

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CHILDREN HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE:
DECEPTION, AGE, AND AVOIDING GIVING IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

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Note on Orthography

Written Marshallese is not standardized. Words are spelled in multiple ways in different print media and even within the nation's newspaper *The Marshall Islands Journal*. I have frequently seen words spelled multiple different ways within one article. I have also seen teachers use different spellings in school. While I was in the field some teachers and administrators at the Ministry of Education told me that they recently instituted a new official orthography and spelling that teachers are to teach. I suspect that this orthography is the same one adopted by the language and culture commission. Nonetheless, some of the teachers on Jajikon were not aware of this change.

I spell the names of atolls as they are typically spelled on maps and for the government. With this exception, for all other Marshallese words I use the orthography recently adopted by the language and culture commission and first presented by Abo et al. (1976) in the Marshallese-English dictionary. There are two versions of the dictionary. I mainly use the online version as a reference (Abo et al. 2011). There are some words that do not appear in the dictionary. I have tried to fit them into the orthography presented below as best I can. Unfortunately, since I am not a phonetician, there may be some mistakes.

I have reproduced the orthography on the next page.

Figure 1: Orthography

Reproduced from Willson (2008) who in turn adapted it from Abo et al. (1976).

<u>orthography</u>	<u>IPA</u>	<u>description</u>
a	[ɐ]	a low back unrounded vowel
ā	[ɛ]	a low front vowel
b	[pʷ]	a bilabial stop
d	[ɟ]	a retroflex trill
e	[e] or [ɛ]	a mid front vowel
i	[i] or [ɪ]	a high front vowel
j	[tʃ]	a dental stop of affricate
k	[k] or [kʷ]	a velar stop, unrounded or rounded
l	[lʷ]	a lateral
l̄	[lʷ] or [lʷ]	a lateral, unrounded or rounded
m	[mʲ]	a bilabial nasal
m̄	[mʷ]	a bilabial nasal
n	[nʲ]	a dental nasal
n̄	[nʷ] or [nʷ]	a dental nasal, unrounded or rounded
n̄̄	[ŋ] or [ŋʷ]	a velar nasal, unrounded or rounded
o	[o] or [ɔ]	a mid back rounded vowel
ɔ	[ɐ]	a low back rounded vowel
ō	[ɤ] or [ʌ]	a mid back unrounded vowel
p	[pʲ]	a bilabial stop
r	[rʷ] or [rʷ]	a retroflex trill, unrounded or rounded
t	[tʷ]	a dental stop
u	[u]	a high back rounded vowel
ū	[u] or [u]	a high back unrounded vowel
w	[w]	a rounded velar glide
y	[j]	an unrounded palatal glide

Abstract

In the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) adults are expected to give most things, including their infants, to kin. Often, however, people do not want to give. Their efforts to avoid giving are central to the exchange process itself because any act of giving requires simultaneously not-giving to an indefinite number of others. A woman will not have enough fish to give to her mother if she has to give fish to all of her neighbors as well. In other words, people must pick and choose to whom to give—they must pick and choose between relationships. Giving, moreover, is destructive of relationships as well as creative: it forges bonds with some but weakens those with others.

Managing the destructive as well as positive results of giving depends on manipulating signs, as the circulation of goods and that of signs are intricately intertwined. Through hiding signs of the existence of goods, and deceiving others about the nature of goods, people in the RMI get out of giving. Such semiotic manipulations reveal that the practices and meanings of exchange depend not on what people have and give but on what they appear to have and give (or not-give). It is this appearance, as opposed to the actual exchange of goods or lack thereof, that affects people's reputations, relationships, and livelihoods.

In the RMI, successfully manipulating signs to reduce the destructive and negative effects of exchange depends on children because children have unique communicative powers that make them central to the familial process of avoiding giving. Adults believe that children lack guile, do not hide things from others, and feel no pressure to give. Consequently, adults feel no animosity when children talk about goods or carry them in the open. Ironically, children can also lie without incurring suspicion or mistrust. Consequently, children are the main people who

transport everything around the village. Adults send children in their place because as immature social actors children can do something that adults cannot—reveal signs of goods without giving those goods away.

Consequently, current theories of exchange are inadequate to explain economic, political, and social life in the Marshall Islands because they do not take into account avoiding giving, semiotics, or children. The fact that exchange—a topic that has played a central role in anthropological theory and research since the discipline's inception—cannot be understood in Oceania—the region that is the source of most of those theories—without taking children into account reveals the centrality of age to the anthropological agenda and the problems with the fact that cultural and linguistic analyses of age lag behind studies of gender and race.

At the same time, the importance of children and age to avoiding giving reveals much more than how economic and political life works. Through mediating adult exchanges and speaking and acting in ways that are inappropriate for adults, children perform their immaturity and their difference from others. Their participation leads children to take on a child sense of self, revealing how they come to subjectively experience their age and how age is socially constructed. This analysis of children's performance of immaturity and construction of themselves as different than adults lends novel insight into socialization and cultural reproduction.

Introduction

It was hot. In a few months the windy season would arrive, making ocean travel around this small island nation in the Pacific significantly more dangerous but the days on land more pleasant. In a few hours it would be dusk—the brief but perfect time of day free of the sickness that comes from the sun and the ghosts that appear in the dark. Dusk is when basketballs and volleyballs come out, people stroll back and forth visiting friends, and kin sit on the grass gossiping about the days' events and observing all who pass by.

In the heat of the day, however, people rested in the shade and the village's single dirt road was largely empty. But empty did not mean unobserved. Women sitting in cookhouses could see the road through the door and kin relaxing under the cooling limbs of a breadfruit tree kept their eye on anyone who might be going back and forth. From the shade outside my house I myself saw two children advance onto the road, struggling with a bike and a large plastic container.

Like all bicycles in Jajikon, a 250 person village on an outer atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the vehicle was an ancient hunk of metal. Its tires were patched with rubber bands, its brakes non-existent, a short metal bar took the place of a pedal. One of the children held the bike steady as the other tried to balance the container on its handlebars. As they grappled with the bike they stood in the plain light of day. Their plastic container was visible to all.

'Hey!' I called out. 'What is that?'¹

¹ Text in single quotations ('...') represents dialogue that I did not record but wrote down either at the moment or later on in my fieldnotes. Text in double quotations ("...") represents dialogue recorded by my audio or video

The boy hesitated. Around ten years old, he was one of my adopted brothers, a member of the remarkable family who had taken me in during my year in the field. Finally he called back, ‘food!’

‘What kind?!’

‘Rice!’

For some reason I did not believe him. Perhaps it was because the plastic container seemed inordinately large for rice. Or perhaps it was because families often shared uncooked rice but rarely bothered to share cooked rice. Rice, despite the fact that it is imported, is now the main staple in the RMI and something that everyone cooks regularly. I ran over to the children and peered into the container. There I found not rice but an amazing assortment of riches: turtle meat, donuts, barbeque chicken, fish. It was food leftover from a celebration the previous day. Kyle and his cousin, eleven-year-old Jilaba, were taking it from Kyle’s house to Jilaba’s house to share with her family. Jilaba immediately and surreptitiously offered me a donut.

Instead of taking it I accused, ‘This is not rice!’

Kyle laughed sheepishly.

‘Why did you lie?’ I asked.

“It is taboo to yell about food,” Jilaba scolded me.

In some ways, Kyle and Jilaba were engaging in something very recognizable to anthropologists and particularly to anthropologists of the Pacific: exchange. They were transporting food between two families who were closely linked through kin ties and through constant acts of giving that reinforce those ties. Giving, as we know well, creates bonds, forges

recorder. All dialogue was in Marshallese. Most I have translated myself, although I worked with bilingual Marshallese-English speakers on portions of some transcripts.

relationships of mutual solidarity and trust, and compels future gifts that recreate those relationships (Gregory 1982; Mauss [1923] 1990). Giving, moreover, is central in the RMI from not only an etic but also an emic perspective. As the Marshallese say, “*jouj eo mour eo*”—generosity is life.

At the same time, however, Kyle and Jilaba were also engaged in something only rarely discussed by anthropologists: not-giving. These children did not give the food that they carried to a myriad of people: their neighbors to the north and south, the residents of any houses that they would pass as they walked through the village, anyone whom they might happen to meet on the road. In other words, to give the food to Jilaba’s family the children had to avoid giving it to many others, all of whom were also kin and thus were people with whom the children and their families should share. The children employed many strategies to get out of their obligation to give. They kept silent about their wares. They said that all they carried was rice, trying to create the impression, for me and the many interested observers looking on, that what they carried was insignificant. The children’s parents and grandparents, in turn, got out of giving by sending children on the errand in their stead, children who have fewer obligations to give.

Jilaba, Kyle, and their families exerted this effort to avoid giving because, in contrast to a bevy of scholarship that focuses on the gift’s role in creating and forging social structures, giving is not always good. In the effort to debunk the myth of *Homo economicus*—in which humans naturally and constantly seek to maximize profits in a world of scarcity—anthropologists have tended to ignore the fact that the material world is almost always limited. This finite nature of the material world does not invalidate arguments that gift-exchange is about more than maximizing profits, that exchange often has more to do with social relationships than the material products at

hand, or that gifts are embedded in a world of meanings. What the existence of scarcity does mean, however, is that any act of giving requires simultaneously not-giving to an indefinite number of others. People must pick and choose between relationships. Giving to a neighbor may mean that one is unable to give to one's mother. Here, giving is destructive of relationships as well as creative: it forges bonds with some but weakens those with others.

Managing the destructive as well as positive results of giving depends on manipulating signs, as the circulation of goods and that of signs are intricately intertwined. Jilaba and Kyle hid signs of their food's existence by keeping it in a container and not talking about it. As Jilaba admonished me, 'it is taboo to yell about food.' The children also used signs to construct the food as something other than what it was—i.e., they practiced deception. Such semiotic manipulations reveal that the practices and meanings of exchange depend not on what people have and give but on what they appear to have and give (or not-give). It is this appearance, as opposed to the actual exchange of goods or lack thereof, that affects people's reputations, relationships, and livelihoods.

In the RMI, successfully manipulating signs to reduce the destructive and negative effects of exchange depends on children. Scholars now recognize that exchange, once depicted as an adult male activity, is heavily gendered. Women are central players in exchange systems around the world. Gifts also take on different meanings depending on who gives them to whom and these meanings are embedded in ideologies of gender (Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992). But although scholars in this area have to a certain extent overcome a gender bias, we have not yet overcome an age bias. Scholars of exchange, as we will see, overwhelmingly ignore the role of children or of people of different ages.

But exchange in the RMI cannot function without children because children have unique communicative powers that lend them crucial roles in the familial effort to avoid giving. Adults believe that children lack guile, do not hide things from others, and feel no pressure to give. Consequently, adults feel no animosity when children talk about goods or carry them in the open. Ironically, children can also lie without incurring suspicion or mistrust. Consequently, children like Jilaba and Kyle are the main people who transport everything around the village. Adults send children in their place because as immature social actors children can do something that adults cannot—reveal signs of goods without giving those goods away. Although Jilaba and Kyle avoided yelling about food they nonetheless did some things that mature individuals never do: they carried cooked food along the road and talked about that food. Children’s power to engage in such activities stems from their immaturity, from the way in which understandings of age transform people’s perceptions of the goods that they carry and the words that they speak. As goods and words move between children and adults they also move, to use Appadurai’s (1986:15) phrase, between “regimes of value,” staying in the hands of some and out of the hands of others.

Consequently, current theories of exchange are inadequate to explain economic, political, and social life in the Marshall Islands because they do not take into account avoiding giving, semiotics, or children. The fact that exchange—a topic that has played a central role in anthropological theory and research since the discipline’s inception—cannot be understood in Oceania—the region that is the source of most of those theories—without taking children into account reveals the centrality of age to the anthropological agenda and the problems with the fact that cultural and linguistic analyses of age lag behind studies of gender and race.

At the same time, the importance of children and age to avoiding giving reveals much more than how economic and political life works. Through mediating adult exchanges and speaking and acting in ways that are inappropriate for adults, children perform their immaturity and their difference from others. Their participation leads children to take on a child sense of self, revealing how they come to subjectively experience their age and how age is socially constructed. This analysis of children's performance of immaturity and construction of themselves as different than adults lends novel insight into socialization and cultural reproduction.

The Circulation of Things

The importance of giving as a social act that forges bonds between people has long been a central tenet of anthropological thought. The Trobriand Islander who gives shells to his *kula* partner establishes a relationship that can last for years, cemented by gifts of shells, food, and hospitality (Malinowski [1922] 1961; Weiner 1976). !Kung hunters share the meat from a kill, forging social bonds and overcoming ill will (Lee 1979; Marshall 1961). By throwing a potlatch Kwakiutl men gain names that establish their hierarchical rank and their relationships with others (Goldman 1975:124; Graeber 2001:201-202). Affines in many societies exchange not only goods but people, sending a woman or a man to another household and thereby creating ties that both households constantly renew through prestations (Levi-Strauss [1949] 1969).

The Problem of Giving

Despite the explicit emphasis placed on giving in most of the literature on these societies, embedded in these and other analyses are hints that people frequently find giving to be a burden.

Malinowski (1979:46) discusses chiefs who, under a greater obligation to share than others, try to hide their food. Levi-Strauss ([1949] 1969:457) reproduced an Andaman Islander myth of a world without exchange, a world in which they would be free from the constant give and take of life. Firth ([1929] 1959:411-412) reports a Maori story about a particularly greedy man who constantly put pressure on people to give. “So tiresome became this practice that at length the people of the district, to end his begging, sent a war party against him and slew him.” Firth (1936:83) also discusses practices of hoarding and hiding food during a famine in Tikopia.

Other scholars of the Pacific follow Firth (1936) in studying practices of not-giving as results of social change and economic stress. Sykes (2007a:221) argues that “in the late liberal democratic era, it is possible to explore the limits of reciprocity.” For example, she shows how with the growth of small businesses in New Ireland people strive to act like corporate individuals who need not give (Sykes 2007b). Martin (2007:285-298) analyzes elite men in Papua New Guinea who do not want to ask for betel nut. Wendel (2007) discusses how extreme borrowing among students in Micronesia drives them crazy, leading their boarding school to ban borrowing. Whether intended or not, Sykes’ (2007a) discussion of these practices as they relate to decolonization implies that these problems with giving are relatively recent, a result of postcolonialism, globalization, and culture change.

But research among hunter-gatherers suggests that a need and desire to avoid giving is ever-present, especially in sharing-intensive communities and regardless of economic stress or social change. Hiatt (1982) reports that the Anbara in Australia adopt strategies to get out of giving—such as eating during food collection—even while they explicitly state that generosity is among the most important moral virtues. Observations buried in a variety of articles and books

imply that in hunter-gatherer communities generosity is typically not spontaneous but rather occurs out of demand (Bird-David 1990:186-196; Clastres 1972:170; Endicott 1988:117; Helm 1972:80; Henry 1964:98, 101; Holmberg 1969:88, 155; Marshall 1976:288, 303, 310; Spencer 1969:164, 193). Peterson (1993) argues that this “demand sharing” stems partly from the problem that in sharing-intensive communities where everyone is kin it is impossible to give to everyone. He also asserts that demand sharing is the norm in many hunter-gatherer communities and for some pastoralists and horticulturalists.² Similarly, Marlowe (2004) conducted food-sharing games among the Hadza and determined that people were less likely to be generous in smaller bands, a finding that he interprets as representing a general weariness with the constant need to share that leads to a desire to get out of giving.

Peterson (1993) suggests two reasons why anthropologists have ignored the phenomenon of demand sharing despite its pervasiveness. First, he argues that anthropologists have focused too much on people’s explicit discussions of the importance of giving and too little on how giving actually takes place. Second, anthropologists have been blinded by a Western view in which only spontaneous gifts, as opposed to gifts given under demand, constitute generosity. There is no reason, Peterson argues, why giving under demand should necessarily be seen as less moral than giving spontaneously. His analysis has implications for the study of avoiding giving. A practice of giving largely in response to demand suggests that people may work hard to avoid those demands as well as the need to give.

It seems clear, therefore, that although most evidence of avoiding giving comes from brief examples or sentences within larger works with different agendas, many people around the

² See also Durham (1995).

world exert effort to not-give. As we have seen, Kyle and Jilaba watched their speech to as to avoid sharing food with others. Moreover, this effort may be particularly pronounced in communities where people are expected to share with everyone. Marlowe (2004) interprets efforts to not-give as a result of the weariness that comes from giving to everyone, while Peterson (1993) sees these efforts as part of a differing understanding of what it means to be generous.

Although both interpretations might be accurate, neither sufficiently analyzes the implications of the prevalence of avoiding giving for theories of the gift as a force that (re)creates social relationships. Understanding why people try to get out of giving requires recognizing that giving has negative as well as positive implications for people's lives and their social relationships. There are two reasons why giving is negative as well as positive: 1) Giving can weaken or destroy people's connection with that which they give. This connection—if the gift is something important such as a name, land, or a child—may be central to people's sense of self, their status in society, or their happiness. This connection—if the gift is food—may be central to their bodily well being. 2) Even at times of plenty the material world is limited. Except for special occasions or among very small groups of people, no one can catch enough fish or grow enough pandanus to be able to immediately share with everyone. Since not-giving, in places like the Marshall Islands, threatens people's reputation and bonds with others, any act of giving requires managing the negative repercussions of the simultaneous act of not-giving.

Inalienable Possessions

Annette Weiner's (1985; 1992) analysis of inalienable possessions provides an argument for how people manage the first problem, the destructive force of the gift. She takes the word

‘inalienable’ from Mauss’s ([1923] 1990) argument that gifts always contain a *hau*, the spirit of the giver. Weiner argues that it is this ability to give without losing one’s connection to the thing given—what she calls the “paradox of keeping while giving”—that is responsible for the reproduction of the social order. There must be continuity, she asserts, for identities to exist. This continuity comes in the form of inalienable possessions that may be given to others but nevertheless continue to be attached to the original owner—possessions such as names, heirlooms, and *kula* shells. It is only through passing such objects to other members of a lineage or family that people maintain their identity, the social order is reproduced, and hierarchies are created.

Weiner (1992:149) uses her discussion of inalienable possessions to critique the “norm of reciprocity” that she claims dominates the anthropological literature. “At issue is not how one gift elicits a return,” the focus of Mauss’s treatise and numerous other works, “but rather which possessions the members of a group are able to keep through generations, even if they must loan them for a time to others” (26). Inalienable possessions have a history that gives them value while simultaneously connecting all people who have ever possessed them to each other, marking them as a lineage and creating class differences that continue across the generations. Economic activity, Weiner argues, is not about reciprocity but reproduction: the reproduction of a lineage across generations, the reproduction of identity and a sense of self.

Weiner’s argument that reproduction depends on inalienable possessions makes reference to the destructive power of the gift and asserts that this destructive force can only be overcome through keeping while giving. When people give, she and Mauss argue, they not only give material goods but also a part of themselves. Therefore, giving weakens people’s identities and

their sense of self. The only way to maintain continuity, to have a stable presence that exists not only across a person's lifetime but across generations, is to keep certain inalienable possessions and pass them on to others who identify with the same group. People try to mark their cloak, name, or ritual as gifts from the ancestors. They send shells into the *kula* circle as opposed to giving them away to kin since the *kula* circle, unlike the kin, recognizes the inalienability of the shell and the inevitability of its eventual return. These heroic efforts to keep stem from "the need to secure permanence in a serial world that is always subject to loss and decay. Enormous energy and intensity are expended in efforts to transmute or transcend the effects of deterioration and degeneration and/or to foster the conditions of growth and regeneration" (1992:7).

Although Weiner's discussion of inalienability offers an answer to how people manage the destructive force of the gift, she does not offer an answer to the second problem with giving: the fact that giving to one person necessarily means not giving to another. This problem, the fact that it is impossible to give to everyone, is what makes everyday giving difficult and dangerous. Weiner (1992:6) states that "some things, like commodities, are easy to give." The fact that they are easy to give, however, also means that they are difficult to not-give. While the everyday act of giving food may not be as destructive to someone's status or sense of self as giving away a fine mat or an ancestral name, it can be just as destructive to people's relationships since the people who do not receive food are almost always more numerous than the people who do.

Managing the second problem of giving requires analyzing the circulation of signs. Ultimately, social relationships are not dependent on what people actually give or not-give but rather on how those acts of giving and keeping are constructed and framed through speech. As a result, analyzing avoiding giving requires looking at the connections between things and signs, at

the semiotic feats through which people manipulate appearances to keep things out of the hands of some and in the hands of others.

The Circulation of Signs

One of the central ways that Marshallese adults minimize the negative repercussions of not-giving is to hide any signs of their possessions. They act as if they do not have anything, creating the appearance of a lack of possessions. These representations of absence depend on manipulating multiple types of signs: words as well as objects that act as signs of their own existence.

Scholars have typically treated goods and signs as different entities: the good is material the sign is immaterial. Keane (2003:410) and Irvine (1996) argue that such an approach is partly a result of Saussure's ([1916] 1959) "radical separation of the sign from the material world" and a long-held Western belief in the separation between the mind and body (Keane 2003:410). Keane (1997:4) shows, however, that "to focus exclusively on either the material or the verbal dimension is to miss the importance of their conjunction." In particular, he argues that gifts have to be packaged appropriately in speech to be received. Animal kills, marriage negotiations, and prestations between affines depend for their success not only on the objects given but also on ritual words. Unaccompanied by the appropriate forms of speech a marriage may fall through, an animal's spirit may go astray, a prestation may be seen as an insult rather than an honor. Similarly, Schieffelin (1990) argues that talk is a metaphor for what happens in exchange just as Robbins (2007) argues for an intricate relationship between material and linguistic exchange.

The way in which the giving and not-giving of both words and goods influences social life depends on people's beliefs about what types of things can serve as signs and what those signs mean.³ Analyses of language's reflexive capacity to interpret and refer to itself have resulted in the concept of "language ideologies"—the conscious and unconscious ideas people hold about speech (Lucy 1993; Woolard 1998). Keane (2003) coined the term "semiotic ideologies" to capture the notion that ideologies include not only beliefs about speech but also beliefs about non-linguistic signs such as material goods. Semiotic ideologies influence how people interpret the material and verbal world.

Keane (1997) gives the example of an Anakalangese man (in Indonesia) who accidentally gave his affine a torn cloth. Some people might interpret this torn cloth as a 'natural' sign, i.e., as a result of an accident. But the Anakalangese interpreted the torn cloth as an insult—as the result of intentional as opposed to accidental destruction. Similarly, Keane (2003:419) says, some might interpret a smaller than usual gift of yams as a sign of a poor harvest. But Trobrianders interpret a "limited prestation" as a signal of stinginess. The way in which people determine whether a gift or the absence of a gift has significance depends on their beliefs about what sorts of words and material signs represent actions and intentions.

Risk and Face

The fact that the social effect of giving or not-giving depends on how others interpret signs makes exchange an arena fraught with risk. Keane (1997) argues that this risk lies in the fact that no one can completely control either things or words. Material things age, they can get

³ For example, Munn's (1986) analysis of value focuses on how Gawans view multiple different types of objects as having similar iconic properties.

torn and broken, they may get lost. However much one tries to gather sufficient fish to give to a family member, ultimately the amount of fish one catches depends partly on the ocean and the fish. However much one tries to wrap a gift perfectly, the gift could fall and get torn along the way. Similarly, people cannot completely control speech, even ritual speech (Keane 1997:24, 163-166). There may be certain scripts that one is to follow when giving a gift. But one may speak nervously or confidently, one may inadvertently include discourse markers that shift the meaning of one's speech, other people may intrude and interpret one's speech differently than one intends. Giving entails risk since one is never entirely sure how others will interpret one's words and material goods.

Exchange outside the bounds of ritual encounters is even more dangerous. The conventions of ritual give people a path to follow, a general expectation of how others will interpret their actions should everything proceed according to plan. Everyday acts of exchange, however, are even more subject to the vicissitudes of chance and people's choice of words. Moreover, in the RMI all components of exchange—asking, giving, and refusing—are socially dangerous. While giving always carries the risk that one must simultaneously not-give to others, asking and refusing can be blatantly face-threatening. Goffman (1967:5) defines 'face' as the positive social value that people can claim for themselves through their actions. Refusing is bad for adults' image in the RMI because they frown on stinginess. As for asking, Brown and Levinson (1978:70-71) argue that asking is intrinsically face-threatening because it indicates that the speaker is willing to impose on another's freedom of action.

Numerous scholars have criticized Brown and Levinson for presenting an ethnocentric analysis of face based on Western presumptions of a rational actor strategically manipulating

social interaction (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Mao 1994). Considering the fact that the Marshallese discuss their own seemingly face-saving actions as the result of emotions as opposed to reason, such criticisms are likely well-founded. The larger point that asking and refusing are frequently face-threatening, however, shows how establishing social relationships through exchange requires careful manipulations of speech and other signs, manipulations that, as Keane points out, are always fallible. In the RMI, minimizing the face-threatening effects of not-giving requires engaging in deception and hiding one's actions and goods from others. The effect of these deceptions, however, also depends on how people interpret signs.

Truth and Deception

There are no ethnographies that focus explicitly on exchange and deception. But Peterson's (1993) analysis of demand sharing and some brief discussions of lying encased in larger ethnographies indicate that deceiving others and hiding possessions are how people in many societies avoid giving without seriously destroying their reputation or offending others. Peterson (1993) reports on widespread accounts of hiding, lying, and secrecy among sharing-intensive communities where deception is the only legitimate way to get out of giving (Altman and Peterson 1988; Hansen and Hansen 1974:13-14; Von Sturmer 1981:fn. p. 29). Firth (1936:83) discusses practices of hoarding and hiding food during a famine in Tikopia. As he argues, hiding food allowed people to save face. "While morals degenerated under the strain of famine, manners remained." Similarly, Marlowe (2004:190) writes about the Hadza, "once seen, food must be shared." Keeping things out of circulation requires removing things from social existence by manipulating material and verbal signs of that existence.

This appearance of an absence of things must be interpreted. For example, to avoid giving Marshallese adults hide their possessions. When they walk along the road or go visit a neighbor their hands are empty. When someone asks, “do you have any fish?” they say, “it is all gone.” But people can interpret this absence of possessions, and these words that supposedly point to that absence, differently. Such prevarications would not necessarily smooth relationships among the Trobrianders since Trobrianders seem to interpret a lack of yams not as a sign of a bad harvest but as a sign of a poor social commitment to kin (Keane 2003).

In other words, local understandings of truth and deception influence the way in which people interpret not receiving fish or statements such as “there is none.” Numerous scholars assert that deception is defined partly by an intention to deceive (Coleman and Kay 1981; Goffman 1975:83; Mitchell and Thompson 1986; Rappaport 1976; Williams 2002:96). Others, however, claim that this concern with intentions—in respect to not only deception but also the meaning of all utterances—reflects a Western ideology in which language is an expression of the inner self. This ideology, reproduced by influential philosophers of language such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), does not accurately describe approaches to speech around the world (Du Bois 1993; Duranti 1993; Goffman 1981; 1983; Hymes 1974; Rosaldo 1982:203-237; Shoaps 2007). Samoans, for example, interpret speech in terms of the consequences of speaking as opposed to the speaker’s intentions (Duranti 1993). Similarly, people argue that intentionality is not part of all conceptions of deception. Danziger (2006), for example, claims that Mopan Maya understandings of ‘lie’ do not include intentions to deceive on the part of the speaker. In previous work I argued that some K’iche’ Maya adults view the intention to harm as more important than the intention to deceive when evaluating utterances as lies (Berman 2011).

Just as people differ in their understandings of what it means to deceive and to lie, people also differ as to whether lying or telling the truth is morally good (Bauman 1998; Besnier 1994; Du Boulay 1976; Gilsenan 1976). Rosaldo (1973) and Peterson (1993) (Peterson 1993:352; Peterson 1993:334-352) argue that in certain situations the Ilongot and the Pohnpeians value fabrications, indirection, and concealing the truth. Heath (1983) asserts that members of African-American communities in the Piedmont area of the Carolinas relish making stories and are not concerned with referential accuracy. Weiner (1984) argues that the Trobrianders avoid speaking “hard words”—speech that is true but creates conflict between people. Blum (2007) claims that among the Chinese it is more appropriate to avoid transparency than to speak with referential accuracy. All of this work speaks against not only Austin (1962) and Searle’s (1969) argument that the ‘true’ purpose of speech depends on the speaker’s intentions, but also Grice’s (1989) claim that interlocutors expect the truth.⁴

Finally, in addition to holding differing ideologies of the nature of deception and differing opinions as to whether telling the truth is good or bad, people see different sign vehicles—i.e. material goods and words—as having differing abilities to act as truth-tellers. Rappaport (1979:223-246) argues that ritual serves as a solution to the problem that language makes it easy to lie. For example, he says, since people can lie, Marang men do not know if they can trust another’s promise to accompany them to war. According to Rappaport people confirm the sincerity of each others’ words through ritual: Marang men communicate their commitment to helping others in warfare by dancing at festivals, affines communicate their commitment to

⁴ For additional criticisms of Grice see Keenan (1976) and Lindstrom (1992).

each other as kin by performing rituals and, as a part of those rituals, exchanging material things. Building on Rappaport, Robbins (2001; 2007) argues that in places such as Melanesia where people view speech as unreliable and think it is impossible to know another's intentions, material exchange as opposed to speech carries the weight of truth. In other words, in some places people do not trust speech to communicate sincere commitments (such as "we are kin and we help each other"). But they may trust gifts to communicate such commitments.

The ways in which truth and deception differ in a myriad of ways across cultures affects our understanding of avoiding giving in the Marshall Islands. The Marshallese do sometimes take intentions and people's inner states into account when evaluating utterances and actions as truthful or deceptive, moral or immoral. At the same time, however, most Marshallese think that it is impossible to know those intentions or know why someone spoke in the way that they did. Like the Urapim of Melanesia with whom Robbins works, Marshallese adults distrust other adults' words but trust material gifts. People who give are "truthful" since by giving they show that they care and are kin. People who do not give are "liars" since they are probably hiding goods so as to avoid giving. In other words, Marshallese adults interpret an absence of goods as meaningful, as a sign of intentional deceit and a lack of concern for kin. Consequently, while the only appropriate way to manage the risk of not-giving in the RMI is to lie and hide, lying and hiding are themselves socially risky.

The Identity of Interlocutors

Marshallese adults do not distrust all people's words. Rather, they only distrust some people's words. Linguistic anthropologists have shown that interpretations of utterances differ according to the identity of interlocutors, the content of the utterance, the place in which the

utterance takes place, and the presence and identity of overhearers (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Hymes 1964). Therefore, we must ask, how do interpretations of signs that signal an absence of possession differ depending on the identity of the interlocutors? While Melanesians distrust speech and trust gifts, are there some people whose speech they trust more than others? Do all Urapim interpret all gifts as indications of sincerity and commitment to social relationships? Does a torn cloth signal intentional disrespect to all Anakalangese or only to certain Anakalangese? To women or to men? Does it matter if the person sending the cloth is kin or non-kin, a son or a father? Upper class or lower class?

In Robbins's (2007) analysis of changing language ideologies in New Guinea he takes the first step toward answering these questions. He argues that the Urapim view Spirit women, in contrast to most people, as "unimpeachable truth-tellers" (129). The ability of these women's speech to carry the force of truth relates, he asserts, to changing understandings of speech. Previously, social truths such as people's commitment to each other as kin were communicated by material exchange. With conversion to Protestantism, however, the Urapim increasingly stress the importance of sincere linguistic exchanges.

The relevance of the identity of interlocutors to analyses of deception, however, goes far beyond this group of Spirit women. The most obvious starting place to look for variation within exchange interactions is gender. We know that exchange is gendered (Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992). We also know that people frequently interpret speech differently depending on whether a man or a woman speaks (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003; Keenan 1976). While gender undoubtedly plays an integral role in Marshallese practices of exchange and interpretations of

deception, Kyle and Jilaba's activities reveal another social distinction that is just as important but even more overlooked: age.

Children and Age

Marshallese adults in Jajikon interpret acts of not-giving by another adult as signs of stinginess and lack of concern for kin, signs that their social bond is not entirely real. These acts include holding food but not-giving it as well as simply appearing to have nothing to give. Adults also treat other adults' words with suspicion. Consequently, while claims that "I do not have any" are not as damaging to people's relationships as explicitly refusing to give, these claims nonetheless can signal deception and a desire not to share regardless of whether an adult actually has anything.

In contrast, adults interpret acts of not-giving by children as insignificant. Moreover, while adults' words raise suspicion, children's words have the force of truth. To return to Keane's (2003:419) example of a torn cloth that can either be a "natural sign" of an accident or a "non-natural" sign that indicates disrespect, adults differently interpret goods and words as natural or non-natural signs depending on whether a child or adult speaks and acts. In other words, in certain circumstances children, according to Marshallese adults, exist outside of the realm of meaningful deceptive action.⁵ They are, to use Goffman's (1959:152) language, "non-persons," people who are present but are unimportant and socially insignificant. The way in which children exist outside of the adult social order transforms the meanings of the words and things that they hold or do not hold, giving children the semiotic ability to not-give without adults interpreting their actions and words as deceptive or insulting.

⁵ For similar ideologies of children and deception in other societies see Watson-Gegeo (2001) and Berman (2011).

As a result, while adults who carry containers of food insult other adults, Kyle and Jilaba can carry such a container without fear. Similarly, while adults would be inclined to view the declarations that food is “rice” as lies if coming from an adult, they are less suspicious of a child such as Kyle. Even if an adult were to do as I did and look inside the container they would not find much fault with Kyle. After all, he is a child. Consequently, his words are not his own and he cannot really truly lie. His immaturity makes him incapable intending social harm. His status as immature transforms his act of not-giving into something unimportant, something that does not cause offense.

Children, as a result, are central to familial efforts to avoid giving and to economic activity as a whole in the Marshall Islands. As we will see, moreover, the importance of children challenges not only understandings of gift-exchange but also theories of socialization and cultural reproduction. Understanding this challenge requires taking a closer look at the place of children and age in the literature on the gift and in anthropology as a whole.

Exchange and Childhood

Up until the late twentieth century, exchange was depicted as an adult male activity. Women either do not appear at all in the early literature on exchange or their role is limited to that of passive people exchanged between men (e.g. Levi-Strauss [1949] 1969; for criticisms of the gender bias in literature on exchange see Weiner 1992). Feminist anthropologists have corrected this mistake. They argue not only that women are involved in exchange and that these exchanges are critical to the economy as a whole, but also that gift exchange itself is thoroughly gendered. The process of giving and receiving recreates gendered bodies even as it stems from understandings of gender itself (Battaglia 1992; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992).

In many ways developments in the study of childhood have paralleled developments in the study of gender. Scholars argue that children, like women, must be considered legitimate and important social actors (Alanen 1994; Levison 2000; Oakley 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995; Thorne 1987). Numerous researchers discuss children's roles as producers, consumers, and laborers and show that children are important economic agents (Cain 1980; Cook 2008; Hawkes et al. 1995; Levison 2000; Nieuwenhuys 1996; Orellana 2001; Porter 1996; Reynolds 1991; Schildkrout 1978; Zelizer 2002).

Considering the significant amount of research on children's economic activities, it is ironic that we have yet to consider the role of children in one of the most fundamental issues in anthropological thought and research: gift exchange. Scholars have discussed adoption and fostering as crucially intertwined with other forms of exchange (Brady 1976; Carroll 1970). In addition, people have shown that just as gifts forge bonds between adults, children use gifts to construct relationships with their peers (Chin 2001; Ferguson 2001; Katriel 1987; Nukaga 2008; Thorne 1997; Thorne 2005). Schieffelin (1990) has analyzed how children in Papua New Guinea learn to refuse to give appropriately, a work of significant relevance for the current study.

No one, however, has considered how children as actors might be fundamental to (and consistently erased from) gift economies beyond those exchanges internal to children. Children are not only absent from older works such as Mauss ([1923] 1990), Sahlins (1972) and Firth (1939; [1929] 1959), but they also have no part to play in the more recent discussions of gendered exchange (Strathern 1988; Weiner 1976; 1992). Children, unlike women, make no appearance in a recent analysis of anthropological perspectives on the gift (Sykes 2005). Similarly, while in Graeber's (2001) study of value he briefly analyzes the role that socialization

and child-rearing play in exchange, he never discusses children themselves. Carsten (1991) briefly mentions Malay children's engagement in exchange but focuses on how such interactions affect kinship bonds and identities as opposed to on how it may be only through these children that exchange can take place at all.

In Jajikon, we will see, material exchange cannot function without children. This finding suggests that other studies of exchange and the gift have overlooked and erased children's crucial roles. Moreover, children's importance to the economy in the Marshall Islands derives from the fact that their status as children lends them unique communicative powers to speak and act with adults in ways that adults cannot. Consequently, while my analysis clearly builds on an important body of literature that emphasizes children's economic and political agency, I present a different perspective on this agency and, in many ways, on the agency of subordinate people in general. As I show, Marshallese children are invaluable economic actors not in spite of the fact that they are children but precisely because of the fact that they are children. Understanding their importance requires shifting our analytic lens from the study of children to the analysis of difference, a focus that requires theorizing and re-examining age.

Age and the Analysis of Difference

In the last couple of decades childhood scholars have pushed to understand childhood as a social construction and children as important social agents (Aries 1962; James and Prout 1990; James 2007; Stephens 1995). This research has been invaluable for adjusting some anthropological oversights in the last century—e.g., the mistaken notion that children are irrelevant to studies of culture and the different but still incorrect idea that children are relevant only in so far as they are going to become adults (Hirschfeld 2002; Toren 1993). But, Cole and

Durham (2008:21) argue that the irony of this work is that it “increases the likelihood that we will ignore the more general kinds of insights gained from taking children and youth as a site for social and cultural inquiry.” This focus on children’s sociality has shunted aside not only the developmental aspects of childhood but also a general analysis of the stages of life, as opposed to in isolation from each other, in relationship to each other. In addition, while this emphasis on showing how children are just as important as adults has increased our attention to children’s action and voices, it has also erased the difference that necessarily exists not only between children and adults but between all people of different ages.

Children’s difference from adults, moreover, is precisely what lends Marshallese children their power in exchange networks. Here, my argument builds on a small body of literature that suggests—but only in brief articles or, more often, in sentences hidden within larger works with entirely different agendas—that children’s immaturity allows them to do things that adults may not (Berman 2011; Carsten 1991; Gaskins and Lucy 1987; Haviland 1977:189; Hotchkiss 1967; Kulick 1992:230-234; Lancy 1996:158; Mead [1930] 2001:40; Reynolds 2008; Schildkrout 1978). For example, K’iche’ Maya children run errands, carry messages, and buffer feelings of resentment between adults. Children in Kano run errands for women who are in purdah and cannot leave their homes. Underdeveloped and under-theorized, it is not surprising that recent analyses of childhood as a social construction and of children’s agency overlook the implication of such brief analyses—that children are not only active but also different and their agency comes largely from this difference.⁶

⁶ For a notable exception in the study of youth see Durham’s (2008) discussion of youth-specific agency in Botswana. She argues that agency in Botswana is not defined by rebellion or political participation and that youth take on agency in ways appropriate to their stage of life. She does not, however, analyze how youth might have this

A focus on difference leads us to step back from analyzing childhood to think about the larger category of age. Anthropologists in second half of the twentieth century discussed age as a central organizing feature of society, studied different ways of organizing people into age groups, and analyzed the significance of peer groups (Baxter and Almagor 1978; Eisenstadt [1956] 2003; Fortes 1984; Goody 1962; Kertzer and Keith 1984; La Fontaine 1978; Wilson 1951). Life-course perspectives in human development and sociology hold that people in different stages of life experience historical events differently. Moreover, these distinct historical experiences of cohorts meld them into generations that differ from each other (Elder and Giele 1998; Elder [1974] 1999; Mannheim [1952] 1972; O'Rand and Kreckler 1990; Riley 1987). Sociologists also argue that people develop a concept of a normal life cycle and experience their own life as “on-time” or “off-time” in respect to this historically specific perspective (Burton 1985; Neugarten 1996). This work connects to anthropological analyses of differing cultural perspectives of time and the life course as well as to arguments that people in most parts of the world are not as wedded to chronological age as Westerners (Bledsoe 2002; Munn 1992).

Recent research in anthropology has largely left behind this older approach to focus on the social construction of particular, isolated, stages of life (Cohen 1998; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; James and Prout 1990; Shweder 1998; Sokolovsky 2009; Stephens 1995). A second but connected strand of research, building on earlier scholars such as Mead ([1928] 2001) and DuBois (1944), considers how people imagine growth and personhood and how culturally specific understandings of development affect the life course (Gaskins 1996; Gaskins 1999; Lamb 1997; Lamb 2000). Both of these areas of research have increased our understanding of

agency precisely because they are different from adults, children, and the elderly or the significance of these age-differences for people's sense of self and for cultural reproduction.

the relationship between the life-course and culture. At the same time, however, both tend to analyze specific life stages as independent units as opposed to dealing with the category of age itself or the relationships between people of different ages.⁷

This narrow focus on life stages in isolation from each other as opposed to in relationship to each other inhibits our ability to understand issues ranging from social change to gift-exchange. Cole and Durham (2007) argue that a focus on the relational properties of age affords new insights into globalization and social change, asserting that “studies of age must move beyond focusing on particular age groups (the recent trend), and take age itself as an analytic” (14). I will show that attention to the relationships between peers and non-peers, as opposed to children in and of themselves, suggests new ways to understand avoiding giving in the RMI. Both children and adults in the RMI are more concerned with the opinions of their peers (a category that is constantly shifting) than the opinions of non-peers, just as children are also more concerned with the opinions of similar-age children than of children of significantly different ages. As a result, it is less risky to refuse to give to a non-peer than a peer. Therefore, it is largely in interactions between non-peers, and particularly between children and adults, that avoiding giving takes place.

Just as understanding exchange requires paying attention to peers, it also requires analyzing how people in different age groups differentially understand each other. On the one hand, as discussed, adults interpret goods and words in the hands of children differently than they interpret those in the hands of adults. On the other hand, children have their own distinct

⁷ One place where anthropologists have discussed inter-age relationships has been parent-child studies (e.g. Barlow and Chapin 2010; Eksner and Orellana 2012; Fong 2007; Martini and Kirkpatrick 1992; Suizzo 2004). Most of these studies, however, focus on child-rearing practices or socialization (of the child or of the parent) as opposed to how, particularly because of the age differences involved, child-adult interactions might be a key place not only for socialization but for political, economic, and social activity.

interpretations. For them signs also have different meanings depending on whether an adult or child speaks and acts.

In other words, exchange is aged—not only insofar as people of different ages are differentially involved in exchange but also in that age has multiple effects on how people interpret signs. Furthermore, through giving and speaking people recreate aged bodies and age itself. Children, when they run errands for adults and avoid giving in ways that adults avoid, perform their immaturity and take on an aged self. They come to understand themselves as children and feel the things that children are supposed to feel. Seemingly paradoxically, moreover, by doing things that adults should not children are socialized into mature ways of giving and speaking.

Language Socialization and the Performance of Difference

Language plays an integral role in socialization (Duranti et al. 2012; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Through engaging in social activity children learn to speak. Through speaking children take on moral values, gender and racial identities, understandings of power hierarchies, and culturally appropriate ways of being and feeling (Clancy 1986; Farris 1991; Kulick 1992; Kulick and Schieffelin 2004; Ochs 1988; Ochs and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin 1990). Language socialization scholars recognize socialization as a life-long process infused with agency. “Novices’ participation in communicative practices is promoted but not determined by a legacy of socially and culturally informed persons, artifacts, and features of the built environment” (Ochs and Schieffelin 2012:4). Through interacting with a range of people children and other novices not only learn and are influenced by others but they also change themselves.

Language socialization studies often, at least implicitly, focus on age. Studies of peer socialization show that through language children position themselves in categories such as girls or boys, jocks or burnouts, gamers or newbies (Aronsson 2012; Blashki and Nichol 2005; Butler and Weatherall 2006; Eckert 1987; Evaldsson 2005; Farris 1991; Goodwin 1990; Goodwin 2006; Goodwin and Alim 2010; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012; Kyratzis 2004; Rogoff 1981). Studies also examine local ideologies of growing up, such as the Kaluli belief that babies are soft and must learn to be assertive, and analyze how linguistic practices create culturally particular forms of infancy and childhood (see also Kulick 1992; Schieffelin 1990).

Less discussed, however, is the fact that before children learn to be adults they must learn to be different than adults—i.e., children. For example, many studies of peer socialization analyze children's gender categories but do not explicitly examine how girls construct themselves as different not only from boys but also from women (Danby and Baker 1998:151-175; see also Evaldsson 2002; Evaldsson 2005; Goodwin 2006; Goodwin 2011:250-271). As another example, in an excellent chapter Clancy (1986) shows how Japanese parents encourage children's socialization into the various forms of indirection typical in Japanese adult modes of speech. But she does not consider how Japanese parents and peers also might also encourage children to speak in ways appropriate for children but inappropriate for adults. Similarly, numerous other studies examine how caregivers teach children politeness, but do not examine how children learn to be impolite in the first place, or that it might be appropriate and expected for children to be impolite and/or produce forms of politeness that differ from adults' (Burdelski 2012; Demuth 1986; Field 2001; Park 2006; Smith-Hefner 1999:84-5; Tessonneau 2005; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986).

In the RMI, adults' belief that growing up is a process of learning to feel shame includes an expectation that children need not avoid doing things that are shameful for adults. Since children can and should avoid giving in ways that adults may not, adults tell children to run errands that are inappropriate for adults. The children themselves actually fear adults and, as a result, fear to run these errands since the errands require interacting with adults. But by acting as children and marking themselves as immature through various forms of semiotic activity, children manage to overcome their fear. They take on child-specific emotions—a lack of fear or shame. Through age specific and culturally specific ways of speaking and giving children inhabit forms of habitus different than those of adults.⁸

Although the argument that children somehow learn to be children (just as women learn to be women) may seem obvious and insignificant, focusing on how people gain age-specific ways of being suggests new ways to think about socialization and cultural reproduction. Affect, Kulick and Schieffelin (2004:352) argue, “is a central dimension of any theory of becoming.” By leading children to perform their immaturity adult commands call children into subjectivities that are different than those of adults. At the same time, children's performance of difference socializes them into mature modes of speaking and giving. Adult commands exhibit what Kulick (2003:145) calls “dual indexicality”: they “manifest both their surface propositional content and simultaneously the inverse of that content” (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004:358). When adults send children to run their errands for them, they command children to act in adult-inappropriate ways while simultaneously providing a model of adulthood and the shame that adults feel.

⁸ Eckert (1998:167) argues that “aging has not yet been explicitly studied as a sociolinguistic variable.”

Children become particularly aware of this model of adulthood in middle childhood, typically perceived of as from the age of six or seven up until puberty (Cole et al. 2005). It is these older children, such as Kyle and Jilaba, whom adults send on errands that they themselves avoid. Only these older children are simultaneously mature enough to transport food and messages while still immature enough to do what adults should not. Ironically, as we saw with Jilaba and Kyle, these older children are also mature enough to understand the need to hide. Nonetheless, older children continue to carry food around, they continue to admit to having food though they may lie about its nature. After all, they are still children, people who can break the rules to which adults are bound. Through constantly breaking the rules of maturity specifically so that adults need not children indelibly imprint upon themselves the differences between childhood and adulthood. By running errands since the age of seven or eight children slowly gain an image of what life is to be like when they leave childhood behind, an image to which, as they get older, they slowly start to conform.

In other words, through acting differently than others children take on a sense of self that depends on understanding themselves in contrast to those others, leading them to imagine the course of life and their place within it. As Cole (2010:16) argues, representations of the life course play a central role in shaping choices and making “certain paths, certain social trajectories, easier to imagine than others.” Her argument relates to McNay’s (2000:116) claim that selfhood emerges from people’s attempts to deal with change and “the temporality of existence.” Age, like the social categories gender and race, depends partly on oppositions, constructions of differences between people in different stages of life. Through speaking and

(not) giving children both take on an aged self and imagine a different future to which they slowly start to conform.

Fieldwork in the Republic of the Marshall Islands

The RMI is a small nation of around 68,000 people spread across twenty-nine atolls and five single islands (CIA 2012). Atolls are remnants of dying volcanoes. As a volcanic island gradually sinks into the sea, coral continues to grow at what was previously the island's outer edge, creating a barrier reef. Once the island has disappeared completely, the atoll is what remains—a ring of skinny coral islands encircling a lagoon (Darwin 1842). Sometimes only a couple of feet, and generally no more than a half-mile wide, the highest point on such islands is ten feet above sea level (EPPSO 1999). At low tide it is often possible to walk between certain islands in an atoll. Between other islands, however, the coral never emerges from the sea, creating shallow and dangerous channels that are often the only way to enter a lagoon from the ocean. While the atolls in the Marshall Islands span 750,000 square miles of sea just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean, the total land area is only 70 square miles (RMI Embassy 2005).

I first went to the RMI for eleven months in 2003-2004 as part of a program run by the Education Department at Dartmouth College to send recent graduates to the islands to teach. I was assigned to Kili Island, a single island a third of a mile square in the southern Marshalls that is the main home for Bikinian refugees.⁹ I found myself in a classroom of first-graders who spoke no English. As I taught them English they taught me Marshallese.

⁹ Residents of Bikini atoll were moved off of their home by U.S.A. military forces in 1946 when the U.S.A. turned the atoll into a nuclear testing site.

Marshallese is an “Oceanic language, in the Micronesian sub-branch of the Austronesian language family” (Willson 2008:2). Micronesia is the geographic region of the Pacific Ocean in which the RMI is located, a region that includes Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and the Marianas. There are two main dialects, Rālik and Ratak, which correspond to the two island chains although each atoll also has some linguistic distinctiveness. These two dialects, and individual atoll variations, are mutually intelligible. Differences are largely semantic (Willson 2008). Even these semantic differences are mutually intelligible and often include simply adding or removing a syllable. For example, “good” is *emman* in the Rālik dialect and *mōman* in the Ratak dialect.

When I returned to the RMI for two months in the summer of 2008 and then for twelve months from 2009-2010 I went not to Kili, a single island, but to an outer atoll in the southern Ratak chain. In order to protect the anonymity of the people with whom I lived and worked, I call this atoll by a pseudonym, Rōrin. Since as a teacher I had learned the Rālik dialect and during my fieldwork I learned Ratak, I now speak a combination of both. Although I am not fluent I am very proficient. I converse, interview, give speeches, and teach in Marshallese and can often understand gossip that I overhear, particularly if the gossipers are children or women. Although I occasionally worked with people bilingual in English and Marshallese on the capital, all of my research assistants on Rōrin spoke only Marshallese.

I spent most of my time on Rōrin in a village that I will refer to as Jajikon. During my first trip to the atoll I lived in a different village for two months, and I later briefly visited several other villages on the atoll to celebrate birthday parties or to sing with church groups. To further protect people’s anonymity I occasionally combine characteristics of life and events that

occurred throughout these villages, speaking as if they all occurred in Jajikon even though some of them did not. This approach is problematic since the villages obviously differ and life in them is historically particular. Since the villages are so small, however, such efforts to protect anonymity are necessary. I also occasionally change details of distinctive stories—such as the gender of participants or how many children someone had—so long as such details are not crucial to understanding the implications of that story.

Methods

I used four main methods: participant observation, recordings of natural conversations, regular video-recordings of eight focal children, and interviews.

Participant Observation

In Jajikon I lived with a family and was adopted into their household. This adoption made me kin not only with my family but with virtually everyone in the village. Although I circulated throughout the village, played with children, and chatted with women in different neighborhoods, I have significantly more data from my family and the other families with whom we were close than from other households. I spoke to everyone, and they spoke to each other, in Marshallese. While all children learn English in school they learn it as a second language. With the exception of some of the teachers, no one in the village spoke English particularly well. Many of the teachers also preferred to speak to me in Marshallese.

I occasionally joined mixed gender groups and chatted with men but I spent the majority of my time with either women or children. Mixed gender social groups are rare among adults. As a result, although I often spoke to men individually, I could not easily join a group of men to

chat. I try to supplement the things that I heard and saw in the company of woman with explicit attention to men's opinions during formal and informal interviews. Nonetheless, my adult data is biased toward women's perspectives.

Since mixed-gender play groups among children are typical, my time with the children was much more evenly balanced according to gender. Even with the children, however, I fit in better with the girls than with the boys. Children sometimes separated themselves off into gendered play or gossip groups. Although I frequently and purposefully joined groups of boys I sometimes felt uncomfortable doing so. Consequently, given a choice and a lack of specific direction, I was much more likely to join a group of girls than a group of boys.

Because it is mainly older children who run errands and mediate exchange interactions between adults I focused on middle childhood and spent the majority of my time with children between the ages of seven and thirteen. Since children regularly congregate in multi-age groups, however, I often found myself writing about and recording younger and older children. Nonetheless, the majority of my data comes from middle childhood.

I found participant observation among children both easier and harder than I had anticipated. Contrary to researcher's reports that it is difficult, in our adult bodies, to be accepted as a child, I found that often children were delighted to include me in their games and conversations. While adults occasionally commented to me that adults do not play with children, the children themselves had relatively few reservations. When they excluded me from an activity it was typically not because I was an adult but because I inappropriately negotiated child power structures or for some reason had made them angry. I suspect that a succession of American teachers in the village who typically play with children in ways that Marshallese adults do not

helped children accept me into their games, although I noticed that children treated me significantly less respectfully than they treated the American teacher who lived in the village at the same time.

Fieldwork among children was more difficult than I had anticipated because I, unlike children, could not play all day. I became tired and wanted to stop playing, or I became hot and wanted to get out of the sun. Moreover, I often needed to be by myself and write fieldnotes or spend time with a research assistant transcribing recordings. Sometimes I simply wanted to sit by myself with a book. As a result, I could not film children whenever they wanted. Nor could I give away all the prizes I brought to the island, not if I wanted to have any to give to children after I interviewed or worked with them. As a result, I often found myself doing things that I had not originally wanted to do, such as kicking children out of my house. Luckily, children reacted to my behavior largely as they would to a child. "I hate you!" they cried when I refused to do what they wanted, marking me as equal enough such that they could expect me to accede to their desires and insult me when I did not. Although I eventually came to realize that such proclamations were good because they meant that, although obviously not a child, children did not treat me as an adult, I still found negotiating child politics emotionally tiring. I suspect that other children did as well.

Recordings of Natural Conversations

I carried a Zoom H4 audio recorder with me virtually everywhere and turned it on whenever it seemed like something interesting was happening. Interesting events included conversations, classes in school, and speeches or church events. I asked, of course, before I turned on the recorder. For the most part children wanted me to record them and they wanted to

listen to the recording after it was done. I often had some trouble getting them to talk to each other and ignore the recorder, but as time went on they became more accustomed to it and paid it less attention. Occasionally when children were gossiping they told me not to turn the recorder on. More often, children told me that I could record but that they did not want any of my research assistants in the village to listen to the recording. In such cases I had people who were not from Rōrin and did not know the children transcribe the recordings either on Majuro or in Enid, Oklahoma where I went to do some translation work. Much more frequently, women and men told me that I should not record them, although they also often permitted me to do so. Only adults who were in the recordings themselves would transcribe them. Since I was close friends with both of my research assistants, more often than not one of them was present during the interaction recorded and could do the transcription.

Video-recordings of eight focal children

I picked eight children between the ages of eight and twelve—four boys and four girls—to videotape once a month for the twelve months of my stay. Although it was impossible to be exact, I tried to pick children whose ages spanned the breadth of middle childhood. As opposed to filming the children at the same time every month, each month I changed the time of day so as to capture all of children's activities.

I used two different types of recording devices. The first was a traditional video camera on a tripod. I attached a wireless microphone to the focal child to capture his/or her voice and also had a basic shotgun microphone feeding into the camera. I generally found myself chasing after children with the camera and tripod as they ran around the village.

The second device is something that, as far as I know, has never been previously used in anthropological fieldwork or for research among children. The amazing success of this technique means that all anthropologists should consider it. The device is a small high definition sports cam (Contour HD), a video camera designed to be attached to helmets to film what people see as they ski or ride bikes. I attached the camera to a headband and had the children wear it. Some of my richest data comes from this camera. Children wore it as they ran errands, went to church, and played, and the camera was much less disruptive than my tripod and video camera. Although everyone knew about the camera children frequently forgot about it. One time they even stole bracelets from my house while wearing the camera (after a couple of minutes they remembered about the camera and put the bracelets back). Limited insofar as the camera only filmed whatever the child was looking at, which was not always what I found most interesting about the interaction, this technique also afforded a child's eye view of the world, or as close to one as we can get at the moment. I tried to have women wear the camera but they refused, possibly because by the time I asked women to wear it children had already worn the camera for a couple of months. The women claimed that wearing the camera was a childish activity.

Interviews

In addition to informal questions that I constantly asked throughout the day I also recorded interviews with children and adults. These interviews took two forms: relatively unstructured interviews in which I had some basic things I wanted to discuss but also let the children and adults talk about what they chose; and more structured interviews in which I discussed some hypothetical stories with the children and adults. Since all of the children constantly wanted to work with me (possibly because they got to draw pictures and I gave them a

small prize at the end), I interviewed all twenty-five or so children between the ages of eight and twelve twice. In both formats I had the children draw—in the unstructured interviews they drew their family and friends and then discussed their relationships with them. In the more structured interviews they drew the various hypothetical stories that I discussed with them. The stories were designed to get them to tell me what they would do in a given situation. For example, I would tell them to pretend that they had eaten fish for lunch and only a couple of fish were left. Then they leave the house. As they are walking along the road someone says, “What did you eat for lunch?” Then I asked the children what they would say about what they had eaten and why.

