From Strangers to Family: How Material and Non-Material Gift Giving Strategies create Agapic Relationships over Time

Lydia Ottlewski

Lydia.Ottlewski@unisg.ch

Doctoral Candidate and Research Associate

University of St.Gallen

Institute for Customer Insights

Bahnhofstrasse 8

9000 St. Gallen

Switzerland

+41712242159

BIO

Lydia Ottlewski is a doctoral candidate in Marketing and a research associate at the Institute for Customer Insight at the University of St.Gallen, Switzerland. Her research interests are gift-giving, elderly consumers, social innovation, and alternative family constructions. Her master's thesis was supervised by Professor Domen Bajde at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense and Professor John Schouten supervises her PhD research.

ABSTRACT

Gift giving is an important element in various cultures, systems, and dyadic relationships. Multiple facets of gifting, mainly relational, have been examined in the realm of consumer research. In the context of a non-commercial elderly-student home share program, 'Housing for Help', this study extends our understanding about the progression of relationship types and exchange dynamics in the field of gift giving. Drawing on Sahlins' (1972) model of kinship distance and reciprocity as well as Belk and Coon's (1993) agapic love model, this study explores how strangers transform their transactional market exchanges into close family-like relationships and friendship bonds, by engaging in strategies of material and non-material gifting. The gifting strategies follow a spiral of reciprocity, which consists of material gifting, and non-material gifting, such as sharing of interests, telling & listening, shared experiences, learning from and caring for each other. The contribution is a temporally extended model that considers both the longitudinal emergence and reformulation of relations between alternating givers and recipients. This study also provides insights into the broader context of marketing and public policy: addressing the importance of aging in place, the wellbeing of elderly through social connections, and the disruption of current care solutions.

Keywords: Gift-giving spiral, relationship transformation, exchange types, reciprocity, aging consumers

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter contributes to our understanding of the social ontology of gifts, and gift giving as a practice of giving and reciprocation in intimate relationships. The social framework in which I explore the gifting dynamics and relationship progression is the context ‘Housing for help’- a non-profit home share arrangement between an elderly person (the homeowner) and a student (the tenant). This special arrangement is not organized as a typical rent contract. Support, in terms of assistance and activities for the elderly, is exchanged for low-cost/free lodging.

The ‘Housing for help’ initiative is an interesting and illustrative case that address the increasing loneliness of elderly and the alienation of individuals in our society. It places two persons of different generations together in the same household, such that they begin to share their lives together. This is similar to former living arrangements of extended families that were characterized by different generations under one roof – with the major difference that the elderly person and the student are not related. They are, in fact, complete strangers.

Sahlins’ (1972) model of kinship distance and reciprocity as well as Belk and Coon’s (1993) relationship paradigms are central concepts of this chapter to understand the types, dynamics and reciprocity of the relationships. Building upon these frameworks, I provide a processual model that discusses the progression of market-gift relationships.

Sahlins’ (1972) model assumes an a priori condition that determines what kinds of reciprocity will occur among people- ranging from family at the closest to enemies at the most distant. Sahlins (1972) uses the term ‘kinship distance’ to describe the kinship relations among people in terms of social distance. A high kinship distance exists between strangers and enemies, whereas we can find a low kinship distance between friends and family, ‘closest kin’. According

to Sahlins, this kinship distance defines the type of reciprocity one may expect. Negative reciprocity occurs among stranger and enemies in unbalanced transfers that are characterized by theft or underhanded dealings. Balanced reciprocity occurs in a market exchange among people who are not close kin but rely on each other's trust and cooperation in a communal setting. Generalized reciprocity occurs among the closest kin, such as family. They are acts of kindness and generosity that do not assume a *quid pro quo*. I use Sahlins' framework of kinship distance and reciprocity to characterize the progression of the relationship dynamics among the 'Housing for Help' participants.

The second theoretical building block for this chapter is Belk and Coon's (1993) agapic love paradigm that I use to specify the various types of relationships in the 'Housing for help' context. According to Belk and Coon (1993), economic exchange and social exchange are not the only two models within the broader exchange paradigm. Building on that they present 'agapic love' as an alternative paradigm of gift giving. Agapic love is characterized by "altruistic gifts that celebrate powerful emotions" (Belk and Coon 1993, p.393). The term 'agapic' refers to altruism and selflessness (Oxford University Press 2018). It is important to note that the term 'agapic' does not just refer to romantic love but also includes brotherly love, spiritual love, and parental or familial love (Belk and Coon 1993, p.406). I extend this definition of 'agapic love' by including friendships and quasi-family relations.

This chapter does not refer to the concepts of romance and intimacy as an emotional, sexual, or passionate attachment between lovers. Instead, the word intimacy is used to refer to a very close relationship, that is personal and private in nature and connotes familiarity, bonding, and belonging. In Sahlins' (1972) terms, it would be a relationship with a minimal kinship distance and only little or no expectation for reciprocity.

This book chapter presents the development from strangers in an economic exchange model into intimate relationships within an agapic love model. The starting point is a dyadic relationship between two strangers of different generations engaged in a balanced quid-pro-quo exchange, in which there exists no expectation of additional gifts or reciprocity. The ending point is an agapic bond (family-like relations and friendships) characterized by familiarity and closeness. Addressing Belk and Coon's (1993, p.412) claim that "gift giving may reveal the move from economic exchange to romantic love", I explore the transformation of relationships by analyzing strategies of material and non-material gifting, the dynamic development of the exchange types, and the relationship outcomes that flow from them.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIAL BONDS THROUGH GIFT GIVING

The literature on gift giving has a long history and started with classics like Mauss's (1967) work on the forms and functions of exchange and Sahlins' (1972) seminal theory on kinship distance and reciprocity. Since then, literature on gift giving has been further explored throughout various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, marketing, family literature, economics, and consumer behavior.

