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Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity among Foragers

Despite the prevalence of an ethic of generosity among foragers, much sharing is by demand rather than by unsolicited giving. Although a behavioristic model of demand sharing can be seen as matching sociobiological expectations, the emphasis here is on the social and symbolic significance of the practice. It is argued that demand sharing involves testing, assertive, and/or substantiating behavior and is important in the constitution of social relations in egalitarian societies.

CONFRONTED BY SUCH A FORTHRIGHT DEMAND for a loan as "I want to owe you five dollars," delivered without hesitation or apology, visitors to the Murngin of Australia might well feel that this mode of approach is reserved for comparatively wealthy outsiders. They would be wrong.

The extent to which the idiom of giving and sharing among Aboriginal Australians is one of demands and claims is surprising. It contrasts sharply with the common ethnographic emphasis on a dynamic of unsolicited generosity and sharing among hunter-gatherers (see, e.g., Sahlins 1972: appendix A). Of the Australians, Les Hiatt has written:

Probably everywhere in Aboriginal Australia the highest secular value is generosity. Readiness to share with others is the main measure of a man's goodness, and hospitality an essential source of his self-esteem. As Aboriginal children seem as demanding and self-centred as children anywhere, the altruism of adults is most plausibly explained, not as a natural propensity, but as the outcome of a programme of moral education in which greed is condemned and magnanimity extolled. It is likely that this pervasive and highly-developed ethic of generosity emerged as a cultural adaptation to the exigencies of hunting and gathering, and conceivably conferred improved fitness on those who adopted it. [Hiatt 1982:14-15]

Hiatt goes on to comment, however, that below the melody line in praise of generosity among the Anbara people of Arnhem Land, a grumbling about their stinginess, neglect, and ingratitude also was evident. Public pressure on individual Anbara to share was virtually irresistible, so various counterstrategies were adopted by the diligent to prevent exploitation by the lazy or manipulative. The most effective of these, in Hiatt's view, was eating during food collection so that the greater part of a person's produce was in an advanced state of digestion by the time he or she returned to camp (1982:24).

Considering the widely held view that little if any giving is truly altruistic, it is curious that the way in which many items move between people and households so frequently remains obscured. While both ethnographers and Aboriginal people emphasize the positive moral imperative of the ethic of generosity as the principal dynamic, observation and ethnographic evidence suggest that much giving and sharing is in response to direct verbal and/or nonverbal demands. This raises the question of why generosity is so often expressed with what might be construed as contradictory meanness: Why do recipients often have to demand generosity?

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Ethnographic Evidence for Demand Sharing in Australia

While there is no systematic account of sharing practices in any Australian Aboriginal society nor any measure of the frequency of demand sharing as opposed to unsolicited giving, there is fragmentary evidence of the kind of behavior under consideration. Although the practice is found throughout Australia, I will illustrate it with examples from two areas of north Australia, in situations where it is particularly marked.

Among the Yolngu (Murngin) people of Arnhem Land with whom I lived in the mid-1960s largely off the bush, demands for food or other items were common, although they did not always take spoken form. Simply presenting oneself when food was being prepared and eaten meant one had to be included. This was rarely done by adults, unless large quantities of food had been brought into camp by one household; but for children it was common practice. If they overheard anybody talking about food, they often went across to have a look, giving rise to the rebuke *buthurru gungmirri* ("your ears have fingers").

Among adult men, demands for spears and other items of material culture were frequent, and two interesting strategies were used to avoid having to meet them. Valued spears or guns could be given to elderly women by their sons or other male relatives or purchased by such women with their pension checks, although the women never used the weapons for hunting. The purpose was twofold: the owner of the weapon used had a right in the distribution of whatever was killed, which thus ensured they received an adequate amount and desirable portion; it also allowed the person who was using the gun or spear, and who normally had it in their possession all the time, to refuse demands for it because it was not his to give. The other strategy relates most frequently to pipes and tobacco, but can be extended to almost anything. Old men, by carving sacred designs on their pipes and then covering them with strips of cloth or paper, render them taboo to all women and any men who has not had the design revealed to him in a religious context. Since demands for tobacco were common, this strategy was highly effective (see Thomson 1939). The general principle is extended to all sorts of things that old men may reserve for themselves by placing them under a taboo (e.g., Thomson 1949:26 and 46-47).

