Gift Giving in Enduring Dyadic Relationships: The Micropolitics of Mother–Daughter Gift Exchange

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This article investigates the dynamics of long-term gift exchange between British mothers and their adult daughters, delving into the processes behind dyadic gift giving. Through 54 comprehensive interviews, we elaborate the micropolitics that characterize these dynamics. Micropolitics refers to the subtle, everyday interactions, including gift exchange, that shape the ongoing negotiation of roles and the management of conflict or consensus within relationships. The study uncovers how these micropolitics manifest through four distinct processes of gift exchange: confirming, endorsing, connoting, and commanding. Gifts emerge as key instruments in this negotiation, serving as a medium for the reciprocal regulation of role behavior concerning gender, identity, and both endo-dyadic (within the dyad) and exo-dyadic (outside the dyad) roles. In contrast to previous research that adopts a synchronic (snapshot) approach to gift giving, our diachronic (over time) perspective emphasizes how power dynamics, intent, and identity politics evolve to sustain and transform relationships. Our findings illustrate the important communicative and power-laden processes of gift exchange in enduring relations, explaining why even unwanted gifts can have significant bonding value. Our study offers fresh perspectives on the continuous evolution of relationship and role dynamics, as viewed through the practices of gift exchange.

Keywords: gift giving, gift receipt, gift exchange, micropolitics, dyadic relationships

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Long-term or enduring relationships, such as those between neighbors, friends, or family members (Bell and Coleman 2020; Epp and Price 2008) contain relatively unique sources of satisfaction and conflict (Argyle and Furnham 1983; Fischer 1986), making them special contexts for consumption. Consumer researchers have recently recognized the importance of dyadic pairs in consumption in close relationships such as these, arguing that they

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deserve special attention in our field (Cavanaugh 2016; Garcia-Rada et al. 2021).

Gift giving is a highly significant consumption context in enduring dyadic relationships (Arnould and Rose 2016; Belk 2010; Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth 2004), and it is thus unsurprising that relational elements have long been identified as key in gift giving (Fiske 1991; Joy 2001; Sahlins 1972). In foundational work, Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim (1993) identify six social roles that gift givers may express to their gift recipients in response to the nature of the relationship they share, ranging from casual acquaintance to extreme intimacy: the pleaser, the provider, the compensator, the socializer, the acknowledger, and the avoider. Extending this work, Joy (2001) finds her participants altering gift giving practices depending on the type of dyadic relationship, such as parent–child, boyfriend–girlfriend or best friends. Prior research also reveals that there are various functions, intentions and outcomes of dyadic gift exchanges (Belk and Coon 1993; Chan and Mogilner 2017; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Givi et al. 2023; Liu, Dallas, and Fitzsimons 2019; Sherry 1983; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993). It further acknowledges that individuals give, receive, reject, and reciprocate gifts strategically (Bradford 2009; Branco-Illodo, Heath, and Tynan 2020; Kessous, Valette-Florence, and De Barnier 2017; Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1992).

The strategic element is crucial to the recognition that gift giving expresses inherent power relations. Belk (1988, 150) asserts that "giving possessions to others" is a means of extending the self and thus is a special form of control. Consequently, we might expect gift giving in long-term relationships to uncover the subtle yet powerful struggles—characteristics of such enduring connections. For example, Ruth et al. (1999, 393) observe that recipients may grapple with the decision to accept or decline charitable gifts from close relatives and friends to avoid the stigma of seeming needy. Kessous et al. (2017, 219) present a story of an informant who feels "pressure on his shoulders" when he receives a luxury watch that embodies his father's hard work and his fear of not "having what it takes" to live up to it. Compromise and negotiation are also apparent in Branco-Illodo et al.'s (2020, 867) observation that, instead of expressing dissatisfaction to well-meaning gift givers, such as a loving grandparent gifting something that a teenage grandchild finds undesirable, gift recipients may cope with an identity incongruent gift by concealing their emotions and pretending to love the gift.

Prior research in this vein, however, tends to focus on only one-side of the dyadic exchange (Liu et al. 2019), either from the gift giver (Fischer and Arnold 1990; Givi and Galak 2020; Joy 2001; Klein, Lowrey, and Otnes 2015; Otnes et al. 1993; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016; Wooten 2000) or the gift recipient side (Branco-Illodo et al. 2020; Marcoux 2009; Ruth et al. 1999; Sherry et al. 1992). Importantly, it does not account sufficiently for the enduring nature of many of these relationships. Similarly, even when voices from both gift giver and gift recipient are captured (Appau and Crockett 2023; Belk and Coon 1993; Bradford 2009; Branco-Illodo and Heath 2020; Giesler 2006; Kessous et al. 2017; Sherry et al. 1993; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2011), the dyad is not analyzed explicitly in relation to the important long-term or enduring relationship context. Thus, research understandings still remain hazy on how dyadic gift giving unfolds as a dynamic, ongoing process in enduring long-term relationships. Our study investigates this topic by shedding light on the micropolitics of gift exchange in these relationships.

MICROPOLITICS AND DYADIC GIFT EXCHANGE

Dyadic Gift Exchange

Although their presence in enduring dyadic exchange has rarely been investigated, gifts have long been an entry point for consumer researchers' study of identity work and how social ties unfold in contemporary societies (Belk and Coon 1993; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Joy 2001; Klein et al. 2015; Marcoux 2009; Otnes 2018; Sherry 1983; Sherry et al. 1992; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2011). Classic anthropological and sociological accounts of gift exchange recognize that gifts are often manifestations of power relations and given as a means to enact relations of dominance and subordination among those holding different social roles and identities. Mauss (1954/2002), for example, viewed the primitive practice of Potlatch as an agonistic gift exchange between two chieftains competing for social prestige through gift acquisition and consumption. However, this agonistic, competitive aspect of gift exchange has not generated nearly as much consumer research as the arguments related to the formation of social ties grounded in feelings of love, reciprocity or solidarity (Belk and Coon 1993; Bradford 2009; Branco-Illodo and Heath 2020; Chan and Mogilner 2017). These studies tend to invoke role theory or gift giver–recipient asymmetries, both of which may be important aspects of giving and receiving in enduring dyadic relations.

Dyadic Gifts and Role Theory. Roles are important to dyadic gift giving and serve to structure interaction in specific ways (Joy 2001; Liu et al. 2019; Otnes et al. 1993). Gifts are given to express a range of social roles with varying intentions, goals, and motives (Fiske 1991; Sahlins 1972). For example, both Cheal (1988) and Fischer and Arnold (1990) suggest that a woman's domestic, caring role compels her to shoulder the major responsibility for buying and giving gifts on behalf of the household to which they belong. Joy (2001, 247) presents a case of one informant who states that she would be "dead meat" if she forgot to give gifts to her parents on gift giving occasions such as

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Mother's Day or Father's Day to fulfill her role as a filial child. Liu and Kozinets (2022, 322–323) show that Chinese "leftover women" engage in competitive parental gifting to claim the role of the more filial child. In sum, prior consumer research on the gift adopting a role theory perspective has suggested that gift giving in families' enduring relationships is motivated by familial roles.

Dynamism in Enduring Dyadic Gifting. Beyond the fact of the permanent nature of dyadic family roles lies the dynamic enactment of everyday familial roles in these relationships. Being a mother, daughter, sister, or aunt is an ongoing process, as family members share a lifelong journey with a long history of giving and receiving. In fact, interactional role theory posits that "roles are continuously constructed and reconstructed as individuals engage in rolemaking [with available resources] in the course of interaction with incumbents of alter roles" (Turner 2002, 252). For example, an older parent becoming ill or frail may assume a more dependent role. This change can prompt their child to suddenly see himself or herself as responsible for caring activities, taking on a role more traditionally held by a parent (Fischer 1986, 53–55).

The ongoing dyadic role-making process is neither linear nor predictable. In some instances, the aforementioned parent may not see herself as frail, and thus resist the child's caring activities that seek to relegate the self into a childlike dependent role (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Heid, Zarit, and Fingerman 2016). The concept of (in) dependence and role shifts are closely affiliated with consumer identity politics. It emphasizes the potential struggles, conflicts, tensions, and resistance that may transpire during the process as individuals compete to claim or resist certain social roles. These intriguingly dynamic aspects of role-taking and role-making in enduring dyadic gifting remain largely uninvestigated.

Gift Giver and Recipient Asymmetries and Power Struggles. Asymmetries between gift givers and recipients are another crucial aspect relating to the agonistic and competitive aspect of the exchange. Gift exchange reveals giver–recipient asymmetries in gift preferences, interpersonal goals, and related struggles (Branco-Illodo et al. 2020; Givi et al. 2023; Kessous et al. 2017; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016; Zhang and Epley 2012).