I also had two formats for interviews with adults. Since adults, unlike children, did not constantly clamor to work with me as much as possible, I only interviewed adults once. I conducted twenty unstructured interviews with ten women and ten men. Occasionally during the conversations other adults joined us and multiple people would talk. In the structured interviews, as with the children, I had adults react to hypothetical stories. For example, I told a story in which a woman mistakenly told a man that the boat had not arrived, leading the man to miss the boat. Then I talked with adults about how they would evaluate the woman’s speech. I conducted these interviews with seven people, four women and three men.

Transcription

I had two main research assistants whose primary duty was to transcribe. I also worked with numerous other adults on specific recordings that involved them, and had another female assistant when I spent two months in a different village. Possibly because I was most comfortable with women, all of my research assistants were women. They were also all in their twenties. My assistants would listen to the recording and transcribe by hand in a notebook.

When they were done I typed their transcriptions on the computer. Then we listened to the recordings together as I made changes, asked them to re-listen to certain sections that were unclear or incorrect, and asked them to define words (in Marshallese) or explain to me what was going on when I did not understand. Their insights and interpretations of people's behavior often ended up in my fieldnotes. I also recorded our transcribing sessions so that I could re-listen to important conversations. Not including recordings of transcription sessions or of interviews, I have over 60 hours of audio and video recordings, 30 hours of which are transcribed. I had people on the capitol who did not know anyone in the village transcribe all of the interviews, both the children's and the adults'. I also worked with some bilingual speakers in Majuro and in Enid, Oklahoma to translate some sections of transcripts that I did not understand.

Limitations

As an analysis of age, my data is limited in that it comes largely from two categories of people: children in middle childhood and adults. The grouping of all adults into a single age category is obviously problematic, as is the fact that I have relatively little data concerning infants and teenagers. Ideally, I would compare not only children and adults but people of all age groups. For example, I expect that teenagers have different ideologies of both adulthood and childhood than either children or adults, and that these ideologies influence how they interpret children's behavior and how they engage in exchange. My data is particularly limited concerning this age group because most teenagers go to high school on the capital and are not in the village. Nonetheless, my comparison of children in middle childhood and adults is a step forward from studies that focus on a single life stage. My study shows how, even with only two age categories that are obviously more internally complex than I have been able to represent, meanings of signs

and patterns of exchange are aged just as through engaging in economic behavior people recreate local ideologies and practices of age.

Second, the children in middle childhood whom I followed for a year are old enough such that their speech and practices at the end of the year were not different enough to let me track change in a specific child, or at least not in a consistent pattern that I can see across multiple children. My latitudinal data from adults and different children of different ages does show consistent differences that are correlated with age. Clearly, however, I have observed correlation as opposed to causation, which affects the nature of the claims that I can make about socialization. Interrogating socialization in-depth would require additional fieldwork and more longitudinal data. (And of course even such longitudinal data, acquired through observation, does not really speak to causation.) What my data does show, however, is that there is a correlation between age and certain patterns of speaking and being, a correlation that strongly suggests new ways of thinking about socialization and cultural reproduction.

Finally, any study of socialization and cultural reproduction should ideally speak also to social change. I do not have the data, however, to discuss this issue. First, historical data on childhood, speech, and even giving in the Marshall Islands is limited. My study is the first in-depth analysis of childhood, the first linguistic anthropological analysis of naturally occurring speech, and the first study of how people get out of giving. McArthur's (1996) dissertation falls into the realm of linguistic anthropology but he studied oral narratives as opposed to everyday speech. Linguists have studied Marshallese but they base their analysis on elicited speech as opposed to natural conversation (Bender 1984; Choi 1992; Choi 1995; Hale 2000; Pagotto 1987; Pagotto 1992; Suh 1995; Willson 2008). Hence, my data also constitutes the first corpus and

analysis of naturally occurring speech. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether my observations differ from speech and practices in earlier historical periods.

Consequently, I have left the question of change for a later date and subsequent fieldwork in the Marshall Islands. It is possible that the differences that I observe between children and adults constitute cohort as opposed to age differences and are representative of social change as opposed to cultured patterns of development. Adults do speak about how children today are different from the children of yesterday. But the differences that they discuss do not include children's feelings or lack or shame, children's activities helping out the family and running errands for adults, or the idea that children are too young to engage in meaningful or important deceptions. The Marshallese imagine these differences as natural products of the process of development and aging. Having no evidence to the contrary, I also speak of them as such.

Nonetheless, it is easy to imagine how the performance of difference could result not only in cultural reproduction but also in change. Adults encourage children to do that which adults avoid, thereby providing children with a model of the adulthood. In the RMI, children eventually start to conform to this model, leaving behind the explicit realm of immaturity for the deceptive and hidden ways of the mature. It is possible, however, that instead of conforming to the model of adulthood that they receive other children in might choose to reject it. I must leave the analysis of this question to a later date or to others.

Chapter Outline

For the moment, I turn to Marshallese practices of giving and avoiding giving. I argue that children's immaturity makes them invaluable economic agents in this effort to not-give and

that, through acting differently than others, children eventually become those others. I begin in Chapter 1 by analyzing Marshallese ideologies and practices of giving and how multiple people have rights of possession over most things. In Chapter 2 I show that despite an explicit ideology in which good people are those who give, in practice neither giving nor asking is always good. But refusing is difficult because refusing is shameful. In Chapter 3 I argue that to avoid giving and avoid shame, adults practice the semiotic technique of hiding. Adults hide not only possessions but also feelings, intentions, and words. By cultivating an ambiguous mode of communication adults save face and keep themselves out of trouble. But although hiding is better than explicitly refusing to give, hiding is also dangerous since adults run the risk of being accused of lying.

The danger of hiding means that it is much better for adults to pass the burden of speaking and acting on to someone else as opposed to engaging in the semiotic effort of avoiding giving themselves. In Chapter 4 I turn to a discussion of those intermediaries, children. Adults believe that children do not feel shame and do not hide. As a result, children's immaturity gives them the power to do what adults are too ashamed to do: carry food, ask for things, and refuse to give. In Chapter 5 I show that, contrary to appearances, children are not unconcerned with face. Rather, they simply have a different self-image to project than adults. This image requires revealing as opposed to hiding because assertive speech is how children gain power and respect among their peers. Ironically, however, while children demand things of and refuse other children, they prefer not to speak in such a manner with adults.

Rather, as I show in Chapter 6, children fear adults and prefer to hide from them. Obeying adult commands, however, requires coming out of hiding. Children manage to

overcome their fear by performing their immaturity. These performances lead children to take on aged selves. They also lead children to imagine the life course and their place within it, giving children a model of maturity to which they slowly begin to conform.

Chapter 1: The Value of Giving

There is no better example of the importance of both giving and kin in Marshallese life than the practice of adoption (*kaajiriri*). One day I was sitting with an older woman whom I call Katōli revising for the umpteenth time my kinship charts. The frequency of adoption—90% of households in Jajikon had adopted someone in or out and 26% of children younger than fifteen years old were adopted—made kinship discussions unwieldy and kinship diagrams convoluted.¹ Katōli, I finally discovered, had given away three of her nine children. She herself was adopted as an infant. Her family tree, as far as I could tell, looks like this (Figure 2).

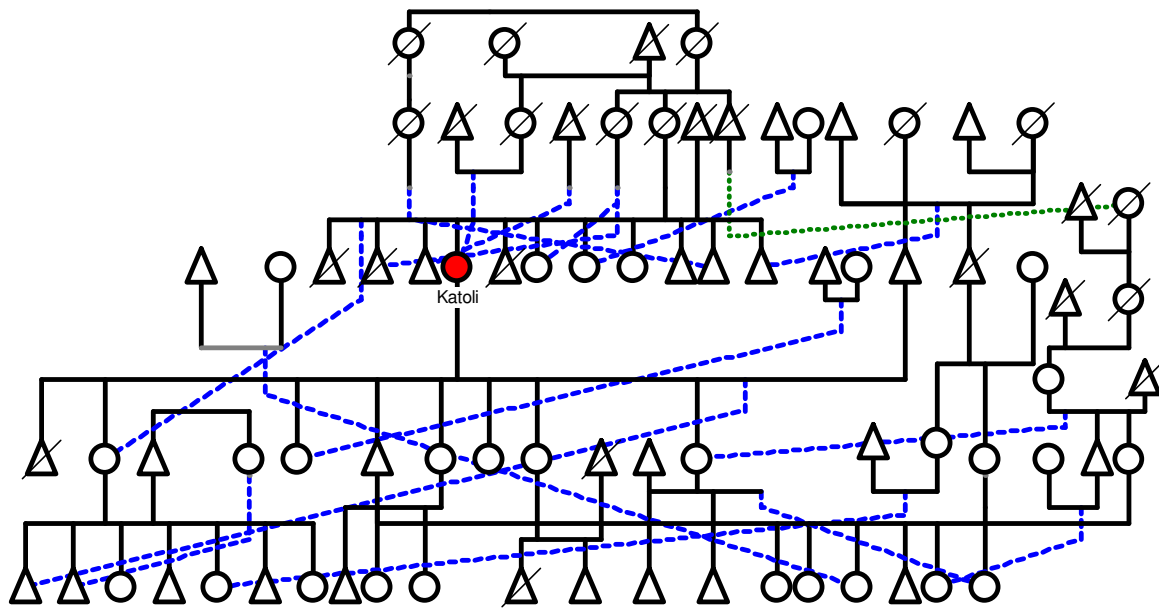


Figure 2: Katōli's Family

Blue (dashed) lines are adoptive relationships.
Green (dotted) lines are classificatory relationships.

¹ I counted all people who lived on Jaljikon for more than three months during the year in which I was there.

Eventually, exhausted by the effort to untangle the relationships between her kin, I asked Katōli why she gave her children away. Instead of answering she asked a question of her own.

‘Your older sister, she has children?’

‘Yes.’

‘Aren’t you going to take any?’

‘Of course not!’

Katōli was taken aback by the vehemence of my response. After all, in Marshallese terms I was, although not crazy, certainly out of the ordinary. There I was, a woman in her twenties with no children. My sister, on the other hand, had three young children, more than she needed. She could still have more. I could also bear children, but this fact was irrelevant to the situation at hand: at that moment in time I did not have any children and my sister did. If I were Marshallese, I would most likely approach my sister and ask for her newly born infant. If my sister were Marshallese, she would be obligated to give.

While Marshallese practices of child-sharing made me uneasy, people in Jajikon were confused that I struggled to comprehend adoption (*kaajiriri*). My declarations that *kaajiriri* was not practiced in America contradicted their experience with international, and specifically American, adoption of Marshallese children.²

² The RMI was a popular source for international adoptions in the late 1990’s. In 1998 the RMI, with a population of 60,000, was the fourteenth largest source nation for international adoptions in the USA, coming in just behind Mexico. There are numerous reasons for the RMI’s popularity: the Marshallese have a custom of sharing their children particularly when high status people such as American officials ask; there were minimum adoption regulations in the RMI to prevent adoption agencies from exploiting this custom; the RMI has a compact of free association with the USA which means that Marshallese can immigrate to the USA without a visa, making adoption significantly easier. The RMI eventually issued a moratorium on international adoptions until better regulations could be introduced (Jorban 2004; Roby and Matsumura 2002; Walsh 1999). According to statistics from the new Central Adoption Agency that was created, international adoptions have been slowly increasing since 2003, but are nowhere near the rate of adoption in 1998. Almost all adults, however, know of Marshallese people who had given their children away to Americans (Walsh 1999).

‘You in America do not adopt (*kaajiriri*)?’ one woman asked me.

‘No.’

‘But then why do Americans come and take our children?’

Suddenly I was at a loss for words. Why indeed did I find the expectation that people should share their children with their kin so disturbing when Americans adopt all the time?

The woman thought for a moment. Then she laughed. ‘Oh,’ she said knowingly, smiling at the irony. ‘You take but you will not give.’

In contrast to this woman’s analysis of American life, most Marshallese give a lot. As one example, they give (or share) their children with others. They also give food and flashlights, young pigs and mosquito coils, money and clothing, water and coconuts, labor and hospitality. Walk past a Marshallese house and one will inevitably hear someone call out “eat (*mōñā*)!” an invitation to share their food and their company. People express the importance of giving by valuing *jouj*, generosity.³ Good people, in Jajikon, are generous people.

People in Jajikon express their generosity and their relationships with others through both formal and informal giving. Formal giving occurs at festivals, parties, church, and significant occasions such as the arrival of visitors or the greeting of a new minister. Informal giving happens all the time as kin ask for salt or flour, share a catch of fish or lend out their DVD player. This informal economy looks a lot like what has been alternatively called “total prestation” (Mauss [1967] 2007:101) “pure gift” (Malinowski [1922] 1961:176) or “generalized reciprocity” (Sahlins 1972:193-194). None of these gifts are, in fact, “pure”, as Mauss ([1923]

³ Others have translated *jouj* as ‘kind’ (Abo et. al 1976). I translate *jouj* as ‘generous’ because, as we will see, people who are *jouj* are those who give (see also McArthur 1996:124; Walsh 2003:117).

1990) has shown us. Nonetheless, in this kin-based gift economy people give without immediate expectation of reciprocation. Their relationship with others is similar to that of a conjugal family in which people give according to what they have and what others need. Giving implies, but does not compel or specify, return obligations. Here, the gift both creates and reflects relationships in which people are bound to each other and expected to help each other.

People do not, however, have to give to everyone. Nor, despite appearances, must they give everything. A sketch of the Marshallese social environment and categories of givable things reveals how, why, and when people in Jajikon feel a moral imperative to give.

The Social Environment of Giving

In Jajikon and the Marshall Islands more generally people expect each other to give in relationships of both power and solidarity. People with less power respect, defer, and give to those with more. People with authority have their power because, ideally, they care for those with less. Solidarity, in turn, is largely defined by giving. As a result, in this 250 person village virtually anyone encounters has multiple claims on one's possessions.

Relationships of Power

As Walsh (2003:145) argues, "the symbiotic relationship between gift-givers and receivers is integral to Marshallese understandings of authority." Power in the Marshall Islands comes from four sources: titled status (such as chief or landowner), elite status (such as senator or businessman), church status (such as reverend or deacon), and age. People with more power are expected to give to and support those with less. Those with less obey and tithe to those with more. Giving pervades relationships between not only people, but also nations.

Chiefs and Titled Landowners

Historically, Marshallese society was stratified between the nobility (*irooj*) and commoners (*kajoor*) (Spoehr 1949:75-78). The amount and type of power that chiefs had over land and people differs across time and atoll. Some chiefs controlled relatively little land while the most powerful chiefs controlled entire atolls and occasionally multiple atolls (Carucci 1988; Tobin 1958; Walsh 2003).⁴ Successful chiefs were warriors, priests, and feast makers (Walsh 2003:126-127). They—in some regions and times—led people into and out of war, had exclusive rights to some tattoo patterns, controlled land, and could command tithes and labor from the people under them. The chiefs had (and technically still do have) the authority to evict anyone from their land if they were not fulfilling their responsibilities to the chiefs. According to the available data, these responsibilities included giving food and help to the chief, supporting the chief in times of war, and observing the taboos that surround a chief (Walsh 2003). Traditionally matrilineages (*bwij*) headed by a landowner (*aļap*) own and work swaths of land (*wāto*) in a chief's domain, with the chief having some rights to the land and to the fruits of it, although the nature of the chiefs' rights differs with historical period, geography, and the chief (Carucci 1988; Rynkiewich 1972).

Today the relationship between chiefs and commoners is both similar and different. The highest chiefs sit on the Council of Iroij, a political body that was set up to function much in the same way as the House of Lords in Britain. Chiefs no longer wage war and people no longer approach chiefs on their hands and knees. At the same time, however, people continue to afford

⁴ Carucci (1988) argues that before European influence few, if any, chiefs controlled multiple atolls. The RMI was never a united political entity. It was, however, a cultural entity since people intermarried, traded, and fought along the two island chains, Ratak and Ralik. Even after interaction with Europeans The Ratak chain was never united under a chief, although most the Ralik chain was at one point in time (Carucci 1988; Tobin 2002:2-3).

chiefs and chieftesses respect. At any party people seated even lesser chiefs at the table with other important individuals and fed the chiefs first. People told me that I should not sit when even a lesser chieftess was standing and that I should not sit on a chair if this chieftess was sitting on the ground.

People said that one must modify one's behavior around a chief and their land. One house in Jajikon was the residence of a former chief. Although this chief was dead, his ghost remained.⁵ Consequently, people said, they must be particularly careful to act in accordance with custom (*manit*) near this house. The things people told me one should not do—wear shorts if one is a woman, walk around without a shirt if one is a man, go in and out of windows instead of the door, walk on graves—are technically always taboo. Nonetheless, people occasionally broke these rules, and some of them they broke frequently. If one breaks these rules by a chief's residence, however, the ghost will be angry and cause people harm. Two young women stopped me with horror one day when I went in and out of a window to put my camera at the best angle. 'Don't you know that that chest in the corner belongs to a dead chief?' They remonstrated. 'He will hurt you if you go in and out of windows.' One woman whose seven year old daughter had recently died went on to tell me that her daughter's death was the result of the anger of this chief.

In addition, chiefs still have power over land, although their power has changed. For example, I was told that half of Rōrin seceded from their chief around thirty years ago, making those matrilineages independent of any chiefs. Nonetheless, the U.S. pays most of its rent for the use of Kwajalein as an army base to the Kwajalein landowners—the chiefs—who then supposedly care for the land and the people (Walsh 2003:351-352). People on Jajikon told me

⁵ The Jajikon villagers had a widespread belief in ghosts who haunt the forests and the village.

that in Majuro chiefs have the ability to kick individuals out of their homes. It is much easier (so people said), to evict families in the urban areas who live on land to which they have no historical connection than to evict families in the outer islands who, generally speaking, continue to live on land that chiefs gave to their lineage in the past or who have bought the land from chiefs or other lineages in the relatively new (and highly contested) land market that now exists (Doak Hess 2007). Nevertheless, the idea that chiefs have the ability, at least in the abstract, to kick people off of their land in outer islands as well as the capital still exists. As an older man told me, if he fails to give to the chieftess of Rōrin or if he disobeys other cultural laws she can evict him.

Consequently, although the power of the nobility has changed, it is still very much alive.

Giving To and Obeying Chiefs

People are expected to give to chiefs, although not nearly as much as they used to. Most of the tribute that I saw, in fact, was directed to the reverend on Jajikon as opposed to the chief—indicative of the growth of the importance of the church. On the other hand, the reverend in Jajikon was a member of one of the most powerful chiefly families in the capital, showing how the growing power of the church has not entirely replaced, but rather been combined, with the traditional power of chiefs.⁶

⁶ My information may be slightly skewed by the nature of the population on Jajikon. The chieftess of Rōrin, although she actually only controls around half of the atoll after fights and disagreements between people during the mid 20th century (Rynkiewich 1972). Her main property of land was in a village a mile or two away from Jajikon, but she spent most of her time in Majuro during the year I was in the field. The chieftess who lived in Jajikon was of lesser rank, although she was still recognized as of the chiefly class. However, the preacher who lived in Jajikon was the highest Protestant reverend on the atoll. Hence, it may be that I saw tribute to the reverend as opposed to the chief because the highest chieftess was not in residence.

I never actually saw any tribute to chiefs. But people who still lived on land under a chief's control told me that around once a year they give some fruits of their labor to their main chieftess. They do not seem to give much. One woman told me that she gives a bag of breadfruit, a bag of bananas, and a bag of copra—work that could be accomplished by a family unit in three or four days. Copra is the dried meat of mature coconuts that can get made into coconut oil, one of the most important exports for the RMI. When I asked another woman if they give to the chieftess, she shrugged and said that the chieftess does not need it because she gets money simply from her position. Similarly, I was told that the chieftess receives a percentage of all money by selling copra that was gathered on land that is under her control, roughly half of the atoll. This copra tax is simply deducted from the amount of money people who sell their copra get paid—roughly two cents per pound, (at the end of my stay copra was running 15 cents a pound).

Although tithes may be less than they were before, nobility still have the power to command commoners to do what they say. If a chief asks for something one must give, and if chiefs give orders one should obey. Reports from missionaries and explorers from the 1800s purport that chiefs were despotic and autocratic (Hezel 1995). Such descriptions may have been biased due to explorers' expectations that chiefs should be autocratic. Nonetheless, there clearly was a hierarchy of power and, even today, Jajikon villagers defer to and frequently obey chiefs. A lower chieftess who lived in Jajikon asserted her authority in discrete but observable ways. During a conversation among women as they were preparing for the arrival of a reverend Katōli criticized the woman and suggested a new course of action. "You all need to clean up over there because it is the face of the village." Her statement, containing the verb form that indicates

“should,” was a particularly strong command when compared to discourse among Marshallese adults that tends toward indirectness.

Similarly, the oldest son of a paramount chieftess badgered his way on to a boat that travels between Majuro and Rōrin. Staggeringly drunk, the chief then cursed a reverend who was also on the boat. The reverend complained to the mayor. Since alcohol is not allowed on Rōrin, it is also illegal to transport people who are drunk. But the chief could not be punished. Nor could the boat-owners stop him from boarding the boat. He was a chief, one whom others must obey.

With Power Comes Responsibility

Chief’s power comes not just from inheritance, but also from their generosity. Chiefs, even more so than commoners, are expected to be generous (*jouj*) (Walsh 2003:116-117).⁷ In the past the “potency of a [chief] was displayed in successful gathering of warriors and resources, victory on the battlefield, fair distribution of new lands, and kind treatment of the vanquished survivors” (Walsh 2003:126-127). Chiefs gave feasts and food, gave help to those in need, and generally provided for the people under their care. A chief that did not display *jouj* tended to lack enough support to either his or her power and had difficulty passing on that power within the matrilineage (Hezel 1983; Rynkiewich 1972:81-82; Walsh 2003). Rynkiewich (1972) argues that the succession of chiefs on an atoll was wrought with conflict. Chiefs only gained power by also gaining the goodwill of the people through providing for them. If they did not provide, others who were younger might nevertheless gain the title of chief.

This idea that chiefs must give still holds force. One woman on Jajikon told me that it was particularly bad for chiefs to refuse to give. Because, she explained, a chief’s job is to

⁷ For parallel practices in other Pacific chiefdoms see Firth (1939) and Fried (1967).

provide for the people under his or her care. A chief has more and should distribute that bounty. Similarly, Walsh (2003:118) interviewed a chieftess who emphasized that “a true chief is very generous.” This woman went on to discuss an acquaintance of theirs who was not recognized as nobility. Nonetheless, the woman said, the acquaintance was actually probably a chieftess herself since “many people recognized her selfless generosity.” Chiefs are both generous because they have land and goods, and being generous is indicative of their status as chiefs.

Hence, although when a chief asks people give, chiefs must also give themselves. Similarly, when anyone of higher rank asks, people fear to say no. This general rule applies to the relationships between not only chiefs and commoners, but also any people of differing power. These other people with authority include the new elite—products of the historical processes of colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization—church leaders, and elders.

Colonialism, Post-colonialism, and Foreign Relations

Today, the RMI is technically an independent state although it has a Compact of Free Association with the USA. Under this compact the U.S.A., among numerous provisions, leases Kwajalein atoll as an army base. The U.S.A. gives the RMI money and RMI citizens the ability to immigrate to the states without a visa, among other benefits. Walsh (2003) argues that the RMI’s relationship with the USA reflects the relationship between commoners and chiefs, showing how giving reflects not only on individual relationships but also national and international relations.

The Americans, however, are simply the last of many colonial powers in the RMI. Explorers—Spanish, British, German, Russian, American—passed by the Marshall Islands from the 16th century onwards although most did not know exactly where they were and most did not

stay long (Hezel 1983; Walsh 2003). Only one Russian explorer, however, developed harmonious relationships with the Marshallese, partly because up until the 1850's the Marshalls were seen as savage and dangerous (Hezel 1983; Walsh 2003).

This reputation of a hostile land changed with the coming of both Germans and missionaries. American protestant missionaries landed on Ebon atoll in the southern Marshalls in 1857. Protestantism spread with fits and starts, contested by some people and embraced by others. Just a couple of years after the first missionaries, Germans arrived to take advantage of the Marshall Island's most exportable resource—copra. In 1878 the Germans raised their flag on their chosen capital and commercial hub, Jaluit atoll. Jaluit became the busiest port and richest source of copra in Micronesia (Hezel 1983:290; Hezel 1995:45). In 1885 the Germans formally annexed the Marshall Islands (Hezel 1995:45). Although their rule was largely indirect it did result in numerous changes, including halting warfare between Marshallese chiefs.

The Japanese, who took the Marshalls from the Germans during World War I, were much more engaged rulers. Partly by promoting universal education, they limited the power of the chiefs and raised the power of the commoners. They conscripted labor, developed the land, and made an economic miracle during the 1930's. Hezel (1995:194) argues that the only time after colonialism during which the Marshalls were self-supporting and exports outnumbered imports was during Japanese rule between the two world wars. World War II, however, was horrible. According to reports and oral histories the Japanese conscripted Marshallese labor, beat people who did not work, and moved people to different islands for work or to make room for military bases and routines. There was famine and hardship. And as the war continued there were battles on many islands where Marshallese, as well as Japanese and Americans, died (Hezel 1995).

When the Americans wrested control from the Japanese they showered the starving, desperate Marshallese with an array of goods and food. Thus, during their first encounter with the Marshallese as colonial rulers the Americans acted, albeit unconsciously, as chiefs. They were generous (*jouj*), particularly compared to the embattled Japanese whom they replaced (Hezel 1995; Walsh 2003). They supported and provided for those with less.

This power relationship between the RMI and USA continues to this day. From World War II until 1979 the Marshall Islands were essentially an American colony, grouped with the other Micronesian islands into the Trust Territory. The military quickly recognized the strategic importance of the Marshalls as a safe stopping place on the way to Japan and China and established a military base on Kwajalein atoll. Then the military relocated not only Kwajalein residents but also the residents of two other remote atolls that became nuclear testing sites—Bikini and Enewetak. The drama surrounding the first nuclear test prompted Louis Réard to name his new invention, a bathing suit, after the atoll (Niedenthal 2001:182-184). From 1946 until 1958 Americans tested sixty-seven bombs on those two atolls. Relocated residents of all atolls suffered both starvation from their life on land unsuitable for settlement and from the loss of culture and heritage. In 1954 the United States tested the first hydrogen bomb on Bikini and vaporized three islands in the atoll in the process. On the day of the test the wind was going the wrong way. As opposed to heading west as planned, the wind headed east toward other inhabited atolls but the military tested the bomb anyway. Fallout drifted over other Marshallese atolls—Rongelap and Utirik. Now, as part of the Compact of Free Association the US pays nuclear reparations to the RMI and particularly to the residents of these four atolls—Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap, and Utirik (Barker 2004; Hezel 1995; Niedenthal 2001).

An independent state that is heavily economically dependent on the U.S.A., the RMI today has a parliamentary form of government. The President is selected from the Nitigela (parliament), the main governing body. There is also a council of *Irooj* (chiefs) on which sit the main chiefs from each atoll. Amata Kabua, an important paramount chief, was the first president in 1979 and remained president until he died. Although many senators and presidents come, like Kabua, from the ranks of the chiefly elite, in 2000 Kessai Note became the first commoner president. There is now a new elite consisting of business owners, government leaders (in the ministries as well as the parliament), wealthy people, and church leaders that has considerable power and sometimes challenges the power of the chiefs (Walsh 2003:140-294). Members of this new class go to good (relatively) schools, have money and power, and often speak English.

Walsh (2003) argues that the spirit of the gift and the importance of generosity is part of what gives the new elite, as well as the chiefs, their power. The importance of generosity to authority has, Walsh asserts, structured and changed Marshallese relations with foreign powers throughout colonial rule up to today. For example, Kotzebue, the Russian who was first able to maintain friendly relations with the Marshallese in the early 1800's, did so partly through giving. "This evidence of *jouj* [goodness, generosity] may have strengthened any understandings of Kotzebue's foreign and sacred connections" because he appropriately took on the mantle of a chief by giving (Walsh 2003:144). The Americans who "liberated" the Marshallese from the Japanese gave the Marshallese gifts upon gifts: crackers, canned foods, and candy. They shielded the Marshallese from the Japanese and acted as "protectors...who revealed their *jouj* through generous provisions offered to starving people" (Walsh 2003:193). From the time of the trust territory until today Americans have used, and in many cases abused, Marshallese land and

people. At the same time, the U.S.A. showers the Marshall Islands with money, revealing its authority through giving and taking on the mantle of a chief that both tithes and protects commoners—the Marshallese.

Marshallese beliefs in the goodness of authority is by no means absolute. People criticize chiefs, although not too loudly for fear that they might get into trouble (Walsh 2003). People criticize the U.S.A. for moving people around, bombing land and creating sickness. The new elite struggle with the old elite. Marshallese activists are trying to revive old traditions, others protest the continued authority of the U.S.A., others resent the U.S.A. for continuing to occupy Kwajalein and take land.

Nevertheless, the larger ideology that those who have more must protect, care for, and give to those with less remains. When people criticize others for abusing their authority, they often do so through metaphors of generosity. For example, when the Bikinians left their atoll they did so with the understanding that the U.S.A. would care for them forever. Their struggles since their resettlement indicate that America has renegeing on its responsibility (Niedenthal 2001; Niedenthal 2010 personal communication).⁸

The Church

The church has become overwhelmingly important not only spiritually but also as a place where goods exchange hands and people display their generosity (Allen 2002; Carucci 2003). The importance of giving in church teachings as well as other parts of Marshallese life reveals how most people see Marshallese culture and the church as symbiotic rather than antithetical.

⁸ Americans are by no means the only foreign interest in the RMI today. There is a strong presence of Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Australians, and other Pacific Islanders in Majuro. Nonetheless, the U.S.A. remains the dominant foreign power.

People know that the missionaries decried many of their old ways—such as tattooing, bare-breasted women, magic—as antithetical to Christian teachings. In respect to giving, however, people say that both Marshallese customs and the teachings of gospel agree. As the reverend explained to me, “our old customs and the gospel are the same....because [in both] there is a lot of watching over each other, loving each other, feeding each other, helping each other. If they build a house, everyone contributes.”

The church is the center of public giving on Jajikon and in most of the Marshall Islands. People give to the church and the reverend. In doing so, numerous adults told me, they are not only giving to each other but also to God. We are thanking him, one woman told me, explaining why they give to the church. God and people agree, good people are those who give. In addition, technically God and preachers are, like chiefs, supposed to care for their people. It is worse, adults told me, if a preacher does not give than for others to not give. Even if the reverend is not asked, the reverend gives his knowledge and teaching to everyone.

Although what the Marshallese call *Protijen*, a non-evangelical form of Protestantism, continues to be the dominant form of Christianity in the RMI, there are at least ten different types of Christianity practiced and evangelical churches are growing. Jajikon, with 250 people, had two evangelical churches in addition to a Protestant church. Nearby towns offered additional types of churches, giving the 500 person population of these towns significant choice in places to worship. Although I occasionally attended the other churches the family with whom I lived were Protestants so most of my data comes from Protestants.

Although Protestant churches are scattered across the atoll with different preachers for each church, one preacher at the main church served as the paramount reverend for the atoll.

While people treated all preachers with respect, the deference that they offered to this reverend was particularly profound. They served him first at festivals and continuously gave both to the church and to the preacher himself.

All church services end by someone passing around a collection plate. This money apparently goes toward the church itself. All of the other goods and money that people give at church, however, seem to go to the preachers. For example, often after church a group performs. This group—such as the youth group or the woman’s circle—might decorate the church with bags of rice and flour, canned goods, soy sauce, and other material items. All of these goods are gifts for the preacher.⁹ The group also deposits money for the reverend while walking around in a circle and singing, as other members of the congregation also stand up to deposit money. When children perform they often carry around money flags, one dollar bills attached to a plant stem that they wave around and eventually placed on a platform in the center of the room. All of this money, adults told me, also goes to the preacher.

Why did they give to the church leaders? Some adults told me that giving to the reverend is like giving to God. Others told me that the reverend has no time to make copra because he was busy teaching his congregation. So they explained, it is their duty to provide for him. The reverend himself told me that he did not get a salary, a sentiment that many people repeated. In truth, however, the Protestant church does seem to pay preachers a salary although everyone on Jajikon has a different idea about how much they get paid. One woman said that the paramount reverend gets three hundred dollars a month. She then asserted that this amount is not nearly

⁹ These groups display their generosity not only to the church and the reverend but also to the community. When groups give performances at the church, they also feed people after the church.

enough to support him and his family which is why everyone needs to give.¹⁰ In addition to these gifts at church moreover, there is a special meeting on the first Saturday of every month. On the first Saturday of every month, one woman explained, there is a special meeting. Each family contributes \$2.50 to the reverend at this meeting.

The climax of public displays of generosity is Christmas, a holiday centered around giving to the church.¹¹ During the Christmas that I experienced all Protestants in the atoll traveled to the main church, reuniting family members from many villages. Christmas at the Protestant church starts mid-morning and continues into the wee hours of the evening. The day itself consists of an endless succession of performances. Age and gender groups from each village—the Sunday school, the youth group, the women's circle—sing and dance. These dances, called *beat*, generally only occur at Christmas and consist of acting out in lines and ritualized movements a song that generally details some sort of "traditional" Marshallese activity. For example, the youth group performed stylized movements that represent the many actions that go into making *bwiro*, fermented breadfruit.

In addition to singing and dancing, each group ends their performance by walking in a circle and depositing money in the collection plate at the center of the room. Often the plate overflows and has to be exchanged for another. Each group also collects five or ten dollars from each member prior and puts the money in an envelope that they give to the preachers. The woman's circles from each village proudly displayed additional goods, such as ten or twenty

¹⁰ Teachers, who were virtually the only people with a salary who lived in the village, seemed to make around three hundred dollars a month. Almost everyone else solely made money from copra. I do not have specific data how much copra people processed every month. I was told that it took around 1-2 days, working constantly, for a man to make a 120 pound bag of copra worth around 30 dollars. Consequently, three hundred dollars a month is more or less what most people seem to make in Jajikon.

¹¹ For an extensive discussion of Christmas rituals and the months of preparation that go into them see Carucci (1997).

traditional woven purses, that they also gave to the preachers. Everybody from Jajikon was carrying a towel that they waved back and forth as they marched around the room. All of these goods, again, they gave to the reverend. Culminating the public displays of generosity, while people sing they produce candy from the folds of their clothes and delightedly fling the candy across the room as children run around laughing, grabbing as much as they can.

At the end of the day the deacons stood up and reported exactly how much money each group had given to the preachers. The total amount was around \$4000. \$2000 went to the main reverend, \$1000 each went to the lower preachers. It was a competition, my friends told me, to see who would give the most. ‘And what do you get for giving the most?’ I asked. My friend looked at me confused. ‘Nothing,’ she said. All they get is the honor of giving, of displaying their generosity to all.

Age

In addition to titled status, wealth, and church leadership, age is a defining feature of Marshallese hierarchy. Relative age is ever-present in the RMI. Most kinship terms identify the relative age between two individuals. In Marshallese people distinguish siblings not by gender terms such as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ but by age with the words *jeiū* (older sibling) and *jatū* (younger sibling).¹²

As with all other forms of power, those who are older command deference and respect. Numerous people said that they agreed to give an item to someone else because the person who asked was older and could command respect. One older woman, for example, told a younger

¹² *Jeiū* actually means “my older sibling.” It is impossible to say ‘older sibling’ in Marshallese without possessing it. Now people also sometimes use loan words from English, *brother* and *sister*.

kinswoman to help make handicrafts. When I asked the younger woman why she helped she responded, “she is older.” A woman wanted to refuse to give her child away but was unable to say no to the people who asked. ‘Why not?’ I asked. ‘They are older,’ the woman replied. Another woman never asked her classificatory father to repay a significant debt he owed her because he is “really old” but she “is a child (comparatively).” “I am small,” she asserted.

Similarly, I was sitting with Barbra in her house one day and we saw her uncle walk up to the house.

“Shhh,” Barbra said. We watched the uncle take some fish from a table. “He is stealing fish,” she whispered to me.

“Why don’t you go and say, ‘hey, you should not steal?’” I whispered back.

“Because he is my uncle.”

“Are you mad at him?”

“I am a little mad but, I won’t be very mad because he is my uncle. If it had been my sister or brother, I would have said, ‘hey!’” She feared to protest her uncle’s actions because he had the power of age.

Children sometimes used this older/younger hierarchy to their advantage to torment younger siblings. One youngest sibling in a family was particularly weak and small and had difficulty sticking up for himself. When his older siblings teased him they would say “you are my younger sibling” in a disparaging tone of voice. The younger child would inevitably burst into tears and would scream “I am not!” By trying to deny his status, he was also trying to deny his siblings’ power over him. The siblings’ statement, “you are my younger sibling” upset him precisely because his status as younger meant he was to obey.

Just as with chiefs, nations, and church leaders, the very fact that people are older means that they naturally have more and should be generous with it. Younger siblings should not have more than older ones, numerous adults told me, because “they are younger.” One oldest sibling reflected on whether or not his siblings were generous

It is said, according to the beliefs of the Marshallese.... it is said that the oldest...it is said that he or she is generous. He or she will be more generous than the people who are younger [younger siblings]. Because their belief is, it is said that God made him or her the oldest so that he or she will be generous and good to people.

Similarly, a young woman told me that God might put people in the position of younger sibling as a form of punishment. If a person is bad, then God will make them younger, because he or she does not know how to look after people so he or she should not be an older sibling. These statements echo the ideas discussed earlier about the source of chiefly power. According to this logic, people are not generous because they are older or higher in rank. Rather, they are older because they are generous.

Such a belief applies to the relationship between parents and children just as it does to the relationship between older and younger siblings. Good parents, many people told me, feed their children. Other adults said that it was appropriate for children to get mad at their parents if they fail to give them what they want. One woman complained that her mother rarely gave things to her but often gave to her younger sister. Her mother has ‘a bad manner,’ the woman continued, remarking that since she was now eldest (her older brother died) her mother should respect her the most. Another woman praised her father as “generous” because he gave to her money and food when she asked for it. She contrasted her father with her mother who always said “wait” and did not give.

Just as with chiefs, the relative power arrangement between youth and elders depends not only on age but on how people show proof of their status by behaving accordingly. A famous Marshallese myth about the invention of the sail is an excellent example of both the importance of obeying one's elders and that age rights can be overturned by actions. There are many different versions of this myth but generally speaking the story goes like this: Liktanur had seven sons. One day the brothers decided to race to decide who would be the ruler. As they all got in their separate paddling canoes Liktanur asked the oldest sibling to take her along. He refused, fearing that her weight would slow him down. One by one Liktanur asked her sons to carry her and was rejected. Finally she asked Jebro, her youngest son. He took her into his canoe. Liktanur then revealed a surprise, a sail. She showed Jebro how to set it up. Jebro, because he obeyed his mother, won the race and became chief despite the fact that he was the youngest sibling. In other words, those who obey and defer to their parents will prosper since their parents will give to them just as Liktanur gave the gift of sailing to Jebro.¹³

Formal Versus Informal Giving

It is clear that a central feature of hierarchy is giving—both goods and labor. Those who are lower in rank more often give labor than goods, but they are sometimes asked for goods as well. There are different ways of giving, however, and distinctions between formal and informal giving.

Christmas is the prototypical formal giving event, but all parties and feasts in the Marshall Islands involve formal giving and they all follow a similar pattern. Someone—the

¹³ See McArthur (1996) for an in-depth discussion of this myth and various different versions of it.

people running the program, the people throwing a party, the people who are hosting a funeral, or the people who are greeting newcomers or honoring people who have done a service for the community—provides food for everyone else. People line up to get the food and, depending on the size of the event, leave with plates piled high with food. They often take this food home because they cannot eat it all. These people also give to their hosts. They sing, and at the end of singing or during the last song walk up and give money, soap, cans of food, or handicrafts. When people, and particularly women, sing they often produce candy from the folds of their clothing and throw it a delighted audience, reveling in the act of giving.

During these special occasions, moreover, people can ask to claim (*tōptōp*) the possessions of the people for whom the occasion is special. Hence, during the biggest festival, the party celebrating a child turning one (*keemem*), people claim (*tōptōp*) all sorts of goods from the child's family. During one *keemem* some women asked the child's mother for the child's dress, shoes, and underwear. The mother immediately undressed the baby, gave away the clothes, and then went to put some more clothes on the baby. Other women asked the mother for her own clothes. One family that gave a very large *keemem* for their child also owned numerous piglets and chicks. During the week before the party I tramped through the jungle with a dozen eight to twelve year-olds as they chased the piglets away from their mother, claimed them, and brought them home. After the *keemem* the child's mother told me that their family was “wiped out.”

Both men and women have different but important roles to play in these formal acts of giving. In this matrilineal society, as McArthur (1996) argues, women are seen as the main source not only of land but also of life. Women give nourishment to their children. “Then, when

grown up the child receives land (*bwidej*) through the mother's lineage and, again, essentially eats from her" (123). Women play a focal role in formal exchanges. They not only cook the food but are the main ones who publically give. At a ceremony to honor workers from the capital who installed solar power into the school, a long line of women marched and deposited baskets of food. Some men marched after the women, also depositing food. Women's circles organize programs at the church, singing publically and giving to the church. There are no men's circles. Numerous women went on a trip to another village to celebrate a *keemem*. No men went.

Although women are the public face of giving, their gifts depend, of course, on men's work. Men capture the fish and kill the pigs for the feast, gather the bananas and the coconuts, haul the copra bags to the ship to get money to buy food (both men and women collect mature coconuts for copra but men do more of the work than women.) The man provides the raw food for women to cook (McArthur 1996). Although power (technically) comes from women, it is men who fill the main public leadership roles in the government and are the main ones who give speeches as a pastor, councilman, chief, or grandfather—with the exception of female chieftesses, grandmothers, and female heads of lineages. I have heard people say, particularly in respect to the relationship between spouses, that men are more powerful than women. But I have also heard people say that women are more powerful than men. McArthur (1996) argues that, at least in ideology, the genders are complementary as opposed to hierarchical.

Formal exchanges are relatively rare compared to informal gifts. As far as I can tell, both men and women engage in relatively similar ways in the informal economy.¹⁴ People, men and

¹⁴ Although I suspect that an explicit focus on gender would reveal some differences. For example, I suspect that women are more likely to ask for things of and give to other women, while men are more likely to ask and give to other men, but I do not have enough data on gender differences to be certain.

women alike, constantly both ask and expect each other to give. The belief that chiefs, elites, and church leaders are to care for their people technically means that they should buy plane tickets for those who need them, give food to those who are starving. Chiefs and church leaders told other people to do things, to work on projects, and sometimes (although not that often), to give to them. But informal giving largely takes place in relationships of solidarity—specifically between kin.¹⁵

Relationships of Solidarity

In Jajikon, being kin means sharing. Those who do not share are not kin.

Kinship

With 68,000 people in the RMI and another 60,000 Marshallese living in the US, most Marshallese are related in some way to each other. Even on Majuro, where an estimated 30,000 people live, I rarely walked down the street without seeing someone I knew. On Jajikon every single person in the village, including the pastors who were assigned to Jajikon as opposed to voluntarily choosing to move there, was related in some way to everyone else. Despite globalization, the influence of modern technology, the increasing rate of immigration to the U.S., and new socio-political structures, kinship relations continue to structure life for everyone.

Technically, Marshallese kinship is matrilineal and bilateral: inheritance goes through the woman's line but kinship is reckoned from both one's mother and one's father (Spoehr

¹⁵ Pollock (1970:274-301) claims that many of these more informal gifts must be reciprocated. She says that when one woman brings a plate of food to another woman, that woman should fill the plate with something else and send it back. Whether because I was in a different village or in the Marshall Islands at a different time, I did not see or notice these expectations of immediate or even time-delayed reciprocity. Giving creates an expectation that another will give back, but this expectation is not an obligation. Informal giving in Jajikon fits better into Sahlins's (1972:193-194) idea of generalized reciprocity, where each gives according to their means.

1949:155-160, 192). One's clan (*jowi*) and one's lineage (*bwij*) come from one's mother (Pollock 1970:24). Technically, also, cross-cousins and parallel cousins are distinct: parallel cousins are siblings while cross-cousins can marry (Spoehr 1949:186-187). In addition, technically children refer to their parents' siblings as "mother" and "father." Therefore, children also refer to their parents' parallel cousins as "mother" and "father," they refer to their parents' parallel cousins' children as siblings, and so on. Likewise, regardless of gender one's siblings' children are also one's offspring.¹⁶

Keeping track of relationships is crucial for appropriate behavior and was something I often failed to do. Unable to keep everyone's relationships in my head and less invested in making sure I behaved appropriately than I would have been if I was actually Marshallese, I often was unaware that a given man was actually my adopted mother's classificatory child or my adopted father's father's adopted grandchild, making the man my brother. Brothers and sisters, classificatory or otherwise, as well as cross-gender parent-child relationships, are avoidance relationships in which all references to romantic or sexual relationships and profanity are avoided. "Shh!" my adopted classificatory mother protested, laughing, when I showed off my Marshallese language skills and cursed her, an action that usually brought delighted laughter and a halfhearted slap from my mother. 'Don't you see Paul sitting over there? He is your brother!'

Although any individual has many mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, and siblings and will refer to all of these individuals with these kin terms, everybody recognizes gradations of kinship—not all mothers are equal. Specifically, people often insert the modifier *naaj* (almost/like) in front of a kin term to indicate more precisely the nature of one's relationship.

¹⁶ See also Spoehr (1949:182-221).

Abraham, a twelve-year-old boy, was confused as to my relationship with my adopted family and asked one of my brothers, “what is your relationship to her [Elise]?” “She is my older sibling,” my brother said. “Because she is whose child?” Abraham pressed. “She is *naaj* [like] mama’s child,” my brother responded. Along the same lines, kinship relationships could be distinguished between *mol* [real] relationships and *riab* [false] relationships. “Yes!” exclaimed Josh, twelve years old, during a heated discussion about people’s relationships. “You know mama and, mama Murel and Tamy,” he continued, distinguishing Murel with whom he lived during the school year from his biological mother, Murel’s sister, with whom he lived during the summer. “You know dude,” he continued, “They are siblings.” “True siblings?” Jason asked. “Yes” Pat, another boy, inserted. “Yes,” Josh agreed. “Really true ones?” Jason pressed. “Ok, I don’t know,” Josh admitted. Similarly, I once pressed Barbra, a roughly thirty year old woman, as to the relationship between her parents and Susan, a woman who lived nearby. She responded that her father and Susan’s maternal grandmother were siblings. “Real siblings?” I asked. “They aren’t really family,” she responded “...I just know that they are cousins.”

The frequency of adoption and the relatively flexible way in which people decide who is their brother, sister, mother, or father, mean that everybody gets classed as kin of some sort and that people often conveniently change kin relations to suit their own needs. For example, as Barbra did above, many people called cross-cousins siblings. So one of my friends, a young unmarried woman in her twenties, protested vigorously that she could not date Tony because he was her sibling. I thought for a while, and then mentioned that since Tony’s mother and her father were siblings, that would make Tony her cross-cousin, eminently dateable. She blushed, laughed, and denied my claim. She insisted that she and Tony were siblings.

Similarly, people who stay on Jajikon for a while and do not fit into a kin relationship eventually get adopted. For example, man had a friend whom he brought back from Majuro to live on Jajikon in his family's house. When I asked why people told me that this friend, Miōk, had no family on Majuro, something that is basically unthinkable for the Marshallese. So the man "saw Miōk's sadness" and brought him to his family. When Miōk first arrived he was not kin. By the end of the year he was the grandson of his friend's mother. I was chatting with her one and I referred to Miōk as her son. Then I stopped and turned to her, asking, is he your son? She said that she had decided that he was her grandson so that she could say "you asshole" to him and other sorts of vulgar expressions. Her response demonstrates both that if people are not kin they become kin in some way or another, and that people often choose kin relationships for strategic reasons. Similarly, I was adopted into my parents' family and became subject to the avoidance taboos that occur between cross-gender siblings.

Kinship and Giving

Consequently, although knowing and keeping track of kinship relations is essential, kinship relationships are often conveniently changed. The actual instantiation of kinship relationships requires giving, just as people who are kin are required to give.

Many people explained why they gave things to others and why they asked for things by discussing their status as kin. I asked one woman why she was making numerous woven mats for a *keemem* on Majuro. She replied that the person who had asked for her mats was 'almost [her father].' A young woman said that family is very important and that if a relative comes and asks for salt or flour one is obligated to give to them. Another woman said that they gave fish to another family because one member of the family was her uncle. This same woman explained

that she gave her daughter away (as an infant) because her younger sister asked for the child. Said one man about why they adopted a child, “because he is the son of her [his wife’s] younger brother.” Occasionally people take children to help out kin. One woman needed to nurse her kinswoman’s child because her kinswoman had no milk. “I helped them,” she said, and then “they gave me my child.”

Kin also give labor to each other. Making fermented breadfruit is a task that takes a lot of time and generally requires more adult workers than are present in a single household. When my household made breadfruit, therefore, several other people assisted, specifically close kin. Rina’s parents, Rina’s sister, and Kaymal’s adopted son and his wife came to our house and spent several days making fermented breadfruit. Several days later, however, the same group made breadfruit at Kaymal’s adopted son’s house. Several days after that the same group made breadfruit at Rina’s parents’ house. These same family members helped out when I threw a party for the village.

People also often conveniently stress particular kin relationships when they want things from each other. My neighbor asked me for a mosquito coil. When I hesitated she pressed, ‘for your child so she won't get bitten.’ This woman had a newborn baby. She appealed to my solidarity with her child, a parent-child relationship, and to the need to nurture those who are children to compel me to give. In this particular case, her appeal worked, I gave her a mosquito coil.

As a second example, I had a Tuvaluan friend on Majuro who was a tattoo artist and ran a tattoo shop. The art of tattooing has long been lost among the Marshallese. Now, many people want tattoos but do not know how to do them. When my friend came to visit Jajikon he brought

his tattoo equipment and said that he would give people in my household tattoos for free. As a result, I was deluged by requests for tattoos even after my friend left. When I said that I thought he would make people pay if they went to get a tattoo on Majuro numerous friends of mine exclaimed something along the lines of, ‘but we are relatives! Won’t your friend give a free tattoo to one of your (*nukum*)?’ Here, people used the fact that we were relatives to imply that privileges for one person apply to everyone in that person’s family. They assumed (wrongly, in fact), that he would be giving me tattoos for free. If he is giving me free tattoos he should give my whole family free tattoos.

Not only do kin help each other out by giving time, but kin are often seen as replaceable—if one person cannot do something someone else in the family does. For example, one woman told her sister’s daughter to help her prepare for the party. But the sister came instead. She told me under her breath that her daughter was having her period and therefore was restricted from cooking for the party. Similarly, another woman said that she would attend a housewarming party, but she was unable to go. She sent her granddaughter instead.

Treating kin right, by helping them and acknowledging them, was seen as good. Some women praised a young man who greeted a kinswoman helped her out.

“He ran toward me on the ocean road and...greeted me. He really greeted me.”

Another woman agreed with her assessment. “He always took time to come and see us on the docks. He came to the docks and hauled the goods.”

“He knew how to be kin,” the first woman remarked.

Giving and Possessing

Clearly, however, people do not give everything, even to their closest kin. In Jajikon there is a trajectory of types of possessions. I use the word “good” for most possessions following Gregory’s (1982:24-28) argument that economics appropriated the word “goods” as part of their argument for patterns of exchange that exist in situations of scarcity. “Goods” are good, they are things that people want but cannot always have. Gregory argues that economic analyses should use the words “gift” and “commodities” as opposed to “goods” because practices of exchange are not universal and the former words, unlike the latter, capture historically specific categories. But while I agree that practices of exchange are historically specific, in Jajikon economic activity is characterized by the fact that people frequently do ask each other for things that they want and giving all the time is problematic because there is a limit to what people can give. Consequently, “good” seems to be the appropriate term to use to capture exchange relations.

Nonetheless, there are different types of goods in Jajikon. Most goods fall into the category of possessions that people ask for and expect others to give. This category includes all possessions that lack agency and the ability to choose themselves to whom they want to belong—a characteristic that applies to infants as well as things such as food. Second, there are goods that people can give but for which people should not really ask. These are possessions that someone has had for a long time or in which he/she has invested a great amount of resources such as money, food, or labor. Finally, there are things that cannot be given at all—these include anyone with sufficient agency to make one’s own choices, a category that applies to all people

older than infants and some grown animals. Goods in this category also include commodities, things that should be bought as opposed to given.

Goods in the second category may seem to fit Weiner's (1992) category of inalienable possessions, which she defines as possessions that are so imbued with history that even when someone gives them they retain their connection to their original owner. But as Gregory (1982) argues about gift economies, in Jajikon every gift retains a connection to its former owner and is in some way inalienable. Even commodities in Jajikon retain history since people regularly buy commodities on credit that they never repay and their ability to do so depends on the nature of their relationship with the owner.

Therefore, the meaning of almost all acts of exchange in Jajikon depends on the identity of the possessors. But possession is more complicated than simply who created, or is holding, a possession at a given time. Strathern (1988:142) argued against the Western, and Marxist, notion that those who produce an item should possess it. Whereas Marxists argue that those who lack control over that which they produce are alienated from their labor, Strathern (142) asks, "Does the right to determine the value of one's product belong naturally to the producer?" She suggests that the very idea that an individual should possess the fruits of his/her own labor is a Western view of possession and property that does not hold in Melanesia. Similarly, in the Micronesian village of Jajikon, people do not have an inalienable right to the things that they produce or the children that they birth. Goods, and infants, belong to the kin group as a whole. Giving has value not only because it creates relationships, but because giving is compelled by the very relationships and existence that gave one the ability to possess anything.

Givable Goods

The list of givable goods in Jajikon includes food, clothing, tools, time and labor, baby animals, and human infants.¹⁷ People constantly asked for, gave, and talked about giving food. One man asked another, “do you have any meat?” This food includes both things people buy—such as rice, flour, and salt—and what they fish and harvest. Everybody in Jajikon as on most outer atolls lives partly on subsistence and partly by selling copra (*waini*). Families gather pandanus, coconuts, and breadfruit from the trees that they own as well as other fruit such as limes, papayas, and bananas. Men fish with nets, fishing poles, or spears. Occasionally men take out boats to get a large catch. People sometimes asked for, and gave, fruits of the land still on the trees as well as food that had already been harvested. A woman called out, ‘Do you have any pandanus?’

Food was the most frequent, but by no means the only, consumable item that people asked for and gave. People asked me for tape, lighters, flashlights, and medicine. They shared mosquito coils, firewood, and clothes. With items that are not completely consumable, such as DVD players or tools, there is an expectation that one should eventually return the item to its original owner. Imon, for example, once told me to return to her neighbor a hammer that she had borrowed. Nonetheless, as one woman said, “borrow” often means that the item will never return. I once asked a woman for a roll of duck tape that I lent her a couple of weeks prior. She

¹⁷ I observed at least one instance of people asking for and/or giving the following items: food (cooked and raw, bought and gathered), firewood, long sticks for gathering breadfruit and pandanus, tools such as knives and hammers, lighters, matches, money, flashlights, batteries, mosquito coils, tape, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, fishing gear, snorkeling masks, books, bibles, paper, pencils, pens, marbles, toys, TVs, radios, cameras, watches, DVDs, iPods, headphones, glasses, clothes, ukuleles, underwear, shoes, jewelry, gas, cars, boats, chairs, tables, oil, medicine, and combs.

said, in an apologetic but not guilty manner, “there is no more.” When one gives, others can keep until someone asks for the item back.

Money is no exception. A few people in Jajikon—the teachers, the doctor, the policeman—received a monthly salary from the government. A couple of others owned stores. When I was in town I employed two women as research assistants. There was also some temporary work available when a science crew developing an experimental plan to save the coral reefs came to Jajikon. But for most people during most of the year their main source of cash beyond remittances sent by family in the capital or abroad was comes from copra (*waini*), the dried meat of mature coconuts from which people can make coconut oil. Even people who did receive a small salary supplemented that salary by selling copra.

When people have money—be it from jobs, remittances, or selling copra—others can ask for it. The family with whom I lived frequently asked me for money. Similarly, both of my research assistants told me that people were constantly asking them for money. One day one of my assistants was late for work. I eventually found her in a heated debate with one of her kin. She told me later that the woman had asked her for money. When my research assistant claimed that she did not have any money her kinswoman accused her of “saving,” hoarding a stash of money and refusing to share it. This woman’s use of “saving” as an insult shows that when one has more than another one is expected to share as opposed build up a supply for the future.

