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Negotiating Age: Direct Speech and the Sociolinguistic Production of Childhood in the Marshall Islands

*Children in the Republic of the Marshall Islands regularly do a number of things that are inappropriate or even taboo among adults: they walk with food that they do not offer to share; they refuse to give; they directly demand things; and they directly criticize and insult each other. One explanation for their behavior is that they are too developmentally immature to speak in the indirect and polite manner of adults. But I show that, while Marshallese children's apparently direct forms of speech are indeed linked to immaturity, they are linked to immaturity not as a developmental stage but as a social status. Hence, this article reveals, discusses, and challenges two different ideologies of childhood and language: (1) a Western ideology that associates directness with developmental immaturity; and (2) a Marshallese ideology that associates "not hiding"—either words or goods—with being a child. Through their apparently direct forms of speech, children negotiate their relative age and power relationships with each other while simultaneously constructing each other as peers and indexing participants as immature relative to adults. This analysis reveals how age and childhood are produced through speech and considers the implications of this production for understandings of language variation and socialization. [Direct speech, childhood, language socialization, language ideologies, Marshall Islands, Oceania]**

Children played and chatted as they gathered in a church in Jajikon, a small village (population 250) on an outer atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). They were waiting for a rehearsal to start. Rōka, a five- or six-year-old boy,¹ wandered in to join them, sucking on a lollipop.

His roughly ten-year-old classificatory mother, Kinta, cried out, "Tok kijō!" (Give me my food!).² At that time, Rōka shared a house with Kinta's classificatory siblings. Kinta also sometimes slept there.

Rōka grudgingly gave Kinta a brief lick. Then he snatched the lollipop back.

"Aolepen" (All of it), Kinta demanded. Rōka ignored her.

"Ekwe" (Okay), inserted Kol. "Letok bwe ña in kiji" (Give it to me so that I can bite it). Like Kinta, Kol was also around ten years old. He was Rōka's classificatory father, though he spent less time at Rōka's residence than Kinta.

Rōka ignored him.

"Ekwe" (Okay), Kol said, "Idike yok" (I hate you).

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Everything that Rōka, Kinta, and Kol said or did in this interaction is inappropriate or even taboo among Marshallese adults. In the RMI, good people are *jouj* 'kind'—they care for others and respect others' desires. People present themselves as *jouj* through giving and through cooperative interactions. Hence, adults hide food that they do not intend or wish to give, and they avoid direct requests, refusals, and criticisms so as not to appear stingy or uncooperative (Berman 2012; cf. Howard 1970 on similar practices in Hawai'i).

Although the kind of interaction presented above is taboo and would not occur among Marshallese adults, it is quite typical among Marshallese children. Their inclination to directly disagree and challenge each other also seems to be characteristic of children elsewhere (e.g., Boggs 1978; Corsaro and Rizzo 1990; Evaldsson 2005; Goodwin 1990, 2006; Lein and Brenneis 1978; Rizzo 1992). Goodwin and Alim (2010:183) note that "conflict is ubiquitous in children's conversations. . . . Opposition moves are built in ways that clearly demonstrate an orientation towards displaying disagreement rather than deference."

Why do Rōka, Kinta, and Kol disagree rather than defer? Why do they directly demand things and refuse to give rather than using indirect speech to avoid conflict, like adults? The simple answer, and the one that Marshallese adults give, is, because they are children. According to adults, children lack the "thoughts" and "shame" that compel adults to "hide" their acts of not-giving, asking, and demanding. Similarly, as we will see, some academic traditions explicitly or implicitly assume a developmental trajectory from directness to indirectness. Such traditions tend to portray direct speech as less social and as part of the realm of the immature.

Although Marshallese children's apparently direct forms of speech are indeed linked to immaturity, I argue that they are linked to immaturity not as a developmental stage, but as a social status. In what follows, I reveal, discuss, and challenge two different ideologies: (1) the Western ideology that associates directness with an immature developmental stage, and (2) the Marshallese ideology that associates "not hiding" with being a child. The interaction between Rōka, Kinta, and Kol is a struggle to claim control over persons and possessions. Since such control, in the RMI, is an index of greater age, through this struggle, they negotiate their relative age relationships with each other. The forms of speech that they use, however, are inappropriate among adults. Ironically, by working to raise their age relative to each other, Rōka, Kinta, and Kol simultaneously mark themselves as peers who are immature relative to adults, revealing how age and childhood are produced through speech.

We know that childhood is at least partly a social construct and that understandings of the life course, as well as experiences of childhood, differ across cultures and contexts (e.g., Alanen 2014; James and Prout 1990; Lancy 2008; LeVine 2007; Stephens 1995). But we still know relatively little about the linguistic practices through which people construct themselves as children in opposition to others or about how age differences are made and marked. In this article, I present an analysis of how people take on aged identities and of how culturally specific ideologies of immaturity come to be. I also challenge an ideological association between directness and immaturity, shedding new light on language variation and socialization.

Direct Speech and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Childhood

There is a tendency in scholarly work to view direct, impolite, or conflict-provoking speech as easier and more natural than their opposites. This tendency is evident in Brown and Levinson's (1987) account of politeness, in which they present indirectness as a central way in which people maintain social relationships by restraining their individualistic and antisocial desires. It is also evident in scholars' former disinclination to study conflict because it was supposedly detrimental to social order,

as pointed out by Goodwin (1990), Kulick (1993), and Pagliai (2010a). Finally, this tendency is present in the developmental-psychological assumption that children acquire direct speech first (see review and critique in Gibbs 1994; see also Pollio et al. 1977; Prinz 1983; Winner 1997), and in the pragmatic tradition of Searle (1969, 1975) and Grice (1989). According to this "traditional" pragmatic view (Gibbs 1994:60), understanding indirect or nonliteral speech is more difficult than understanding literal speech because the former requires a longer inferential chain based on an utterance's literal meaning (e.g., Giora et al. 1998; Temple and Honeck 1999). In other words, direct and/or impolite speech is easy partly because it is a transparent reference either to something in the world or to some aspect of the speaker's inner life.

Although linguistic anthropologists have challenged this privileging of reference and/or intention over other types of meaning and have shown that speaking transparently takes a good deal of work (Carr 2010; Danziger 2010; Du Bois 1993; Duranti 1988; Keane 2002; Rosaldo 1982; Silverstein 1979; Woolard 1998), few have discussed the implications of the standard pragmatic view for ideas of development. Specifically, by assuming connections among simplicity, directness, and impoliteness, scholars create an impression that children naturally speak more directly and simply and hence less politely, than adults. Even in anthropology, a comparative lack of studies of the socialization of impoliteness and directness, in contrast to a wealth of research into the socialization of politeness and indirectness, suggests an implicit bias toward the idea that direct speech need not be socialized as explicitly or as rigorously as indirect speech (Blum-Kulka 1997; Boggs 1978; Burdelski 2012; Clancy 1986; Demuth 1986; Field 2001; Gleason 1980; Park 2006; Schieffelin 1990; Smith-Hefner 1999; Tessonneau 2005; but see Garrett 2005 for an exception). To a certain extent, such an assumption is inadvertently perpetuated by a greater focus on arguments in studies of children and on avoiding or resolving conflict in studies of adults. Such foci create an apparent contrast between direct children and indirect adults (Danby and Theobald 2012; Watson-Gegeo and White 1990).