Although past research on gift giving has mostly treated these asymmetries as unintentional errors on the part of givers (Cavanaugh, Gino, and Fitzsimons 2015; Givi 2021), a few studies have accentuated that they also may encompass power struggles between gift giver and recipient. For example, Ward and Broniarczyk (2016) find that close givers often diverge from gift registry suggestions in a strategic effort to find a "better" gift that expresses authentic relational sentiments, resulting in gifts that often deviate from recipient preferences. In examining envy's influence on gift giving behavior, Givi and Galak (2019) demonstrate that givers avoid giving gifts that compare favorably to their own possessions, even though they know these gifts will bring most joy and happiness to their recipients. In avoiding such gifts, givers can "keep the Joneses from getting ahead in the first place" (375). Liu et al. (2019) deliberate how when the preferences of the giver and the recipient are asymmetric, intra- and interpersonal dynamics relating to dominance, accommodation, and compromise often surface in making gift choices for joint consumption. Givi (2021) also notes that givers give gifts more often than recipients prefer when they know the recipients will not be able to reciprocate, underestimating how uncomfortable recipients may feel about receiving a gift without returning one.

This stream of research reveals the many acts of impressing, envy, dominance, accommodation, compromise and reciprocation underscoring the power dynamics inherent in gift exchange. The self-interested elements of gift exchange contribute to the potential tensions and conflicts manifested in the process. Givi and Galak (2019) and Appau and Crockett (2023) suggest that elements of economic competitiveness bring the wider power differentials into these processes and outcomes. However, we still know little about the specific elements involved in managing these tensions and conflicts, which should be especially visible in long-term enduring relationships where giver–recipient asymmetries are regular occurrences, such as within intergenerational family relations (Swartz 2009).

Micropolitics of the Gift

Micropolitics. Traditionally, a sociological focus on micropolitics (also spelled micropolitics by some scholars) addresses the ways in which power is enacted by an individual or a group in order to effect an outcome, achieve a result, or promote an interest (Sarcinelli 2018). In contrast to the macro-perspective of political economy, a micropolitical perspective focuses on "small-scale, everyday, and ongoing interactions, negotiations, collaborations, and transactions" aimed at achieving consensus or resolving conflict in a relationship (Taylor 2021, 46). Although micropolitical strategies have traditionally been viewed as the "darker side" of self-interested manipulation (Hoyle 1986), they are also recognized as a daily and inevitable part of institutional life (Marshall and Scribner 1991) and of particular importance in reproducing inequalities and relations of dominance and subordination (Morley 2000; Pyke 1999). For example, Crockett (2017, 558) employs the concept of micropolitics to theorize how African Americans manage everyday race relations. Clark (1990, 305; 1997), one of the key micropolitical scholars, notes that micropolitics can be positive or negative, but are invariably related to "the creation and negotiation of hierarchy."

Relational Micropolitics. Increasingly, studies of relational micropolitics at the family level reveal the many

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points of disagreement, competing needs and conflicts that family members must manage to maintain their own mental stability and resilience (de Oliveira and Barreto 2019; Sarcinelli 2018). The competition for a particular identity or role type is often central to these relational micropolitics, although not explicitly framed as such. For example, Sarcinelli (2018, 384) tells a story of a same-sex family in which the two mothers compete in giving everything they can imagine to their children to be "more mother" than the other. Implicit in this line of argument is that the two mothers are competing to firstly, present the self as "the more resourceful mother," and secondly, cast the child to be "the needier" of their resources.

In self-interested exchange, micropolitical power flows are co-constituted in "material moments" (Taylor 2013, 2018) and implicated in acts of role-taking and role-making (Fiske 1991; Pyke 1999). Like the many types of acquisition and exchange behaviors and relationships, enduring dyadic gift giving is attuned to conventional marketplace dialects for role definitions and enactment, such as the links between "consumer identity projects" (Arnould and Thompson 2005), high/low economic expenses (Reshadi and Givi 2023), high/low status gifts (Appau and Crockett 2023), and relationally impactful or ordinary gift-exchange (Ruth et al. 1999). Little has thus far been written about these important conceptual linkages. However, these conceptual linkages likely infuse the micropolitics of the gift within the ongoing relational give and take of the enduring dyad. Although it emerged inductively from our findings, a focus on micropolitics serves in this article as a key conceptual tool for analyzing enduring dyadic gift giving. As we use it, we define micropolitics as a perspective on small-scale, everyday, and enduring interactions, which include gift exchange, that are used to enact material moments in the service of negotiating role relationships and managing relationship conflict or consensus.

Research Focus

By studying the micropolitics of gift giving in long-term enduring relationships, we may gain a fuller appreciation of the enduring aspect of dyadic gift exchange. Focusing on micropolitics highlights the negotiations, affirmations, tensions, and conflicts involved in gifts exchange, also placing them in the relationship history that precedes it. Micropolitics accords an integral role for gift exchanges' sociocultural meanings, viewing them as a medium for expressing relational power dynamics, managing relationship rifts, and preventing dissolution. This study thus seeks to address the following research question: How does dyadic gift giving unfold as a dynamic, ongoing process in long-term enduring relationships? In attending to this research question, we start by introducing the context of our study, the mother–adult daughter relationship.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Context: The Mother–Adult Daughter Relationship

Mothers and daughters engage in personal identification throughout their lives on the basis of their (often, but not always) common biological sex and gender identities (Sakashita and Kimura 2011; van Mens-Verhulst 1993) and that this identification carries over into their gift giving behaviors (Nishitani 2019). Yet their relationships, while typically enduring and emotionally close, are also often conflict-laden and anxiety-producing (Fingerman 2001; Fischer 1986). During upbringing, mothers are primary carers and gift givers and make important decisions about their daughters' education and fashion choices. They seek to make a lasting impact on their values, manners, morals, social activities, and role identities. Studying the nature of normative mother–daughter everyday disagreements, Bravo, Romo, and Hurtado (2021) find that the most frequently recurring conflicts between them often involve consumption-related values, beliefs, and practices, including clothing styles, makeup use, acceptability of piercings and tattoos, organization of parties, appropriateness of media use as well as caretaking, which reveals the integral role of marketplace consumer cultures in identity politics. There is a deeply rooted power struggle in these conflictual interactions as the daughters seek to gain autonomy, while the mothers seek to reinforce their parental authority. However, as daughters grow older, they often begin to engage in alternate, intermittent or mutual mothering—because they often gradually come to see the similarities in their own and their mothers' roles and to subsequently view their mothers as women with their own life struggles and vulnerabilities (Callahan 2013; Gilligan and Rogers 1993). As a site of enduring dyadic interaction, then, mother–daughter relationships provide our study with a rich context of ongoing gift exchange, role conflict, relational negotiation, consumption-related concerns, and conflicts—the core aspects of our investigative focus.

Interviews and Analysis

Using personal networks and through a snowballing recruitment process, we recruited twenty-seven mother–adult daughter dyads of various ages and in various types of family relations in the United Kingdom (see web appendix for details). All of the 54 participants identified as white or Caucasian females. Although they varied in profession and education level, they are either squarely middle-class or have aspirations of a middle-class lifestyle. To better capture genuinely dyadic exchange, we studied adult relationships rather than those engaged in upbringing. Although the age of daughters ranged from 22 to 46, all were financially independent. Beyond the white, British, middle-class cultural sample skew, we must recognize that

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these women volunteered for the research, and thus our findings may over-represent those willing to share intimate details of their private family relationships.

The first author conducted all the interviews either via video calls or at the participants' residence or in local bars or coffee shops of their choice. The mothers and adult daughters were interviewed separately, which resulted in 54 individual in-depth interviews in total. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 50 minutes and 2.5 hours in length. They began with "grand tour" (McCracken 1988) questions about participant backgrounds, segued into the mother–daughter relationship, then asked and probed about mother–daughter gift exchange experiences, including their micropolitical contexts. In line with Carrier (2005) and prior consumer researchers (Belk and Coon 1993; Marcoux 2009; Sherry 1983), we defined and investigated the idea of a "gift" broadly, including both material gifts (e.g., tangible and experiential goods) and nonmaterial gifts (e.g., advice, time, service, and companionship). In keeping with our focus on "material moments," we probed into the normative marketplace and consumer culture meanings our mothers and daughters associated with their gifts.

