence that others in the givers' social network can impact the type and value of gifts offered to recipients. Yet there is little understanding of how givers incorporate or respond to these third parties or how others influence dyadic giving over the long term. A taxonomy describing social influences on giving, and the conditions associated with them, is an important first step in understanding the broader issue of how social networks impact dyadic exchange. In developing this taxonomy, we explore these questions:

1. How do third parties in a giver's social network influence dyadic giving over time?
2. What are givers' motivations for incorporating social influence in dyadic giving?
3. What underlying relational processes are associated with these social influences?

METHOD

Although third parties may affect recipients' behavior, our focus is on givers because of their purposive roles in selecting gifts. We interacted with five key informants during five Christmas seasons over a 12-year period (1990-2001). This holiday is a highly appropriate context within which to study social influences on giving; as Cheal (1988) observes, Christmas accounts for 80% of all gifts given annually in North America. Moreover, Christmas giving involves close and affinal family members, friends, coworkers, and service providers and helps bolster sometimes vulnerable social relations (Berking 1999).

Examining givers' perceptions of social influences for more than a decade enabled us to assess their stability or fluidity over time, as givers and recipients moved through various relational changes and stages of their life cycles. Rather than observing the existence of social influences at

one point in time, tracking the same informants over the years allowed us to identify the process by which these influences evolve. We first interacted with these informants, whose names and identifying characteristics have been changed, during the 1990 Christmas season (see the appendix for informant details). We followed a protocol of interview, shopping trip, interview, shopping trip, and follow-up interview (see Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993). In 1992, we followed the same protocol but without the follow-up interview. In 1994, we conducted two interviews and one shopping trip with each informant. In 1997, we conducted one shopping trip and one interview with each informant. Interviews (INT) lasted between 45 minutes and one hour; shopping trips (ST) lasted 30 minutes to two hours. In 2001, we conducted member-check interviews with each informant to validate the social influences that emerged. With the exception of the 2001 interviews, where notes were taken, all interviews were taped and transcribed and field notes were typed, yielding over 1,250 pages of text. Informants were paid \$20 each year except 2001, when they were treated to lunch by the interviewer.

Following Mick and DeMoss (1990), we began our analysis by systematically coding the text to classify and compare changes in giver/recipient relationships and other key dimensions of gift giving. This process helped us manage the meanings intrinsic in the voluminous data and enabled us to compare our interpretations of emergent patterns. While assessing the relational roles existing among the five givers and their many recipients (for a total of 70 dyads), as well as changes in their lives, we noticed that our informants adapted their dyadic gift giving in response to other people in their social network. As a result, we recoded the data, identified characteristics of these social influences, and observed givers' motives pertaining to them. Two authors coded the text for these influences and motives, resolving any discrepancies. The remaining author audited the emergent interpretation and provided additional insights.

FINDINGS

The social influences on givers' behavior described in our taxonomy extend beyond mere direct or indirect information-gathering activities (e.g., Aunt Mary tells a giver to buy her husband a CD, or a giver buys mugs for recipients after seeing others do so). Rather, givers' active use, or passive incorporation, of social influences is associated with interpersonal relationship processes that include initiating new relationships, maintaining or severing existing relationships, seeking out or providing support, and regulating behaviors through normative pressures and sanctions (Milardo and Helms-Erikson 2000). Table 1 summarizes givers' motives and the five specific underlying relational processes that emerged in our text. Because two influences were associated with each relational process, we organize our discussion around the social influences associated with each process. As the findings will demonstrate, the focus of a giver's attention may shift from one recipient to another, such that a particular individual may be a focal recipient in one re-

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON DYADIC GIVING

Social influence	Description of influence	Giver's motives	Underlying relational process
1. Calibrating	Giver distinguishes recipients who vary in relationship type and/or closeness	Make distinctions between recipients on a relevant dimension, affirm important relationships	Making social comparisons
2. Practicing equipollence	Giver treats subsets of recipients as equivalent	Maintain satisfactory relationships with equal recipients, signal they are equal	Making social comparisons
3. Reenacting third-party traditions	Giver takes over traditions previously maintained by a third party	Maintain relationships with recipient and now absent third party	Adjusting to disrupted relational traditions
4. Relinquishing tradition	Third party changes/discontinues giver's tradition for particular recipient	Maintain satisfactory relationships by allowing tradition to dissipate	Adjusting to disrupted relational traditions
5. Enrolling accomplices	Third party assists in giver behavior toward a recipient	Maintain satisfactory relationship with recipient, perhaps bond with accomplice	Accessing social support
6. Using surrogates	Giver uses third party when offering risky gift to recipient	Minimize risk of negative recipient reaction, perhaps bond with surrogate	Accessing social support
7. Gaining permission from gatekeepers	Giver seeks approval from third party for a gift to recipient	Maintain satisfactory relationship with gatekeeper while pleasing recipient	Acting within relational rules
8. Adhering to group norms	Giver adheres to group's shared rules of gift behavior	Please recipient, maintain satisfactory relationships in the social network	Acting within relational rules
9. Integrating	Third party brings new recipients to the network	To third party, demonstrate knowledge of importance of integrated members	Initiating and severing relationships
10. Purging	Giver subtracts recipients because of severed relationship with third party	Symbolize relationship disintegration	Initiating and severing relationships

lational episode and a third party in another instance. This facet of the findings further reflects givers' adaptability of their behavior over time, as they acknowledge and manage their relationships with numerous individuals in their social networks.

