

22 Leveraging *Seinfeld* to Understand the Norms of Failed Gift Exchange

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From the day you are born until the day you die, you stand in the midst of gift-giving and gift-receiving dilemmas...every gift you receive requires that you attempt to decode the intended message of the giver, then challenges you with an added interpersonal burden of appropriate gift reciprocation. Unfortunately, gift objects do not speak for themselves.

[Sunwolf 2006, p. 3]

The quotation above reinforces the fact that especially within contemporary consumption-oriented societies, gift-giving is an entrenched and often challenging aspect of everyday life. Furthermore, the potential of gift exchanges, and especially failed exchanges, to illuminate aspects of interpersonal relationships explains their pervasiveness in cultural texts such as novels, short stories, films, TV shows, and comics (Belk 1989). Textual creators often feature failed gifting incidents in main and secondary plots to reveal how characters wrestle with the norms regarding what and how givers and recipients can ask/not ask or reveal/not reveal, highlighting the ambiguous and enigmatic nature of gift exchange (Guéry and Throssell 2013).

Consider an episode of the popular TV show *The Big Bang Theory*. After Sheldon, the main character, discovers his neighbor Penny has bought him a Christmas gift for the first time, he comments that although he knows she thinks she's being generous, she's actually obligating him to reciprocate ("The Bath Item Gift Hypothesis" 2008). The rest of the episode focuses on Sheldon trying to buy a gift equal in value to what Penny has bought for him, although he has no idea what she has bought, or how much she has spent.

In short, the influence of television programs on popular culture provides a foundation for studying important cultural trends in consumer behavior, as consumers' television viewing constructs (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997), affects (Shrum et al. 1998; Signorelli 2009), and reflects (Bilandzic et al. 2017; Scharrer and Blackburn 2017) their perceptions of reality and social norms. Long-running, highly viewed television programs are especially ripe for exploring gift-giving practices, because such series afford the writers opportunities to both introduce and repeat many motifs about failed (and

successful) gift exchanges between characters. In addition, social interchanges about media offerings, whether occurring during face-to-face “water cooler moments” (Lochrie and Coulton 2012), or virtually through myriad forms of social media, clearly shape cultural discourses about the practices such offerings depict—including those pertaining to gift-giving.

Several popular, acclaimed sitcoms—from classic programs airing in the 1990s such as *Frasier*, *Friends*, and *Seinfeld*, to the more recent *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–2019)—feature myriad episodes where characters give, receive, (mis)interpret, and dispose of gifts. This chapter maps occurrences of gift-giving failures onto specific gift-giving norm violations by analyzing *Seinfeld* as a cultural text. Sitcoms such as *Seinfeld* become successful due to a perfect mix of realism, irony, and fantasy (Juckel et al. 2016). They enable us to study the nuances of gift-giving norm violations and gift failures through television storytelling, and also trace their cultural impact on the ways gift-giving norm violations are debated and described. Thus, in this chapter, we explore the question: “What can a popular TV show illuminate about violations of gift-giving norms, and the relational consequences of these violations?” Below, we review the recent literature on gift failures to shed light on what is known about how various aspects of the gift-giving process (including norm violations) contribute to that outcome.

Background

Gift-giving failures occur for various reasons, and the gift-giving ritual itself is often fraught with anxiety, negativity, and conflict (Sherry et al. 1993). By its nature, gift exchange is an ambiguous activity—it is governed by a series of unstated and inscrutable rules (Caplow 1984), and gift experiences can incite both positive and negative emotions that can shape the relationship trajectory between giver and recipient (Ruth et al. 1999). Furthermore, gifting involves a complex process of comparing and synthesizing multiple relationships, and understanding tacit rules of communication and exchange within those relationships, as gifts are exchanged over time (Lowrey et al. 2004). In addition, recipients often compare previous gifts received from the same giver (Sinardet and Mortelmans 2005).