In these disciplines, studies consider different contexts of gift giving such as dating (Belk and Coon 1993), festive occasions (Clarke 2006; Rugimbana et al. 2003; Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth 2004; Fischer et al. 1990), business situations (D'Souza 2003; Lambsdorff and Frank 2010; Bellemare and Shearer 2009), online gifting (Hollenbeck, Peters, and Zinkhan 2010; Skågeby 2010), surrogacy and organ donation (Raymond 2014), meanings, values and feelings associated with gift giving (Chan, Denton, and Tsang 2003; McGrath, Sherry, and Levy 1993), charitable giving, volunteerism (Eckstein 2018; Bajde 2009, 2012; Mathur 1996) etc.

Most of these studies investigate relational aspects of gift giving. We learn about different relational constructs, ranging from interpersonal, dyadic gifting to whole gift systems, and also negative influences of gifting on relationships (Marcoux 2009). More specifically, relational gift giving studies cover gifting oneself (Mick and Demoss 1990), dyadic gifting (Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth 2004; Raymond 2014; Saad and Gill 2003; Rugimbana et al. 2003), household/familial gifting (Joy 2001; Tumama Cowley, Paterson, and Williams 2004; Bradford 2009; Clarke 2006), business/work gifting (Lambsdorff and Frank 2010; D’Souza 2003; Bellemare and Shearer 2009), community gifting (Eckstein 2018; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012; Hollenbeck, Peters, and Zinkhan 2010; Skågeby 2010), to whole gift systems (Giesler 2006; Weinberger 2017; Sherry 1983).

One common characteristic that we find in most of these relational gift giving studies is that gift giving strategies are applied to strengthen an existing personal connection between people: “to reproduce a social bond between people (Mauss 1967), “to communicate and solidify intimate relationships” (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012, p.74), “strengthen and maintain relationships” (Joy 2001, p. 240), “demonstrate ones feelings through gifts” (Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p.269), “promote ties and bonding between individuals” (Joy 2001, p.239), and “gifts as expressions of the desire for connection...and intimacy with others“ (Belk 2010, p.716).

For example, gift giving is used to improve the relationship between people in various situations, such as dating (Belk and Coon 1993, p.393), between lovers (Rugimbana et al. 2003) in between generations (Bradford 2009; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000), within a community rather than interpersonal relationship work (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012), between employee and co-worker (Bellemare and Shearer 2009), or between family members (Cheal 1987), and business partners (Chan, Denton, and Tsang 2003; D’Souza 2003).

Based on the common finding that gifts strengthen and maintain existing relationships, some studies further extend this knowledge by exploring the relational dynamics in more detail. Joy (2001) extends our understanding about relational dynamics and presents a gift continuum that calibrates relationships from most effective to least. According to her study, gift giving differs among the different relationship types. Sherry's foundational anthropological perspective (1983) extends our understanding about the relational dynamics of the gifting process by providing an understanding about the gift giving cycle itself. His work offers a detailed examination of a single gift giving phase, consisting of three stages: gestation, prestation, and reformulation. Gestation is the behavior antecedent to the exchange on donor's side and his/her motivation (Giesler 2006, p.284). Prestation is the substance of gift transaction and involves the recipient's response and donor's evaluation of the response (Giesler 2006, p.284). The reformulation concerns the disposition of the gift, such as display, storage, or rejection (Giesler 2006, p.284). His work assumes that gifting partners reciprocate the gift transaction continuously like a cycle.

In contrast to previous research, Belk and Coon (1993, p. 403) provoke a new direction of thought by claiming that gifts do not just strengthen *existing* relationships- "gifts can be the symbolic ritual medium through which *strangers* are transformed into kin" (Belk and Coon 1993, p.403). This statement assumes, that gift giving can be used as means to establish a relationship between strangers. This research gap serves as a starting point for my research.

In line with Belk and Coon's (1993) assumption, this book chapter explores the progression of a transactional market relationship to an agapic family-like bond and provides insights about how strangers can become quasi-family by applying material and non-material strategies of gift-giving. In contrast to Sherry's work (1983) that covers a single gift giving

phase, I provide a temporally extended model that considers both the longitudinal emergence and reformulation of relations between alternating givers and recipients.

The ‘Housing for help’ initiative provides the ideal context to study this research question. Starting off as strangers, the participants describe their relationships as friendship, mentorship and family over time. This book chapter explains how they transformed their relationships by engaging in practices of gift-giving. A processual model provides the framework for discussing the progression of market-gift relationships.

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Vast growth in elderly populations is disrupting existing social systems, health care approaches, markets, and public policy, leading to various challenges that existing institutions can barely cope with (Ulrich 2005; Mai 2008; World Health Organization 2008; Pavalko 2011; European Commission 2015; European Commission 2017). One condition that researchers identify as enhancing elderly consumers’ wellbeing is the ability to grow old in the familiarity of their own homes, something that is often difficult to achieve given declining health, current economic conditions, and family structures (Aceros, Pols, and Domènech 2015; Ewen et al. 2014; Black, Dobbs, and Young 2015; Vasunilashorn et al. 2012; Granbom et al. 2014; Wiles et al. 2012). A possible initiative to address and overcome these challenges is the context of this study, the initiative ‘Housing for Help’.