People also expect each other to give their time and labor. “The other day I told her to make the soft breadfruit and be ready for Friday,” Katōli complained when her daughter did not show up to help the women who were preparing a feast for the arrival of a new preacher. Murel asked a woman from every house to help with her granddaughter’s *keemem*, the party to

celebrate a child's first birthday. Jako frequently asked men around the island to help cart bags of copra to the collection boat or to fish for an important occasion.

Finally, people regularly ask each other for baby animals such as chickens, pigs, and dogs as well as human infants. Adoption of children by kin is a common practice not only in the Marshall Islands but throughout the Pacific (Brady 1976; Carroll 1970; Silk 1980; Treide 2004).

¹⁸ During my stay eight infants were born and three of those infants were adopted (one was adopted by a grandparent). A family in Jajikon adopted an additional infant born in a different village. Adults asked for, but did not receive, at least two of the other infants. In addition, multiple adults asked for, but did not receive, an infant born to kin on the capital. Parents did not always talk about the people who ask for their children so it is possible that people asked for many of the additional infants born but not given. In all three adoptions that I observed the prospective adopting parents approached the birth parents and asked for the infant.

All of these possessions—food, money, piglets, infants—are givable and are, in some sense, alienable. At the same time, they also always retain their connection to previous possessors. Gifts of these goods are meaningful not only due to the material properties of the good but also due to the identity of the person who gave and the relationship built through giving. When people give fish to another family everyone knows where the fish came from. “It is Tōrin’s fish” people might say. As for goods that cannot be consumed, as they circulate everyone knows to whom they used to belong. A DVD player passed through three or four households but everybody knew to whom the player should ultimately, but not inevitably, return.

¹⁸As reported in 1976, adopted individuals constituted 25% of the population on Manihi atoll in Tuamotu, 15.4% on Rumung Island in Yap, and 13% on Namoluk in the Caroline Islands (Brooks 1976; Kirkpatrick and Broder 1976; Marshall 1976). At that time 83% of the households in a village in the Ellice Islands contained at least one adopted individual, compared to 75% in Manihi and 41% on Namoluk (Brady 1976; Brooks 1976; Marshall 1976). In contrast, 4.4% percent of the population is adopted in the United States (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2004).

Similarly, when adults adopt children those children do not entirely lose their connection to their birth parents. People talk about adoption both as “giving children (*lelok ajri*)” and “sharing children (*ajej ajri*).” As the use of the word ‘share’ (*ajej*) implies, birth parents still have some rights of possession over their children. Most adopted children have contact with both sets of parents by the time that they are adults. Birth parents can take their children back, although they generally do not do so except in cases of abuse because taking back a child creates conflict. Like children, no goods can be entirely separated from people who possessed them previously—complete alienability does not exist.

Goods For Which One Should Not Ask

Some goods are so imbued with the identity or the labor of their possessor that it is impolite to ask someone to give them up. While no goods are entirely alienable, some are more so than others.

These possessions include extremely expensive goods such as cars and boats, goods attached to extremely important people such as paramount chiefs, grown animals such as chickens and pigs, and older children. Many adults scoffed when I asked whether people request these goods. People ‘will borrow them,’ they said, but they will not take them. One former residence of a chief still had a chest filled with clothing and other items of the deceased. These items were powerful, I was told, and often punished people who disobeyed cultural rules within the clothes’ vicinity.

People generally do not ask for grown animals. In fact, four adults laughed when I asked about requesting a grown animal. As one woman explained, ‘people have spent too much time feeding them.’ Another woman differentiated pigs from chickens, stating that the pigs require

more care and are more inalienable. A similar logic can be applied to grown children. The reason why birth parents should not take back grown children is because the adoptive parents cared for and invested resources in the child. One woman, for example, was angry when her adoptive daughter's birth mother used the twenty-year-old's recent illness as a reason to take the young woman away. The birth mother claimed that the adoptive mother was not properly looking over the twenty-year-old. The adoptive mother protested that she cared for her daughter quite well. Then she added, 'I fed her and fed her. And now that she is grown she takes her back?'¹⁹ Another member of the adoptive mother's family was also angry, asserting that the birth mother should not have taken her daughter back because 'she did not watch her.' Through giving food the mother left a part of herself in her adoptive daughter. Over time her daughter, like grown animals, became inalienable in the sense that she had so much of her adoptive mother in her that she should not be taken away.

In addition to grown children, the Marshallese are very attached to their land. They invest parts of themselves in the specific plots of land that they own and work.²⁰ They are also attached to their village, their atoll, and their nation. Land, like titles, technically pass through the woman's line.²¹ One's land identity depends more on one's history and ancestry than on one's current residence. For example, two women who had married into Jajikonian families did not feel themselves to be people of Jajikon (*ri-Jajikon*) or people of Rōrin (*ri-Rōrin*). Rather, they told me they were *ruwamāejet*, a word defined in the dictionary as 'stranger' but that has a

¹⁹ After a couple of weeks the daughter ran away from her birth mother and returned to her adoptive parents.

²⁰ Traditionally, plots of land (*wāto*) stretch from the lagoon to the ocean, dividing the village into horizontal chunks that give people access to both bodies of water and to the jungle that generally rests on the ocean-side. In addition to this land where they have their house, people frequently own parts of the land outside of town or even on other islands. They generally use this land to produce copra.

²¹ There are many exceptions to this rule and there are some forms of patrilineal descent and inheritance. For a detailed discussion of land tenure see Rynkiewich (1972).

deeper connotation of a person who intrudes into an ancestral space (Abo et al. 1976).

Ruwamāejet are at a disadvantage not just because they miss their homeland. Rather, the land itself works to dispel and kill *ruwamāejet*, to get rid of those who do not belong. One woman refused to tell me a story about a ghost because speaking about ghosts can sometimes produce them and as a *ruwamāejet* she said that she was in particular danger. Ghosts come in many forms. Some of them typically punish people who break customary rules. These ghosts also punish *ruwamāejet* regardless of whether they break the rules simply because *ruwamāejet* do not belong.

People own not only the land but also the products of their land, including the fish in the sea that borders their land. Adults warn children not to pick mature coconuts from another family's land (regardless of whether that land is completely owned by the family or ultimately belongs to a chief). Men ask permission before fishing in the waters off of someone else's domain. No one asks someone else to give them the land that is their livelihood and identity.

Although people should not ask for land, grown animals, and very expensive items, these goods can be given (in contrast to grown children who cannot be given). They can also be bought and sold. Chiefs in the past gave land as gifts to commoners whom they favored (Rynkiewich 1972:64). Land, particularly on the capital, can be bought or rented. Although history connects people to these goods, they can separate themselves from the goods.

Moreover, people do not have free reign to do whatever they want with these somewhat inalienable goods. Although people should not ask for permanent possession of a car or boat, they did ask to borrow vehicles or for rides to particular places. Other large items, like TVs, travel around households. Similarly, although people do not generally ask for land they do ask

for the fruits of land and for hospitality. They ask for limes and breadfruit, for permission to fish in a particular area or to collect *waini*. Although people would not ask for land itself they might ask to build a house on someone's land. Kin arrive and expect to be given a place to stay. In exchange for hospitality they bring food and work to support the family during their stay. This tradition in which kin support and give hospitality to kin means that, in the RMI, there are no homeless people.²²

Goods travel between people, inalienable in that their ultimate identity and owner does not change, alienable in that kin nevertheless have some rights to use all of these things. Even with seemingly inalienable goods such as land people do not have the power to independently determine how, and by whom, a good is used.

Commodities

Just as one should not ask for goods too embedded with history and value, one also should not ask for commodities. Although gifts and commodities are materially the same, they differ according to their relationship with their possessors. Commodities, Gregory (1982) argues, really are alienable—their identity comes from their material qualities, not their history or the identity of the person who gave them.²³ While gifts are given, commodities are bought and sold.

²² At the same time, the urban areas are extremely dense and unsustainable partly due to the fact that many people move there because they have someone to support them while they go to school or look for work. Ebeye in particular—the small island where the Marshallese workers on Kwajalein, the American army base, live in a system that resembles apartheid—is an urban jungle. With 46,000 people per square kilometer, it is also one of the densest islands in the world (Gorenflo and Levin 1989; McClennen 2007).

²³ Although, as Lapavistas (2004) points out, no commodity transaction can be entirely bereft of the relationships that are essential in gift economies. No commodity is faceless or lacks history. Its brand, for example, marks it as a commodity that can be trusted to do as expected, or as a commodity that will fail and that one should not buy. There is a measure of trust in the relationship between buyers and sellers even in a market system, a trust built on the identities that are embedded within commodities.

During my fieldwork four households in Jajikon operated small stores. (Only two of these households consistently had things to sell.) These stores were family-run informal affairs. Only one household had a room dedicated to a store. This store, moreover, was out of business for most of the year. People in the other households stacked goods in an inner room or in a cupboard. These stores have no hours and no managers other than the family. People pop in and out at all hours so long as someone in the family is home.

People said that one should buy commodities as opposed to asking for them so that the businesses can prosper. Nonetheless, the importance of copra as a source of money and the fact that the people buying and selling are kin means that in practice the line between commodities and gifts is nebulous. In addition to money owners of stores accept copra as currency. Since people do not carry large bags of copra around with them whenever they want to buy a can of tuna, accepting copra as currency means selling on credit. Kin, moreover, feel pressure to sell to close kin on credit. They also feel pressure to simply give that which is in their stores to their kin when they ask.

People who buy on credit (everyone) often do not settle their debts. One store's receipts from a three month period show that the worth of the copra people give to settle their debt rarely equaled the cost of the goods that they had bought on credit. One man had a debt of \$88.45. The copra that he brought in was only worth \$31.22.²⁴ The next month he bought at least \$50 more on credit. Another man brought 29.52 dollars of copra to settle a debt of \$41.65.²⁵ Store owners

²⁴ The currency in the RMI is the US dollar.

²⁵ Business owners sold copra to Tobalar, the copra processing plant on Majuro, at 15 cents per pound. They gave people who brought copra to their store 12 cents per pound. The amount of their debt that people paid off was based on getting 12 center per pound of copra. Even if people did not entirely pay off their debt it is possible for business owners to break even, but people would have had to pay off significantly more than half of their debt for that to happen. As I could not see receipts from before a couple of months, I do not really know the financial viability of

talked frequently about the difficulty of getting people to pay back what they owe. One said that many people “don’t pay, from now until tomorrow.” Another told me that people owed a total of \$6,000 to his store. While I cannot confirm that specific amount the receipts from his store indicate that he was owed quite a large amount of money.

In other words, in Jajikon there is a fine line between gifts and commodities. As one man said, “businesses” are compatible with “Marshallese culture” because if someone really needs something their relatives give. An older woman who ran a store that had largely gone out of business by the time I arrived had a similar understanding of how commodities function in Jajikon. She said that she found running a business very hard because she felt ashamed to refuse to give when someone did not have enough money to buy what they needed. While technically people buy commodities instead of asking for them, in practice, with commodities as with gifts, people feel pressure to give.

Possessions That One Can Not Give Away

The only possessions that people feel no pressure to give are those whose agency takes them out of the realm of goods and into the realm of agentive people. For example, while infants are similar in form to batteries, bracelets, and food in that they cannot walk or act on their own desires, toddlers have too much agency to be givable. Once an infant gains the ability to express his or her desires by walking away from what he or she dislikes and toward what he or she prefers, the child is no longer a good. Similarly, it is difficult to give grown dogs away since they have the ability to act on their own preferences.

the stores. The receipts from three months suggest that people do not pay off enough of their debt for the stores to break even, but it is possible that over the long term they do.

Consequently, in all three adoptions that I observed infants were adopted before the age of one.²⁶ One other infant born during my stay was adopted by her grandmother when she was one and a half.²⁷ Since before the adoption the mother and the grandmother lived in the same household and both served as caretakers, moving with her grandmother when the household split up was not entirely the same as being adopted by non co-resident kin. People also told me about six infants adopted in the past, all of whom they said were adopted before the age of two.²⁸

Parents who wait to give their children until the child is older often find themselves unable to give since the children refuse to go. One mother told me that she put off giving her son to his adoptive parents until he was older. As a result, she said, they never adopted him. Apparently when the time came and she gave her son away he would “sleep there [at the adoptive parents’ house] one night and then come back. Two or three nights, and then come back. Because he was this age [she gestured with her hand] and I didn’t give him when he was small.” Similarly, another mother never ended up giving her son away at all because she put off the transaction until he was too old.

“He didn’t go?” I asked her.

“He didn’t want to.”

“You asked Jejao if he wanted to go and he said no?”

²⁶ Although Spoehr (1949:202) claims that adoption occurs only after the child’s first birthday, my observations show that adoptions often happen earlier. It is quite possible that there have been significant changes in how adoption takes place over the last century, particularly with the increasingly accessibility of formula to use in place of breastfeeding.

²⁷ Grandparent adoption is very common. Some people told me that it is typical for grandparents to take adopt their firstborn grandchildren. Regardless of when grandparents adopt, I know of no grandparents on Jajikon who did not adopt grandchildren. In the RMI the nest is never empty.

²⁸ I have less confidence in the accuracy of these retroactive reports since people generally do not keep track of age.

“Yeah, he didn’t because he was grown up then and he didn’t want to.” Both of these mothers’ statements imply that infants are no longer givable once they grow out of infancy and gain the ability to act on their desires by speaking and walking away.

Indeed, Marshallese children older than infants have a great deal of agency to determine where they will sleep and live. This agency comes partly from the fact that fosterage, a form of child sharing less permanent than adoption, is quite common.²⁹ Children frequently move between households. One eight-year-old girl spent four months on Jajikon with her classificatory father’s family. She returned to her family on the capital when her mother “asked for her.” Other parents who lived on Majuro sent all of their children to live with their kin on Rōrin during the school year since they thought that Rōrin was safer. During the summer the children returned to Majuro. Children often temporarily change residence to take care of (*karwaan*) older family members who need help. For example, a woman’s classificatory children stayed with her to help her and keep her company when her own children were away. Similarly, some grandchildren moved in with their grandparents for a couple of weeks while the children the grandparents had adopted were away. One woman was very busy one weekend and had no female children at home. She asked her relatives to send her twelve-year-old classificatory daughter to stay with her and help her. ‘I said that they should give her to me to work,’ the woman told me.

Children’s movement is subject not only to adults’ whims but also to children’s desires. Children often sleep in different places simply because they want to. One ten-year-old stayed with his grandparents for a while. His older brother said it was because he was “lazy” and did not want to do all the work his father made him do. Another ten-year-old lived somewhat

²⁹ See Burton (2002) for a discussion of child circulation elsewhere in the Pacific.

permanently with his grandparents but was not seen as adopted by them (see footnote 28). When I asked why the boy lived with his grandparents his mother said that he “wanted to.” Children constantly slept at different houses to visit friends or enjoy the company of children on a different side of the village. These children still had a family and home that they called their own. They simply temporarily slept elsewhere.

Most children and adults said that while children could temporarily choose to sleep in different locations they could not permanently choose to leave. Nonetheless, children sometimes used the threat of leaving as a method of expressing their anger at their parents or guardians. One girl said that when she gets mad at her parents and they scold her she says, “I won’t sleep in the house. Similarly, an eleven-year-old reported that his older brother said, ‘Lance said he will not sleep here anymore.’ While Lance glared at his brother I asked, ‘Why?’ The eleven year old responded that Lance was angry ‘because [his mother] did not let him go on the trip to the east.’ The younger brother was clearly teasing Lance by repeating something that he may or may not have said in private. But regardless of what Lance actually said, both boys clearly saw threats to leave as a typical way of responding to parental decisions that they do not like.

In particular, adopted children always have the option of permanently leaving their adoptive family and returning to their birth parents, assuming that the children are able to reach their birth parents. (Children whose adoptive parents and birth parents live on different atolls have a much harder time returning to their birth parents.) For example, one twelve-year-old girl ran away from her abusive adoptive mother. She went to the capital to go to the hospital. While on the capital she asked to visit her birth grandparents who happened to live on the capital. Once in her birth grandparents’ house she refused to leave.

No adoptive parents ever tell their children that they are adopted. Adults say that the reason for their silence is their fear of their adoptive children's flight. Children's ability to leave is one reason why parents need to be good to their children if they want them to stay.

The Language of Possession

Most goods in Jajikon are givable and askable. In respect to everything else, multiple people have multiple rights to possession. Even in the case of non-givable possessions such as older children and land, children circulate between kin and multiple people use the land even though they will not ask for the land itself. Possession in the Marshall Islands is distributed across a kin group.

This distributed possession is reflected in grammar even as it is made clear by the practical transfer of goods. Typically when people ask for things in Marshallese they use the first person possessive. "Just give me **my** drink (*limō*)" Kōrin said when she asked another woman to give her some tea. "Do give us **our** food (*kijed*) by you," another woman said. "Give me **my** child (*nejū*)," Carla reported that she said to her sister-in-law when she asked to adopt her infant. "Go and say that Hukira should give me **my** gum (*kijō bwil*)," Imon said to a young man whom she commanded to ask for gum.

All of these women asked for things that they did not yet have and that were in the physical possession of someone else. Nonetheless, with their grammar they spoke as if the goods were already theirs. Instead of saying, 'could you give me a drink' or 'could I have some of your food,' people say 'could you give me **my** drink' or 'could I have some of **my** food.'

In Marshallese it is not obligatory to ask for things in the first person. It would be somewhat odd to use the second person possessive ("could I have some of **your** food"). But

people can ask without possessing the item at all. For example, a child running an errand said to a woman, “give me **one** mosquito coil.” A woman said to her older sister, “do give me that breadfruit by you.” Nonetheless, it is not obligatory to ask for things in the first person breadfruit by you.” Since the use of the first person is common but not obligatory, when people ask for things in the first person they mark the item as something that they should have, as something that should be theirs.

Indeed, the fact that things in Jajikon belong to everyone means that even on special occasions when there is a spoken or unspoken agreement that people will give and honor one specific person or group and not others, people have to explicitly state the recipient of the gifts through speech. For example, one night I attended the birthday party of a nine-year-old boy. After eating, according to custom we guests stood up to sing and ceremonially give money and other small items to the birthday boy. The children and adults then spent ten minutes debating who was to give a speech in the name of the guests. The adults, who often use children's birthdays as an opportunity to teach children how to give speeches, encouraged different children to stand up and speak. The children refused, imitating adults who, with the exception of elders and titled leaders, avoid public speaking or calling attention to themselves as much as possible.

Frustrated, the matriarch of the family eventually turned to me. ‘You should speak.’

‘What do I say?’

‘It’s like, you know the money, these birthday gifts?’³⁰

‘Yes.’

³⁰ I did not record the first part of our conversation but I did record the rest of it.

“You bring it out here, show it, give it to us so that it will be ours,” she explained. Such a speech was necessary because it was “not yet clear that [the money] is his because no one has said, ‘ok this money is yours.’” The money belonged to everyone unless explicitly marked as the property of the birthday boy.

I understood the matriarch’s instructions perfectly after listening to the recording I made of our conversation. Somehow, however, at the time the implication of what the matriarch said was so foreign that I failed to understand and I gave an inadequate speech. I stood up and thanked God, the beginning, I had learned, of all good speeches. Everyone smiled. I then thanked the birthday boy and his family for the food they had provided. Everyone nodded in approval. I concluded by wishing the boy Happy Birthday and sat down, unaware of the problems my speech was to cause.

Apparently, after the party was over the birthday boy tried to give away his money. As one of his grown sisters explained to me, I had neglected to say that the money belonged to Mōjro. As a result, she said, the money belonged to everyone.

‘What?!’ I exclaimed.

‘Of course,’ she continued. ‘He gave me a dollar after the party was over. I asked him why, and he responded, ‘Elise never said that it was mine.’ I left out a very important sentence, the very sentence, in fact, that the matriarch had instructed me to say.

Even on special occasions when there is an unspoken agreement to give to one person goods belong to everyone. It is only through speech that people change the status of goods and temporarily take them out of circulation. I eventually spoke to several other adults about this incident at the birthday party. Partly to spare my feelings, I think, they told me that it was not my

fault that the birthday boy felt compelled to share. People in Jajikon rarely find themselves in a position in which they need to think about whether they should give because ritual words have not been said since Marshallese speeches are very conventional and few others would make the same mistake that I made. Nonetheless, the fact that the matriarch explicitly instructed me to mark the money as the property of the birthday boy in speech, and the fact that the boy tried to give at least some of his money away, shows how lacking evidence to the contrary multiple people have rights of possession over goods. In the Marshall Islands people cannot themselves decide what to do with any given good. Multiple people have legitimate claims to goods, even ones as valuable as human infants.

A Moral Imperative To Give

As kin, subordinates, and people with power, Jajikonians are obligated to share almost everything. Consequently, people praised as moral those who did give and condemned as immoral those who did not. ‘She is so good,’ one man remarked about another woman. ‘She always brought a lot of food.’ “That’s how bad she is,” a woman criticized about a different woman. “She hated it when people claimed things.”

Through giving people also indicate that they have compassion, that they feel *būromōj* (sadness, grief, empathy). A word used to explain people’s grief when a kinsperson dies, people also use it to refer to the feeling that compels them to give. A storeowner said that he let people buy on credit because he felt empathy (*būromōj*) for them since they had yet been paid for the copra they sent to the capital. A woman said that she gives because she feels sad (*būromōj*) for people who ask. Children, a teacher explained, help other children cheat because they feel bad

(*būromōj*) for others when they do not know the answer. A woman gave her child to her relatives because she “felt empathy (*būromōj*) and gave because they want a child.”

A Culture of Sharing

Consequently, it should not be surprising that adults see generosity (*jouj*) not only as socially obligatory but also as an essential characteristic of Marshallese culture. People on Jajikon maintain that Marshallese culture (*manin majel*) is a culture of giving and that Marshallese people are particularly generous.³¹ As one man said, “Marshallese people, right. If you really look at the Marshallese, there is really a lot of feeling, caring, loving, everything. There are a lot of these things with the Marshallese....so you should ask in accordance with the things you need.”

“And if you ask [for something?]” I asked him.

“If they have it they give it,” he replied. An older man once reprimanded me for failing to replace a broken comb with a new one, “in Marshallese culture we share.” I protested slightly, explaining that if I gave away all of the combs right now I would not be able to give them to the people I interviewed later. He asserted again, “in Marshallese culture we share!”

People’s belief in giving as a central feature of the Marshallese way of life is further affirmed by how they contrasted American culture with Marshallese culture. Among the many differences that people noted they said that the Marshallese are “freer” and more “giving” than Americans. “Free” refers mainly to the ability to go wherever one wants in the Marshall Islands. For example, one young woman told me that Marshallese culture was better than American

³¹ The Marshallese word for culture, *manit*, has surprisingly similar connotations as the English word for culture. People used *manit* to refer to a variety of customs including ways of eating, styles of dress, appropriate speech, appropriate behavior with chiefs, and even emotions that one might feel in a given occasion.

culture because Marshallese people are free and can go anywhere. Similarly, two older women told me that in the RMI people are very free. Another woman said that although in the RMI one can visit any house, eat anywhere, and talk with anyone, in America one cannot. Part of being free seems to include not only being able to go wherever one wants and visit whomever one wants, but also ask for anything and expect for those items to be given. Hence, as one man said, the Marshallese share but Americans do not. Marshallese feel free because they know everyone, feel comfortable in everyone's house, and can expect everyone to be hospitable and share.³²

Conclusion

There is a moral imperative to give. This imperative comes from people's sense of themselves as Marshallese, their ideas of what it means to be a good person, the obligations that they feel to their kin, their duties as parents and older siblings, their need to obey their elders, their status as Christians. Through giving people create themselves as parents, siblings, and kin. Everything they give has meaning not in and of the item itself but because of from whom the item came. Fish offered to a parent establishes oneself as a dutiful child. Rice given to a younger sibling creates a woman as a responsible and generous older sister. No goods in this economy are entirely alienable since they all have value due to their history, their previous possessors, and the relationships they create. Through giving people create both hierarchy and solidarity, they weld themselves to others and attach others to themselves.

³² In actuality, people felt more comfortable with some than others. Nevertheless, they professed the belief that they could visit everyone if they chose.

Chapter 2: Morality's Price

While in ideology life on Jajikon revolves around giving and people have distributed rights over possessions, in practice exchange is dangerous. Giving can weaken and destroy relationships in addition to creating them. Asking is not only a right conferred to people who have distributed possession over goods, but also the territory of people who are lazy and annoying. People often need to ask, however, since others cannot be trusted to give when they should. Moreover, both asking and refusing can be shameful (*āliklik*) while giving can be destructive.

Integral to all of these actions is the issue of face and how to keep it. The shame of asking and refusing comes from the possibility of losing face. But people can also lose face if they cannot support their family or if they do not have enough to give to those in need. Adults are caught between the need to keep and their shame (*āliklik*) to refuse, their need for goods and their shame (*āliklik*) to ask.

The Problem of Giving

While giving may strengthen bonds between two people or parties it also represents a loss of power. The power of having is partly why Weiner (1992) argues that inalienable possessions play the greatest role in both the construction and defeat of hierarchy. In addition, Marx (1993:228-234; [1904] 2009:166-185) distinguishes money—that which a person keeps—from coin—that which a person spends to purchase a commodity. Money represents potential and the

possibility of spending it. People who hoard their money hold on to their power, the power to buy.

Similarly, people who do not give a gift hold on to their power to give. When a woman gives fish to her neighbor she loses the power to give that fish to her mother. When a man gives a flashlight to one neighbor and not another he strengthens his relationship with one while threatening his relationship (comparatively) with another. Giving anything requires simultaneously not-giving to an indefinite number of others. Since, despite the fact that everyone is kin, all social relationships are not equal, it is more important to give to some than others. As a result, it is not always good to give.

Giving Is Not Always Good

Although in ideology good people are those who give, all adults recognize that in practice giving is not always good. As one woman commented while sympathizing with a friend who gave all of her coconut oil away, giving to everyone means that people may not be able to take care of their family. “And then when you give it to them so that they can oil themselves,” she said, “there is no oil left for your daughter.” Giving the coconut oil away was both good and bad. It was good because she gave to someone who asked and was generous. But it was bad because giving meant that the woman was unable to fulfill part of her role as a mother.

Consequently, quietly and in private, many people said that sometimes they do not give food because they needed the food for their family. One man explained why he did not give some cans of tuna to another man by saying that the tuna was ‘the food of the children.’ Another woman justified the fact that someone else lied about not having any fish by saying that maybe the fish were for elderly people in the family who had not yet eaten. A third woman said that

people have to not-give if some people in the family have not eaten. ‘You have to save the fish for your husband,’ said a fourth woman when explaining why she would not give. Kāti reacted forcefully to a hypothetical situation I presented in which a woman convinced a hungry visitor to eat until she was full even though there was not enough food left for the woman’s family. “It is good for the [visitor] but it is bad for her family because her family is not full.” Kāti went on, “she should not have taken the food and given it to her.” In giving away the food the woman failed to fulfill her greater obligation to her children and family.

Sometimes people viewed giving as bad not because it took away their power to give to another but because of the inalienable bond between them and the gift. For example, parents bond with their children results in two reasons people do not want to give. First, parents are attached to their children. “I was sad/grief stricken,” one woman said when she explained why she did not give her child. “He was my only son.” “Because I would have missed her so much,” another woman said, explaining her own refusal to give a child.

Many people who gave their children told me that they cried the night their infant changed residences. Others said that they refused to give their children to people who lived far away. Some parents missed children even when they lived nearby. For example, a family in Jajikon adopted the child of a family in the next village over. The day after the adoption both families attended a ceremony at the church in Jajikon. The birth mother and adoptive mother sat together outside the church, the infant on the adoptive mother’s lap. The birth mother tried to get the infant’s attention by repeating her name over and over again. The infant did not react and seemed perfectly content with her adoptive mother. Finally, the birth mother picked the infant up and held her to her chest. ‘I cried last night,’ she told me, looking fondly at her child. Like this

mother, every single mother who was asked to give up a child told me that the transaction saddened them and they would have preferred not to give.¹

Second, many people do not want to give their children away because they fear that adoptive parents, who lack the inalienable bond that exists between birth parents and their children, will not care for the child well. It was seen as a fact of life that adoptive parents abuse their children more than birth parents. Many people told me that the reason they did not give their children away was because they did not want their child to be abused. One woman, for example, said that she would not give her children to people who were going to live far away because “I won’t know what they are doing to her.” In fact, numerous people told me that the custom of adoption was bad mainly because of this supposed abuse. Twelve adults told me that although some adoptive parents love their children others mistreat them. But they said, those parents do not mistreat their birth children. Many children held a similar belief. Five children between the ages of ten and thirteen told me that custom of sharing children was bad since adoptive parents sometimes mistreat their children.

The reasons given to me for this abuse centered on the bodily, and inalienable, connection between birth parents and their offspring: adoptive mothers did not carry their children in their stomachs and their adoptive children were not real. This belief in an inalienable bond exists in tension with the understanding that children belong to the kin group as a whole. As one woman explained to me, adoptive parents abuse their children “because they are not their children. There wasn’t anything in their stomach.”

¹ I think that most people who told me that they did not want to give their child away were telling the truth. But parents are supposed to be sad about giving their children away. Some people may express more sadness than they actually felt. Parents could not legitimately express their desire to give away their child so they may not have told me about such feelings.

“Do they love them less?” I asked.

“Yes, they love them less because they are not their children, they were adopted. If they are true (birth) children, then they really love them.”

“But why do they take them if they won’t really love them?” I asked, confused as to why people wanted to adopt if they were only going to abuse their children.

Another woman sitting in the room broke into the conversation. “They are deceitful. It is a lie,” she explained, arguing that adoptive parents do not actually love their birth children although they say that they do. People in Jajikon did not think that all adoptive parents abuse their children. Rather, they thought many adoptive parents were excellent. But some, they said, did abuse their children, and one of the reasons for that abuse was the child’s adoptive status.

As partial evidence supporting people’s claims that adoptive children are abused more often than birth children, all of the specific cases of abuse that I heard about or saw involved adopted children. In one instance, an infant was adopted his classificatory father. The classificatory father (in English kinship terms his uncle) apparently did not sufficiently care for the child. So infant’s grandmother took the child away from her son and condemned her own son’s behavior.

A second incident concerned Kiti, the eleven year old girl discussed in the last chapter who managed to leave her adoptive family by running away to her birth grandparents. Her living situation was quite complicated. It seems that she was adopted by Tamaj, a man of some relation to her natural mother. But when Tamaj separated from his wife while Kiti was still very young, Tamaj’s sister Aileen adopted the girl. Then, Aileen’s mother, Heidi, took Kiti. So Kiti grew up living with her adoptive grandmother, Heidi. Everything was fine until Heidi started spending a

lot of time in the capital. She left all her grandchildren, including Kiti, in the hands of her daughter Aileen on Jajikon. During a trip to the capital Kiti ran away from Aileen back to her birth grandparents. I visited Kiti on the capital and asked her why she left. She looked at me with surprise. She asked, “You didn’t know that mother Aileen really hits me all the time?” On a separate occasion Kiti’s adoptive brother also told me that Aileen hit Kiti even though she did not hit him. Kiti wanted to live with her birth family instead, people whom she thought would not abuse her.

From my data it is impossible to know if adoptive children really are abused more than birth children. As should be clear from the above stories, this abuse only really becomes public knowledge when the children leave their adoptive parents. Abuse of birth children remains more of a secret since birth children are not as able to leave.²

Regardless of what actually happens, people on Jajikon certainly believe that adoptive parents are more abusive. Hence, despite the constant exchange and transfer of children between kin Jajikon residents also believe in an irreplaceable and inalienable connection between birth parents and their children.

This inalienable connection may be why people asserted that their possessions—children as well as other goods—were “theirs” and they did not have to give. Katōli said that she did not fear others’ requests for her children when she was pregnant because she was able to say no. Eleven other people agreed that they had the ability to say no when someone asked for their possessions. As another woman said, “we [say no] if we want to.” Asserted a man, “it is not hard

²It may be the case that adoptive children are in a better situation than birth children because they have more choices.

[to say no]. It is your choice.” Four people said that they knew that people would get mad if they refused to give but that they did not care because “it is mine” and they did not need to give.

This view that people do have possessions and have the right to decide what to do with them exists in tension with the idea that kin have distributed possession over goods and infants. The forcefulness with which people told me that they could say no shows how they make claim to things despite constant expectations that they should give. Their belief that things are “theirs” parallels the recognition that giving is not always good.

Not-Giving is Dangerous

Although giving is not always good, refusing is dangerous. People frequently condemned others who did not give. For example, one woman, Deina, scathingly criticized another woman for her lack of hospitality. “We do not enter that house anymore because they fill it with their stuff,” Deina said, faulting the woman for failing to make room for guests.

“It’s full, why did they fill it?” her friend Relin remarked.

“That’s how bad she is! Other people will not be able to go back to that house. I say that woman is bad. Is it true that she is a bad woman?”

“Yes,” Relin agreed. “Just think about the first birthday (*keemem*) of her oldest son. She was really stingy with everything.”

“That’s right girl!”

“She hated it when people claimed things,” Relin continued, criticizing the woman for failing to give.¹ People, as mentioned, typically claim the possessions of the family of the birthday child during the celebration (*keemem*) of the child’s first birthday. By referring to the *keemem*, Relin not only agreed with Deina’s statement that the woman was bad but also offered

additional evidence. This evidence of her immorality was the woman's lack of generosity, her failure to give.

On another occasion Kāti contrasted her own generous behavior with the stingy behavior of another woman, Jujan. “Because, you know me, if someone asks me for something I won't hold on to it,” Kāti said, explaining why she gave away all of her coconut oil to another woman. She was too good to refuse to give.

“And then when you give it to them so that they can oil themselves,” her friend sympathized, “there is no oil left for your daughter.”

“Regardless,” Kāti insisted. “If they say, ‘give me a little,’ then it is over. I am ashamed [to keep it].”

“Who asks for a little [oil] girl?”

“Damn! Jujan came and poured and poured and poured it out...when she had some oil I just went and begged incessantly,” Kāti said, explaining that she herself had asked Jujan for oil earlier. But while Kāti might give to Jujan, Jujan did not give to Kāti. “It's like it is hard for her to give it to me.” So Kāti said, it was “over. It is over because [she] is stingy with that oil.” Kāti was generous but Jujan was stingy and this stinginess marked her as immoral.ⁱⁱ

Similarly, a woman once condemned another woman as “really stingy” because she had “taken money out of the bank” but “did not” buy things for the women she was with. A group of older women criticized some younger women as lazy because “they didn't come [to make food]” and they “should have come.” Clearly, being seen as stingy is dangerous in Jajikon.

The appearance of greediness not only creates negative gossip but can also actively harm people's relationships with each other, as in the case of Hiuna and her husband Yuka's

relationship with Yuka's classificatory father, Jamin. Jamin was the head of a family I occasionally stayed with on the capital. One day he refused to let me work with Hiuna who was serving as my research assistant during that trip to Majuro. Jamin had apparently told Yuka to bring him fish. But Yuka never brought the fish. As a result, Jamin and his wife were mad. 'You should not be giving them money,' Jamin explained to me, 'since you are...living in our house.'

I never personally experienced any other disagreements caused by the lack of giving but I heard about many. A woman's classificatory sister once accused her of hoarding money. Babra mentioned that she was angry with her mother for selectively giving to her sister. Some older children told me that two women fought when one asked for a frying pan and the other would not give. Two families that had lived in the same household complex on my first visit to Rōrin had separated residences upon my return. When I asked why a person in town told me that the fight started when one of the men refused to share soda with the other. It seems unlikely that a fight over a soda caused a change of residence. Nonetheless, it is significant that people viewed refusing to share soda as a legitimate reason for tension. Even though giving is not always good, it is dangerous to refuse.

The Problem of Asking

Asking, like giving, is simultaneously good and bad. On the one hand, people frequently ask for things. When people know what someone has they often ask for it. As demonstrated previously, these requests are seen as appropriate since kin are supposed to share and people have distributed possession over things. On the other hand, ideally people should give spontaneously such that there is no need to ask. Moreover, adults often criticize those who ask

too much as lazy and annoying, people who do not work themselves but choose to survive on the generosity of others. Thus, asking is typical and appropriate but dangerous.

A Life on Stage

The skinniness of the land, limited ways of getting to and from the village, and relatively open houses means that life in Jajikon is constantly on display. Like most Marshallese villages, most houses in Jajikon border the lagoon. The backs of the houses face the lagoon whereas the front doors and yards look out onto the road. One road—a relatively wide dirt path—traverses the length of the village. It is difficult to walk between houses through the jungle since most footpaths through the jungle lead from houses to the ocean or lagoon rather than lengthwise across the village. Consequently, the only real alternative to travelling along the road is the lagoon beach. This possibility, however, is inconsistently available. At high tide the water comes all the way up to the trees. Even a couple of hours before and after high tide the sea is sufficiently high that walking on the beach is difficult.

Most people, therefore, get to where they are going on the road. Walking along the road—or sitting along the road and watching people pass by—is a good way to figure out what is going on with everybody. Household compounds consist of a pebble yard and at least two structures: a sleeping house and a cooking house. All cooking houses have openings to let the smoke from the fire escape. Consequently, everyone knows if someone is cooking. Many activities—cleaning the yard, preparing fish, gathering breadfruit, fixing bikes, and washing clothes—take place outside where anyone walking by can see what is going on. Many complexes also have an enclosed fireplace for smoking coconut meat so that it can be sold to the copra processing plant. Close to this fireplace, in the shade, most families set up a coconut husking

sharp metal stake which they use to husk coconuts to eat and to husk mature coconuts, dozens at a time, for making copra. Often, particularly on hot days, adults gather in the yards in the shade of a breadfruit tree to talk, relax, and eat. The pebble yard and the road in front of it are two of children's many playgrounds.

Consequently, walking along the road can give a Jajikon villager, or an ethnographer, a lot of information about people's day-to-day lives. As one walks one might see a woman scrubbing clothes in a wash basin, adults sitting in a circle scrapping coconut meat out of coconut shells, or people gathered in the yard cleaning and gutting fish. The gathering of flies leaves evidence of fish long after the work of cleaning the fish is done. A truck parked by a house means that visitors are in town; people carrying boxes back and forth in wheelbarrows or the presence of boxes in a doorway shows that the family has just received a shipment of goods from the capital.

People sitting, working, or talking gather their own information from the road that rests in their vision. "Where are you going?" they call out as people walk by.

Just as land travel into, out of, and through the village largely occurs via the road, sea travel into and out of the village largely occurs via the section of the beach most amenable to launching a ship. Besides the land and the sea, Majuro is the source of all material goods on Jajikon and almost all of those material goods have to get to Jajikon via a boat. Despite the fact that the boat between Jajikon and Majuro rarely follows the schedule to which it supposedly accords, everybody (except for me) knew when a boat was coming. The few families with short-wave radios, such as my host family, listened and talked to the boat's owners on Majuro. Villagers constantly popped in and out of our house to use the radio, talk to the owners, and

simply inquire as to the status of the boat. Everyone gathered at the beach to greet visitors, welcome returning family, or simply observe.

Consequently, all goods that arrive pass under the watchful eye of someone. Men note how many boxes of tuna a man has; women discuss whether the boxes of chicken legs brought for a party will be sufficient to feed everyone. People watch passengers unload their goods, looking for the hint of candy or flash of a food package to show what treats people might be concealing.

In this land where ways to travel are limited and life is largely lived in the open, the possibility was high that someone would see what one has. When adults see others' possessions, moreover, they are either going to talk about them or ask for them.

Gossip About Goods

The presence and use of material goods was a constant topic of conversation on Jajikon. As a result, even those who did not see goods coming onto the island or circulating between people often found out who had what and who had given what to whom. For example Pino, his wife Imon, and their son-in-law spent some time discussing who had drums of gas and what they were doing with them.

Pino asked, "Hey girl, did Pōrin just take his drum?"

"They say that he took one drum ahead," Imon reported. "He and Timi, when they were going to go they took two drums. Who knows if there is gas in them."

"There is gas in the big ones. They are very full."

"I was talking about the ones that they took ahead." Imon complained. Then she went on, "Regardless, why did they take those things?"

“Are there still drums in that house?” The son-in-law asked, wondering if any drums of gas were left.

“Who knows,” Pino responded. “They unloaded one yesterday.”

The son-in-law, wondering how much people paid for their gas, changed the conversation. “How much did the drums cost? The other ones, that those guys took?”

“A hundred fifty dollars,” said Pino.

“He paid a hundred and fifty dollars? Because I asked that Jinke and he said that he did not know [how much the gas cost],” the son-in-law complained. Jinke worked at the gas company and was expected to know how much the gas cost.

“He had already asked the gas company,” Imon said, implying that Jinke did know how much the drums cost and was lying when he said that he did not know.

“Because,” the son-in-law continued, going back to the question of who had taken drums of gas. “There were six drums. One went with Pōrin and one went with Timi. That made four left. If Jinke takes one then there will be three.”

This conversation between these adults shows that they were not only interested in the minute details of who got which drums and how much money they paid, but also that they readily gave each other this information. Knowledge about material goods spreads quickly through Jajikon.

Asking

People who knew about goods were likely to ask for them, making it particularly difficult for adults to not-give. Deina called to a man walking by, “you still owe us some turtle!” Imon commanded her classificatory son, “go and tell Hukira [the son’s mother] that she should give

me my gum.” Deina’s brother came by and asked for fish or meat. Imon told a young woman walking by to give her some candy. Imon and Pino, Deina’s parents, frequently asked for flour, salt, and rice. A woman walked to another woman’s house, calling out, “ah Mariana! Are there not any limes?”

Adults often talked about the things that they asked for or that others asked of them. One woman mentioned while telling a story, “you know I said that he should go and bring some cooked breadfruit.” Both of my research assistants told me that people were constantly asking them for money. People frequently asked me when I was going to pay my assistants, possibly so as to find out when they should ask them for money. Lionara told numerous other women that she asked her friend to go to Majuro to “bring back supply [a supply of goods].”

This prevalence of asking is due partly to the idea that people have distributed rights to objects. These distributed rights apply particularly to surplus goods. When a woman said, “the people in the house near the ocean have a lot of oil” another woman responded, “you didn't tell them to give us some oil?” Her response is an implicit criticism of the woman for seeing a surplus and not sharing it. Once Deina saw me taking a pill out of a container with numerous pills. She said, ‘why don't you give me a pill?’ A bunch of women saw a supply of q-tips that I had and immediately asked for some.

Most adults recognized the difficulty of building up a surplus, of keeping anything in this land where people are expected to share. As one woman said, it is difficult to save for tomorrow “because they ask.” If people are hanging out near a house and see some cans of tuna, a woman added, they will ask for them. Another man explained that no one builds up a surplus of goods

because if they did the food would be gone in a week.³ Consequently, it was particularly hard for people to get out of giving because others often asked them for things.

Asking is Dangerous

Asking, however, is not always good. Rather, just as giving can be both moral and immoral, asking can be both appropriate and inappropriate.

Specifically, while asking is appropriate in accordance with the idea that kin have distributed possession over the goods that they own, asking is also bad because it shows a lack of concern for others' well-being. Moreover, people get annoyed when others ask because they may not want to give. As one man said, "if it were me...and I had just one [thing of] rice, and I am trying to figure out how to support my family [then I would ask]. But some other people come and ask for rice, ok that is bad. Because we work hard...so that our kids will not be hungry." People who ask are placing their own needs higher than others, an ungenerous and selfish thing to do. Indeed, while people sometimes accepted food when others offered it adults also often politely declined to eat. A couple adults told me that it was proper to decline food as opposed to eating when one knew that a family did not have enough.

Some people believed, moreover, that people should not pressure others to give. As one man explained, "if it were me and I had food, I say 'come and eat.' It's not you, you don't ask on your own, 'ah, just give me this thing and that thing.' That is bad." Similarly, an older woman said that while one can ask, one should not. "You see," she once remarked, "even if it's for us we

³ One woman claimed that whether or not people ask for food depends on the state of the good in question. As she explained it, people will ask for a can of tuna if they see a person with ten cans or with an opened case of tuna. If the tuna is in an unopened box, however, people will ask what is in the box but they will not ask for the cans themselves.

don't ask," commenting on the goodness of her family who refrained from asking even when something was intended for them. Imon scowled once as she fed two small children who lived next door but happened to be hanging around our house during mealtime. 'They shouldn't be eating here,' she told me, 'they should eat at their own house.'

'Why are they eating here?' I asked.

'No meat,' Imon replied. Her tone of voice implied, moreover, that the lack of meat was their families' fault for not working.

Indeed, many people interpreted frequent requests for things as an index of laziness, expressing contempt for those who choose to be lazy and ask instead of work. Numerous people singled out a particular young man as someone who asks a lot because he is too lazy to do any work. Another woman expressed relief that her spouse was a hard worker and good provider. As she told me, her husband's industry meant that she did not always have to ask her relatives for things. If she did have to frequently ask, she continued, they would call her lazy.

The Need to Ask

In an ideal world, people would not need to ask for what they need. Rather, people would spontaneously share their surplus with others. As Peterson (1993:860-874) argues about hunter-gatherer communities, however, despite an explicit ideology that sharing and generosity is important, much of the time sharing occurs as the result of verbal demand. Most Jajikonian did not believe that people would spontaneously share when they should, making asking necessary even as they look down on it. A woman and her mother, for example, chatted about their kinsman Balap and his catch of fish. Apparently, Balap did not share as much as he should.

"Yeah," the woman said. "Balap didn't give the sailors their food."

“Are they going to give it to us?” The mother asked.

“They won’t if you do not ask,” the woman responded.

“What?”

“They will not give it to you...”

“...they always do that. You see, even if it is for us we don’t ask.” The mother was proud of the fact that her family refrained from asking, even when it would have been just to ask for that which they deserved.

The problem, as this interaction shows, is that often, just as Peterson (1993:860-874) argues, if people do not ask they do not get anything. Asking is legitimate and illegitimate, criticized but good, necessary but dangerous.

Exchange is a field scattered with mines. Asking is potentially dangerous, refusing will definitely do harm, and even giving is not always good.

Face and The Realm Of Exchange

The situation is complicated even more by the problem of face. If we define face as “an image of the self delineated in terms of approved social attributes,” all the different ways of engaging in exchange can threaten people’s “positive social value” or their face (Goffman 1967:5).

Part of people’s loss of face includes the feeling of shame (*āliklik*). Both refusing and asking are shameful acts. Refusing threatens an image people have developed of themselves as generous and moral kin. Asking threatens people’s image as industrious and sensitive to the needs of others. The loss of self-image entailed in some acts of asking and refusing is felt by

people as shame about themselves and who they are. This shame and their desire to save face compels people to give even when they would rather not, to refrain from asking for that which they want or need.

Shame (*Āliklik*)

There are numerous words in Marshallese that refer to something on the continuum of fear, embarrassment and shame including: *mijak*, *kor*, *jook*, *abje*, and *āliklik*.⁴ *Mijak* (fear) is the broadest term. People use it to refer to fear for one's physical safety, fear of the dark, shyness to approach people of the other gender, fear of talking to people one does not know well, and fear to do something that transgresses cultural rules such as refusing to give. Kāti said that she slept over at a kinswoman's house on the other side of the village one night because she "feared (*mijak*)" ghosts and did not want to walk home in the dark. Children frequently talked about how they "fear (*mijak*)" older relatives and this fear is why they obey them. A woman said that the reason why her daughter did not tell an older kinswoman that she was sick and could not help cook for the party was because she was "afraid (*mijak*)."

Numerous other words carry some of these meanings of fear (*mijak*) but have more limited connotations. Although *mijak* can generally be substituted for any of these other terms, these other terms cannot be substituted for all uses of *mijak*. *Kor* (fear), for example, is largely used only to indicate a fear for physical safety. 'Are you afraid (*kor*)?' a woman on the boat asked me during a ride when the ocean was extremely rough. *Jook* and *abje* both connote shyness and embarrassment and were often used to explain why people avoid talking to people of a different gender or calling attention to themselves in public. 'Who do you are you shy of

⁴ For definitions see also Abo et al. (1976).

(*jook*)?’ some women asked me when I mentioned that sometimes I was shy, indicating that they interpret shyness as directed toward an individual of a different gender. “I am embarrassed (*jook*)” a girl admitted when she explained why she gets mad when other children tease her and say that she has a boyfriend. A woman said that her son did not give a speech at a ceremony because he was “shy (*jook*).” “It is like she is embarrassed (*abje*) to go over there” a woman commented about another woman who hesitated to bring food to the men outside.

Āliklik, in contrast to these words, refers only to the feeling that stops people from doing something that is transgressive or inappropriate. Therefore, *āliklik* fits with arguments that shame is an emotion that is socially grounded, comes from speakers’ potential loss of face, and results from transgressions of the moral/social code (Addo and Besnier 2008; Fajans 1983; Heller 2003; Rosaldo 1983; Shweder 2003; Strathern 1975). People sometimes substituted both *mijak* and *jook* for *āliklik*. Mariana, for example, said that she was not scared (*mijak*) to ask people where they were going. ‘What about the reverend?’ I asked. ‘I am ashamed (*āliklik*),’ she responded. Another woman said that *āliklik* and *mijak* were the same.

But other adults differentiated between the words. In addition, there are many situations in which one can use *mijak* or *jook* but not *āliklik*. For example, people never used *āliklik* to refer to their fear for physical safety. One woman explained that while people might be scared (*mijak*) or shy (*jook*) to dance in front of others at Christmas or at a party, they would not be ashamed (*āliklik*). Delina said that sometimes when women are talking softly to each other she is scared (*mijak*) to ask them what they are talking about because they do not want her to hear. But she is not, she explicitly stated, ashamed (*āliklik*). Similarly, she said that she is sometimes scared (*mijak*) to ask men where they are going but she is not ashamed (*āliklik*). *Āliklik* is a narrower

concept than fear or shyness although fear or shyness can often be used in the place of *āliklik*, shame.

Adults say that people feel shame (*āliklik*) to do that which is inappropriate and transgresses cultural rules. The prototypical example of shame (*āliklik*), according to every single adult with whom I spoke, is the compulsion people feel to share when they are eating or carrying cooked food in the presence of others. Indeed, all adults said that they “felt shame (*āliklik*)” to carry cooked food. As Katōli said, “if the rice is cooked, and you are carrying it on a plate, you feel shame (*āliklik*) because you need to say, “eat!” People feel shame (*āliklik*) to carry food in front of others without offering it to them. They feel shame (*āliklik*), moreover, because such an act marks them as someone who is simultaneously stingy, impolite, and unconcerned with Marshallese culture.

I was once eating dinner when an older woman sat down next to me. As the female head of the household was also in the room I continued eating, expecting the female head to offer to fill a plate of food for the older woman. For some reason, however, the female head did not speak.⁵ After a while I felt uncomfortable eating next to the older woman. I offered her my plate. “Eat,” I said.

She smiled at me. “Are you ashamed (*āliklik*)?”

I raised my eyebrows, Marshallese for “yes”.

Then the older woman pushed the plate away, saying that it was my food, that she was not hungry, and that she would not eat. She was clearly pleased that I had felt ashamed (*āliklik*). I was supposed to be ashamed (*āliklik*) to eat in front of others. Moreover, I demonstrated my

⁵ I suspect that she had already offered food to the older woman and that the older woman had said that she was not hungry.

shame (*āliklik*) by offering food. If I had felt bad about eating in front of her but nevertheless neglected to say, “eat,” then I would not have felt shame (*āliklik*). Indeed, people who do not feel shame (*āliklik*) and who walk around with food and do not give it are people who “*jejeļok kilin*,” people who “have no shame.”⁶

Although the prototypical example of *āliklik* is the shame people feel that compels them to offer food, people also use *āliklik* to describe how they feel in any instance in which they refrain from doing something that would threaten their face. Hence, people feel *āliklik* to refuse requests. “Everybody in the world knows,” one man explained, “that it is very hard to directly say no.” One of my research assistants said that when people ask her for money after she has been paid she gives. “Because I am ashamed (*āliklik*).” Sometimes this shame (*āliklik*) comes not only from the act of refusing but also from the reasons why one cannot attend or help. A woman explained why she did not refuse invitations to celebrations. “If you invite me to a first-birthday celebration (*keemem*),” she said, “but I do not have anything to give, I will not go. But I say, ‘okay, I will come.’ Because, it is as if I have a lot of shame (*āliklik*). If it were me, I wouldn’t want you to know that I do not have anything [to give you].” She hesitated to say that she could

⁶ In many places people refrain from showing off their wealth because of a fear of black magic or the evil eye (Dundes 1992; Evans-Pritchard 1976:44-45; Reina [1966] 1973:369; Robarchek and Robarchek 2005:212). In Jajikon people only rarely talked about black magic (*ekapāl/anijnij*), while they frequently talked about shame (*āliklik*), as a reason not to show wealth. They did, however, occasionally mention black magic as a danger. Some adults claimed that they did not believe in black magic or witchcraft. Others believed in it but said that it was a thing of the past. Some said that although there are still practitioners today none live in Jajikon. Other people talked about black magic in Jajikon but not about people practicing black magic out of jealousy. People largely talked about black magic in respect to people’s love lives—practitioners might use magic to separate two lovers, or to make a woman love a man even though he beat her and was bad to her. The prevalence of talk about magic in respect to love may be related to a recent Marshallese movie, *Ña Noniep*. This film is about an old woman who uses magic to separate two teenagers in love (Niedenthal 2009).

People did occasionally talk about the use of black magic when people are jealous of others’ material wealth. One child said that he should not carry food around because then people would use black magic on the food. When I asked some women explicitly about whether or not people curse others who have more than them the women said yes. Nonetheless, these women also said that people do not hide their goods out of fear of black magic. When I asked why, they responded that maybe people forget that others might use black magic out of jealousy. Black magic was not central to people’s understandings of why they and others avoid carrying food around.

not attend a celebration because she did not want people to know why, it would be shameful if they knew that she was not able to give.

People also used shame (*āliklik*) to describe how they feel in situations that have little to do with food or giving but in which they feel compelled to act in accordance with culturally expected beliefs. For example, a woman was frustrated during a trip to a village on the other side of the atoll. There were so many people around, many of whom were her “brothers,” that she was “ashamed (*āliklik*)” to use the bathhouse to bathe. When Marshallese women need to go to the ocean to relieve themselves or into the bathhouse to bathe they always wait until they can depart for these activities unseen by men. In accordance with the avoidance relationship that exists between siblings and parents of different genders, it is taboo for brothers and fathers to see any evidence of bodily activities including signs that index bodily activities such as leaving for the beach. In this situation, like many others, the woman did not feel shame (*āliklik*) because she acted inappropriately. Rather, she had a desire to act inappropriately but her shame (*āliklik*) stopped her from doing so.

People also used shame (*āliklik*) to refer to what motivates people of lower rank to defer to those of higher rank. For a couple of weeks in the spring the mayor of Rōrin suspended the boat service between Majuro and Jajikon because the captain disobeyed a law. Although drinking on the capital is legal Rōrin, like most outer atolls, is technically dry. People on Jajikon told me that it is illegal for boats to bring not only alcohol but also drunkards. Captains are supposed to refuse passage to anyone who tries to get on a boat drunk. Unfortunately for the boat and its captain, one day the chief of Rōrin arrived at the boat drunk. “The captain said” to the

chief, Lacy reported as she told the story to Kāti, ““You should stay on shore because you are drunk. You will make this boat culpable and then we will have to pay a fine.””

“And?” Kāti asked, wanting to know what happened next.

“[The chief] kept on swearing girl!”

“Didn’t they call the mayor?” Kati asked, suggesting that the mayor is the one who should take care of drunkards on the boat. “It is his own fault [that service was suspended], they should have called the mayor....And the police. Regardless” of the fact that he is a chief, she asserted, recognizing the difficulty in reporting a chief to the police.

“It’s like they were really ashamed (*āliklik*),” Lacy remarked. As Lacy interpreted it, the people on the boat were too ashamed (*āliklik*) to call the police. Commoners are supposed to obey and defer to their chiefs as opposed to reporting them. Shame (*āliklik*) kept them from obeying their desire to act inappropriately.⁷

As a result, *āliklik* differs slightly from common conceptions of ‘shame.’ Yau-Fai Ho et al. (2004) argue that shame comes from the self being rejected and that losing face makes people feel ashamed. Such a definition does fit some uses of *āliklik*. For example, one woman said that she would be “very ashamed (*āliklik*)” if someone found out that she had food after she had lied and said that she was out. In this instance, her shame comes from the fact that the generous self that she should project was undermined.

Often, however, *āliklik* comes not from actually losing face but from contemplating losing face. Hence, one person bilingual in Marshallese and English translated *āliklik* not as

⁷ In addition to the drunken chief, an important reverend was also on the boat. The chief swore at the reverend. After the trip the reverend contacted the mayor to complain. The captain broke the rules, but it was the reverend’s presence and complaint that directly led to the mayor suspending service.

“shame” but as “hesitate.” *Āliklik* is what compels people to act appropriately because it makes them hesitate to act inappropriately. If they feel *āliklik* they do not do that which they should not. *Āliklik* comes before losing face as opposed to afterwards, it is a feeling that compels people to act appropriately so as to keep their face. It should not be surprising that adults often substituted *mijak* (fear) for *āliklik* (shame), such as when a woman defined *āliklik* as “*mijak* (fear) to carry food.” When people are afraid to do something they do not do it. Similarly, when people are ashamed about acting in a particular manner they do not act.⁸ *Āliklik* serves a check on people’s desires; it forces people to adhere to norms in situations in which they otherwise would not.