There are numerous problems with assumptions of a developmental trajectory from direct to indirect and from impolite to polite. First, all forms of language are socialized (Ochs and Schieffelin 2012). Second, studies show that children's disputes, much like impoliteness and conflict among adults, serve social goals (Boggs 1978; Bousfield and Locher 2008; Briggs 1996; Goodwin 2006; Pagliai 2010b). Since characterizations of speech and actions as "polite" depend on context, youths' behavior is appropriate to their social position and is not impolite but "politic" (Tetreault 2010). Third, children may not actually acquire direct and literal speech first. Psychologists and anthropologists have shown that people do not necessarily comprehend the literal meaning of an utterance more quickly than its non-literal meaning, and that even very young children use and comprehend various types of figurative language (Boggs 1978; Gibbs 1994). Finally, classifications of speech as direct or indirect are problematic. Silverstein (2010) asserts that such a classification is itself ideological, while Bosco and Bucciarelli (2008) argue that utterances should be classified as simple or complex and that indirect simple utterances are acquired at the same time as direct simple ones (see also Kiesling 2010).

If these arguments are accurate, why do children often appear to be more direct than adults? This question is relevant for early as well as middle childhood. In the RMI, as we will see, even older children use forms of speech that adults avoid and that seem to fit Searle's (1975) definition of "direct" speech acts. One possible explanation of their behavior is that there is a correlation between what we see as directness and something else that is developmentally prior (but nonetheless socialized), such as short or simple utterances. Another explanation, not necessarily incompatible with the first, is that forms of speech that seem to be "direct" are sometimes, in different ways in different places, connected to childhood as a social status.

The tendency to assume that “direct” speech is less socialized and the natural domain of children is essentially ideological, an example of interpreting indexical associations between speech and social status as iconic representations (Irvine and Gal 2000) of children’s inherent nature: their developmental immaturity. Since ideologies often interact with practices to produce the forms of speech that they represent, different ideologies in different places may both reflect and create forms of speech that some people in the West interpret as direct. Indeed, although the Marshallese do not make a distinction between direct and indirect speech, adults do say that children “hide” and “lie” less than adults because they are too young to do otherwise. Acts of “not hiding” or “not lying” in the RMI can look similar to “direct” forms of speech.

Hence, immaturity—which I define as a trait attributed to people or practices seen as not yet fully social, typically children—is an ideological construct, not just a physical or developmental stage. Like all such ideological constructs, it contributes to, and stems from, the production and negotiation of linguistic and social difference (Irvine and Gal 2000). Specifically, characterizations of people as immature or mature often serve to differentiate people according to age.

Language socialization work clearly shows that speech changes with age (Duranti et al. 2012). In addition to studies of how children learn various forms of speech and cultural practices (e.g., Clancy 1986; Heath 1983; Ochs 1988; Paugh 2012b; Schieffelin 1990; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), work on peer language socialization often discusses forms of speech specific to the peer context (Boggs 1978; 1985; Evaldsson 2005; Goodwin 1990; Howard 2007; Katriel 1987; Kyratzis 2004; Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp 1999). For example, disputes among younger part-Hawai’ian children differ from those among older children and adolescents in the same community (Boggs 1978); Zinacantec siblings produce their own sibling and peer culture through playing with and subverting adult sociolinguistic rules and genres (de León 2007); and Kwara’ae children have a child-mode presentation of self in which they mark themselves as not adult (Watson-Gegeo 2001). Some of the most extensive analyses of age-graded speech patterns come from studies of language shift that reveal how different linguistic codes get attached to different generations (Garrett 2005, 2007; Kulick 1992; Meek 2007; Paugh 2012b). These shifts may relate to ideologies of children’s speech: as in the RMI, the people of Gapun (Papua New Guinea) interpret children’s utterances as particularly aggressive because they view children as naturally willful and headstrong (Kulick 1992). These works show that children may be socialized into practices inappropriate or uncommon among adults, as in the case of Mayan children who learn not to be responsible for their words (Berman 2011; Reynolds 2008), and Samoan children who curse and index themselves as being of low social status (Ochs 1993; Platt 1986).

Nonetheless, most language socialization work focuses on the production of something else—linguistic forms and genres, gender or racial identities, power structures and social organization, relationships, language shift or bilingualism, even peer cultures—rather than, ironically, age itself (Coupland 2004; Eckert 1998; Suslak 2009). For example, Kulick (1992) and Boggs (1978) do not explicitly consider how the ideologies and practices that they discuss are involved in the production of age and childhood. Moreover, most studies of age-graded speech deal primarily with language shift and do not fully or explicitly address the production of speech that is regarded as immature and thus becomes inappropriate for children’s use as they become adults (Garrett 2005; 2007; Meek 2007; Paugh 2012b). Finally, with some exceptions (Boggs 1978; Ochs 1993; Watson-Gegeo 2001), studies of linguistic forms tend to focus on either changing or mature forms, as opposed to markedly immature ones. For example, Schieffelin (1990) analyzes how interactions socialize Kaluli children into appropriate modes of avoiding giving, but does not discuss how children learn the nonappropriate forms of avoiding giving that they eventually must leave

behind. Even Briggs (1998), in her ethnographic account of an Inuit baby's transition out of babyhood, does not include a discussion of the child-specific nonadult forms to which babies turn.

As a result, the anthropological study of childhood and of language socialization has some significant gaps. In the anthropology of childhood, the now extensive literature on the social construction of childhood and other life stages needs to be backed up by linguistic research into the production of those age categories through the use of signs in interaction. In language socialization research, there is a need for explicit analysis of the production of age categories because, in all situations, regardless of whether or not language shift is occurring, before children learn to be adults, they learn to be different from adults. This suggests that we should see socialization as the constant and continuous production of difference, particularly age differences.

In what follows, I begin by discussing what it means to be a child in the RMI and the relationship between relative age and power. By analyzing the interaction among Rōka, Kinta, and Kol with which this article began, I then show how they negotiate their relative age and power relationships and constitute each other as children. Finally, I discuss how children's use of speech indexes them as immature and likely also socializes them into immaturity and childhood.

Fieldwork in the Marshall Islands

I have spent a total of 26 months in the Marshall Islands. For 12 months in 2009–2010 and 2 months in 2012, I lived with a family on Jajikon. I engaged in participant observation with adults and children, recorded and analyzed naturally occurring conversations, videotaped eight focal children between the ages of 8 and 12 years once a month, and interviewed adults and children. I observed and coded adult–child interactions as well as interactions between peers. Many of my video recordings, including the interaction between Rōka, Kinta, and Kol, come from a camera that children wore on their heads, a novel method that I call Passive First-Person Recording (Berman 2013).