This non-profit initiative arranges home-sharing between an elderly homeowner and a student in need of lodging. Elderly persons act as landlords, providing students with low-cost or free rooms in their apartments or houses. In return, student tenants assist the elders with such things as household chores, gardening, technical matters, social activities, or basic consumption activities such as doctor visits and grocery shopping. Nursing-care activities (e.g. medication,

bathing, assisting to go to the restroom etc.) are forbidden by the organization. The arrangements allow the elderly to remain living in their homes more easily and safely than they otherwise could, and the students receive substantial housing benefits. ‘Housing for Help’ developed independently in many countries in the world. It is institutionalized in different cities through sponsorship by various organizations, such as student unions, city governments, universities, federal ministries, volunteer organizations, senior and social services, private sponsors, churches, the job center, the Red Cross or Caritas. In facilitating service exchanges between elders and students, ‘Housing for Help’ effectively offers a market-based approach to addressing the changing emotional, material and health-related needs of older consumers desiring to age in place.

This research utilized an ethnographic approach (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012; Marcoux 2009; Scaraboto 2015; Giesler 2006; Sherry 1983; Sherry and Kozinets 2001; McGrath, Sherry, and Levy 1993) to advance our understanding about these elderly-student home-sharing arrangements in Germany and Switzerland. I visited the six pairs, consisting of six elderly women and the six corresponding student-tenants, in their homes and spend a few hours with them. This allowed me to engage in in-situ observations of their private sphere. Moreover, in-depth, semi-structured interviews together as pairs and separately, took place ranging from 2-4 hours. It is important interviewing both, the elderly and the student, together to understand the interactions and dynamics of their relationships. Additionally, separate interviews were conducted to create a trustful atmosphere for the individual, making them feel comfortable to also talk about possible challenges and worries of the home share. A total of 18 participant interviews was recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 200 pages of single spaced transcriptions.

The detailed emic perspective of the participants was enriched by four formal interviews with four project coordinators. The interviews with the project coordinators lasted 1-1,5 hours resulting in 85 single spaced pages. Further informal interviews with other project coordinators transpired in the course of the data collection. Enriching the 285 pages of transcribed interviews are 14 pages of field notes from 15 hours of in-situ observation, a researcher diary (11 single spaced pages), and 15 photographs. Media data (180 items) in the form of newspaper articles, documentaries, videos, and governmental reports about the ‘Housing for Help’ initiative helped to triangulate my findings (Rothbauer 2008). An online blog (weekly posts over a two-year period) of one of the elderly participants allowed for a longitudinal perspective of her daily life with the student.

The data analysis was conducted in iterative steps, continuously moving between empirical data and theoretical background, using open, selective and axial coding, until “subcategories, perspectives and themes” evolved from the multidimensional data (Spiggle 1994, p.492). Recurring patterns led to more abstract conceptualizations.

TRANSFORMING STRANGERS INTO QUASI-FAMILY & FRIENDS

The ‘Housing for help’ initiative illustrates that strangers in a balanced quid-pro-quo exchange use gift giving practices as a strategy to create intimacy and transform their relationships into agapic bonds. The dynamic changes in forms of reciprocity and kinship distance are in line with this transformation of exchange practices. The first section provides an understanding about the economic exchange between strangers as a starting point. The second section demonstrates the type of relationships that developed over time in the home share arrangements. The concluding section explores material and non-material gift giving practices the that the pairs engaged in in

order to move from strangers to quasi-family and friends. The findings will be discussed under the light of the spiral of reciprocity.

Starting point: Quid pro quid exchange between strangers

The ‘Housing for help’ initiative serves as an intermediary to match the needs of students and those of the elderly. The volunteer-run project introduces potential participants and provides them with a contractual basis for home sharing. The contract specifies that the homeowner grants a certain amount of living space, measured in square meters, to the student in exchange for a certain amount of labor, measured in hours. The contract can be personalized to so that the living space is free or greatly reduced in price, with the labor hours adjusted accordingly. Other practical rules or expectations also are agreed upon in advance as well. The arrangement is beneficial for both sides, a tit-for-tat. This means that the elderly and the student enter the agreement in a balanced quid-pro-quo exchange as two strangers. The project coordinator describes it the following way:

It is a clear and smart idea. Both parties have something that the other party needs or wishes for. It's mutual. So they just get together and the scale is balanced, and that is a very simple idea. That's why it fits. The one has 100% space and 0% strength, whereas the other brings strength and flexibility but no room to live. So the two sides just come together and exchange where they have a shortages and contribute from their abundance. It's a win-win situation. Maybe even win-win-win, because I also benefit from it. Because I am satisfied with my work since the student and older person are both happy. And that is just wonderful! (Project Coordinator, 45)

We find various market-like elements in the project coordinator's quote: balance, mutuality, reciprocity, and exchange. One of the seniors describes the market exchange character of the project in a similar way:

This project is great, because it provides me the opportunity to do both, stay independent and continue living in my house. I worked hard to finance this home, so it means even more to me. There was a point last year when my health deteriorated drastically I certainly did not want to move to an elderly home. Luckily, I have the help of Nadine. Through that, I could stay in my home receiving her help and she has a nice and spacious place to live. (Anna, 82)

In this statement, Anna highlights the tangible advantages of the market-like arrangement that she has with the student Nadine. The elderly receives help and security to age in place, and the student benefits from a large place to live during the studies at minimal costs. Both the elderly and the student receive benefits from their arrangement and balance what they give and receive.