Asking, such as asking for permission to use something, is *ngang'thun* and is distinguished from demanding in our sense of "bumming" something off somebody, which is *barl'yun*. Except in limited circumstances, such as funeral distributions, very little spontaneous giving takes place outside the household. One reason for this is that it is seen as rude to offer something unasked, as it puts people in a position where it is difficult to refuse, since refusing is even ruder. A particularly interesting practice is known by the term *wamarkane*. Yolngu do not express appreciation lightly, but a person may occasionally do so at a public event, for instance, by complimenting a person on their dancing. The person who has paid the compliment then has the right to make a substantial demand of the person they have complimented. Exactly what stops people from making many complimentary statements is not clear, but even a casual remark of that nature, such as "Oh, what a beautiful baby," allows the speaker to demand something from the person complimented.²

Among the Wik-mungkan of Cape York, demand sharing is commonplace. An indication of this is that there are formal ways to stop excessive demanding. McKnight (1975) reports that if one's kinsperson fails to fulfill his or her kinship duties, one can swear his or her hands on somebody else's head or other body part, thus preventing the kinsperson from giving anything to the person whose head has been invoked. Thus, a woman may swear her daughter's hands on her own husband's head if she feels her husband (i.e., the girl's father) is taking too many things, particularly food. A likely consequence of this is to divert food to the swearer (i.e., the girl's mother, in this case). A man may also be stopped from taking something by saying his mother-in-law's name or by claiming it belongs to either his father-in-law or mother-in-law (1975:81-82).

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Von Sturmer, writing generally about how to interact with Aboriginal people, takes demanding for granted (1981:23-24); but this could be seen as a special case, as he is dealing with Aboriginal-European interactions. I do not believe it is, however, although the intensity of demands made of Europeans may be greater, especially as many of them do not know how to say no appropriately.

Although this brief illustration of demand sharing does not justify the assertion that it is widespread in Australia (for Central Australia, see Myers 1988:56, 59), because it is reinforced by other examples mentioned throughout this article, the personal experience of many colleagues and graduate students doing field research, and my own experience across the breadth of north Australia, I have no doubt that it is a widespread phenomenon.

Sharing and Socialization

It is widely reported that the upbringing of Aboriginal children is highly indulgent (see Cowlshaw 1982:495-500). This indulgence is characterized by a great tolerance of children's demands, interruptions, tantrums, and physical attacks, particularly demands by boys on their mothers and on older siblings, who are the main focus of these behaviors (1982:501). From the very beginning, feeding is demand-initiated by the baby seeking the breast or crying (Hamilton 1981:52) and, when older, by the throwing of tantrums, especially by boys.³ Crying babies are assumed to be demanding food in most circumstances, and their needs are always met as soon as possible. While infant children always get what they demand, they are often deliberately shown that they in turn have to give on demand. Thus when a child cries out for food from someone nearby, he or she will be given it; but then others nearby will in turn start asking the child for some of it, often taking it from the child's hand, explaining their relationship as they take the food: "Oh, I'm your big sister/big brother; you've got to give food to me" (see D. Smith 1980). After age five or so, a child has to give priority to the demands of its baby siblings, and thus learn more intensely the social value placed on sharing (Cowlshaw 1982:501).

Girls are socialized into serving old people and men's needs and demands, fetching water and wood for them, cooking food, and helping their mothers to ensure that the provisioning of rituals, especially circumcision rituals, is successful (Cowlshaw 1982:504). In western Cape York they are taught to serve older siblings who are not allowed to ask for anything from younger siblings (D. Smith 1980). For boys it is only with the approach of the initiation rituals that the willful demanding from their mothers and sisters stops.

Gerrard suggests that in Arnhem Land there are differences in demand sharing between men and women. Men, she says,

were likely to ask other men for much larger services than women asked from women or than men asked from women and they did not make these large demands abruptly. A woman might thus ask a relative to mind a child or to give her meat or lend her money without any ceremony at all, but a man asking another man for help in a business venture, for example, might spend an hour making his request clear. [1989:111]

If giving is the natural expression of goodwill, the positive valuing of the demand sharing of food is established at and reinforced from the moment of birth, and its potential as an index of the state of social relations is powerfully inculcated.