Furthermore, social norms may contribute to gift-giving failures when an asymmetry in preferences exists between the giver and the recipient—that is, when a giver offers something the recipient does not want to receive. Givi and Galak (2024) find the gift can be aligned with, or in violation of, a descriptive norm (i.e., it can be perceived as a “generic” gift, as in the case of a Netflix subscription), or an injunctive norm (i.e., it is perceived as a socially unacceptable gift, such as a Weight Watchers subscription).

Gifts also convey and possess symbolic value, both in how they reflect the communication and understanding between intimate others, and through the economic significance of the exchange. Schiffman and Cohn (2009) find that gift failures in marital dyads occur when one spouse follows a gifting

“rulebook” that differs from that of their partner (e.g., that gifts should be primarily economic, or conversely, that they should be symbolic).

Thus, the asymmetry between the giver’s and recipient’s perceptions of the gift’s attributes, value, and usefulness can lead to gift failures. Specifically, givers tend to focus on desirability, or overall gift quality (e.g., considering the food when giving a restaurant gift certificate), whereas receivers are more interested in feasibility, or the ease and convenience of using the gift (e.g., the distance to the restaurant or ease of parking [Baskin et al. 2014]). Furthermore, givers focus more on the moment of gifting rather than on what owning the gift actually entails. Simply put, attempting to impress or surprise the recipient rather than considering the usefulness or desirability of the good, service, or experience often contributes to gifting failures (Galak et al. 2016). Intriguingly, such failures seem to wield a greater impact on close non-familial relationships than on those with family members. This outcome may be explained by close family members interpreting gift failures as “misses” rather than as abject failures (Ruth et al. 1999). Furthermore, gift failures may primarily affect the future gift-giving aspect of the relationship (Roster 2006).

In addition, recipients of disliked gifts may feel pressure to retain or use the gift, rather than return or dispose of it. This decision unwittingly provides the giver with misleading feedback about how much the gift is liked (Roster and Amann 2003). Recipients may also cope with failed gifts by concealing, disclosing, or re-evaluating them, to overcome negative emotions about the gift, and prevent these emotions from affecting the broader relationship with the giver (Branco-Illodo et al. 2020).

In summary, research on gift failures affirms that these outcomes are common and that they seem more problematic for the recipient than for the giver. In addition, research supports the finding that several factors—including relational closeness—consistently act as buffers against the consequences of failed gift exchanges. Nevertheless, this outcome still places a burden on the recipient to physically, psychologically, and logistically manage any negative consequences (e.g., through managing their emotions, and deciding whether or how to retain or dispose of the failed gift). Our study of failed gifts within a popular television program finds that even when these outcomes are exaggerated for comic effect, they are rooted in and resonate with real-world gift failures.

Context

We explore our research question by revisiting incidents of failed gift-giving in the persistently popular series “*Seinfeld*.” Originally airing from 1989 to 1998, it remains one of the most-streamed comedy series—current US viewership places it in the 99th percentile of comedies watched (“United States Television ...” 2023), with high viewership in other countries such as Canada, Australia, the UK, and China as well (“Current Demand for

Seinfeld” 2021). Notably with respect to its cultural influence, it is also one of the most highly acclaimed comedy programs ever, receiving ten Emmy and three Golden Globe awards, and ranked in the top five sitcoms of all time in many different polls (e.g., *Rolling Stone* magazine; rottentomatoes.com; Sepinwall et al. 2021).

Seinfeld is a “true-to-life comedy” about the “misadventures of neurotic New York City stand-up comedian Jerry Seinfeld and his equally neurotic...friends” (“*Seinfeld*: Plot” 2023). Creators Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David ostensibly claim it is “about nothing,” but its broad and deep cultural commentary infiltrated American discourse through neologisms, labels, catchphrases, and even the creation of rituals (e.g., Festivus). Its cultural resonance and resilience make *Seinfeld* an ideal program through which to scrutinize the dynamics of gift exchange, as the four tightly knit main characters (Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer) interact with myriad family members, friends, co-workers, and others over its nine-year run. Likewise, the “no hugging, no learning” mantra that guided the writing team (Colburn 2018) meant that because the characters typically did not acquire any real interpersonal or relational skills, their social and relational ineptitude would permeate the series.