To describe this starting point of the arrangement in theoretical terms, it can be characterized as 'commodity exchange' (Belk 2010) due to the involvement of strangers, who engage in an economic market-like exchange with a reciprocal transaction (Belk 2010, pp. 718-720). A market transaction normally expects high reciprocity (Marcoux 2009, p.681). In Sahlins' (1972) terms, considering the model of kinship distance and reciprocity, this case is characterized as balanced reciprocity- the closest equivalent to a market exchange. It occurs among people that are not close kin, but who rely on each other's trust and cooperation in a communal setting.

Development of close agapic bonds- establishing quasi-family relations & friendships

Over time, emotional dimensions develop in the dyads. One aspect that influences this emotional aspect is certainly the close collaboration and living conditions of the participants.

However, this cannot be the sole reason, as we also find some dyads whose relations are kept to material and economic dimensions. In this work, I focus on the majority of dyads, which started to trade in non-material aspects as well and developed into non-market types of relationships. An example of this is the pair Johanna (student, 25) and Elisabeth (homeowner, 73). Elisabeth, the elderly homeowner, describes their relationship the following way:

Friendship! We maintain our independence but just with pleasure. It's a very warm relationship. When I'm in the kitchen she comes out of her room and we talk, and it is just so nice. Or when she comes home, she knocks and asks if I need something and tells me about her day. It is very kind. A very friendly communication. Recently, we went to the city together, because I needed to do some shopping, and it was very entertaining.

She also tells me about herself and her mother, I appreciate that. (Elisabeth, 73)

Also Johanna, the student, describes their relationship as friendship:

We are at least friends. We live very well together. And we talk about things, we help each other and I also receive important help. This is a very positive situation for me. (Johanna, 25)

The pair- Sophie (student, 21) and Inge (homeowner, 75) even describe their developed relationship as family.

We also go out for a coffee. It's nice, because I don't live in a shared housing with other students any more, and sometimes I feel lonely. And also because she is a grandma for me here, since mine are back home. ... I think we just get along really well. And I am about the same age as her grandchildren. And yes, we also talk a lot. I don't know, we always have something to talk about. And that's really nice, not to just sit next to each other silently. We talk about anything. She tells me about her past – for example about her husband and how they met – and I tell her about my family, my grandparents. It's really nice, she's my grandma from Freiburg. (Sophie, 21)

The development of close agapic and even family-like relationships is a non-planned side effect

of the initiative. In Sahlins' (1972) terms, the pairs decreased their kinship distance and established kinship relations. Close kin, such as family, engage in generalized reciprocity, which includes acts of kindness and generosity with no expectation for quid pro quo. The age difference between the students and the homeowners points us towards grandmother/grandchild relations, as the 'Housing for help' participants also refer to. I use Belk and Coon's (1993) terminology of 'agapic' to describe non-romantic, but close family-like relationships and friendship bonds. The next section shows how the participants of the 'Housing for help' initiative engaged in gift-giving strategies to transform their relationship from strangers to agapic relations.

Spiral of reciprocity: engaging in material and non-material practices of gift-giving

In the first section of the findings, we learn that the 'Housing for help' participants enter their arrangement as strangers. Over time they develop close agapic bonds. This section explores how gifting as a practice of giving and reciprocation transformed these relationships. The formal exchange is already balanced and fulfilled, so the participants freely engage in material and non-material gifting. Especially the non-material 'gifts' do not happen based on contractual obligations, but out of care, interest, generosity, and the willingness to bond with the other.

Material Gifts. Louisa (student, 22) regularly receives little gifts from Erna (79) when they go shopping.

When we are out in the city, she always invites me for something or pays for me. I always tell her that it is really not necessary and that she does not need to do that, but she insists on doing so. When we are grocery shopping for example, I take care of the shopping cart, she adds her things and I help her to find stuff. Simple as that, just like grandma and grandchild. (Louisa, 22)

Louisa describes that she often receives little presents from Erna, when they are shopping together. Even though Louisa does not expect a gift and even tries to reject it, Erna constantly insists. Erna uses gift giving as a strategy to thank Louisa for her companionship, even though Louisa already receives a cheap lodging to balance the exchange. Both developed a very close relationship, that Louisa describes as grandma and grandchild in the quote above.

Material gifts also play a role in the case of Judith (26) and Bettina (81). Judith describes that Bettina would like to pass along the furniture to her:

I have my room and bathroom in the upper part of the house. Bettina got it refurbished before I moved in. The room was also furnished with really nice, wooden pieces so I didn't have to bring all the stuff from my hometown. Bettina told me a while ago that I could keep the furniture in the future if I'd like to, since she does not have any relatives. (Judith, 26)

This example draws a parallel to Price, Arnould and Curasi's study (2000, p.180) about older consumers' disposition of special possessions. In their case, older consumers passed along their belongings to other family members. In the case of Judith and Bettina, the elderly does not have any extended family anymore and therefore decided to gift the student with the antique wooden furniture. The giving of material gifts is just one strategy applied by the participants to transform their relationships. Non-material gifting plays a more important role in developing family-like relationships.