When speaking with other Marshallese people, Marshallese people in the RMI speak almost exclusively in Marshallese, an indigenous Micronesian language.³ The Pacific archipelago of the Marshall Islands was colonized by Germany in the 1800s and subsequently passed to Japanese and then American control before achieving independence in the 1980s (Hezel 1983). Combined effects of globalization, American nuclear testing from the 1940s to the 1960s, the continued American military presence, and a Compact of Free Association with the United States have led to forced migrations from native land, migrations to the United States, an influx of unevenly distributed U.S. money, and rapid urbanization in two parts of the archipelago (Barker 2004; Hezel 1983, 2001; Niedenthal 2001).

These and other changes have doubtless influenced child speech. For example, most children do not know many older ritual words. It is not clear, however, whether or how other aspects of speech have changed. As far as I am aware, my research is the first ethnographic analysis of Marshallese children and of recordings of naturally occurring speech in conversational contexts.

While this lack of historical data means that it is possible that the differences between children and adults that I discuss constitute cohort differences, all current evidence points to them as markers not of social change, but of cultured patterns of development. The Marshallese emphasis on giving represents continuity with, rather than a break from, the past (Walsh 2003). In Jajikon, a rural village not affected by nuclear testing, people still subsist largely through a combination of farming coconut meat to sell for money, fishing, cultivating crops, and remittances. When asked how children have changed, adults say only that children are naughtier and work less than they used

to. These comments reflect their view (accurate or not) that it is only children's obedience to adults that has changed, not their modes of getting out of giving to their peers. Children's direct forms of speech are indexically attached to their supposed developmental stage, and not to generational differences.

Being a "Child" in the RMI

The Marshallese word *ajri* has both a definite and a relative meaning. In its definite sense, it means 'child' and refers to people who are older than babies (*niñniñ*) but younger than youth (*jodrikdrik*) and adults (*rütto*) (Carucci 1985). These categories have no specific boundaries, so classifications of people shift. The only rite of passage in the RMI is a child's first birthday (*keemem*), which merely begins the slow and gradual passage from babyhood to childhood (Carucci 1985). In addition, there is no distinction between early and middle childhood, although persons in what psychologists call early childhood are classified as babies more often than others. Consequently, although my focus in the field was on older children, and although the form of sociality that I outline below seems to be a prototypically middle-childhood phenomenon, I avoid making a distinction between early and middle childhood. As we will see, the relative meaning of the word *ajri* can either distinguish people whom we would call toddlers from people such as Kinta and Kol or group them all together.

Although the boundaries of childhood are fuzzy, there are some people who are clearly children and others who are clearly not. Specifically, children do a number of things that mark them as a social group. They stand together in the children's line for food at parties, separated both from adults (*rütto*), who stand in a separate line, and from babies (*niñniñ*), who do not stand in line at all. Post-pubescent youth stand in either of the lines, as they choose. Just as the word *ajri* (child) is logically opposed to the word *rütto* (adult) (Carucci 1985:110), these lines construct childhood in opposition to adulthood and collapse youth into one or the other of the two categories. Children also tend to socialize with other children, rather than with adults, and spend much of their time in play with each other, without elder supervision (Berman 2012). Since child-child caregiving is common, those elders are often other children (Gallimore et al. 1974; Morton 1996). Time away from elder supervision increases slowly as babies turn into children, just as the relative amount of time spent in play versus work diminishes gradually as children grow. Finally, children sing with the Sunday school group at church and go to school during the week. Since school in Jajikon ends at eighth grade, people past eighth grade either do not go to school or live in the capital, thus marking themselves as no longer completely children.

These bonds of solidarity that tie children together and mark them as members of a social group mean that children are supposed to share with each other (Katriel 1987; Mauss 1990[1950]). Generosity is valued across the Pacific and across the life course in Jajikon (Mauss 1990[1950]; Schieffelin 1990; Strathern 1988). Jajikonians see generosity as central to both Marshallese and Christian (everyone is Christian) ways of life (Rudiak-Gould 2010). As an 11-year-old girl explained, "Enana tör . . . Rej jar im relax ba, an won tör? Im re ba an satan" (It is bad to be greedy. . . . They go to church and they say, to whom does greediness belong? And they say, it belongs to the devil).

The importance of generosity means that, ideally, people should share with everyone. In practice, of course, people often do not give. People put more pressure to give on those with whom they are closer, including those to whom they are closer in age. As one child said, «Children share with children.» And indeed, I constantly saw children sharing with each other (Katriel 1987; Schieffelin 1990). They passed bracelets back and forth, distributed marbles or pieces of candy, gave their few toys to kin and siblings, and invited other children to "eat" and to share their food—often, even food that was already in their mouths—creating bonds of solidarity through exchange.

Ajri means not only 'child' but also 'immature person' (Carucci 1985). In this use, *ajri* as well as *rūtto* 'adult/mature person/old' are fundamentally relational terms that designate some people as younger or older than others. For example, a woman in her late twenties referred to herself as an "immature person (*ajri*)" in comparison to an older kinsman in his forties who was "really old/mature (*rūtto*)." A woman who sent her three-year-old son on an errand justified it by saying, «because you are mature/a big boy (*rūtto*).» A ten-year-old girl chastised someone who hit a four-year-old by saying, «Do not hit immature people (*ajri*).»

These relative age distinctions affect the ties of solidarity discussed earlier. While people who play every day in multi-age groups, as all children do, are in some ways all bound together as "children (*ajri*)," children also preferentially give to specific others—inevitably, people apparently close in age and, generally, people of the same gender—whom they call "friends (*mōttan*)." As one boy said, he would not give to children who "are not friends."

On the one hand, *Rōka*, *Kinta*, and *Kol* are all the same insofar as they are all children, grouped together by an age distinction that posits them as similar to each other and different from others—as people obligated to share with each other. On the other hand, these three individuals also exist in age relationships with each other that mark *Rōka* as an *ajri* 'immature person' relative to *Kinta* and *Kol*.

Relative Age and Power

In the RMI and throughout Oceania, relative age is linked to relative power (Boggs 1985; Brison 1999; Mead 1928; Morton 1996). People who are older ideally, and often practically, wield power over those who are younger.⁴

This power consists partly of control over material wealth. More powerful people such as elders and chiefs should have more than others. Their wealth obligates them to be especially generous (see also Barlow 2010; Howard 1970; Keating 2000; Peterson 1999; Sahlins 1963). As one man explained,

It is said that the eldest [sibling]. . . is generous. He or she will be more generous than the people who are younger. . . . God made him or her the eldest so that he or she will be generous and good to people.

With power comes responsibility, specifically, the responsibility to be benevolent.