Method

Although much debate surrounds the definition of “gift” (Davis et al. 2010), for the purpose of this chapter, we define gifts as objects or experiences that givers intentionally offer to recipients, either at an occasion where both believe gifts are expected or warranted, or at a time when the giver offers something the recipient is not expecting. This definition accommodates “just because” or “surprise” gifts, but excludes sharing and casual/assumed relational offerings (e.g., when Jerry tells Kramer he can share Jerry’s pizza because they are neighbors). Cards often act as surrogate gifts (Papson 1986), so our definition accommodates card-giving as well.

To determine the gift-exchange incidents in *Seinfeld*, we first watched all 180 episodes of the series and coded for each time a gift made an appearance, either through a gifting act, or the recounting of a gift exchange. Many episodes include more than one gift incident—and some even occur in Jerry Seinfeld’s comedy onstage monologues that open (and sometimes close) each episode.

We found over 60 gift incidents in the series where characters engaged in gifting behavior (including shopping, giving, receipt, transportation, and disposition). However, the most common depiction is that of failed gift-giving—namely, where one character offers an object or experience to another, who then criticizes or rejects the gift. We therefore decided to focus on how the characters’ violations of gift-giving norms spur failed gift receipt.

In this chapter, we offer an analysis of ten episodes where gift-giving is central to the plot, and where one or more characters violate spoken or unspoken

gift-giving norms. We analyzed the text by engaging in close reading, a practice based on literary criticism, and typified by “slow reading, a deliberate attempt to detach ourselves from the magical power of storytelling and pay attention to language, imagery, allusion, intertextuality, syntax, and form” (Showalter 2002, p. 98).

All three authors watched the ten episodes, coding the text independently. We then met as a team to discuss the instances of gift-giving we observed, the gift-giving norms violated, and the relational impact on the characters (if any). We labeled all of the categories of gift failures, and the norm violations occurring within them, negotiating any nuanced meanings between categories.

Findings

In focusing our analysis on addressing the research question, “What can a popular TV show illuminate about violations of gift-giving norms, and the relational consequences of these violations?,” our coding resulted in four broad relational categories where gift-giving norm violations can occur: dyadic, intimate friendship circle, broader social network, and customer/provider. Even among our select subset of ten episodes, we found several specific types of gift-giving violations occurring within each of these categories. Space precludes us from discussing each violation; however, Table 22.1 offers an example of each that emerged.

Below, we will unpack one example within each category, highlighting the details of the failed gift exchange, the social norm violations in evidence, and the consequences/outcomes of these failed exchanges. It is worth noting, however, that in the real world, the relational consequences of failed gift exchanges are often negligible (Ruth et al. 1999). Similarly, the four key characters in *Seinfeld* often code these failed gifts as “misses,” or if they regard their friends’ actions as dubious or unfortunate, they simply gloss over their gift failures as somewhat par for the course.

Dyadic Gift Failures

Dyadic giving typically occurs between people who are romantic partners, or between parents and children (with parties in the exchange sometimes treating multiple recipients as one giver and/or recipient, such as one gift for Mom and Dad [Otnes, et al. 1993]). The context of dyadic giving offers by far the most varied type of gift failure (see Table 22.1). This is not surprising, given that most “real-world” gift exchange occurs between dyads.