Data analysis was iterative, intertextual, and intratextual, moving back and forth from individual interview transcripts to the corpus of interview data and involving open, axial, and selective coding as well as hermeneutic interpretation of results considered in light of prior findings and the many helpful review team comments. Reflexivity was also important, as interpretations were also influenced by the first author's systematic consideration of her experiences as an adult daughter who regularly exchanges gifts with her mother. Although presented in the article as a guiding framework, the micropolitics conceptualization emerged inductively after several years of collective interpretation, discussion, and consideration by the article's authors of the data from the 54 British mother–daughter interviews.

FINDINGS

How does dyadic gift giving unfold as a dynamic, ongoing process in enduring relationships? Our investigation of enduring dyadic gift giving dynamics reveals that gift exchange originates from the ongoing management of these long-term relationships and includes the navigation of tensions and conflicts that arise between giver and recipient. These management functions, tensions, contestations, and their navigations are structured by life events in the timeline of the dyad, and the history of the dyad. These dynamics stem from moves that the dyadic partners make in order to negotiate or assert their roles within the relationship. The partner must handle ongoing and evolving challenges relating to gender roles, personal identities, roles within the dyad (which we term *endo-dyadic roles*; how partners relate to each other in the dyadic relationship), as well as relational roles that extend beyond the relationship (which we term *exo-dyadic roles*; how the relationships with others influence the dyadic relationship). The long-term management of the relationship is negotiated alongside the more immediate needs of the individual dyadic members and their long- and short-term goals for each other. Conflicts can be resolved or evolve in the back-and-forth negotiation of power over role maintenance and role transformation between the long-term dyadic partners as their relationship develops throughout their lifetimes.

Through our inductive analysis of the 54 enduring dyads' gift exchanges, "gift value" and "gift politics" emerged as key dimensions of their guiding processes (table 1). The findings illustrate how long-term dyadic giving manifests the dyad's ongoing navigation through relational and role dynamics occurring within and outside of the relationship. Concurrently, they show how intimate, enduring relationships are ultimately elevated and thrive through not merely the maintenance functions of gift exchange, but the various tensions and conflicts dyadic members experience and seek to resolve or accommodate in the processes of gift exchange.

Dimensions of Enduring Dyadic Gift Giving Processes

Mothers and daughters engage in gift exchange to manage the relationships, show care, communicate feedback on roles and relational dynamics, and attend to tensions and conflicts that may develop in the process. The importance of the perceived value of giving, and their reception emerged through our inductive analysis of the data. The value of giving and receiving is a subjective perception on the part of the gift giver and recipient. It is contextual and depends on factors that include the cultural capital and financial situations of the gift giver and recipient, their currently lifestyle, prior history, ambitions, setbacks, and so on. Positioned within this context, the perceived high value of a gift may communicate a certain gravity that imparts messages of urgency and significance to the gift's recipient, especially regarding the maintenance or transformation of their relational and role dynamics. Based on our inductive research findings, we find *gift value* and *gift politics* to be two central dimensions of the enduring dyadic gift giving processes we observe among mother–daughter dyads.

Gift Value. The first dimension, gift value, refers to the perceived value of a gift, the value that the recipient associates to a given gift. Gift value ranges from those which are subjectively considered *high value*, extraordinary, or special (e.g., a car, an expensive branded handbag, a large sum of money), to those considered *lower value*, everyday, or routine gifts (e.g., an ordinary home-cooked meal, flowers, chocolates). In a similar fashion to the primitive practice of Potlach (Mauss 1954/2002) and the Kula ring (Malinowski

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TABLE 1

ENDURING DYADIC GIFT GIVING PROCESSES

	Gift politics	
	Affirming recipient role(s)	Refuting recipient role(s)
Gift value		
Low value	Confirming: Affirming the continuity of positive relational dynamics between the dyadic partners, especially during times of relational uncertainties or life event challenges • Aurora (D8): Mom (M8) does crap penny sweets bag for each one of us every Christmas. . .They make me really happy! Its like nothing has changed that I am still a child, spoilt. She wanted to stop but we wouldnt let her [mom feels were all grown up now] (laughter).	Connoting: Subtly prompting the recipient to engage in a self-appraisal or reappraisal to make changes in life direction or role relationships • Maggie (D9): I drew 2 old people walking down the street in opposite direction and young people dancing together [as one of the birthday gifts]. Mom (M9) loves dancing, but she wont do it in public. . .I think the drawing presents mom well. . .I want her to be more confident in herself (see web appendix for a copy of the drawing).
High value	Endorsing: Heartily commending existing identity, life direction, or role performances • Helen (M12): The biggest gift that we bought for her (D12) is a house 7 years ago. When she just gave birth, she stayed at home and lived with us. . .We re-mortgaged our family home [to put down a house deposit for her] and we were terrified (she never knew), but she wanted to have her own space [to be a mother to her child].	Commanding: Strongly suggesting the transformation of recipient life direction, role, or relational dynamics • Victoria (M23): Madison (D23) wants to help me get [pay for] a gardener [once every fortnight, which can get expensive] and not do the grass and look after the heavy stuff myself. But. . .Im not ready to be put out to grass yet. . .I might be 64 years old, but I only feel 44.

1978/2002), our findings suggest that unusually high-value gifts exert greater influence on the recipient, often through arousing "epiphanic" gift experiences that can either enhance or threaten relational and role dynamics, charting "new and uncertain territory in the relationship" (Ruth et al. 1999, 398–399). On the other hand, low-value gifts tend to be more concerned with maintaining relationship stability, affirming elements of the status quo of dyadic members, and/or preserving desired relational and role dynamics. These low-value gifts closely resemble what Ruth et al. (1999, 390) call "affirming gifts" which, although perceived to have relatively lower value, may nonetheless have some "personal significance for either the recipient or the relationship."

Gift Politics. For all the other things that it may be, the mother–daughter relationship is also often a power struggle in which the two dyadic members vie for dependence, independence, and influence over each other's lives. In micropolitics, as Burns (1961) foundationally described it, others are used instrumentally to achieve one's own aims in competitive situations. In the case of enduring mother–daughter dyads, gifts can become instruments of power, expressing disapproval or reinforcement of relational and role dynamics. The micropolitical dimension of the gift's instrumentality is represented through the second dimension, gift politics, which includes gifts that affirm or refute the recipient's role(s). *Gifts refuting the recipient's role(s)* (or *role-refuting gifts*) represent an attempt to signal that a transformation in the recipient is needed, or to effect such a transformation. Role refutation is intended to communicate a need for change. In this case, the giver takes responsibility for socializing or reverse socializing the recipient, despite the relational tensions and conflicts that may ensue. *Gifts affirming the recipient's role(s)* (or *role-affirming gifts*) exist to support or reinforce the recipient or the relationship. However, these gifts may not align with the giver's preferences or, particularly in the high-value case, they might conflict with the recipient's sense of independence, particularly when reciprocation is difficult (Givi 2021).

Enduring Dyadic Gift Giving Processes

Having outlined the key concepts of the framework, we now explain the four enduring dyadic gift giving processes (gift value × gift politics) depicted in table 1: (1) confirming, (2) endorsing, (3) connoting, and (4) commanding. In the following sections, we illustrate how each dyadic gift giving process signals or strengthens giver attempts in maintaining or transforming relational and role dynamics in a relationship. In particular, we show how each process tends to be received and encounter unique points of tension, conflict, or challenges. In iterative, dynamic, and lifelong cycles of relating, these processes underline the micropolitics of the mother–daughter dyad.

Confirming Process. In the spirit of confirming, this gift giving process is focused on maintaining the relational

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dynamics between mother and daughter as rock solid through the giving of a consistent stream of perceived low value, role-affirming gifts. Although they are common to many dyadic relationships, our data suggest that the confirming process is especially important in times when they feel the mother–daughter relationship is under threat or experiencing uncertainties due to external influences that often involve exo-dyadic role dynamics or a third party (Bojczyk et al. 2011; Lowrey et al. 2004).

The confirming process is illustrated as the type of considerate, consistent, and lower-cost gift giving related by Emma (M6), a mother, and Jasmine (D6), her daughter.

> Emma (M6): When Jasmine was with the horrible man, he had a complete control over her . . . I'd go and pick her up with children so she can be away from him. I took her to do nice things and go to the park. We tried to not judge and stand by her because that's what she wanted. I'd take her to the concert every now and then. He would try to sabotage it by having a fight with her . . .
>
> Jasmine (D6): I had a long difficult time [with my boyfriend at the time] and it drilled me to the ground . . . So my mom dragged me out of it (the toxic relationship) . . . She would buy me flowers, perfume, books, chocolates every now and then and she would come around to see me, take me to concerts . . . Looking back now she had been very strategic . . . She took a step back [at the time]. She didn't want to lose her connection with me.