Sharing and Scarcity

Demand sharing makes sense when there is scarcity, as Helm suggests is the case among the Dogrib (1972:67), but today it is almost received wisdom that hunter-gatherers are normally free from market obsessions with scarcity. Sahlins (1972), following Polanyi, has persuasively developed the substantivist case that scarcity is not necessarily present in all societies and has suggested that hunter-gatherers enjoy unparalleled

plenty because they are satisfied with a low standard of living. The widely reported optimism about tomorrow (see Lee and DeVore 1968) has, however, to be distinguished from the concerns of today.

Two classic accounts document the prevalence of demand sharing: Holmberg's account of the Siriono painted a dismal picture, but Turnbull's book on the Ik (1972) was the first extended report of a less idyllic situation than normally described. While some accept the veracity of his description of the Ik's outrageous behavior more or less at face value, others decry it for taking unwarranted liberties with the ethnography. If the account is accepted, is it the case that deprivation in the case of the Siriono and starvation in the case of the Ik has transformed their normal behavior, or is it more likely that stressful conditions have simply intensified a common pattern?

Inertial generosity could be an important daily strategy even in conditions where there is no material shortage.⁴ Consider the situation of a person with limited means living in a community of several dozen people, all of whom are kin. On the occasions when they have limited amounts of goods that they can share generously or give away, with whom are they to share, or to whom are they to give? If they have lived in the community all their lives, there will be scarcely a person with whom they have not had some interaction and to whom there is not some kind of social debt. Are they to run through the entire list of people to whom they are indebted in one way or another, rank the debts, and then distribute the surplus as far as it goes? Should they concentrate on meeting the largest or oldest debts, or only those to close kin, to the neglect of more distant relatives?

An alternative strategy to this bookkeeping approach is simply to respond to demands as they are made. This has at least four advantages: difficult decisions are avoided; the onus is placed on others; discrepancies in the evaluation of relationships are not laid bare; and an excellent excuse is provided for not meeting some obligations within the context of behaving generously. Further, it fully recognizes the inherent difficulty in delayed reciprocity: time alters the value of objects and the perception of relationships, compounding the difficulties of calculating the correct return.

Such an inertial strategy also provides an additional possibility: demands can be refused. This can usually be done only by hiding, secretive behavior, and lying. It is not just the Siriono who hide their food under difficult conditions: such hiding is widespread and is a fully self-conscious strategy. A Pintupi man talking about collecting and using wild tobacco in Central Australia had this to say:

Don't bring back the weak leaves without trying it. Let us bring back ash tree to mix with the pitcher. Let us eat it together with the ash, we who are starving for pitcher. Let us eat it, so it can burn our throats. When walking without water, chewing pitcher is good to keep one alert. Let us cook pitcher. One should break his lump in half and give it to another. After preparing it, let us hide it in the shelter, so the women won't grab it from us. Let us carry it in our pockets. If you keep it where people can see it, they ask you for it, and finish it all up. Not only pitcher but tin of tobacco and cigarettes as well (Hansen 1974:13-14).

It is not only potential givers who hide resources, but also potential receivers, who hide what they have so that they may ask others because they are seen to have a need. Myers records how, after reacting angrily to a demand for cigarettes from a Pintupi man, he was surprised by the man not taking offense at his anger, but instead sympathizing with the fact that Myers had been taken advantage of. He told Myers that he should not give things away so easily and instructed him on how to hide a packet of cigarettes in his socks so that he could tell people he had none. Also, he gave Myers a packet of cigarettes and told him he had several others buried near his camp (Myers 1988:56; see also Von Sturmer 1981:fn, p. 24).

Many other examples of hiding could be given (e.g., Altman and Peterson 1988), including those drawn from my own personal practice in places like Alice Springs, where I encounter many people I know who ask for money, leading me to keep large-denomination bills in one pocket and smaller change in another.⁵ All this suggests that such

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While this construction of the logic of demand sharing in terms of self-conscious and self-interested strategy is heuristically useful, it lacks a certain plausibility as an accurate representation of lived experience. Calculation is undeniably part of the everyday practice of demand sharing, as the evidence of concealing alone makes clear; but for demand sharing to be a pervasive social practice, it has to be a part of the habitus and of moral education in the management of interpersonal relations, as the nature of socialization suggests it is.