The Intergenerational Norm Violation

One type of dyadic gift failure can occur between generations, specifically when gift-giving upends or inverts the social hierarchy between the giver and recipient. In most cultures, it is an assumed norm that older family

Table 22.1 Gift-giving norm violations in *Seinfeld* episodes

Category of gift-giving norm violation	Description of norm violation	Specific norm violations in each category	Example of specific norm violations/ episode name	Outcome(s) of gift failure
Dyadic	The gift disrupts, or does not reflect, how one member of the dyad perceives the relationship	<i>Probing</i> : seeking (covert) or demanding (overt) updates on the recipient's gift use	Mrs. S asks J where the watch is that he gave J for his birthday ("The Wallet")	J lies to his parents because he had thrown the watch away; J buys it back from Uncle Leo (who had found it in the trash); Mr. S finds out J lied to him
		<i>Disingenuous Giving</i> : offering a gift but not really wanting the recipient to take it	Jack Klompus offers J his astronaut pen; J accepts it ("The Pen")	Jerry doesn't understand he shouldn't have accepted the pen; Jack and Mr. S argue over whether J should have taken it; the resulting tension spills over into the condo social network; J returns the pen
		<i>Relationally Incongruous Giving</i> : offering a gift that does not reflect the recipient's perception of the relationship status	J gives E a card that calls her a pal and cash for her birthday, after she thinks they have resumed their romantic relationship ("The Deal")	E is angry with J; in a later episode, we learn the romance did not stick
		<i>Giver- vs. Recipient-Directed Giving</i> : offering a gift to the recipient without knowing whether it will be liked or desired	G buys his new girlfriend a cactus ("The Label Maker") and the girlfriend repeats the name of the gift, which is a sign she doesn't like it	The gift is the least of George's problems with her; other issues supersede any effect it may have had
		<i>Ulterior-Motive Giving</i> : offering a gift to try and achieve a goal rather than please the recipient	G tries to placate the cleaning lady with whom he had sex, by giving her a cashmere sweater, but it has a defective red dot ("The Red Dot")	The cleaning lady initially loves the gift; then finds the defect and reports to the boss that she and G had sex in the office; G is fired
		<i>Intergenerational Giving</i> : an adult child offering a gift to a parent in a situation that could embarrass the parent	J offers to pay for his parents' dinner in front of Uncle Leo & his friends ("The Watch")	Mr. S causes a scene in the restaurant; he violates a marketplace norm by offering to send the restaurant a check for the meal

Intimate friendship circle	Giving disrupts balance/perceived equity of friends within a close circle	<i>Burdening the Recipient</i> : requiring the recipient to outlay resources in order to use the gift	J offers G tickets to the Super Bowl, but G remarks the tickets would require G to buy airline tickets and a hotel room (“The Label Maker”)	None: G rejects the gift
		<i>Outgifting</i> : offering a gift better than what someone else offers in the friend circle	K gives E a better gift than J gives her (“The Deal”)	E is touched and grateful; J is irked his gift looks worse compared to K’s
Broader social network	Circulating a poor-quality or poorly thought-out gift through a social circle	<i>Giving a Defective Gift</i> : wittingly or unwittingly buying gifts that do not work or possess a flaw	The red-dot sweater (wittingly gifted—“The Red Dot”); the watch (unwittingly gifted by Mr. S to J—“The Wallet”)	E returns the gift to G; G regifts to the cleaning lady to placate her after sex; Mr. Lippman returns it to G after the cleaning lady gets G in trouble; the friends try and regift it to E’s drunk boyfriend; G is fired
		<i>Degifting</i> : taking back a gift the giver offers a recipient	Real or attempted degifts of the Super Bowl tickets: J from Whatley; Whatley from E; Whatley from Newman (“The Label Maker”)	G reveals his ignorance of gifting norms; J gets to go to the SB after all, but has to sit with Newman
		<i>Breaching Gift Etiquette</i> : failing to offer a gift at an expected time/place/social situation	The Rosses don’t offer cake to the Costanzas after hosting them for dinner (“The Marble Rye”)	Mr. Costanza degifts the marble rye; G decides he has to replace it; G realizes he’ll have to keep the in-laws apart for the rest of his life
		<i>Overgifting</i> : offering a more elaborate gift to a recipient than others in the intimate circle could afford	J gives Mr. S a Cadillac. While originally a dyadic gift, J doesn’t understand how it will disrupt the social dynamics within his parents’ condo complex (“The Cadillac Part I”)	Mr. S loves the gift; and gives J recognition for being a good son; the condo members become suspicious and impeach Mr. S; J’s parents have to move
		<i>Regifting</i> : visibly passing on a gift that was received as a gift to someone else in the social network	Tim regifts the Label Baby Junior that E gave him for Christmas to J (“The Label Maker”)	E and J think less of Tim Whatley because he’s a regifter; ultimately E and Tim Whatley get together romantically after discussing the gift.
		<i>Unauthorized Giving</i> : the giver offers an item to a recipient without clearing it with a gatekeeper in the social network	G gives the security guard a rocking chair, but he doesn’t have the storeowner’s (Susan’s uncle) permission to do so (“The Maestro”)	The store is robbed as the guard sleeps in his rocking chair