In addition to control over wealth, those with power have control over people. While elders' gifts are acts of benevolence in which they choose to engage, those with less power are supposed to be deferent and to obey their elders (Berman 2012:61–64). Thus, a woman feared to challenge her older uncle whom she claimed never paid her back for cigarettes, explaining, «He is very old (*rūtto*).» Similarly, a woman said that she helped an elder kinswoman who asked her to make handicrafts because "she is old." As in Polynesia, where children and youth move and engage in physical activity for their elders (Boggs 1985; Brison 1999; Morton 1996; Ochs 1993; Shore 1982), children are at the bottom of this hierarchy and are supposedly at the beck and call of people older than they, including older children. "Go and bring my backpack from over there," a ten-year-old boy commanded his six-year-old next-door neighbor; the six-year-old ran off to retrieve it.

Children mark their lower status by *mijak* 'fearing' their elders, a fear that leads them to obey. Every single child whom I asked said that she or he was "scared" of adults. All children whom I asked also named other children whom they feared because they were older. One boy said that of course he was scared of two other boys, explaining his fear by exclaiming, "But they are old

(*rūtto*)!" A nine-year-old girl feared her cousin "because she is old (*rūtto*)." This fear of older children is not shameful, but appropriate, a sign of respect (Brisson 1999).

Producing Relative-Age Relationships

But how does one know who is older? Such a question is particularly relevant in the case of Rōka, who had moved to Jajikon only a couple of weeks before the interaction in church. Chronological age, after all, has little meaning in the RMI. Moreover, while most kinship terms such as "elder sibling (*jei-*)" and "younger sibling (*jat-*)" encode relative-age relationships, people often pragmatically renegotiate kin relations and most people are potentially related to each other in numerous ways. Although status may be conferred by things that are supposedly out of one's control, such as age or inherited rank, in practice, such statuses are often negotiated, marked, and produced in interaction (Boggs 1985; Cicourel 1972; Goffman 1967; Howard 2012). In situations where age is tied to power, through negotiating power, people also negotiate their relative age (see also Howard 2007, 2012). In other words, like power, age is "emergent and interactionally achieved" (Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012:382). In the RMI, children negotiate relative age through attempts to assert their control over people and possessions: through public displays of having things, resisting others' demands to give, forcing others to give, and threatening and criticizing others for not giving.

Conspicuous Consumption

Rōka initiated a struggle to control material wealth by entering the church while sucking on a lollipop, an act of conspicuous consumption of a kind that is quite common among children. I constantly saw children wandering around with fruit, candy, and food that they did not share with others.

Like conspicuous consumption in other times and places (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1919), Marshallese children's conspicuous consumption is a presentation of the self (Goffman 1959). Children regularly evaluated other children who displayed their possessions as *kanbar* or *kakōl* 'show-offs.' As one girl complained about another, "Ekijōñ kakōl im ba ejjab letok kijō" (She always shows off and doesn't give me my food). Children interpret conspicuous consumption as an act of differentiation that affords people power by establishing a person as being in control of material wealth.

Marshallese children's acts of conspicuous consumption are typically silent displays that serve to balance the competing demands of power and solidarity. Consciously or unconsciously, Rōka's seemingly nonchalant manner of wandering around while eating a lollipop created the impression that his consumption was not a deliberate performance, but an intended consequence of joining the children in church. Such silent displays allow children to make claims to the status that control over material wealth affords while also minimizing the potential for such claims to fracture ties of solidarity and good will between children and friends.

Here, a comparison to some other acts of conspicuous consumption is informative. On another occasion, Tōta, a girl close to Rōka in size and therefore probably also age, wandered around with food in front of her younger cousin. Unlike Kinta and Kol, the cousin did not ask for her food, denying Tōta evidence that her cousin noticed her display of power. So Tōta resorted to speech, taunting, "Iba, kwe jel? . . . Kwaar jab ba" (I said, is your mouth watering? . . . You didn't say). Her cousin responded, "Idike yok bwe kwōjjab letok kijō" (I hate you because you aren't giving me my food). After a brief dispute, the cousin changed the subject and made her own claim to possessing property that Tōta

could not access: “Ekwe” (Okay), she said, “jab tok ñan m̄weien” (don’t come to the house). Ironically, the house to which her cousin referred was in fact Tōta’s own house. But the cousin was better at using words than Tōta, and thus linguistically claimed the house as her own. Tōta prompted her cousin’s aggressive response by not allowing the food that she had to speak for itself. Her conspicuous consumption failed as a display of control over wealth partly because she resorted to speech.

Since control over wealth is an index of greater relative age, conspicuous consumption is not only a display of power, but also a performance of age. Through such a performance, Rōka marks himself as old enough relative to the other children to have gained control over a lollipop as well as someone who does not fear other children and their inevitable demands. Tōta’s failed performance, in contrast, marks her as someone who is not old enough or powerful enough, relative to her cousin, to control material wealth.

Claiming Authority

Such a display challenges both the ties of solidarity that bind Rōka to other children and the power that older children claim over him. Since it is most challenging to either close friends or elder kin, it makes sense that it is people who understand themselves as elder kin to Rōka, such as Kinta and Kol, who demand repeatedly that Rōka give:

Transcript 1.1⁵

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 1 | Rōka | ((enters the church while sucking on a lollipop)) |
| 2 | Kinta | Tok kijō
Give me my food |
| 3 | Rōka | ((he is off-screen, but Kinta’s next utterance suggests that Rōka allows him a brief lick and then takes the lollipop back)) |
| 4 | Kinta | Aolepen
All of it |
| 5 | Kol | Ekwe letok bwe ña in kiji
Okay give it to me so that I can bite it |
| 6 | | ((another child speaks)) |
| 7 | Kol | Ekwe idike yok
Okay I hate you ((to Rōka)) |
| 8 | | Ña ij bwinbwin ñan lalem
I am going to count to five |
| 9 | Kinta | () |
| 10 | Kol | Juon
One |
| 11 | | Ruo jilu emen
Two three four |
| 12 | Rōka | Itok
Come |
| 13 | | Ekwe kwōn itok
Okay you should come ((to Kol, presumably indicating that he will give Kol some food)) |
| 14 | Kinta | LaRōka ah letok kijed!
Hey, Rōka, give me my food! |

Upon seeing Rōka sucking on a lollipop, Kinta demands, “Give me my food” (line 2). Her sing-song prosody reflects the fact that her demand and its form are associated with a regular routine between children. The form of her command indexes her ability, or effort, to control both Rōka and the lollipop. Kinta once explicitly rejected my hypothesis that, if sent on an errand by her grandparents to ask for salt fish from her aunt, she would say, “Letok jidik jol” (Give me a little salt fish). Instead, she explained, she would say “Komaroñ letok jidik jol” (Can you give me a little salt fish), using the politeness marker *komaroñ* ‘can you.’ In contrast, when speaking to Rōka, Kinta avoids politeness markers and deletes as many words as possible, shortening *letok* ‘give me’ to *tok* ‘toward me’ (line 2). She also emphasizes that the lollipop is already hers, thereby also emphasizing her power and control over wealth, by using the possessive classifier for food, *kij-*, and putting it in the first person, *kijō* ‘my food’. Although the first person is the only grammatically correct way to request something in Marshallese if one includes a possessive classifier, Kinta could have avoided a classifier entirely (as she did in her hypothetical request for salt fish); she could have said, “Give me that lollipop by you (*loli ne*).”