Sharing, Uncertainty, and Risk

By its nature, the hunting and gathering life involves risk and uncertainty, particularly where there is no storage and where provisioning is on a day-by-day basis.⁶ Under such conditions, sharing appears to make good economic sense (e.g., Cashdan 1985). As Ingold puts it:

Were each hunter to produce only for his own domestic needs, everyone would eventually perish from hunger. . . . Thus, through its contribution to the survival and reproduction of potential producers, sharing ensures the perpetuation of society as a whole. [1980:145]

Eric Smith (1988:234) calls this the "received view." From the perspective of evolutionary biology, it is problematic because it depends on the suggestion that the survival of the social group is the function of sharing practices. Setting this phrasing aside, Kaplan and Hill (1985) have shown that among the Ache, where large animals are shared, such sharing does indeed increase the nutritional well-being of most band members, although not equally (see also White 1985).

Smith argues, however, that a simple risk-reduction model of sharing fails to consider the costs of sharing, such as transporting food for others and ensuring that others share. Using a game-theoretical model, he shows that from the point of view of evolutionary biology, truly altruistic or indiscriminate sharing is evolutionarily unstable and will be undermined by freeloaders: a system of generalized reciprocity is dependent on a way of monitoring reciprocity and a means of invoking sanctions against freeloaders (E. Smith 1988).

The virtue of an individualistic and rationalistic risk model, Smith argues, is that it provides a general framework for predicting the degree of variation in sharing from time to time and place to place. This means that it predicts the existence of demand sharing under certain conditions in a way that the received view does not. The model is based on the assumption—with which Smith admits to feeling a little uncomfortable—that most individuals would prefer to get something for nothing, all else being equal (E. Smith 1988). The rigorosity introduced by such formal models allows for quantification, and through the game-theoretical aspect it introduces the world of interpersonal politics; but these models seem scarcely adequate for dealing with the contingencies and historical particularities of everyday life, and they overdraw the distinctions between nature and culture, selfishness and altruism, individual and group. Further, because they are framed with reference to un-self-conscious life-forms that do not engage in strategic manipulation of the social in the way that humans and other primates do, they underplay the social and symbolic significance of much sharing behavior in maintaining and modulating relationships in their single-minded focus on hunger (Kent 1993).

Game Sharing

It is widely reported, particularly in the older literature, that there are strict rules regulating the distribution of meat; such rules, if observed, would eliminate the possi-

bility of demand sharing. Dawson provides the following account of game sharing in Victoria:

When a hunter brings game to the camp he gives up all claim to it, and must stand aside and allow the best portions to be given away, and content himself with the worst. If he has a brother present, the brother is treated in the same way, and helps the killer of the game to eat the poor pieces, which are thrown to them such as the forequarters and ribs of the kangaroos, opossums, and small quadrupeds, and the backbones of birds. The narrator of this custom mentioned that when he was very young he used to grumble because his father gave away all the best pieces of birds and quadrupeds, and the finest eels, but he was told that it was a rule and must be observed. [1881:22]

Reports like this are common in Australia. They imply that Aboriginal people are captives of custom and have been construed as evidence for the collective appropriation of nature, two enduring representations of Aboriginal societies and cultures.

Rule-bound game sharing has been seen as evidence for the collective appropriation of nature in two different ways. One view is that game in the wild cannot be owned by either individuals or groups, because it wanders widely, regardless of boundaries. Thus it must be collectively owned; however, it is acknowledged that it does not appear to be collectively appropriated, because it is widely reported that one or another person is designated as the owner of the kill—frequently the owner of the spear, where they are used.

Ingold (1986:223–229) asks why the owner of the spear should become the owner of what was previously collective property. He suggests that ownership of tools of the chase is primarily a mechanism for identifying the animal's killer, who then acquires the right to distribute the meat. Without such a mechanism for identifying the successful hunter, it would be difficult to motivate people to hunt in the presence of an ethic of sharing, since everybody would sit around waiting for others to hunt, knowing they would automatically receive a portion. By identifying a hunter with the right to distribute, hunters are motivated to hunt because they receive substantial prestige by being so identified. Thus there is no contradiction: game was collectively owned and appropriated.

An alternative view has been elaborated by Testart (1987). He has been struck by what he perceives to be two distinct patterns of sharing game in hunting and gathering societies. In type A sharing systems, sharing is initiated by the producer: the hunter himself shares out the game. In type B sharing systems, the process of sharing is initiated by somebody other than the hunter, as in the account provided by Dawson. Testart argues that, because they define the relationship between producers and nonproducers completely differently, these two systems represent two distinct kinds of social system, critically differentiated in the nature of their kinship systems.