(Continued)

Table 22.1 (Continued)

<i>Category of gift-giving norm violation</i>	<i>Description of norm violation</i>	<i>Specific norm violations in each category</i>	<i>Example of specific norm violations/ episode name</i>	<i>Outcome(s) of gift failure</i>
Customer/ provider	Giver selects unreliable source for gift selection or execution	<i>Giving Offensive Gifts</i> : the giver offers something politically incorrect or otherwise upsetting to recipients	J gifts E a cigar-store Indian and uses language offensive to Native Americans both verbally and in the card he also offers, in front of E's Native American friend Winona ("The Cigar Store Indian")	K's un-PC flaunting of the Indian in front of J, undermines J's attempts to make up with Winona; K sells the Indian to E's publisher boss, and gets a deal for his coffee-table book about coffee tables
		<i>Outsourcing</i> : the giver entrusts gift delivery or execution in the hands of a questionable marketplace agent	G hires K to take the Rosses on a hansom cab ride; K feeds the horse Beefareeno which causes the horse to have massive flatulence ("The Marble Rye")	K's feeding choice and resulting flatulence disrupts the timeline for G and J's marble-rye regifting scheme; the Rosses are displeased with the gift; G ends up getting caught trying to regift

Notes: Character abbreviations are as follows: Jerry (J), George (G), Elaine (E), and Kramer (K), Mr. Seinfeld/Mrs. Seinfeld (Mr. S/Mrs. S). Other characters are identified by name or by role, depending on which is used in the episode.

members should typically bestow more resources on younger ones—that is, that resources should flow in a downward direction from one generation to another (Cheal 1986). The tension resulting from an inversion of this norm, and the possible social consequences, can often embarrass or insult older recipients (Cheal 1986, 1988; Liu et al. 2024). In “The Watch,” Jerry offers to pay for dinner for his parents while they are at a restaurant with Jerry’s Uncle Leo. Mr. Seinfeld takes umbrage over the fact that this gift implies he is unable to pay for his meal—and the incident is even more embarrassing, given that his brother-in-law witnesses Jerry’s offer. Mr. Seinfeld wails to the maitre’d that he can’t let his son pay for him. The comic twist to this failed gift exchange emerges as Mr. Seinfeld realizes he has forgotten his wallet, and asks if he can mail the restaurant a check. Thus he violates an intractable norm of dining out—that payment is due at the end of the meal.

In a later (two-part) episode, “The Cadillac,” Jerry violates this rule again on an even grander scale when he buys his father a Cadillac. This luxury purchase wreaks havoc on his parents’ social network dynamic and lifestyle. Indeed, Jerry’s mother clearly understands that children should not give lavish gifts up the generational ladder to their parents. She both chastises Jerry for offering his father such an expensive gift, and urges her husband to reject it, to no avail.