Making Social Comparisons: Calibrating and Practicing Equipollence

Our informants' giving activities reinforce the observation that "all network members are not created equal" (Milaro and Helms-Erikson 2000, p. 42). The underlying relational process that motivates both calibrating and practicing equipollence is that of making social comparisons across individuals in the giver's social network. When calibrating, givers acknowledge that they value some recipients more highly than others and adjust their giving to reflect this fact. Thus, givers' behavior toward a focal recipient is affected by how this recipient compares to others in the giver's social network. Affirming the scaling rules that Caplow (1984) identifies, givers offer favored recipients items that cost more in terms of time, money, or sentiment. Calibrating enables givers to affirm, or at least not weaken, more highly valued relationships within the network (Ruth,

Otnes, and Brunel 1999). Our interpretation reveals that givers' calibrations remain stable if the relationship quality with valued recipients remains consistent over time. Lisa said of her husband and daughter: "I'm spending more on Bill and Kendra, and less on other people . . . [they] are my family . . . that's who I need to take care of first" (INT 90). Lisa repeated similar sentiments over the years, reaffirming that her decision to give more elaborately to Bill and Kendra at Christmas "still holds. These are the most important people in my life" (INT 01).

Despite our informants' tendency to calibrate in favor of close family (or those who are like family), such activity is not universal. Joy (2001) observes that close family members in Hong Kong do not exchange gifts, and, as romantic others become increasingly more like family members, gifts to them diminish as well. In addition, gifts in Hong Kong are calibrated "according to the nature of the relationship with the gift partner . . . wife, child, or nephew" (Joy 2001, p. 253). However, because gift-giving norms in America are more individualistic, our informants had no qualms favoring some people who occupy the same relationship position. For many years, Alice devoted more time and energy when buying gifts for her nephew Donald than for any of her siblings' other children. In 1992, when Donald was visiting, Alice

taught Donald to drive, even lying so he could get his driver's license, saying "he was staying with her and going to [the university] in the fall" (ST 92). As Feld and Carter (1998) observe, such shared activities foster close relationships. Over the years, Alice justified her Christmas gifts for Donald, saying, "He works really hard. He deserves it" (ST 97). Given their shared experiences and her pride in his achievements, it is not surprising that Alice acted as a provider to Donald (Otnes et al. 1993), only relinquishing the role when Donald's marriage in the late 1990s meant that a more important person in his life—his new wife—would assume it.

Although our informants sometimes calibrate among afinal relatives, they also often adopt the opposite strategy—practicing equipollence—when giving to nuclear family members who occupy the same relationship status, such as siblings. Equipollence "dictates that recipients in a subset . . . be treated in an egalitarian manner by the giver" (Lorey, Otnes, and Robbins 1996, p. 42). Equipollence enables givers to signal to similar recipients that they are regarded equally and can also be a signal to others that the giver values these recipients equally. Although givers often treated groups of children in the same nuclear family and adults such as coworkers in a similar manner, our text also reveals that givers modify Caplow's (1984) scaling rules and treat individuals across nonequivalent subgroups equipollently. In so doing, it seems they recognize that a relationship that lies in the "central core" (i.e., the immediate family) is more emotionally equivalent to one found in a "concentric ring" that contains more socially distant relationships (Johnson 1974, p. 301).

Since her parents' divorce when she was young, Heidi has been emotionally detached from her geographically distant father. In fact, her relationship with her father is more like the one she shares with her uncle, whom she sees infrequently because he lives far away. For many years, Heidi gave almost identical gifts to her father and uncle: "She said she was going to get her dad and uncle holiday ornaments" (ST 90). In 1992, Heidi and her mother devised another equipollent solution for the two men: "[They] . . . were put[ting] together collages for each of them with pictures . . . of family events . . . since her father and uncle would be together in Florida, they could send the collages down together and the men could compare." In 1994, Heidi told the researcher:

"Well, my dad's done." . . . She decided to give him one gift [a fish pitcher] for this year and the other [fish tie and socks] for next year. I asked if he liked to fish and she said, "Oh, yeah. And besides, if he dies, I can just give the other gift to his brother. . . . Isn't that terrible?" (ST 94)

We interpret Heidi's equipollence as reflecting her father's downgraded status from a central-core to a concentric-ring relationship, associated with more distant relations (Johnson 1974).

Joan provides the most dramatic example of the conse-

quences of not practicing equipollence, when one of her recipients believes he should be treated similarly to another. In 1990, Joan's ex-husband had custody of their son Bob, and Joan had custody of their daughter Kim. The parents had agreed to provide a big Christmas for the child who lived with them or who was most embedded with them in terms of number and quality of interactions (Feld and Carter 1998). But Joan reported: "When I told Bob . . . he had tears coming down his face. . . . He said, 'You always get my big Christmas'" (INT 90). As Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999, p. 299) observe, celebrating holidays and establishing new traditions can be "key turning points" as families strive to negotiate satisfactory relationships after disappointing circumstances such as divorce. Joan's "new twist to the Christmas buying" (INT 90)—her decision to buy equally for her son and daughter—demonstrates that she adopts her son's interpretation of Caplow's (1984, p. 1313) rule that "parents with several children should value them equally throughout their lives," regardless of their living arrangements. Moreover, treating them equally also eliminates potential interpersonal conflict between her children—a sensitive issue because their separate living situation already makes their sibling ties vulnerable. In sum, she seeks harmonious relationships with and between the two most important people in her life—her two children—even if it means violating an agreement previously made with her ex-husband.

From 1990 on, Joan meticulously described how she made "sure their presents looked even," (ST 90) even as Bob finished and Kim started college in 2001. When asked that year how she defined treating them equally, she replied, "Both the number of gifts and money. I start with the money in an envelope. Whatever I don't spend . . . stays in the envelope and they get it" (INT 01). Joan's consistent practice of equipollence over 12 years implies that as long as she views her children equally and seeks satisfactory relationships with them, she will continue to treat them equally throughout the life cycle.