Type B systems allegedly are found only in Australia. As described by Testart, game usually goes to somebody in the category of father-in-law, "at the other end of society." This system presupposes a society organized into sections, with meat distributed through each of the major sections. This is, then, a society with collective appropriation of game, and Australia has the only set of societies with true primitive communalism. Despite this communalism, evidence for the distribution of meat by age and sex in two contemporary Arnhem Land outstation communities shows that distribution practices advantage senior men and disadvantage elderly women (see White 1985:337–339, 344; Meehan 1977:507–508).

Where there are accounts of sharing that distinguish between normative statements and practice on specific occasions, a more complex situation emerges. Evidence from the eastern Gunwinggu shows that formal sharing rules there allocate only about half the maximum number of basic cuts, leaving up to 50 percent by weight unallocated, and that where a capable hunter was not pulling his weight, meat was withheld from him, occasioning a dispute (Altman and Peterson 1988:78–80, 88). Gould, writing of the western desert, notes that the hunter gets the entrails and the participants in the

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hunt then in turn make their choice of cut, with the father-in-law and brother-in-law having first choice (1982:72). This kind of description implies that people always camp and go hunting with their fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, which is unlikely.

Emphasis on the pure and simple rules obscures the probability that they are significant only if there is a shortage, in which case they help reduce conflict by ranking either people or cuts of meat. Much of the time, there was probably no shortage: people lived in small groups that often were quite dispersed, and a much more complex social interplay was at work, as the frequent disputes or complaints over food sharing suggest. Love, speaking of the Worora people of the northwest Kimberley region, Australia, comments that "one of the least pleasing features of savage life [in Australia] is the quarrelling that results from dissatisfactions over food sharing" (1936:73). Polly Weisner (personal communication, 1978) reports that over 60 percent of the topics in a sample of everyday !Kung conversations related to food and complaints about people's generosity. Game sharing is nowhere near as rule-bound as many accounts suggest.

Demand Sharing: Nonfood Exchange and Accumulation

Most of the evidence for demand sharing concerns food exchange; however, the same inertial principle is as evident in the unsolicited dynamic of generosity in nonfood exchange, although it may not be so common. Its general presence is indicated in a widespread feature of trading partnerships and exchanges: commonly the creditor goes to see the debtor. By presenting himself or herself, a creditor makes at least a nonverbal demand that the partner meet his or her obligations. It could be, of course, that the debtor has sent for the creditor; but this would leave the question of why the debtor does not arrive with the return gift. Here the calculus of interpersonal relations suggests that an egalitarian logic is at work: when the creditor visits the debtor, even if the visit is prearranged, there is a small but subtle loss of status that ameliorates to some degree the inequality created by the debt, putting a person on their best behavior in a situation that constrains his or her action.

Thomson, writing on ceremonial exchange in Arnhem Land, notes that there is an indigenous distinction between items surrendered because they were asked for and those a person gives because he or she likes to: the latter kind of gift is known as *wetj*. Nevertheless, Thomson still speaks of the "incessant demand for *wetj*" (1949:78, 68). Further, the term for exchange or barter is *djayyunamirri*—to take from one another—which, Thomson says, when used without qualification has almost the force of "steal," although there is a separate word for theft (1949:49).

On the Daly River, three kinds of movements of goods are named, and in at least two, the movement is initiated by demand. Short loans (*mima*) are claimed on the basis of friendship and have to be repaid as soon as possible in the exact form loaned (see Stanner 1934:462). In the *kue* marriage gift-exchange, Stanner says, the precipitating factor is the demand from the wife's parents, via their daughter, for the husband to make the *kue* (1934:459–461). The situation with respect to the third kind of exchange, the *merbok*, is more ambiguous, since Stanner uses the word "send" to describe the movement of goods without indicating who takes them. Even if they are spontaneously given most of the time, Stanner indicates that

men occasionally make special visits to see their merbok partner. If a partner is lagging a little in his merbok a man takes the first favourable opportunity of making a casual public reference to it (1933:161).