Intimate Friendship Circle Gift Failures

When a gift-exchange failure occurs within an intimate friendship circle, it is often because a giver has not borne in mind issues that pertain to maintaining perceived gifting equity within the circle. Gifts given among intimate friends may be visible to all members of the circle—perhaps not at the moment a gift is received, but as it is viewed and talked about. Therefore, gifts within social circles can serve as reminders of inequitable treatment by or from some in the circle, contributing to the potency of these gifts as disruptive forces among what may otherwise be assumed to be “equal others.”

The Outgifting Norm Violation

When one member of the friendship circle remembers another friend on an important occasion (e.g., a birthday), the gifting gesture should reflect the intimacy shared between the two friends. Additionally and importantly, the gift should also not be perceived as better than one extended by another network member. Put simply, if a group member is perceived to “outgift” another friend, this situation may cause repercussions.

One obvious outgifting violation in *Seinfeld* is first exacerbated by Jerry’s dyadic-failure violation of offering a relationally incongruent gift in an episode titled “The Deal” (see Table 22.1). After Jerry and Elaine rekindle their sexual relationship, Jerry is stumped on what to buy Elaine for her birthday.

Ultimately, he gives her cash wrapped in a nice box and a card where he describes her as a “pal.” Jerry regards the gift as a sacrifice (Belk and Coon 1993), because as he explains to Elaine, the amount—\$182—represents everything in his checking account. Elaine’s reaction—where she asks him if he’s her uncle—reveals she nevertheless perceives the cash gift to be superficial and generic. Needless to say, being labeled a pal when she thinks they are rekindling their romantic relationship adds fuel to her already negative reaction. As she is visibly seething at Jerry’s thoughtlessness, Kramer arrives and gives her a wooden bench she had really wanted, along with a sweet card with a Yeats poem inside, which delights her. Elaine tells Kramer it’s the most thoughtful gift anyone has ever given her, making Jerry even more perturbed that Kramer’s gift is the better one.

Broader Social Network Gift Failures

The four main characters of *Seinfeld* comprise an intimate friend network that is situated within a broader social network. This network includes fixed and essentially permanent relations (e.g., parents), as well as more transient people (e.g., romantic partners, employers, co-workers, and acquaintances—what Joy [2001] calls “hi/bye friends”). Gift failures, such as the circulation of a defective or poorly thought-out gift between these more distant connections, may be more difficult to forgive or resolve compared to those occurring within closer relationships. This discrepancy could be due to the lack of regular communication between the parties and the lower stakes surrounding the potential dissolution of the relationship.

The Regifting Norm Violation

Recipients sometimes dispose of unwanted gifts by passing them on to members of their broad social networks. However, problems can arise if the original giver becomes aware of that action. In “The Label Maker,” Tim Whatley, a dentist and acquaintance of the *Seinfeld* gang, regifts to Jerry a “Label Baby Jr.” label maker that Elaine had given him for Christmas. Elaine sees the label maker in Jerry’s apartment right after he opens the gift, and she angrily and hurtfully calls Tim a regifter. Initially, Tim goes down in both Jerry and Elaine’s estimation due to his gift recycling and solidifies Jerry’s frustration with him over another gifting incident involving Superbowl tickets. However, later Elaine and Tim have an emotional conversation over her motivation for giving him the label maker, and end up romantically involved. Elaine was able to explain why she unwittingly gave Tim what he called the worst gift ever, and Tim completely forgave her for the blunder. This outcome demonstrates that the impact of failed gifts on relationships can be negligible (Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999), or even positive, if givers can convey to recipients that their intentions were sincere.

Customer/Provider Gift Failures

Gifting an experience often means enlisting several people in a social network to help plan and orchestrate this type of gift (Clarke 2006), and also relying on service providers to execute or supply aspects of the experiences. Experience gifts not only require investments of givers' time, money, and effort—recipients also must invest their time and effort to fully reap the purported benefits of the experience (Clarke 2006, 2008). This fact, and the inherent variability in quality and uncertainty that can pervade aspects of experience purchases (Gilovich and Gallo 2019), can make gifting an experience a riskier venture than giving a tangible object (Goodman and Lim 2018).