Both calibration and equipollence reflect the influence of the social exchange paradigm, in that our informants recognize that the money or effort expended on gifts communicates the level at which recipients are valued (Belk and Coon 1993). However, the agapic paradigm that Belk and Coon identify also applies, in that Joan's decision to gift her children equally—an act that she initially did not consider necessary—represents a sacrifice of time and money on her part.

Adjusting to Disrupted Relational Traditions: Reenacting Third-Party Traditions and Relinquishing Traditions

Christmas is one of the major rituals in American culture, during which families establish and enact traditions that enhance bonds in the social network and across members of the culture as a whole (Pleck 2000). Two social influences on dyadic giving—reenacting third-party traditions and re-

linquishing traditions—reflect the importance of traditions that originated within the network but that are somehow disrupted or discontinued. Confirming Berking's (1999, p. 34) observation that gift giving "encompasses both the living and the dead," loved ones who are no longer present can still influence social relations (Milardo 1992), especially if they had created or maintained Christmas rituals. Givers reenact these third-party gift traditions to acknowledge, remember, and even keep alive absent loved ones.

Typically, givers reenact such traditions because both givers and recipients shared a common bond with the now absent third party. After 1994, Heidi abandoned gifts such as fish ties for her uncle in favor of homemade treats based on old family recipes: "I had Uncle Jack send me recipes that came from Grandma . . . now it reminds him of me . . . [and it] keeps Grandma alive to me" (INT 01). Heidi's new strategy reflects her uncle's favorable reaction to a gift that possesses value because of its handmade quality (Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000) and symbolizes someone they both loved. We interpret Heidi's gifts of heirloom recipes as an act of ancestor worship that enables her to recapture her grandmother's spirit (or *hau*; Mauss 1954).

Beth's reenactment of her mother's gift traditions also demonstrates that the filial piety that children demonstrate to parents when giving (and described by Joy [2001]) can be relevant even if the parents are deceased:

My husband's thing is ketchup. My mom used to buy him kegs of ketchup every year . . . because he uses ketchup on everything. And she'd wrap it in boxes with bricks to disguise it. . . . The first year [after Mom died] I bought him some ketchup and I put Mom's name on it, because that's what Mom did. (INT 92)

In later years, Beth reported her father had gotten involved in this tradition: "My Dad would buy Ed ketchup. . . . Not every year, but if he can think of it, he'll get it" (INT 94). This reenacted tradition demonstrates that "an otherwise unremarkable object . . . [can be] imbued with unique significance, reaffirm[ing] . . . continuity of relational connections over time . . . and across relational transitions" (Burlleson, Metts, and Kirch 2000, p. 253).

Givers adopt and perpetuate these traditions to affirm their relationships with recipients and to perpetuate network ties with absent loved ones, filling the void left by the loss of a cherished relationship (Belk 1988). As Burlleson et al. (2000) note, sharing symbolic codes such as traditions also signals a desire for relational closeness among participants in the tradition. Over time, givers tell stories about the tradition's originator, attempting to ensure the survival of these traditions by sharing their meaning with and enrolling others in their perpetuation (Bochner, Ellis, and Tillman-Healy 1997).

Although reenactment represents a giver's attempt to perpetuate Christmas traditions, our informants also relinquished cherished traditions shared with recipients in order to maintain satisfying relationships with powerful members

of the social network. In 1990 and 1992, Lisa was excited about giving her daughter Kendra a collectible Happy Holidays Barbie "from Santa . . . I want to get one for her every year" (INT 90). In 1994, Lisa observed in a displeased tone, "Well, Dad got [the Barbie] . . . and I won't be able to set that out from Santa," (INT 94) and, in 1997, Lisa "said that her Dad had bought the Holiday Barbie" (ST 97). By 2001, it was clear Lisa had adopted a passive, avoidance relationship strategy with her father (Canary and Stafford 1994), allowing him to co-opt this tradition rather than confronting him or trying to regain control of the tradition: "Dad still buys them for Kendra and I'm OK about it" (INT 01). Lisa's gesture demonstrates that agapic giving need not be limited to givers' direct actions toward recipients. Rather, givers practice "unselfish, nonpossessive, and sacrificial" giving (Belk 1996, p. 60) by relinquishing cherished traditions to third parties, in order that relations among those involved in Christmas might be harmonious.

These examples support Surra's (1988) observation that such sacrifice and behavioral adaptation are particularly likely if the interfering party occupies a more senior status in the family. Yet recipients' peer groups can also exert pressure on givers to relinquish traditions. By age eight, most children stop believing in Santa (Prentice, Manosevitz, and Hubbs 1978). The tension between Joan's desire to maintain the Santa tradition and her daughter Kim's desire to fit in with her peers was evident in 1990, when Kim was seven: "I think this will be the last year [Kim believes] because she's asking me, 'Are you really the Santa?' And I say, 'Well, let's just wait until after Christmas'" (INT 90). A few weeks later, "[Kim] said 'I really want to know because everybody in my class says there's no Santa.' And so I said, 'OK. I'm really Santa, but it's nice to pretend because it's fun.' And she got all upset" (INT 90). After this conversation, Joan did away with the Santa tradition, sacrificing a key mechanism for fostering "the transcendent delight that children ideally experience on Christmas morning" (Belk 1996, p. 67). Moreover, this agapic sacrifice results in Joan's loss of a key mechanism for her own self-gifting behavior (Mick and DeMoss 1990): "See, I've always bought for myself before so that there'd be presents under the tree from Santa" (INT 90). Thus, Joan succumbs to third-party peer pressure exerted on her daughter, sacrificing the Santa tradition to enable her daughter to save face (Metts 1997) and maintain relations with her friends.