***Āliklik* To Ask**

Just as people feel shame to walk with food and to refuse to give, they also feel shame to ask for goods. As we have seen, asking can be bad because it marks a person as lazy. Asking can also be bad because it shows a lack of respect for another’s needs as well as a lack of concern for maintaining harmony, maintaining each other’s face. Indeed, there is a word, *akweḷap*, that refers to people who ask over and over again without respecting another’s needs or implicit attempts to not-give. People said that Terij was an “*akweḷap*.” One day he asked for his classificatory granddaughter’s infant son. The infant’s mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother indirectly communicating their lack of desire to give. ‘The infant needs to come home to be washed,’ the great grandmother said. Terij ignored these signs and insistently begged for the infant. He eventually received him.

⁸ It is quite possible that adults talked about *āliklik* as coming before, as opposed to after, inappropriate actions because the only way that they were able to judge people’s feelings is through their actions. Consequently, one could argue that the definition of *āliklik* that I have presented is merely how people talk about *āliklik* as opposed to what they actually feel. But people’s speech and actions are the only way I can access how they understand *āliklik*. Their discourse concerning *āliklik* is the closest that I can get to understanding the emotion with the data that I have.

People say that insistently begging and asking for something, being an *akweḷap*, reveals a lack of shame (*āliklik*). Kāti, for example, reported that although once she “went and just *akweḷap*” and begged her kinswoman for some coconut oil, she quickly became “ashamed (*āliklik*)” and stopped asking. Shame (*āliklik*) is what compelled her to stop asking just as shame (*āliklik*) is what often compels people to give.

Similarly, a man defined *akweḷap* as people who do not have any “shame (*āliklik*).” As another man explained, “if you ask me for everything, everything everything. Salt, rice, sugar, everything....you are going to say, ‘oh no! Now I am really going to just wait a while and not ask,’ this is because you are ashamed (*āliklik*).” People who are insistent beggars (*akweḷap*) and ask all the time not only present themselves as lazy but also as people who have no concern for others’ needs and wants.

Seventeen adults reported that they felt ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask for things. Ann said that she “is always ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask, it’s like I am scared (*mijak*) to ask.” I pressed her, “but I thought that in Marshallese culture we can ask for everything?” She responded, “Yes, all Marshallese people ask for everything, but some people it’s like, they have a lot of shame (*āliklik*).” Similarly, Lila said that “we ask but we are always ashamed (*āliklik*).” Sometimes adults also use the word *jook* (embarrassed/shy) to refer to why they do not ask. For example, Lacy and I were chatting under a breadfruit tree when a little girl ran over and excitedly reported that the next door neighbors had a lot of candy. Lacy told the girl to run and get some candy. I asked Lacy if she was going to go ask for candy. She said that she would not go because she was embarrassed (*jook*).

People's shame to ask does not just come from a belief that asking is bad. Rather, many people fear the consequences of their requests, consequences that could make them embarrassed and lose face.⁹ First, people might give in response to a request but then speak about the asker behind his or her back. As one adult said, some people are "good and some are bad. They could say 'here' and you go off with the item, but if they say 'aaaah!' they will gossip about you." A woman explained that in "Marshallese culture if you eat [at someone's house] and then you leave, the person with whom you were eating talks [about you]. If you hear [what they said], now you are scared to go and eat again and you are ashamed (*āliklik*)." Even worse than negative gossip, however, would be a refusal. Barbra felt "ashamed (*āliklik*)" to ask because "for example, if I say, 'Elise, give me my ponytail!' And then you respond, 'It's the only one!' your words affect me and I become embarrassed (*jook*)." Being refused is itself an embarrassing act.

***Āliklik* and The Loss of Face**

Being refused is embarrassing because it represents a loss of face. Being refused indicates that people are not close enough as kin, not important enough as elders, or not significant enough as younger individuals, to be people to whom one should give. People feel shame (*āliklik*) when they consider doing something that would represent a loss of face for themselves. They also feel shame (*āliklik*) when they consider threatening someone else's face. Those who feel no shame are not only those who have not only no concern for Marshallese custom, but also those who have no care for others, people who are not kin.

⁹ Similarly, see Endicott's (1988:117) discussion of Batek and Semai beliefs that if people's demands are refused they will get sick.

Consequently, part of keeping face requires maintaining one's status as kin. Since maintaining one's status as kin requires giving, it is both less and more dangerous to ask for things from kin. First, it is less face-threatening to ask from kin because asking is particularly appropriate between kin and because people can expect close kin to give. Hence, most people claimed that they were not ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask things of close relatives. As Caitlin explained "people who are your friends, your family, you are not ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask them for things... with other people, you are ashamed (*āliklik*)." Cando, Mariana, and Jake agreed that one is not ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask for things from relatives. Consequently, Liti said that she was "scared (*mijak*)" and "ashamed (*āliklik*)" to ask from most people so she only asked from people in her house or family. At the same time, however, asking for things from close kin is potentially more dangerous than asking from more distant kin since the consequences of a refusal are even more damaging. "We can be ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask our older and younger siblings," Frank remarked. Carla agreed, stating that "even if they are really our relatives we are ashamed (*āliklik*)." Kin refusing to give is particularly embarrassing as it distances people who should otherwise be close.

Just as people are concerned with maintaining their own face, they also put effort into making sure that other people will not lose face. Goffman (1967:10-11) argues that people are "disinclined to witness the defacement of others." In the RMI one can go even farther and assert that witnessing the defacement of others leads a person to lose face him or herself. Indeed, people's concern for others' face is one of the reasons that people were ashamed (*āliklik*) to refuse to give. Numerous people said that adults feel "ashamed (*āliklik*)" to say, 'sorry, I can't give you that' because doing so would make the other person feel "embarrassed (*jook*)."

Similarly, Leah told a story about how she was too “ashamed (*āliklik*)” to make someone feel uncomfortable. Leah was visiting her friend’s house. Her friend was mad at another woman, Jōjina, who happened to also be outside the house. The friend told Leah to “tell Jōjina that she should leave because I am going to slap her.”

“But I didn’t tell her,” Leah continued.

“You didn’t tell her?” asked a woman who was listening to the story.

“I didn’t tell her because it is like I was ashamed (*āliklik*).”

“You were ashamed (*āliklik*),” the woman agreed, “because she was already standing near the house.” Telling Jōjina to leave would threaten Jōjina’s face by making her feel unwelcome. Leah felt ashamed to embarrass Jōjina so she did not act.

In addition, people avoid refusing invitations partly because of their concern for others’ face and feelings. Even refusing an invitation to a party because of a prior engagement “would make her (the host) sad.” If a person declines an invitation, another woman said, “there will be trouble, according to our ways... (and) the person will be embarrassed.” Or, said Kōrin, saying “I am sorry, I can’t go’...will make the other person sad. And the person could become mad and say, ‘well, then, that’s it. I won’t look to invite you to my parties again.’”

Hence, people feel shame (*āliklik*) to do something that could harm others. Consequently, one man said that since he was the oldest sibling he was ashamed (*āliklik*) to ask for things from his younger siblings. He knows that they would give to him since he is their elder, but he also knows that they really need what they have. Here, again, Kevin’s shame (*āliklik*) comes from disregarding his sibling’s needs, a disregard that could be seen as contrary to his status as the oldest brother who is supposed to be generous (*jouj*) and look after everyone else. People who

have shame (*āliklik*) care for others and look out for their needs. People without shame do not, they put people in difficult circumstances that are face-threatening, they ask insistently for goods even when it is clear that people would rather not give. They do not think of others but of themselves.

The Danger of Exchange

The physical environment of Jajikon puts people on stage. With such an audience, exchange is a treacherous landscape in which everything that adults do is potentially dangerous. Fearing the loss of face people feel shame to refuse to give. Fearing others' refusals, adults feel shame to ask for that which they want or need. This shame compels people to avoid asking and to give. But giving is not always good.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that like giving and asking, adults see shame (*āliklik*) as both "good and bad." Shame (*āliklik*) is good because "if I ask they will give," an older woman said. But shame (*āliklik*) also means that even when necessary people cannot get out of giving. When someone feels shame (*āliklik*), another woman said, 'there will be misfortune.'

'Why?' I asked.

'I am hungry,' the woman replied, 'because I gave away food.'

The residents of Jajikon would feel a connection with the Andaman Islander myth of a world without exchange (Man 1885:94-95, quoted in Levi-Strauss 1969 [1949]:457). Although they value their way of life and the act of giving, they also dream "of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was possible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing" (Levi-Strauss [1949] 1969:497). At least

occasionally, they long to be able to refuse without losing face, to be the masters of their own possessions, to be able to act without feeling shame.

According to Levi Strauss ([1949] 1969:497), this “world in which one might keep to oneself” lies only in fantasy, in “the Sumerian myth of the golden age and the Andaman myth of the future life.” In contrast, I argue that this world where one can keep and ask lies not in fantasy but in hiding. Under a surface shield of words adults quietly and constantly ask for things and avoid giving. They mask their actions with signs, creating an under-economy that never comes out in the open but through which people simultaneously avoid giving while avoiding shame.

Chapter 3: Hiding

There was soda in Liklob.¹

I don't normally like soda but when Karlin told me that there was soda within walking distance my mouth started to water. I can only imagine how it affected others in Jajikon. Most people seemed to crave sugar even more than I, which is not surprising considering the relatively bland normal diet of fish, canned tuna, rice and breadfruit. People even put sugar in their water when they had enough to spare. Consequently, when Karlin asked me to go on a trip with her to buy some soda, I agreed. Despite the wonders of soda, however, this trip turned out to be more trouble than it was worth.

The main problem, of course, was that it was very difficult to go on a trip to buy soda without buying soda for everyone. Shortly after Karlin asked me to go to Liklob with her I realized, happily, that I was free to go a day earlier than I originally thought. When I went to tell Karlin I found her chatting with a crowd of women.

Foolishly I said, 'Let's go now.'

The women pounced. 'Where are you going?'

I hesitated, realizing my error much too late. What to say? I could not tell them we were going to buy soda. Then they would ask for soda. I decided that Karlin, more adept than I, should speak. So I said nothing.

'Where are you going?' the women insisted.

'Elise,' Karlin said. 'They are asking you a question.'

¹ Liklob is another village on Rōrin atoll.

I looked at Karlin in horror. Why was she forcing me to speak when I did not know what to say?

When I still said nothing Karlin insisted, ‘they are asking you a question.’

Finding no way out, I responded. ‘To Liklob.’

‘To do what?’ the women asked.

‘Just a *jambo* (trip with no specific purpose),’ I lied.

In some respects, my lie was the result of selfishness. I did not want to buy all of the women in the group a soda. At the same time, however, telling the truth about what Karlin and I were up to would have placed me in an impossible situation. For whom should I buy soda? Just the women in the group? Then my family would inevitably also expect some. So would all the bystanders who would see me giving soda to the women. What about my research assistants and neighbors? Should I buy one soda for each household? Then the children would clamor for more. How many sodas were there in Liklob? There were definitely not enough for the entire village. If I gave soda to some and not to others somebody would almost certainly be annoyed with me. In fact, it would be better for me to give to no one. If I was to give to Karlin I had to manage to avoid giving to everyone else. I had to lie.

That conversation quickly taught me the error of my ways. I should not give off any signs that I had, or was going to get, something that other people did not have unless I wanted to give to everyone. Karlin and I needed to engage in what is called “hiding (*nōnooj*).” Moreover, we needed to hide not only the soda but also any signs that might index soda. I should never have mentioned the trip in public. We (or I) lied to make sure that no one knew about the trip.

As the trip continued we engaged in numerous other forms of deception and indirection. We (or rather I) lied to Karlin's father so that we could borrow bicycles from him without mentioning soda. On our way out of town Siana, a neighbor, called out that she was going to ride to Liklob with us. Unsure of each other's intentions, the three of us kept quiet about soda throughout the entire ride. It was not until we arrived in town and both Siana and I sheepishly pulled money out of our pocket that we discovered with relief that we had the same intentions and could make the purpose of the trip explicit. On the way home we put the sodas in a plastic bag which, upon arrival, I hid in my small room. Siana and Karlin came over later and we closed the blinds and drank our soda together.

The difficulty that Karlin and I had buying and drinking soda reveals the difficulty everyone has getting out of giving in Jajikon and the semiotic maneuvers necessary if people are to avoid giving successfully. Success means managing to avoid giving without feeling shame (*aliklik*), losing face, or making others angry. But avoiding shame and saving face do not always require actually giving. Rather, they merely require creating the appearance that one has given all that one can.

It is not what people actually have, but rather what they appear to have, that plays a role in social life. People cannot give that which they do not possess. By semiotically changing the nature of people's connection to things—hiding not only the goods themselves but also people's status as owners who have the right to give—adults in Jajikon can avoid giving.

This hiding, both the goods themselves and people's control over those goods, is part and parcel of a general conversational trend in which adults avoid making explicit anything that could threaten either their own face or the face of others. Hence, in addition to possessions

people also hide intentions and feelings that can create conflict such as the intention not to give or feelings of anger. Adults also hide words and knowledge—both the requests that can be shameful and the gossip that might create a negative reputation.

In so far as adults suspect each other of lying or find hints of the information, feelings, and things that lie hidden beneath a surface of words, many of these semiotic manipulations are not entirely successful. But saving face often does not require actually deceiving others but rather simply keeping embarrassing truths unsaid. Since people work to save others' face as well as their own, so long as people's shameful and threatening requests, refusals, and feelings are hidden enough to create a veil of respectability adults ignore these hints and pretend that people's secrets are concealed. Through not-speaking interlocutors silently agree to collectively engage in the illusion that things, feelings, and information do not exist, saving each other from shame and their social relationships in the process.

It is not the case that people in Jajikon are particularly lazy, mean, or stingy. As in any community, some people are stingy while many are generous. Nonetheless, no one can give to everyone or do all that people ask. When one cannot give or help, it is much more polite to lie and say yes than say no. Saying no, as we have seen, not only brings about shame but also embarrasses others. Concern for other's face requires deception and indirection, getting out of giving without directly saying so.

Hiding Goods

One way to create the appearance that one has given all that one can is to hide both material goods as well as any indices—material or verbal—of their presence. Another way to create this appearance is to hide not the goods themselves but people's control over them. I

define this control as “social possession”: the generally expected recognition that a given individual or group has the ability to decide what to do with a good. In contrast, “physical possession,” as I use it, refers to a person’s physical contact with a good that gives them the immediate ability to physically give it. In the RMI, physical possession prototypically indexes social possession. People expect those who carry goods to give them. But adults can also get out of giving by speaking as if they do not have the right to give that which they hold, i.e., by hiding social possession.

Hiding Signs of Existence

One cannot give that which does not exist. Therefore, adults go out of their way to keep possessions that they do not want to give hidden. With one exception, I never saw an adult carry cooked food. Carrying such food, and in particular walking while eating, is “taboo” and, as discussed, is the prototypical event that brings about shame (*āliklik*). Shame (*āliklik*) compels people not only to give but also to hide. Explained one woman, “I will not carry food [that I do not want to give] by your house on the road. Because if I take food from my house and walk towards your house I will pass the people in Jujan’s house. Then I will say ‘eat.’ They will eat.” It is impossible, as this woman describes it, to carry food along the road without giving it. Her solution to this problem is to never walk along the road with food.

I only saw an adult carrying cooked food once.² She was a woman who had recently come back to Jajikon after many years in America. On this occasion she was walking quickly down the road while carrying a bowl with something in it.

² With the exception of right before or after a party. During such special occasions it is acceptable to carry plates of food around because everybody either will get or has received food. Even so, however, a woman on her way home

One of the men sitting near me yelled, 'Hey, what is that?'

The woman did not slow her pace. Instead she held up a small piece of a pancake and called over her shoulder, 'it is all gone!'

The man scowled. 'She is bad,' he muttered under his breath.

'Is it bad to walk with food?' I asked.

'Yes.'

Although with this one exception I never saw adults carrying cooked food, I occasionally saw adults carry uncooked food and other goods around. When they did so they made an effort to keep these items hidden. One man bought a small can of kerosene at a store and stuffed it in his pocket for the walk home. Another man bought a bag of rice. He carried the rice home on the lagoon, avoiding the more populated road. Siana, the woman who had accompanied Karlin and me to Liklob buy soda, wanted to drink the soda outside of town before we re-entered Jajikon. But Karlin, for reasons that are not entirely clear, did not want to stop. 'But there are so many people in my house!' Siana protested, pointing out that she could not drink soda in front of the fifteen-odd people who lived in her house. Siana and Karlin solved the problem by putting the sodas in a plastic bag and giving the bag to me. Any Marshallese person would have refused to carry the bag because the sodas were visible through the plastic. I, a foreigner, agreed. Unlike anyone else in Jajikon I actually had a small room all to myself. When I got home I hid the soda under some clothes. Just as I hid the soda in my house, adults hide other valuables beneath clothes or in chests, in a back room if they have one.

from a party one day offered the plate of food that she was carrying to another woman. This other woman had been invited to, but had not attended, the party.

In this land where there is significant verbal pressure to give it is not enough to hide the material goods. Rather, people also have to control their speech and actions, to hide any signs that index possession. Few Marshallese adults would make the same mistake that I made of talking about Karlin's and my trip to get soda. Rather, adults selectively draw attention only to that which they are prepared to give. For example, it is polite to call out "eat!" to anyone passing by. Adults constantly call out "eat!" but they often only mention food that they do not mind giving away. Hence, the mother in the house in which I lived frequently called out "eat rice" but she never called out "eat tuna" even when the meal was rice and tuna. If people took up her offer for food, she would give them some meat (if there was any left). But yelling about meat would be detrimental. Yelling about rice, of which there was generally plenty, was fine.

Similarly, a man who recently went fishing avoided giving off signs that he had a large catch of fish that he could share. It is hard to hide a fishing trip or a catch of fish. Men have to walk to and from the water, they clean fish outside, and flies accumulate. As one man told me, everyone knows when men go fishing. When a young man called out to another, "did you have good fortune dude" about the second man's fishing trip, outright lying about the fish that he caught was not really an option. But it was possible to construct the trip as not very successful, to portray the catch as small instead of large. Hence, the second man called back, "just enough for this household to eat." If the first man had actually asked for fish it would have been shameful to claim that he had some fish but not enough to give. Since the first man did not ask, the man with the fish took the opportunity to construct a situation in which others would feel shame to ask.

Imitating others who hid signs that could lead to pressure to give, I purposefully kept quiet about my birthday. On people's birthdays, just as during celebrations, others can "claim (*tōpe*)" the birthday person's possessions. A week later a friend asked me when my birthday was. When I said that it had just passed she laughed. 'You really know what to do!' she said, implying that I had inadvertently hit upon a typical strategy to get out of giving. 'You hid your birthday so that I could not claim!'

One of my research assistants scolded me for answering truthfully when people asked me when she was paid. She told me that I should not even tell people what days of the week she worked. Rather, she said, I should just say, "It's not yet clear." When another woman asked me to bring lotion back from the United States she added that I should not tell anyone else about what I was doing. Then, she said, they would also want lotion. 'And then what would we say?' I asked. 'It is all gone (*emaat*),' she responded, using the typical phrase that people use to show that they cannot give. Similarly, the woman discussed earlier who was carrying a bowl with a pancake in it yelled to us, 'it is all gone (*emaat*).'

As the conversation about lotion reveals, hiding often entails lying. 'Do you have any tuna?' A man asked another man. 'It is all gone,' the second man said about the four cans of tuna that I could see in the next room. My research assistants told me that they frequently "lied (*riab*)" to others and said that I had not yet paid them or that they had already spent their money. Once, one of the women said, she lied and said that she spent the money on chocolate.

On another occasion a man said to Dōrik, 'do you have any meat?'

'What type of meat?' Dōrik asked.

'Any type.'

‘It is all gone,’ Dōrik said even though there was fish in the house.

Both women and men interpret such behavior, when they know about it, as lying (*riab*) and hiding (*nōḥooj*). When my research assistants talked about hiding their money they explicitly called what they did “lying.” Karlin said that if people ask for something and person says that they do not have any then they “lie.” Another women described people who say ‘I don’t have any’ when people ask for fish as “lying.” A couple described concealing goods so that people do not have to give them as “hiding.” “Adults say there is none, they hide it,” another man said. With a woman I discussed a hypothetical story in which a man hides rice from another man and lies about it. “He lies,” she said, “if he hid it and then says that he does not have any.”

Hiding Social Possession

As mentioned, in the RMI and among adults physical possession often indexes social possession. For example, if an adult carries something people assume, lacking signs to the contrary, that the adult has the right to give it. Sometimes a spatial link between people and goods can also index social possession. Hence, if a man has bag of rice in his house, even if he is not touching the rice the spatial link between the man, the house, and the rice indicates that he has control over the rice and the power to give. As a result, as we have seen to avoid giving people try to hide these physical signs that index possession, changing the nature of their supposed relationship with goods.

But physical possession does not necessarily index social possession. If a man carries a woman’s skirt, for example, most people will assume that even though he is physically touching the skirt he does not have the right to give it. Consequently, another way to avoid giving is to try to break the indexical link between physical and social possession, to speak as if physical control

does not constitute social control. Hence, adults frequently said that something they were holding or wearing was not actually theirs, using speech to counter the appearance that they had the right to give.

For example, I asked Alina, a woman in her late teens, to whom the iPod that she was listening to belonged.

“It belongs to people,” she responded. Alina spoke as if others, as opposed to her, had control over the iPod. She claimed that even though she was holding the iPod she did not have the power to give it.

I demanded of Alina, ‘which person?’

‘People,’ Alina vaguely replied.

Deina who was sitting nearby and had overheard the exchange broke in. ‘She is saying that you are lying (*riab*),’ Deina informed Alina. Apparently, Deina interpreted Alina’s response, “people,” as a lie, while she also interpreted my questions as indicating that I thought Alina was lying.

Recognized that Alina might indeed be lying and might hesitate to speak freely in front of others who would expect her to give, I waited until we were alone. Then I asked again who owned the iPod. Alina told me that it was hers. When I asked her why she had spoken otherwise she said that if she admitted that the iPod was hers people would say, ‘give it to me so that I can listen for a little while.’ By pretending her iPod belonged to someone else she hid her social possession, her control over the iPod and the right to give it.

Similarly, Lacy told me that if she is carrying food and people ask for it, she just “lies (*riab*)” and says, “it is Drake’s food.” Drake was a volunteer American teacher living on Rōrin

while I was in the field. He lived in Lacy's house and most people respected the fact that some food was dedicated to him (and bought with the money WorldTeach provided). Lacy used Drake's status as someone who did not really have to give to get out of giving herself. Through speech she indicated that what appeared to be the case—she possessed and controlled the food—was not actually the case, thereby hiding the fact that she was indeed able to give.

Such an analysis makes Karlin's behavior during our trip to buy soda more understandable. Some types of people are seen as more responsible than others in certain social situations and with certain possessions. She believed that, since she was Marshallese, people would hold her more responsible for our trip and our sodas than I, an American. Therefore, she consistently worked to shatter that expectation. By marking me as in control she tried to abdicate responsibility not just for the trip to Liklob but also for the sodas that we bought.

Therefore, instead of responding to questions about our trip she referred the questions to me. 'Elise they are asking you a question,' she said when the women asked where we were going. Later we had to talk about our trip to her father to get him to give us bicycles. 'Elise tell him,' she said when her father inquired as to where we were going. The questions continued as we biked out of town. 'Where are you going!' people called from their houses. 'Ask Elise!' Karlin responded.

When we were waiting outside of town for our friend to catch up with us I asked Karlin why she kept on telling them to ask me. She paused. Then she said that if she told them that we were going to Liklob they would ask her to bring things back for them. But I, she continued, can just tell them that we were going to Liklob for a *jambo* (trip with no

definite purpose). Karlin perceived me, as an American, to be more immune to requests than she.³ By creating the appearance that I was in control as opposed to her, she abdicated her social possession of the sodas and her responsibility to give to others.

Changing the Nature of the Good

People cannot give things that are not gifts, regardless of whether or how they possess them. Hence, a way to get out of giving is to transform potential gifts into things that cannot be given.

For example a woman tried to avoid giving some chocolate first by concealing signs of its existence and then, when that failed, transforming the chocolate into something that cannot be a gift. I was sitting with some women by the side of the road when Dieni walked by. A hint of plastic peeped out of her pocket.

‘What’s that?’ the women asked Dieni.

‘Nothing.’

The women must have suspected that Dieni was lying because they insisted that she show them what was in her pocket.

Finally, Dieni gave in. She opened up her pocket slightly to show a plastic wrapper. ‘Coffee.’ Most people would not expect Dieni to immediately share with multiple people one small package of uncooked coffee grounds. Sharing would entail pouring the grounds into the women’s hands. Presumably the women would not think it worthwhile to walk back to their

³ Whether or not this perception was accurate is another question. Since people typically thought that I had money, I suspect that if I had revealed that we were going to the store they would have asked me to buy a number of things. It may be the case, however, that even though getting out of the requests would have made me uncomfortable it was still easier for me, than for someone who was Marshallese or from Jajikon, to not-give.

house to brew a sweaty and insubstantial portion of the grounds. By mentioning coffee Dieni tried to construct her possession as something that she should not have to give.

Somehow the women knew that the food in Dieni's pocket was not coffee. "Lie!" they declared.

Dieni surrendered to the inevitable. Out of her pocket she pulled, not coffee, but a bar of chocolate. She immediately broke the bar into pieces to share with us. 'My period,' she explained, trying to save face by providing a reason for her attempt to hide. Women are not supposed to prepare other people's food during their period. After Dieni left the women I was with dismissed this last remark as also a lie. Dieni, they claimed, just did not want to give.

Commodities

In addition to marking food taboo (which is rare), people take goods out of circulation by turning them into commodities. Such a transformation is done, as always, through signs and words such as "they belong to the store." In effect, such a transformation means that adults are not in social possession of commodities since they do not have the power to decide to give them. Of course, since people in Jajikon have relationships of reciprocal dependence with each other as opposed to the relationship of independence that Gregory (1982) argues is the hallmark of commodity exchange, the line between commodities and gifts is nebulous at best. Pressure from kin often forces adults to turn commodities back into gifts, to admit that they have the social power to give.

Nonetheless, turning gifts into commodities has numerous advantages. Considering the amount of debt that customers accumulate, stores in Jajikon may or may

not be profitable.⁴ But people are much less likely to ask for things in stores than things that are not commodities. Moreover, although most people accumulate debt, buying on credit at least entails the expectation that one should eventually repay the debt.

This idea that commodities do not have to be given means that people are able to accumulate commodities in a way that they cannot with other goods. Adults in Jajikon generally avoid accumulating large quantities of things that they cannot hide. For example, families often sent a child to a store to buy a can of tuna for lunch and then sent that child out again four hours later to buy another can of tuna for dinner.

No families, except for those that owned stores, seemed to have a surplus of goods because a large surplus is difficult to hide. Someone could try to hide a surplus, a woman told me. But then, she said, people will ask, “what did you eat?” Inevitably, moreover, someone in the house will respond, “tuna.” Then people will ask, “where did it come from?” And the same foolish person will say, “Majuro.” And then, the woman continued, the game is up and people will accuse the members of the house of greediness. As Gerald put it, “it is impossible” to hide a large surplus. “How can you hide ten bags of rice?” He asked. Moreover, another man said, if he were to hide food others would “hate” him. If they hoard a supply, some people explained, others call them “greedy.”

Families with stores, however, can accumulate surpluses in their house without having to hide or being called greedy. As one storeowner said, if they did not have a store they would have to give away all of their rice instead of selling it. For example, the woman explained, when people ask her sister who does not have a store for things the

⁴ The data I have on one store indicates that it was not profitable. I only saw receipts for a couple of months. It is possible that over the course of numerous years people paid off their debts, or at least enough of their debt that the store's mark-up on the price of goods and copra paid off.

sister has to give to them or lie. Storeowners, however, do not have as much of a burden to give. Although storeowners are under considerable pressure to sell on credit, people do not buy as much on credit as they would ask for if the surplus was simply lying around. In addition, they recognize their debt as something they ought, and sometimes do, pay off. As a result, unlike most other households, whenever a store has food so does its family (since they eat the store's supply).

People without stores also sometimes turned goods into commodities when they had a surplus. For example, banana bread was a tasty treat that women made from time to time when bananas were ripe. Children told me that adults frequently told them to lie about eating banana bread so that others would not ask for it. Whenever one woman made banana bread, however, she turned it into a commodity instead of a gift by selling pieces for 25 cents. The banana bread tended to last for a couple of days and, even though the woman ended up giving some of it away as opposed to selling all of it, she also made some money. In contrast, when the woman's mother was watching over the household she too made banana bread but did not sell it. It was gone in less than an hour. Similarly, when some men had a large catch of fish they dried and salted the fish to preserve them. Then they sold the salt fish. As one woman explained to me, if the woman and these men had not sold the bread and fish, people would have asked for it and it would be gone. Through changing gifts into commodities adults change the nature of their relationship to goods, transforming that relationship into one in which they do not have to give (as much).

Immediately un-givable

In addition to turning goods into commodities, people can mark a good as currently un-givable, meaning that it is not possible to immediately give it. For example, if limes are not yet ripe they must stay on the tree, meaning they cannot immediately be a gift. Essentially, people put off an exchange until the properties of the good have changed enough such that it can be a gift. Putting off an exchange until later, moreover, means that people often do not give at all.

As another example, offspring are not always ready to be given. Obviously while a woman is still pregnant she cannot give the baby inside of her. For a number of reasons, moreover, women do try to hide their pregnancies for as long as possible. One reason, I suspect, is women's general embarrassment about most things having to do with their body. Additionally, however, one woman told me that when she was pregnant she was "scared" that others would ask for her child. Once she was far enough along that she was unable to hide her pregnancy she tried to get out of giving by avoiding the requests altogether. "What did you do?" I asked. "I ran away," she said laughing. "Ran here, ran there, there, and over there....[When] they came I said, 'oh just a minute!' And I ran away again." Such attempts to hide the existence of an infant must eventually fail. Adults cannot run away from everyone. At some point in time a child is born and it is difficult to hide a baby.

But infants, just like fetuses, are not always ready to be given, or at least their kin try to construct them as such. For example, take Pinla's infant son. Pinla's pregnancy was her first and it was a difficult one. She spent the last three months of it on the capital where she had access to a hospital. On the capital she lived with her classificatory grandfather Terij, the *akwelap* (incessant beggar) discussed in the last chapter whom almost no one can refuse (See figure 3).

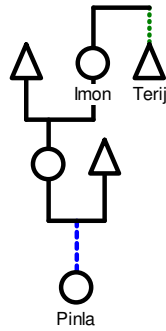


Figure 3: Pinla's Family
 Blue (dashed) lines are adoptive relationships.
 Green (dotted) lines are classificatory relationships.

The birth, when it finally came, was excruciating. First there was a false alarm and we all spent three days at the hospital just to have Pinla discharged. Weeks later, weeks past her due date, Pinla gave birth through a C-section and faced complications due to bleeding. Her baby, however, was healthy and vibrant.

He was also a boy. Terij and his wife, for reasons of which I am unaware, had only one child, a ten-year-old girl. They wanted a boy. They asked for Pinla's infant.

Pinla did not want to give but she was unable to refuse. So Pinla said that Terij should ask her mother for permission.⁵ Her mother was also unable to refuse Terij, so she referred the request to a still higher authority, her own mother Imon. Imon explained to me that Pinla and her mother's difficulties stemmed from not only the fact that Terij was of higher rank, but also Terij's character as an *akwelap*. 'Only I,' Imon said, 'can say no to Terij.' Imon's ability to refuse was helped, one assumes, not only by her personality but by her superior hierarchical status as Terij's older sister (see Figure 3).

⁵ I was not present for these negotiations but Imon, Pinla's maternal adoptive grandmother, reported them to me in great detail.

When Imon and Terij spoke on the radio, Imon tried to avoid giving her grandson away by marking him as not-yet-givable. Imon argued that before Terij took the baby the baby should return to Jajikon to be washed. Marshallese newborns are washed in Marshallese herbs multiple times a day for the first couple months of their life. This need to be washed means, Imon implied, that her grandson was not yet ready to be a gift.

Essentially, Imon hid her intention to never give, as well as the gift itself, underneath a shield of words that presented the infant as currently un-givable. Both Terij and Imon knew that it was possible to give the infant. Nonetheless, Terij accepted Imon's words at face-value, that the infant could not be a gift until he had been washed. But Terij also claimed that the washing could take place on the capital. In the end Terij won. The baby was to be washed on Majuro in Terij's domain and Terij got the infant.

While Imon failed to avoid giving, her strategy of saying "wait a little" or "maybe later" is the conventionally accepted way of getting out of giving an infant and often succeeds. One woman told me that she asked for one of the infants born during my stay but his parents said, "wait until later." She interpreted that response as indicating that the family did not want to give and backed off. Similarly, a mother told me that she responded to a request for her child with, "when you two want to take him, when he is older, okay." She never gave the child. A third woman told me that she was living on another atoll when her husband's sister asked for her infant. Her husband, the woman said, "said that he will return and give him but he didn't because the two of us took him." "Did he lie?" I asked. The woman laughing, "he lied". These partners told their relative that they would return to the atoll with the child but instead they left the atoll and never went back.

These conventional ways of getting out of giving leave people in considerable confusion as to whether or not the owner is intending to give. Sometimes, after all, people do give infants even after saying “wait.” In other words, “wait” is not always a lie, particularly because sometimes—such as during a pregnancy—fetuses actually are un-givable. Moreover, among all the adoptions that I saw, the birth mother breastfed her child for the first couple of months before giving the child to her or her adoptive parents, suggesting that newly-born infants are indeed not entirely givable.

Consequently, prospective adoptive parents were often quite unsure as to whether or not they would receive a child. For example, during my stay in Jajikon Carla asked her sister-in-law, Siera, for her infant while Siera was pregnant. I spoke with Siera later and she told me that she said “*emman* (good).” Nonetheless, she was not necessarily going to give. ‘Who knows?’ Siera commented. ‘Perhaps Carla doesn’t really want the baby. Perhaps,’ she continued, ‘I will decide not to give.’ Siera clearly viewed her “yes” response as ritually required but neither binding nor significant.

For her part, Carla interpreted Siera’s response as ambiguous. She said with worry that she did not really know if she was going to get the child. ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘Carla does not really believe Siera,’ Carla’s sister-in-law Alina said. Carla explained that people say yes but do not give their child because, ‘maybe they lie’. She then questioned me intently about my conversation with Siera, trying to figure out if Siera was actually going to give her the infant or not.⁶ Through speech birth parents hide their intentions (or their lack of a decision), making it ambiguous whether or not they are going to give.

⁶ In the end Siera actually did give her the child.

The Power of Physical Possession

Adults use various maneuvers to try to break the spatial link between people and goods that often indexes possession and the ability to give. First, they try to hide that spatial link itself, hide the fact they physically possess anything. Second, they hide social possession by lying and saying that they do not actually control the good that is in their hands or their space. They turn goods into commodities and mark infants as not yet ready to be gifts, essentially also hiding social possession. People who control something have the power to give it. If commodities cannot be given and infants are not yet gifts, then the adults actually do not have control over the commodity or the infant, they do not have the power to give.

The fact that all of these semiotic manipulations are attempts to create the appearance that those who physically control a good do not really control a good shows how powerful and important physical control actually is. Because, in effect, the people who physically possess a good do control it and are able to make decisions about who will get it next. A friend who borrows an iPod has to decide to give it back, the storeowner who supposedly must sell rice is perfectly capable of choosing to give it. A child carrying bread that belongs to his mother is capable of running into the woods and eating it.

Of course, some decisions and actions are easier to imagine and more socially acceptable than others and people's behavior is constrained by their social position and the consequences of their actions. Nonetheless, changing physical possession and transferring goods between people requires breaking the status quo. This is relatively easy to do if both interlocutors are willing or if one interlocutor is particularly powerful, but it is dangerous and difficult to do if an interlocutor is (silently) unwilling. If people do not spontaneously give, changing the status quo requires the

semiotic effort of asking. But whenever adults ask for something they engage in a potentially face-threatening act. Each time people manage to hide a refusal to give by saying “wait,” thereby maintaining physical control over goods, they force others into the dangerous and shameful position of having to ask again and risk the embarrassment (*jook*) that comes from being refused.

The power of physical possession is precisely why Imon wanted to get Pinla’s son back to Jajikon and why Imon’s efforts to avoid giving eventually failed. People frequently talk about avoiding giving infants as “holding (*dāpdep*),” a word that speaks to the importance of physical control. But in the case of Pinla’s son, physical and social possession actually were different. Pinla, her mother, and her grandmother collectively had the social power to decide what to with Pinla’s son. But Pinla and the son were in Terij’s house, in his physical space. Because Terij had physical control it was Terij, as opposed to Imon, who had to be convinced to let the infant go. Terij, moreover, knew perfectly well that Imon’s words were simply a shield that hid her desire to get the infant into her physical space so that she would not have to let him go. The semiotic effort necessary to break Terij’s control was too great. Imon would have had to have been overly explicit if she was to actually take the infant, an explicitness that would threaten everybody’s face and harm the relationship between the two families. So Terij won. (Physical) possession, as they say, is nine-tenths of the law.

Hiding Commitments and Feelings

Hiding Commitments

In addition to hiding goods and possession, adults also avoid giving time and labor by hiding their intention to not-participate. Refusing to help is just as bad as refusing to give.

Almost without fail, therefore, adults agree to help or attend anything that someone else asks them to do even when they cannot or will not do it. I tried to start a once-a-week adult English class. Everybody said, “I am coming!” but virtually no one came. People frequently complained about the captain of the boat who said he was going to run trips that he never actually made. Numerous men said that they would bring fish for church but did not.

Imon was planning on going on a trip to a nearby island for a *keemem* (first birthday festival) in a couple of days. A woman invited her to a housewarming that was to take place at the same time as the *keemem*. Imon told the woman that she would be at the housewarming. After the woman left, I burst out, “but you are going to the *keemem*!” Imon smiled and put a finger to her lips. Then she said, “Jilaba will go,” indicating that she would send her granddaughter to the woman’s housewarming in her place.

Such a practice, sending kin instead of going oneself, is perfectly acceptable and appropriate. Similarly, a woman agreed to help cook for a party but her mother went instead. Rather than criticizing such behavior, adults generally accept that family members can stand in for each other. As one woman explained, if someone cannot attend they “send someone else [a son or daughter] and it is not a problem. It is good.”⁷ Despite the fact that people can and should send relatives in their place, Imon refrained from directly saying that she would not go. To speak in such a manner would “make her [the woman holding the party] sad.” This speech would threaten each other’s face and needs to be avoided; such commitments and intentions need to be hidden.

⁷ This practice can create problems when the Marshallese immigrate to the USA. An American in Enid, Oklahoma, where there is a large Marshallese immigrant population, complained to me that Marshallese workers often do not show up for work and send their sisters instead.

Hiding Feelings

Adults' concern for both their own and others' face, and their practice of hiding anything that might be shameful to them or embarrassing to others, extends to negative feelings. As in many places around the world, adults in Jajikon avoid overt disagreements and explicit conflict as much as possible (Briggs 1971; Clancy 1986; Farris 1991). Just as they rarely say no to a request for help or an invitation to an event, adults rarely tell others that they are upset or angry with them. They prefer to preserve each other's face than invite open disagreement.

Indeed, adults on Jajikon often go to great lengths to avoid directly showing their anger at another. One example is when Jamin and his wife told me, as I mentioned, that I could no longer work with one of my research assistants, Hiuna, while I was living in Jamin's house on Majuro. I protested that Hiuna and I had already set up a meeting for the next day. Jamin reconsidered. They did not want me to work with her because, as they said, I was a member of their household and should not give her money. Nonetheless, actively changing an already established plan would require considerable semiotic effort. Moreover, this effort would highlight, as opposed to hide, the rupture that existed between the families. Jamin told me to work with Hiuna the next day as planned but to not arrange any other sessions.

When it later occurred to me that I did not know how I should let Hiuna know that we were not to work together again I turned to Jamin's wife, Niata for help. She told me that when Hiuna asked me when she should come back I should say, 'it will be clear.' These phrases—"it will be clear" and "it is not yet clear"—are conventional ways of refusing invitations or requests for labor. Whenever I said "I don't know" in response to a question people inevitably asked me numerous follow up questions that forced me to either admit to a general time period or lie to

provide a more specific answer. For example, when I told children that “I don’t know” when I was going to film them they inevitably simply repeated their request over and over again.

In contrast, when I said, “it is not yet clear,” people accepted the convention and asked no more questions. My experience with children makes me suspect that people interpreted this phrase not at face value—i.e. it really was not clear—but rather as a refusal. Often frustrated with children’s constant questions as to when I was going to film them, I started responding, “it is not yet clear.” To my astonishment the children immediately became angry. They yelled and asked me why I was not going to work with them. I tried to calm the flames by explaining that I did not mean that I was never going to work with them. Rather, I meant that I literally did not know at the moment. The children clearly interpreted, “it is not yet clear,” as an implicit refusal to accede to their request. Indeed, when I told Hiuna, as Niata instructed, “it is not yet clear when you will work,” Hiuna smiled a strange smile that made me suspect she understood my response as the refusal which it was. Later on she told me that, indeed, she knew that I was hiding something.

By telling me to say “it is not yet clear,” Niata instructed me to get out of working with Hiuna without explicitly saying anything or telling her why we were not to work. During our conversation Niata asked me if I had already told Hiuna that they were mad at her. When I said no Niata nodded with satisfaction.

‘Should I tell her?’ I asked.

“No,” Niata said. “We do not say it.”

When I talked to Niata’s daughter later about the situation she agreed. ‘In Marshallese culture,’ she said, ‘we do not say anything.’

Such an approach means that people often read each others' feelings not from words but from facial expressions and actions. For example, I once told Kāti that I feared another man in the village was angry at me. She asked me if I had looked 'at his face' to find out if he was mad. Similarly, numerous people told me that when adults get mad at each other they do not tell each other that they are angry. Rather, they simply stop speaking with each other.

Although actions and facial expressions can indicate that people are angry these sources of information supply little information as to why a person might be angry. This information, however, is crucial to repairing relations. Although sometimes when adults are mad at each other "they just go and ooooooh.... and [after a while] all is well again," often people stay mad until someone has apologized. It is difficult to apologize, however, if one does not know what to apologize for.

This information comes "from people," from the gossip that circulates throughout the village until in some form or another it reaches the offending party. For example, Hiuna eventually learned of the reasons for Niata and Jamin's anger from third parties. A couple of days after Jamin told me to stop working with Hiuna she got into a heated discussion with two other women. From them, she told me, she learned that real reason for the fight was not what she thought—the lack of fish—but something else all together. Apparently a rumor was circulating that Hiuna had been talking about Niata behind her back. Although Hiuna admitted that she had indeed said what the rumor claimed, she protested that the gossip chain took her words out of context. She had been joking, she insisted. Nonetheless, armed with this knowledge of her supposed wrongs, Hiuna eventually apologized to Niata. The conflict was resolved.

Was the fight due to a failure to give fish or to a nasty rumor? I do not know. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the real cause of the fight. Nonetheless, it is clear that, preferably, fights among adults do not take the form of angry words or heated debates. Rather, they take the form of silence. Information slowly moves along indirect channels until someone either apologizes or the fight continues. Direct communication only returns between the two families once they can have amiable, non-confrontational interactions, once they can interact in ways that do not threaten each others' face.

Nonetheless, clearly occasionally there are direct confrontations. These confrontations make people uneasy, as revealed by the fact that people overhearing the interactions tend to laugh. Niata laughed hysterically during my conversation with Jamin when he told me that I could not work with Hiuna. During a PTA meeting about a new school motto, a grown son and his father had a falling out as to whose motto to use. Throughout their heated discussion the entire crowd of parents laughed constantly.

“You know the meaning of your [motto],” the father said gently with a big smile on his face, “the meaning [of the motto] is arrogance.”

“Okay,” said his son. “I am going to tell Rōri (another person) to just look at it. Because you are saying that it is not a motto.”

Numerous women laughed.

This laughter serves to further hide people's feelings by making it difficult to determine whether or not they are serious. Niata's laughter, for example, led me to initially take Jamin's command not to work with Hiuna as a joke. He had to state firmly “I am not joking!” before I understood that he was serious. I was not the only one who found it difficult to interpret

interactions when people laugh even as they or others voice conflict. “Are they joking?” I whispered to another woman, as the audience laughed about the son and father’s debate. “I do not know,” she whispered back. This laughter undermined these open displays of conflict and made people more comfortable with it. It also worked to hide people’s feelings, making the confrontations sufficiently ambiguous such that it is not entirely implausible to argue that people were simply joking. The laughter hid their feelings, or at least gave them the ability to plausibly deny that conflict or negative feelings had ever existed.

Hiding Requests

Not surprisingly, adults hide not only their goods, feelings and intentions, but also their requests. After all, although not as dangerous as explicitly saying no, asking for things is also risky and can bring about shame.

Most adults ask for things privately as opposed to in a group. First, asking in front of others is rude since such a public request compels a person to give to everyone. Second, asking in front of others is more dangerous since there are more people around to witness a refusal and the embarrassment that such a refusal could cause. Consequently, most of the requests that I overheard, except for the ones framed as a joke, were private requests directed toward the family with whom I lived. For example, a woman asked for sugar and a man for fish. These requests presumably did not need to be hidden from me since I already had access to my family’s possessions. Similarly, most people asked me for things when others could not overhear. One woman asked me for lotion in private. Another asked to borrow DVD’s, again in private.

In addition, most requests are indirect. For example, a woman said to a man, “go and tell Hukira [the man’s mother] that she should give me my gum.” This woman asked for gum

through a third party as opposed to directly to Hukira. Another woman called out to a man, “you still owe us some turtle.” Her speech implies that she had previously asked for turtle. Although through speaking she reminded the man of his obligation, the way she phrased the statement did not compel an immediate yes or no response. Rather, it invited an explanation as to why the man had not given turtle, putting pressure on the man while simultaneously giving him room to explain himself.

Often, moreover, adults phrase requests as technically requests for information as opposed to material goods. A man asked another man, ‘do you have any meat?’ Similarly, as opposed to asking Dieni (the woman with chocolate in her pocket) directly for food, the women asked for information. ‘What is that?’ Asking for information about what people have is a form of “conventionalized indirectness,” a way of speaking that everyone interprets as a request for the good but nonetheless serves to distance the speaker from the request, helping him or her to save face (Brown and Levinson 1978:75).

In addition, adults also often use negative questions to ask. For example, a woman asked, “are there not any limes?” Her use of the negative accomplished two interactive goals. First, she implied that limes should exist, with the additional implication that the other women should already have given them to her. Similarly, Deina’s frequent question to me, “are you not going to give me shampoo?” has rhetorical force because it indicates that I should already have given her shampoo. I frequently heard adults and older children simultaneously command and scold younger children through phrases such as ‘Tito, are you not raking?’ This negative question, again, has the force of a command in that it implies that Tito should be raking.

Second, the negative phrase is much less combative than an explicit question or statement that might have a similar referential meaning. Negative questions separate the asker from the question, putting the onus on the person with the limes as opposed to the person asking for them. In addition, as with the question, ‘do you have any tuna,’ the person asking for limes technically asked for information, managing to hide the request itself. These ways of asking give adults the ability to plausibly deny that they ever asked for anything. This plausible deniability can help them overcome their shame.

Adults do not always use these indirect, opaque, and unassertive requests. Rather, when requesting things that they do not doubt will and should be given they often speak in a more direct, but nonetheless polite, manner. For example, women sharing food while preparing for the arrival of a new preacher frequently requested food and other items from each other. “Can you give me that cup there by you?” “Give us our tea Sofia.” “Do give me that breadfruit Deina.” Sometimes the women included politeness markers such as “can you” with these requests, but they took no pains to hide the fact that they were asking. Sitting and eating in a group, the women knew that they would get the things for which they asked. Hence, there was no shame in asking and no need to hide.

There is a need to hide, however, when requests are dangerous. In addition to indirectness, a crucial tool for hiding is humor.

Joking

Adults often hide both their requests and refusals with jokes. Joking creates ambiguity as to the sincerity of a remark; helping adults avoid the shame that can come from speaking. Jokes rest in a nebulous area between sincerity and falsehoods. This characteristic makes joking

important not only for hiding requests and refusals but also for helping people avoid the dangers that come from lying.

Adults frequently ask for things in a joking tone of voice. For example, as discussed one day Imon called out to a younger kinsman walking by, “Go and tell Hukira that she should give me my gum!” Hukira—the man’s mother—had just returned from Majuro and presumably she brought back treats. Imon did not say anything particularly outrageous. Moreover, she asked indirectly by going through a third party. Nonetheless, the forcefulness of her request and the fact that she spoke so loudly were almost enough to mark her speech as a joke. Requests, as we have seen, are generally private. By breaking the rules of privacy and by asking forcefully (albeit indirectly) Imon moved herself into joking territory.

The man responded humorously thereby marking not only his implicit refusal to give but also Imon’s earlier request as jokes that need not be taken seriously. “Ask for gum with so many people on the dock?!” he called in a loud tone of voice. His response refers to the common but often unspoken truth that one does not ask for gum in a crowd. Since everyone knows that he cannot ask for the gum and since he yelled his response for all to hear, something he would only do if he were joking, not only his response but also Imon’s request must be jokes. Joke requests are not real requests and do not compel a gift.

By responding with still another joke Imon further framed their conversation as humorous as opposed to serious. “Ok,” she said, “you should say [to your mother], ‘Give me my food unimportant girl (*luweo*) because I am broke from supporting my in-laws!’” Both Imon and the man burst into laughter.ⁱⁱⁱ Imon’s speech fully ratified the man’s interpretation of the entire exchange as a joke regardless of whether Imon had actually been joking in the beginning. A son

would never say “*luweo*” to his mother. Barring swear words, *luweo* is the most disrespectful female vocative available in Marshallese. Even children only rarely used it. For the most part I only heard children only said “*luweo*” during role-play when they pretended to be fighting. Imon’s additional off-color reference to in-laws who ask and ask for things thereby making life difficult for their new son or daughter-in-law added to the outrageous nature of her suggestion. The rude and childish language she suggested that the man use, “give me my food,” also framed her utterance as not-serious. People observing this interaction burst into laughter after Imon’s statement. The man, with help from Imon, successfully framed Imon’s initial request as a joke and thereby avoided giving gum.

Similarly, an older woman told a story about a man who also avoided giving by trying to frame his refusal as a joke. In this re-telling, however, the man was unsuccessful at defining the interaction as a joke. He emerges from the narrative as unhelpful and greedy.

“But you know,” Sofia reported, “that I told him to bring some *bwilitudek* (breadfruit cooked with coconut). He said, ‘You know I would have brought it if it had been another type of food. But girl, I won’t bike there for that type of food!’”

The women listening to the story laughed. By insulting the food the man tried to frame his failure to give as a joke and not real.

Sofia continued with the story. “I said, ‘It’s not your food.’” As she tells it Sofia resisted the man’s attempt to hide his refusal under a joke. Instead, she insisted that it was not his place to keep food (i.e., that he did not have social possession). He should have brought the food.^{iv}

Nonetheless, her story and the women’s laughter shows that they recognize joking as a legitimate

way to respond to a demand even while they also imply that joking as opposed to giving is not entirely appropriate.

Another interaction between two women shows both that adults joke to avoid giving and that such joking is criticized even while people accept it as a legitimate response. Lōla, a younger woman, was walking by. Imon, the older woman discussed previously, called out for some candy. Again, the loudness and forcefulness of Imon's request made it possible to interpret her request as a joke.

Lōla attempted joke herself out of a need to give. She responded, 'it's bad to eat candy,' humorously referring to the fact that candy has little nutritional value.

Imon responded by insulting Lōla with public and sarcastic insults that made everyone roll with laughter. 'You smell bad!' she called.

Some bystanders laughed.

Lōla protested.

Imon called out again, 'you smell bad!' She turned to some other women and called Lōla a 'loudmouth.' She then called out again to Lōla, 'you are going to cheat!'

These insults, despite their joking tone and the gales of laughter coming from bystanders, eventually overpowered Lōla. She saw down next to Imon. 'Why are you not asking Jerasia or Kiklo?' Lōla asked, naming other women who also recently came from Majuro and might have candy.

Lōla, in the end, realized that her attempt to joke backfired. Imon, older and more powerful, insulted her. Imon framed her insults as jokes. Nonetheless, all jokes have a kernel of truth. These insult jokes served to scold Lōla for speaking out of place, for trying to avoid giving

in a manner inappropriate when speaking with an elder. Realizing her mistake, Lōla finally resorted to other strategies to hide her refusal to give. She shifted the social and physical possession of candy on to other women.

Allowing Others to Hide

Adults, such as Imon, often saw through others' attempts to hide. It seems likely that Imon knew perfectly well that Lōla jokingly insulted her to try to hide the fact that she was not going to give any candy. Sometimes people fought back against such hidden refusals by voicing their suspicions. 'Are you lying?' an older man asked me when I claimed that I did not have any mosquito coils. Others, like Imon, express their disapproval indirectly. Imon did not explicitly reprimand Lōla but her insults implied that she was unsatisfied with Lōla's response.

Often, however, people said nothing even when they saw through others' attempts to hide. They made no sign to indicate that they suspected deceit, sometimes even when deceit was obvious. Their behavior reveals a larger practice of letting people keep hidden that which they do not want to share. Often, adults silently agree to act as if things are hidden, to go through life accepting an illusion of secrecy even though completely hiding is impossible.

For example, Karlin and I did not actually make it to Liklob and back without anyone knowing that we had bought soda. One reason (although definitely not the only one) why we were unable to proceed with stealth was because going to Liklob required bicycles. Getting bicycles required asking Karlin's father to get them out of the shed.

Karlin and I went to her house where her father and Lance, Karlin's thirteen year old brother, were relaxing. Instead of asking for the bicycles, however, Karlin said to me, 'maybe we should wait until Sunday to go on our trip because then the bicycles will be free.'

At the time, I was shocked by Karlin's speech. Why did she make my rookie mistake of talking about our trip in front of others? In hindsight, however, Karlin was very strategic. Instead of directly asking for the bicycles she spoke to me about having to put off our plans for the day. She succeeded in indicating to her father that she wanted to take the bicycles out without ever having to actually say so.

Nonetheless, her father immediately wanted more information. 'Where are you going?'

I ignored him, thinking that no answer was best. Like before, however, Karlin tried to shift responsibility for the trip and the sodas to me. 'Tell him,' she said.

I glared at Karlin. 'To Liklob, just for a *jambo* (trip with no specific purpose),' I finally said.

What happened next was surprising. Her father said nothing. Karlin's younger brother, however, pounced. 'Liar! You are going to buy soda! And if more people go you won't buy soda, if I came you wouldn't buy the soda!'

How did Lance know? Perhaps he had overheard Karlin and I talking earlier in the day. Perhaps he interpreted any trip to Liklob at that time as an expedition for soda. Regardless, Lance described completely accurately the situation that Karlin and I were in.

If Karlin's brother read behind our words and actions so well I have no doubt that Karlin's father also knew exactly what we were up to. At the very least, the brother's outburst must have made her father suspect that we were going to buy soda. Her father, however, did not challenge us. Without a word he got up and unlocked the shed. Then he gave us two bicycles and silently sent us on our way.

Why didn't he speak? I suspect that Karlin's father was respecting our desire to hide. He chose to allow us to stay hidden, to pick up on the signs that told him that we did not want to give. If he had been someone else I would say that he felt shame (*aliklik*) to ask us if we were going to get soda in the face of evidence that we did not want to share. As we have seen, most adults felt ashamed to ask if they thought that they would be refused or that others did not want to give. Karlin's father, however, was an imposing and authoritative man who had power not only over Karlin as her father but also over me through my adopted kin relationships, power that he generally did not hesitate to assert. He expected respect and his children gave it to him in the form of obedience and fear. It seems unlikely that he would have feared to ask or insist that Karlin and I, his subordinates, explain ourselves and give.

It seems more likely that he was concerned for us, for Karlin and me, and our desires. Just as the elder brother felt shame to ask for things from his younger siblings since he knew that his power over them would force them to give, Karlin's father may have felt shame to force us away from our desires. Shame comes not just from being refused or acting inappropriately but also from making others lose face. Karlin's father had the authority to make us share with him and with his entire family. He chose not to use that authority. He chose not to force our deceptions into the spotlight where we could no longer pretend they did not exist.

When the eventful trip to Liklob was almost over I rode back into Jajikon on the borrowed bike, a plastic bag with four sodas in it hung over my handlebars. Karlin had insisted, if we recall, that we drink the soda later at night as opposed to outside of town as Siana and I preferred. I, the foreigner, was the only one foolish enough to agree to carry the soda into town. I say "foolish" because the plastic bag was not sufficiently opaque to hide what it held. Perhaps it

was my own guilt speaking, but I could feel eyes staring at me as I rode sweating through town. “Where did you come from?” “Where are you going?” “What are you doing?”

The most dangerous interaction came right before I reached the safety of my house. I had to pass the church where older women were clearing weeds in the yard.

‘Come here!’ one of them called.