Emma describes the confirming process as a set of services—doing "nice things," taking her "to the park" and "to the concert"—that Emma performed for her daughter. Emma was conscious that intervening in Jasmine's "toxic relationship" could strain their bond. She thus needed to be "strategic" with how she nursed Jasmine through a time when she faced challenging exo-dyadic role dynamics. To this end, a steady stream of gifts such as "flowers, perfume, books, chocolates" and concert tickets were the means Emma used to give comfort to Jasmine and reinforce the close mother–daughter bonds in this time of need. Their listing in a row suggests that their subjective impact was from the combined and regular effort, rather than from any particular gift being perceived as high value. Instead, these gifts replicated the frequent flow of small thoughtful gifts that a romantic partner would give, especially at a relationship's beginning (Belk and Coon 1993). Jasmine finds them "strategic," explaining that her mother "didn't want to lose her connection with me."

Importantly, these gifts confirm and reinforce Jasmine's positive relationship with her mother against the wishes of her then boyfriend who had little time for or interest in his girlfriend's mother. Emma's supportive gifts were both a lifeline and an important way of maintaining the mother–daughter connection at a time when Jasmine—and the mother–daughter relationship itself—was potentially vulnerable. The confirming process of gift giving provides ongoing, concrete proofs of the unswerving dependability of Emma and her enduring relationship with Jasmine. Jasmine's sense of "ontological security" (Giddens 1991, 92), that is, her confidence and trust in the reliability of her mother were reassured, by this continuous flow of considerate gift giving, which substituted her mother's constant physical presence. As Jasmine recalled, Emma "took a step back," but at the same time her gifts "dragged me out of" this difficult time.

The same confirming process of giving and receiving as a way to maintain the enduring close relationship in times of trouble is also present in the narrative of Ivy (M2) and Poppy (D2) below.

> Ivy (M2): Poppy was a stability for me . . . with Poppy getting married, it was very emotional, quite unsettling . . . it was unsettling because I don't know how things are going to change between us . . . Poppy's husband feels threatened by our relationship I feel. He would say to Poppy that we have a strange relationship . . . after the wedding . . . Poppy invited me to hers once a week for a cooked dinner . . . I'd really look forward to seeing her . . . it gradually eased my worry about how she now is married might weaken our relationship.
>
> Poppy (D2): Mom cried the whole time [the night before my wedding], because she felt she was losing her daughter to someone else . . . she felt left out . . . I made it a mission to not let this happen . . . Since I was married, mom has been coming around for food every Tuesday and we would do mother–daughter chats and watch movies etc afterwards.

Poppy describes herself as someone who is "strong and very independent" whereas her mother is "more vulnerable and needing to be taken care of [by her]." At the same time, Ivy often mentions how Poppy represents "stability" and helps her financially and emotionally with gifts that show care and encouragement, casting her into *the child role*: "Poppy has bought me, for example, a laptop to help me with studies. She always encourages me, 'you are intelligent and you can do this' . . . Poppy became the mother and I was going back to school." When recollecting the time when Poppy got married, Ivy says that "it was very emotional, quite unsettling" and expresses her concern that changes in her daughter's identity and exo-dyadic role dynamics of becoming a wife to a husband would negatively affect their long-standing relationship, especially when the husband appears threatened by their enduring bond.

Responding to her mother's fear of losing her, Poppy uses a confirming process of gift giving similar to the one Emma enacted with her daughter Jasmine. Poppy gave her mother a regular flow of generally low-value, role-affirming gifts that signaled her unwavering commitment to maintaining their relationship through rocky times. While Emma's experiential gifts of concert tickets and walks in the park also underlined the unwavering commitment,

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these "travel-related gifts" (Liu and Kozinets 2022, 324) are at the same time aimed at broadening Jasmine's horizon beyond the toxic relationship with her then boyfriend who "had a complete control over her" and her world by extension. Poppy's gifts of a homely experience such as weekly food invites and dedicated mother–daughter time together, to promote their shared experiences (Chan and Mogilner 2017) exclusively with each other, on the other hand, became especially important during this turbulent time—a time when she wanted to reassure her mother of her continued presence as a close family member by incorporating her into the matrimonial home rituals.

Caplow (1982, 391) notes that "ritualized gift giving, in any society, is a method of dealing with relationships that are important but insecure." In an enduring dyadic relationship such as mother and daughter, these ritualized exchanges are likely to assume even more importance in times of threat, change, or insecurity. The weekly food invitations and shared time together become a type of a ritualized gifting that reinforces Ivy and Poppy's relationship in the face of a new marriage that also commits Poppy to her husband. It is evident in Ivy's account above that such an invented tradition of smaller, but still significant, and role-affirming gift giving successfully reinforces the importance of their mother–daughter dyad, providing emphasis on the independent caregiver versus the dependent cared-for roles, as they both wish. That said, at the end of the interview, Poppy expresses how she anticipates the mother–daughter role reversal with Ivy will be reversed again as she is now pregnant and expects Ivy to "parent" her with childrearing-related giving, such as babysitting. The mutuality (Arnould and Rose 2016; Carrier 2005) in an intimate dyad means that the dyadic partners engage in ongoing back and forth series of gives and takes that also ritually determine future giving and receiving. Poppy's regular gift giving sets up a pleasant expectation of receiving "the same" from her mother when she wants to be the dependent cared-for, adjusting to her new identity as a mother.

Endorsing Process. The endorsing process of the enduring dyadic gift giving is aimed at generously promoting the welfare and the role performance of the recipient with perceived high value, role-affirming gifts in a bid to produce an enhanced relational connection. It is, however, important to note that where large gifts are in play, so are the manipulative acts of micropolitics. For, as Mauss (1954/2002) famously argues, there is no free gift (also see Laidlaw 2000). Sociologists and economists have argued that even a "charitable" contribution can be linked to givers' anticipation of "an emotional or prestige-based benefit," such as the personal satisfaction of giving or the accumulation of status from peer appreciation (Barman 2017, 276). Therewithal, the gift's recipient is always placed in debt and burdened with the desire to reciprocate, somehow, inevitably motivated by the principle of mutuality (Arnould and Rose 2016). Rosie (M5) and Lucy (D5) recounted the times when Rosie gave her car and financial aid to help Lucy better perform and function in her exo-dyadic roles as a parent having her second child, and as a building surveyor having to drive to work.

> Rosie (M5): I gave Lucy my car when her second baby came along because she and her husband really needed another car. They are both building surveyors so both need to drive around, and one child needed to go to school, and another needed to go to nursery [two cars to enable both parents to parent]. After I gave the car, I just felt relieved because she could move around better. Being able to help is great, I am thankful . . .
>
> Lucy (D5): Mom contributed some money to help us get a new car [after the car she gave us stopped working]. I didn't feel great taking the money, I wish I wouldn't need to take it. It was more like a one-off gift so it's not equal, imbalanced . . . My pride was getting in the way. When I was younger, I felt it's OK to take it but when I am older, I felt I don't see others going around and asking for handouts from their parents. . . . To give back the financial aid that we have been receiving from my mom and dad, we'd visit their house and bring food and cook food for them at theirs. It's our way of saying thank you to them . . .

For Rosie, two cars are essential for childcare, as they enable Lucy and her partner to manage their different work commitments and drive their children wherever they need to go. Thus, having two cars affirms the exo-dyadic parental role responsibilities that must be shared between Lucy and her husband: "One child needed to go to school, and another needed to go to nursery." That is, Rosie's role-affirming gifts of relational care such as her own car as well as financial aid not only cast herself as the cultural ideal of the self-sacrificing mother (Cantillon and Hutton 2020), but also steered Lucy and her husband to perform their parental roles in a manner that she approves, and therefore, she feels "relieved" and "thankful" upon giving these gifts.

In response, unlike Emma's low-value, role-affirming gifts of "flowers, perfume, books, chocolates" or Poppy's "weekly food invites" that may be easily reciprocated to regain a sense of independence, Lucy said, "I wish I wouldn't need to take it [the money]. It was more like a one-off gift so it's not equal, imbalanced." While Lucy clearly appreciated her mother's monetary contribution toward buying a second car, because of its perceived high value, it seems to have more impact on altering their endo-dyadic role dynamics, relegating her to a childlike role and threatening her sense of adulthood where financial independence feels critical in establishing a more "equal, balanced" mother–daughter relationship: "When I was younger, I felt it's OK to take it but when I am older, I felt I don't see others going around and asking for handouts

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from their parents." As such, Lucy experienced a strong sense of caring obligation to reciprocate, motivated by her guilt of "taking the money," and a compromised sense of adulthood as a result. To resolve her internal tensions, Lucy emphasizes the importance of "giving back" within her financial means with thoughtful, practical gifts, such as home visits and cooked meals, that transform the endo-dyadic role dynamics from a dependent relationship to everyday interdependence where spending time and eating together also builds an increased sense of relational closeness (Chan and Mogilner 2017). This illustrates the micro-politics of enduring dyadic gift exchange because it shows how in the essence of role endorsement, gift giving can still involve egos and a potentially patronizing maneuvering for power and influence.