Demand sharing clearly makes accumulation difficult. However, accumulation is possible, and it occurs in three main spheres: money or artifacts for valued social purposes; wives/social relationships; and sacred objects/knowledge.⁷

Limited accumulation of money or artifacts can be achieved by declaring that they are to be dedicated to a specific valued social purpose, such as the purchase of a major capital item like a car, a ceremonial presentation, or one's children (see Altman 1985;

Sansom 1988). This protects the money or items in question from demands—but in the case of saving for the purchase of capital goods, not from demands to use or borrow once the item is acquired. Powerful Aboriginal men acquired several wives—and in some cases, many. Exactly what pressures were placed on such men to share their wives' labor power or sexuality is not well documented in the literature; but it seems highly likely, in the light of the construction of authority and deference, that they were subject to greater demands, at least in the flow of goods. It is recorded that Aboriginal men who had good access to income from mining royalties in the Oenpelli area seemed to have more kin—that is, more people claiming close kinship to them than to people who were less wealthy (Kesteven 1984:30). It is clear also that men and women seriously involved with local ceremonial life deliberately accumulated huge bodies of religious knowledge in the form of songs, designs, dances, stories, and myths, and that men in Central Australia accumulated large numbers of sacred boards and other objects. The ethnography does not indicate how these stores of sacred objects were managed, whether they were subject to demand, or, if so, how they were protected.

Demand Sharing and the Representation of Social Relations

Riches suggests that in small-scale societies with universal systems of kin classification and multiplex relationships, sustaining the obligation to give is a rational response. In such societies, where one may be involved in several different kinds of purposive activity with any one person, people can make high demands, he suggests, because they know that the person to whom the demands are directed is unlikely to jeopardize the existence of a connection in which many other vital interests are subsumed (1981:215). While this view is plausible in general terms, the fact that people do conceal things from each other and have no trouble lying to each other in the face of requests raises problems.

Myers recounts a case where the male leader of a Pintupi community hid cooked meat in a flour drum on hearing of the arrival of his close and generous relatives from a nearby community. One of them came across and asked whether he had any meat, to which he replied that he was empty-handed. The visitor clearly did not believe him in light of the evidence of cooking strewn about, and he proceeded—without rancor—to open various flour drums lying around until he found the meat (1988:59). Myers argues that property of all kinds is significant primarily for its ability to express autonomy or relatedness. The leader's polite rejection of his kinsmen through hiding was an expression of autonomy that did not lead to a repudiation of relatedness nor create conflict, because he had been generous enough in the past. The visitor's sense that he could search without offence was likewise an expression of his relatedness to the leader and at the same time a recognition of the leader's right to autonomy as expressed in hiding the meat, since in searching without rancor he accepted the likelihood of the leader's deception (1988:59–60). As Myers observes, there are nevertheless potential dangers in this kind of behavior that are clearly outlined in many Pintupi myths and evidenced in the splitting up of bands because of conflict over food.

Another difficulty for Riches's view is raised by Woodburn's (1982) observation that in the societies he designates as immediate-return (Mbuti, !Kung, Batek, Hadza, Paliyans, and Malapantaram), corresponding to those that Meillassoux (1973) would identify as hunter-gatherers, there is no expectation, even in the closest kin relationships, of strong moral commitment. Apparent indifference permeates interaction, allowing relatives to abandon the old or seriously ill and often to laugh at their misfortunes. A superego that acts as an impulse, ensuring that people feel they should do something even in the absence of others, seems to be diluted to a more pragmatic concern with being seen to do something when requested. Such a morality would seem to be congruent with the apparent indifference implied by demand sharing.

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his labor in specific social relations, apart from those with his parents-in-law, in order to establish future claims on those who have received meat from him. Strong, morally binding commitments to kin are created, he suggests, by the constant transmission of important goods and services characteristic of delayed-return societies; in such societies, demanding might be expected to be greatly diminished and to be replaced by more active servicing of obligations.

Demand sharing is clearly not confined, however, to immediate-return societies: it is also prevalent in delayed-return societies such as those of the Australians and, for example, the Inuit (Spencer 1969:164) and Siriono (Holmberg 1969:98), which renders this suggested association between demanding and the absence of load-bearing relationships problematic. The failure of kin to offer support before it is requested may not be, as Woodburn suggests, a moral indifference to their plight so much as, in part, a heightened sensitivity to the meaning of giving, which often constrains people to act only when faced with a demand. Thus, giving can be construed as both rude and dominating—even as an aggressive act—where large gifts are concerned. So, compassion may be present, but evoked only when people present themselves as lacking something (Myers 1986). This concern with the needs of the demander is reflected in the Batek and Semai belief that if a person refuses a demand, the demander may fall sick because his or her needs have been made evident but not met (see Endicott 1988:117).