I groaned inwardly. I could not possibly go to the women with the soda in my hands. “Just a minute,” I called back as I biked rudely away from the women. I hurried to my house, stashed the sodas inside, and then went back to where the older women were sitting.

‘Give me a dollar,’ the woman said.

My heart jumped. Did she know about the sodas? ‘Why?’ I foolishly asked.

‘For the church! It is just a dollar!’

I sighed with relief. They were not asking about the soda but rather about a fundraiser for church. ‘Of course I’ll give,’ I said. ‘I just wanted to know why.’ I gave her a dollar, happy both to give and that my other adventure, giving to Karlin but to no one else, had not been discovered.

I was mistaken, however, to believe that our prevarications had fooled anyone. A couple of months later while chatting with a friend we somehow got onto the topic of soda. ‘Why didn’t you give me any?’ my friend asked, referring to this time when I rode through town with soda.

She knew about the soda, my friend told me, because she could see it through the plastic bag. I suspect that everyone could see it too, including the old women in the churchyard. My flimsy plastic bag—just like many forms of speech—inadequately hid its contents. But my friend, the old women, and Karlin’s father kept their silence. Both the bag and my speech were

just opaque enough to make it possible for everybody to pretend that they had not discovered my secret.

I suspect that without the bag I would have been truly transgressive and people would have asked for the soda. They would have had to ask, if only to criticize my behavior and reinforce the custom that such displays of things cannot be tolerated unless one is to give. The partly transparent bag hid the soda just enough for others to plausibly pretend that they did not know. As I suspect they do countless times every day, the women swallowed their words and hid their understanding, allowing avoiding giving to take place by outwardly accepting the illusion that I had nothing to give.

The Control of Speech

It is clear that the circulation of things is intricately intertwined with the circulation of words. Like the plastic bag, words and other signs create the veneer of non-existence necessary if one is to not-give. People manipulate these signs to hide not only their possessions but also their relationship with their possessions: their status as physical and/or social possessors. These signs are what change the status and nature of goods. Goods are givable or not-givable, commodities or gifts, taboo or available, depending on people's perceptions of who possesses them and who has control. Through words people move goods into and out of circulation, affecting the nature of things even as things affect people, their face, and their relationships.

The give and take of words is as much a part of exchange as is the give and take of things (Keane 1997). Therefore, understanding the gift requires an analysis of how it is that words transfer between people. Such an analysis shows that giving and asking for words carry as many perils and possibilities as giving and asking for things.

Asking and Giving Information

Marshallese often speak of words and information as things that, like goods, can be given. For example, a woman discussing something the captain told her remarked, “the captain gave it to us (*letok*).” She used the root *le-* (give), the same verb that people use to talk about giving material goods, to indicate that she received information from the captain. Similarly, another woman said, “he said that if Majuro gives it to us (*letok*) then [the bridge] is fine.” This woman also used the root *le-* (give) to refer to information that the captain was to receive from Majuro. We could also translate this utterance as, “he said that if the information comes from Majuro then the bridge is fine.” People also often talked about *le-* (giving) speeches or the position to give a speech. Hence, another woman said that a baby’s grandmother spoke instead of the baby’s father during a celebration of the baby because the father “gave it (the position to give a speech)” to the grandmother. Finally, using a word that also implies the give and take of goods, Carla explained to me why a woman kept on saying “I don’t know” by saying that “some people do not want to *jea* [share].” Carla uses the word “share,” a word often used to talk about sharing food, to refer to sharing information.

Just as people expect to be given goods, moreover, they also expect to be given information. “What did you eat?” People ask. “Where are you going?” “What are they doing?” “What are you carrying?” Women would invariably ask me, “What is your mother (Marshallese) doing?” Other people would ask, “what did they say?” after I completed an interview. No one accepted my excuse that I could not speak because I had promised confidentiality. Rather, people frequently repeated their questions as opposed to permitting me to keep quiet. “Who?” Kāti demanded when I said that I could not tell her the name of another woman who had given me

information. When I continued to hold out Kāti accused me of “lying.” Since I would not say where the information came from I must be lying about it. No one, moreover, trusted me when I said that I would keep what they told me confidential. ‘You will tell Juri,’ one woman said even after I promised that no one on Jajikon would listen to a recording of their conversation.

Once when some women refused again to let me record them because they claimed that I was going to share the recording with everyone else I asked why they did not believe me when I said that I would not share. A woman responded, ‘because you do not show your life to us,’ referring to how I would often sit by myself and write or listen to a recording. Adults and children frequently came by asking to watch a video, look at a recording, or see what I had written. I consistently refused to share my data with them, an action in accordance with IRB guidelines but out of place with the expectation that people can and should have access to what others are doing. On the other hand, although one woman pointed out my strange behavior as a reason to distrust me, other woman said that it was not me in particular whom they distrusted but everyone. ‘Everyone tells,’ one woman said, talking about how information flows even when one would prefer that it not.

The Danger of speech

Even through people ask for information and expect others to give, asking and giving information is dangerous. First, people refer to people who ask too often with a pejorative, *kajnōt*. Although the dictionary defines *kajnōt* as “curious” (Abo et al. 1976), in my experience *kajnōt* has a negative connotation and refers to someone who is an annoying busybody. “Asking and asking and asking,” numerous people said to define the meaning of *kajnōt*. Others said that *kajnōt* referred to people who ask questions to which they already know the answer. One woman

said that people criticize those who *kajnōt* as “liars (*riabeb*).” ‘Because,’ she explained, ‘they are asking questions that they already know the answer to.’

In practice, people seem to use “*kajnōt*” to refer to both annoying busybodies and people asking about things that they already know. One man jokingly told me not to interview a specific woman because “she is really *kajnōt*” and she “judges” people. Numerous adults pointed out an older woman who constantly asked questions as *kajnōt*. For the most part, however, adults see *kajnōt* as a character trait of young children, many of whom tend to ask annoying and repetitive questions. Adults would occasionally say to children who were asking me a lot of questions “don’t *kajnōt*.” Sometimes these were questions that the children obviously knew the answer to, such as when a young boy asked me “what are you eating?” while looking at my plate of food. On other occasions, however, the children did not necessarily know the answer, such as when another boy asked, “why are Marshallese people brown and Americans white?” Regardless of the reason for scolding someone for *kajnōt*, it is clear that asking questions can bring about criticisms.

Giving information is even more dangerous than asking since people who talk can be accused of gossiping or lying. A woman scolded another woman for spreading a story about a mother hitting her child. The second woman defended herself, protesting that she had not said anything. Both of these women clearly saw the act of spreading information itself as a problem regardless of whether that information was true or false. On another occasion a woman said, “she really makes words,” a criticism, a research assistant said, of people who talk all the time. As another woman told me, it is bad to be “a person who talks all the time.” An older man argued that people should not gather information at all, much less spread it. Rather than walking around

and seeing things, he said, people should close their eyes and ears. People who talk too much are *lelōñiñi*, tattletales and tell-alls.

Giving information is often seen as bad. In turn, asking for information can be dangerous and annoying. The negative connotations attached to asking and giving words show that despite the openness of Marshallese life, people would prefer to be able to keep things quiet, to be able to hide.

Hiding Words

It should not be surprising that just as adults hide goods, feelings, intentions, and requests, they also hide information. “*Nōñooj naan* (hiding words),” a woman said, is when people tell someone, “do not say it.” Some people said that adults “hide words,” when they do not want to talk about bad things. Said another woman, adults “hide words” when they do not want to cause trouble.

At the same time, many people said that “hiding words” was bad and pointed out that it is what women, much more so than men, do when they gossip about each other or are jealous of each other. A Marshallese saying, “the tongues of women (*lōñin kōrā*)” connotes the image of women flapping their tongues, gossiping, and lying. Eleven out of twelve adults said that women lie and gossip more than men. ‘Because they hang out and chat (*bwebwenato*)’ one person explained. Explained another woman, “in the old days people did not lie as much because they did not wander around...women did not go from this house to that house and hang out and talk.” When I sat with a group of women, they often joked that people who pass us would say that we were gossiping. “Liars!” a woman laughingly called to me and another woman chatting by the side of the road.

Although everyone says that women hide words and lie more than men, adults agree that men sometimes do it too. Moreover, people are not always hiding embarrassing gossip or creating lies that damage others' reputations. Rather, adults seem to hide words about many different things and for a number of reasons—sometimes simply because they do not want to be the ones spreading information. For example, one day a man whom I call Tomaj arrived on Jajikon from Majuro to become the partner of a young woman in the village. Most people in the Marshall Islands do not get officially married.⁸ Rather, they simply move in with each other and as a result of moving in they are *koba*, “together.”⁹ Everybody hides their lovers before they become *koba* since men and women move in largely separate spheres and people are embarrassed by talk of romance and sex. It was not surprising, therefore, that no one had ever met this man or even knew of his existence. On her part, even after her partner arrived the woman continued to deny that she had ever had a boyfriend in Majuro and proclaimed (to most people's disbelief), that she did not know he was going to show up in Jajikon to become *koba*.

The woman's grandmother also hid her knowledge about this young man but in a different way. When Tomaj arrived at Jajikon he went first to his lover's parents and then to her grandparents to ask permission to become *koba*.¹⁰ I ran over to the grandparents' house to see if I

⁸ Some couples in the RMI do get married (*mare*) in a church. Although these marriages can take place before a couple moves in together, most people start off as together (*koba*), at least among the non-evangelical Protestants with whom I lived. After a couple of years or decades couples might decide to have a ceremony and get officially married (*mare*). Most people I knew had this ceremony in order to move up in the church hierarchy. In daily life people do not differentiate between couples who are *koba* and couples who are *mare*. They also use the same words to describe people in both arrangements: *leolio ippān* (man/woman with her/him) or the English borrowings “husband” and “wife.”

⁹ More often than not, since the Marshallese are largely matrilineal, the man moves in with his wife's family.

¹⁰ Asking for permission seems to be largely a formality, partly because of Marshallese practices of hiding conflict and disagreement. I asked the woman's mother what she thought about Tomaj and his daughter becoming *koba*. She responded, ‘he has already come, how can I say it is bad?’ It is “hard,” she explained, to say no to him. The woman's father agreed. ‘If it isn't good with me,’ he said ruefully, ‘what am I going to do about it?’

could catch the action but by the time I arrived Tomaj had left. I chatted with the grandparents.

‘So,’ I said, ‘What did you say to Tomaj?’

‘Who?’ the grandmother asked.

‘The guy who came to move in with Juri.’

‘Juri is *koba* (together)?!!!’ The grandmother asked me incredulously.

I paused, surprised. ‘Don’t you know?!’ I demanded. ‘They came here!’

The grandmother protested that she did not know anything about Juri and her new husband and did not know that the husband had come to ask permission.

I continued to demand incredulously that she must have known.

After a couple of minutes, the grandmother backtracked. ‘Tomaj spoke to my husband, not me, I only saw him from a distance.’

The grandmother clearly knew about what had transpired but tried to hide her knowledge. As a result, I, as opposed to the grandmother, was the first person to offer any information. Through cultivating ignorance the grandmother avoided spreading information and putting her name to words that may circulate throughout the village.

There were many other times when adults hid their knowledge by cultivating a reputation of ignorance. Once, for example, two women chatted about a birth. The first woman asked if the baby had been born yet. This woman clearly knew the answer to her own question since she immediately went on to discuss her surprise when she heard about the birth because she thought the infant was not yet due. Similarly, Lacy was chatting with me and another woman, Kāti, about some gossip from Majuro. When Lacy asked why the mayor had suspended a boat, Kāti referred the question to me saying, ‘Elise, what happened?’ It was Kāti, however, who had told

me the story about the boat in the first place, so she clearly knew the answer to her own question. She preferred, however, not to be the person who gives or distributes information. To hide her knowledge and to get out of talking, she cultivated an air of ignorance.

Just as spreading information is dangerous, however, so can pretending not to know. Both run the risk of being accused of lying. Staying out of trouble requires manipulating perceptions not only of what one knows but also of why one speaks the way one does. To this end, the fine line between joking and lying is helpful. For example, on an extremely windy day in March a small boat capsized in the open ocean between Majuro and Rōrin. Luckily for the passengers a larger boat was nearby and rescued everyone. A day after the event I was sitting with a group of women and asked Siana, a woman who had been on the rescue boat, what happened.

‘I don’t know,’ Siana said.

I pressed Siana for more information but she stuck to her claim that she had no idea. Eventually, frustrated, I burst out, ‘but you were on the boat!’

‘I was on [the other boat],’ Siana said.

‘But it picked up the passengers from the overturned boat!’

‘Well,’ Siana reconsidered, ‘I was sleeping.’

A woman sitting near us broke in to the conversation. ‘She is lying, she just does not want to share.’

I asked Siana again, ‘Are you saying you don’t know even though you were there?’

Siana paused for a while. ‘It’s a joke,’ she finally responded. She used the fine line between joking and lying to get herself out of trouble, to make it such that she could not be held

responsible for her speech. Understanding how this works requires taking a closer look at Marshallese concepts of a lie.

Lying, Truth, and the Morality of Giving

Hiding—be it goods or information—clearly depends on lying and deception. Lying, moreover, is integral not only to avoiding giving but also to giving itself, since exchange cannot take place without the ability to get out of the obligation to give. The Marshallese concept of a lie, however, and their moral evaluations of the act of lying, differ significantly from those proposed for English.

Lies, Mistakes, and Truths

In some contexts, *riab* (lie) seems very similar to the concept of “lying” proposed for English. Coleman and Kay (1981) argue that the English word ‘lie’ prototypically refers to an utterance that fits three characteristics: it is false, the speaker believes it to be false, and the speaker intends to deceive.¹¹ People always view utterances that fit all of these characteristics as lies, while people sometimes view utterances that fit some of these characteristics as lies. Similarly, adults in Jajikon often labeled utterances as *riab* if they matched these three characteristics. For example, while chatting with two women on Majuro one of them said that she was going to return to Jajikon that day on the boat. “Lie,” the other woman accused. Through saying “lie” this woman claimed both that the utterance was false—in that the woman was not going to go back to Majuro—and that the woman knew it was false. Another day a teenage boy

¹¹ Coleman and Kay (1981) used interview data for their analysis. It seems likely that ethnographic data would yield different uses of the word “lie” in context, and that these uses vary dramatically among different dialects of English and different communities of speakers. In addition, Coleman and Kay do not account for the fact that the role of “speaker” is often more complicated than simply who physically speaks and utterance (Goffman 1981).

said that he was going to go fishing. Then he came back to the house as opposed to getting in the fishing boat. When I asserted that the boy had “lied” about going fishing his grandmother corrected me. The boat was full, she explained. Her explanation indicates that she did not interpret the boy’s words as a lie because the boy had neither known his words were false nor intended to deceive, he did not know that he was not going fishing. Similarly, two women told me that people are not lying if they have forgotten the truth.

In addition, people’s distinctions between joking and lying indicate that they sometimes viewed people’s intention to deceive, as opposed to joke, as important when evaluating an utterance as a lie. Two women told me that there were hookers on Jajikon.

“Really?” I asked.

“It’s a joke,” one of them said.

‘You lied (*riab*)!’ I exclaimed.

The woman corrected me. “It’s a joke,” she repeated. Since she had not been intending to deceive, her utterance could not be interpreted as a lie.

At the same time, however, there are many ways in which *riab* differs significantly from Coleman and Kay’s (1981) definition of “lie.” First, *riab* means “false” as well as “lie.” Children often clamored to borrow my snorkeling mask while swimming. “Me next,” a child demanded. “*Riab* (false),” another child said. This child used “*riab*” to indicate that the state of affairs the other child demanded, that he would get the snorkeling mask, was not to his liking. He was not concerned with the other boy’s intentions or knowledge, but merely that I act to make the state of affairs the first child wanted false. On another occasion an old couple disagreed about which of their sons was the youngest. The husband told me not to listen to his wife because she

“*riab*.” He meant merely that she was wrong, not that she was intentionally giving me misinformation. Similarly, *riab in naan* (false/lie words) refers to nonsense speech, just as *riab in jinō* (false/lie my mother) refers to classificatory kin. *Riab* is the opposed of *ṁool* just as “false” is the opposite of “true.” ‘Is it true?’ I asked a woman. “*Riab* (false),” she asserted, meaning not that anyone had lied to me but that that event I was asking about does not actually take place on Jajikon. In these uses of the word “*riab*” the speaker’s knowledge or intention to deceive are irrelevant.

Moral Component of Lying and Truth

When *riab* means “lie” (as opposed to false), its meaning and the meaning of *ṁool* (true) depend as much on the morality of the utterance as they do on either the speaker’s knowledge or intention to deceive. Consequently, when people speak and act morally others often evaluate their utterances as *ṁool* (true/good) irrespective of not only the speaker’s state of belief or intention to deceive but also referential accuracy. For example, I discussed with numerous adults a hypothetical story in which a woman, under the mistaken belief that the boat had not yet arrived, tells a man that the boat had not come. Some adults said that this woman was neither lying (*riab*) nor wrong (*ebōd*) but telling the truth (*ṁool*). She “is truthful because she did not go to the ocean,” one woman explained, so she did not know that what she was saying was incorrect. She spoke the truth that was in her heart. Similarly, many adults said that a man in a hypothetical story who incorrectly said that a house was not burning told the truth (*ṁool*) because he did not know that the house was burning. If people do not know that they are saying something incorrect then, rather than making a mistake, they are telling the truth.

Not everybody agreed that these individuals said the truth. Those who disagreed did not say that they made a mistake but rather that they *riab* (lied). Moreover, their evaluations depended on their view of whether the speaker acted morally. “She lied because she was not on the dock,” one man explained, explaining that if she was not there then she did not really know and should not have spoken as if she did. The individual in the story should have made a greater effort to find out the information rather than leading others astray and into catastrophes.

The morally charged nature of understandings of “lie” and “true” means that it is impossible, in Marshallese, to say that these individuals made an innocent mistake. Although in school *bōd* refers to mistake, in most contexts *bōd* refers to a morally wrong action.¹² One woman would not speak to another because of the “*bōd*,” wrongs that the second woman committed. A man said that the woman in the story who spoke incorrectly about the boat both lied (*riab*) and committed a “*bōd* (moral wrong).” Lying (*riab*) and wrong (*bōd*) go together and are opposed to *ṃool* which means both true and morally right.

The importance of morality to the evaluating utterances as lies becomes even clearer if we look closer at the distinction between lying and joking. Many of the jokes that Marshallese adults tell are funny precisely because they are referentially inaccurate. When I asked Lacy how old she was she said with a straight face that she was two-years-old. Deina teased Maria one night and called her pregnant because Maria did not want to eat. On another occasion Maria told another Linora, another woman, that I was pregnant. Linora initially believed Maria, until I said that it was not true, and then all of the women laughed.

¹² “*Ebōd* (it is wrong)!” a child cried when another sang the wrong words to a song they learned in Sunday School. *Bōd* (mistake) is the opposite of *jimwe* (correct). “*Ejimwe* (Is it right)?” another child asked me when I was helping him with his math homework.

People alternate between evaluating such utterances as *riab* (lies) or *kōjak* (jokes). For example, an elderly lady stared into the camera and declared, “Here is a pandanus, it is the dinner for those of us who are celebrating a birthday.” “You are *riab* (lying) there,” Carl retorted, interpreting Tina’s remarks as a lie but not as a serious one. A man yelled to his child who was wearing a camera, “tell her to pay you ten dollars!” When a research assistant listened to this recording with me she laughed and classified the man’s statement as a *kōjak* (joke). I asked Niati if adults lie. ‘He does,’ she said smiling, pointing to a man. He “lies,” and claims that her husband is asking for her. “He is joking,” Niati added.

Although many lies are also jokes just as many jokes are also lies, numerous people differentiated jokes from lies according to moral culpability. One woman, for example, said that a man who gives rice after declaring that the rice “is all gone” was joking, not lying. In contrast, a man who says “it is all gone” and does not give rice is lying. “If he is joking he will give the rice....But if he hides it and says that it is gone, then he is not joking.” Rather, he is “lying.” Another man offered the same judgment. “Lie” he said about a man who says that he is out of rice.

“He isn’t joking?” I asked.

“He isn’t.”

“How do you know?”

“Because if he says that it is all gone and the other person leaves and he does not give to him, he is greedy. But if he says that it is all gone and gives, he is joking.” Clearly, under this analysis jokes do not have negative consequences. If they do have negative consequences or if they are morally wrong, then they are lies.

Moral Evaluations of Lies and Speech

The moral component of definitions of lies and truths affects not only how people label an utterance but also their evaluation of speech itself and the act of hiding. Technically, lying is morally wrong, which makes sense considering that morally wrong utterances are often classified as lies. “It is bad to lie,” numerous people said. ‘Don’t lie,’ a man warned me once when I said that I was out of mosquito coils. ‘If you are lying you will go to hell.’

In theory, lying is a sin, an act that Christian people do not commit and that God forbids. God tells the truth. The pastor at an evangelical church in Jajikon spent a whole sermon talking about how “God is truthful and his promises are not lies.” Throughout the sermon he repeated, “God does not lie,” proving his point that God said he will help us and he will. The pastor said that we should believe God’s words, i.e. the bible, because “the words of God are true.”

All adults agree that swearing to God is wrong because it is particularly bad to lie in church or to God. “*Mejān Anij!* (On the face of God/I swear on God),” children frequently yelled when they were trying to convince someone else that they were telling the truth. In contrast, I never heard an adult swear on God. All adults agreed with one woman’s sentiment that ‘It is very bad to say, ‘on the face of God.’

‘Have you seen God?’ a woman demanded of me when I said “on the face of God” to convince her of my truthfulness.

‘No,’ I responded guiltily.

‘Then you should not use his name!’ the woman declared.

One reason why swearing on God is wrong is because, more often than not, people are liars. If a person swears on God and lies, numerous people told me, something bad will happen—

an accident, a broken finger, or death. A woman explained that since people “lie a lot” it is wrong to swear because it is unlikely that one is telling the truth. Adults, the woman continued, are scared to swear on God because they may not follow through with their words. Another woman criticized the men in the youth group in church because they did not bring all the meat that they said they would. The men were particularly bad, the woman said, because they lied in church.

Although technically lying is wrong, outside of religious contexts people generally condemn others for their actions or the results of their words, as opposed to their words themselves.¹³ Although parents might call out on occasion, “don’t lie,” they never really disciplined their children for lying. Indeed, parents often laughed about the lies their children told. One woman’s son often “lied” and claimed he went to school, the woman told me laughing. As opposed to punishing him she let him skip school that year and start it the next year. “She is lying,” a woman said about her thirteen year old classificatory daughter. The girl smiled and kept walking. The woman issued no additional reprimands. Another woman said that lying was not a particularly large sin, at least not in comparison with things like sex outside of marriage. If a Christian lies, she said, all the person has to do is pray a little, and they will be Christian again.¹⁴

Everyone said that women talked, gossiped, and lied more than men. A Marshallese saying, “the tongues of women (*loñin kōrā*)” connotes the image of women flapping their tongues, gossiping, and lying. Eleven out of twelve adults said that women lie and gossip more than men. ‘Because they hang out and chat (*bwebwenato*)’ one person explained. Explained another woman, “in the old days people did not lie as much because they did not wander

¹³ Unlike, for example, one of the communities Heath (1983) studied in which any false statements were severely punished.

¹⁴ See Chapter Four page 187 for a more in-depth discussion of what it means to be Christian on Jajikon.

around...women did not go from this house to that house and hang out and talk.” When I sat with a group of women, they often joked that people who pass us would say that we were gossiping. “Liars!” a woman laughingly called to me and another woman chatting by the side of the road. But, although women are said to lie, gossip, and hide words the most, everyone agrees that men also lie.

Moreover, although people often criticize others for lying they nevertheless frequently evaluate their own lies as morally good. For example, almost everybody said that if they knew damaging gossip about someone they would, and should, say “I don’t know” in response to a request for that gossip. As one woman said, she would “lie a little” and say “I don’t know” because the information should not circulate. ” Kāti gave the example of “lying” and saying “I forget” when people ask for gossip. In cases like this, she continued, one ‘needs to lie.’ Agreed another woman, in such a situation one should say “I don’t know.” Saying “I don’t know” a man said, may be a “lie” but it is also “good.”

Many adults evaluate lying to get out of giving as good in situations in which people need to avoid giving in order to be able to support their family. ‘There are two fish left and your husband hasn’t eaten,’ I said to a woman, giving her a hypothetical example. Someone says, ‘is there any fish?’

The woman interrupted me. ‘None,’ she said, explaining what she would say.

‘Is it a lie or the truth?’ I asked.

‘I lie.’ Then the woman continued, ‘Because why are they asking for fish, why don’t they go fishing?’

Numerous other people agreed with this woman's implicit argument that lying, in such a situation, is good. It is a "lie" but "good," one woman said laughing. Another woman asserted that saying there was no more fish is a "lie." But then she added that one has to lie since some people have not yet eaten.

While adults sometimes say that it is morally good to lie, the importance of morality to definitions of "lie" means that many people argued that utterances such as "I don't know" or "it is all gone" were not *riab* (lies) at all in situations when it was best to prevaricate or hide. For example, many people evaluated saying "I don't know" in response to requests for information as telling the truth. First, if a person has not seen the incident in question but received information from a third party then in a sense they really do not know. For example, one woman said that although saying "I don't know," about something she had seen was a "lie," saying "I don't know" about something she had merely heard about was "true." To give the information and still be truthful, another woman said, one would have to say, 'so and so said it but I do not really know.' Hence, the woman's statement that she did not know about her granddaughter's suitor could be seen as true since she merely saw the suitor from a distance and heard about him from her husband. Second, a woman explained, even if one has seen something it is 'not a lie' to say "I don't know" when she should not talk about what she saw. Agreed another woman, "It is not a lie because it is not a good thing [to talk about]." Niati said that I should say "nothing" if people asked me what some other women I had been sitting with were talking about.

'And is that a "lie?" I asked.

Niati hesitated. "it is good," she finally said, avoiding calling the statement a lie or the truth. "It is good," another man agreed.

Similarly, many adults interpreted the utterance ‘it is all gone’ as the truth if there was only a little bit of food left. A research assistant and I transcribed together a video clip in which a boy ate some fish and later inaccurately told others who asked that the fish in his house “is all gone.” The assistant said that the boy told “the truth.” When I protested that the video showed that there were still fish in his house, she said that maybe they were for a couple of older people who lived there. Since the family did not have enough fish to share and since there was only enough fish left for the people in his house, “it is all gone” was in fact a true utterance. Similarly, a man said ‘it is all gone’ when there were four cans of tuna in the other room. When I commented, ‘it is not gone,’ his wife said that there were not many cans left and if they gave them away there would not be sufficient food for the family.

Another woman said that if there was only one fish left and it was for her husband she would yell out “it is all gone!” because she has to save it. ‘Are you lying or telling the truth?’ I asked. The woman hesitated and then, instead of answering, asserted again, ‘I have to save it.’ Although the fish was not gone, which meant that she was lying, saving it was good, which meant that she was telling the truth. Confused as to whether saving the fish was *riab* (lying) or *mool* (true), she instead declined to answer my question.

The Danger of Lying

While people may evaluate their own prevarications as truthful because they are morally right, others almost inevitably criticize people who do not give to them as liars. First, people hold each other responsible for their words. Adults constantly criticized the captain of the boat for failing to leave on the day he had designated. I forgot that I was going to watch a movie with another woman. She, partly in jest and partly seriously, called me a “liar” to remind me of my

promise. Another woman said that her husband “lied” because he did not come back to Jajikon when he said that he would.

Moreover, adults frequently expect others to lie to them and try to gather information to determine the truth. One woman asked another woman, ‘did Tojwul [another woman] have any bread?’ ‘Yes,’ the second woman said. ‘Urg,’ the first woman complained, ‘Tojwul told me, “they are all gone.”’ Sometimes adults asked for things multiple times in an apparent attempt to get something that they suspected others were hiding. Cara, a young woman who was close kin with Deina, asked if she had any sugar. Deina said that they were out, which happened to be true. After making small talk for five minutes Cara asked for sugar again, albeit in a more indirect manner. She suggested that Deina ask her husband for some sugar. ‘Holy cow (*orōr*)!’ Deina exclaimed, ‘I said that it was gone!’ The next day Cara asked for sugar again. She clearly did not believe that Deina was telling the truth.

My conversations with adults, combined with people’s utterances of disbelief when I myself claimed that I did not have things, further support this conclusion that people often expect others to lie to them. Numerous adults said that adults frequently say ‘there is no more,’ even when it is not true. Barbra said that when people ask, ‘is there any rice?’ they “lie” and say, “there isn’t any.” Kalibman said that sometimes if a person “goes...and asks, ‘Is there rice?’” others say, ‘Oh, none.’” Because “if he/she is not happy to give it, he won’t...he will say that there is none.” Deina said that when people do not want to give they say “we don’t have any.” Similarly, Carla said that “some people” hide food. “They don’t say ‘sorry I can’t [give you any] but [instead] they say they don’t have any. But there is some, the children’s food.”

“And will people believe him or her?” I asked.

“They won’t,” Carla said.

Often, avoiding giving leads to a chain reaction. “If [the first person] goes and says, ‘oh, can I borrow your wheelbarrow or your car.’” to a person to whom he previously avoided giving, the second person will say, ‘oh, the gas is gone.’” People say “no more” instead of explaining that they do not have enough to give because “if they say, ‘sorry I cannot give it to you,’ they will say, ‘you are stingy.’”

“And are there a lot of people who hide things and don’t give them?” I asked.

“Yes, yes.”

“Why?”

“They are greedy.”

While adults hold each other responsible for their words, they care much more about the morally wrong acts that result from or are intertwined with lying—stealing and not-giving—as opposed to people’s words themselves. First, many adults said children should not lie because lying leads to theft. “In Marshallese culture, if we lie a lot then we steal.” Said another, “stealing is the friend of lies.” Consequently, children who lie will “grow up and steal.” Moreover, most adults worry about theft. I actually saw very few acts of thefts, but adults talk about it as a problem. Few people leave their houses completely unattended for fear that someone will steal. When whole families leave they often have a couple of relatives move into their house, again to protect it from theft. This deep negative evaluation of theft, above and beyond negative evaluations of lying, makes sense considering the overriding importance of giving and sharing in Jajikon.

In addition to stealing, lying is considered bad because it is inseparable from the act of not-giving. The word for thank you in Marshallese, *kom̄mool*, combines *kwe* (you) with *mool* (true) to mean, literally, “you are true.” More than merely a metaphor, every adult I asked repeated a saying: people who are “stingy...*riab* (lie)” while those who give “are *mool* (true).” A boy saw a large box of cookies that I had brought back from the capital to share. He burst out, “Elise, you are really *mool* (true).” Similarly, instead of responding *kom̄mool* (thank you), people frequently respond to gifts and favors with “*kwelukkuun emool* (you are really true).”

Scholars of Oceania frequently mention an ideology of opacity, the belief that it is impossible to know another’s mind (Robbins 2008; Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Schieffelin 2008). Peterson (1993) discusses *kanengamah*, a culturally patterned form of concealment in Pohnpei. Robbins (2001; 2007) argues that in places where people distrust speech, they see goods, as opposed to language, as vehicles of truth.

Thus, in Jajikon the moral character trait of generosity (*jouj*) is intricately connected not just to giving but also to speaking the truth. People who are generous, seven adults said, are truthful while people who are not generous are liars. As Karlin pointed out one day, *jouj* refers to when someone gives something to someone who asks for it. ‘People who are generous do not lie,’ another woman agreed.

It is easy to see why people in Jajikon equate giving with truthfulness. Anyone who gives must have told the truth when they said that they would give. Anyone who does not give, in contrast, probably lied since the typical way of getting out of giving is to say “there is none.” If people are generous, a woman explained, they say that they will give and actually do give. In contrast, if they are not generous they say that they will give and then “run away.”

Consequently, hiding is a dangerous act. Saying ‘I don’t have any’ is much better than directly refusing to give. But there is a good chance that others will interpret hiding as an act of lying, an act of avoiding giving and an index of someone who is not generous.

Conclusion

Hiding goods is both necessary and dangerous. Hiding and lying are the only accepted ways to get out of giving. Indeed hiding and lying are how people negotiate all potentially face-threatening situations. Adults leave many things unsaid—their dislike of others, their desire for an item, their recognition that another person is lying or does not want to give. Through never explicitly speaking about that which is potentially dangerous they make their possessions, knowledge, feelings, intentions, and words sufficiently ambiguous so as to avoid shame and save both their own and others’ face.

Just as all ways of engaging in the exchange of material goods—asking, giving, and refusing—are dangerous, so is the exchange of words a perilous cliff. Asking for information is annoying, giving information is often morally wrong, and people criticize others for lying. Even avoiding giving marks people as liars because the act of not-giving, regardless of whether one actually has the good or not, can mark an individual as stingy. People who do not give are by definition liars.

Despite the dangers of lying and hiding, it is better to prevaricate than to directly refuse to give. Nonetheless, adults would be better off passing the burden of speaking and acting to someone else as opposed to engaging in the semiotic effort of hiding themselves. They cannot, however, ask another adult to speak or act for them. Any adult would refuse to run such an errand for fear of the shame or negative criticisms it would produce. Indeed, there is only one

type of person in Jajikon who ever agrees to run such errands, people simultaneously low enough in rank that they must run errands when asked but who are also exempted from the demands of face and reputation. These people are children.

Chapter 4: The Power of Immaturity

Honjo was nine or ten years old when his birth mother took him away from his adoptive mother. The incident, told to me with surprising consistency by numerous adults and children, began with Lena, Honjo's nine-year-old mischievous neighbor. One day Lena, as she told the story, hid in the bushes by Honjo's house and spied on his family. From her hiding place she saw Honjo come home late. Honjo's adoptive mother grow angry. To punish Honjo she cut his hand with a knife.

Honjo cried out in pain.

The adoptive mother scolded him, 'don't cry or I will hit you again.'

The story quickly spread throughout the village. Lena told some children, including ten-year-old Jon. One of the children with whom Lena spoke told Kara and Krino. The three children—Jon, Kara, and Krino—lived next door to each other and spent a lot of time together. One or all three of these children repeated the story to Kara's mother, Delila.

Delila was also Honjo's birth mother. When she heard the news she stormed over to the adoptive mother's house. 'Give me my child back! I gave you my child when he was small. Now that he is older, why do you abuse him?'¹ 'It's a lie,' the adoptive mother sobbed. 'It was an accident, he ran into a knife.'

Delila did not believe her. She slapped the adoptive mother's face, grabbed Honjo, and took him home. As far as I know, Honjo never returned to his adoptive parents' house.

Back at Delila's house adults pressed Honjo to tell them what happened.

'Nothing,' the boy said. 'It was an accident.'

They didn't believe him. 'But didn't she cut you with a knife? What really happened?'

¹ None of the people who told me about this incident actually saw the fight. They heard about it from others.

Eventually, various adults told me, the boy told “the truth” and blamed his adoptive mother for purposefully cutting his hand with a knife.

What actually happened? Did the adoptive mother indeed cut Honjo with a knife or was it an accident? As with most things in life we will never really know. Just about everyone in the village, however, sided with Delila.² Adults were certain that the adoptive mother had abused her son and that she was lying to cover up her guilt. Why were they certain? Because the information came from children, Honjo and Lena, and “children do not lie.”

Most adults offered additional reasons to mistrust the adoptive mother. ‘I always knew she was bad,’ one young woman explained. ‘When she wants Honjo to come she yells at him and pulls his hair.’ ‘She smokes too much,’ another woman criticized. ‘And then she makes Honjo watch the baby so that she can sneak off to smoke.’ ‘She hits all of her kids,’ other women scolded. One added, ‘I always see her hitting Honjo, her hand gets swollen.’

Ultimately, however, adults supported their mistrust of the adoptive mother by asserting that the fact that she was an adult made her by definition less trustworthy than the children who spread the story. Lena and Honjo had spoken and they must be right. ‘Children are saying it,’ an older woman asserted, ‘which means that it is true.’

In contrast to the adoptive mother, Honjo and Lena had a remarkable power to be believed, at least by adults. This faith in children’s truthfulness is part and parcel of adults’ general belief that children are people who do not hide, or at least not as much as adults. To adults in Jajikon growing up is a process of taking on not only responsibility but also immorality, shame, and the need to hide that comes with such feelings. Consequently, children have a status

² The one exception was a good friend of the adoptive mother. This friend thought at first that the children were lying. Later on in the year she changed her mind.

as immature social actors who are not concerned with face. These beliefs lend children's speech the force of truth and make children the perfect people to do all of the difficult semiotic work that adults are too ashamed to do.

The burden of speaking and acting, of animating adults' errands and sparing adults' shame, falls largely on children in middle childhood. Younger children lack shame and never lie, but they are also too young to work and too young to obey. The seven to thirteen-year-olds are the only people who are simultaneously old enough to run errands and young enough such that their face is not threatened, or so adults believe, by bringing goods and words into the open. These older children are invaluable economic and political actors not in spite of the fact that they are children, but precisely because of the fact that they are children. It is immaturity itself that lends them the power to act.

The Stages of Life

Most Marshallese do not pay much attention to chronological age. They now all have government issued cards that contain their birthdates. Many people lose these cards. One woman said that the hospital wrote down the wrong date when her classificatory daughter was born.

Few people, child or adult, are able to consistently say their chronological age. "Do you know what month you were born?" One boy asked another while they were signing up for a camp and had to write down their birthdays.

"I don't know dude!" The ten-year-old responded.

"Mine is March," another ten-year-old asserted. "March. Thir...thir...thirteenth. Oh twelve. Ninety-nine." Later in the year I looked at his card. It said April 17, 1998. Adults

asserted their birthdates with more confidence but not necessarily more accuracy (I did not gather their cards so I do not know how accurate they were).

Although chronological age is rarely an issue in everyday life, people are often concerned with relative age and age groups. The Marshallese words child (*ajri*) and adult (*rūtto*) are both relative and definite.³ In a relative sense, people use these words to refer to people who are younger or older than another. For example, numerous people referred to individuals in their early teens as “*rūtto*” to designate them as older than children. Another woman called a twelve year old “*rūtto*” because the twelve-year-old knew how to lie while a man called a nine year old “*rūtto*” because she knew how talk.

Similarly, people use the word *ajri* (child) to talk about people who are young relative to others. A woman in her late twenties referred to herself as a “child (*ajri*)” in comparison to an older kinsman in his forties who was “really old (*rūtto*)” and could do as he pleased. Children sometimes chastised each other for picking on younger children. “Do not hit children (*ajri*),” one ten-year-old said, marking the four-year-old who was hit as a child but herself and her peers as older. Women in the youth group—a singing group made up of people anywhere from teenage to middle-aged—sometimes referred to the group as *ajri*. In some interactional contexts *ajri* and *rūtto* are relative terms and “child” refers to anyone who is younger than a given individual or group.

At the same time, “child (*ajri*)” has a definite meaning. The borders of childhood are fuzzy and opaque since, with the exception of the first birthday party, no coming of age ceremonies exist to definitively distinguish between any of the stages of life (1985). Nonetheless,

³ See also Carucci (1985).

socially some people are children and some people are not. These people—older than babies and younger than teenagers—are children because they care more about play than work, they go to elementary school, they go to Sunday school, they wait in the children’s line at parties, and they largely spend time with each other as opposed to socializing with adults.

To understand the features that differentiate children from babies, youth, and adults we must first situate childhood in the context of these other stages of life (See also Carucci 1985).

Infancy

When babies are born people call them *niñniñ* (babies). These individuals lack agency and are similar in form (although not necessarily in value) to fish, batteries, and TV’s. Belonging to the kin group as a whole as much as to any individual, they cannot express their own desires as to where they will live and therefore are gifts as opposed to givers.

Women are the primary caretakers and many mothers (adoptive or birth) take their baby with them almost everywhere they go until their baby is around two or three years old. Two neighbors who had new born children rarely strayed far from their infants’ side. The fathers helped take care of the babies but they also often wandered off to fish, gather copra, play basketball, and chat with other men.

Nonetheless, most Marshallese babies have numerous caretakers. Some babies seemed to be more often than not in the hands of someone other than their mother. One young woman with her first child lived with her parents, a typical arrangement in this matrilineal society. Her family was large and I constantly saw the infant on the arm of various different family members: the grandmother or grandfather, the mother’s younger siblings, non co-resident kin. This dispersed

care can come with a price. When the grandmother immigrated to America she took the year and a half old baby with her.

Older children also care for their younger siblings. Roma, nine years old, took care of her baby sister almost every day. Nomi, ten years old, also often cared for her two-year-old brother. Children frequently took their three or four year old siblings with them as they went on errands, to Sunday school, or to play. Children also constantly played with infants who were not their siblings. These children express a great deal of affection for babies and younger children. One ten-year-old girl loved infants so much that she ran away from her own work to do her neighbor's laundry and spend time with that neighbor's infant. Inevitably girls, as opposed to boys, care for babies. Nonetheless, boys occasionally hold babies and frequently play with them. The babies grow up in a situation of constant interaction and excitement.

The only coming of age ceremony, the *keemem* in the Marshall Islands occurs at the first birthday. Carucci (1985) argues that before the *keemem* infants are still in limbo, attached to the spirit world which may yet pull them back. Nonetheless, for infants life is not much different before or after the ceremony. Childhood is still a year or two away. These one year olds still spend most of their time with an adult or a sibling caretaker and do not wander around with a peer group. Nonetheless, these babies are on their way to childhood. They start to walk and talk, giving them agency and the ability not only to be given, but also to be involved in the exchange process.

Early Childhood

Eventually babies (*niñniñ*) become children (*ajri*). This transformation happens at no particular time. One mother called her three-year-old a “baby”. Then she said that he really was a child, but to her he was a baby.

Although in Marshallese there is no word for toddler or early childhood some social features of these preschool years separate children who are three, four, and five both from babies and those in middle childhood.⁴ First, these children who can run around and walk away from their houses have a very different social environment than babies. They spend more of their time with other children and less time with adults. Bands of three to five-year-olds often roam around their neighborhood laughing and yelling. They do not go as far from their houses as older children wander. Nonetheless they sometimes play by themselves out of sight of an older individual.

At the same time, these young children also often gather with older children and adults. I saw them tagging along with older siblings on their errands and games or chasing each other and laughing while adults sat and talked. All older children look after younger children as well as babies, although some children were more attentive caregivers than others.

Nonetheless, the three to five-year-olds do not really participate in the play and activities of the elder children. They do not go to school. I frequently saw four-year-olds run out of Sunday school, or wander around paying no attention while the older children sang and rehearsed. These younger children still also often accompany adults on their activities, sitting in an adults’ lap during a youth rehearsal or making noise during a performance. These three-five year olds

⁴ Nobody on Jajikon would distinguish between children according to their chronological age. Nonetheless, I use their ages here to help readers used to chronological age place characters in respect to their stage of life.

constitute a social group that is fuzzy around the edges but separate nonetheless from babies as well as older children in or on the cusp of middle childhood.

Middle childhood

Ajri (child) as a definite term covers children in both early and middle childhood. Nonetheless, children gradually move into a different social environment as they enter middle childhood. Middle childhood is typically defined as beginning somewhere around age seven and ending at puberty (Cole et al. 2005).

First, these older children often play and work together. While children frequently gather in multi-age groups they also sometimes gather in less age-diverse groups. Often groups included only children in or close to middle childhood. For example, a group of children seven to twelve years old played ball together. Another day a group of boys collected snails and then went fishing. The youngest boy was six and the oldest fourteen. The six year old helped out by carrying the bag of snails and giving them to the boys when they needed more bait but he did not actually participate in fishing. While older children often let younger children tag along, they nevertheless frequently leave younger children out of their games. For example, one day children between the ages of three to fourteen gathered at dusk. Only the older children played, however, in a game that they organized. Sometimes older children left even seven-year-olds out of games. For example, children in Jajikon were caught for a couple of months in a jump rope fad. The older girls only rarely included younger ones—preschool children or first graders—in their games.

At other times even children in middle childhood separated themselves into more age-homogeneous groups. One day at recess girls between the ages of ten and twelve gathered.

Similarly, a bunch of group of children between the ages of seven and nine played baseball. They would not let an eleven-year-old boy who wanted to play join them. They argued that he was too big and would give a team an unfair advantage.

Children's social groups clearly shift and change frequently. No definite boundaries mark five-year-olds as too young or fifteen-year-olds as too old. Nonetheless, there is a clear pattern that as children get closer to middle childhood and their play groups become more adult independent of adults they are more accepted as members of this older social group of children.

Children's participation in school and Sunday school reveals this blurry but present age divide between early and middle childhood. School on Jajikon starts at kindergarten and children are supposed to enter kindergarten when they are five-years-old. But most parents neither know nor care when their child is five. Children tend to start school when they choose and when parents feel the time is right. Since public school is free and five and six year olds contribute little to any household economy, parents rarely withhold children from school for a lack of money or so that children can work. Parents also, however, do not force children to go to school. While some parents talk about how their child is going to start school the next year, whether or not children actually start school depends partly on their own desires.

As children get older, however, many of them want to go to school. Some start at five, others not until eight or nine (although the one eight year old on Jajikon who was still in first grade eventually dropped out). The school on Jajikon has only five classrooms. Therefore, most classrooms are a mix of two grades: kindergarten and first grade; second and third grade, fourth and fifth grade; sixth and seventh grade. Eighth grade has its own classroom and teacher. Teachers tend to teach all the children in one classroom as a group.

Kindergarteners are clearly on the fringes of school both socially and academically. They only go to school for a half day.⁵ Some children in kindergarten try out school and then drop out until the next year. I never saw older children include a kindergartener in the organized games that they played before and after class. But the older children did occasionally include some of the older and bigger first graders.

Participation in Sunday school at the Protestant church also reveals the fuzzy line that divides children in middle childhood from children in early childhood. Sunday school occurs at 9:00—give or take an hour or two—on occasional Sundays throughout the year. It mostly consists of singing although the pastor occasionally has the children recite bible facts or perform skits. This singing is also practice for their performances at church on holidays such as Christmas or Easter. Although three-year-olds frequently tag along they rarely fully participate in these activities. Three or four-year-old Ramon often came to church with his older siblings but then ran around outside. He tried to march in one of the performances but looked out of place and confused. The pastor's wife eventually stood up and led him through the actions. As children leave early childhood they participate more consistently.

The upper limit of this gaggle of children is also fluid and shifting but nonetheless present. Twelve-year-olds are clearly very different than eight-year-olds who are clearly different than six-year-olds. Nonetheless, all sing in Sunday school as opposed to in the youth group. They all go to elementary school. They play with other children, swim in the ocean and the lagoon, play tag and jump rope, and gossip with other children. Girls continue to wear shorts and pants, often up to the age of fifteen or sixteen, flouting the dressing standards of women who wear long

⁵ A group of four or five first graders stay and study in the afternoon.

flowery muumuus or skirts that cover and hide their thighs. Finally, children stand in the children's line at parties. Parties on Jajikon always include food. People line up to get this food and there are two lines: the children's line and the adult line.

For the most part, both children and adults still talk about older children in the beginning of their teenage years as *ajri*, children. Numerous children thirteen or fourteen years old called themselves "children" in conversations with me to show that they belonged in Sunday school or to assert that they were still girls, not women, and therefore could walk among men because they were not yet restricted by the limitations of adulthood. Socially and institutionally children in middle childhood constituted a fluid, shifting, and fuzzy but nonetheless distinct social group.

Teenagers and Youth

School on Jajikon stops at eighth grade. Many people in their teenage years then leave Jajikon for the capital. A few eighth graders pass the test required to get into Marshall Islands High School. Most of the others end up attending a remedial high school that is also on Majuro. Even this fate, however, is not assured since entrance into this school also depends on receiving a certain number of points on the high school entrance exam. Some teenagers complete high school, others drop out after a year or two due to disinterest or pregnancy, and some never go at all. When teenagers drop out of school they might become *koba* (together) and move back home or in with their spouse's family. Numerous youth became couples when the woman got pregnant, dropped out of high school, and returned to her home.

When students in high school come back from the capital during Christmas or the summer they have to choose whether to identify themselves as children or youth. There are various words to refer to youth—youth, *teenage*, and *jodikdik*—as well as words that refer to

young women (*jiroñ*) and young men (*likao*). Some sixteen year olds who went to school on the capital still played with the children when they were back in Jajikon. Nonetheless, all of these individuals stood in the adult line at festivals and chose to sing with the youth group rather than with Sunday school. They identified themselves as different and acted as such.

This change in status starts while people are still on Jajikon and in seventh or eighth grade. Since many children repeat multiple grades, many eighth graders are well past puberty. Others have only just started puberty, but are clearly beginning to leave childhood behind. These people find themselves gradually leaving the children's domain for the domain of youth and adults. For example, one fourteen year old in eighth grade sang in Sunday school, still occasionally joined in children's games, and frequently gathered with children at night. She also participated in some woman's dance events and tended to watch the children's games as opposed to participating in them. Another young man in eighth grade wanted to join a women's baseball game. Eleven and twelve year old boys frequently play with women and some were playing that very day. The women decided that this eighth grader, however, was "a man" and too old to play with women. They told him to wait until the men's game.

Because of the fact that most teenagers go to school on the capital, there are relatively few individuals in this age group on Jajikon. It is clear, however, that teenagers are distinct from adults in that they do not have responsibility for a household or children and they are not married. Nonetheless, eventually these teenagers can no longer act as children. Expecting that the years of play are over, their parents give them more and more work, particularly if they are girls. The young women stop wearing shorts. Their social groups become more gender homogenous than the play groups of children.

The church youth group that these individuals join is a heterogeneous organization. Unmarried youth with no children who only yesterday played with other children stand next to seasoned husbands and wives. “Youth”, as they call this group, contains not only *jiroñ* and *likao*, young women and young men, but also adults.

Adulthood

Adults are known as *rūtto*, a word that is the opposite of *ajri* (Carucci 1985). Composed not of ‘teenage’ or ‘youth’ but ‘women (*kōrā*)’ and ‘men (*mōmaan*)’, like all other stages of life adulthood is fuzzy around the edges. Some said that women and men are people who have a partner or children. One woman claimed that she was not a *jiroñ* (young woman) but a *kōrā* (woman) because she had a husband. Certainly, caring for a family is central to Marshallese understandings of adulthood (Carucci 1985). At the same time, however, this same woman declared on a different day that she was a *jiroñ* (young woman). Similarly, a woman in her early thirties with one young child and one older adopted child claimed that she herself was still a “*jiroñ*” (young women) and pointed out older women in the group whom she considered *kōrā* (women).

Adults can participate in two distinct church groups. Both of the women discussed above sang with the Youth group, the group in which unmarried sixteen-year-olds also sing. Some of the older women with numerous children eventually move from the Youth group to *Daedikdon*, the women’s circle. As there is no corresponding organization for older men, men who grow too old for Youth either stop participating in an organization entirely or take on distinguished individual positions in the church.

The women's circle is central to church life. All important church members who are female, including the reverend's wife, participate. They organize many of the church functions, help clean the church, and decorate the church on important occasions. They are seen as elder and important church leaders, a position that comes to some earlier than others but is only delegated to women who have been mothers for a while and who have acquired the age necessary to have power. Although women (*kōrā*) are involved in this group many of participants are old women (*lōllap*).

Old Women and Men

The last stage of life translates rather unfortunately into the English terms “old man (*lallap*)” and “old woman (*lōllap*)”. The translation is unfortunate because “old man” does not speak to the distinguished status of *lallap* and *lōllap*. As with all stages of life, people become these elders at indefinite times. People who are seasoned grandmothers and grandfathers are clearly elders. I also occasionally heard people calling individuals who had stopped bearing children but were not yet grandparents elders. Both *lallap* (old man) and *jimma* (grandfather) are terms of respect, as are the corresponding categories for women and the general term for the aged, *rūtto*. In order to show respect people sometimes used these words with others who were clearly not yet elders. “*Būbū* (grandmother)” a young woman said respectfully to a relative in her thirties.

For the most part, it is grandparents and elders who give speeches, oversee burials and birthdays, organize events, and order the rest of their family (including their grown children) around. The church designates special day to honor the elders. People give elders chairs and at parties feed elders right after chiefs and important church officials. Younger women and men sit

and listen as their elders talk, ask questions, and dominate the conversation. Having started as children under the beck and call of everyone around them, in old age people finally reach a time where there are few to order them.⁶

Moving Through the Stages of Life

People move through all of these stages of life not only when they must but also when they choose. For example, a seventeen year old girl home from the capital for the holidays declared herself to be a *jodikdik*, a youth. She called a cousin of hers, slight and small for his sixteen years of age, “*ajri* (child)”. When I protested that the cousin was only one year younger so he must also be a youth the girl criticized me for focusing on chronological age. ‘People who want to be older are older,’ she said. ‘People who do not are children.’

Her comment reflects the fact that while there are many people who are obviously children and others who are obviously not, the borders of all age groups are fuzzy and flexible. People on the borders of groups move back and forth between babyhood and childhood, childhood and youth, youth and adulthood. Central to this distinction between children and their elders, moreover, is the feeling of shame and the desire to hide.

Adult Ideologies of Childhood and Child Speech

According to adults the process of growing up entails learning to think and pay attention to work and Marshallese customs. At the same time, these thoughts lead children into sin and immoral behavior, feelings of shame, and the need to hide. Children’s lack of thought means that

⁶ When people die their physical bodies are buried but their spirits remain and exert considerable influence over the living. These *rūtto ro* and *tiṃoṇ ro* (ancestors and ghosts) appear to people through dreams and apparitions, punish people they dislike, and negotiate their own social order (1985).

they do not think to lie or to hide things and that they do not feel shame to bring goods and words into the open. To the best of my knowledge, adults do not differentiate between girls and boys in respect to these specific ideologies, although of course in respect to other issues they see girls and boys as different.⁷ Adults recognize some children as more mature than others and argue that older children think, lie, and feel more shame than younger children. Nonetheless, even by the end of middle childhood adults believe that children still lack the levels of shame that adults feel. As a result, children have the ability to do things that adults cannot.

Children Do Not Think or Work

As children grow, adults say, they start becoming “able to think.” Children do “not know anything” because “they are still small,” “their brain is small” and they “do not have any thoughts in their brain.” Even ten-year-old children ‘do not know how to talk.’ It is only once children are older that they “know how to think” and “what they should say.” Since children by definition cannot consider the implications or consequences of their actions, they should not be held responsible for their actions or speech.

As children grow they not only need to learn to think but also to direct their thoughts away from play and toward work. While adults are not concerned with play “because they work,” “in children’s minds, kids of this size [eleven-years-old], when they think about the future, they think only of fun and play.” Moreover, since work is the essence of life, the reason why children are naughty and adults generally are not is because children think about play. As

⁷ I often did not explicitly ask about gender differences in respect to hiding, shame, or sin. It is possible that adults have some ideologies of gender differences that I did not uncover. However, they did bring up gender differences in respect to the type of work children do and naughtiness, but they never brought up gender differences in respect to these other issues, suggesting that they see a lack of shame, sin, and proclivity to hide as a feature of children in general.

one woman pointed out, “when children think about play they run away and don’t work.” For example, “If I said, ‘you all come and bring my things,’ yes? They run away....because they are thinking about their play so they take off and disappear.”

Many adults grumble about children’s proclivity to play and not work. Some blame their play on the modern age. “The children of old really knew how to work,” praised an older woman. “But children today, they really do not know how to work, they just play all the time.... Because they are thinking more about play.” Despite their grumbling, however, adults also accept children’s play as part of the natural order of life. As they grow children slowly learn to play less and work more. Nonetheless, even older children should not be held to the working standards of adults. Their brains are still small and their concerns still different from the concerns of adults.

Children Have No Sin and Do Not Hate

Children’s immaturity means they not only lack thoughts but also lack sin. Adults distinguish between true wrongdoings (*bōd* and *jerōwiwi*) and naughtiness (*bōt*). Everyone agreed that all children are naughty. But all adults say that naughtiness is not a sin (*jerōwiwi*). Some adults even said that naughtiness is not a moral wrong (*bōd*).⁸ One older woman scoffed at me when I challenged her claim that children do not commit any moral wrongs (*bōd*). ‘But they are naughty!’ I said. The woman laughed. ‘Naughtiness is not a sin.’

While the Marshallese, depending on context, view a range of actions as sinful including lying, stealing, disobeying people, drinking, and smoking, the prototypical sin is extramarital

⁸ People sometimes use these two words, *bōd* and *jerōwiwi*, as synonyms. At other times they differentiate between them. When they differentiate them, *jerōwiwi* is the stronger word and truly connotes a sin.

sex.⁹ Moreover, although one adult said that children commit as many wrongs as adults — wrongs such as lying and stealing—every other adult said either that children have no sin and do not commit moral wrongs or that children’s wrongs are smaller than adults’. Even ten-year-olds, one person said, “have not really” started to commit wrongs. Similarly, one woman said that young children “do not sin because they are children. But adults, they sin.”

“What about Krino?” I asked, inquiring about the woman’s twelve-year old grandson.

“Ok...Krino doesn’t really. He doesn’t really...sin. He acts correctly.” Even at twelve, Krino was seen as enough of a child to be innocent of the sins of adulthood. While children are bad in that they are naughty, they are never really truly bad. They cannot truly be bad because as children they “do not have any sin.”