Non-Material Gifts. According to Belk and Coon (1993, p. 403), examples for non-material gifts are time, ideas, feelings, and experiences. They are considered even more important than material gifts. The participants of 'Housing for help' engage in strategies of sharing the same interests, learning from another, telling & listening, shared experiences, and caring about each other.

a) Sharing of interests

A very basic form of non-material gifting is to share the same interests. Marie (student, 24) describes how much Susan (homeowner, 68) and her have in common:

Well, we share the same religious faith. And what else? So many things! We listen to music, because we both like Schlager music. (laughs). Other things- we talk about educational topics, because she used to be a teacher and I am becoming one. She is very interested in what has changed within the educational structures of universities, what is being taught. And also about parties of younger people. She used to go out to dance as well. We both like the French language and we like to talk about our families. (Marie, 24)

This quote illustrates that the both create a common bond through the same interests in music, education, dancing and religion. Interests of other pairs include cooking & baking, theater plays, novels, and current politics.

b) Telling and Listening

An essential type of giving is to pay attention to and appreciate each other's interests, lives, and histories. The participants of the initiative engage in genuine conversations and share their thoughts, emotions, and stories with one another. The different pairs report about their profound conversations:

We also have a lot of long conversations, for example when I am eating downstairs, sometimes I am eating up here when Anna is on the phone, but otherwise, I learned a lot about her life and we talk about many things. It is really nice to talk to her. She also likes to talk a lot, that is good. (Nadine, 28)

Nadine reports that most of their conversations happen in the course of joint dinner. The student enjoys the conversations with the senior. It is important to note that both sides value the common, non-contractually-obliged time. Also Sophie point out their special relationship and describes how much they contribute to each other's lives:

I think we just get along really well. And I am about the same age as her grandchildren. And yes, we can also talk a lot. I don't know. We always have something to talk about. And that is really nice, not to just sit next to each other silently. We talk about anything. She tells me about her past, for example from her husband and how they met- and I tell her from my family, my grandparents. It is really nice. (Sophie, 21)

Also the elderly reports how much they share with one another, even very private matters:

She already told me about her life and these are things that you don't tell just anyone, it was very private. I perceived that as a big credit of trust towards me. And I also tell her about my family and my worries and that is very nice, because you spend more time together than with the own children. (Inge, 75)

Inge feels honored that the student shares those details with her. She perceives this as a sign of trust, which makes her relationship very special. She also emphasizes that she spends even more time with the student, than with her own children, which creates a closeness and strong attachment among them. What we learn in all these quotes is that they do not just engage in deep conversations, but rather spend time together appreciating and respecting each other, and caring for another.

c) Learning from another

Another gifting practice that pairs engage in is to teach each other and learn from another. Learning in this respect may have various facets. Anna (homeowner, 82) describes that she taught the student to appreciate the nature:

And Nadine certainly learns from me how to deal with the nature. Now she feeds the birds and the dog, and she really enjoys it. (Anna, 82)

Erna describes that she learns from Louisa on a very personal level:

I learn from Louisa to be constantly friendly, always being willing to be responsive to others. And absolutely her understanding for the situation. I learn that from her. To settle into this situation without any egoism. (Erna, 79)

Erna suffered from a stroke and it took her some time to recover and to be able to live a normal life again. Louisa supported her in this situation. What Erna values is not just the physical support, but also the emotional attitude that Louisa brought towards her. Furthermore, the participants mentioned to learn about tidiness, different cultural and religious beliefs, political perspectives, specialized medical knowledge, languages, about other generations, technical know-how, and discipline during their arrangements. Both sides give and receive in the process of learning and teaching, since it requires the willingness and goodwill of both.

d) Shared experiences

Another fundamental type of gifting are shared experiences. Both parties are simultaneously giving, or contributing, to the experience. It is important to note, that these common experiences are non-contractual and outside of the obligatory exchange dimension. Both sides engage in the common experiences freely. Shared experiences can be various activities, such as enjoying a coffee together, attending church services, or sharing meals. The following quotes describe the feelings of the participants:

It is always so nice together. Sometimes we go for a coffee together, and it is really cozy. I really like that, and I think she is also happy to have someone to drink a coffee with, without any time-restrictions, without being hectic to have a proper exchange. (Marie, 24)

Marie emphasizes how much both enjoy being together without any stress. She appreciates the exchange they engage in, in a comfortable atmosphere. Susan (68) values the church visits with the student.

Sometimes, we also go to church together. We share the same faith. Even though I can get there quite easily without her help- but if she has time and no other plans, she joins me. (Susan, 68)

Going to church together is a very private and family-like activity- similar to sharing meals as described by Elisabeth (homeowner, 73):

I always wake up early and directly have to eat breakfast, but she usually joins later. And when she is having breakfast I join her with the newspaper and we start to talk. And also in the evening, we often talk a lot and sit together comfortably. (Elisabeth, 73)

Elisabeth emphasizes her ability to relax with the student and enjoy the time together. Sharing these experiences together is a central element that contributes to developing these close relationships. This takes place outside of the contractual exchange. Instead, the participants build closer connections through their shared experiences.

e) Caring about each other

Gifting takes also place by expressing how much one cares for the other and the wish to contribute to facilitating each other's' lives. Bettina, who sits in a wheelchair, describes how the student Judith takes care of her and surprises her with little favors:

And I would really like to add that Judith spoils me. I am really spoiled! I just put all my dishes somehow in the kitchen and she just cleans everything, puts it into the dishwasher, unloads the dishwasher etc. I always realize that when she is not here, and I have to do it myself. (Bettina, 81)

Claudia emphasizes how much she appreciates the extra effort Marina is doing for her and that she does not take it for granted. Also Nadine, the student, freely takes on additional chores, when Anna's cleaning lady is sick:

She has a cleaning lady who comes once a week to clean downstairs, I clean my room and the bathroom up here myself. And if the lady is sick, I clean downstairs as well - that is not a problem for me at all. I also do the dishes right after the meal, even though we did not set that in the contract. Anna normally just leaves the dishes during the day to do it all at once. But I just do all our dishes right away. She tells me that I don't have to do that, but I still do it. (Nadine)

All these activities are examples for showing affection and care for the other person. To summarize, gifting occurs in various instances and facets. It can take place in a material and non-

material way. In the preceding sections, we learned that various facets of gifting are applied by the participants of the ‘Housing for help’ initiative to transform their relationships from strangers to close agapic bonds.