If demand sharing is not predicated on an immediate return morality, neither is it clearly based on a simple normative kinship morality. That is, people are clearly not following prescriptive behavioral formulas in day-to-day sharing any more than they are in game sharing. As Myers has emphasized, relatedness has to be produced and maintained in social action, which suggests that seeing Aboriginal social relations in terms of what Sansom calls "a grammar of service exchanges" (1988:173), where the history and type of services rendered define the norms of interaction, has much to recommend it.

Sansom distinguishes three types of service. There are routine services of the daily *quid pro quo* variety; there are signal services that are rendered to people in great need and that incur a debt that is never completely eradicated; and there are dedicatory services, such as a mother renders to a child (or, less commonly, between two adults with closely entwined shared histories), which may be reciprocated only when the child reaches adulthood (1988:174). Many of the obligations that underwrite the economy of service exchange arise from the specific personal histories and patterns of nurture that have brought an individual to adulthood (D. Smith 1980), as much as any material exchange of goods. The giving of care, nourishment, protection, and support is the foundation for an extensive and highly personal system of reciprocal responsibilities, rights, and commitments on which the right to make claims and demands is founded and by which particular kinds of knowledge, experience, property, and authority are transmitted.

Demand sharing also relates to constructions of authority. In an elegant analysis of authority and ideology among the Pintupi, Myers has shown how demanding and deference go hand in hand (1986). The Pintupi term *kanyiminpa*, meaning to look after, is used in several senses: in particular, it is applied to parental care, especially as expressed in a mother holding her child; but it applies also to the relationship between successive generations. The senior generation holds the religious law and derives its authority from having undergone the process of transmission of the law from the generations senior to it. Collectively and individually, members of the senior generation are obliged to look after and nurture the succeeding generation, preparing them for holding the law. Hierarchy and authority thus come to be presented in the guise of concern and nurturing, and in consequence, generosity becomes the complement of authority. In return for respect and deference, the subordinate generation can legitimately make demands for goods on their relatives in the senior generation. Of course,

such demands are not made at random, but where a history of services leads to an expectation that they should or will be met. In the arena of noncontractual relationships, leaving people to ask is one way in which people secure the recognition of their status and authority; in the arena of contractual relations, it seems to serve as a constraint.

Demand sharing reflects the underlying tension Myers has identified between autonomy and relatedness that runs throughout Aboriginal life (1986). On the one hand, there is a socially created scarcity arising from the preparedness to recognize a widespread range of kinship ties that brings with it many demands, often more than can be easily met. On the other hand, the stresses of having too many social relationships to negotiate leads people to try to reduce demands by retreating into smaller groups, being passive in sharing, and keeping production to a minimum.

Conclusion

It seems, then, that there are ample ethnographic and intellectual grounds for assuming demand sharing to be an important and intrinsic feature of Aboriginal Australian social life and indeed of hunting and gathering societies more generally. This raises the question of why it has not received more attention and why it usually suffers the fate accorded to it in Hiatt's account: gaining a limited descriptive reference before being passed over.

One possibility is that it is a consequence of interviewing informants about their practices, which tends to put them on their best behavior and leads them to present a normative account. Such accounts are often neat and tidy and can mesh with romanticized views of other ways of life, thus reinforcing them, as in the case of game-sharing rules and the collective appropriation of nature.

More significantly, however, it reflects a paucity of information on the vernacular formulation of the ethic of sharing and its day-to-day practice, so that our own deeply held understandings and evaluations slip into the vacuum. These lead to a situation where, because the unsolicited giving associated with generosity by Westerners is seen as positive, the practice of demand sharing is seen as negative, since it is a damper on that generosity. But should the practice be construed negatively? Free giving in our own society is often informed by self-conscious strategy and assessment of what is appropriate, so there are no necessary grounds for negatively evaluating a different construction of the ethic of generosity simply because it may involve self-conscious strategy. Indeed, focusing an account of demand sharing on strategy is part of the problem, because it is really a deeply sedimented social practice often well removed from self-conscious calculation. From this perspective, if moral obligation and commitment to others is construed not in terms of giving freely, but in terms of responding positively to their demands, the morality of demand sharing is as positive as that of generosity.⁸

Another reason for the neglect of demand sharing could be that rather than being a behavior of long standing, it is a transitional phenomenon resulting from a breakdown in social obligations and surges in wealth differentials that the orthodox ethic of generosity cannot handle. However, demand sharing seems too deeply embedded in the daily practice of Aboriginal life and too integral to the tensions between autonomy and relatedness to be accounted for either by wealth differentials, disruption, poverty, or the entrenching of social inequality, although these things may have intensified the practice.