This belief that children, in contrast to adults, cannot really be immoral has a number of implications. First, according to adults children cannot be Christian. In the RMI although everyone goes to church not everyone is Christian (*ri-Kūrjin*), at least not among Protestants. Rather, becoming Christian requires swearing an oath in church. Remaining Christian requires avoiding all sins including adultery, drinking or smoking, and lying. If Christians sin they lose their status as Christian until they stop sinning and swear another oath.

While most adults are not Christian because they are sinners, all children are not Christian simply because the label does not apply. Since children are too immature to have sin they cannot legitimately renounce sin. They do not smoke or drink so they do not have to restrain

⁹ Since most people do not get married in a church but rather simply move in with their spouse, technically most adults are constantly sinning. Most Protestants, however, are not unduly concerned with their sinful state unless they decide that they want to move up in the church hierarchy. I am not sure if members of evangelical churches are more committed to formal marriage or not.

themselves to be good.¹⁰ They cannot swear an oath to be Christian since such an oath has no meaning coming from a child. One woman told me that ‘maybe at sixteen’ people are old enough to swear the oath to be Christian.

Not only must children grow into Christianity but they also grow into the possibility of going to hell. A pastor insisted that children up to fifteen years old do not sin and will not go to hell for their sins because “they do not know anything.” Similarly, a woman argued that all children in Sunday school, a group that includes individuals as old as fourteen, are “angels.”¹¹ A second woman disagreed, saying that a ten year old child we discussed would go to hell because that ten-year-old was older and “lies all the time.” Nonetheless, this woman also said that a five year old girl would not go to hell even if she lied. Despite differences as to timing, adults largely agree that starting to sin and gaining access to hell are things that that come with age and as children grow.

Although in ideology children cannot sin or do wrong, in practice adults frequently scold and discipline children and label specific actions as bad. Nonetheless, upon reflection adults often qualified their judgments and argued that the true sin belonged to the parents, not the children.

“They did wrong” a woman said when I asked her what she would say about children who steal.

“But you said that they do not do any wrong!” I protested.

¹⁰ Adults believe that children do not drink or smoke. I never saw children drinking. Once I saw a six-year-old smoking briefly (an adult caught him and slapped him.) I occasionally saw eight and nine-year-old boys imitate smoking by setting wads of paper inside a plant stem on fire. I would not be surprised if children who came across alcohol or cigarettes secretly experiment with them. In addition, it may be different on the capital where children have more access to liquor and cigarettes and also opportunities to experiment out of sight of adults.

¹¹ Children’s status as angels technically means that spirits do not appear to them. Not all adults agreed that spirits do not appear to children. Most children, moreover, are scared of spirits.

“In Marshallese culture if you steal, your family stole. If it were you who stole, for example. Now you have a baby. She or he will grow up with what you do. You stole, so the baby is going to steal.” The child’s sins are not his or her own but belong to his or her parents.

In a sense, therefore, the worst that children can be is naughty. Sometimes adults do associate naughtiness with moral wrongs (*bōd*). “Yes they do wrong because we order them but they [do not obey].” Nonetheless, these child-sized wrongs are different in quality and quantity than adults’. Adult wrongs are bigger, one woman explained. They must be bigger, because adults are responsible for their actions in a way that children are not.

Adults also say that children do not really hate. This position surprised me at first since I constantly heard children saying to each other, “I hate you!” But as one woman told me, children merely articulate their hate whereas adults, as we have seen, keep it hidden. Moreover, adults claim that although children express hate much more often than adults this hate is “*riab*” (pretend) because it is momentary. When children say “I hate you,” one woman said, it is “pretend (*riab*) hate.” Numerous other women agreed. As one put it, children “might hate each other but tomorrow all is well.” Then she contrasted children’s hate to adult hate, stating “children, okay they are joking, but adults they are not....If adults say they hate them they will hate them forever, but children just today, and tomorrow all is well.” Said another adult, “Children might hate each other only for a little bit. A couple of seconds. Maybe three, five seconds.” But adults, “it is very long.” Children say that they hate each other, another woman pointed out, and then they play together the next day. She compared children to the case of Kōrin and Jujōro. These two kinswomen lived in the same household complex but in different houses. They had a stormy relationship and hated each other for years until Jujōro died. This hate, the

woman implied, was real. Child hate is momentary and fake. As this women's example of Kōrin and Jujōro reveals, moreover, adults see hatred as particularly strong between women, women who frequently have "trouble" with each other that lasts for a long time. But although men do not hate others as much as women, adults of both genders hate others more than children. Or, at least, adult hate is more real.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that many adults argued that children are purer, better people than adults. They do not sin and they do not hate. "Whose hearts are better, children's or adults?"¹² I asked. "Children," a woman said. Because, she continued, they play together while adults get angry at each other and stay angry. "Children" three woman independently said, because they will not intentionally spread gossip about someone's request for food. Adults, in contrast, spread gossip about the fact that someone asked for things. "Children," Carla said, because "they don't know anything." "Children," Babra said, because they are "angels."

Children Do Not Feel Shame (*Āliklik*)

Part of children's immaturity involves not only a lack of thoughts, sin, and hate, but also a lack of shame since they have not yet learned to feel bad about transgressing cultural boundaries. Children, adults said, "do not know" enough to feel shame (*āliklik*). They do not feel shame "because... there is nothing in their brains. They do not have enough to think with." When I asked an eleven-year-old if she ever felt shame her nineteen-year-old sister interrupted and stated that her sister was too "small" to feel shame. Another woman said that her children,

¹² In Marshallese emotions are located in the throat. Therefore, a literal translation of my question is, "whose throats are better?"

including a ten-year-old, “do not know shame because they are small.” They do not feel shame “because they are children.”

Although all adults agree that growing up is a process of learning to feel shame, they disagree as to when children learn it. One couple said that some children in middle childhood do “know how to feel shame. If they come to you and see that you are eating and you say, ‘eat,’ they might not eat.”¹³ In addition, this couple said that children might refuse to transport food because they would say, “ugh, I feel really ashamed (*āliklik*).”¹⁴ Similarly, a woman said that even her seven-year-old daughter sometimes felt shame and would not eat in front of a group of people. Her nine-year-old boy, moreover, might hide food in his pocket if he saw people coming. A man said that his six-year-old grandson felt shame because if he was eating and other children came by his grandson would share his food. Another woman said that her twelve-year-old grandson feels shame. “I say ‘carry this thing over there.’ [He says], ‘Aah I am scared (*mijak*)!’ He feels shame (*āliklik*).”

But some adults said that even older children do not really feel shame. One man said that his twelve-year-old son “may [only] feel a little, a little shame. Because shame is for grown-ups, grownups only. Only adults.” A teacher said that his students, some of whom were fourteen years old, do not feel shame “because children do have any thoughts.” Another woman said that even eighteen year olds do not yet feel shame.

Moreover, even adults who said that younger children do feel shame made it clear that children’s shame is of a different quantity and quality than adult shame. One of the men who said that his children felt shame added that “adults” feel much more “shame” than children because

¹³Adults considered it bad manners to eat when a family clearly did not have much food and was simply offering food to others to be polite.

¹⁴No child would actually say this because no children knew the word *āliklik*.

“their brains are very grown up.” Another man who also said that children feel shame went on to talk about adults who “really feel shame” and stressed that adult shame is a different beast. The woman who proudly asserted that her seven-year-old felt shame also said that children are less ashamed than adults to walk with food because “they are small. But adults, they are really ashamed.” As one woman put it, children “do not have shame and they have shame.” They have to grow into shame. Even though some children might feel a little bit of shame, their shame is of a different order of magnitude than the feelings of adults.

Children Do Not Hide

With their supposed small brains, lack of sin, and lack of shame, it should not be surprising that adults say that children do not hide. Children do not think to hide goods or words. They do not need to hide since they do not commit real wrongs that they must cover up and they do not feel ashamed to reveal their words or goods.

First, adults say that, as opposed to hiding words children spread information. As one woman said, children “do not know” not to say things. If people were to see a secret romantic tryst, a man said, the child would talk about it while the adult would not. A second woman explained that if a man denies having rice but his child knows that he has rice the child will yell out, “here it is!” If children see what someone has they talk about it, another adult said. They might yell, “Elise has a lot of lotion!”

One day a friend shared with me a tantalizing piece of gossip. The night before last she saw an older man having an affair. Nobody knew about it yet, she said. But eventually children would find out.

‘And will the children tell?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ she said.

“Because they see it,” a different woman explained in reference to a different event. If, for example, I were to hide goods and say “‘it’s nothing.’ They [the children] will say, ‘hey, Elise has some. She is lying and saying she doesn’t have any!’” One woman, therefore, said that she gets a lot of information from the children in her house—four, ten, and twelve years old—because children are big “tattletales.” “It is like they are reporters,” another woman said. If someone poops, she continued, they talk about it. If something happens, they say it.

In line with adults’ ideology, it was a chain of children who ended up spreading the news of Honjo’s abuse. Other adults told me that although they had not seen the event they had long known that the adoptive mother was abusive.

‘I know that [the adoptive mother] is bad because I always see her hitting Honjo,’ one young woman said.

‘Why didn’t you tell [the birth mother]?’ I asked.

‘I did not want to make trouble.’ This woman feared to speak and threaten social relationships. Therefore, she hid her knowledge. The child Lena, however, apparently felt no fear about spreading socially dangerous information.

A man described a similar event in which a child revealed socially dangerous information that adults chose to keep to themselves:

There was a lighter on the dock.... It fell from [a man’s pocket] who lives in Liklob. And I saw it. Another young man came and took it.... Later the young man who lost the lighter, he came to look for it.... “Where is my lighter?” He asked. A little boy [seven years old] came and said, “That other man over there he took it.”

This man presents the boy as much more willing to speak up about the theft than he was himself. The man also saw the theft. But he did not report it until after the boy spoke. Children,

adults believe, do not have as much fear as adults to speak and therefore they spread words.

In addition, one reason, although certainly not the only reason, why adults think that children do not fear to speak is because they can expect their words to be believed. As the woman who feared to talk about Honjo's abuse explained, she actually had two reasons for not talking about how Honjo's adoptive mother was abusive. First, as discussed, she did not want to make trouble. Second, 'I did not think that [his birth mother] would believe me.' The fact that she was an adult meant other adults would view her words with suspicion.

Adults say that children's words, in contrast, have the force of truth. "Children do not lie," five adult told me. The young boy who saw the man steal the lighter not only spread information but also the truth. Similarly, adults believed Lena when she spoke about Honjo's abuse because she was a child. "Children are more truthful than adults." Even if they are jealous, a man argued, children do not lie about each other. Similarly, a woman said that the word *etao* (tricky/deceptive) cannot be used with children.

This ideology that children are truthful was so explicit that even people who claimed they disagreed with it commented on its existence. One young man was a schoolteacher, a position that may have given him a different view of children's behavior. "If a child says something," he said, "the Marshallese they say that he or she will not lie." But then he continued. "I do not believe [it]." Nonetheless, he went on to explain what other adults think. "In Marshallese culture, if [a fourth grader] says, 'papa that dude threw rocks at me,' According to the older Marshallese, the moms and dads, they say that he is not lying, not even a little."

"Why do they say that?"

"I do not know....I [myself] know that children today, they are very smart now and they

know how to lie.”

This man’s perspective shows how practice and this ideology that children do not lie often contradict each other. For example, one day an adult friend told me that she saw nine-year-old Jason in a fistfight with another boy. Later that day I was chatting with Jason when my friend joined us. This relatively unusual situation—adults do not normally hang out in the same social circle as children—was probably a result of my abnormal practice of befriending both woman and children. This situation may have also offered my friend a different vantage point on child life than she would otherwise have had. Indeed, Jason shortly surprised the woman. It started when I asked Jason about what had happened earlier in the day.

‘You fought with Chris?’ I asked.

Jason shook his head.

The woman protested. “Lie! You ran from Chris.”

‘We were playing tag,’ Jason prevaricated, contradicting what the woman had seen with her own eyes.

The woman turned to me. “I am surprised!”

“Why?”

“They say that [children] do not know how to lie.”

Just as with their beliefs about shame, adults had differing opinions as to when children start to lie. Some adults said that some children, like ten-year-old Jon, are “big liar(s).” Other adults said that only younger children spread words while older children do not. Two women said that while children do not lie ten-year-olds do. A man asserted that children do not gossip or

lie but then hesitated when I asked him specifically about ten-year-olds. Another woman said that she equally believes both ten-year-olds and adults.

At the same time many people, sometimes the exact same people, also expressed a belief that even older children engage in un-adult behavior such as spreading information. One of the women mentioned above who said that ten-year-olds are as truthful as adults also declared that Lena, a nine-year-old, was not lying about Honjo's abuse because she is a child. Another man said that his even his ten-year-old daughter would expose rather than conceal his prevarications. If he tried to hide goods, he said, "She could say, 'hey papa I saw it over there!'" She would reveal his deceptions to others.

Moreover, adults saw even older children's lies—like older children's shame—to be of a different quantity and quality than the lies of adults. With only one exception, every adult I asked said either that children do not lie or that adults lie more than children. "It's like Nomi," one man said, referring to his ten-year-old daughter. "Maybe two percent of the time she lies....But people like me, it could be fifty percent."

Similarly, adults saw children's lies as differing in quality from adults'. Adults who said that children do not lie often seemed to be thinking mostly about whether children hide things that are of concern to adults. 'Children do not hide words,' a woman declared, 'but adults do because they do not want to get into trouble.' 'Children do not lie,' another man said. Then he corrected himself. 'Ok, well they do a little bit. But they do not lie about goods.'

Children might lie about fighting or about going to school. They might lie about other children. But since they do not lie about adults or try to hide food and other goods from adults (or so adults say), their lies do not matter and in a sense are not lies at all. "*Riab* (lie)," if we

recall, has a moral component as well as a referential component. If children do not sin or do things that are morally bad because their immaturity makes their actions irrelevant, than their words cannot be lies.

Similarly, some adults who said that children do hide goods and words argued that children do not of their own accord hide and therefore are not responsible for their speech, meaning that they do not lie. Two adults, for example, said that some children lie about the goods that they have in their house. But these women said that they only do so because they are scared of their parents. Children lie under duress as opposed to out of a lack of generosity (*jouj*). This view that often children are not responsible for their speech helps clarify the way in which adult reacted to how Honjo talked about his abuse. While eventually Honjo said that his adoptive mother hit him, at first he said that he accidentally ran into the knife. I suspect that adults did not interpret his first utterance as a lie because they assumed that he was protecting his adoptive mother because he was scared of her. His speech was not his own so he did not lie.

Hence, adults carry an ideology that children reveal rather than hide, or at least that they do not of their own accord hide things that concern adults. Children talk about what other people do, they report gossip, they chatter about what people have, and they do not of their own accord lie about goods. They do not hide such things because they do not think, they have no sins to conceal, and they have no shame to motivate a desire to hide. In comparison to adults they are transparent creatures who reveal goods, feelings, and words to the world.

Immaturity and Power

It seems, therefore, that children are the ideal answer to adults' semiotic woes. To avoid shame and save face adults are better off relegating the effort of speaking and acting to a third

party. Any other adult, however, would refuse to act, largely because they cannot convincingly act as animators who have no responsibility for their own words and actions. Goffman (1981) separated the act of speaking an utterance into three roles: animator or the person who voices an utterance, author or the person who creates/writes the text, and principal or the person whose social status is embedded in that utterance. Although one individual can simultaneously be animator, author, and principal sometimes different people take up these different roles.

Seen as responsible for their own actions, for the most part adults are unable to convincingly shed ownership of their words and actions or their role as principal. Most women cannot transport food for another adult without feeling shame, just as most other adults watching would not accept the excuse that the food is not her own. In other words, for the most part among adults physical possession indexes social possession. Similarly, if a man catches another man lying the second man will bear the blame for his speech regardless of how much he might try to argue that he was merely acting on the orders of another. Some very powerless adults, including a number of teenagers, may be able to convincingly present themselves as lacking control, as lacking social possession of their words or actions. But most of these people are too ashamed to act or bring things out of hiding.

According to adults, however, children feel no shame. They are not responsible for their words. Indeed, in some sense they cannot lie. They can convincingly take on the role of animator. They can speak and act without embedding their social status in their utterance. In other words, according to adults' physical possession does not index control over a good and the power to give if the person holding the good happens to be a child. Children can defer responsibility onto adult principles while simultaneously distancing adults from their actions,

allowing adults to engage in the dangerous activity of exchange without losing face or having to lie.

There is only one problem with this potential use of children: the children themselves. Just as children's immaturity shields them from sin and shame and the need to think, so do adults say that children's immaturity makes them naughty, disobedient, and disinclined to work. The Marshallese tenet that youth obey their elders only works with people sufficiently mature to feel the need to obey. Marshallese adults indulge their young children largely because it is pointless to force them to do anything until they are grown up enough to want to do it themselves. Moreover, young children are small, weak, forgetful, and have difficulty speaking—characteristics that hamper their ability to facilitate the giving and not-giving of words and goods. It is only the older children, the ones in middle childhood, who are simultaneously young enough and old enough to obey commands, run errands, and mediate economic activity. Understanding why older children are uniquely suited to this economic activity requires first analyzing adult patterns of childrearing and childcare.

Commanding and Indulging Children

On the one hand, children are at the bottom of the hierarchy of age and are constantly under the beck and call of their elders. On the other hand, adults believe that children should not be forced to act and should not be given too much work. Young children, in particular, should not be given work at all because they are too young to want to do it.

Life in the Lower Ranks: The Ideal of Obedience

Good children obey their elders while bad children are naughty (*bōt*). Adults say that

“all” children are naughty, although some adults also say that boys are naughtier than girls. Boys “are bad,” one woman said. They “say ‘*auuuu*’ and run away.” Girls,” in contrast, “come.” Out of seven adults I asked, six said that they preferred girls over boys because girls watch over the house and help whereas boys do not. In addition, as one man pointed out, most girls will stay close when they get married as is appropriate in this traditionally matrilineal society. When boys marry, however, they leave and work for another family. Two people repeated a saying that when a girl is born the family gains “a cook” but when a boy is born they gain “a drunkard.” But although some children (often girls) are less naughty than others (often boys), all adults agree that all children are at least somewhat naughty.

Adults’ arguments that girls are less naughty than boys because they obey and help reflect the fact that naughtiness is defined not only as failing to work but also as disobeying an elder. For example, one grandmother said that her granddaughter was naughty because “when I order her she runs away.” The kindergarten teacher, frustrated one day by her wild students, told a traditional story about a girl who got eaten by a spirit because she was “naughty (*bōt*)” and did not obey her mother. When the teacher ended the story she called out, “is it good to be disobedient (*bōt*)?”

“No!” the children responded in chorus.

“Why did the demon appear?”

“Because she was naughty (*bōt*)!”

The importance of obedience means that it is appropriate, expected, and extremely common for adults and older individuals to order children around. These commands are known as “*jilkin*,” to send a child to do something. “Everyone orders [children]... the Marshallese

custom is like I say, 'hey! Go and, can you go and bring that thing.' Even though you are not my child."

Adults should order children not only because the children should obey and help but also because children needed to be ordered if they are to learn to work. Four adults agreed with a woman who said that if adults do not order children then they "would not know how to work." Another man said that adults who do not order their children are bad because they do "not teach them." Some adults criticized people who "favor" specific children and do not order them. When these favored children's parents die, two people told me, "the children will not know how to live" because they never learned to work.

Adults constantly command children to help. "Pour me some water." "Just come here." "Just bring me the flashlight!" "Rake!" "Clean up!" "Fill this plate." "Get my shoes!" They tell children to pick up the trash, clean up the yard, carry things, cook, watch over younger children, deliver messages, transport goods, collect coconuts, do the dishes, cut the lawn, and scratch their back (literally). While girls' work differs from boys' work in a number of respects—girls wash clothes and help cook, boys mow the lawn and might tag along with men when they fish—adults expect children of both genders to fetch and transport things. The only exception is at night when adults might be more likely to send a boy than a girl on an errand since boys are supposed to be stronger and better able to protect themselves against spirits. Generally, however, all children, girls or boys, (and all adults) refuse to walk by themselves at night.

Often adults command children to do something they need to help them in their work such as bringing pots and pans, filling water, mowing the yard, or organizing the sprouted coconuts. But frequently when adults are relaxing or gossiping and are free to move they

nevertheless order children to bring a glass of water or get the dog out of the house. Younger people move for older people, letting their elders stay still. This association of lower status with mobility exists in a number of other places in Oceania as well as in the Philippines and Madagascar (Cole 2005; Morton 1996; Rosaldo 1982).

Consequently, children often found themselves running errand after errand. For example, a man told an eight-year-old girl, "Take this to Cory."

The girl carried the pipe to Corey.

Corey said, "Bring a little fire."

The girl went to the cookhouse to get a coconut shell that was partially on fire. She handed it to Corey.

"Go and bring my shoes at the start of the path on the lagoon side."

The girl went to the lagoon and got the shoes.

As she was walking back into the house another woman said, "Please bring the coconut shells here. So that you can throw the things away in the lagoon."

Again, the child obeyed.

This girl was a particularly industrious and obedient child. Nonetheless, ideally all children should drop whatever they are doing to obey. The child's purpose or need is always subordinate to the needs of elders. A ten-year-old girl was passing a house on her way to another house when her classificatory mother saw her and said, "Go and get me a broom." The child stopped and went to get the broom. A fourteen-year-old boy had to continuously start and stop his homework one night as his father constantly called him to run minor errands. While a twelve-

year-old was eating her older cousin and grandparents commanded, “Bring their spoons” “Give it to grandfather.”

Non co-resident adults also order children around. One boy went looking for his friend. He found not his friend but his friend’s grown-up sister who ordered him to carry some plates outside. A woman told her non co-resident classificatory daughter to bring cups to the cookhouse. Another woman told a visiting girl to bring her a pot.

Older children also command younger children. One day two girls were alone in a house. The elder, around twelve years old, imitated the prosody of adult commands and told the younger, around seven, to get her a glass of water. A ten-year-old boy ordered his younger siblings to help him make a fire and cook rice. An eleven-year-old boy told a six-year-old boy to go get his backpack from across the field. The six year old obeyed with alacrity. Indeed, most children told me that they order their younger siblings around and that their older siblings ordered them.

Don’t Make Them Work Too Much

Despite the expectation that adults should order children, adults also criticize people who “*keñtaan* (cause to suffer)” their children—people who make children work too much. This abusive form of childcare and childrearing involves giving children “no time to rest” and difficult, heavy work. They make children “gather coconuts from morning to [night] even if they are really tired.” Although adults can and should work long hours children should not. “Their bodies are weak” and they are not accustomed to hard work so they get “tired.”

If children work too hard their health suffers and they “could die.” “Their bodies don’t know how to grow” and their minds are also “slow.” For example, numerous adults criticized a

mother who constantly made her nine-year-old daughter carry and watch over her baby sister. The child carries the baby around too much, an older woman told me. The woman also said that this work is why the child was so small. She was also slow in school, another woman told me, because she spent too much time watching her baby sister and not enough time playing with other children.

Just as adults should not burden children with too much work, they should not force children to work before they are ready. In turn, readiness is signaled by children's desire to work and want to obey, a desire that naturally increases as children grow. One woman compared her fourteen-year-old son to her nine-year-old son. The fourteen year old, she said, works because he "is older and knows how to think." The younger one, however, still does not listen to her when she tries to order him to help. "He runs here and there, he is still a little child." Moreover, "if he does not want to come, that's it." His mother has to wait. When he is older he will help. While he is still young, however, he will refuse. If people force their children too much, another woman told me, they will do bad things. Some, a man added, might eventually commit suicide when they grow up.

Consequently, when children choose not to go to school their parents largely let them. One woman's child, starting kindergarten, disobeyed her command to go to school. I asked her if she should force him to go to school. At first she said yes. Then she added that since her son refuses to go school there is nothing that she can do about it. "He does not yet know" enough to obey and go to school, he does not have "thoughts." As another woman said, if an adult tells a child to go to school but he or she does not go "it's over." Forcing children to obey is pointless because, ultimately, no children help around the house or go to school simply because their

elders tell them to. They do it because they want to, because they recognize the importance of either work or obedience. These are insights that come with age.

Indulging Babies and Children in Early Childhood

It should not be surprising, therefore, that adults indulge babies and very young children. These children are too young to obey or be disciplined when they misbehave. Moreover, in a social order where those who have more are supposed to give to those who have less, good parents give their children, and particularly their youngest children, what they want. Adults feed babies on demand when they cry. In many houses adults also feed the youngest children first before feeding the older children. Even in my household, where the youngest child was an eight-year-old boy, adults gave the boy food first.¹⁵ Adults and older children do not expect babies to give and sometimes preferentially give things to infants. For example, once at church a baby's mother opened a box of biscuits. She gave all the biscuits to her infant and another baby. None of the adults and children milling around protested that she had not shared the biscuits with them. While if the mother had kept the biscuits to herself she would have been greedy, giving all of the biscuits to the babies was appropriate. The thirteen-year-old sister of one of the babies did try to take a piece of a biscuit from her sister. The baby held onto the biscuit and started to cry. The thirteen year old begged the baby for the biscuit. When the baby continued to cry the thirteen-year-old gave up her plea, leaving the food to the younger children.

Adults and older children hesitate to discipline or punish babies and very young children. "Don't hit children (*ajri*)" one grandfather said to an eight-year-old boy, using *ajri* as a relative

¹⁵ In my house, at least, they always fed important people, such as guests, first. When it came time to feed the children, however, they always filled the youngest child's plate first.

word to mean that he should not hit children who are younger. Numerous children held the opinion that their parents did not hit the youngest child because they favored him or her. When babies did things that they should not adult reprimands were limited to interjections such as “no!” or “bad!” that were intended to halt, as opposed to punish, the infant. One mother said in a mild and amused prosody to her two year old who was acting up, “I am going to punch your tongue.” Then she laughed. This threat was a joke; the child was too young to scold.

Indeed, before the age of three or four adults permit children to be tyrants. Two three-year-olds constantly threw tantrums when their mothers left.¹⁶ The women scolded and threatened them but never actually hit them. On another day a four-year-old boy hit an older child with abandon. The older child lightly slapped the four-year-old to punish him. An eleven-year-old girl then scolded the older child for his behavior. ‘Did it hurt?’ the eleven-year-old asked rhetorically. Since four-year-olds are too weak to do much damage, it cannot hurt when they hit and therefore one should not retaliate. The four-year-old should be left alone to hit whomever he pleases (so long as it is someone older than him). ‘Don’t hit children (*ajri*),’ the eleven-year-old scolded.

This same four-year-old followed his mother one day when she left to go to work. The mother told her classificatory daughter, ten-year-old Kinta, to take the child home. As Kinta approached the boy he picked up some rocks and threatened to throw them at Kinta. Kinta backed away and ducked as if she was scared. Indeed, I suspect she was scared since he could throw rocks at her but she could do nothing to stop him.

¹⁶ One of the women also had a four-year-old child, this child never threw tantrums. Indeed, by the age of five children only screamed and cried in front of their parents when their parents hit them. (They did sometimes scream or cry at other children.)

The mother scolded her son. 'Go home!' she said. She did not mention the rocks or tell him to stop threatening to throw them. Knowing that the mother was watching her and expecting her to obey, Kinta hesitantly approached the child again. She made one brief, brave effort to take the rocks out of his hand. He screamed even louder and threatened to throw them again. Kinta retreated behind a house, defeated by his youth. The mother continued to scold the child as he stood there, refusing to move. Finally she started walking toward him yelling, 'I am going to hit you!' This threat was successful. The child ran off toward his house and Kinta chased after him. While the child eventually obeyed his mother, he clearly won the stand-off with Kinta. He had the ability to throw rocks. She could do nothing because he was too young for her to hit.

Nonetheless, this boy was growing into an age in which some obedience, and some discipline, is acceptable. The fact that the four-year old ran away after his mother threatened him suggests that she had, at least once, hit him. Similarly adults occasionally, and half-heartedly, start commanding these younger children. "Ramon, go and tell grandpa that he should fill the plates with *lukor* (a dish made of sugar, milk, water, and sprouted coconut meat)," a woman told her three or four year old classificatory son. "Because you are grown-up." Although Ramon did not go, the woman would not have even tried to order a younger child. On another day I was chatting with a woman when Siera and her two-year-old son sat down with us. Siera pulled some candy out of her pocket. She handed me a couple pieces. She was too far away, however, to give to the other woman without getting up. She put some candy in her son's hand and told him to give it to the woman. He whined and cried for a couple of minutes until finally he walked over to the woman and gave her the candy. I suspect that Siera did not want to get up. She may have

been teaching her son obedience as opposed to generosity. Nonetheless, he likely learned about both.

The Demands and Freedom of Middle Childhood

Children in middle childhood are under considerably more pressure than younger children to work and obey. Adults often preferentially order older children, including teenagers, than younger children. Ramon, for example, lived with his ten and twelve-year-old cousins. It was these ten and twelve-year-olds whom their parents and grandparents told to clean up the house and to bring rice. Similarly, in another house, adults told children between the ages of six and twelve to clean up the lawn. Adults left the four-year-old alone. One woman told her eleven-year-old grandson to get a flashlight as opposed to her eight-year-old grandson who was also there. Deina called out to her fourteen-year-old son “bring two leaves” instead of to his younger brothers. The older the children are the more they should work.¹⁷

When older children disobey adults sometimes discipline them. Generally, this discipline takes the form of scolding. Scolding takes the form of constant threats of physical violence. “You will feel pain!” “I am going to hit you!” “I am going to punch you in the face.” “If you keep on raising your eyebrows I am going to shave them off.” “You are going to cry.” More often than not, these threats have no teeth. For example, over the course of nine minutes a mother issued six physical threats but never lifted a finger to actually hit anyone.

Sometimes, however, adults do resort to physical punishment. Most adults believe that some physical discipline is not only appropriate but necessary because children who are never hit

¹⁷ Adults sometimes “pay” children for gathering mature coconuts to make into copra. The payment is often a lollipop per twenty coconuts. But adults also often order children to do this work for no reward.

do not learn. By hitting children adults “teach” them. “How can we teach children not to be naughty?” I asked. “Hit them,” an older woman responded. Another woman told me a story about her fourteen-year-old sister who slipped out one night to be with her boyfriend. Another woman in the house saw her and told the matriarch of the household, the grandmother. Then the grandmother hit the fourteen-year-old with a stick. ‘Was it a good thing to do?’ I asked. ‘Yes, because she should not be going out.’

At the same time, however, adults said that only a certain amount of physical discipline is acceptable. Numerous people repeated to me a mantra that one should only hit children with one’s hand (as opposed to a stick or a knife) so that one can feel how much it hurts and therefore will know when to stop. Everybody criticized the adoptive mother who supposedly cut her son with a knife. Neighbors frequently criticized others who hit their children, albeit behind their backs. For example, negative rumors circulated one day that a woman had hit her teenage sister-in-law. The woman protested that she had simply scolded her.¹⁸

I only rarely saw physical punishment although I suspect that it occurs more often and that adults try to keep it out of sight. During one recording a child repeatedly disobeyed her mother. A slapping sound and the child’s subsequent cries indicate that the mother hit her. I saw a grandmother brandish a stick at her granddaughter’s legs—the granddaughter skipped away and partially avoided the stick. Theresa, eleven-years-old, told me that she left her adoptive parents’ house because her adoptive mother “really hits me all the time.” On a separate occasion, Theresa’s brother also told me that while their mother does not hit him she frequently hits Theresa. A mother twisted her daughter’s ear when she disobeyed. A thirteen-year-old ran out

¹⁸ Western views of physical punishment as bad have also started to be influential in the Marshall Islands and particularly among some NGO’s and government organizations on the capital. Technically teachers are not allowed to physically discipline their students, although many children told me about teachers who ignored that rule.

of her house one day in front of her mother who was tossing a rock at her. Pinla lightly slapped her younger brother with the flat side of a knife.

I suspect that adults hit children more often than I observed. Most adults, however, threaten violence far more often than they actually commit it. I could discern no rhyme or reason as to why adults sometimes decide to follow through with their threats and I suspect that children could not either. Although children are clearly more scared of some adults than others, most children frequently disobey most people, indicating that they are not particularly concerned about adults' threats.

Indeed, considering the verbal stress that both children and adults give to the importance of obeying one's elders, these older children can be remarkably disobedient (albeit much less so than younger children). A young woman in her twenties told a nine-year-old to pass her some money from the other room. She repeated her command five or six times before he finally obeyed. An older woman told a thirteen-year-old girl to bring cups to the cookhouse. The girl said "wait a little" and then ran off. A woman told her nine-year-old son multiple times to go get a knife but he never went. She told her older son, fourteen, to open the window. This was an easy command to obey as he was sitting next to the window. He did not move. The mother repeated her command at least five times to no avail. Frustrated, I eventually muttered "he is really naughty" under my breath. The boy finally stood up to open the window. A woman told a ten-year-old girl to fill up a plate of food. The girl was lying down and did not get up until the woman repeated her command multiple times. One day a grandfather told his granddaughter to pass some information on to her grandmother. Instead of getting up the granddaughter yelled across the yard to her grandmother. 'Don't yell, get up and go tell her,' the grandfather said.

‘My legs are tired.’

‘Why are your legs tired when you did not go to school?’ the grandfather scolded.

There seem to be multiple reasons for children’s disobedience. First, adults frequently do not punish them. Second, although most children would never admit it, occasionally children seem annoyed that they can be called at anytime to do anything. Elders often have to repeat their command numerous times because many children waited—either a couple moments or a half hour—before getting up and running an errand. One child muttered under his breath when a woman told him a second time to look for her husband, “ugh, tired of looking again.” A girl said with mild frustration after adults kept telling her to do things during dinner, “damn, my food is going to go away,” an idiom that means that all this work would prevent her from being able to eat.

I experienced this frustration myself although I suspect that I was less accepting than children of the idea that older people’s needs came before mine, particularly when I saw no reason why the elder could not run the errand him or herself. For example, one day I was walking quickly back to my house to get my camera, scared that I was going to be late to film the arrival of a boat for a ceremony. I passed a group of elder women. One called out and told me to bring her some donuts. Impertinently I called back, “why?” She criticized me, “you are naughty,” shaming me into bringing her donuts despite my desire to make sure that I had my camera ready.

The third reason for children’s disobedience is that children are really only expected to obey their elders in respect to two things: physical safety and work.¹⁹ In regard to the rest of their

¹⁹ Adults also feel strongly that children should not swim too much because then they will get sick. Adults do punish children for swimming without permission.

lives children are largely free to do as they please. Adults do not command them (or at least do not succeed at commanding them) to do other things like going to school or going to sleep. Children sometimes temporarily move residences when they are mad at kin. Even twelve and thirteen-year-olds do not have to follow adult customs concerning dress or gender avoidance. In church the youngest children run around playing games on the floor while the older children are quieter but nevertheless frequently change their seats, whisper, or go outside. Despite the injunction against playing games on Sunday, children as old as twelve sometimes played games.

A pressure for children to obey exists in tension with a practice of giving children comparative freedom in many parts of their life and a belief that children will not work until they are old enough to want to work. These differing pressures combine to create, in middle childhood, people who are simultaneously conscientious enough to help their family, do chores, run errands, and obey commands at least some of the time while also free from many of the social restrictions of adulthood.

Children's Power

Specifically, while adults believe that children in both early and middle childhood do not hide goods and information in the same way as adults, it is only the children in middle childhood who are obedient enough that adults can make use of their lack of shame. Adults frequently tell these children to do those things that adults are too ashamed to do themselves. They transfer the semiotic pressure of revealing goods and words onto children, distancing themselves from their actions and potential loss of face by using children as animators. Children's invaluable role in the circulation of goods starts with their role in the circulation of information. Their power to both

facilitate and prevent the flow of information in ways that adults cannot heavily influences the flow of material goods.

Children Can Gather Information and Spread Information

First, children have the freedom to go where adults do not dare. Children in middle childhood, in particular, range far and wide both for work and in their pursuit of play, gathering all sorts of information along the way. For example, Lena was only in a position to see Honjo's abuse because she did not feel particularly compelled to obey the unwritten rule against spying on one's neighbors. Children played a similar role in gaining private information and spreading it when Lijinita, a woman in her thirties, went "crazy (*bwebwe*)." This story has a relatively happy ending as by the time I left Jajikon Lijinita had largely recovered although she still had some difficulty speaking. When it began, however, we were all terrified.

All of a sudden one night Lijinita started screaming. She continued to scream all night as people held her down. Adults ran back and forth to anoint her with holy water. The reverend prayed for a while but then gave up as Lijinita's sickness appeared intractable. She spoke sense some of the time and nonsense the rest, although her sense was that of another world. She wanted to run with the spirits, she declared, talking as if she was holding the hand of a four-year-old girl in the village and could see the ghost boat from which spirits never return to the living. "She is infected by a spirit," everyone judged. We almost lost her. If she had stepped on the boat she would have been gone forever. If she had taken the child, the child would have been gone too.

We all emerged the next day tired from the ordeal and curious about what lay ahead. Upset for Lijinita, I gossiped with some children and gathered details about what was going on.

‘Do you want to go look at her?’ they asked.

‘Can we do that?’ I responded.

‘Of course!’ Theresa exclaimed.

‘Wait for me!’ Sisina called as we ran off toward Lijinita’s house.

‘Where are you going?’ a woman called as we ran by.

‘To play with the children!’ I responded, embarrassed for some reason to say that we were going to look at Lijinita. My prevarication, however, was pointless.

‘I thought you were going to look at Lijinita?!’ the woman called knowingly, understanding exactly where the children were going and why I was going with them.

Upon arrival we found Lijinita’s daughter Kara playing by herself outside. ‘What are you doing?’ She asked us.

‘We came to see your mother.’ Kara looked up briefly, and then returned to silently smashing shells against each other in the story-telling game that girls frequently play. I think that she was upset and understandably so. In a true Marshallese manner, however, she shortly put on a bold face and joined the other children, pushing back her pain.²⁰

Before the children could walk toward the house Lijinita slowly emerged, her head hung over, propped up by two other women. The children ran forward and then suddenly ran back, screaming. ‘She said that she was going to bite us!’ Then they gathered slightly away from the

²⁰ This ability of Marshallese children to put on a brave face constantly amazed me. No matter what happened, they managed to continue smiling and playing. In America we might call such behavior repression. On Jajikon they call it survival. Expressing sad emotions leads to sickness and death. The path to health depends on keeping one’s emotions in check.

house at a vantage point that had a good view. I stood with them. After Lijinita went back to her house the children slowly crept forward, eventually leaning around the corner of the house to peer into the window.

I also wanted to see what was going on but ended up keeping my distance, too uncomfortable to peer. I chatted with two other young women who also clearly wanted information. Like me, however, they were too ashamed, embarrassed, or scared to stick their heads in the window like a child. Eventually I left, caving to the invisible social pressures that indicate children can spy but adults should not.

Children's spying brings considerable advantages to adults who must stay away. As soon as I got home my Marshallese parents pounced on me, the word somehow having spread that I was at Lijinita's house and knew what was going on. They asked for details, wanting to know everything about Lijinita's situation in a manner that paralleled how they often pried information from children. Similarly, when a nine-year-old boy returned from his grandmother's house one day his mother demanded, 'What is she doing? What were they eating?' On another occasion I returned with three ten and eleven-year-olds to their house. Their grandmother fired one question after another, 'Where is grandfather? What was he doing? Who came on the boat? What did they bring? Was there a lot of stuff?' Deina sent her classificatory daughter to clean up the church. When the girl came back Deina asked if the women next door were awake yet. "They are oversleeping," the girl replied.

This spreading of information was largely the domain of older children who traveled back and forth much more frequently than their younger siblings and more reliably reported about what they saw. Even younger children, however, occasionally offered interesting tidbits of

information. “LiHiana!” Delina called across the street one day to her brother’s four or five year old child. “Where did you all sleep?”

“Dad is sleeping at, but mom is sleeping at, what’s it called, Ruriko.²¹ But me, I am sleeping in Liklob.”

“With whom?”

“With grandma.”

“Why?”

“Because Ruriko is bad....father said that Ruriko is bad....” Hiana stumbled, not entirely sure why she was staying in Liklob. Although Delina could not learn everything she wanted to know from Hiana, she still learned a lot about what was going on in a place that Delina was not.

In addition to asking children questions adults also sometimes overhear gossip by listening to children talk. For example, Mariana listened during lunch one day as children from a nearby town discussed with Mariana’s children a recent event in that town. “[Father] really hit them [some children]...because they were playing with the vehicle...Ārtur’s vehicle.”

Mariana perked up her ears. She was interested not in the punishment that had occurred (which is what the children were excited about), but rather the vehicle. Trucks only go to the town nearby to bring two things: important people or goods. “What did they bring you?” Mariana asked.

“Just food,” the eight-year-old responded. “Flour and rice and, what’s it called, oil and...dude! Baking powder and that’s all.”

²¹ The name of a section of land.

Mariana guessed right. The truck had been transferring goods and now she knew what those goods were as well as who had given what to whom. When she asked for information the child responded in significant detail, happy about the attention. Her movement between towns, and her chatter, gave Mariana important information.^v

Children not only see things that adults do not but they also sometimes talk about things that adults should not. A boy, as we have heard, tattled on a man who had stolen a lighter when adults were too scared to speak. Lena spread the news of Honjo's abuse. In both of these instances other adults had relevant information but declined to pass the information on out of fear of making trouble. This fear is well-founded. For example, shortly after Honjo returned to his birth mother's house home Kiti and Celia, two women, chatted about the conflict. Celia accused Kiti of spreading information about the adoptive mother's behavior. Kiti earnestly refuted Celia's accusation, arguing that she never said anything to anyone. Kiti and Celia then started talking about who was to blame for the rumor. They pinpointed two other women as culpable even though, so the rumors went, the women merely supported Lena's claim but did not initiate the accusation. The women left Lena, the person who really passed on the information, unscathed. She was a child and had the permission to speak about things that adults should not.

Children Can Carry Things

Children's ability to spread dangerous information without endangering themselves relates to their ability to bring food and other goods out into the open. In both cases, children reveal, as opposed to hide, information. It is much less dangerous for children than adults to

reveal signs of goods since children have no shame and do not feel obligated to give.

Consequently, when adults need to bring things out in the open they often give them to children in middle childhood to carry.

Every adult I asked said that either they themselves, or other adults if they denied doing it themselves, give things to children to carry when they are too ashamed to carry things themselves. As one woman said, when she feels ashamed to carry food “I say [to my children] take it.” It is better for the children to carry the food, she continued, because “they are small...and they do not have any thoughts.” Two other women I spoke with agreed. “Do you give food [to children] so that they will walk with it?” I asked.

“Yes,” they said.

“I say,” said one woman, “Take this food to...”

“Yeah,” the other woman interrupted. “Yes, because I am ashamed.”

Similarly, a man explained in detail that he gives food to children to carry precisely because the children do not know enough to be ashamed to walk with it:

Sometimes I give [the food] to children. The reason that I am ashamed is because if my brother or sister is there. I am shamed with the people, my friends there, because I don't give them their food. In truth, I should have given them their food but now, I am ashamed because if there is only a small amount of the food left and I take it over there...they [will] say, “you are bad.” Now I am ashamed. So I give it to the children so that they will take it. And maybe [my friends] will say [that I am bad] but the children do not pay any attention.

As support for adults' assertions that they have children carry that which they themselves would need to hide, I constantly saw children and only occasionally saw adults buying and transporting food. One grandfather sent his granddaughter to buy Spam. Two other children transported a big container of donuts, rice, and other goodies across the village. Two girls carted a big basket of chicken back to their house.

These children never offer the food they carry to anyone. For example, a woman once gave her nine-year-old son a plate of cooked bread to carry to her relatives across the street. The boy took the plate and, not even bothering to conceal the bread under a cover, he walked right past numerous men sitting in the yard. He ignored them and they ignored him.

Shame is not the only reason why adults send children on errands that involve transporting goods. Children constantly run errands for adults not necessarily because adults are ashamed, but because adults are working or because they take advantage of their rank to stay still and have children move for them. It is impossible to distinguish between times when adults feel ashamed and the times that they do not want to move. Nonetheless, adults never transport cooked food as obviously as children often do. Moreover, adults' explicit statements that they do send children with goods because of shame shows that they interpret at least some of their behavior as stemming from a social fear of transporting goods.

Sending children to transport food not only protects adults from feeling shame but also provides a convenient scapegoat should others should protest that an adult did not give. For example, Mariana marked her child as responsible for the limes that she failed to give to her friend Kanut.

Kanut found Mariana cleaning up the yard outside of her house. "Ah Mariana aren't there any limes?"

"Damn, there were almost a thousand this morning."

"What?! I said that you should send some." Kanut was annoyed. She asked for limes and Mariana had failed to provide.

“Ugh, that Jakean,” Mariana said, referring to her ten-year-old son. “I said that he should bring them to you, but instead he biked to the south.” In other words, the lack of limes was her child’s fault.

Such an argument borders on the unbelievable. After all, children do not control resources. Indeed, children are only able to be such effective animators because adults do not see them as in control of resources or their own actions, because physical possession for children does not index social possession. Moreover, few children were so blatantly disobedient that they would deliver a whole box of limes to the wrong person. Children might run away and never deliver the limes at all, but they would not take them in the opposite direction of where they are supposed to go.

Perhaps Kanut saw through Mariana’s attempt to hide behind her child. But the fact that children are sometimes uncontrollable gave Mariana’s statement just enough plausibility to serve as a cover, to hide her act of not-giving such that Kanut could at least pretend to believe it. Mariana’s son’s status as immature meant that neither he nor Mariana could be held responsible for giving the limes away.^{vi}

Children Can Ask For Things

Adults also often send children to ask for things from others. Just as with carrying goods, every adult I asked said that either they themselves, or other adults if they denied doing it themselves, send children to ask for things when they are too ashamed to ask.²² As one adult said, when they are “ashamed to ask for something” they send children in their place because the children “do not know” to feel ashamed to ask. Adults say to children, “go and bring me the

²² I asked at least ten adults, five women and five men.

thing that Riana has. Because we are ashamed.” Similarly, one woman laughed when I asked if people send children to ask in their place.

“Why are you laughing?” I asked.

“Because you really know about Marshallese culture,” she declared, affirming my analysis. “The main thing that we see among people is that they send their child to say, ‘grandpa says give me that thing.’ The real reason is because they are ashamed.”

A young man explained that “the reason to send children is because, it is like we are ashamed.”

“But why, if we are ashamed, do we send children?” I asked. “Do children not feel shame, or what?”

“The child does not think. He or she does not know that...,” the man paused. “You know Marshallese custom, right?” he asked me. Without waiting for an answer he went on. “If you ask me for something: ‘Elise!’” he exclaimed, imitating someone asking me. “And I say no, you will be mad at me. But if you send someone else and [I] say ‘no,’ when we meet each other we will be fine.” An intermediary, this man argued, helps both parties save face. Since any adult would refuse to be such an intermediary, children who “do not think” are those who must act.

As support for adults’ arguments that they send children to ask, I frequently saw children asking for things in the place of adults. For example, one girl went to the store and asked for four packages of ramen which she then took and carried home under the eyes of numerous watchful men. She did not pay for the ramen, indicating that she was buying on credit for her family, something that adults often hesitate to do even more than they hesitate to ask for things. Another child came to the store and asked for fuel which he also carried home. One grandmother sent her

ten-year-old grandchild to the other side of town to ask her daughter for mosquito coils. Another woman sent her grandchild to ask a kinsman for tuna. A man sent his children to ask some other men for tobacco. As these examples demonstrate, often when children ask for things they then have to carry them home, another reason to send children to ask instead of going oneself.

As with sending children to carry goods, it is impossible to distinguish between times when adults send children to ask because they feel ashamed and the times that they send children because they do not want to move. For example, one woman said that she says to her grandson “go and get that thing” not because she “feels ashamed, but because [she] is busy with [her] work.” Hence, when a grandmother sent her granddaughter two houses down to ask for a hammer, or when Deina sent her two sons to a house on the other side of the village to ask for some coconut husks for the fire, they may have simply wanted to get their work done. When Kilin sent a child over to ask if they could watch videos on my computer, he could have simply wanted to stay still as opposed to feeling shame to ask.

A number of examples, however, lend credence to adults’ reports that one of the reasons why they send children to ask is adults’ feelings of shame. Once, for example, a woman was sitting on a log in a yard waiting for Deina. Seeing nine-year-old Moje nearby she yelled for Moje to go ask Deina when she was going to come home. When I asked the woman why she did not just go find Deina herself (who was simply across the street), the woman said that she was scared of the priest’s wife with whom Deina was sitting. On another day I found myself used to ask because I, probably even more so than the children, did not know enough to be ashamed. Dōre told me to go to a particular house and ask for fish. I hesitated but did it, much like a child as opposed to an adult who never would agree to such a shameful errand. When I got to the

house and said, “Dōre said to give her fish,” the adults in the house stared at me with some amazement. ‘There are two types of fish,’ one of the men said. ‘The live ones in the sea which Dōre can get for herself. As for the dead ones, we don’t have any!’ I felt embarrassed. I would have felt much more embarrassed if I was not able to defer responsibility for my words onto Dōre. It seemed pretty clear that Dōre would have been ashamed to ask for fish herself.

Children and Adults Can Refuse Each Other

If Dōre had gone herself to ask for fish the men would probably have spoken to her quite differently. First, they probably would not have insulted her. Second, if they were lying to me and actually did have fish, they would have been more likely to give if she had asked herself. Using children as intermediaries to transport and ask for goods is an invaluable site through which avoiding giving takes place because adults believe that both children and adults can refuse each other.

Children’s lack of shame, adults argue, gives children the power not only to carry things but also to refuse to give them. As one woman said, “if you ask for something from a child, he or she will not give it to you. Because he or she is not ashamed. But if you ask for something from an adult, they are ashamed and they say, ‘here.’” Although she argued that it was mainly children in early childhood who refuse, she also said that children as old as twelve do not feel shame to refuse in the same way as adults.

Just as children can refuse to give to adults, adults can refuse to give to children. As another woman said, “It is easier to not give to children than to adults. [Because] they do not feel ashamed with children, [but adults] they are always ashamed with them.” As an example, Jin, a young man in his twenties, refused to give fish to twelve-year-old Carl much more directly than

he would have refused an adult. Carl was hanging out in Jin's house when another young man rode by on a bike, inquiring as he rode about Jin's fishing expedition.

"Hey dude, did you have good fortune (fishing)?"

"It is enough for the people in this house," Jin responded. Although the young man was riding past and did not seem to actually want any fish himself, Jin needed to create the appearance that he was not able to give. He could not claim that he had no fish since other men knew that he went fishing and it is difficult to hide the act of cleaning and cooking fish. As a research assistant who analyzed this video with me said, when men go fishing everyone else knows. If a man has a large catch, he said, people will be mad if the man does not share. Jin needed to create the appearance that he simply had bad fortune and did not catch many fish, an appearance that would make others too ashamed to ask for fish.

Or, at least, this appearance made adults too ashamed to ask for fish. The young man on his bike rode past without another comment. But twelve-year-old Carl challenged Jin's claim. "You have had good fortune!" he exclaimed laughing, implying not only that Jin was a liar but also that he had the ability to share fish.

Jin quickly corrected Carl's interpretation. Carl, after all, could tell others about the fish and then people might get mad at Jin. "It (the trip) was not very successful, there is only enough for us to eat," he said, adding the word "only" to stress how few fish he actually had.

Whereas most adults would probably have hid their suspicions that Jin had more fish and respected Jin's implicit attempt not to give, Carl was having fun and refused to give in. "Enough for whom?" he challenged, still playing with Jin.

“Enough for us to eat,” Jin said, using the first person plural form that excludes the person with whom he is speaking. Then he added, “not enough for Carl to eat.”

Jin did not say “no.” Nevertheless, by using Carl’s name as an example of someone who will not eat he refused to give in a much more explicit and obvious manner than is typical between adults. It is clear that Jin had fish but was not willing to share with Carl.

Carl gave up and stopped bothering Jin. Jin, moreover, seemed to suffer no social problems from his relatively explicit refusal. Carl, after all, is a child. Refusing a child is not particularly dangerous for Jin’s face.^{vii}

Similarly, a young woman whom I call Liṇi made a little, but not much, of an effort to hide a refusal to give to nine-year-old Jason. Jason noticed as he was running by that Liṇi was eating a lime with salt (a common treat). “My food, salt and lime!” he yelled. Liṇi did not respond. “Liṇi,” Jon pleaded.

“It is all gone,” Liṇi answered. Under most circumstance this phrase is a typical and appropriate way for adults to get out of giving. Liṇi, however, happened to be eating a lime, making her words particularly difficult to believe. Jason pointed out this discrepancy when he responded, “hey what’s that?” It is hard to imagine that Liṇi would have lied so blatantly if she had been speaking with an adult.

Jason continued to beg. “Just a little?”

“And if it just a little why should you eat?” My research assistant interpreted this response as sarcastic. Jason’s entire utterance, “hey what’s that, just a little?” has two possible meanings: 1) Jon wanted just a little bit of lime; 2) Jon was asking how much lime Liṇi had and is suggesting that it was only a little. Liṇi chose the latter interpretation, although this

interpretation seems much less likely. Liṇi then asserted, sarcastically, that since there was so little lime Jason should not get to eat any.

Jason, ever a rascal, did not give in. “Give me my lime.”

“Ok,” Liṇi said surrendering. “Take that half.”

Although Liṇi surrendered in the end, her approach to refusing Jason is similar to how Jin refused Carl. Neither Liṇi nor Jin explicitly came out and said “no.” Rather, they use relatively conventional ways of hiding their refusal to give, such as saying, “there is no more.” They used these phrases, however, in situations and in ways that made it pretty clear that they had things that they would not give. They were able to be more explicit and obvious about their possessions with children than they could with adults since the negative consequences of refusing children are relatively small.^{viii}

Numerous people commented on the ironic fact that sending a child to ask makes it more likely that adults will refuse their requests. One woman said that if she was too scared to ask then there was no reason to send a child in her place because the other adult must be a “mean” person who, regardless, would not give. “I know,” she said, “that they will not give it.” A man said that the reason why he did not send children to ask was because adults might say mean things to and in front of a child that they would not say if he went himself:

“The reason why I do not want to send children... when I want something, it is best if I show up myself. If I send children, I do not know what my older sister will say to him or her. She might curse me, all different things.... I wouldn’t hear what she says, ‘hey, go and say your grandfather fucks his mother.’ [If I went], she may give it to me and she will not talk, or she might not give it to me but she would not talk...it’s ok.”

In other words, it would be better to go himself so that his sister would restrain her speech.

As support for such an interpretation, one day Rose, thirteen years old, returned to her house with a message from her classificatory mother Celia. “Catherine,” she said to her younger sister who was in the house. “Celia said to fill a plate with rice for her.”

Myrta, the girls’ grown sister, interrupted, “go and say that there is no more rice in this house.”

“Cooked rice?” Rose asked possibly thinking that Myrta had misunderstood her request.

“Why doesn’t she cook rice in her own house?” Myrta responded, making it clear that she did not intend to share rice with her classificatory mother.^{ix} Myrta never would have spoken in such a way to Celia herself. Similarly, Celia would not have been able to get an adult to run this somewhat shameful errand to ask for rice. With Rose as an intermediary, Celia got out of asking while Myrta was able to lie to Celia without few repercussions. Rose left for Celia’s house, presumably to give her Myrta’s message. A couple of minutes later Catherine carried a plate of rice out of her house and shared it with numerous children nearby, eating the food that they supposedly lacked.

Ironically, therefore, adults’ belief that children lack shame and the ability to lie frequently puts children in the position to lie to other adults. Rose was old enough that I suspect that no adult would say that she does not lie. Nonetheless, others probably would not view Rose as a liar in such a situation. She was merely animating Myrta’s speech and the responsibility for the speech belongs with Myrta.

Children are an imperfect solution to adults’ desire for goods but shame to ask. Sending a child makes it much more likely that adults will not get what they want. Nonetheless, sending a

child and risking the greater possibility of a refusal is often better than going oneself and risking the loss of face.

The supposed ability of both adults and children to refuse others outside their peer-group makes children's activity essential for avoiding giving to take place. Adults' belief that children need not give, moreover, facilitates avoiding giving regardless of whether or not these beliefs are accurate because the belief inhibits adults from asking children for things. I only saw adults ask children for food that they carried twice. In both instances the adults were youth and they were asking for candy that children themselves controlled as opposed to food that children were carrying for others. Since adults believe that children will not, cannot, or do not need to give, asking for the things that they transport for adults is pointless. As one adult explained, "children know that you will not ask for their food because they will not give it to you."

Through sending children instead of going themselves, adults abdicate responsibility for the goods that they transport. In other words, physical contact between people and goods carries a different meaning depending on the identity of the person. While a physical connection between adults and their things marks adults, in absence of other signs to the contrary, as able to give, it has a different effect on children. Children are seen as having physical possession but lacking social possession. Moreover, since children have physical possession adults, in a sense, lack social possession. Children are unruly. When they are physically holding a good they are the ones who have to physically give it. Therefore, one cannot fault an adult if a child does not give. Sending a child to transport goods is another way of manipulating the relationship between people and goods, manipulating who has social power over goods.