Rōka responds by giving Kinta a brief lick, implicitly acknowledging Kinta’s right to share his wealth as either a fellow child or an elder (line 3). Then he snatches the lollipop back. Kinta is not satisfied: “All of it,” she demands (line 4). But Rōka ignores her, his continued control over the lollipop challenging Kinta’s power over him and her status as his elder. Then Kol joins the conversation, demanding, “Give it to me so that I can bite it” (line 5). Kol’s utterance, like Kinta’s, is clearly a demand that lacks any politeness markers and marks his position as someone who expects to be obeyed. This demand could also position Kol as potentially more powerful than Kinta, as she is only able to get a lick. But Rōka ignores Kol as well.

So Kol declares, “I hate you” (line 7). This declaration serves two interactional goals. First, like a demand, it puts pressure on Rōka to share. Kol counts to five after declaring, “I hate you,” indicating, as my Marshallese research assistant explained, that he is going to hate Rōka if Rōka does not give by the count of five (lines 8–11). As his mild, matter-of-fact prosody shows, he is not really angry with Rōka, but wants him to give. Indeed, “I hate you” is one of children’s regular responses when other children withhold possessions and is a phrase that registers their disapproval (Berman 2012). This declaration reasserts Kol’s status in the face of Rōka’s challenge to his power. Letting Rōka’s resistance go without comment would be an implicit admission that Kol is indeed weak enough that Rōka can defy him.

The way in which insults such as “I hate you” mark their speakers as older and more powerful is clear from the fact that children situated as younger than others generally do not criticize or insult their elders who do not give (see also Boggs 1985). Later on in the same day, Kol found himself with food. Numerous children roughly Rōka’s size surrounded him and demanded their share. “LaKol letok kijō lo!” (Kol, dude, give me my food!), a girl said, asserting herself as old enough to expect that Kol should give. Although Kol initially shared some of his food, he then chose to strategically divide the rest of it with a friend in his class at school. “Örra edik” (Ugh, it’s too small), Kol declared. “Kōjro enaaḡ ṃōñā nabōḡ, kōjro wōt men e” (The two of us will eat outside, this stuff is only for the two of us). The children whom he excluded did not criticize him. By refraining from speaking, they acknowledged that he was sufficiently older than they to have the power and the right to control his food.

Co-constituting Children

Ironically, in struggling to differentiate themselves from one another, Rōka, Kinta, and Kol simultaneously mark themselves as children and peers. As Transcript 1.2 will show, Kinta and Kol’s repetitions of their demands, criticisms, and threats, as well as Rōka’s eventual direct resistance of Kinta and Kol, identify this interaction as a child–child-specific activity.

The control afforded by greater age comes with responsibility. This responsibility includes an expectation that those who are older should give a lot to those who are younger and should not take things from them. As one adult eldest brother explained, he did not regularly ask for things from his younger siblings because his power would obligate them to give. Such potential for abuse of power arises in relationships between adults and children as well as between children and babies.

Consequently, although adults constantly command children to do work or to stop being annoying, and criticize or threaten children who disobey, they rarely command children to give (Berman 2012). Similarly, children only occasionally try to wheedle toys and food from babies, people whom children and adults alike indulge. On the few occasions when adults and children do demand things, neither adults (toward children) nor children (toward babies) exert much force to compel a gift. Even in exceptional cases, as when a birth mother demanded food numerous times from a child who had been adopted away from her (possibly as an attempt to reinforce her position as the child's mother), demands are not followed up with any threats or criticisms. Similarly, a 13-year-old tried to get a cookie from a baby several months short of her first birthday. When the baby did not let go, the 13-year-old gave up; she did not declare, like Kol, "I hate you!" Such behavior would be pointless, since babies do not have the sense to respond or to obey. The mother and the 13-year-old in these examples may very well be socializing the babies to share, as opposed to, or in addition to, trying to get food from them. (It is likewise unclear whether Kinta and Kol really want Rōka's lollipop.) In any case, the relevant point here is that the ways in which they interact with the babies differ from the way in which Kinta and Kol interact with Rōka.

Hence, by demanding Rōka's food, Kinta and Kol run the risk of constructing themselves as people who take food from the mouths of babes. Consider the case of Nomi, a girl roughly Kinta's age. On a different occasion, Nomi said to Pokri, a younger kinswoman around Rōka's age who was chewing gum, "Boktok kijō bwil" (Bring me my gum). When Pokri did not give, Nomi threatened, "Koban tok im aluij" (You won't watch movies). At that point, ironically, Kinta intervened. "Kijem ñe bwe kwar kañe" (It's your food because you chewed it), she said. Here, Kinta took on the mantle of an elder sufficiently removed in age from the girl that it was her job to make sure that the girl had food and was able to keep it. By saying "because you chewed it," as an adult would say to a child or a child to a baby, she positioned (1) herself as in a life stage different from Pokri's; (2) Nomi as abusive of her power; and (3) Pokri as an "immature person" (*ajri*) who needed to be protected.

In contrast, Kol and Kinta's repeated demands that Rōka give position Rōka as defiant, as opposed to babyish. Kol reinforces this construction by declaring, "I hate you," marking Rōka as someone who is old enough to be hated. Similarly, by initially giving to Kinta, Rōka shows that he is capable of responding to demands while his simultaneous acts of defiance indicate that he is old enough to defend himself.

Any positioning of Rōka as defiant necessarily marks Kol and Kinta as people not abusive of their power and as people close enough in age to Rōka that it is reasonable for them to make demands. Indeed, when Kinta switches to the first-person inclusive plural *kijed* (line 14), she gives up some of her claim to the power of age. Her grammar reflects a common rhetorical strategy that children use when resisting their elders. When children object to an errand, they often declare, "Jemijak," which means literally 'We are scared' but is perhaps better translated as "It is scary." Through such an utterance, children construct the errand itself as scary, as opposed to themselves as disobedient. Such a grammatical construction minimizes the speaker's claim to power while giving the speaker's utterance moral force by framing his or her requests, feelings, or actions not as idiosyncratic, but as shared by others.

Rōka, Kinta, and Kol further co-constitute each other as relatively similar in age, and thus as all *ajri* (children) in the life-stage sense, as their interaction continues. Also involved now is Krino, a ten-year-old boy who is Kol's neighbor and Rōka's classificatory father.