Accessing Social Support: Enrolling Accomplices and Using Surrogates

Two forms of social influence reflect givers' use of social support to facilitate gift exchange: enrolling accomplices and using surrogates. Pierce et al. (1996) describe social support as emotional and instrumental assistance provided by other people. When enrolling accomplices to complete Christmas shopping, givers ostensibly seek assistance from third parties but also capitalize on opportunities to bond with accomplices. Over the years, Heidi consistently relied on her

mother as an accomplice when selecting gifts for other recipients:

[A bookstore] was having a sale . . . Mom thought of the book, I went in and checked to see if they had it, put it on hold, and she went in and paid for it. So we do work together. (INT 92)

I just did find something for Dad. . . . It was on senior discount day and I couldn't buy it, so I had Mom buy it . . . I got an extra 15% off. (INT 01)

Canary and Stafford (1994) found sharing tasks and engaging in joint activities are key mechanisms for relationship maintenance. Heidi's mother Iris is the most important person in her life, but, over the years, Iris has also been a key third party who helps Heidi accomplish certain tasks and maintain and affirm relationships with others. Although Heidi wants to select appropriate gifts for recipients, she enjoys and is motivated by the opportunity to bond with her mother while Christmas shopping. When we shared our observation of her accomplice behavior in 2001, Heidi grinned and said she "liked that [term]. It's sneaky" (INT 01).

At other times, givers' motivations for enrolling accomplices might be more instrumental and self-serving. Alice describes her inability to hold gifts until Christmas: "I'm bad about this, really bad" (INT 90). This tendency prompted her to ask a coworker to hold the leather coat that Alice had bought her boyfriend. Demonstrating that "relationships often have a social utility" (Milardo and Wellman 1992, p. 340), Alice uses her coworker to regulate her own compulsive behavior so she can save the coat for a more appropriate ritual context. Alice's use of accomplices is clearly more in line with an economic, cost-benefit model (Belk and Coon 1993) than with any desire to engage in meaningful social or agapic exchange with her coworker.

Sometimes, givers wish to offer items to recipients that they know are risky. At the same time, they understand a recipient's dislike of such gifts could have a negative impact on the dyadic relationship. Again adopting a more economic approach to giving, givers enroll others (wittingly or unwittingly) as surrogate givers for such items. As such, givers use third parties as intermediaries to redefine the gift setting and thereby reduce the likelihood of gift rejection, minimize harm to the giver/recipient relationship, and cope with the increased anxiety that can arise in vulnerable social settings (Bradshaw 1998). Givers may even go so far as to claim gifts are actually from these surrogates, again as a means of reducing risk.

As a recipient, Beth's mother-in-law represented a challenge, because of what Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993, p. 232) describe as the "threat to family solidarity and intimacy that in-laws embody" and because Beth knew "there isn't anything that I could buy that [she] would want and wouldn't have" (INT 90). However, because Beth's mother-in-law shared the name of a famous cow, Beth believed she

could singularize her mother-in-law and also satisfy her ideal self-concept as a unique gift giver (Belk 1979) with cow-theme gifts. Although Beth knew her mother-in-law disliked her name, Beth offered her cow-theme gifts one year on her birthday, and strategically "made sure that *that* came from the kids. She wouldn't get mad at me then" (INT 92). To her delight, Beth's decision to repeat cow gifts at Christmas proved successful:

We were passing packages out, she goes, "That one's my cow." And I started laughing and said, "What makes you think you're going to get more cows?" She said, "Ever since I got that, you told me to expect more cows. I know there's cows in there." I started dying laughing. We had a real good time . . . opening her cows. (INT 92)

Later Beth mentioned, "I think at first I hurt her feelings and I thought maybe it's a bad thing that I'd done, but now when she picks up a package to open, 'Oh, it's a cow!'—and I think she'd be truly disappointed if it wasn't" (INT 94). Nine years after she began the tradition, Beth was still giving cow gifts, even though her mother-in-law "half likes and half doesn't, but expects them . . . [the cows are] sometimes from me, the kids, Santa. Usually I try to give them from the kids, so they get the blame and I don't" (INT 01).

Beth's initial decision to delegate her children as surrogate cow givers demonstrates her understanding that adult recipients should forgive children for gifts that are less than perfect (Belk 1996). But over the years, Beth and her mother-in-law enjoyed joking and teasing about the cow gifts, and as Burluson et al. (2000) observe, such interactions can increase relational intimacy. As positive feedback led Beth to employ a same-as-last-year giving strategy (Otnes et al. 1993), Beth's children evolved from surrogates for Beth to hide behind into full-fledged partners in the tradition. In 2001, Beth reported that if she forgot the cows, she would "hear about it" from her kids. (INT 01) By that year, Beth's strategy had evolved such that she happily took credit for the classier antique or collectible cows but still used her children to save face (Joy 2001; Metts 1997) when the cows were kitschier and, therefore, riskier in terms of potential relational damage with her mother-in-law.

Thus, givers' motives for using accomplices or surrogates include managing problematic aspects of gift giving, sustaining satisfactory relationships with recipients, and sometimes enhancing bonds with third parties. Although givers openly seek support from accomplices, they may hide their intentions from surrogates.

Acting within Relational Rules: Gaining Permission from Gatekeepers and Adhering to Group Norms

Burluson et al. (2000) describe norms as patterns of interactions that network members expect in certain situations and rules as prescriptions for how these interactions should proceed. With such mechanisms in place, network members

develop and hold expectations for appropriate interactions and behaviors. When gaining permission from gatekeepers, givers demonstrate their knowledge of such rules and norms, acknowledging that third parties are important to givers and may be more powerful figures in recipients' lives than givers are. Parents may use gifts as agents of socialization to instill values in their children (Belk 1979) and often provide information to others about the types of gifts that would support or contradict such values. When seeking permission from gatekeepers, our informants attempted to balance their desire to please a recipient with that of demonstrating respect for, and not alienating, these potent third parties.