However, even the most well-intended gift can go awry (Branco-Illodo et al. 2020; Cavanaugh et al. 2015; Kessous et al. 2017) and it seems that when it is intended as a high-value, identity-affirming gift of welfare endorsement but fails to achieve as such, it can be all the more embarrassing or disappointing for both parties involved, as shown in the case of Ivy (M2) and Poppy (D2).

> Ivy (M2): I bought her (Poppy) an expensive teddy bear for her 18th birthday because I wanted her to have something that's unique, something to keep. The bear is so beautiful and sweet . . . but she told me it wasn't something she was particularly attracted to. I felt very disappointed that I got it wrong [I thought she would like it].
>
> Poppy (D2): In the UK, these big birthdays are normally a huge gathering. You have all your relatives and friends over. I opened the gift in front of everyone and when I saw a big teddy bear [It looked very expensive, a branded, limited edition], I was in complete shock and looked awkward because I am not a girly girl, and all my friends know that. They must have seen my expression. I was like what I am supposed to do with that . . . I am still feeling so guilty to this date.

In Ivy's account, we can almost feel the excitement and pleasure she derived from choosing Poppy's 18th birthday gift, as she anticipated how Poppy would cherish the "expensive" and "unique" high-value gift. From Poppy's perspective, the limited edition and branded teddy bear is a high-value gift that inspired "shock." This is especially the case because, as a single mother of three, Ivy had money concerns—additional context leading to the conclusion that this was subjectively perceived as a high-value gift. Yet, despite Ivy's best intentions, the high-value gift became a public show of embarrassment to Poppy. Poppy rejects the nurturant personal identity she believes to be communicated by the gift: "I am not a girly girl . . . what am I supposed to do with that?." The teddy bear symbolizes an identity she rejects.

Reflecting on the memorable birthday event, Poppy expresses her lingering guilt for having hurt Ivy's feelings who had the best intentions to find the "right" gift for her at the time. She then concludes her reflections by declaring that she intends to give the teddy bear, still in her mother's garage, to her unborn child, underlining her belated recognition of the relational care embodied in the previously unwanted and undesired gift. When this intention was communicated by the interviewer to Ivy with Poppy's consent, Ivy teared up and expressed a sense of joy and disbelief that her daughter still remembers the gift and now appreciates it. This emotional scene is a powerful demonstration of the way that the dynamics of the gift do not simply fade away in enduring relationships over time, but they can endure and develop too. As the roles of the dyadic partners change across time, so too do the meanings that they may attach to the gift.

Connoting Process. Employing low-value, role-refuting gifts, connoting is an attempt to use gift giving to prompt the recipient to engage in self-appraisal and change. Role-refuting gifts, given by the giver with full awareness, are undesirable yet seen as necessary to correct the recipient's behaviors. Perceptions of the usefulness of the undesirable gift are not always shared between the dyadic partners, as demonstrated in Lola (M7) and Kate's (D7) gifting narratives of gender role dynamics connoting feedback about body image below.

> Lola (M7): Kate plays rugby . . . I've tried to tell her about skin aging and all that. I keep buying her skincare because I'm sure she will understand once I have got through the importance of skincare to her . . . I also bought her nail varnish. I tried to encourage her to be more ladylike. Kate has a decent career and is now climbing up the ladder. I feel if she is more feminine, she might go even further. She can look a little bit more presentable instead of walking around like she has just finished Rugby . . .
>
> Kate (D7): Mom buys me skincare products as presents. I am not girly enough [like my mom] to use the skincare products. It'd just sit there at home. It's a struggle [to get her to stop buying me skincare products]. She just keeps nudging me, but I know she does this from love . . . but I just couldn't be bothered . . . She tries all the time to get me to use skincare. She would buy me Christmas gifts and the main thing would be what I want [that's expensive] but there will also be like stocking fillers with like temple spa skincare presents. I just take one look [say thank you], and I know I wouldn't use it. I just roll my eyes when I see skincare presents, thinking "well here she goes again."

The passages above illustrate that Kate is quite different in her gender role self-expression than her mother. Despite being repeatedly rejected, Lola continues to give Kate skincare and beauty products. Kate's use of the term "nudging" is informative, indicating that she subjectively perceives the gifts to be both low value ("stocking filler" is another) and role-refuting. Using loaded terms that many today would find outdated or unacceptably confining (Scott

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2006; Watkins and Johnston 2000), Lola said she wants to encourage Kate to "be more ladylike" and "more feminine," and therefore, "she might go even further." To wit, with "the Rugby look" being coded masculine or unattractive, and skincare and beauty products feminine or a necessity for enhancing attractiveness (Mulhern et al. 2003), Lola's gift giving attempts reflect her desire to not only keep Kate in line with her perceived beauty standards, but manage her daughter's career prospects where she believes a well-groomed appearance is essential (Hooley and Yates 2015; Lemay, Clark, and Greenberg 2010), especially when it comes to the female gender role (Wolf 1991). Micropolitics is apparent in the way that Lola strategically presents skincare gifts. She includes them as mere "stocking fillers," or "stocking stuffers" in American English, to indicate that they are not a big deal. As well as being a practice that invokes the stability of a family tradition (Cheal 1988), Lola uses these skincare stocking fillers to subtly direct Kate toward adopting what she regards as a more appropriate "feminine" regime of self-care (O'Donnell 2021).

Faced with her mother's tireless attempts at gender role socialization, Kate rolls her eyes and resists by having the skincare presents "just sit there at home." She declares: "I just couldn't be bothered." The phrase, "I just couldn't be bothered," is nuanced. It underlines Kate's unwillingness to make the effort to "use skincare," or create unnecessary relational friction, given its perceived low value. A lifetime of experience has taught her that her mother's socialization attempts will continue, so avoiding direct conflict requires adept sidestepping. Micropolitics plays out not in open conversations, but in the subtle communication of the disposition of the gift (Sherry et al. 1992). Reading the two gifts in context provides an even deeper sense of the micropolitics in this relationship. With "the main gift" being high value, and role-affirming, the low-value and role-refuting "stocking fillers" become less identity threatening. The latter type of gifts is thus more tolerable and dismissed as not a "bother."

Unlike Kate who sees her mother's skincare and beauty presents as representing her undesired self in terms of gender role expression, Camilla (M17) recognizes the necessity of tackling her undesired self as implicated in Mila's (D17) experiential gift giving to change her hoarding identity and the related lifestyle and living environment.

> Camilla (M17): I've found it really difficult to get rid of things and to part with things, like furniture. I agree with them (my daughters) that it's cluttered and that I should get rid of it, but I can't make myself. It's a struggle [with myself] . . . they buy me massages and spa days. That's one of the things they do, because they think I've got too many things in the house. I always think I will go back [to the experiences], but I don't . . . I'm just very cluttered, and they're trying to cure me of it (Laughter).

> Mila (D17): We (me and my sister) get her to go to a spa and I'd buy her afternoon tea to enjoy experiences and not hoard things . . . but like I was saying it is her personality [being a hoarder], she can't walk away from a bargain . . .

Reflecting on her daughters' experiential gifts of massages and spa days, Camilla laughs, shrugs, and admits that "it's a struggle" to fully embrace them. Whereas Kate's (D7) struggle is external in that she sees little value in skincare and beauty presents and hopes that her mother will stop giving them as gifts, Camilla's struggle is internal in that she sees merit in the experiential gifts her daughters give but struggles to become less of a hoarder: "I'm trying very hard [to not hoard things but enjoy experiences] at the moment." Mila's experiential gifts not only connote but directly challenge her mother's undesired hoarder-self (Bahl and Milne 2010; Ogilvie 1987), forcing Camilla to revisit and engage in an appraisal of her need for material objects whenever an experiential gift giving opportunity arises.