Transcript 1.2

15	Krino	LaRōka ah lelok kijen liKinta Hey, Rōka, give Kinta her food
16	Kol	[Rōka ah tok kijō] Rōka, give me my food
17	Kinta	[Koban lale eni] You won't watch us playing tag
18	Krino	Jab lelok kijen LaKol! Don't give Kol food!
19	((10.4-second pause; another conversation, between other children, is taking place))	
20	Kinta	LaRōka ah Hey, Rōka
21	((6.4-second pause as the other children continue talking))	
22	Kinta	LaRōka ah! Hey, Rōka! ((stretching out her hand for the lollipop))
23	Rōka	[Eñe ippa] Here it is with me ((brandishing the lollipop in the air))
24	Kinta	Ah ñe koboke jim̄mam enaj mane yok Ah if you take it your grandfather will hit you
25	Kol	Jidik wōt Just a little
26	Rōka	Ah iban! Ah I won't!
27		Iban! I won't!
28	Kol	()
29	Kinta	Kijō! My food!
30	((other children talking))	
31	Kol	Etan bar kain kane? What is the name of that kind of thing again?
32		Ah ña kij jidik wōt Ah I am only going to bite a little off
33	Krino	((singing))
34	Krino	Letok kijō ɭo LaRōka ɭo Rōka, dude, give me my food, dude
35	Kol	((changes the subject and yells at some younger children to sit down))
36	Child	Ekōk letok kijō Ugh, give me my food
37	Kol	Kwōn baj miin wōt ɭe Man, you are really stingy

Kol and Kinta, joined by others, collectively demand nine times (in addition to four times previously) that Rōka give. This considerable amount of repetition secures the construction of Rōka as defiant, as opposed to babyish/immature, and of Kinta and Kol as young enough for their demands to be reasonable. Kinta's threats do the same thing (lines 17 and 24). Here, she tries to put on the mantle of an elder by imitating adults who regularly threaten disobedient children. But her attempt backfires. First, she issues a threat in response to a failure to give, as opposed to a failure to work. Like Kol's declaration "I hate you," Kinta's threat constructs her as young enough that Rōka has an obligation to give to her. Second, although the "your grandfather will hit you" threat is something that adults might say, the "You won't watch us playing tag" threat is not.

Third, Rōka explicitly defies both Kinta and Kol, thereby marking them both as young enough to be defied, i.e., as non-adults. First, in response to one of Kinta's pleas, Rōka takes conspicuous consumption to a new level by yelling, "Here it is with me" and brandishing his lollipop in the air (line 23). He taunts Kinta (and the other children) by using words and gestures that emphasize his control over his lollipop. Second, after Kinta tries another threat and Kol pleads "Just a little," Rōka raises his voice and declares "I won't! I won't!" (lines 26–27). Before this moment, Rōka had used children's preferred mode of avoiding giving: ignoring demands. Children regularly ignore demands from friends as well as from children more distant in age and from adults, using silence to avoid explicitly presenting themselves as stingy or making a claim to power that could break ties of solidarity with friends or challenge adults' authority (Berman 2012:284–287). I have no examples of friends explicitly refusing each other, as Rōka did, or of children explicitly refusing adults. But children do refuse non-friend children, presumably because they are more willing to risk the social dangers inherent in such behavior. As we have seen, Kol refused—perhaps more politely than Rōka, but no less obviously—to give to numerous other children. On another occasion, ten-year-old Nomi, after spending some minutes resisting her 14-year-old cousin's demand for her bracelet, eventually said, "LiJaki iban kwonaaj aje beñkol e ao" (Jaki, I won't; you are going to share my bracelet). In Nomi's case, as in Rōka's (lines 26–27), the use of the first-person singular prefix *i* and the negative future-tense form *ban* make their social act—refusing—transparent. This speech marks Kinta and Kol (and Jaki) as neither friends nor adults.

Rōka's defiance basically silences Kinta. She makes one last attempt—"My food!" (line 29)—her mild exclamation revealing that she has become more frustrated than she was earlier in the interaction. Then she lets Rōka go. Kol, however, does not leave before making sure that Rōka knows his place. "Man, you are really stingy," he declares (line 37), again positioning himself as older while also marking Rōka as old enough to be criticized. But Rōka keeps his lollipop, his control emblematic of the victory that his refusal has given him in his battle to be recognized as an equal among children.

All three children thus constituted each other as people with whom it is reasonable to struggle, i.e., as peers. When children ask for things or refuse to give to older children, they pull their interlocutors down out of youth or adulthood. Similarly, when children refuse to give to younger children, demand goods from them, or criticize them, they pull their interlocutors up out of the category of babies and "immature people" relative to themselves.

Interpretations and Constructions of Immaturity and Childhood

Through constructing themselves as similar to each other, the three interlocutors also contrast themselves to adults, positioning themselves as immature people (*ajri*) relative to their elders and producing a relationship between their speech and their immaturity. They do so because this struggle involves using four interactive

strategies—conspicuous consumption, demands, refusals, and direct insults and criticisms—that are absent in adult–adult interactions (Berman 2012).

Although readers may find walking while eating a lollipop unremarkable, such behavior rarely occurs among Marshallese adults. Walking while eating food is explicitly taboo in the RMI, as is eating food in front of others. Adults differ as to whether or not lollipops count as “real” food (and thus as something subject to such taboos). Despite this conceptual disagreement, in practice, unless they are at a party where everyone has one, adults never walk while eating a lollipop where others can see. Among adults, walking while eating is the prototypical act that exemplifies a lack of *āliklik*, an emotion that can be roughly translated as shame and that stops adults from engaging in culturally inappropriate behavior (Berman 2012). As a woman explained, “Ak ñe raj mat, kwōj bōk ilo pileij en, kwe āliklik bwe kwe aikuj ba, ‘mōñā!’ ” (If the rice is cooked, and you are carrying it on a plate, you feel shame [*āliklik*] because you need to say, ‘Eat!’). One of my research assistants called Rōka’s behavior *kōmmejāje* ‘showing off with food’ and explained that *kōmmejāje* is specific to children.

Adults also tend to avoid direct and public demands. Since adults generally do not engage in conspicuous consumption and goods are not displayed, demands such as “Give me my food” make little pragmatic sense. Rather, adults ask whether things exist by saying, for example, “Ejjeļok lime ke?” (Are there not any limes?). Such utterances have a function similar to “Can you please pass the salt?” and are obviously requests. Nonetheless, unlike “Give me my food,” they give others the space to get out of giving by denying that they have whatever has been requested. Even when goods are visible, as when adults visit a family and find them eating or cooking, adults tend not to make demands as Kinta and Kol did. I once visited an adult friend and found her cooking cinnamon rolls. Due to all the time that I spent observing children, I assumed that saying “Give me my food” was the appropriate way to ask. So I said to my friend, “Letok kijō” (Give me my food.) She immediately scolded me, telling me that such forms of speech are appropriate for children but not for adults. Adults often feel “ashamed to ask” and therefore make private requests, as revealed by a man who protested his elder kinswoman’s request for gum with the rhetorical question, “Kajjitōk bwil ak elukkuun bwijin armej ilo ob en?!” (Ask for gum with so many people on the dock?!) Requests can mark one as a lazy person who imposes on others and takes things from them, i.e., someone who is not generous.