Through a series of interactions, Heidi learned to ask her sister Mary whether certain gifts for her nephew Trent would be appropriate. In 1990, Heidi "found a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle postcard book. . . . She thought it was a nice gift because he could write back on it" (ST 90). But, in 1992, Heidi reported Mary had forbidden such gifts: "If you don't do Turtles, which he does do but I'm not allowed to let him do it anymore, there's not a lot [to choose]" (INT 92). That same year, Heidi made gaining permission from her sister part of her gift-giving routine: "I'm going to get Trent a model airplane. I called and asked and that was approved" (INT 92). Over the years, Heidi recognized certain gifts were subject to parental banning and also rued the times she had neglected to ask permission: "I have Power Rangers in my house that I couldn't give to Trent when he was younger" (INT 01). Nevertheless, again demonstrating how third parties can cause givers to sacrifice their own desires, Heidi acquiesced to her sister's wishes, communicating that she valued their relationship and understood her as a person of power.

Consistent with Lewis and Lin's (1995) observation that parental authority diminishes as children mature, by 2001, it was evident that Mary's gatekeeping role for her older child had declined in Heidi's eyes:

Interviewer: Now Bianca [Heidi's niece] must be about 16, right? So do you [ask their mother about gifts] for the older kids as well as the younger ones?

Heidi: Actually, I bought and then asked this time. I knew Bianca wanted jewelry. (INT 01)

Although Mary's power over her daughter's gifts was diluted, Heidi still signals that Mary is a key figure in her children's lives by seeking Mary's approval even after she had selected a gift for her older niece.

Likewise, our informants act within relational rules when they adhere to group norms, help orchestrate these norms, or agree to parameters for giving behavior within a group. In so doing, they acknowledge their willingness to cooperate with the group, maintain satisfactory relations by adhering to these rules, and do not violate others' expectations. The power of this social influence is derived not from the specific norm negotiated but from the agreement givers share with others to adhere to these tenets. In 1990, Alice remarked that some of her siblings' financial resources were strained,

so they all agreed to change from a norm of gifts for all siblings and their children to "just [each others'] . . . kids . . . this year" (INT 90). Alice adhered to this norm in 1992 as well, reflecting social influence that persisted over time.

However, as Milardo (1988, p. 14) observes, as families grow and change, they are "active agents in modifying and adapting . . . to meet ever-changing circumstances." Thus, givers must constantly be attuned to changes in relationships or circumstances of individuals over time that may elicit changes in agreed-upon norms. As was true with calibration, individualistic norms in the United States sometimes supersede those that would dictate a more equippollent strategy for a group. By 1994, Alice had resumed giving to her siblings—but only to those with whom she enjoyed satisfactory relationships: "[I'm buying for] Greg and Jane [brother and sister-in-law] but . . . sister Cheryl . . . I'm debating on, we haven't gotten along for the past year . . . we fight like cats and dogs" (INT 94). In later years, Alice reverted back to no gifts for siblings and then modified it again by giving to her sister Caroline, who had come to rely on Alice for financial support: "I don't give to all anymore, just the ones I'm close to. . . . I started sending [Caroline] money every month . . . she's a single mom with four kids" (INT 01). As Alice moved through the life cycle and selectively formed adult relationships with her siblings, she developed a more idiosyncratic definition of the group norm that originally had dictated she give to all of her siblings.

Similarly, givers adapt to giving norms in the workplace that can vary widely. From 1990 to 1997, Alice worked in an office where the norm was to give Christmas gifts to many coworkers. Yet, by 2001, she had a new job where she and her team of coworkers "really don't get each other anything [at Christmas] . . . what we do when we travel is buy stuff for the team [all year round]" (INT 01). Similarly, Joan's coworkers followed the norm of each drawing one name, a norm Caplow (1984, p. 1315) describes as "nearly standard at nonfamilial Christmas gatherings." Such activities demonstrate how groups act in accordance with Duck's (1994) proposition that there are two paths to relationship maintenance: explicit strategies and implicit maintenance activities such as routine, everyday interactions. When members of the network arrive at a norm that eliminates or restricts Christmas gifts, they acknowledge their relationships can be maintained through everyday interactions rather than explicit, strategic, and scripted activities. Moreover, limiting the number of gift exchange recipients helps gift-giving activities at work from becoming overwhelming and redundant (Ruth 2003).

Although some informants complained that gatekeepers or norms restrict their choice of gifts for recipients, they nevertheless generally complied with the wishes of these third parties in order to maintain satisfactory relations with them. Clearly, such actions contain what Camerer (1988) describes as elements of instrumentality, in that following group rules can result in economical (e.g., fewer gifts) and relational payoffs. However, acting within the relational rules is also agapic in a sense, in that givers sometimes

sacrifice what they consider to be good gift ideas in consideration of the desires of gatekeepers or groups.

Initiating and Severing Relationships: Integrating and Purging

Givers, recipients, or others in the network may initiate or sever relationships, and such activities have spillover effects for giver/recipient dyads as well as for other relationships. Typically, when givers enter into romantic partnerships or marriage, they may add their new partners' associates to their gift list at Christmas. Similarly, new recipients may be added to lists when a highly valued relationship partner starts a new relationship. In both cases, new recipients are added because they "are significant to other people considered to be important" (Milardo 1992, p. 449). Conversely, when such relationships end, givers remove recipients who were placed on the list merely through association with a more highly valued partner.