In response, Mila places her focus on articulating a sense of an undesired, relational self (Liu and Hogg 2017) in managing her exo-dyadic role dynamics, motivating her experiential gift giving, as she later shares: "It's embarrassing to invite friends around [that they see the family home is all cluttered] . . . especially with mom I think people think that's what you're going to be like when you're older." The motive of Mila's experiential gift giving largely resembles analyses focused on the management of courtesy stigma (Gray 2002; Green 2003). Mila seems to be aware of the risk of courtesy stigma presented by having a hoarder as mother and how that can have a negative impact on how her friends may view her. Her micropolitics involves an attempt to alter her mother's hoarding behaviors with a stream of lower value experiential gifts such as massages, spa days, and afternoon tea.

Commanding Process. Role-refuting gifts in the connoting process typically offer a gentle nudge for change, causing less offense due to their perceived low value. By contrast, the commanding process utilizes perceived high-value, role-refuting gifts to communicate an intense appeal, transform existing role dynamics, and/or demand appropriate role-conduct with force, often resulting in overpoweringly negative sentiments and heightened relational strains. Let us begin by considering Sienna (M3) and Ruby (D3)'s accounts of the financial aid that Ruby feels she has had no choice but to receive from Sienna over the course of her divorce proceedings:

> Sienna (M3): We have been in a 2-year legal battle for the [my daughter Ruby's] divorce . . . we have been contributing to the legal bills £18,000-£20,000 these last two years to try to help Ruby out . . . I felt angry because it's such a waste of money, annoying . . . I [also] bought her gas cooker, fridge freezer etc to help with her functional, practical needs . . . it became all the more expensive [that I have less money to

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> spend on other things] . . . But you're there to support them and I hope she would learn from the mistake of marrying a guy I disapproved of.
>
> Ruby (D3): Last two years with the legal battle and everything (all Sienna's giving), she can also be overbearing . . . I am very grateful. She (her mother) also helped me move out by paying my first month rent and deposit. I reverted back to a child . . . She would need to take a step back now [that] I am better [financially with the divorce battle coming to an end]. I became dependent . . . she would try to teach me how to be a mother, we don't always agree . . . for example, . . . she will be very strict with the children about their manners [I don't see it as a big deal] . . .

Sienna and Ruby, mother and daughter, describe a battle for independence waged largely through subjectively high-value, role-refuting gifts. These gifts include significant payments to family law attorneys handling Ruby's divorce, as well as expensive, large appliances for her, her rent, and rent deposit money. They are subjectively perceived to be high value because they amount to tens of thousands of pounds and come at a time when Ruby has few financial resources. While exhibiting a caring orientation to help with Ruby's "functional, practical needs," they are role-refuting because they incorporate Sienna's hope that Ruby would learn from her "mistake." Tellingly, Sienna adds an "I told you not to marry him" to her recounting of the gifts as if underscoring this point. Because Sienna is able to financially support Ruby, she may be expressing desire to control her daughter's endo-dyadic dynamics as well, embodying an authority–subordinate role relationship. Sienna's gifts cast Ruby as the subordinate when Ruby cannot afford to decline the gifts or reciprocate the equivalence to balance the power dynamics in the relationship.

Indeed, while being grateful for all that Sienna has given to "help" her as a form of relational care, Ruby confesses that her greater need of her mother's financial aid and her incapability to reciprocate in kind have transformed their endo-dyadic role dynamics and "reverted [her] back to a child"—a time when Sienna is afforded with the authority and legitimacy to offer direction to her life. As we can see in Ruby's excerpt above, the prolonged parental provision of large sums of money and expensive gifts as well as the accompanying unsolicited supervision challenge her sense of adulthood and autonomy: "I became dependent," she said, with apparent resentment (Givi 2021). The apparent resentment toward the financial aid for the divorce and getting her own place is in sharp contrast to the more appreciative sentiments we witnessed in Rosie (M5) and Lucy's (D5) gifting accounts of a second car in the earlier section. The apparent resentment seems to have resulted from the micropolitical struggle wherein Ruby resists the gifts' communicated roles that are incongruent with her preferred self-identity and endo-dyadic role dynamics: "She [my mother] would try to teach me how to be a mother, we don't always agree" (Backman 1985). The contrast with Lucy is stark, as the financial aid for Lucy's second car projects her into an affirming parental role, fitting with her desired exo-dyadic role dynamics.

Role imposition in the spirit of commanding can be very unsettling for both the gift giver and the gift recipient. The large and continuous financial gifts represent a continuous struggle within the dyad to attenuate the mutual desire for solidarity against a respective need for autonomy. Sienna expresses her annoyance at having to "waste money" on the large legal bills she could have avoided if Ruby did not marry someone she "disapproved." Ruby expresses frustration and a desire for more personal autonomy, when she said that she wants her mother "to take a step back now [that] I am better" to establish independence, indicating her anticipation of an end to the flow of financial aid and gift giving that disempower her and force her to take up a childlike role of dependence, obligating her to "listen to her mother" if disagreements transpire. Note that despite Ruby (D3) and Lucy (D5) both experiencing a sense of compromised adulthood and expressing their discomfort of being relegated to a childlike role, for Lucy, it is not about having to "listen to her mother" since the financial aid for a second car affirms her role commitment in childcare, which explains why she is looking to establish interdependence with counter gifts of home visits and cooked meals instead of planning to stop acts of gift exchange to achieve independence. These contrasting stories of gift giving and receiving showcase the complexity and nuances of the micropolitics involved in the enduring dyadic gift giving processes.

Recognizing the relational tensions, Sienna later also stated her intent to alter the types of gifts she gives her daughter from being role-refuting to role-affirming, once they have put the divorce behind them: "I think things will change [post divorce] . . . . She would become more independent [financially]. Hopefully I will be able to give her more personalized gifts, luxury gifts [that Ruby enjoys, and I support], like the Pandora ring [to which Ruby greatly appreciated: "Because it's my mom who has given that to me, wearing it makes me happy . . . It helped me take my wedding ring off . . . the ring means she is always going to be there for me"]." Ruby and Sienna both declare that they anticipate a change in future gifts to repair their rifts, reflecting an oncoming change in the relationship and its endo-dyadic role dynamics.

Subjectively high-value, role-refuting gifts can be particularly threatening to recipients who cannot afford to decline or reciprocate the gifts. Still, such gifts of commanding for change disrupt identity politics, even when the recipient is capable of reciprocating and can afford to decline the gifts (Marcoux 2009).

> Aurora (D8): I paid for my parents to go away for a weekend. It wasn't even that far. They hated the drive and when they are back, they kept saying how awful it was and how

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> my mom would never want to do it again. I felt very frustrated and like whatever, fuck it . . . Because of the financial situation after my dad left, we didn't go places when we were growing up. We had no money to go on holidays. I wanted my mom to enjoy traveling . . . I feel like the mother who tries to push her to have more confidence . . .
>
> Anna (M8): We got lost on the way there and on the way back . . . I have always been nervous about new places. I'll never feel confident. Aurora tries hard instilling confidence in me. She just doesn't give up . . . I did ask her not to organize any more holidays, it's rubbish. And she said, "no, you're rubbish" and I said, "yes, we are [rubbish]". Oh, I am useless. I felt safer when Aurora was around [treating me like a child]. She is so confident and competent . . .

Anna and Aurora's verbata highlight that the daughter's gift is interpreted by her mother as an insensitive socialization attempt. The vacation is a perfect gift (Branco-Illodo and Heath 2020)—an "expensive," status gift her mother could not afford when Aurora was growing up. Yet, Anna sees it as an unwelcome, role-refuting gesture, thus concluding it to be a "rubbish" gift which she feels she cannot refuse: "It's too expensive to not go." Linking Aurora and Anna's accounts together, it appears that Aurora is imposing her will of pushing her mother "to have more confidence" through the vacation gift: "I feel like the mother," just as Anna is imposing her will of dependence on Aurora through her narrative construction of a "rubbish" gift: "Treating me like a child." There is an ongoing micropolitical process regarding how relational care should be received and which relational role should one assume in the domain of traveling-related lifestyle.

Interestingly, the term "rubbish" is also used by Anna to describe herself: "Yes, we are [rubbish]." When someone is called *rubbish* in British English, it means that the person is worthless or useless (Oxford English Dictionary 2012, 633)—all of which are not what Aurora wants her mother to become. Consumer culture theorists have examined how cultural capital and status intertwine with marketplace performances, and how traveling as a lived experience helps "improve ourselves" (Üstüner and Thompson 2012, 804), create social distinctions (i.e., not all travel experiences obtain equal recognition) (Boley et al. 2018), as well as broaden horizons and elevate status (Liu and Kozinets 2022, 321, 324, 327). Anna's self-abasement is therefore strategic; she uses it to protest against the globally recognized and quintessentially status-rich cultural identity of the "independent traveler" (Maneze and Pacheco 2018) and Aurora's socialization attempts to not "treat her like a child" with the weekend away gift, asserting her continued desire to depend on Aurora for comfort and security "like a child."