THE GIFT GIVING SPIRAL

- f) The next section discusses the findings in a broader context. The participants of the initiative engaged in spirals of reciprocity to establish trust and increasing care. The gift giving spiral is characterized by non-circular movements that do not return to its original point: e.g. some of the gifts are not directly reciprocated and the relationships are progressively developed. In contrast to Sherry’s work (1983) that covers a only single gift giving phase, I provide a temporally extended model that considers both the longitudinal emergence and reformulation of relations between alternating givers and recipients. The following illustration demonstrates the connections between the various elements of gift giving in more detail.

Insert figure 1 about here

Figure 1 Gift giving spiral (own illustration developed based on Sahlins (1972) and Belk & Coon (1993))

The gift continuum (Joy 2001) represents the spectrum of gifting relationships. Economic exchange and romantic love lie at opposite ends of the continuum (Malinowski's (1922) cited in Belk and Coon 1993, p.407).

The findings showed that the study's participants moved from one side of the continuum to the other as they engaged in practices of gift giving and thus transformed their relationships from stranger on the left to family-like relations and friendships on the right. In Sahlins' (1972) terms, balanced reciprocity lies at the very left and develops into generalized reciprocity on the right. In between, the expectation of reciprocity and the kinship distance, both decrease.

The spiral of reciprocity constitutes the center of the illustration. The "continuous spiral of reciprocity" (Giesler 2006, p.284) consists of three distinct phases: giving, receiving, and reciprocating (Joy 2001, p. 239). This spiral repeats in reciprocal giving. With each "turn of the circle" the levels of trust and caring increase. Throughout these spirals, the participants build up trust and increase their generosity and gift-giving.

The gifting can either be material or non-material, as we have seen in the findings. Material gifting is more traditional and hence more akin to Sahlins's (1972) generalized reciprocity. Non-material gifting has various facets. The sharing of interests and the shared experiences are special and important cases. Every shared experience represents a full spin of the spiral, because both parties are simultaneously giving, or contributing, to the experience.

The pair starts off with a formalized, balanced and contractual quid-pro-quo exchange (lodging in exchange for support) of two strangers. The kinship distance is high, and each side fulfills their obligations with a high expectation for reciprocity. Over time, a non-transactional relationship type develops. In alignment with this transformation of exchange practices are the dynamic changes in forms of reciprocity and kinship distance. Kinship distance as well as the expectation for reciprocity both decreased. Instead of contractual arrangements, the social aspect becomes the central element of the pair. They engaged in material and non-material strategies of gift giving to create intimacy/closeness.

However, not all 'Housing for help' pairs experienced the positive spiral of reciprocity. One of the couples described their relationship as negative. Their living arrangement started like all others as a contractual formalized home share agreement. The elderly loosened the formal rules of the home share agreement to grant trust to the student and improve their relationship. Instead of reciprocating this gift, the student (ab)used the freedom and increasingly stopped to fulfill his formalized obligations of the contract. In contrast to the elderly's expectation, the student did not seek a close relationship with the co-living partner. This unbalanced state of giving and receiving led to a broken gift spiral and to increasing conflicts between the elderly and the student. Sahlins' (1972) model describes this type of unbalanced transfers as negative reciprocity. Once the senior realized that the student gained more at her expense, she introduced

formal control measures (e.g. book keeping of the student's tasks, reminder notes, timing the student's household activities, etc.). The student did not understand this drastic step out of the gift spiral, leading to further misunderstandings of the pair. Marcoux' 'dark side of the gift' discusses these negative feelings and dangers of gift giving like social indebtedness, embarrassment, emotional oppression, and a sense of dependence (Marcoux, 2009, p. 671). As described in Marcoux' work, the senior also turned to market logics and measures to avoid the disadvantages of the gift economy.

This study contributes to the gift giving literature by exploring the progression of a transactional market relationship to an agapic family-like bond and provides insights about how strangers can become quasi-family by applying material and non-material strategies of gift-giving. In contrast to Sherry's work (1983) that covers a single gift giving phase, I provide a temporally extended model that considers both the longitudinal emergence and reformulation of relations between alternating givers and recipients.

It is important to discuss these findings in their broader context of aging populations. The data for this study was gathered in Switzerland and Germany. One might well wonder why elderly consumers in these two countries, being among the wealthiest countries in the world, with established social security and care systems, would choose to participate in the 'Housing for help' initiative. The findings of this study clearly point to the fact, that elderly are not primarily part of this initiative to receive support in the household or to receive assistance with any other activities. Instead, by transforming the transactional service arrangement into a family-like cohabitation constellation, the close relationships become the central element and *raison d'être* of the initiative.