Conclusion: Children's Agency

Consequently, children's and adults' bodies serve as indices that change the status of the things that they hold. While in adults' eyes adult bodies mark certain items as up for grabs, child bodies mark those items as unattainable. The things that children hold need not be shared, there is no moral imperative that they or the adults who sent them give. As people transfer things between individuals of different ages they move things between spheres of value, keeping them out of the hands of some and in the hands of others.

Children, and particularly children in middle childhood, are invaluable economic and political agents. Women cannot give bread to their mother on the other side of town if they have to share the bread with everyone that they see along the way. Children's ability to avoid giving is essential for giving to take place at all.

Children have this power not in spite of the fact that they are children but rather because of the fact that they are children. Such an analysis presents a new approach to considering children's economic and political agency. While a couple of older articles remark on how children can do things that adults cannot (Hotchkiss 1967; Schildkrout 1978), little of the recent work on children's economic activity considers the fact that children are not only actors but also distinctly different types of actors with a different form of power than adults. Levison's (2000:125-134) analysis of children's economic agency, for example, notes that children work but not that they can do things that people in other stages of life cannot. Zelizer (2002:379) argues that once "we examine social lives from children's own vantage points, we discover an extensive range of economic activity significantly differentiated by setting and social relation." But she does not also remark on the fact that it is a type of economic behavior on which adults

depend and in which adults cannot engage. It is precisely this difference between children's and adults' economic involvement that makes children's work crucial. Only by analyzing difference, moreover, as opposed to childhood, can we move past simply adding children, like women, to the mix of people involved in social action and start analyzing how all social action is aged in ways that we have only just begun to examine.

Chapter 5: Children's Face

Rōka, like most other Marshallese children around six years old, was a stubborn boy.¹ He arrived in Jajikon in November 2009 when his parents moved their family from his father's home atoll back to his mother's ancestral land in Jajikon. Shortly after he arrived it became clear that Rōka rarely did anything he did not want to do. He was still slightly too young to be expected to do much work. Older children ordered him around, as they did all younger children, but he only occasionally obeyed. His mother tried to send him to school but he never went. He also rarely took part in Sunday school lessons or performances although he often wandered around when children congregated. As we have seen, Rōka's behavior, despite reflecting a little more obstinacy than most, was typical of children his age.

He often behaved in ways that suggest, just as adults argue, that he had no shame. For example, one day while nibbling on a pancake he wandered around near a group of children playing. He did not offer the food to anyone else.

"Rōka, a little?" One boy begged.

"No," Rōka said. Rōka apparently felt no need to create an appearance of generosity.

His classificatory brother Kyle noticed the food. "Rōka, give me a little food.

"Hey, you didn't give me my food."

"I won't give you your toy," Kyle, eleven years old, threatened. At that moment in time, Rōka and Kyle were living in the same house.

¹ Rōka's mother left her children's birth papers behind in the capital. As a result, I am not entirely sure how old Rōka was, although his 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 age. Rōka was a little taller and more articulate than the children I knew to be four or five, leading me to suspect he was older.

Rōka ignored him.

“Give me a little food.” Kyle demanded. “Dude, why are you so greedy?”

As this struggle continued both children spoke and acted in ways that adults would find horrifying. Kyle repeated his demand, leaving no room to pretend that he did not want the pancake and no place to hide from the embarrassment that adults, at least, would feel from being refused. Rōka repeated again, “Hey, why didn’t you give me my food,” not bothering to hide his refusal or his criticism of Kyle behind a joke. Both of the children actively invited conflict, Rōka through his refusals and Kyle through his demands and criticism.

Kyle found Rōka’s behavior so frustrating that, in addition to refusing to give to Rōka in the future, Kyle threatened physical violence. “You know, if you tell me again to give you your food I won’t give it to you. *Jim jee!*” Kyle cried to his dog, using an interjection that commands a dog to attack. “You are in for it,” he continued, talking again to Rōka. “That dog is going to bite you because you didn’t give him food. Oh boy, look out! You are in for it, also from that other dog, watch out!” He turned to the dog again, “Chase him! Chase him!” Rōka, Kyle implied, better watch out because Kyle has force on his side that he could use if he should so choose.^x

The children’s behavior seems, at first, to support adults’ opinions that children are too immature to think about the consequences of their actions or feel the shame that would lead them to hide. Rōka did not hide his food. Rōka explicitly refused to give. Other children directly demanded food. Kyle insulted Rōka, inviting conflict and, one would think, a loss of face.

But scholars have shown that children around the world are indeed concerned with their self-image and often strategically use language to accomplish social goals (Corsaro 2003;

Goodwin 1990; Goodwin 2006). Hatch (1987) argues that kindergarten children engage in facework and impression management. Similarly, as we will see, Marshallese children in the end of early childhood and throughout middle childhood do sometimes hide goods and information in order to protect their self-image.

The difference between children and adults is not that children never hide but rather that they only sometimes hide. Among children, moreover, it is not always good to hide because their reputation and image depend as much on asserting themselves as they do on avoiding conflict and being generous. While Brown and Levinson's (1978) influential book on politeness and face has helpfully spawned a great deal of work on how people linguistically manage their self-image, it has done the disservice of making the concept of face seem inevitably connected to indirect, evasive, polite communication. As Brown and Levinson argue, people only diverge from a "highly rational maximally efficient mode of communication" when trying to save either negative face, freedom of action and from imposition, or positive face, a positive self image, (Brown and Levinson 1978:60, 66). Numerous other scholars argue against Brown and Levinson's definitions of face and politeness and assert that the concepts differ cross-culturally (Arundale 1999; Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Eelen 1999; Fraser and Nolen 1981; Held 1999; Lim and Bowers 1991; Locher 2004; Mao 1994). Nevertheless, even these scholars assume "an intrinsic link between face and politeness" or at least between face and the various forms of indirect communication that make up appropriate behavior in a given society (Mao 1994:451).

While Goffman (1967:5) also implies that facework entails politeness strategies by discussing how people make a "good showing" for themselves, his original definition of face does not necessarily link facework with politeness. As he argues, "the term *face* may be defined

as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.” Pagliai (2010:89) points out that in Italy expectations of polite behavior differ with class and that in some verbal duels facework requires impoliteness, to “obtain positive social value the artists can insult and attack each other.” In other words, the face people try to present and the face that they benefit from assuming differ across cultures and contexts and the relevant contexts that affect people’s face constantly shift during interaction.

Such an analysis is particularly relevant to the study of children. Children’s interactions in many places are often characterized by conflict and argument (Brenneis 1998; Briggs 1971; Evaldsson 2005:763-786; Goodwin 1990). Goodwin and Alim (2010:183) argue that conflict seems to be “ubiquitous in children’s conversations, and opposition moves are built in ways that clearly demonstrate an orientation towards displaying disagreement rather than deference...[that] can be blatantly face threatening.” But while one might argue that Rōka had no concern for face because he presented himself as stingy, one could also argue that through asserting themselves both Rōka and Kyle tried to claim the positive social value of having power. One way of understanding children’s conflict may be to think about face differently and consider the idea that supposedly face-threatening acts serve to bolster a different social image, a different type of face.

Marshallese children find themselves constantly engaged in a struggle for status. Their competition for power, moreover, requires assertive and forceful speech. Children retain and raise their rank in the hierarchy of children through showing off their goods, refusing, forcing others to give, and criticizing those who do not give. This hierarchy is, of course, intricately intertwined with relative age relationships. Through forcing younger children to comply older

children affirm their status as older and more powerful. Through objecting to older children's demands younger children protest their rank, asserting that even though others might be older, they are still children and, in a sense, equal. Retaining a positive social image as someone whom other children respect and fear requires that children not-hide.

At the same time, however, like adults children value generosity. By middle childhood, therefore, children find themselves juggling the competing demands of status and solidarity, the simultaneous need to assert themselves and to be generous and give. They strategically hide depending on the nature of their interlocutor, constructing themselves as generous with their friends and as strong and assertive with children who differ significantly in age.

Their interactions bring us back, again, to the gift. Few studies analyze the social reasons behind refusing. But discussions of how gifts create bonds between people lead us to expect that refusing would harm relationships of power as well as solidarity.² Through agonistic exchange big men, chiefs, and other important people assert their rank by giving more than others (Beidelman 1989; Thomas 1991). In these places, just as among Marshallese adults, power depends on showing one deserves one's rank by having, helping and providing.

Child life in Jajikon, however, works according to a different premise than that outlined above. Specifically, among children refusals are often necessary to maintain and/or increase their rank in the hierarchy of children. While revealing their things, words, and feelings is almost always bad for adults, it is only sometimes bad among children. While children who never give have no friends, children who always hide have no respect. Hence, although both giving and

² For a discussion of power and solidarity see Brown and Gilman (1960).

hiding are tools that help bolster solidarity, revealing is the weapon children must wield to gain power.

Children's speech both reflects and creates the idea, held by children and adults alike, that mature people hide and part of what it means to be immature is to feel no need to hide. Through speaking and acting children recreate this truth and the subsequent need not to hide if they are to be successful as children. People who never obviously refuse to give are not children—either because as babies, animals, or mentally handicapped individuals they do not have sufficient presence of mind, or because they have moved out of childhood into the hidden world of adults. Just as children must eventually learn to appropriately hide toddlers must learn to appropriately show off, not necessarily because revealing is easier than hiding but because people of different social strata must speak differently to speak appropriately.

The Value of Giving: Solidarity

Like adults, children in Jajikon believe that moral people are generous people and that children should share. “It is bad to be greedy,” an eleven-year-old girl said. “They go to church and they say, to whom does greediness belong? And they say, it belongs to the devil.” “Greediness belongs to the devil,” numerous other children agreed. “Greediness...is bad,” explained a seven-year old girl, “because I say, ‘give me that pencil’ ...[but] they hold on to it.” An eleven-year-old boy said that he shares food with others because he “does not want to be greedy.” A fourteen-year-old told me that he does not get tired of sharing because “children give to children.”

By middle childhood children constantly share with each other. A girl and a boy shared a drink on the way to school. Another girl took gum out of her mouth and gave it to her friend who

put it in her own mouth. A boy asked children in his class for a pencil. When a twelve-year-old boy arrived at a house during dinnertime, his fourteen-year-old friend said, “eat!” An eleven-year-old filled her plate with rice and then turned to her friend who was visiting. “Eat!” she said. Children constantly passed plastic glow-in-the-dark bracelets around among them. George wore Carl’s bracelet, Jaki wore Jilaba’s bracelet, Jilaba wore Kyle’s bracelet. Another girl took out a container of marbles that her mother had just brought back from Majuro and carefully distributed them among six other girls.

Unanimously, children praised people who were generous and criticized those who were stingy. Mōjro said that his younger sister “has a bad heart” because she does not share food. Said another child, people who “find it hard [to give things away]... are really stingy...because they do not want to share.” When Roni hid some food so as to not share it, Kyle said about Roni, “he was really greedy.” Generally speaking, “if small children are greedy, [other children] usually hate them.” This eleven-year-old girl went on to explain that Tito, age nine, often refused to give her food. When he refused she became get angry, she said, stating, “I am always mad, I am always mad and I hate him.” Another child said that she let a boy copy her work because if she did not “he would have been mad.” Giving is a central feature of the children’s social world.

Moreover, like adults children give not only material goods but also information. I learned the hard way that among children no information is seen as private unless they pinky swear not to tell. Many things that I thought I told children in confidence quickly became communal knowledge until I learned to swear every child with whom I spoke to secrecy.

For example, ten-year-old Karistin seemed to feel no qualms about reporting what others had said. “Dude,” she said in front of a crowd of children to ten-year-old Ajiji. “What is it that

George says you said he said? He said, he said about the house...hey! He said he didn't say the thing that you said..."

"What did George say?" Ajiji asked.

"He said that he did not say the stuff that you said to me," Karistin complained.

Apparently Ajiji had told her that George had said something. When Karistin confronted George about it, George claimed that he had never said anything.

"Where is George?" Ajiji demanded. "Where is George?"

"Hey! He said that when he was raking you were talking..."

"George is lying." Ajiji asserted.^{xi}

In school children also frequently share information, engaging in what we in schools in the United States would call cheating and what the Marshallese call alternatively "copying (*anōk* or *arin*)" "stealing (*kooṭ*)" "cheating (*kamak*)" and "sharing (*ajej*)." I observed four tests in school. In all of them many children cheated. As a seven-year-old said when I asked what she does when a friend asks to copy her homework, "I give." During one test in the fourth and fifth grade classroom Kinta and Krino sat together.³ While Krino always struggled in school Kinta was at the top of the class. Under the nose of the teacher, who either didn't notice or ignored the interaction, Kinta leaned over and helped Krino with his test. She started off by just showing him her paper and letting him copy it. She then pointed out sections of her paper and told him what he should copy. Eventually she whispered him information. Finally she actually took his pencil and wrote some answers on his paper.

³ All of the desks in school are two person desks.

Although children argue that people who give things are good, like adults children see the giving of information as more ambiguous. They say that talking about children “is good.” But when I asked about sharing information in school all children told me that it was a bad thing to do. One boy said that children “should not look” at each others’ work “because they will steal...answers.” At the same time, however, some children said that people who do not let their friends copy their work want to keep all of the A+’s to themselves. This view of cheating implies that children who refuse to cheat are immoral because they are stingy. Moreover, many children said that they let others copy their work because they “feel empathy” when other children are struggling. This empathy also prompts children to give material goods, implying that those who do not share information, or goods, are bad.

Giving Between Friends

Considering children’s negative evaluations of other children who do not give, it should not be surprising that children are particularly careful to share with their friends. In this small village children played every day in multi-age multi-gender play groups. Nevertheless, when I told children to draw their friends during interviews, for the most part they only drew children of the same gender who were relatively close in age. In fact, considering the fact that people pay no attention to chronological age, it is somewhat remarkable that out of the 104 times that children mentioned a friend, 85% of the friends children named were within one year of their age and 99% were within two years.⁴ For example, Sisina, a nine year old girl, drew four other ten-year-old girls and a seven-year-old girl as her friends. Ten-year-old George drew one friend, a nine-

⁴ According, at least, to the yellow cards that I use to determine how old the children are.

year-old boy. Ten-year-old Jon drew six boys between the ages of nine and twelve. Catherine, eleven years old, drew four girls between the ages of ten and thirteen.

The children who broke this pattern, moreover, named as their friends children of the opposite gender as opposed to children farther apart in age. Boys and girls did sometimes behave as friends. Numerous girls drew as their friend a boy whom the children identified as “*kiben*,” or effeminate. In addition, a ten-year-old boy let another ten-year-old girl ride his bike and then offered to let her borrow it whenever she wanted. I frequently saw a fourteen-year-old boy and an eleven-year-old girl hanging out together. They even saved money together to buy some popcorn. Although children typically identify other children of the same gender as their friends, children do have some cross-gender friendships.

Children stress the importance of giving to their friends. Hence, as one child responded when I asked him if he ever got tired of his friends asking him for things, “but they are my friends!” Similarly, a boy “does not” get tired of his friends always asking him for things “because they are my friends.” As one girl explained, if she did not share with a friend the friend would “talk to everyone. And I would hate her and [then] she won’t be my friend.” A nine-year old boy agreed, stating that if he does not give children “won’t be my friends.”

Hence, children determine who is friends with whom at least partly by who shares with whom. As a ten-year-old girl explained, while children who are not her friends often lie and refuse to share, her friends always share. Gideon said that he was not friends with a boy close to his age “because he is greedy.” Another boy was not friends with a girl because she “always argues with me...about food.” Jason and Mōji are friends because they “always eat” together.

Many children, moreover, admitted that they selectively shared with their friends. One nine-year-old girl said that she would share with her friend Sisina but that she would not give to a fourteen-year-old boy.

“Why?” I asked.

“I hate him,” the nine-year-old said.

“Why do you hate him?”

“He always hits me.”

Similarly, a boy said that he would not give to some other boys because “they are bad.”

“Why are they bad” I asked.

“They are always hating me.”

A third boy said that he would give to another boy he named as his friend but not to a girl whom he called “a pest” and who always argued with him about food. Another boy said that he would not give to children who “are not friends.”

Friendships can be made and broken through sharing. One girl said she was best friends with another girl because they frequently ate pandanus together. A trio of older girls (eleven and twelve) bombarded a friend of theirs with questions about whether she had any candy (this friend had recently returned from the capital where sweets are plentiful). They then accused their friend of lying when the friend said no. Two or three girls who were friends stored marbles together and then shared them when they played. Sarah explained that sometimes she gets angry at her friends “when they are greedy.” An eleven-year-old referred to two younger boys who “hate each other...because Tirol took George’s toy.”

In my interactions with children I also experienced the friendship that sharing brings as well as the problems that not sharing provokes. Nomi, a temperamental ten-year-old, alternatively loved me or hated me depending on whether I had recently filmed her or given her anything. She overcame one of her bouts of anger at me after I shared some sprouted coconut. Numerous children frequently told me they hated me when I refused to videotape them while those with whom I had recently worked clung to me and wanted to play.

It took me a while, however, to really learn the lesson that if I wanted to be friends with children I had to give. I had a stack of blank CDs and DVDs in my house for backing up data. One day four girls came to my house, Catherine (eleven), Caroline (eleven), Nomi (ten), and Jaki (fourteen). They asked me for a blank CD. I asked them why they wanted one. They did not explain. I considered the situation for a while and then decided that I needed the discs to back-up data. So I said no. The girls looked at me, astonished. ‘You aren't going to give us one?’

‘No.’

‘Really?’ One girl asked.

Another girl asserted ‘but you have so many!’ I stated that I needed them. Eventually the children walked off.

I thought that was the end of the incident but instead it was just beginning. While Nomi and Jaki quickly either forgot about the incident or did not care, Catherine and Caroline refused to speak to me again. Walking home from school one day they locked arms with each other and stopped, waiting for me to walk ahead of them before moving again. I asked them what was wrong. They said that they hated me. I asked why. They did not respond. This scenario went on for about a week until I managed to badger them into telling me *why* they hated me. Caroline

said it was because I did not give them a CD. Then, realizing my mistake, I attempted to explain. I went into detail about how the CDs were for work. Then I apologized for not giving them a CD. This seemed to do the trick, and Caroline and Catherine were friends with me again.

Consequently, my relationship with children, and children's relationships with their friends, depend on creating images of generosity. These images require either actually giving or, as among adults, hiding goods and lying. And indeed, children also sometimes hide things and lie to protect their image among those whose opinions are important to them.

Manipulating Signs and Hiding

By middle childhood and possibly earlier children are able and willing to manipulate signs and hide goods to save face. For example, an eight-year-old played with avoiding giving. He was chewing on a lollipop stick. It just so happened that he was chewing on an empty stick since he had finished the lollipop, but nine-year-old Liti did not have that information. Liti walked toward Trint and gestured to her mouth to indicate that he should share with her.

Trint, having fun, pretended that he indeed had food but was not going to give. "Why don't you just collect sprouted coconut?" Trint criticized. This particular candy (*ametema*) is made from the meat of sprouted coconuts. Adults often make children gather some of the coconuts before they make them the candy. By asking Liti why she didn't collect sprouted coconuts Trint implicitly criticized the fact that she asked for food, imitating adults who might in a joking fashion ask why others are not going fishing or collecting breadfruit. He thereby tried to hide his pretend refusal by changing the focus from his lollipop to Liti's laziness.

"Dude," Liti responded under her breath, "you are really greedy." Liti recognized his response as the attempt to avoid giving that it was.

“Here,” Trint said grinning, still playing. He pulled the stick out of his mouth and offered it to her, laughing at his own cleverness when Liti realized that there was no candy. He had tricked her and made her think that he was refusing to give. Through his play, moreover, he showed his ability to avoid giving in a less explicit, more hidden manner than saying, “No.”

Similarly, although ten-year-old Nomi said “I won’t” when Jaki asked for her bracelet, she included this refusal in a number of maneuvers through which she attempted to divert the conversation away from the fact that she was refusing and onto Jaki’s request.^{xii}

“Nomi, give me the bracelet on your arm.”⁵

“But what about me?” Nomi protested. Unlike adults’ semiotic manipulations, Nomi’s speech did not hide her refusal. Nonetheless, her plea for fairness, that if she gave she would not have a bracelet for herself, did justify her refusal to give in a way that Rōka’s “no” did not.

“But where is your bracelet?” Jaki asked. Nomi successfully diverted Jaki’s attention away from getting the bracelet to discussing the issue of whether Nomi would still have a bracelet after she gave. At the same time, however, by using the second person possessive, Jaki spoke as if the bracelet Nomi was wearing was no longer hers, implying that it should be Jaki’s.

“Here on my ankle,” Nomi responded, ignoring Jaki’s implied argument that the bracelet she had is no longer hers. Then she again diverted Jaki’s attention from her demand for Nomi’s bracelet. “I said, what about me?”

“Ask again.” I.e., Nomi should ask her parents for another bracelet.

“Eeeeh!” Nomi protested.

⁵ Jaki misspoke; the bracelet was actually on Nomi’s ankle.

Jaki laughed, giving the interaction a humorous quality that, as with adults, worked to belie the seriousness of her demands and statements. “Go and tell your mother to buy you yours.” By now Jaki was almost certainly joking. Children do not tell their parents to buy them bracelets.

“Jaki, I won’t.” Although Nomi spoke more directly than an adult would, she followed her refusal to give with additional justification for why she would not give. “You are going to share my bracelet,” she complained, a common excuse children offered for not giving. If Nomi gave her bracelet to Jaki and Jaki then shared the bracelet with someone else, Nomi would never get the bracelet back.

“With whom?” Jaki protested.

“With people.”

“Which people?”

“Ah...,” Nomi hesitated. “Barbra.” Jaki then gave up, Nomi had successfully diverted attention away from the fact that she refused toward the problem of what Jaki would do with the bracelet.^{xiii}

Lying

Just as children in middle childhood can strategically manage their refusals, they also lie. Since children, like Rōka, frequently wander around with food and do not have many possessions, they have fewer opportunities than adults to lie about goods. It is pragmatically difficult to say “there is no more pancake” if one happens to be eating a pancake. But children frequently lie about other things in efforts to save face.

For example, ten-year-old Kinta lied to save herself from embarrassment. I was sitting with a young woman and a teenager when I saw Kinta walking by on the road.

Seeing that Kinta was late for rehearsal I called out, “What are you doing?”

“Going to the north side,” Kinta responded.

I assumed that Kinta was headed to the children’s rehearsal in the Protestant church, located on the north side of the village. “If you are going to rehearsal you are late!”

“Huh?”

“If you are going to rehearsal you are late,” I repeated.

“I am not going to rehearsal,” Kinta stated firmly.

The women and I looked at Kinta with surprise. “Are you a member of Seventh Day Adventist?” Kinta’s nineteen or twenty year old cousin asked pointedly. “Assembly of God?” she continued, naming churches on the south side of the village. The cousin was clearly trying to make Kinta admit she was lying about not going to rehearsal. We all knew that Kinta went to the Protestant church.

“No,” Kinta said.

“So why aren’t you going to rehearsal?”

“Kinta,” the teenager said, “where are you going?”

“Huh?” Kinta asked.

“Where are you going?”

“The north side.”

“And?”

“To rehearsal,” the cousin broke in. “She is lying (*riab*), saying that she isn’t going to rehearsal.” Since there was rehearsal that day and Kinta almost always went, it seems likely that the cousin was right and Kinta was indeed going to rehearsal. When I told her that she was late, however, she backtracked and lied so as to not be in the embarrassing position of going to something that she had already missed. Kinta’s older cousin and teenage neighbor tried to force Kinta to admit her supposed lie. But even in the face of the cousin’s logic, (if you are not a member of Seventh Day Adventist or Assembly of God, which we know you are not, then you are going to rehearsal, so therefore you are lying), Kinta held on to her story.^{xiv}

Like Kinta, most children are very good at holding on to their assertions and embellishing their lies such that, in the face of evidence to the contrary, they raise a reasonable degree of doubt and get themselves out of trouble. The principal told me that I was not allowed to let any children into the room in which I worked since it contained batteries for the solar panels. One day when a boy came in I told him to get out. He jumped out. Then he claimed that he had never come into the room. We argued for a couple of minutes and the boy held his ground even in the midst of a blatant falsehood. Catie told me that she was seven years old. I told her that her mom said she was six. ‘She lied,’ Catie immediately responded. To back up her claim, she said an obviously untrue statement, ‘I am in grade eight.’ Catie may not have been very good at embellishing her lie in a believable manner, but she clearly tried.

Sometimes children even constructed reputations of ignorance and denied knowledge that they clearly had. For example, one day Kinta asked Jilaba if the holiday that we had just celebrated was Mother’s Day or Father’s Day.

I challenged Kinta's supposed lack of knowledge. 'You don't know?' I asked. It seemed next to impossible for Kinta to not know that we had just celebrated Mother's Day. To honor their mothers all the children including Kinta put wreaths of candy on their mothers' heads. In addition, the men served food at church, a startling reversal of gender roles that should make an impression.

Jilaba stated that Kinta was "lying about not knowing."

Kinta held her ground, stating that she saw all of the men serving food and thought that it was father's day.

"Liar," Jilaba muttered under her breath.

In addition, contrary to adult arguments that children do not hide, children report that they frequently tried to avoid giving through adult techniques such as hiding their goods or lying. For example, I asked nine-year-old Lena, "Do some kids lie and say that they are out of candy?"

"Yeah," Lena said.

"Who?"

"Me."

I started laughing. "Do you lie?"

"Yeah," Lena said, laughing herself.

"Who did you lie to?"

"To Sisina," she said, naming a nine-year-old girl with whom she often played.

Similarly, eight-year-old Kurt talked about a time when he tried to avoid giving. "I hid it [food]...and Jason came around my back and saw it." Kyle talked about a time when he saw Roni hiding food. I gave ten-year-old George a bracelet and asked him how he would manage to keep

it. He said that he would “lie” and say that the bracelet he was wearing was someone else’s so that he would not be forced to give the bracelet away. I passed nine-year-old Jason on the road eating a banana. When I asked him what he was eating, he stuck the banana behind his back, responding, “nothing.” On another occasion, Kinta called out for George’s yo-yo that he was carrying as he walked down the street. He said that it was not his. Similarly, eleven-year-old Nomi once asked me for a balloon that she saw on my floor. I gave it to her but told her not to tell anyone else that she got it from me. ‘What will you say when they ask where you got it?’ I asked. ‘I found it by the lagoon’ she replied instantly, showing an ability creatively and convincingly prevaricate on the spot.

Twelve-year-old Carl walked to his neighbor’s house shortly after eating fish. Lance, fourteen, apparently smelled the fish on Carl’s hands. “Hey Carl man,” Lance said, “You didn’t bring my fish?”

Carl ignored him.

“Carl,” Lance said again. “Carl. Go and bring me my fish dude.” Like the younger children discussed earlier, Lance demanded repeatedly and insistently, eventually forcing Carl to respond.

“The fish is gone,” Carl said, even though according to the video there were still some fish in the house when he left.

Lance tried one more time. “Hey Carl! Go and bring me my fish.” Carl turned away and Lance finally gave up.

Did Carl lie? I talked to him about this video afterwards. At first, echoing the reasoning of adults, he claimed that he told the truth (*mool*) because there were only fish heads left and

those were for his older sister. Then he hesitated and said that it was a lie (*riab*). Then he changed his mind again and claimed he said the truth (*mool*). Regardless of how one classifies his utterance, however, it is clear that he tried to present an image of generosity.

At twelve years old Carl was a mature child and, one might say, too old to be seen as too immature to feel shame or to know how to lie. Nonetheless, these older children are the ones on whom adults rely on the most, counting on both their maturity and their childhood to send them on errands that adults find shameful. Still seen as young enough by adults to do what they avoid, Carl and other significantly younger children are clearly concerned with face and hide and lie to save it.^{xv}

The Struggle For Power

Even while children work to create bonds of solidarity with their friends and hide and lie to project an image of generosity, they also struggle to maintain and increase their power over others, their place in the hierarchy of children. In this struggle for power they need to refuse as opposed to give; they need to assert themselves, reveal what they have, and impose their desires on others. Only by not-hiding can they manage to save face, their status as a child whom others respect.

Power, Fear, and Age

In one sense, all children are equal because they are all children. At the same time, however, all children would agree that some children are higher in rank than others (although no two children would agree on the exact specifics.) Children see status as determined by the interrelated characteristics of age and strength, both of which combine into the ability to instill

fear and obedience. In other words, the child who would win in a fight is the child with more power. Children of lower rank are scared of those of higher rank.

Ideally speaking, those who are older are superior both by virtue of being older and by virtue of the fact that since they are older, they are bigger. Hence, children view their fear of older children as not only inevitable but also appropriate. Not a single child was ashamed to name for me older children whom they feared. Interestingly, for the most part they also named older children of the same gender, suggesting that the struggle for power is more pronounced within as opposed to between genders. Eleven-year-old Kyle, who claimed that he was not scared of most other children and dismissed numerous other boys as “*kiben* (effeminate)” and weak, said that of course he was scared of two fourteen-year-old boys. “But they are old!” He exclaimed. Nine-year-old Lena said that she feared her older cousin Kara who lived in the same house “because she is old.” She also “fear[ed] [Lance] because he is older than me.” Sarah (ten) said that she would not talk back to her sister Jilaba (twelve) because Jilaba “is older.”

Although children generally feel that their fear of older children is acceptable and appropriate, they nonetheless do not want to be seen as children who are scared. In particular, although they sometimes try to present themselves as strong enough not to fear children who are only a little older, they really do not want to be seen as scared of children who are similar in age. Since the older-younger hierarchy is often conceptualized as a stronger-weaker hierarchy, admitting to being scared means that one is lower in rank regardless of relative age. Moreover, since few children know how old they are, part of the way that they determine relative age is through positioning one child as stronger than the other. For example, one boy justified his fear

of another boy by stating that the latter was older. According to my calculations, however, the two boys were chronologically the same age.

A common insult was to state that a child was scared of another. The insulted child would, more often than not, vehemently deny the claim. One nine-year-old boy teased a ten-year-old girl, stating, “Ajiji said he wasn't scared of you. He said your penis [fuck you].” The girl's response, “Ajiji is an asshole,” demonstrated her annoyance that Ajiji did not fear her and her attempt to show that she did not fear him. Similarly, one fourteen-year-old boy teased his younger sister by stating that she was scared of her friend.

“[You are] scared of Cate,” he accused.

“Am not. [You are] scared of Jotol,” the sister responded, naming a boy close to her brother's age. “Scared of Jotol!”

“Scared of Cate.”

“Scared of Mama!” The sister exclaimed, treading onto dangerous ground. Children are supposed to be scared of their parents. “Are you scared of Mama?”

“I am not,” the boy denied, caught in a bind between disrespecting his mother and asserting his strength.

“Mama!” the sister tattled to their mother. “He says that he isn't scared of you!”

Like these two siblings, children frequently boast about their strength and how they are not scared of other children, even children whom they really should fear because they were older. Ten-year-old Kinta, for example, said that she was scared of “some” older children, but only because she had not yet sized up their strength. “There are a lot of older children that I am afraid of, but I am not afraid of Caroline, Catherine, and Theresa,” Kinta said, naming three girls

only a year or two older than her but in the next grade in school. “Because,” she explained, “I have fought with them.”

“Did you win?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“Did you fight with Catherine?”

“The two of us,” Kinta paused. “I am not, I am not afraid of Catherine because the two of us wrestled and I really went, BAM! I immediately threw her down, on the ground. As for Caroline, the two of us were doing handstands and I just took her head and pushed it into the wall. You could say that we, um, you know that lock that goes CLICK?”

“Yeah.”

“I pushed Caroline’s head into it.”

“But the other kids, are you scared of them because maybe they will win?”

“Yeah. But if I fight with them then I am not scared of them.” Kinta, like other children, understood her position in respect to others to be largely a matter of age. But this power of age is instantiated, and can be overcome, through physical strength.

The Power of Signs and Words

Despite children’s discussion of the importance of strength and fighting I saw relatively few physical fights. Co-resident children frequently hit each other, such as when one nine-year-old hit her sister during a game. But these squabbles rarely developed into full-fledged fights. I only heard about two fully developed fist-fights during my year of fieldwork. Children did often roughhouse and compete with each other in games such as baseball, basketball, tag, handstands, jump rope.

Just like when adults scold children, however, children threaten violence much more often than they actually commit it. Through these threats they attempt to establish their status not through physical prowess but through semiotic skill that serves as an index of that prowess and reveals that they are able to force others to adhere to their desires. Hierarchy, although embedded in relative age, strength, and power, “is emergent and interactionally achieved” through linguistic practices (Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012:382). “If you ‘a’ ‘n’ ‘i’ ‘j’ I will punch your mouth,” Jilaba threatened her younger cousin who had just sworn on God (*Anij*) that she was telling the truth.⁶ “I want to stick you with a sharp object!” a boy yelled at another boy who did not throw him the ball. “If you don’t film me I am going to hit you,” he threatened a boy who was wearing the camera on his head. “I am going to throw rocks at your head,” a boy said to another boy who took his shells. Through these threats children imply that others should be scared of them, they try to gain the upper hand and, consequently, superior rank.

This semiotic battle for power carries the shadow of force behind it and spreads across numerous domains beyond simply threats of violence. Any semiotic effort through which children attempt to force their desires on others is also a play in the struggle for rank, an attempt to raise some children and lower others. Although children’s view of power in many ways is in accordance with, rather than opposed to, adult constructions of hierarchy, the way in which children go about establishing power is much more explicit. Adults with more power are similarly able to issue commands and assert their will over others. Nonetheless, adults ask politely, use semiotic manipulations to mask their requests and demands, and avoid avert conflict.

⁶ Swearing on God (*Anij*) is bad. For more information see Chapter Three.

Children, however, often invite conflict. They need to invite conflict if they are to maintain their status, their own face as children who cannot be pushed around, who are powerful or, at the very least, are not so weak that others can push them around. Children's behavior presents a challenge to Brown and Levinson's (1978:70) claim that utterances that threaten another's wants or autonomy are intrinsically face-threatening. Among children threatening others' wants are often a necessary way to establish their face, a face that depends as much on power as it does on solidarity.

Revealing

One central place where this power struggle takes place is in the realm of exchange. Through showing off, demanding things, refusing to give, and criticizing others who do not give children try to stake a claim to importance, asserting that they do not fear others and need not acquiesce. Many of these semiotic battles take place between children of clearly different ages. With their friends children often want to present an appearance of generosity. They care less, however, about the goodwill of children more distant in age, meaning that these are the children with whom they often choose to express their power. Indeed, older children need to claim power to reaffirm their rank as older just as younger children protest others' demands so as to assert that even though they might be younger, they are still children and on some level equals.

Revealing Goods

Part of establishing their face includes doing something that is taboo for adults, carrying food in plain sight. Children and some adults interpret such behavior as showing off, as an attempt to increase status by having things that one is not forced to share.

For example, as we have seen Rōka wandered around near other children with a pancake that he had no intention of sharing. Similarly, during pandanus season all the children wandered around eating pandanus. On innumerable occasions I saw children walking and eating limes. At school children constantly snacked on gum and candy. They also frequently wandered around munching on the meat of sprouted coconuts or on uncooked ramen and rice. While Western readers may find such behavior unremarkable, in the RMI where one is expected to offer food to everyone one sees and where among adults such actions constitute the pinnacle of impoliteness and meanness, children's transparent displays of their food are striking.

On the surface, children's actions seem hypocritical since children, like adults, condemn people who eat while walking. With the exception of ten-year-old Kinta who said that one can walk and eat on the south-side of the island but not on the north-side where the chief lived, every single child eight and older judged walking while eating food such as fish and rice to be bad. As Kurt, age eight, explained to me, if he ate while walking people would say, 'look at that boy who is walking and eating!' and he would feel ashamed.

Unlike adults, however, children distinguish between walking with meal food such as fish and rice and walking with snack foods such as candy, pandanus, coconuts, papayas, lime, raw ramen, or raw rice.

"Is it ok to walk and eat?" I asked.

"It's bad," said Karistin.

"With pandanus?"

"No problem."

Ten other children agreed that walking while eating snack food was fine.

Such views and behavior changed as children grew out of childhood. One evening I asked some children if I could eat pandanus while walking. Twelve-year-old Jilaba responded, “but it is food,” implying that pandanus was no different from fish or rice. Eight-year-old Regina and eleven-year-old Kyle retorted that eating pandanus was fine. The children argued briefly as the younger children defended their position and Jilaba asserted her more mature perspective. Eventually, I asked why many children say that eating pandanus while walking is fine. Because, Jilaba said scornfully, “they are children and they don’t know anything.” Jilaba seemed to have grown into the reasoning of adults. Nonetheless, Jilaba herself occasionally wandered around childishly snacking on uncooked rice or limes. Despite her maturity she was still largely in the children’s world and often behaved as such.

Children’s general belief that walking and eating snacks is morally acceptable does not entirely explain why they walk with food considering the seemingly negative consequences of their actions. Rōka could have easily avoided his confrontation with Kyle had he refrained from wandering around with a pancake. Rōka did not need to join the children when he did. He could have sat in the cookhouse. For some reason, therefore, he chose to wander into a group of children as opposed to eating his food in a more private location.

As with Rōka, other children’s transparent displays of their possessions inevitably lead to demands to share. Kinta was sucking on a pandanus fruit as she walked up to a group of children. Nomi then demanded, “Hey! Kinta give me my pandanus! Kinta, you should give me my pandanus.” Nine-year-old Mōjro came up to a house while eating pandanus, prompting eleven-year-old Kyle to say, “Why didn’t you bring me my food?” Ten-year-old Karistin once walked out of our house with a plate of donuts and found herself immediately surrounded by children

demanding their share. Kinta and Karistin both demanded a sweetened drink from their classmate Bidok who was drinking as he strolled along the road to school. Revealing possessions forced children to respond to requests to give that they could have otherwise avoided.

Conspicuous Possession and Status

Children put themselves in such situations at least partly because displaying their possessions gives them status. Although it might just be possible to argue that five and six-year-olds cannot restrain themselves and do not think about the consequences of conspicuous possession, by middle childhood all children know that others expect them to give and that if one child sees their goods they will soon be surrounded by a mob of children asking, begging, and demanding. Once, for example, I hesitated when Jaki and Jilaba asked me to bring my dinner outside, as opposed to eating inside, so that I could stay with them and gossip. The girls interpreted my hesitation as a fear to eat in public and told me that all would be fine because they would not ask for my food.

For children possession is simultaneously dangerous and powerful because having things is admirable. When a research assistant analyzed a video of a child bringing his lollipop to church she told me that the child did it to “show off with food (*kamejeji*).” *Kamejeji*, she asserted, is childish form of behavior. Similarly, children frequently criticized other children who blatantly displayed their wealth as “show-offs” indicating that they interpreted acts of conspicuous possession as deliberate attempts to let other children know that they had goods. When eight-year-old Tito paid no attention to his older brother Lance’s demand for his ball Lance muttered under his breath, “ugh, a show-off.” Lance also criticized his younger cousin for talking about money, “that one just loves money. Show-off.” One child told me that a friend of

his showed off “with his food.” Karistin said about another girl that she “always shows off and doesn’t give me my food.”

Children are only criticized as show-offs if they both display their things and do not give. For example, once Hearol criticized Lena for showing-off “with her food,” arguing that when he said, “give me my food...[Lena] is always greedy.” Here, Hearol criticized Lena as a show-off not simply for having food, but for showing her food to others without sharing it. These remarks imply that children interpret each other’s conspicuous possession of goods as attempts to achieve higher social status through having but not giving, through showing off.

In support of children’s interpretations, two inseparable nine-year-old neighbors saw the type of food they ate for lunch as important to their public image and relationship with each other. Liti was hanging out near the school after lunch when she saw Angela walking by. Liti signaled for Angela to come closer. “What did you eat?” Liti asked.

“Rice. You?” Angela asked.

Liti smiled widely and said under her breath. “Cheese balls.”

Angela automatically started to respond. “And what els...” She abruptly broke off her sentence as she realized what was going on. Liti clearly asked what Angela ate to interpolate Angela into a standard interaction on Jajikon. People constantly ask each other what they ate and generally expect to get trite responses. “What did you eat?” “Rice, you?” “Breadfruit.” Everybody has rice for a meal, the interesting information is what people get to eat in addition to rice. For reasons that have been discussed in detail, like Angela adults often hide the more interesting part of their meal.

Liti, however, had no interest either in politely starting a conversation or in what Angela actually ate. Moreover, Liti did not want to hide the interesting part of her meal. Rather, the whole point of the conversation was to give Liti an excuse to tell Angela that she ate cheese balls without blatantly showing off.

It worked. Angela rushed to reveal the treats that she ate. “Hey, it wasn’t rice girl!”

“Yeah?” Liti asked.

“Um, bananas and salt fish.” Not nearly as exciting as cheese balls, but nevertheless a more respectable lunch than rice. Both she and Liti tied their image partly to what they ate, an image that required revealing, rather than hiding, things that the other lacked.^{xvi}

Liti manipulated the situation so that she could reveal her good fortune without being criticized as a show-off. She seems to have succeeded. Angela rushed not to insult her but to try to show that she also had a good lunch. Younger children often more blatantly and obviously paraded their goods thereby drawing criticism upon themselves. For example, Maji, a six-year-old, blatantly called her younger cousin Kiti’s attention to the fact that Maji had food that she did not share. While eating a lime Maji taunted her cousin, “I said, is your mouth watering?”

Kiti did not answer.

Maji seemed to want Kiti to admit that she wanted what Maji had. “You didn’t say,” Maji accused.

“I hate you because you aren’t giving me my food,” Kiti stated calmly. Maji’s attempt to show off backfired. She showed off so obviously that Kiti criticized her for being greedy.

“I won’t show you the ball,” Maji countered, trying to further assert her power through proclaiming that she had something else (a ball) that Kiti did not.

This attempt backfired as well. “But I know where it is!” Kiti claimed.

Maji shifted course. “Hey, that’s the devil’s food, food from the ground!” She accused Kiti of eating something covered in sand.

Kiti stood her ground and threw the accusation right back at Maji. “You, you will be devilized (infected by the devil’s food.)”

“You there.”

“You.”

“You.”

Kiti changed the topic and pressed her attack. “Okay, don’t come to the house.” Just as Maji tried to do with food, Kiti expressed her power by asserting that she had something Maji did not.

“But it’s my house!” Maji yelled. Maji lived on Jajikon and Kiti was merely visiting from the capital. It was indeed Maji’s house.

Kiti, however, was not concerned with practical issues such as who actually lived where. Winning does not require truth. “Your house is that small one.”

“This is my house.

“That’s not your house,” Kiti incorrectly but dominantly said. “Your house is the small one.”

“This is my house!” Maji tried another tactic. “Ok, return to your house.”

“Okay, go to your house,” Kiti countered. She clearly won the battle. Maji had begun by trying to increase her power by showing off. Kiti insulted her and then eventually claimed access and control over the house, showing Maji that she should not try to withhold things from Kiti or

raise herself up to the status of an older child who has the power to refuse. Maji was clearly bigger than Kiti. She was also older chronologically. This interaction also shows how words can counter age and the appearance of physical strength.^{xvii}

Just as among adults, children's face depends not on what they actually have but on what they appear to have. In contrast to adults, however, maintaining or increasing their self-image seems to sometimes require, or at the very least benefit from, revealing possessions. Consequently, children cannot just have goods. They also need to display them because being a successful child in Jajikon requires transparent communication of their possessions. Walking with goods establishes children as people who are players in the social game of life, as children who must be taken seriously by other children, if only because they might have something that others want.

Making a Stand

Conspicuous possession almost never ends with children freely walking around with their food or goods. Rather, part of what makes conspicuous possession powerful is that it presents a challenge. Children's possession dares other children to respond, to demand a gift, to demand recognition as an equal and important child. Ignoring conspicuous possession is not a neutral act but rather an expression of weakness or a lack of solidarity. Conspicuous possession starts a cycle of challenges since when children demand goods what others have, by demanding they too dare the other child to refuse and face their wrath.

Through all of these challenges—conspicuous possession, demands, refusals, and criticisms—children battle for power and control. As the following analyses will show, the form that these challenges take and the way in which they play out depends not only on children's

stage of life but also on the relative age between interlocutors. For all children, completely avoiding conflict and all possibility for conflict would in and of itself be a face-threatening act. Children who never issue a challenge have no power, no right to be respected by others.

Rōka's Obstinacy

A couple of days after Rōka and Kyle quarreled about the pancake Rōka walked into church while sucking on a lollipop. As with all acts of conspicuous possession, Rōka's behavior presented a challenge to the other children around.

His classificatory sibling Kinta, ten-years-old, first saw his lollipop and demanded that he fulfill his obligation to share with her, a fellow child and his elder kinswoman. "Give me my food (*tok kijō*)." Her demand was forceful, to the point, and direct, representing the exact opposite of adults' ambiguous, indirect requests that make it possible to claim that they never asked for anything. Rather than adding politeness markers such as 'please (*jouj im*)' or 'can you (*komarōñ*),' Kinta deleted as many words as possible and shortened *letok* (give me) to *tok* (towards me). Instead of saying "lollipop" which would have allowed her to avoid indicating who owned the lollipop, she used the food possessive *kij-* and put it in the first person. The food was already, or at least should be, hers.

Children and adults alike perceive this abrupt and direct way of formulating requests as an index of childish speech. My time spent with children socialized me into these childish forms of expression such that I occasionally inappropriately used them among adults. For example, one day I visited my classificatory mother. I saw that she had some cinnamon buns and demanded of her, like Kinta, "give me my food." The woman immediately scolded me not for my request

itself but for its form. When I protested that children speak in such a manner all the time, she responded that they were children but I was an adult and must speak differently.

Kinta herself was perfectly capable of asking for things in a different manner. She told me that if her grandparents sent on an errand to ask for mosquito coils she would say, “can you give me mosquito coils?” She explicitly told me that she would not say to an adult “give me mosquito coils.” Such an abrupt form of speech would be inappropriate with an adult.

But Kinta’s direct and rude form of speech was clearly appropriate with children. By speaking to Rōka in such a way, moreover, Kinta not only tried to force Rōka to give but also implicitly criticized Rōka for eating a lollipop in front of her, an older sibling, without giving. If he is to eat in front of her he must suffer the consequences, he must give.

Rōka, however, did not want to recognize Kinta’s claim. He ignored her.

After a while Kinta, frustrated, demanded again, “all of it (*aolepen*).”

Rōka ignored her.

Kol, Rōka’s ten-year-old non co-resident classificatory cousin, heard the chatter and wanted some of the lollipop for himself. “Okay, give it to me so that I can bite it.”

Rōka ignored him. This strategy, ignoring, is children’s most common strategy to get out of giving. Less explicit than speaking, it represents children’s attempt to have their cake and eat it too, to keep their goods and power without explicitly saying no and inviting criticism. I only rarely heard adults ignore requests, reflecting the likelihood that adults do not view ignoring a demand as a particularly polite or effective way to get out of giving.

For Rōka as for many children ignoring demands was ineffective since it simply caused Kinta and Kol to repeat their demands and exert more pressure on him to give. “Okay,” said Kol,

“I hate you. I am going to count to five,” he threatened, speaking as an older child who has the right to compel and scold a younger child. “One, two three four...”

“Come,” Rōka said, giving in to Kol’s threat. “Okay, you should come.” He gave Kol a brief lick of the lollipop. Perhaps he gave to Kol instead of Kinta because Kol was also male and Rōka was more concerned with Kol’s good will. Perhaps Kol more effectively voiced authority, a distinct possibility since many of the younger children claimed that they were scared of Kol.

Kinta, of course, protested at this unfair treatment. “Hey Rōka, give me my food (*letok kijed*)!” This time instead of using the first person singular *kijō* (my food) she used the first person inclusive plural *kijed* (our food). My research assistants consistently translated similar uses of the first person plural not as “our” but as “my.” As a rhetorical strategy, the first person plural implies that children’s requests, feelings, or actions are not idiosyncratic but shared by others, lending Kinta’s demand moral force.

Tōrino, another ten-year-old boy, overheard the interaction. Apparently he also thought that it was unfair to give to Kol and not Kinta. He also demanded that Rōka give. “Hey Rōka, give Kinta her food.”

As for Kol, he was not satisfied with one brief lick. “Hey Rōka, give me my food.”

“You won’t watch us playing tag,” Kinta threatened at the same time, trying to somehow gain the authority that Kol had managed to display.

“Don’t give Kol food!” For some reason Tōrino was on Kinta’s side.

Rōka ignored them. For 10.4 seconds he had peace as the children focused on another conversation. Eventually, however, Kinta tried again, stretching her hands out. “Rōka!”

For 6.4 seconds Rōka ignored her. Finally Kinta demanded again, “Rōka!”

“It is here with me,” Rōka said, implying that the lollipop was going to stay with him. He had tried to ignore her but she continued to insist. Kinta’s repeated, direct demands compelled Rōka to speak, to refuse more explicitly than he had before and in a manner that would be shameful among adults.

“Hey, if you take it your grandfather will hit you,” Kinta threatened, trying to give herself more authority by referring to a higher power.

“Just a little,” Kol pleaded, wanting a little bit more.

Rōka had had enough. He was not going to give, not to Kinta and not again to Kol. “I won’t! I won’t!” he cried. A terribly face-threatening response coming from an adult, coming from Rōka this refusal positioned him as powerful enough to resist older children. It also positioned him as stingy but Rōka seemed more concerned with power and less concerned with solidarity.

With Kinta he was successful. She pleaded one last time, “my food!” Then she gave up.

Kol, however, would not let Rōka go. “What is the name of that kind of thing again? Hey, I am only going to bite off a little,” he pleaded.

Tōrino added his voice to the mix. “Rōka dude, give me my food dude.”

“Ugh,” another child complained. “Give me my food.”

Finally, Kol gave up. Nonetheless, he could not simply walk away. He turned to Rōka one last time. “Man,” he said, “you are really stingy.

Rōka’s refusal was too dangerous for Kol to let Rōka go without a criticism. By positioning himself as powerful Rōka threatened Kol’s authority and Kol’s status as an elder who can compel fear and obedience. Perhaps Kol felt particularly threatened because he was a bossy

child who frequently made other children obey. Although all children's image is bound up with their ability to instill fear and obedience, Kol's reputation was particularly attached to his ability to command younger children. Kol's final insult gave him the last word and restored some of his rank, showing Rōka that refusing his elders does not come without a cost.^{xviii}

The Challenge of Refusing Elders and Peers

Rōka was a particularly obstinate boy. Few other children his age would have been able to resist their elders for so long. But while the scale of Rōka's defiance may be unusual, his refusal to give to his elders is not unique. Other children, both his age and older, often refused to give to older children and tried to establish their power in the process, although they did not always refuse as effectively as Rōka (or ineffectively, since Rōka invited criticisms). Tulet, a first grader, was chewing gum as she passed Kinta and Nomi. Kinta we already know. Nomi was her friend, also ten-years-old. Although Nomi was chronological older than Tulet, technically Tulet was older in rank since she was the classificatory sister of Nomi's father. Among children, however, actual relative age is generally more important than genealogical rank.

"Tulet!" Nomi cried. "Bring me my gum. Bring me my gum," she repeated, using the imperious form of demand that we have seen is typical of children who, rather than hiding their requests, are trying to compel others to obey.

"We want to blow bubbles," Tulet objected. Less frank than Rōka's "I won't," Tulet's response nonetheless made it clear that she did not want to give.

"Okay, I want to blow bubbles too. Fine," Nomi continued, not waiting for Tulet to respond. "You won't come to watch movies." Just as the older boys and girls did with Rōka, Nomi drew on her authority as an elder to try to compel Tulet to obey.

Unlike Rōka, however, Tulet had a champion who wielded some power over Nomi. “She is lying,” Kinta said, referring to Nomi. “It’s your food because you chewed it.”

“Ugh,” Nomi complained, but she did not press the subject further. It was difficult to do so when Kinta had just implicitly criticized Nomi for trying to force a younger child to give. Although youth are supposed to obey their elders, their elders are also supposed to take care of youth and give them what they need. Elders are not supposed to take advantage of the fact that young children do not have the power to refuse.

Nomi confessed to me earlier in the year that she was scared of Kinta. This interaction reveals her fear. Kinta’s criticism of Nomi gave Kinta the upper hand and diminished Nomi’s power not only in respect to Kinta but also in respect to Tulet. At the same time, Kinta established herself as more powerful than both Nomi and Tulet. She positioned Tulet not as someone who was powerful enough to refuse, but young enough to need protection, young enough to be excused from the need to give.

Children older than first graders also blatantly refused to give. At the beginning of my fieldwork I gave nine-year-old Lena a toy to reward her for letting me follow her around all day. Other children immediately surrounded her and demanded that she share. She ignored them. The children closest to her own age, her peers, were the ones who got really mad.

“Ah Lena, you are greedy Lena. You are greedy Lena,” nine-year-old Jason insulted. He was Lena’s next door neighbor and they were in the same class in school and often played together. Clearly she should share with him.

“Lena don’t talk because you are greedy,” Roni, also in their class, accused laughing.

“You are stingy, Lena you are stingy,” Jason said again.

“Elise, Lena is stingy,” Roni said.

“Lena is stingy,” said Jason.

“Why?” I asked.

“She doesn’t give her toy to us so that we can hold it,” Jason explained.

Lena should have given to these children who were her peers, the children close in solidarity. By not giving, she threatened the solidarity between them. Roni and Jason could not let such a challenge to their status go, a challenge that threatened to make them weaker as opposed to peers with Lena. Their criticism let Lena know that she should give to them. Their speech positioned them as, at the very least, Lena’s peers, at the most, stronger than she.^{xix}

Lena did not verbally speak but she did manage to keep her toy. Nonetheless, the barrage of criticisms made her seem weak just as Nomi’s acquiescence diminished her power in respect to both Kinta and Tulet. The ways in which this absence of assertive speech diminishes children helps explain why many older children, when faced with intransigent youth, scold and criticize them incessantly. Twelve-year-old Jilaba was particularly annoyed when her eight-year-old cousin Regina objected to Jilaba’s claim that she owned a magnet that Regina had found. “That girl Regina is such a stealer,” Jilaba taunted. “Hey!” Regina responded. “No way is it yours!” Jilaba then spent the next ten minutes reestablishing herself as superior in the face of this affront to her authority. She said that that Regina, by wearing her baby sister’s small shirt, was “trying to be sexy,” a shameful and frequent insult between girls. She called Regina a worse speller than Rōka, Regina’s younger brother. “No way!” Regina yelled. “It’s true,” Jilaba declared without foundation. (As far as I could tell Rōka had never gone to school and could not spell a word.) Jilaba continued her barrage of insults. “She doesn’t know,” taunted Jilaba. “She’s worse at

spelling than Trint” (Trint won the spelling bee for Regina’s grade). “Wow, so shameful. It’s shameful, she is older but can’t spell as well as Trint....you are trying to be so sexy but your gums are too big... hey, the big-gummed girl... hey the sexy girl... you smell like poop.”

Eventually, Jilaba tired of her taunts. Regina wandered off with her magnet, emblematic of the victory her refusal gave her in her battle to be recognized as an equal among children. Jilaba departed with her taunts and criticisms ringing in Regina’s ears, reminding Regina that however much she refuses Jilaba will always be older and Regina will always fear her.

Strategically Refusing Those Who are Younger

Most of the time, older children try not to explicitly refuse their peers. Indeed, even Lena never actually said “no,” she simply ignored all of the demands to give. But older children do selectively share with their peers while ignoring or refusing those who were younger, choosing to strengthen their bonds of solidarity with some and their power over others. On their part, younger children often demand that older children give, thereby positioning themselves as equal enough to be able to ask (children do not typically demand things from adults.) These younger children do not, however, criticize older children when they do not share, showing how direct, demanding speech both reflects and creates power hierarchies among children.

For example, ten-year-old Kol found himself besieged by demands from younger children to give.

“Kol!” Caje, a first-grader, cried.

“Kol, give me my food dude (*tok kijō lo*),” another first-grader exclaimed. Like the older children discussed previously who demanded things from younger children, these first-graders demanded loudly and publically. Rather than, like adults, trying to hide their request, they

asserted their right to share, declaring that even though they may be younger they are still children and peers. Just like those older children, these younger children used direct and abrupt grammar to try to compel their elders to give. As opposed to politeness markers this child added an impoliteness marker, the vocative *lo*. Part of a group of vocatives—*liō*, *lio*, *leo*, *leō*, *le*, *le*, and *lo*— that translate roughly to “dude,” “man,” or “girl” in English, people use these vocatives when speaking informally or disrespectfully. These vocatives pepper children’s speech, such as when a child demanded of Rōka in a previously discussed episode, “Rōka dude give me my food dude.”

For his part, Kol actually initially gave to some of the children. “Get your hand ready,” he said.

But the demands kept on coming. “Kol dude, give me my food!”

“Hey, everybody has had some!” Kol protested.

The children did not agree. “Kol!”

Tōrino, the only child around Kol’s age who was there, added, “Dude, I never got any!”

“Jeez, there is only a little,” Kol complained. “The two of us,” he went on, speaking to his friend Tōrino, “will eat outside. This stuff is only for the two of us.”

While Kol made an attempt to justify his refusal to share (there was only a little food), he made no attempt to hide the fact that he would not share with most of the children. He selectively shared only with his friend, another boy similar in age. The younger children let him go without a comment. Too young to criticize him and take an authoritative stance, all they could do was demand and hope that next time he would give.^{xx}

Even individuals almost out of childhood selectively shared with their friends and made relatively little effort to create an appearance of generosity. Jaki, fourteen years old, was carrying around an open bag of uncooked rice.⁷

“My food,” her neighbor Kyle, eleven-years-old, demanded.