The protest in this case is a success, followed by an Indian trip that Aurora organized and led, which Anna declared: "It's amazing and ecstatic. I didn't have fears because we were going with Aurora and her husband. We were being treated like children." Citing Yau, Chan, and Lau's (1999) work, Joy's (2001, 244) findings affirm that "a deferred payment is valued, because a belated gift, always larger than the initial one, allows individuals to savor, affirm, and strengthen existing relationships." For our mothers and daughters, high-value, role-refuting gifts that are perceived to have led to strained relational distance are often followed up by even higher value, role-affirming gifts that help mend the relational strain and strengthen relational connection.

In follow-up answers, Aurora expresses how she has come to terms, albeit somehow reluctantly, with her mother's wish to maintain her identity and endo-dyadic role behavior as a dependent traveler. "My husband told me to stop getting so angry. It's now just about us spending time together. It needs to be in her comfort zone. What my mother wants is not something I would want . . . " Aurora's acceptance shows care and tolerance. Because the relationship is enduring, the conflict over the gift gradually turns into acceptance. Ultimately, the conflict serves to strengthen the relationship rather than weaken it. Here, the micropolitics of enduring dyadic gift exchange is as much about personal and relational growth, if not more so, than it is about power struggle and a hierarchical ordering.

DISCUSSION

The Micropolitics of Enduring Dyadic Gift-Exchange

Consumer relationships are full of enduring dyadic relationships, with some of the most central occurring within families. Tensions of affiliation and autonomy abound among family members, who draw on marketplace resources to manage them (Epp and Price 2008). In this study, we find ways by which gift exchange is used by mother–daughter dyads to manage these and other tensions affecting the enduring dyads. These tensions are situated in the dyad's past and current life events, as well as the ways in which they perceive what constitutes appropriate role conducts in relation to gender roles, identity roles, as well as endo-dyadic and exo-dyadic roles. In practice, our study finds that mother–daughter dyads use gift exchange to navigate these and other enduring tensions.

Enduring dyadic members use gifts to express relational care and provide feedback that seeks to maintain or transform dyadic dynamics within contexts that hold various life events, the negotiations of those life events, and much more. Gifts in these contexts are expressions of desires for role maintenance or role transformation. They signal reinforcement or disapproval of particular identities or role performances operating in the dyad. Within this setting, the confirming gift process upholds the status quo in mother–daughter relationships through regular, supportive gestures of dependability. The endorsing

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process enhances the relationship by promoting the recipient's role performances through significant, often expensive gifts, although it may also burden the recipient with the social expectation of reciprocity. The connoting process is about gentle encouragement for change via modest gifts, while the commanding process is a more forceful method of seeking change using high-value gifts to assert expectations. These contextually embedded processes present a nuanced interplay of gift exchange, where power dynamics, intent, and identity politics combine to manage and develop ongoing relationship and role dynamics in the dyad. The following sections examine these advances to prior theory about gift giving, emphasizing their power-laden and political aspects, diachronic continuity, and communicative functions within the enduring relationships of dyadic partners.

Gift Exchange as Power-Laden and Political

Thirty years ago, Belk and Coon (1993) studied gift giving among American college students and explored its relation to romantic love. Their research was among the first to draw attention to the sociocultural complexity of the gift giving phenomenon. Intriguingly, while affirming the contextuality of their findings, they speculated that "gift giving among an older set of informants may reveal reversals of the move from economic exchange toward romantic love or may even find exchanges intended to produce pain rather than pleasure as partners attempt to deconstruct and negate their love and life together" (412). We can think of overlapping extended selves as the overall set of possessions shared or exchanged between members of long-term relationships. Belk and Coon (1993) called for further research into understanding the way in which these overlapping extended selves affect gift giving in established relationships (412).

Our findings reveal relations between dyadic partners that are so intimate that one member may experience a critique against the other member as a self-critique. The intertwined sense of self is closely related to the overlapping extended self-concept. We find that it fuels gift giving behaviors intended to support, protect, and supervise the recipient. These behaviors, particularly those relating to assertions of dominance through the authority roles, may create situations where the micropolitics of the gift pushes the recipient into an uncomfortable role and relational script. For example, Sienna shared that her provision of financial aid forced Ruby into a dependent and childlike role subject to Sienna's supervision. Sienna's large financial gifts accompanied her involvement in Ruby's parenting decisions and eventually threatened the relationship's stability. In response, and in one of the few cases we found the recipient approaching withdrawal based on a gift, Ruby recounted she wanted to escape the tyranny of her enduring dyadic partner's ongoing gifts. Sensing this, Sienna expressed her desire to give more personalized, luxury gifts of care, like the Pandora ring, that had the potential to mend the rifts resulted from the divorce-related financial aid.

As the example shows, our investigation follows on and focuses Ruth et al.'s (1999) examination of the role of gifts in the ever-unfinished business of human relationships. Providing broad scope for appreciating the complexity of the link between gift receipt and relationships, that article developed six relational effects (three negative, one neutral, and two positive), and a variety of experiential themes such as epiphany, insult, and threat, various ritual conditions, gift focus, and resulting positive, mixed, or negative emotions. Importantly, Ruth et al.'s article also examined recipients' perceptions of the gift's relational impact, discovering that it can weaken or strengthen over the short or longer term. A key finding of that research was that "the recipient's view of the relationship trajectory influences perceptions of the gift experience and its relational impact" (398), concluding that research is needed "to further explore the relational effects of gifts and the impact of time on giver/recipient relationships" (400), and then offering a series of methodological suggestions—which we have implemented in this study. Our results cast Ruth et al.'s pioneering work in a new light by narrowing in on a key gifting context. Focusing on the mother–daughter relational dyad, we find that enduring dyadic gift giving is an interactive ritual chain that reflects the continual recalibration of role structures and relational dynamics over time. Our findings focus on the subjectively perceived value and politics of the gift in these relationships, suggesting that, within the ongoing development of the relationship, gifts can affirm or refute various roles, identities, postures, and dynamics within and beyond the relationship. Gifts, therefore, often reflect underlying power struggles with long histories and equally significant future horizons.

As we see in the study, gifts in the enduring dyad vary because life situations and relationships are dynamic. The dyadic partners in our study exchange gifts that reflect careful and often strategic considerations about messaging, supervision, support, (in)dependence, and identity. The variety of this long flow of different gifts moves well beyond considerations of gift acceptance or utilitarian purpose. Instead, it reveals a calculative, yet loving, mindset, a symmetry of intentions to control, to manage and to please. These elements are illustrated by the case of Sienna, whose financial aid, Pandora ring, and intention to give more personalized luxury gifts provide an indication of the balancing act involved in enduring dyadic gift giving. Different gifts send different messages of affirmation or displeasure, signaling—with different degrees of intensity—givers' desires for continuity and alteration of existing role and relational dynamics. Through them, members of the enduring dyad demonstrate their commitment to one another and

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simultaneously impart supervision, criticism, praise, and direction.

By investigating giver and recipient perspectives regarding the same gift in an enduring dyad, our research reveals key currents in the ongoing and, at times, agonistic, process of gift giving that serves to manage and shape the relationship. Enduring dyads use gift giving practices not simply to show care; they also are a powerful means of communicating feedback about roles within and beyond the relationship. They play a part in managing the various life tensions and conflicts that dyadic members experience and share with each other. Thus, it is not merely that recipient's views of the relationship trajectory *influence* the perception of the gift experience and its impact on the relationship, as Ruth et al. (1999) found. It is also that the giver *intentionally employs* the gift to communicate and manage the relationship trajectory with the recipient. Gifts are part of a lifelong exchange of advice, opinions, and things. In enduring dyads, these communications are part of an ongoing conversation that may involve long-standing relational tensions as well as persistent efforts to manage the role behavior of their dyadic partner.