Time and again, our informants exhibited consistency in how they treated individuals who were most important in their lives and adaptation when integrating new recipients who entered their lives via valued relationship partners. Three of the five years we interacted with her, Lisa's widowed father had a different girlfriend. Because her father was important to her, Lisa always acknowledged these girlfriends with gifts, even if she disliked them:

She and her sister had decided . . . they had better get their father's girlfriend [whom they called by a derogatory name] something this year. [Note: she didn't seem too thrilled about it.] She said that Target had some sweaters on sale for \$8.99. . . . There was one green sweater left, and she looked at it. . . . She said, "Oh heck, I'll just get it and she can always take it back if she wants." (ST 90)

As Surra (1988) observes, a closed field of involuntary ties, where individuals are forced to interact even if they would not choose to do so, places additional pressure on givers to adapt to the changed circumstances of others who are important. Nevertheless, our informants regard investing in these recipients as worth the price, because such action helps maintain other relationships that givers regard as more crucial.

Our data offer evidence that the economic gift-giving model that Belk and Coon (1993) identify as salient in romantic relationships applies to familial relationships as well. Yet Lisa's gifts to her father's girlfriend also represent agapic sacrifices on her part, because these presents are a reminder that her mother is no longer living and that other women have taken over her mother's role in her father's life. Although Lisa misses her mother tremendously, she buys gifts for these girlfriends in order to maintain a positive relationship with her father, acknowledging that these women (no matter how temporary) are important to him.

In another instance of integration, Beth's inclusion of her father's new wife had an extremely negative effect on Beth's

relationship with her sister Joyce. In 1990, when Beth and Joyce were closer, Beth worked hard to find unique gifts her sister would enjoy: "I bought a pair of antique horse head bookends . . . she's going to [college] for her equestrian degree and she loves horses, so they were perfect" (INT 90). In this case, Beth's gift-giving effort reflects her desire to offer the perfect gift, one that requires a sacrifice of money and time, is luxurious, and can singularize the recipient (Belk 1996).

Two years later, Beth's father remarried. Although giving to her father's new wife Kate made Beth feel disloyal to her deceased mother, Beth nevertheless gave Kate Christmas presents. But Joyce's refusal to do so—and to attend family rituals if Kate was present—strained the sisters' relationship. Drawing on Heider's (1958) balance theory, Sprecher and Felmlee (2000) suggest network relations among three people are stable when all dyadic pairs share a similar valence. Yet relations among Beth, Joyce, and Kate are not balanced, because, although Beth likes Joyce and accepts Kate, Joyce rejects anyone in the role vacated by her deceased mother. As described by Baxter et al. (1999), relationships can be undermined by the social disapproval expressed by network members such as Joyce. Indeed, Beth is caught between her desire to maintain positive relationships with her father and sister, two inner-core relationships that she values. Beth's disapproval of her sister's behavior ultimately causes Joyce to slip from Beth's inner-core relationships, to a more emotionally distant layer (Johnson 1974; Joy 2001). Joyce's actions also reverberate negatively throughout the network, affecting other members as well:

We can't be together [during holidays] because Kate comes up with my Dad. . . . [It's] really hard on me. I only have one sister, and family's extremely important to me. . . . The worst part is, it's the kids that are gonna get hurt . . . now my kids are being pushed out of her [Joyce's] life. . . . It really, really hurts. (INT 92)

One effect of the tension between Beth and Joyce was a change in Beth's gift selection for Joyce, descending from what we interpreted to be joyful selection to the purchase of items devoid of singularity or sentiment. When asked how she felt shopping for Joyce, Beth reported she was "kinda numb. . . . It's almost like I want to get it over with. Be done with it" (INT 92). By 1994, Beth reported the sisters still exchanged gifts but had reached an uneasy truce by adopting an avoidance relationship strategy: "We just don't talk about things that are major problems—mainly Dad and Kate. If we can stay off that, we do pretty good" (INT 94). Yet Beth's giving to Joyce was clearly apathetic. After noting Joyce was a size large, Beth bought her a medium sweater, and, in almost the same words Lisa used when buying for her father's girlfriend, she said, "Well, if she doesn't like the sweater, she can always take it back" (ST 94). We interpret Beth's apathy to reflect a belief that since she deliberately chose not to invest herself in her selection for Joyce, her sister's decision to return it would not harm

Beth's self-image as a creative giver. Seven years after the truce, Beth observed: "Things with [Joyce are] going about the same. We've learned about our limits. . . . I'm OK with buying [gifts] for her now" (INT 01).

Kate's third-party influence on the relationship between Beth and Joyce was unintentional but nevertheless became an extremely powerful factor in the erosion of the sisters' relationship over time. But sibling relationships rarely end, owing to their involuntary embeddedness in a family (Canary and Messman 2000). So although Joyce's actions result in extreme tension, Beth neither severs her relationship with Joyce nor stops giving her gifts. Rather, their token gifts to each other act as what Camerer (1988, p. S198) terms "social insurance," to further protect their relationship from deteriorating, despite their disagreements.

As Camerer (1988, p. S183) observes, integrating an individual such as Kate, who is important to someone significant in the giver's network, indicates the giver is adhering to an investment plan that enables her to further the relationship with that significant individual. In contrast, purging occurs when givers eliminate recipients who had entered the network merely by way of a more important relationship. In 1990, Alice excitedly described the lavish gifts she had chosen for her boyfriend Chad, the most important person in her life at the time, and his two daughters from two previous marriages. But by 1992, Chad and his first ex-wife were fighting. Consistent with balance theory, Chad's relational fallout with this ex-wife and their daughter Ann led Alice to no longer buy gifts for Ann. But because Chad, his second ex-wife, and their daughter Molly were relating well, Alice continued buying gifts for Molly. Alice eliminated Ann, and continued giving to Molly, both to acknowledge Chad's importance to her and her loyalty to Chad. Likewise, consistent with Surra's (1988) observation that relationships decline with a reduction in meaningful interactions, Alice stopped giving to Molly when Alice and Chad broke up in 1994. And, in 2001, Alice's breakup with her fiancé Joe led her to remove not only Joe but also 10 of his friends and relatives whom she had willingly and excitedly included on her recipient list since she and Joe began dating in 1997.