Adults also avoid directly refusing to give. I never heard an adult say to another adult, “I won’t,” nor even something similar to Kol’s “This stuff is only for the two of us.” I also have no examples of adults ignoring each other’s requests as blatantly as Rōka and other children did. Instead, in order to avoid giving, adults “hide” their possessions and “lie” about them. “It is all gone,” a man said to a kinsman who asked for tuna; there were four cans of tuna hidden behind the door. Such lies are better than refusing not only because refusing casts a person as stingy, but also because it embarrasses others by implying, as Rōka did, that others are not close enough or powerful enough to merit a gift. Children also lie and hide in order to get out of giving, just as they are frequently generous and share with each other (aspects of children’s lives that this article does not highlight). Since they also engage in conspicuous consumption and demands, however, they create situations in which hiding and lying are difficult. It is pragmatically difficult to say, “It is all gone” while eating a lollipop. Moreover, it was Kinta and Kol’s insistence that forced Rōka to move from ignoring demands to explicitly refusing to give. Together, children often create situations in which, if they do not give, they have to refuse to do so in ways that adults avoid, further marking themselves as children.

Just as adults avoid damaging their relationships with others through avoiding both refusals and conspicuous consumption, adults also tend to avoid explicitly insulting or threatening each other. Indeed, adults often do not know that others are

angry at them until they hear about it secondhand along the gossip chain (Berman 2012:146–150). Some elders in my host family once commanded me to stop working with a research assistant with whom they were angry. They also told me to avoid telling the research assistant why the work was ending. «We do not say it,» a woman said. Adults avoid direct expressions of criticism because they create open interpersonal conflict and threaten relational ties (see also Arno 1990:146–150; Besnier 1990; Howard 1970; McKellin 1990; White and Watson-Gegeo 1990).

Ideologies of Immaturity

Rōka, Kinta, and Kol's willingness to go on record as having things, refusing, asking, and criticizing when speaking with peers marks them as immature, i.e., as children. Adults often say that very young children "do not think" and "do not know anything." Among the things that young children do not know is the feeling of "shame" (*āliklik*) that would lead them to be indirect and deceptive like adults. Children lack shame "because they are children." As one adult said, "Ajri eo edik ejjelōk kobban bōran. Ejabwe ilo kōlmānļokjen" (Little children, there is nothing in their heads. There is not enough in their brains). Lacking shame, moreover, children feel no inclination to hide their possessions or their words. "Ajri rejjab riab" (Children do not lie), five adults told me in response to my questions about who lies more, children or adults. One man qualified his statement. «Okay, well, they do a little bit. But they do not lie about food.» Consequently, children do things that adults would not, like carrying food around and demanding things from others, because they "do not know" that they should be ashamed of such behavior and "do not know" enough to be capable of indirection or even to find such indirection necessary. Older children, adults generally said, lie better and know more shame than younger ones. But most adults also claimed that even older children have less shame and engage in deception and hiding less frequently than adults.

From a Marshallese adult perspective, growing up is a process of gradually gaining the shame (*āliklik*) and the modes of thinking (*ļōmnak*) that eventually compel people to engage in indirection and deception. The difference between very young children and adults with respect to relationships among peers is not necessarily that adults give more, but rather that adults conceal their acts of having, not giving, asking, and criticizing, whereas children make those "social acts" transparent (Ochs 1993: 288).

My evidence suggests that adult understandings of childhood are, at least in part, ideologies, the result of interpreting indexical associations between children's immature social status and their speech as iconic (Irvine and Gal 2000). In other words, adults assume that children's speech is a natural and inevitable reflection of their immature nature, as opposed to a historical product of their social status as children. But the deliberateness of even young children's conspicuous consumption; the way in which they manage the form and nature of their refusals and demands depending on the social status of their interlocutors; and their use of criticisms and insults to achieve interactional goals all indicate that their speech and actions are examples not of "not thinking," but of thinking about different things.

Such an argument does not suggest that children's speech is disconnected from development, since ways of using language have both developmental and social origins. It does suggest that the Western scholarly and commonsense association between immaturity and directness is also at least partly ideological. As Platt (1986) has shown, children may produce relatively complex forms prior to relatively less complex ones if the former are socially and pragmatically appropriate. Considering the developmental data that show how children as young as three can deceive and seem to have an equally easy time understanding conventional indirect speech and direct speech (Bara and Bucciarelli 1998; Bernicot and Legros 1987; Polak and Harris 1999; Reeder 1980), there are no obvious developmental reasons for Rōka to say

"I won't" rather than "It is all gone" (in Marshallese, the latter is one word), nor for Kinta to say, "Give me my food" rather than "Do you have any lollipops?" or even "Can you give me my food?" There are, however, pragmatic and social reasons (Boggs 1978): both the situational constraints produced by conspicuous consumption and the ways in which, in the children's social setting, certain forms of speech index control, authority, and relative age.

It is clear, moreover, that the form of children's speech is not a direct reflection of their feelings, desires, or a supposed inability to hide their possessions. Rōka's conspicuous consumption is a display of power and age-based status. The form of Kinta and Kol's demands marks their social relationship with Rōka, as opposed to their overwhelming desire for a lollipop. It is even debatable whether they really wanted to eat a lollipop or simply used it as an excuse to exercise their power or to teach Rōka a lesson (the options are not mutually exclusive). Rōka restrained himself from saying "I won't" for quite a while. Finally, Kol's declaration "I hate you" served as a threat that he *was* going to hate Rōka if Rōka did not give, indicating that this phrase was more connected to his interactional goals than to his feelings (whatever they may have been). By revealing how children's uses of directness can serve as presentations of self—a child's self—these data challenge the ideologically based connections (as mentioned in the introduction) among directness, referential transparency, and immaturity that tend to be assumed in scholarly work.

Socializing Immaturity and Producing Life-Course Trajectories

Such presentations of self must be socialized. It is easy to imagine how the interactions that I have described might serve not only to mark children as immature, but also to socialize children (in conjunction with other interactions) into Marshallese forms of immaturity. Children's struggles for power provide opportunities for younger children both to observe and to participate in behavior marked as immature—two processes that scholars have argued are central mechanisms of socialization (Greenfield and Lave 1982; Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff and Paradise 2009).