The Diachronic Dyad and Gift Giving

Just as Belk and Coon's (1993) findings developed our understanding of gift giving in the romantic relationship context by exploring notions of agapic love, our findings enrich understandings of gift giving in the enduring relationship context by studying historical and ongoing dyadic reciprocity and advancing our understanding of the workings of the identity politics wrapped within it. Situated within the short-term horizon of dating experiences, Belk and Coon found gift giving signaling matters that are passionate, spontaneous, idealistic, and forward-looking. Gift giving and receipt experiences in enduring relationships, however, are built upon relational strata that have accumulated over years, affected by particular times and events in people's lives, and often forged within power struggles. In the mother–daughter cases, these struggles concerned matters of status, capital, lifestyle, dependence, and independence within the dyadic relationship and also among the broader contexts of dyadic partners' lives. For example, Sienna and Ruby's gift exchanges are haunted by the specter of Ruby's divorce from a man that Sienna had previously warned her about. The history of the dyad determines the present meaning of the gift. Whereas gift givers in romantic contexts sought to impress and impassion in the short run, gift exchanges between enduring dyads involve subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to transform one another, perpetuate the relationship, and affirm specific aspects of each other and the ongoing relationship.

Because our focus was enduring relationships, our time frames aimed for a diachronic viewpoint to phenomena previously examined synchronically. In research related to our own, gift giving in marital dyads was found to be frequently discordant by Schiffman and Cohn (2009). Their research attributes the discord to "the following of different rulebooks" by the members of the marital dyad. In their interpretation, gifts were given in ways that followed either symbolic communication or economic exchange social logics, very similar to Belk and Coon's (1993, 403) dichotomous theorizing about gifts within social and economic "exchange models." The gifting rulebook classifications of marital dyads were found to evolve based on major life events, such as having a child.

Although it examined an enduring dyad, Schiffman and Cohn's (2009) research investigated a sample of married couples who had all recently transitioned to parenthood. Like their research did, our investigation also found that gifts were frequently mentioned as sources of discord and tension. However, in contrast to Schiffman and Cohn (2009), our findings among mothers and daughters reveal gifts in a more political and power-laden light and showcase the interrelationship of gifts' instrumental and the expressive dimensions within dyadic members' everyday lives. Rather than following different gifting rulebooks or relating to macro systems such as market economy or moral economy, we find gift giving among the members of enduring dyads to be firmly situated in the moral and symbolic micro-universe of communication. Instead of pursuing the automatic unfolding of role reciprocity as the underlying fabric of dyadic interaction, these micro-universes, such as the mother–daughter dyads, are the principal consumption contexts within which and around which the dyadic partner engages in marketplace acts of role-taking and role-making in the service of desired role and relational dynamics.

Moreover, we view the micro-universe linguistically, as if it were a rich and contextualized conversation about roles, identity, and the ever-changing dynamics of enduring dyadic relationships. Our perspective suggests that gift giving among enduring dyads is a dramatic expansion of the vocabulary of the symbolic communication rulebook of Schiffman and Cohn (2009). It turns this rulebook into a type of lexicon, a manual full of meaningful signals relating to dyadic role structures and relational dynamics as they change over time, revealing a diachronic structure to the process that had previously been obscured by prior gift giving research's reliance on synchronic inquiries.

The Relational Dialog of Gift Giving

From prior research, we would expect undesirable gifts to result in strains to relationships, increased distance, or ambivalent identification (Belk 1996; Ruth et al. 1999; Sherry et al. 1992) and that rejected gifts would result in relationship damage, withdrawal, and perhaps even dissolution (Branco-Illodo et al. 2020; Carrier 1991; Sherry et al. 1993). The emphasis on choosing a desirable gift is

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present in Sherry et al.'s (1993) projective research with 83 female gift shoppers. Sherry et al. focused on the notion of "ideal gifts" (237) which are "the union of the right persons and the right objects" (240). In their framing, "gifts often fail" (240) because of the giver's suspicious motives, or the gift's symbolic wrongness in reference to the nature of the relationship. However, our conclusions uncover another reality. Where relationships are enduring, such as between mothers and daughters, individual motives and symbolic representations of the relationship are less important than the messaging of the gift as part of an ongoing dyadic discourse about self, family, needs, life experiences, and direction.

Furthermore, viewing gift giving as micropolitical communication illuminates a more complex idea, and explains why unwanted gifts, or so-called "failed" gift experiences such as those described by Branco-Illodo et al. (2020), rarely harm the enduring dyadic relationship and can serve over the long term to improve mutual understanding of respective identity boundaries. They may prompt adaptation and inspire empathy and compassion. Aurora, for example, eventually came to understand and gradually accept the lack of self-confidence behind Anna's inability to enjoy gifts meant to socialize her into greater autonomy. Besides, we find even initially unwelcome gifts may work to strengthen enduring mother–daughter relationships over time by realizing the good intentions and symbolizing the relationship itself. One such example is the identity threatening, unwelcome teddy bear gift that Poppy gave to teenaged Ivy. Although she initially hated the expensive stuffed animal, much later in her life, she considers it a cherished family heirloom for her unborn child. When the time frame for the relationship is long, the seemingly straightforward meaning of a failed gift must change to accommodate the exchange of complex micropolitical meanings.

In an enduring relationship, it is not that the immediate success of the gift "threatens social ties as much as strengthens them" (Sherry et al. 1993, 237). Instead, the gift is feedback about social ties, roles, and life directions and thus is part of the attempt to strengthen the relationship. Although a sense of gratitude has previously been considered essential to successful gift exchange (Godbout and Caille 1998; Komter 2004), our research suggests that ingratitude or rejection does not deter dyadic partners from exchanging undesirable gifts. The explanation for this is that they are perceived by each dyadic member to be necessary micropolitical moves in an ongoing game. This is an "infinite game" in Carse's (1986) sense of a game whose goal is relational, whose purpose is to keep the game—in these cases, the relationship—going. In our study, the stocking stuffers that Lola repeatedly fills with skincare products that Kate accepts but never uses is a good example of this gifting persistence, an infinite game composed of micropolitical moves and countermoves.

It is perhaps overly simplistic in the face of this complexity to conceive of enduring dyadic gift giving as failing, succeeding, being ideal, or imperfect. Liked or not, rejected or rejoiced, the process, and the gift itself, is an inextricable part of the politics and play that constitute the relationship. Unwanted or undesirable gifts have what Godbout and Caille (1998) call a "bond value," despite the tensions and conflicts that they may generate. Because these tensions and conflicts occur in a context where partners are committed to continuing the relationship, they also play an important communication function that makes role maintenance and transformation possible. Our research develops this recognition by showing how these tensions and conflicts manifest through the context of mother–daughter gift exchange. Affirming at times, criticizing at others, making suggestions and doing it in ways that are regular and that vary in volume from a whisper to a scream, the gift becomes an indispensable tool. It is a way for one member of the dyad to provide advice to the other without saying it, to help without offering, to cement inalienable bonds and simultaneously to attach unwelcome strings.

Close dyads rely on gifts to cement the relationship, communicate what is difficult to articulate, and stay connected during times of need, triumph, joy, hardship, uncertainty, and crisis. Our investigation among British mothers and daughters whose relationships have endured reveals their dyadic gift-exchange as a micropolitical process rich with communication and feedback intended at building the relationships and roles into the future. Further research into relationships in other cultural contexts might reveal other elements of the process. For example, in Eastern cultures where family face-work (Hu 1944) is central to people's social interactions and gift exchange practices, the focus of the micropolitics may be more on managing impressions of others.

Future investigation of other enduring, dyadic gift relationships between father–son, mother–son, father–daughter, husband–wife, sibling–sibling, and long-term friends may well reveal additional nuances and perhaps unexpected new elements. For instance, fathers might use gifts to actively socialize their boys into particular kinds of gender roles or behaviors, just as we observed among mothers like Kate, who opted to give her daughter skincare products rather than those associated with her rugby playing. We do not know if friendships, even close ones, contain this sort of signaling and relational feedback. It seems logical that long-term friends may take turns to influence each other over time, or not, through the continuity and content of their gift giving practices, but this is mere conjecture until investigated. Despite decades of productive research, we are still at the early stages of understanding how people in close relationships use gift giving to manage and balance personal and relational concerns, aspirations, tensions, and conflicts. Gift giving remains a rich area for further consumer research inquiry.

Our study elevates the understanding of gift giving from a transaction to a dialogue within enduring relationships.

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Through a diachronic lens, we discover that gifts act as conduits of communication, subtly influencing the dynamics of power, identity, and role negotiation. Our research thus transcends the mother–daughter archetype of its context, suggesting that in all enduring dyads, gifts—regardless of their size, content, or immediate reception—serve as potent symbols in a living story of relational continuity and evolution.

DATA COLLECTION STATEMENT

The first author conducted all of the interviews from 2015 until 2018 in the UK. The first and second authors jointly analyzed the data and shared their insights with the third author. The fourth author contributed to the initial revision rounds. All notes, images, and data are currently stored on the Open Science Framework under the first author's management.

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