In sum, once a relationship with a significant person has ended, it appears the giver no longer has any reason to continue investing by giving to individuals who accompanied that person into the social network. The resulting purge of recipients is typically permanent for the remainder of the giver's life because relations with the third party have been severed.

DISCUSSION

Over 20 years ago, Sherry (1983) called for research examining givers' ongoing relationships with those in their social networks over time. For over half of the intervening years, we have observed five givers as they entered into, maintained, and severed relationships with over 70 recipients, ranging from acquaintances to intimates. Our taxonomy of 10 social influences, along with the underlying motivations and relational processes that accompany them,

demonstrates how givers simultaneously pay heed to multiple relationships when considering gifts for particular recipients. Furthermore, our longitudinal approach has afforded us the ability not only to systematically articulate how third parties influence givers' behavior toward individual recipients but also to examine the evolution of these influences over time. As such, our findings expand upon the existing body of gift-giving research in several important ways.

First, our study offers evidence that the existing research on scaling rules and calibration across relational positions (Caplow 1984; Joy 2001) can be refined in two ways. Although earlier discussions of calibration imply equal treatment within recipient subgroups (e.g., siblings), our interpretation demonstrates that givers may favor some recipients in the same relational category over others. Likewise, contrary to our existing understanding of scaling rules, givers may treat recipients across nonequivalent groups in an equivalent manner (e.g., father and uncle). Our findings suggest that givers may blur the boundaries of what previously had been regarded as distinct, hierarchical levels of relationships (e.g., familial, affinal, and friendship levels) and do so on the basis of their perceptions of the quality of the relationship with the particular recipient(s) involved. As such, givers' calibration behavior reflects their unique adaptation to each recipient relationship vis-à-vis the larger, social context in which the dyad operates.

Second, our findings suggest that underlying motives and paradigms of gift giving should be expanded specifically to incorporate third parties as key influences in dyadic giving. For example, Sherry (1983) suggests two kinds of donor motives for gift exchange in the gestation stage: altruistic and agonistic. Altruistic motives imply that gifts are offered to express love or esteem to the recipient, whereas agonistic motives mean gifts are used in instrumental ways to affect the dyad. Our findings confirm these motives but extend their reach and relevance by offering evidence that givers also act altruistically and agonistically toward third parties when selecting gifts for recipients. For example, when Beth offers ketchup to her husband, she is motivated to express love not only for her husband but also for her deceased mother. Similarly, the paradigm of agapic giving articulated by Belk and Coon (1993) and Belk (1996) suggests givers are willing to make meaningful sacrifices for recipients in order to find singularizing gifts. Our interpretation extends this notion by demonstrating that givers also willingly sacrifice traditions or gift ideas if doing so enables them to maintain or enhance relationships with third parties. For example, Lisa's reluctant transfer of the Holiday Barbie tradition to her father suggests an agapic sacrifice to a third party rather than to the recipient.

Third, these findings call into question an underlying assumption of exchange "that rewarding and satisfying interactions will be repeated and dissatisfying ones will not" (Berscheid and Lopes 1997, p. 130). In fact, our findings show that, in order to perform important relational work with third parties, givers sometimes repeat dissatisfying ex-

changes consistently with recipients for whom they care little. Our study explains why givers willingly engage in what appears to be apathetic gift-selection activities (e.g., Lisa and her father's girlfriends), if doing so enables them to maintain another relationship that is more valuable to them.

Fourth, these behaviors reflect a type of calibration that goes beyond merely assessing and reflecting the scaling rules givers use for recipients. When givers allow their own or recipients' desires to be sublimated by those of third parties (e.g., gatekeepers), givers' behavior reflects the relative value placed on relationships among all of the parties associated with a dyadic exchange. Clearly, there are times when the giver regards the third party as a more powerful figure in the social network than the recipient. For example, Beth's primary concern in selecting gifts for her father's new wife Kate is not really to please Kate but to maintain a good relationship with her father. It is only when the relational ripple effect trickles down to Beth's children that Beth confronts her sister with an ultimatum to participate in all or none of the family's ritual occasions. Even in this most difficult of situations—involving several inner-core relationships that are equally valued (Johnson 1974)—Beth ultimately engages in gift behavior directed toward a relatively unimportant recipient (Kate) that expresses a type of calibration across social influences (e.g., Beth's father, her children, and her sister Joyce).

Our findings also provide insight into the way that third parties impact gift giving over time, influencing relationship maintenance, gift socialization, and gift traditions. For example, although maintenance implies an ongoing relationship, it does not mean that relationships remain the same over time (Duck 1994). Rather, givers' behaviors toward a particular recipient are highly adaptive as dyadic and third-party relationships ebb and flow. Our interpretation showed that Beth's integration of Kate was the catalyst that led to the erosion of the relationship between Beth and her sister. Yet although this sibling relationship erodes over time, it still continues. Thus, although a giver's list of recipients may remain fairly constant (e.g., father, sister, father's new wife), the culture of those relationships and relational motives for giving may change considerably over the years as givers adapt to the dynamism of relationships as they move through the life cycle. Moreover, the notion of relationship maintenance extends to third parties, as givers use search, selection, and gift presentation to manage relationships with third-party accomplices, gatekeepers, and originators of gift traditions.

Similarly, our longitudinal study demonstrates that gift-giving norms governing group behavior are not immovable rules but, rather, dynamic guidelines that individuals may adapt over time. Furthermore, although givers co-create and adhere to certain gift-giving norms, they also make exceptions to account for changes in their relationships with specific recipients. For example, although Alice's family seems to have agreed to a no-gifts-for-siblings rule at Christmas, Alice violates this rule and offers presents to her emotionally

close and economically distressed older sister. Alice demonstrates that she calibrates within her sibling group while at the same time treating the members of her work team equipollently. As such, it is clear givers can juggle various gift-giving norms governing different groups simultaneously and also adjust their behavior as relationships within these subgroups change.