The study is of high importance since elderly generations are the fastest-growing population groups in most countries. Population estimates predict that by 2050 every third German and every fifth person in the world will be aged 60 and over (The Boston Consulting Group 2012). Large percentages of elderly in a population place strains on social systems including but not limited to pensions and health care. Existing institutions struggle to meet these challenges. Many elderly people desire to continue living in their own homes, even as their abilities to maintain those homes are becoming compromised by declining strength and health. In preindustrial times, or even in many non-western cultures, the situation of elderly isolation in their own homes would be rare because of the orientation to extended families. Members of multiple generations living in the same households naturally took care of each other. What ‘Housing for Help’ has managed to do, is to address the real needs of elderly consumers and craft a solution to the problems of elderly citizens in need of assistance, comfort, and companionship.

REFERENCES

- Aceros, Juan C., Jeannette Pols, and Miquel Domènech. 2015. “Where Is Grandma? Home Telecare, Good Aging and the Domestication of Later Life.” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.01.016>.
- Bajde, Domen. 2009. “Rethinking the Social and Cultural Dimensions of Charitable Giving.” *Consumption Markets & Culture* 12 (1): 65–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10253860802560870>.
- . 2012. “Mapping the Imaginary of Charitable Giving.” *Consumption Markets and*

- Culture* 15 (4): 358–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2012.659433>.
- Belk, Russell. 2010. “Sharing.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 36 (5): 715–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/612649>.
- Belk, Russell W., and Gregory S. Coon. 1993. “Gift Giving as Agapic Love: An Alternative to the Exchange Paradigm Based on Dating Experiences.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 20 (3): 393. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209357>.
- Bellemare, Charles, and Bruce Shearer. 2009. “Gift Giving and Worker Productivity: Evidence from a Firm-Level Experiment.” *Games and Economic Behavior* 67 (1). Elsevier Inc.: 233–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2008.12.001>.
- Black, Kathy, Debra Dobbs, and Tiffany L Young. 2015. “Aging in Community: Mobilizing a New Paradigm of Older Adults as a Core Social Resource.” *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 34 (2): 219–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464812463984>.
- Bradford, Tonya Williams. 2009. “Intergenerationally Gifted Asset Dispositions.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 36 (1): 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.1086/596304>.
- Chan, Allan K.K., Luther Trey Denton, and Alex S.L. Tsang. 2003. “The Art of Gift Giving in China.” *Business Horizons* 46 (4): 47–52. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-6813\(03\)00051-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-6813(03)00051-X).
- Cheal, David. 1987. “Showing Them You Love Them’: Gift-Giving and the Dialectic of Intimacy.” *Sociological Review* 35 (1): 150–69.
- Clarke, Peter. 2006. “Christmas Gift Giving Involvement.” *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 23 (5): 283–91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760610681673>.

- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihály. 2000. "Reflections and Reviews : The Costs and Benefits of Consuming." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(2): 267–272. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9_5
- D'Souza, Clare. 2003. "An Inference of Gift-Giving within Asian Business Culture." *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* 15 (1/2): 27–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/13555850310765051>.
- Eckstein, Susan. 2018. "Community as Gift-Giving : Collectivistic Roots of Volunteerism
Author (S): Susan Eckstein Source : American Sociological Review , Vol . 66 , No . 6 (Dec . , 2001), Pp . 829-851 Published by : American Sociological Association Stable URL :
[Http://www.jstor.org/stable/1234567](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1234567) 66 (6): 829–51.
- European Commission. 2015. "The 2015 Ageing Report".
- European Commission. 2017. "The 2018 Ageing Report: state-of-play".
- Ewen, Heidi H, Sarah J Hahn, Mary Ann Erickson, and John A Krout. 2014. "Aging in Place or Relocation? Plans of Community-Dwelling Older Adults." *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* 28 (3): 288–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763893.2014.930366>.
- Fischer, Eileen, Stephen J Arnold, Eileen Fischer, and Stephen J Arnold. 1990. "More Than a Labor of Love : Gender Roles and Christmas Gift Shopping Linked References Are Available on JSTOR for This Article : More than a Labor of Love : Gender Roles and Christmas Gift Shopping." *Journal of Consumer Research* 17 (3): 333–45.
- Giesler, Markus. 2006. "Consumer Gift Systems," no. January: 283–90.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Markus_Giesler/publication/23547326_Consumer_Gift_Systems/links/02e7e51cc62e6e020b000000.pdf.

Granbom, Marianne, Ines Himmelsbach, Maria Haak, Charlotte Löfqvist, Frank Oswald, and Susanne Iwarsson. 2014. "Residential Normalcy and Environmental Experiences of Very Old People: Changes in Residential Reasoning over Time." *Journal of Aging Studies* 29 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2013.12.005>.

Hollenbeck, Candice R., Cara Peters, and George M. Zinkhan. 2010. "Gift Giving: A Community Paradigm." *Psychology & Marketing* 23 (7): 573–95. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar>.

Joy, Annamma. 2001. "Gift Giving in Hong Kong and the Continuum of Social Ties." *Journal of Consumer Research* 28 (2): 239–56. <https://doi.org/10.1086/322900>.

Lambsdorff, Johann Graf, and Björn Frank. 2010. "Bribing versus Gift-Giving - An Experiment." *Journal of Economic Psychology* 31 (3). Elsevier B.V.: 347–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2010.01.004>.