Children such as Rōka, Kinta, and Kol provide models of child-specific immature behavior for other children (and for Rōka himself) to emulate. Here, I build on language socialization research that reveals the central role that children play in the socialization of other children (Evaldsson 2005; Farris 1991; Goodwin 2006; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007; Kyratzis 2004; Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp 1999). In the Marshall Islands, young children constantly see children their age and older walking around with food. A four-year-old boy who paraded around church one day with a bunch of candy in his hand had clearly absorbed the lesson that possessions confer status; his declaration that he had a lot of food, however, revealed that he had not yet learned Rōka's technique of displaying possessions with a deliberate nonchalance. Young children and babies also observe children declaring to each other, "Give me my food" and "I hate you," as well as ignoring such demands to give. Such observations may be part of what leads children, such as one three-year-old, to declare to his playmate, "I hate you!" For that matter, it was such observations on my own part that initially socialized me into immature modes of speech and led me, as noted previously, to say impolitely to my adult friend, "Give me my food."

Children such as Kinta and Kol also force children such as Rōka to participate in these interactions, thereby learning to negotiate them. On the one hand, Kinta and Kol's demands and criticisms likely teach children such as Rōka that he is now a child and not a baby, that he has obligations to share with other children, and that failing in those obligations can have negative social consequences. By the age of seven or eight, very much aware that not giving to other children is dangerous, children avoid explicitly not giving to friends, although they continue to engage in conspicuous

consumption, refuse to give to children whom they perceive to be further away in age (like Kol), and may ignore demands from friends. Kol's utterance "You are really stingy" could be seen as an effort to "embarrass" (*kajook*) Rōka for failing to give. (Although the two words overlap in meaning, *kajook* is different from, and broader than, *aliklik*.) Since adults would not react like Kinta and Kol, these lessons are specific to child-child interactions.

Kinta and Kol's demands and criticisms, as well as Rōka's success at keeping his lollipop, also force all of the children—if they are to maintain power and rank within their children's world—to engage in adult-inappropriate forms of behavior. The fact that children up to their teenage years do not know or understand the word for shame (*aliklik*) (although they do talk about *kajook*), generally do not interpret demands such as "Give me my food" or threats such as "You won't watch us playing tag" as acts of embarrassing others, and regularly discuss their fear of others who do speak like Kinta and Kol indicate that although some shaming may also be going on, children conceive of these negotiations partly or largely as struggles for power. They also explicitly connect power to age. It is children who speak like Kinta and Kol who are seen as older and are feared by others. In fact, younger children frequently talked about Kol as someone whom they particularly feared. Conversely, no one fears children who give in to everyone. Interactions like the one between Kinta, Kol, and Rōka likely put social pressure on children to engage in immature modes of displaying, asking, not-giving, and criticizing.

For the most part, adults do not intervene in these productions of immaturity. Largely unconcerned with affairs among children, adults rarely chastise them for these particular forms of adult-inappropriate behavior so long as children refrain from taking things from babies or making younger children cry (Berman 2012). For the most part, it is children, not adults, who threaten and criticize each other for this behavior. Adults who do intercede may even encourage child-specific behavior. For example, a man who overheard a four-year-old's boasts mildly chastised him, «If you are not going to give me any, do not say that you have a lot.» He encouraged the child not to act like an adult and to hide the food, but—like a child—to simply refrain from talking about it.

These multiple pressures on children—to give in solidarity and to use direct speech to take control of people and possessions—mean that children's behavior is not completely opposed to adults' behavior. The child who boasts about having a lot of candy eventually will display it silently, like Rōka, just as older children eventually stop displaying their goods at all. Rōka's refusal "I won't" differs from Kol's "This stuff is only for the two of us," as Kol both provided a justification for his behavior ("It is too small") and claimed to remove himself and his food from view ("The two of us will eat outside"). (Actually, he stuffed the food into his pocket and did not exit the room.) Rōka's refusal also differs from Nomi's "I won't" in that Nomi added, "You are going to share my bracelet" (i.e., pass it on to some other child, causing both Nomi and Jaki to lose possession of it). Unlike Rōka, Nomi did not just baldly refuse; she added an excuse that justified her refusal to give by framing Jaki as someone who must not be given the requested item because she cannot be trusted to return it. (In practice, children always pass bracelets on to others and rarely return them to the original possessor. In theory, however, the bracelets are supposed to be returned, which is why Nomi's excuse works.)

Conclusions: Socialization and Age

As Marshallese adults say, there is indeed a life-course trajectory, in the RMI, from not-hiding to hiding. But just as ideologies of child-rearing and child development influence child-rearing practices and children's development (Gaskins 1996; Paugh 2012a), this trajectory may have as much or more to do with how ideologies bring into being that which they represent than with a developmental necessity that children

reveal their possessions or speak directly before they speak indirectly. It is likely partly through forms of interaction such as that between Rōka, Kinta, and Kol that children produce themselves as children and socialize each other into child-specific forms of speech.

Marshallese children's construction of themselves as children hinges on using forms of speech that mark them as different from others: both as mature, relative to babies, and as immature, relative to adults. When children cause babies to take on their modes of communication, they also lead them to take on forms of speech that are inappropriate for adults, socializing them into immaturity. This immaturity, of course, is relative. Babies are immature relative to children just as children are immature relative to adults and younger children are immature relative to older children. Hence, rather than focusing on how children and novices learn "mature" modes of interaction, it may be better to regard the constant and continuous production of age differences as a central mechanism of socialization.

Age is a particularly messy category, as the use of the word *ajri* to mark both a stage of life and a relative-age relationship reveals. If identities are produced through alterity (McNay 2000), it makes sense that the category *ajri*—both when it means 'child' and when it means 'immature person'—is produced through opposition to *rūtto* 'adult/mature person.' But as Mannheim (1952) argues, change over time is continuous even as people perceive it as occurring across sharp breaks. Age, perhaps even more than other categories, is not only constantly changing, but also involves distinctions that emerge at multiple and sometimes minute scales of difference. Such changes and perceptions of differences are produced partly through interactions such as those described here. In negotiating their relative-age relationships with each other, Rōka, Kinta, and Kol also contrast themselves with adults, creating possibilities for ideological interpretations of their speech as immature and thereby constructing themselves as children.

Notes

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1. Rōka's mother claimed that he was five or six. In my experience, parents were often incorrect by up to three years when they estimated their children's chronological age.

2. Text in guillemets (« . . . ») represents an utterance that I did not record, but wrote down, either at the moment of its occurrence or later on, in my fieldnotes. Text in regular quotation marks (" . . . ") represents material that I recorded and transcribed. (In some cases, such material is presented here in English translation.) I translated most transcripts myself, but worked with bilingual Marshallese-English speakers on portions of some transcripts.

3. The Marshallese call their language *kajin Majel* 'the language of Marshall.' Prior to colonization, they had no single name for their culture, language, or people (Walsh 2003:127).

4. Power also comes from inherited rank, achieved rank in the new monetary and political economy, and position in the church (Berman 2012; Walsh 2003).

5. Transcription conventions:

() Undecipherable speech

[] Overlapping speech

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