Demand sharing is a complex behavior that is not predicated simply on need. Depending on the particular social context, it may incorporate one, some, or all of the following elements. It may in part be a testing behavior to establish the state of a relationship in social systems where relationships have to be constantly produced and maintained by social action and cannot be taken for granted. It may in part be assertive behavior, coercing a person into making a response. It may in part be a substantiating

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behavior to make people recognize the demander's rights. And, paradoxically, a demand in the context of an egalitarian society can also be a gift: it freely creates a status asymmetry, albeit of varying duration and significance.

While demand sharing is prevalent in foraging societies, it is not apparently confined to them, as it has been reported among some Bantu-speaking pastoralists and Melanesian horticulturalists (e.g., Schieffelin 1990).⁹ Whether it is as fundamental to the constitution of social relations in these less egalitarian societies as it is among many foragers, where it reflects the tensions between autonomy and relatedness, is a matter for further inquiry.

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Notes

This is a much-modified version of a paper entitled "Reciprocity and the Demand for Generosity: Comments on the Ethnography of Sharing among Hunter-Gatherers," which was presented at the Fourth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, held at the London School of Economics in September 1986. I have greatly benefited from comments made by participants at that conference, where the term *demand sharing* was suggested, and also from conversations with David Martin. Thanks are due also to Grayson Gerrard, Francesca Merlan, John Morton, Alan Rumsey, Diane Smith, Peter Sutton, Franca Thomas, and the anonymous AA reviewers.

1. Schebeck (1967) is one person who has given attention to demand sharing. He wrote, "One gets the impression that the real terms of 'sharing' in this society are not a mutual giving, as is the case in our society, but a mutual taking" (1967:7); however, he sees this as directed only at the apparently rich non-Aboriginal outsiders.

2. I am indebted to Franca Thomas of the LSE, who has recently completed two years of fieldwork at Milingimbi, for this information.

3. It is of interest that Dixon (1973:206-208) records that the same Dyirbal mother-in-law language word *d'ayman* is used for "give" (*wugan*) and "breastfeed" (*gulnggan*), and if a distinction had to be made in the mother-in-law language, "breastfeed" would be rendered as *ngunngudu d'ayman*, which literally means "breast gives," nicely catching the decentered giving of demand sharing.

4. Something that appears like inertial generosity is the most common form of sharing among nonhuman primates. This is sometimes called "tolerated scrounging," but as Ingold points out, to equate human and nonhuman primate inertial generosity on the grounds of behavioral similarity is to omit the all-important consideration of intention (see Ingold 1986:114).

5. Gerrard provides an insightful analysis of the extraction of cash and/or commodities from Europeans in Arnhem Land in terms of "humbugging" (1989). *Humbugging* means, in its widest sense, to annoy or to win something to one's own advantage at the expense of someone else (1989:99). It is mainly directed at Europeans who are seen as having more to give than other Aboriginal people. Although it has a family resemblance to demand sharing, humbugging frequently circumvents any need for exchange (1989:106). This, she suggests, is because of the short period most Europeans spend in Aboriginal communities, which precludes the long-term reciprocal relationships that characterize Aboriginal "service economies"—see below (1989:108). *Humbugging* is an Aboriginal attempt to gain power over cash and goods, directed at influencing what and how much is received and when, instead of simply waiting for social security payments (1989:109).

6. Most, if not all, subsistence practices involve risk and uncertainty to some extent, as Susan Kent has emphasized to me; so the question is whether this is greater among foragers than among other peoples. I share her conviction that the risks faced by foragers are, in many situations, no greater than for dry-land farmers, nonirrigation horticulturalists, or pastoralists.

7. I thank Peter Sutton for raising this issue.

8. I thank Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey for clarifying and emphasizing this point.

9. A point made by two of the AA reviewers.

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