The Outsourcing Norm Violation

Choosing and relying on a service provider to help execute a gift experience can contribute to gift failure, especially if the service provider is not well-vetted or reliable. In the worst-case scenario, “breakdowns in service delivery...can mar any service encounter, and certainly an experience gift...” (Clarke 2008, p. 378). In “The Marble Rye,” George hires Kramer to take Mr. and Mrs. Ross (his future in-laws) on a hansom cab ride led by Rusty the horse, for their anniversary. Kramer, known for failing at simple tasks and being what Elaine calls a hipster doofus in daily life, feeds Rusty a can of Beefareeno, which the horse cannot properly digest, just before the ride begins. This decision results in an intolerable ride for the Rosses, who demand to return home early, as the horse's flatulence overwhelms them.

George cannot really seek recompense from Kramer for botching his provider role, since Kramer was only borrowing the cab from its owner. Additionally, the fiasco does not seem to impact the relationship between George and Kramer. Nevertheless, this gift failure does have repercussions for George, as his whole motivation for giving the cab ride was to gain access to Ross's apartment and put right an embarrassing degifting incident by his father. With the timing for that caper thrown off by Ross's early return from the ride, George ends up looking as foolish as Kramer at the end of the episode.

Future Research

We chose to focus on gift-giving norm violations in *Seinfeld* because of how prevalent these violations proved to be in the plotlines of the sitcom. Yet this show, and others that have enjoyed long successes, offer plenty of examples where the norms governing gift *receipt* are also violated. These would be interesting to explore, especially since most gift-giving research still focuses on the behaviors of givers and not recipients (see Gino and Flynn 2011 and Givi and Das 2022 for exceptions). Furthermore, as our chapter demonstrates, the interactions between characters make it possible to study

behaviors occurring during the actual gift exchange—consider Elaine and Jerry’s tense conversation after she opens her birthday gift of cash, and the card he bought for her that describes her as a “pal.”

With respect to the impact of failed dyadic gifts on social networks, *Seinfeld* sheds light on this topic, which remains essentially unexplored in the academic literature. Although Lowrey et al. (2004) study the ways givers might use social network members to assist them in gift selection, little is known about how a dyadic gift might trigger other outcomes in a social network—from positive ones such as socializing others vicariously through the use of a gift (Otnes et al. 1993), to negative outcomes such as jealousy or bitterness (e.g., as seen among the condo residents, when Jerry gives his father a Cadillac and the residents accuse Mr. Seinfeld of stealing money from the condo treasury to pay for it). The microcosm of the condo community in *Seinfeld* also makes transparent the fact that social networks often negotiate their own norms for giving and receiving, and how people come to learn and master these typically unwritten norms is another topic that deserves attention.

Furthermore, a deeper dive into *Seinfeld*’s panoply of gift-giving incidents reveals that, as is certainly conceivable in real life, failed gift incidents that occur at one point in time often rear their heads in future episodes. Even in a television program governed by a no-hugging, no-learning ethic, these incidents still shape the behaviors (gifting and beyond) of the characters. For example, Jerry wrestles with the failed gift of the Cadillac in at least two other episodes. Also, *Seinfeld* makes it transparent that the topic of how a failed gift can circulate through a social network, either through narratives or in its tangible form, is worthy of attention. (For a real-life example of the longevity of a failed gift in a social network, see Stephen Brown’s story of the stepladder he gives his wife for Christmas in Chapter 26).

We hope this chapter demonstrates the potential of cultural texts to illuminate gift-giving practices, and that readers will be encouraged to revisit them either purely for enjoyment, or to tap into their rich narratives to help stimulate creative scholarship on gift exchange.

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