Investigating givers' behavior with recipients over time has also enhanced our understanding of how individuals are socialized with respect to gift-giving behavior. Caplow (1984, p. 1320) observes that gift exchange "is a language that employs objects instead of words as its lexical elements . . . the language of prestation . . . begins to be learned in early childhood and is used with increasing assurance as the individual matures and acquires social understanding." Although we observed parents socializing their children about gift giving (e.g., Beth instilling the cow tradition in her children), we also observed what Moschis (1987) describes as reverse socialization, where children essentially teach their parents the appropriate norms for gift giving. For example, Joan's young son taught her that the norm of practicing equipollence with her children must take precedence over any agreement Joan and her ex-husband negotiated.

Some forms of socialization, such as gaining permission from gatekeepers, emerged as givers gauged reactions to gifts viewed as unsuccessful by powerful third parties over the years, even if these gifts pleased recipients. As Heidi's gift-giving behavior toward her nephew demonstrates, such negative feedback from potent third parties can result in a permanent adaptation in a giver's behavior. Even as gatekeepers become less potent as children grow up, givers may still pay lip service to them. Additionally, givers must continually be aware of the changing rules of gift giving within social networks and specific contexts such as workplaces. As families grow and change, and as new workplace situations are encountered, givers must rely on others to instruct them on the workings of activities such as Secret Santa exchanges.

Our study also illuminates how gift traditions change meaning over time. For example, Lisa's Holiday Barbie tradition evolves from a cherished mother/daughter exchange into one that enables Lisa's father to buy a successful gift for Kendra, although he co-opts and disrupts Lisa's giving. Likewise, the ketchup Beth's husband receives from his mother-in-law evolves from an accomplice activity for Beth and her mother and a private joke shared between Beth's husband and the mother/daughter team into one Beth must perpetuate if it is to continue after her mother's death. However, the tradition also had meaning for Beth's father, who sporadically but voluntarily participates. As such, the meaning of this tradition has changed from one that is more personal (a private joke between Beth's mother and her son-in-law) to one that becomes salient to a larger part of Beth's social network, largely because of her perpetuation of this tradition.

Identifying and understanding social influences on exchange from the giver's perspective is an important first

step in broadening the study of gift giving beyond a dyadic focus. Nevertheless, we acknowledge four limitations of our study, all of which have implications for future research. First, our emphasis on the giver's perspective did not allow us to assess how others in the social network perceive these social influences. Future studies should incorporate and examine the perspectives of recipients, third parties, and other members of the social network. Expanding this study to include multiple participants in gift exchange would also enable scholars to explore how networks recognize gift-giving norms are needed, the mechanisms through which norms are determined, how newcomers learn about such norms, and how networks react and adjust to nonnormative behavior. Similarly, future research could use such an approach to better understand how gift traditions are created, maintained, and dissolved.

Second, our findings are based on interactions with women. Although women are the primary caregivers and maintainers of relationships and rituals in most societies, it would be interesting to investigate social influences on men's gift giving and how such influences differ from those perceived by female givers. Third, our approach emphasizes how third parties in givers' social networks influence gift giving, but the reverse—how gift giving influences third parties and social networks—also represents a promising avenue for future research. Finally, our informants all inhabit an individualistic, consumption-laden culture in the West. As Joy (2001) has recently demonstrated, social networks in other cultures can exert very different effects on gift giving. Examining third-party effects in cultures that vary in individuality, collectivity, and consumption focus would be worthwhile as well.

CONCLUSION

Our research advances knowledge by exploring perceptions of social influence on giving behavior over a 12-year time span. Our findings demonstrate that third parties can impact givers' strategies when selecting items for particular recipients. Seemingly personal gifts often are the result of givers' joyful plotting with third parties or reflect givers' motivations to demonstrate where the recipient, third parties, and even deceased family members stand vis-à-vis others in the social network. Moreover, personal gifts can represent negotiated compromises and struggles within the social network. Thus, gifts may be agapic and instrumental, but they may also be relational. In short, gifts to recipients may speak volumes not only about how givers regard these individuals but also how givers view third parties who interact with and influence these recipients. We hope our taxonomy will inspire others to further study the interrelationship between dyadic gift exchange and the broader social context in which it is embedded.

APPENDIX

INFORMANT DESCRIPTIONS (AS OF 2001)

Alice is single and in her early 30s. Her parents and her siblings' families comprise the most stable part of her social network. Alice severed two long-term romantic relationships between 1990 and 2001. Her network changed markedly after these initiations and breakups. Her siblings are older, and their children are starting families of their own.

Joan is divorced and in her early 40s. Her daughter lived with her until entering college, and her son lived with her ex-husband. The focal members of her network are her children, her parents (although her father died in 1994), her ex and his new wife, a niece, her daughter's friends, and acquaintances such as teachers and coworkers.

Beth is married and in her late 30s. She has two sons and a daughter. Her mother died before 1990, and several close grandparents also died between 1990 and 2001. Beth's large network revolves around family. Her gift list includes her husband and children, her father and his new wife, her in-laws, her sister's family, a cousin, a few friends, and acquaintances.

Heidi is single and in her 30s. She has lived with her mother since her parents divorced when she was young. Heidi never mentioned a significant other. Her small, very stable network includes her mother, her sister's family, her father, two uncles, and one close friend.

Lisa is married and in her late 30s, with one daughter. Lisa's two most important recipients are her husband and daughter. Her gift list also includes her father (and his various girlfriends over the years), her sister's family, in-laws, an aunt, friends, and acquaintances.

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