Lowrey, Tina M., Cele C. Otnes, and Julie A. Ruth. 2004. "Social Influences on Dyadic Giving over Time: A Taxonomy from the Giver's Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Research* 30 (4): 547–58. <https://doi.org/10.1086/380288>.

Mai, Ralf. 2008. "Demographic change in Germany". *European View*, 7: 287-296. Available through: DOI 10.1007/s12290-008-0048-4 [Accessed 10 April 2015].

- Marcoux, Jean-Sébastien. 2009. "Escaping the Gift Economy." *Journal of Consumer Research* 36 (4): 671–85. <https://doi.org/10.1086/600485>.
- Mathur, Anil. 1996. "Older Adults' Motivations for Gift Giving to Charitable Organizations: An Exchange Theory Perspective." *Psychology and Marketing* 13 (1): 107–23. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6793\(199601\)13:1<107::AID-MAR6>3.0.CO;2-K](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199601)13:1<107::AID-MAR6>3.0.CO;2-K).
- Mauss, Marcel. 1967. "The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies", ed. Cunnison, I., New York: Norton.
- McGrath, Mary Ann, John F. Sherry, and Sidney J. Levy. 1993. "Giving Voice to the Gift." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 2 (2): 171–91.
- Mick, David Glen, and Michelle Demoss. 1990. "Self-Gifts: Phenomenological Insights from Four Contexts." *Journal of Consumer Research* 17 (3): 322. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208560>.
- Oxford University Press. 2018. *Oxford Reference*. Available through: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095355293>
- Pavalko, Eliza K. 2011. Caregiving and the Life Course: Connecting the Personal and the Public In: Settersten Jr., R.A. and Angel, J.L. eds., 2011. *Handbook of Sociology of Ageing*. [e-book] New York: Springer Science+Business Media. Available at: <http://link.springer.com.proxy1-bib.sdu.dk:2048/book/10.1007/978-1-4419-7374-0/page/1> [Accessed 03 February 2015]. Ch. 37
- Price, Linda L., Eric J. Arnould, and Carolyn F. Curasi. 2000. "Older Consumers' Disposition of

Special Possessions.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 27 (2): 179–201.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/314319>.

Raymond, Janice G. 2014. “Gifts and Reproductive Gift Giving : Woman” 20 (6): 7–11.

Rothbauer, Paulette. 2008. “Triangulation,” in Given, L.M. ed. 2008. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. :

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n468>, pp. 893-895.

Rugimbana, Robert, Brett Donahay, Christopher Neal, and Michael Jay Polonsky. 2003. “The Role of Social Power Relations in Gift Giving on Valentine’s Day.” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 3 (1): 63. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.122>.

Saad, Gad, and Tripat Gill. 2003. “An Evolutionary Psychology Perspective on Gift Giving among Young Adults.” *Psychology and Marketing* 20 (9): 765–84.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.10096>.

Sahlins, Marshall. 1972. “Stone Age Economics”, Aldine de Gruyter.

Scaraboto, Daiane. 2015. “Selling, Sharing, and Everything in between: The Hybrid Economies of Collaborative Networks.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 42 (1): 152–76.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv004>.

Sherry, John F. 1983. “Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective Linked References Are Available on JSTOR for This Article : Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective” 10 (2): 157–68.

- Sherry, John F., and Robert V. Kozinets. 2001. *Qualitative Inquiry in Marketing and Consumer Research*. Kellogg on Marketing, Eds. Dawn Iacobucci and Lakshman Krishnamurthi, New York: John Wiley.
- Skågeby, Jörgen. 2010. "Gift-Giving as a Conceptual Framework: Framing Social Behavior in Online Networks." *Journal of Information Technology* 25 (2): 170–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2010.5>.
- Spiggle, Susan. 1994. "Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (3): 491–503.
- The Boston Consulting Group. 2012. "Global Aging - How Companies Can adapt to the new reality." Available at:
https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/financial_institutions_insurance_global_aging_how_companies_can_adapt_new_reality/?chapter=6
- Tumama Cowley, Esther, Janis Paterson, and Maynard Williams. 2004. "Traditional Gift Giving among Pacific Families in New Zealand." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 25 (3): 431–44. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JEEI.0000039949.35285.20>.
- Ulrich, Ralf E. 2005. "Demographic change in Germany and implications for the health system." *Journal of Public Health*, Vol. (13/1), pp. 10-15.

Vasunilashorn, Sarinnapha, Bernard A. Steinman, Phoebe S. Liebig, and Jon Pynoos. 2012.

“Aging in Place: Evolution of a Research Topic Whose Time Has Come.” *Journal of Aging Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/120952>.

Weinberger, Michelle F. 2017. “Gifts: Intertwining Market and Moral Economies and the Rise of

Store Bought Gifts.” *Consumption Markets and Culture* 20 (3). Taylor & Francis: 245–57.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2016.1231748>.

Weinberger, Michelle F., and Melanie Wallendorf. 2012. “Intracommunity Gifting at the

Intersection of Contemporary Moral and Market Economies: Table 1.” *Journal of*

Consumer Research 39 (1): 74–92. <https://doi.org/10.1086/662198>.

Wiles, Janine L., Annette Leibing, Nancy Guberman, Jeanne Reeve, and Ruth E S Allen. 2012.

“The Meaning Of ‘aging in Place’ to Older People.” *Gerontologist*.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnr098>.

World Health Organization. 2008. “The World Health Report 2008 - primary Health Care (Now

More Than Ever).” Available at: <http://www.who.int/whr/2008/en/>