“Ah man, that thing (the food) will be too small. It is for the two of us to fry.” In a manner paralleling Kol’s refusal, Jaki made it clear that she would not give. Although she attempted to justify her refusal she made no attempt to hide the fact that she was selectively sharing with Jilaba. Jaki and Jilaba were among the few older girls who lived on that side of town. They were close friends.

“Just a little,” Kyle pleaded.

Jaki ignored him.

“Hey! Just a little.” This tendency to repeat demands reveals yet another way in which children’s demands differ from adults’ hidden requests. By repeating his demand Kyle not only tried to make it more difficult for Jaki to not give but he also increased the transparency of his speech.

In this case, repeating the demand did not work. Jaki ignored him. Kyle, moreover, let her go. When Rōka refused to give Kyle took it as an affront to his authority and criticized and insulted Rōka. Jaki, however, had the power of age. Kyle could not insult her and he could not compel her to give. At the same time, because she was older her refusal to give to Kyle, unlike Rōka’s refusal, was not an affront to his power and did not represent a loss of face.^{xxi}

⁷ Children occasionally munched on rice even when it was uncooked.

By displaying her rice and refusing to give, Jaki simultaneously asserted her power and marked herself as someone who was still a child. Only a child would walk around with rice. By demanding food from her, Kyle affirmed her status as a child and as someone whom, despite her age, was his peer and should share with him. She resisted, reestablishing her status and rank as an elder who has power and control.

Through conspicuous consumption and refusing to share, children establish themselves as people of power and as children whom others must respect. Other children, however, cannot simply let others walk around with possessions that they do not give. For younger children, never demanding means negating the common bond of childhood that ties children together as peers despite their difference in age. For similar-age children, permitting such behavior means denying their bonds of solidarity. Younger children who walk around and do not give to their elders challenge their elders' positions as superior. Rather than hiding their requests like adults children clearly, obviously, and repeatedly demand that others give.

These demands compel a response. Many children, even as old as fourteen, continue to not-give in obvious ways that would be inconceivable for an adult. They selectively choose to refuse more directly to children distant in age than to their friends, strategically strengthening their solidarity with some while choosing to sacrifice other relationships to the demands of maintaining power.

While younger children let older children get away with not-giving, older children cannot simply let younger children refuse, at least not by the time these younger children are five or six and are old enough to be accountable for their actions. Younger children's refusals threaten older children's status, the power to control youth afforded to children by virtue of being older.

Therefore, when younger children stand their ground and assert their equal rights as children, older children respond by chastising and criticizing them. Through direct and explicit demands, refusals, and criticisms children assert their power, thereby maintaining and increasing their face and their image as important children whom others fear.

Children's Understandings of Themselves

Involved everyday in facework that depends on refusing as well as giving, criticizing as well as allowing others to hide, it should not be surprising that children's opinions of childhood differ drastically from adult images of an amoral, innocent, and indeed purer period of life. Many children state that children are stingy, mean-spirited and frequently lie. They contrast children to adults who, children say, are moral, generous, and truthful.

Children frequently say that other children are stingy and do not care for each other. As a nine-year old girl explained, "there are a lot of children who are stingy." "Are there children who are really greedy?" I asked an eight-year-old. "There are," he said. He then went on to name numerous children in his class at school, "Jason and Chris and Trint and Hema and Yuon." Another nine-year old said that two of his friends were "stingy." Some children even admitted that they themselves do not always share. Lena said that she did not always give to Theresa because "she is always hitting me." One eleven-year-old said that even her best friend was only "a little [generous]."

"Sometimes she isn't generous?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"So it's like, what doesn't she give you?"

"My food.... If I ask, she doesn't give it to me."

This stinginess both stems from and reflects the fact that many children have “bad hearts” and hate each other. Four children said that girls hate each other more than boys, possibly reflecting the adult ideology that women hate each other more than men. Nonetheless, both girls and boys talked extensively about other children of both genders who hate and have bad hearts. Bobby said that Kyle had a “bad heart.” Another child argued that the reason why “children have bad hearts” is because they “hate each other.” Similarly, Regina said that because children “really hate each other” they are greedy and do not take care of each other like adults. Another child offered the opposite causal relationship. He explained that children have trouble in their hearts because “they do not share their food.” Regardless of whether bad hearts lead to hatred and stinginess or stinginess leads to bad hearts, children offer a much more negative view of children’s inner lives than adults.

Some of these children see other children’s badness as opposed to adults’ goodness. Adults, Lena said, “have good hearts.”

“Why do adults have good hearts?” I asked.

“They are adults. It is good between them.”

Mōjro agreed. “Adults do not know how to hate,” he declared. Walking home from school one day, he told me that children are mean but adults are generous. “They give pigs, they give so that they can fill plates with their food...” he said on another occasion.

This negative view of other children’s hearts undoubtedly relates to the fact that children frequently and blatantly refuse to give to each other just as they also frequently say that they hate each other. Adults interpret these expressions of hatred as not-serious because they are momentary (and also probably because the hate is not directed toward adults.) In some ways,

adults' interpretation seems to be accurate. Many children, like Rōka, act as if they are unaffected by others criticisms. One day I watched four boys argue and insult each other only to play together immediately afterwards. Some older children themselves agreed that child-child hate is "not real" precisely because it does not last very long. I asked ten-year-old Karistin, "are you sad when they say, 'you are really bad?'"

"Yeah," she replied.

"Are you sad for a really long time?"

"It's short."

"Are there children who tell you they hate you and are really sincere?"

"They are lying," Karistin asserted, seemingly mimicking the adult belief that child hate is not real.

Nonetheless, there are numerous indications that at least some of the time children are indeed affected and upset by these overt displays of hostility. Although Karistin said that children who say "I hate you" are lying, she also said that such declarations make her sad. Similarly, Lena and I listened together to the recording of numerous children insulting her and calling her stingy. She said, after I asked, that the insults embarrassed her.

Numerous children talked about specific children who hated them, suggesting that the children viewed these insults as significant enough to remember and report them. One eight-year-old said that he had no friends. Even a boy with whom he often played was not his friend because, "he hates me....he hates how I do at school." Another girl said that "Liji...hates me." She then went on to explain that Liji had no friends because "she is always hating people. She

hates the children of the south side [of the island]. And the children of the south side do not play with her.” Moses, ten, said that Kyle, an eleven year old he often played with, hated him.

“And Jon?” I asked.

“He also hates me.”

“What about Jefferson?”

“Some days he hates me and won’t play with me.”

“And Tito?”

“Him too.”

Many children agreed that their hatred does not necessarily last long. Nonetheless, it affected them. As Regina explained, “some girls they hated me. Diamōn, Liti, Lena. They hate me.”

“But I thought that Lena was your friend?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“She is your friend?”

“Now!” the girl exclaimed.

“Oh, but before did she hate you?”

“Yeah.”

“And you also hated her?”

“Yes, I didn’t want to pay attention to her.”

“Was it real or false hate when Lena hated you?”

“Real because she really didn’t pay attention to me.” Even though Lena’s hate did not last long and the two girls soon became friends again, Regina found Lena’s hate real and significant.

As Regina indicated, this hate did not last forever. She was friends with Lena at the time of the interview. But even though conflicts between children might be brief when compared to conflicts between adults, they nevertheless affect the children themselves. A week, three days, even one hour of conflict often seems important to children. Regina and Lena were clearly affected by other children's criticisms, however fleeting such criticisms may have been.

Finally, contrary to adult arguments that children do not lie, children say that it is the adults who do not lie and the children who do. Out of eighteen children fourteen said that adults do not lie as much as children. "No adults [lie]," ten year old Karistin said. "They only tell the truth....because they do not lie because it is bad to lie." Another child asserted that adults "know how [to lie], but they do not do it....Adults do not lie. All adults, everyone, everyone, everyone, everyone." Indeed, returning to the story about Honjo's adoptive mother who cut him with a knife, most children I spoke with were much less convinced than adults of the adoptive mother's guilt. 'Did she hit him?' I asked. 'That's what they say,' they responded. I was chatting with one woman about the story when she asserted, "children do not lie." Ten-year-old Nomi who was sitting with us immediately interjected, "they lie."

In practice, children can and do interpret specific adult actions as mean or deceptive (just as adults evaluate specific children's statements as lies even while they say that children do not lie.) For example, nine-year-old Jason originally declared that children's hearts are bad and adults' hearts are good. Then, in a response to a question, he criticized his parents for not giving him fish or bringing him soda from Majuro. He then changed his mind, stating that children are generous and adults are not. Similarly, Jilaba asserted that adults will not lie right after telling me that a bunch of women who had passed us on the road "lied" about saying that they were going

to Majuro. Nine-year-old Moses asserted that adults were truthful but then also commented on two of his older brothers in their early twenties who would lie and say that they were going to drink food but actually drank beer.

Children's commitment to an ideology that adults do not lie despite their interpretation of specific utterances reflects the fact that, just as adults do not see children as capable of meaningful deceptive action, children do not see adults as capable of meaningful deceptive action. Such a perspective is not, upon reflection, surprising. Adults feed, clothe, and take care of children. Such actions mark people as truthful among children as well as adults. Children also frequently told me that those who give "are truthful" while those who do not "are liars." Children, in contrast, frequently refuse to give to each other and criticize each other. Consequently, it makes sense that children would believe that adults in general have good reasons when they do not give (such as not having any food) whereas children's actions of not-giving and criticizing others mark them as liars who have bad hearts.

Conclusion

This discussion of children's ideologies and struggle for power runs the risk of making children's life seem more filled with difficulty than it actually is. Children give as much or more than they refuse to give, they play and forgive each other, they have friends. Not all children think that other children are stingy hating liars. Some children, particularly the older ones who are closer to adult ideologies, say that children's hearts are "good," and that children share.

Nonetheless, the fact that many children frequently commented on the meanness and stinginess of their peers reveals how children's understanding of themselves differs drastically from adults' understanding of childhood. Their comments also reveal the invisibility, among

adults, of children's struggle for power, and how things that seem unimportant to the mature are terribly important to children. The stakes of this struggle for power are high—how children speak affects whether they gain enough rank so as to avoid others' insults, whether they gain enough authority such that others will give.

Children's ideologies of childhood also reveal the significance of the distinction between peers and non-peers as well as the invisibility, among children, of adults' trials and tribulations. Both children and adults, more concerned with the opinion of their peers than they are with each other, overlook the others' mistakes, lies, and foibles. Similarly, children care more about the opinions of those similar in age (and gender) than those who are very different in age. It is the taunts of these similar-age peers that ring in their minds, declarations of hatred from friends that offend. As a result, it is largely in interactions between non-peers—both between children and adults and between older and younger children—that avoiding giving takes place.

Children's interpretations of each-others' and adults' behavior shows how semiotic ideologies vary with age. Keane (2003) argued, if we recall, that the meaning of signs depends on who people view as actors in the word and what sorts of exchanges reveal those actions. Adults interpret other adults' acts of not-giving as suspicious and insulting but interpret children's acts of not-giving as insignificant. At the same time, children have their own semiotic ideologies and they also differently interpret signs depending on whether a child or an adult acts or speaks. Children's acts of not-giving are very significant to other children—indeed they mark children not only as stingy or as liars but also as insubordinate or powerful.

While to children other children's acts of not-giving index power, adults' acts of not-giving represent an even greater power. Adults are so powerful that their acts of not-giving carry

no hint of stinginess. Adults are too high in rank to be anything but good. Ironically, therefore, as the next chapter will show, while children demand, criticize, and refuse even older children, they know that it is not their place to engage in such a struggle for power with adults. But adults constantly send children on errands to engage in these assertive forms of speech that adults avoid. Children's reconciliation of these competing needs to obey and defer reveals how these errands in which children are to do what adults cannot are a unique site in which cultural reproduction takes place.

Chapter 6: Socializing Aged Selves

Adults, we have found, believe that children feel no shame and do not hide. Therefore, adults send them on errands that adults are too ashamed to do. Children, on their part, are concerned about their image and do engage in facework. Sometimes this facework entails hiding and lying in the manner of adults. At the same time, in the children's world gaining respect and status often requires doing things that would be shameful for adults: revealing goods, demanding things, refusing to give. Engaging in such activities marks children as people of power, people whom other children should fear or, at the very least, people who do not need to fear others.

But while children work to present a face of power to their peers, they have no intention of doing so with adults. Quite the contrary, adults have the indisputable power of age. Adults' power, according to children, is not up for negotiation. Moreover, since demanding and refusing are plays in children's struggle for rank and children do not intend to contest adults' status, children prefer not to demand from or refuse adults. While adults send children to animate their errands because they believe that children need not give and feel no shame to ask, children actually do not feel comfortable engaging in such behavior with the adults whom they must confront on these errands. Ironically, moreover, the older children on whom adults depend the most are the ones who feel the most inhibition to engage in such activities, the ones who do at times feel something approximating adult shame.

Nonetheless, children often run these errands. They do so because, through marking themselves as children and as animators through various forms of semiotic manipulations, children manage to overcome their fear of adults, enabling them to run errands. In other words, by acting like children they come to feel something that only children can feel—a lack of fear or

shame to come out of hiding. By performing their immaturity children internalize their status as children and take on a child self.

Their performance of immaturity is also a performance of difference. They act differently than adults thereby also feeling differently than adults and recreating aged ways of being. Seemingly paradoxically, this performance of difference also works as a socializing force. Adult commands to do things that are inappropriate for the mature both call children into child forms of habitus and serve as models of maturity. As children grow they become increasingly unable to perform their immaturity. Their fear of adults turns into shame in front of their peers, shame that they are unable to overcome. This shame forces them into hiding and into maturity.

Children's Perspectives On Interacting With Adults

Children defer to adults. This deference means that they fear adults. Since conspicuous possession, demands, refusals, and criticisms are expressions and/or claims of power, it should not be surprising that most children do not want to speak or act in such a manner with adults.

Children Fear Adults

By middle childhood every child with whom I spoke said that they were scared (*mijak*) of adults. For the most part children are not embarrassed by this fear. Rather, since age is power and having power means having the ability to instill fear and obedience, fear of adults is part of the natural order of life. Good children, consequently, fear adults and their parents or other guardians. "You know who I am scared of in this house?" Ten-year-old Nomi asked while casually chatting with her sister and cousin. "Grandma and grandpa," she went on, not waiting for an answer. "I am waiting to be able to talk to/pay attention to both of them." A research

assistant who listened to this conversation nodded in agreement and approval with what Nomi was saying. It is fine if Nomi does not want to go and talk to them, my assistant explained, because she is scared.

I asked a nine-year old whether he feared his parents and other older people in his household. “Yes,” he said. “I am scared of all of them.” Lena said that she was scared of all of her parents because “I am scared of older people/adults.” Caroline said that she did not talk back to her mother because “I am scared of her.”

“Why are you scared?” I asked some children.

“But she is my mom (*akō ke mama*),” one responded, using the phrase *akō ke* (but), a typical way of expressing some natural fact of the world.

“They are older/adults,” said another boy, using the fact that adults are older as a natural justification for his fear.

Some adults, of course, are more frightening than others. Just as with children’s relationships with other children, they have the most fear of those whom they perceive to be the strongest. Typically, children said that they fear men more than women. As one twelve-year-old said, “I am scared of [adults, particularly her grandfather,] because they are going to hit me.”¹ A nine-year-old was more scared of his father than his mother because “it really hurts when he hits me.” Regina said that she was scared of her stepfather more than her mother “because he is very powerful, he is very strong.”

While children do not always fear men more than women, they do always express the most fear of the people they perceive to be the most physically aggressive. For example, ten-

¹ She used the 1st person plural, so technically her utterance translates as “we are scared.” As discussed previously, people often use the inclusive first person plural when referring only to themselves to give their utterance more weight.

year-old Kinta lived with her grandparents and her classificatory mother. She said that she feared her classificatory mother the most because “she hits me a lot. She does this,” Kinta explained, pulling on her ear. “And she goes like this,” she went on, slapping her shoulder. “And this,” Kinta concluded, pinching her arm.

Even though some adults are more scary than others, even the weaker adults instill fear. For example, an eleven-year-old boy said that he feared his “dad” the most because he hit him when he was naughty and it hurt.

I asked, “But are you also scared of your mother, or aren’t you?” I asked.

“I am scared of her.” All people who are older should be feared.

For the most part, children’s fear of non co-resident adults or adults who were not close kin was greater than their fear of parents and other adult kin. As Jilaba explained, “if they are my relatives, I am not scared.” But people who were not her relatives she “feared.” Similarly, Nomi wanted a drink of water. But she was too scared to get the water because she was not at her house and she feared the less familiar adults who were close to the tap.

“Hey, can we drink from the well here Elise?” Nomi asked me about a well in the yard of our house.

“Yes,” I said, but then explained that the tap by the house was cleaner and she should drink from that. Numerous adults were gathered in front of the house.

“Damn, it is scary,” Nomi protested, preferring to drink farther away from the house and stay out of the adults’ attention.

According to adults, children who are naughty are the ones who are not scared. For example, some children played one day on and around a water catchment, getting the catchment

dirty. The owner of the catchment complained that she told the children to leave but they were “naughty” and did not listen to her. ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘They are not scared of me,’ she said.

Another woman explained that parents of children who skip school are bad because they do not make their children go to school. The problem, the woman went on, was that the children ‘are not scared of them.’ Children who have no fear do not obey. Since children are supposed to obey, the only way to teach them obedience is to instill fear.

Fear to Refuse

Consequently, children say that they fear to refuse adults and particularly non co-resident adults. As eleven-year-old Catherine said, if an adult asks “I give.” But if a child should ask, “sometimes I give and sometimes I do not.” Similarly, twelve-year-old Krino said that if an adult said while Krino was carrying bread, “cut off a little piece of bread for me” Krino would “give it to them so that they can cut it.” Caroline, also eleven, explained that children “give because they are scared of adults.”

“And if adults ask children [for things],” I asked, “do children say, ‘what a bad adult he should not have asked?’ ”

“They don’t because they are really scared of them [adults].”

“Because if children do not give, what will the adults do?”

“The adult will [say], ‘you are really greedy.’”

Since it is relatively rare for adults to ask children for things that the children themselves own, I have relatively little data on whether children are actually as scared to refuse as they say that they are. Moreover, all of my examples of adults asking children concern young adults in their early twenties, people with whom children are generally more comfortable than older

adults. A young woman in her mid-twenties asked an eleven-year-old girl for some of the candy that she had gathered when the performers threw it across the room. Another young man said to a child sitting outside, "my food." On a third occasion a boy's brother-in-law, a young man in his early twenties, leaned on the eleven-year-old and begged for some of the candy that the boy had just collected during a performance. At first, the boy tried to pull away. Quickly, however, he gave up and handed the lollipop over without a word. Although this boy may be willing to refuse other children in a loud in public manner, he did not have as much courage or power when interacting with an adult. Even though the man was young and was kin, the boy still felt compelled to give.

Fear To Ask

Just as children fear to refuse, children also fear to ask. I only rarely saw children of their own volition (as opposed to under the command of another adult) directly ask non co-resident adults for things. One example concerns an adult who had intruded into the children's world, making it more acceptable children to ask her for goods. One of my research assistants started occasionally playing marbles with children after school. The children were in the middle of a long fad in which they played marbles constantly. At the beginning of this fad only children played. Interestingly, as the fad continued into its second or third month there was a handful of adults who occasionally played as well. These games of marbles were the only time that I ever saw adults intrude into the children's games (although children do sometimes intrude into adults' games.) It started with my research assistants, possibly because they spent most days at school with me surrounded by children. One day I walked to school with some children and one of my assistants, creating a situation out of the ordinary. My assistant revealed some marbles in her

pocket. The children asked her for some. They felt less inhibited to ask because she had entered their world, playing marbles and walking to school with them. Nonetheless, when she put them off they did not ask again.

The only other times I observed a child ask a non co-resident adult for something on their own accord concern two very mischievous boys. Nine-year-old Jason once demanded from his neighbor Liṇi, “my food, salt and lime.” Jason’s mother and his teachers regularly despaired about his incredibly naughty nature. As his mother said, “Jason’s behavior is very bad.” Jason was the only child whom I was really forced—to protect my electronic equipment—to keep in line by withholding a DVD from him for a couple months. Naughtiness, if we recall, is said to stem from a lack of fear of adults, suggesting a reason why Jason was not too afraid to ask Liṇi for food.

The other boy was Tito, also a nine and a rascal, although not as bad as Jason. One day he and a group of boys passed a bunch of men making copra and, in the process, extracting a large amount of sprouted coconut meat. Tito asked his classificatory father, whom he knew relatively well even though they were not co-resident kin, for some food. I interpret his uncommon request in two ways. 1) As a reaction to the large amount of food that was out in plain sight and should be shared. 2) As a bid for status with the other boys. By asking for something from an adult Tito showed that he was not scared of adults, asserting his power in front of his peers.

Most children however, were scared to ask for things from most non co-resident adults. Indeed, I have no other examples of any children asking, of their own accord, for things from non co-resident kin. For example, dinner was often late in our house, particularly when the

parents went to Majuro and the children's grandmother took care of the household. Only once did I hear a child ask for dinner and even then the request was indirect, 'grandmother we are hungry.' Children never complained of hunger during the long programs at church when food was often hours away. Nor did they ask adults to get them food, at least not in the same direct manner that they use with their peers. Adults have more power than them, which means that they should not ask. This fear to ask relates to asking for information as well as material goods. I was sitting with Jilaba when some adults passed us on the road. The twelve-year-old asked me to ask the adults where they were going. When I asked Jilaba why she did not ask them herself, she responded, "children are scared to ask adults."

Eleven-year-old Catherine told her friends a story about a time when she was scared to ask some adults for cake. "Caroline and I," Catherine explained, referring to another eleven-year-old she generally claimed as her best friend, "went to tell them that they should give us the ukulele for the evening." Presumably she and Caroline were under orders from an adult to borrow a ukulele, possibly for rehearsal at church.

Catherine continued the story. "When we were about to leave they said, 'Catherine, Catherine...come and take your cake.' And Kevin [an adult] gave it to me." Apparently, when the girls arrived at the house to ask for the ukulele they came upon a group of people eating cake. Had they found children eating cake the girls would have demanded their fair share. Since they came upon adults, however, the girls were too scared to ask. They ate only after invited to do so by an adult.

"They were done," Catherine went on. "Everybody had finished eating. Sisina [Kevin's daughter] had eaten...." Catherine wanted some more cake. She "went closer and closer. Then I

was scared.” So instead of asking she decided to leave. “I immediately told Caroline that she should come away from there....”

Catherine went on, “I said [to the adult who had given her cake], ‘Thank you.’ And they said, ‘Wait wait.’ They gave me a second one!”

Catherine was too scared to ask for a second piece of cake. Luckily for her, however, the adults in the house chose to give. If she had needed to ask she never would have eaten because she, like most children, feared to impose on adults.¹

Fear to Animate Adult Errands

Children sometimes refused to run errands because they were “scared.” Most adults recognize fear as a legitimate excuse although they nonetheless frequently put pressure on children to obey. For example, as mentioned in chapter four a woman told nine-year-old Mōje to go tell a woman in the church to come and speak with her. When, ten minutes later, we saw the boy wandering around the woman asked him if he had passed on the message. ‘I am scared!’ the boy protested. The woman left him go. Krino, twelve-years-old, said that he was sometimes scared to ask for things from one of the storeowners. A grandmother told her nine-year-old grandson to ask the preacher’s wife for a cooking pan. ‘I am scared,’ the boy said. The grandmother then asked me if I was scared. When I said no she sent me instead.

When children were scared to run an errand they sometimes tried to get another child, generally someone around their own age who was more closely related to the adult, to ask in their place. For example, an eleven-year-old girl said that when her parents tell her to go and ask for some coconut shells from Mariana she often asks Mariana’s son, ten-year-old “Ruto,”

instead. “Ruto or if not him, Chris. Or if not him, Cake” she continued, naming two more of Mariana’s children.

Similarly, ten or eleven-year-old Abaril went to a house on an errand to buy something from a store. But he was too scared to ask. So he said to his friend, “Patpat, just go and buy it here.” Abaril was relatively new to Jajikon. Patpat, also ten, happened to be hanging out and playing with some friends in this house that had a store, showing that he was comfortable with the adults who ran the store. “One corned beef and three cans of tuna,” Abaril continued.

“If they ask who it is for?” Patpat asked.

“You say Rilin,” Abaril said, naming his classificatory mother. Through passing requests on to others in a form of double animation, children mitigate their fear.

Sometimes children even feared to pass on information to their close relatives. Kinta had just moved from her classificatory parents’ house back to her grandparents’ house because she had disobeyed her classificatory mother and was now scared to interact with her. Unfortunately, Kinta’s grandmother sent her to ask her classificatory mother for a mosquito coil. Kinta dutifully went to her mother’s house. She stood silently as the mother and I chatted. She was so quiet that after a couple of minutes the mother and I looked up and, surprised, found that Kinta was gone. Hours later she returned to the house. The mother was in an inner room and children were sleeping in the outer room. Kinta, still scared, attempted to reanimate her message. She woke one of the children up and told him to ask for a mosquito coil. The boy refused. They whispered angrily back and forth as Kinta tried to convince him to ask. Then the mother emerged from the room. ‘Why are you whispering?’ she demanded. ‘Give me a mosquito coil,’ Kinta sullenly

replied. She clearly feared to ask. Had her classificatory mother not emerged from the room, she may have never asked at all.

Children sometimes feared close relatives even when they had not recently been naughty. Eleven-year-old Kyle, for example, came to his mother one evening with a message from his father. His mother was in the cookhouse, his father in the main house.

“Mama, papa says to hurry up and bring the firewood in.”

“No,” the mother retorted. “Didn’t I say it before? ...The coconut shells are mixed in with the coconut husks.”² According to the mother since they had not yet sorted the firewood they could not bring it into the cookhouse.

“But papa says...”

“You should say we will do it tomorrow because we should separate the shells from the husks.”

“We are scared of him,” Kyle protested. Rebecca, a woman who was sitting with the mother, burst into laughter. Kyle too started laughing but did not change his mind. He feared his father too much to pass on the fact that his wife disagreed with him. I did not blame Kyle. His father was a kind man but also extremely gruff and strict. All of the children were scared of him.

“Because he [papa] is such a smart ass,” the mother complained, understanding why Kyle was afraid. Then she urged Kyle to overcome his fear by explicitly referring to his mother as the author, as the one responsible for his speech. “Go and say that I said it. You should say tomorrow because he [needs to] separate the husks from the shells since they are all mixed up.”

² Both coconut husks and coconut shells are people’s main source of firewood. However, they like to keep them separate because they each are suited to different types of cooking.

Kyle, however, did not go anywhere. Other children arrived carrying bags, presumably because the father had also told them to start bringing the firewood in.

The mother commented again on the foolishness of the plan, particularly since it was dark and hard to see what was a husk and what was a shell. “And will you know to put the husks here and the shells there? Huh?”

“We won’t know,” the older boy responded.

“Ok, you should go tell papa!” Kyle burst out, trying to get someone else to carry the message instead of him.

But the adults continued to pressure Kyle as opposed to any of the other children. “Just you, you should go,” said Rebecca.

The mother agreed. “You, you.”

But Kyle did not go. More scared of his father than his mother, he chose to carry out his father’s orders. He started dividing the work up with his younger sister.

The mother gave up. She instructed the children to keep the firewood separate. “Okay, you all fill up the bags only with shells, only with shells. And then with husks, only with husks.”

“But it is night!” The older boy protested, pointing out that they could not see well enough to differentiate the shells from the husks.

Kyle saw an opening. “Okay, you should just go tell papa.”

“Hey, go and tell him!” The mother ordered, annoyed that Kyle refused to obey and was trying to pass her command on to someone else.

Rebecca laughed. “You should say,” she said to Kyle, “Mama says tomorrow so that he can separate the shells from the husks.” But it was no use. “Damn dude!” she exclaimed to the mother. “He won’t go, girl.”

“Regina dude,” Kyle said to his classificatory sister, still trying to get out of speaking. “You should go.”

As the children stood there arguing and hesitating they all realized that it was raining. This news suddenly made the father’s instructions make sense. “Maybe that is why he said to bring them in,” Rebecca mused. “Maybe he does not know that they have given us a cover.”ⁱⁱ

As this last statement clearly reveals, the father and the mother both had similar goals and were in agreement that the firewood needed to stay dry. But they both lacked information—the mother did not know that it was about to rain and the father did not know that they had a tarp—that would have explained the position the other spouse took. This communication problem could have been easily remedied except for the fact that Kyle refused to speak. He was too scared. He did not want to pass on information, to serve as a mediator between adults.

Fear To Talk

Just as many children fear to ask and refuse adults, by middle childhood children unanimously say that they should not talk about adults. It is “bad” to talk about adults, eleven-year-old Kyle said. Nine-year-old Lena said that if she saw two adults fighting she would not talk about it because “mama will hit me.” Ten-year-old Bobby agreed. “They will hit me,” he said. Another girl swore that she did not spy on adults. An eleven-year-old said that if she saw two women fighting and someone else asked her what happened she would lie and say, “I don’t

know.” A twelve-year-old boy explained that “some children hide it so that [adults] don’t hit them.”

Some children refused to even listen to a hypothetical example I offered in which they overheard two adults gossiping. During an interview with seven or eight-year-old Regina I tried to begin the story. “You overhear two adults talking...”

“I don’t hear them talking!” Regina protested.

With effort I explained that it was merely a hypothetical example. I managed to keep telling the story but Regina shook her head constantly as I spoke. She was particularly perturbed when I got to the part in the story in which she told another child about what she overheard. “They would get mad at me,” she explained firmly, referring to the adults.

Similarly, eight-year-old Tito insisted that this same hypothetical example was impossible since he never hears adults speaking because the lawnmower is too loud. I doubt that, in reality, he never listens to adult conversation. Later he told me about some things that he overheard when listening to adults. Nonetheless, his protest underscored his point that it is “bad” to talk about what adults say because “we are children.”

Most children said that while talking about adults was dangerous and wrong, talking about other children was fine. For example, Regina was perfectly content to listen to a hypothetical example in which she passed on information about two children fighting. “I would say, two children are fighting,” Regina said.

“And that isn’t bad?” I asked.

“It’s not, because they are children.” Jilaba agreed. “It is fine” to talk about children, she said, “because they are children.” After all, Jilaba explained, adults will “hit us” if they talk

about them but children “won’t because they are small and they are not mad.” Similarly, Gideon said that talking about children is fine because “they won’t hit us.”

Therefore, while children spread information about other children unless they explicitly promise not to, children often avoided talking about adults with someone whom they did not trust to keep the fact that they spread information a secret. I was chatting with Nomi and mentioned that Siana, her classificatory mother, was pregnant. By that point in time Siana was showing. All of the women in the village were talking about the fact that she was pregnant.

Nonetheless, Nomi exclaimed, ‘She isn’t!’

‘Yes she is!’ I retorted.

‘No!’

‘But everyone says so.’

‘You shouldn’t talk about it,’ Nomi said, ‘She hates it when people talk about her being pregnant.’

On another occasion numerous girls criticized Karistin, ten-years-old, for talking about a scandalous event that she witnessed. She saw the pastor of one of the churches playing with his balls.

“Karistin is such a blabbermouth,” eleven-year-old Caroline complained.

“Yeah,” agreed Kinta (ten).

“She is a blabbermouth” said Rose (thirteen).

“Hey, she immediately told Lila (a young woman in her twenties).” Caroline complained.

“About Ārtur (the pastor.) I am so annoyed.”

“I said...,” said Kinta.

“Lila said,” Rose interjected.

“[Lila] said,” Caroline continued. “She said, ‘ok, I am going to ask the reverend, if he tells me its true then I then I will not talk to him again.’ ”

“But why is that girl [Karistin] such a tattletale?” Rose criticized.

“Yeah,” Caroline agreed. “When we talk we don’t talk to her. But she is like...”

“Did she tell Jilaba what you said?” Kinta interrupted.ⁱⁱⁱ

These girls, none of whom actually saw the incident in question, scathingly criticized Karistin for talking about what she saw. Karistin’s words had negative consequences. A woman explained to me later that Lila, the adult whom Karistin told about the incident, told the pastor’s wife what Karistin said. The wife grew angry. She yelled at Karistin and the other two girls who had also seen the pastor.

The girls went to two other women, one of whom was my research assistant, for help. These women criticized the pastor’s wife for judging and yelling at the girls. They told the girls not to change their story or cave into pressure. As my research assistant explained, the pastor’s wife was to blame, not the children. The wife should not should not have scolded the children because “children do not know how to lie.”

But although the women thought that children had the right to talk because children always speak the truth, the girls unequivocally claimed that talking was bad because children should not spread information about adults. According to the girls the blame lay not with the pastor’s wife, or even with Lila who also broke a promise of secrecy, but with the child Karistin.

For some children, particularly the younger ones, the desire to spread information wins out over their fear of getting into trouble. Indeed, children told me on other occasions that

Karistin was a tattletale. Other children, however, guard their speech quite carefully. For example, Caroline was very aware of the dangers inherent in speaking. Her mature approach became apparent when we watched together the video of the incident just discussed, a video of her and the other girls criticizing Karistin for spreading information.

“What did Karistin say, what were you talking about,” I asked, trying to learn more about what happened.

“I forget,” Caroline lied. Like adults she chose to cultivate a reputation of ignorance as opposed to marking herself as responsible for dangerous gossip.

I then realized that to get Caroline to speak I needed to convince her that I would keep her speech confidential. “Secret,” I declared, pinky swearing with Caroline.

Caroline was convinced. “They saw the pastor.” She was willing to speak only after I swore myself to secrecy.

Hence, while adults say that children spread words and talk, children recognize the dangers in doing so and unequivocally say that they should not. Desires to speak and desires to stay out of trouble pull at each other, leading some children to spread words but many others to spread words only to people whom they trust to keep their confidence.

Children Prefer To Hide Food

Finally, by middle childhood children often either refused to carry food or chose to carry it along the beach instead of the road in order to avoid peering eyes. For example, eleven-year-old Catherine said that when on an errand to transport food she would walk “on the beach....Because they say it is not the custom, we do not walk with food in front of the chief’s house.” Twelve-year-old Josh said that he would walk “on the beach so that they will not see it.”

Jilaba explained that when she transports food “if there is a bicycle I go on the road. If there is not one, the beach. Because...because I am always very lazy to go on the road. And we should stay on the beach so that there will not be a lot of people who will see it.” Kinta expressed a fear that others would ask her about what she is carrying. Therefore, “I always bike. If there is no bike [I will go] on the road but I will [cover the food] in plastic....They should not see it because then they will say, ‘hey, what is that?’ ” Karistin said that when carrying food she goes on the “beach!...so that they will not ask. Because everybody is greedy.” If the tide was too high to walk on the beach, moreover, a twelve year old boy said that he would “go through the jungle.”

I asked Caroline, “Are you scared to carry food?”

“I, I...I go on the beach,” she responded, implying that she would be scared if she walked on the road but she was not scared to take the beach.

There is a relatively clear developmental trend that as children get older they increasingly say that they dislike transporting food in public. Out of seven children between the ages of seven and nine, five said that they would take the road and two said that they would go on the beach. Some younger children said, like Regina, that they would carry fish “in front on the road.” And if people like “Kindin,” an adult who lived next to her, ask what she is carrying she simply says “fish.” But out of twelve children between the ages of ten and twelve only two said that they would take the road and ten said that they would go on the beach. Although these older children’s fear to transport food is greater than younger children’s, the older children are the main ones whom adults send on these errands.

Even children in the beginning of middle childhood, children on whom adults also occasionally depend to transport food, sometimes displayed an awareness of the danger of

transporting food. Trint, only eight years old, said that when adults told him to transport food he “put [the food] in a backpack and brought it.” If he did not put the food in a backpack, he explained, “they would say, ‘give me our food,’ and the food will be gone.” Similarly, although nine-year-old Kurt said that he would walk “on the road,” he also justified his actions, “because there were not any people on the road.” Kurt clearly did not want to carry bread in front of a lot of people despite the fact that he said he would take it along the road. As nine-year-old George explained, “when I am not scared I go on the road, but if I am scared I go on the beach.” A nine-year-old girl said that she would take the road but if she saw people she would “hide it” so that they would not ask.

Children hesitate to transport food in public because they are scared of both other children and adults. Their fear of children comes from the fact that children sometimes shame (*kajook*) each other for carrying food and sometimes ask for the food. Eleven-year-old Bobby, for example, said that he would carry food on the beach because if he did not his ten-year-old neighbor would shame (*kajook*) him for transporting food. He said that adults, however, would ignore him. Similarly, Trint said he would take the beach because other children would ask for food, and then “hate him” when he did not give it.

Other children, however, emphasized that the problem was adults, not other children. One nine-year-old boy, for example, said that if adults saw him transporting food they would “magic it,” work black magic on the food such that it would make people who eat it sick. Children “do not” do this magic, only adults. A twelve-year-old first mentioned as a problem adults who would see the food that he carried. Then he added, “if not them children.” Both children and adults pose potential dangers: children as people who shame (*kajook*) each other and might

indeed ask for the food; adults who can learn about what the family has. Even if adults do not ask for the food (as seems to be typical), they might call out for information and say, “hey, what is that?”

Indeed, in addition to transporting food on the beach instead of the road, children frequently lie about what they ate or have so as to hide familial possessions from others. As mentioned, once when I saw Jilaba and Kyle carrying a large basin along the road, I called out, “what is that?” Kyle, eleven, hesitated and then called back, “rice!” But it was not rice, as I found when I ran to check. It was donuts, turtle meat, and other goodies.

‘Why did you lie?’ I asked.

‘It is taboo to yell about food,’ Jilaba scolded.

Similarly, in interviews I gave children a hypothetical example: they ate fish for dinner. There were only a couple of fish left and a couple of adults had not yet eaten. Someone on the road asks them what they ate for lunch. “What do you say?” I asked. “I say,” a seven-year-old girl said, “Ok it’s like, ‘I don’t know dude.’” A ten-year-old boy said “I say ‘nothing.’ ” They would hide the food that was still at their house.

Children’s reasons for lying relate not only to a fear to refuse to give to adults, which leads them to hide food, but also a fear of their own parents who would be mad if they revealed food. The ten-year-old above explained his answer by stating that if he said he ate fish his parents “will hit me.” Another boy also said that if he does not obey his parents’ commands to hide goods, “they hit me.” A twelve-year old boy said that he says, “nothing,” if someone asks him what he ate for breakfast because his older sister would “hit him” if he talked. As a seven-year-old explained, her mother scolds her when she talks about things that she has. “She says ‘it’s

is not your decision to say that there is something and it is not for you to give it.””

Indeed, many adults say that children of their own accord know that they should hide things from others. One of my research assistants told me that after I paid her she would lie to everyone else and say that she already spent all the money I gave her on chocolate. ‘But what about the children?’ I asked. ‘Jilaba and Kinta (twelve and ten) know not to talk about it,’ she said. Another woman said that while children as young as ten might blurt out the truth if someone came to the house and asked for rice, older children know enough to lie and say that they have no rice to protect their parents.

Since children’s lies are often told out of a fear of parental discipline, in adults’ eyes they are probably not lies at all. Nonetheless, it is ironic that while adults say that they send children to do what they cannot because children do not feel shame or lie, it is the older children on whom adults depend the most who do indeed frequently seem to feel things like shame and do try to hide possessions with their speech.

Do They Feel Fear (*Mijak*) or Shame (*Āliklik*)?

Children, particularly the older ones but also some in the beginning of middle childhood, often do things that, if they were adults, we would say indicate that they feel shame (*āliklik*). They walk on the beach or through the bushes instead of on the road to avoid carrying food in front of others. They hesitate to ask and refuse to give to adults. Are they motivated by shame (*āliklik*), or do they have a different emotional motivation, fear (*mijak*)?

In support of an interpretation that children feel shame (*āliklik*), these children are concerned with their image. Many children say that they transport food on the beach precisely to avoid this loss of image, because other children “will shame (*kajook*) us.” Both eight-year-olds

and twelve-year-olds said that other children would shame (*kajook*) them by saying, “look at the boy who is carrying food” or “look at that girl!” Their fear of this embarrassment leads them to walk on the beach away from prying eyes.

Nevertheless, children’s experiences differ in three ways from adults’ discussions of *āliklik*. First, although children do talk about others shaming them, they use a verb *kajook* that does not have exactly the same meaning as *āliklik*. This verb combines the causative prefix *ka* with *jook* (shy or embarrassed) and literally means “cause to be embarrassed/shy.” The most appropriate translation of *kajook* in English is “shame,” but both children and adults used *kajook* in numerous situations in which adults would not use *āliklik*. To keep the concepts separate, from now on I will use “embarrass” for *kajook* even though “shame”, as a verb, is really the closest translation.

Kajook refers to when people use speech to criticize and embarrass others, and differs from *āliklik* which refers to a feeling that prevents people from getting in such embarrassing situations in the first place. An eleven-year-old said that *kajook* is when children tease another child who wet his pants, saying “you are a pee-er!” Other children said it is when people say in a sing-song voice to a naked baby, “*iu ie*” a teasing idiom that implies that the baby should not be naked. Two women said that when adults scold children they *kajook* them. They also said that children also *kajook* adults when they say things like, “you are bad.”

Children’s embarrassment (*jook*) emerges not simply from engaging in inappropriate behavior but from other people’s words and actions. In contrast, people who feel shame (*āliklik*) never get into a situation in which someone else could embarrass (*kajook*) them. Feeling shame (*āliklik*) by definition means that people refrain from such action. If people, like children,

nevertheless transport food, then they do not feel shame (*āliklik*) regardless of how much others might embarrass (*kajook*) them. Indeed not a single child knew what *āliklik* meant. Even many teenagers were unfamiliar with the word.³

Second, although children talk about other children embarrassing (*kajook*) them, when they talk about what they themselves feel that causes them to hide they say that they feel “fear (*mijak*).” In the case of transporting food this fear is sometimes a fear that other children will embarrass them. Often, however, children mean that they have a physical fear that adults will punish or hit them. This latter meaning of *mijak* does not overlap with the meaning of *āliklik*. For example, the children who said that they would lie about what they ate or hide what they were carrying did not say that they lied out of shame (*āliklik*) and concern for their own face but rather out of fear (*mijak*) of parental discipline. Along these lines, some adults explicitly said that while adults feel shame children feel fear. “*Mijak*” is not the same as “*āliklik*,” one woman said. Children are simply “scared (*mijak*) of grownups” she continued. As another older woman said who alternatively used the words *āliklik* and *mijak*, children might hide food but only because “they will be scared (*mijak*) of their mothers and fathers.”

Third, although as we have seen children often are concerned to behave appropriately, their fear of embarrassment (*jook*) arises in a very different social context than adults’ shame (*āliklik*). Specifically, while adults are concerned for both their face and the face of other adults, children’s embarrassment arises from interactions with other children. It is children, as opposed to adults, who would embarrass children who carry food. Children may avoid asking and refusing because they fear adults’ wrath, but they often avoid transporting food because of a

³ It is possible that the fact that children and teenagers did not know the word *āliklik* represents a cohort shift as opposed to a generational difference.

concern for their reputation with other children. In other words, children can indeed do some things in front of an adult audience that other adults cannot. Or, at least, they can run these errands if they can manage to overcome their fear (*mijak*) of adults.

Performing Immaturity

Many children would not choose of their own accord to do some things that adults command: transport food or ask for things. Similarly, many children fear to talk about adults. And yet, children frequently do transport food, ask for goods, and spread gossip about adults. Why?

On the one hand, they engage in such behavior under adults' orders because other emotions, such as a fear of disobedience or a desire for attention, overrule their fear to speak and act. In other words, they are more scared of some adults than others, and more scared of disobedience than asking. On the other hand, often the only reason why their fear of disobedience or a desire for attention can drown out their fear to run errands is because, through internalizing their sense of self as a child and performing their immaturity, children absolve themselves of responsibility for their actions. Absolving themselves of responsibility, moreover, lessens their fear to run these errands. Hence, only through embracing their childness can they successfully perform as animators who need not be afraid.

Counteracting Emotions

First, as we have seen, children sometimes refuse to run errands and they use fear as their excuse. But often children's fear of disobedience overrides their fear or embarrassment to go on these errands, to come out of hiding. Indeed, one child said that "when I said to dad 'I am scared'

he said ‘don’t be scared because I am going to hit you.’” Her fear of disobeying her father was greater than her fear of running the errand.

Second, in addition to fearing to disobey children also want to obey. Good children are obedient children. For some children, moreover, their self-worth is partly wrapped up in this obedience. For example, one eight-year-old girl told me about another child who disobeyed her mother. “Lielin is always...they tell her ‘bring that thing.’ [But] she doesn’t want to bring it. Her mother...scolds her.”

“And it is bad if children are lazy?” I asked.

“But their mothers are very important to them,” she said, implying that children who do not obey do not value their mothers.

Another ten-year-old girl sat quietly listening while her grandmother told me that she was “naughty...and runs away when I order her.” Then the grandmother went on to say that her twelve-year-old grandson Krino was “not naughty.”

The girl burst out, “Hey Krino is naughty!” Although the girl probably did not like being called naughty, it was even worse to be seen as more naughty and disobedient than her older brother. “Grandma,” she cried, “Krino is naughty!”

“He doesn’t disobey me,” the grandmother retorted. “He is very good and...”

The girl appealed to me. “Elise, Krino is naughty.”

“He isn’t naughty,” the grandmother insisted.

“He is naughty. He is naughty because he doesn’t want to work.”

“Krino is not naughty.”

“He is naughty!”

“Krino is good,” the grandmother asserted, getting the last word. The girl’s effort to argue that her brother was just as naughty as she reveals the importance to her of appearing obedient, or at least no more disobedient than anyone else.

Children sometimes made fun of other children who did not do their work. As a nine-year-old boy said, children might say, “Damn those children are really lazy, damn look at that boy!” Children also often wanted to do their work well and did not like it if other people said that they did it wrong. A girl washing clothes ignored an older girl who said that she had not put enough soap in the water. Nomi spent over a half hour trying to light a fire. The wood was wet and she was having trouble. Her parents and older sibling called to her constantly to stop and let an older girl do the work. Nomi ignored them, intent to succeed.

Sometimes, consequently, children’s desire do their work well and/or obey overcomes children’s fear. As an eleven-year-old girl said, “I am not scared [to bring food] because they said that I should go. Because I want to obey them because they told me [to come].”

Finally, just as children’s fear to disobey and desire to obey works to counteract their fear to transport food and ask for things, children’s desire to talk and tell a good story may work to counteract their fear to spread information about adults. Children certainly reveled in having the limelight and tried to get others to listen to their stories. For example, one nine-year-old broke into a conversation between his mother and some other women to claim that another woman had hit her daughter. While generally adults ignore children, this story was something that the women were interested in and the boy got their attention.

Children also like to have the attention of their peers. Some girls asked me about a recent trip to a nearby atoll. “Did you go to the ocean side?” they asked.

Ten-year-old Kara interrupted. “We went to the ocean-side and saw all the shells.” She had also been on the trip and she wanted to be the one telling the story.

Unfortunately for Kara, the other girls ignored her. Indeed, it was an older girl, as opposed to Kara or I, who started talking about what happened on the trip. The hosts “really threw out sweets...they also threw them toward the pandanus tree.”

Then a girl who had not even gone on the trip started describing the layout of the land. “Tuorin’s house is on the end there...and do you know that house? You know that there is water on the north-side....the ocean and the lagoon come together.”

This was too much for Kara. “I have gone there a ton of times,” she interrupted, trying to take control of the conversation. Why did someone who had not even been on the trip get to describe the village? Kara wanted that privilege for herself. “I was the same size as Runa,” she went on, naming a four-year-old.

Some of the girls laughed.

“I am telling the truth! Grandma and I always go there.”

“A lot of times,” another girl mimicked. “But she [just] said two.”

“You should count how many times,” a girl insisted.

“Twenty!” Kara exclaimed. The other girls laughed. They did not believe her. One of the girls later explained to me that Kara showing off, trying to tell the story and be the center of attention.

In Kara’s case the story that she was telling was perfectly innocent. In other situations, however, children do say things that can get them into trouble, such as when Karistin talked about seeing a preacher play with his balls or when Lena spread the news of Honjo’s abuse.

Sometimes, therefore, children do speak without thinking. On other occasions, their desire to talk overcomes their fear of speaking about adults.

Indeed, the very fact that other forces—children’s fear of disobedience, their desire to obey, their desire to tell a story—overcome children’s fear of running errands and coming out of hiding reveals how children, even older ones, are indeed different than adults. Children’s fear (or embarrassment) to transport food and ask for things is not as strong as adults’ shame. It cannot be as strong because at least some of the time children do run errands and do things that adults would just never do. When children’s fear becomes shame that overpowers these other feelings and pushes children into hiding, making them categorically refuse to animate adults’ errands, then they are no longer children.

Taking On Child Selves

One reason, however, why these other desires can overcome children’s fear to run the errands is because by performing their immaturity children minimize their fear of those errands. Partly, just running errands serves as a performance of immaturity, it recreates children’s feelings of themselves as immature people who do not need be ashamed. Through engaging in childlike activities such as running errands, inhabiting a small body, playing games with other children, and wearing shorts (if they are girls), children mark and present themselves as children.

At the same time, children often explicitly mark their immaturity by speaking as animators who are not responsible for their words or actions. By marking adults as the principals of their actions children can reduce their fear to run errands. After all, they should not be afraid of actions or words that do not belong to them.

The main semiotic resource through which children perform their immaturity and refuse responsibility for their goods and words is reported speech. As numerous scholars have shown, reported speech brings multiple voices into any utterance, allowing animators to construct their speech as not their own (Basso 1986; Basso 1987; Besnier 1992; Goffman 1981; Goffman [1974] 1986; Hill and Irvine 1993b; Hill and Irvine 1993a; Hill and Zepeda 1993; Lucy 1993; Tannen 1995; Urban 1986). Similarly, children frequently mark the adults who commanded their actions as the author responsible for them. Children say, “mama said” or “papa said.” “Do you have a breadfruit gathering stick? Paul asked for it.” “Celia says fill a plate of rice for her.” “Torina says bring a bottle of soy sauce.”⁴ When Kyle was scared to tell his father that his mother said that they should wait to bring in the firewood, adults explicitly suggested reported speech as a way of mitigating his fear. Kyle’s mother ordered, “Go and say that **I said** it (*Iba*).” When Kyle continued to refuse to go, Rebecca, another adult, literally authored Kyle’s speech (although she told him to present his mother as the author). “You should say,” Rebecca suggested, “ ‘**mama says** (*liṃama ej ba*) tomorrow so that he can separate the shells from the husks.’ ” The adults saw reported speech as the main resource through which Kyle could overcome his fear to pass on information.

This ability to defer responsibility depends on children’s status as children. Their immature bodies and actions mark their goods and words as not their own even before they speak, subverting the physical link between goods and people that, among adults, indexes people as possessors who can give. Through speaking children add support for the natural inference that they are not in control of their own actions. They reaffirm their status as animators by

⁴ Children, as is typical in the Marshall Islands, consistently use direct as opposed to indirect reported speech.

linguistically indicating that physical possession does not index social possession in a way that only children can.

While through reported speech children mark an adult as responsible for their words, by referring to adults as the owners of what they carry they can also mark adults as responsible for their goods. I never actually overheard adults or children asking children for the things that they transported in the name of adults. Therefore, I had no opportunity to hear how children handled such a situation. Some children told me, however, that such requests do sometimes occur and that they would get out of them by saying that their package belonged to an adult. “I will say it is Siera and her husband’s food.”

Often children do not even need to utter an adults’ name. Caroline said that when people ask for the food she is carrying she simply says “it is not my food.” People then assume, generally correctly, that what she is carrying belongs to an adult. Other children and adults, of course, do not ask at all or ask only for information, ‘what is that?’ because they automatically assume that what children are carrying does not belong to them. As eleven-year-old Gideon said, “they don’t [ask] because the food belongs to others.”

Most children, although they expressed a general fear (*mijak*) of adults and might object to running specific errands because of that fear, claimed that in general they were not scared to run errands. “I am not scared,” said a nine-year-old girl when I asked her about transporting food. Sometimes children’s stated reason for why they were not scared was because they were sent to speak with kin. “I am not [scared] because we are relatives,” a ten-year-old boy said. Another girl said that she was not scared to ask because “I know them.” Other children’s reason for not being scared was because they took pains to protect against dangers. For example, one

boy said that he was “not scared because I go on the beach.” Gideon was “not scared” both because people do not ask and because the people he passed “are not tattletales.”

I suspect that some of these children claimed a lack of fear partly because they wanted to develop an image, a face, as a child who is not scared. Gaining power in the child’s world, after all, depends on being strong enough not to be scared in situations in which children should not feel fear. These situations include interactions with other children but also running errands. As one nine-year-old boasted to me, she was not scared because “I don’t know how to be scared.”

Regardless of the truth of their boasts, these children’s portrayal of themselves as lacking fear when running such errands likely reflects their understanding of what children, and hence what they themselves, should feel. As Jilaba, a very cogent twelve year old girl, said about running an errand, “adults will send me because they are scared. But me, I am a child so I am not scared.” Similarly, an eight-year-old said that adults do not ask for things as much as children because they “are scared,” implying that children are not. Children do not need to be scared in such situations because while running errands they are not responsible for their speech or actions. Children who manage to internalize their status and their immaturity can overcome their more general fear of adults so as to animate those adults’ needs.

For most children this internalization of an immature self is less conscious than for Jilaba. Nonetheless, their feelings of fear (*mijak*) of adults as opposed to shame (*āliklik*) before their peers, as well as their ability to overcome that fear and animate the needs of adults, shows how immaturity is felt as well as performed. Children are supposed to be willing to do things that adults avoid, to lack the shame (*āliklik*) that would prevent them from speaking or acting. Through imaging themselves as children and taking on an aged self, children overcome the fear

of adults that they would otherwise have. By explicitly marking their immaturity and their lack of responsibility through their speech they not only recreate the truth that children do not (always) hide, but they also internalize the identity that has been imposed upon them—that of children who need not be ashamed or afraid.

Socialization

As children grow their sense of self must change. Nonetheless, adults continue to command twelve, thirteen, and fourteen-year-olds to do that which adults avoid. Eventually children come to be ashamed (*āliklik*) of their own behavior and categorically refuse to come out of hiding. Paradoxically, this transformation may happen not only through pressure on children to hide but also through children's own actions of defying the adult moral code, of doing that which is inappropriate for adults.

Socialization to Hide

There is some implicit and explicit pressure on children to hide. First, although when children are very young they can largely act as they please, eventually people start to punish conspicuous possession. This punishment comes not in the form of scolding or hitting but by expecting children who do not hide their goods to share. For the most part, as we have seen, it is other children including older children, as opposed to adults, who expect and force children to share. By the age of five or six children know that any child who sees what they have will probably ask for some of it. They also know that children will criticize them as show-offs if they reveal too much.

Adults tend not to ask children for things. But adults do occasionally step in when children's behavior is blatantly inappropriate, even for children. For example, a four-year-old paraded around church one day with a bunch of candy in his hand stating proudly, in a way that older children do not even when they are showing off, that he had a lot of food. This display of candy was so blatant that an adult nearby asked for some candy. When the four-year-old refused to share this adult chastised mildly, "if you are not going to give me any do not say that you have a lot." The four-year-old ran away and seemed to suffer little from the criticism. Nonetheless, the interaction was a lesson that if he did not want people to ask for his food he should not talk about it.

Second, as we have seen children report that adults sometimes scold and hit them for talking about goods. In addition, both adults and children say that adults instruct their children to hide goods and lie. When a woman asked me for lotion, for example, she took pains to assure me that she would not tell anyone about it so that other people would not ask me for lotion. I did not need to worry about her children, she continued, because she teaches them not to talk. Even her seven-year-old, she said, obeys. While this woman may have been exaggerating the probability that her seven-year-old would remember to hide the lotion, other people did agree that parents teach children not to talk. Murin said that once when she was in Majuro she and her daughter Turi (five years old) ate at a restaurant. 'I told her, 'don't talk about it.' ' But when they returned home and people asked, 'where were you?' Turi blurted out, 'eating at a restaurant!' Although Turi failed to obey, Murin reported that she tried to instruct Turi to keep information to herself. Similarly, a woman said that when her young son blurts out, "mama has a lot of money" she tells everyone that her son is lying. After they leave, she said, she teaches her son not to talk. Another

woman said that some children lie about goods because their parents tell them to. One of my research assistants went so far as to say that the portion of children who told me that their parents do not say, 'don't tell,' were lying, probably because their parents told them not to talk about how they told them to lie. 'If a parent says 'don't talk,' the child will not talk,' another woman asserted.

While some children claimed their parents did not instruct them to hide or lie, other children said otherwise. "They say," an eight-year-old boy said, "don't walk [with banana bread] because they will take your food and then all the food for people in this house will be gone."

"And if a person comes and asks, 'do you have any banana bread' do they say not to say it?" I asked.

"They say, 'Don't say that we have food because then they will take all of our food.'"

"Is it bad to say that you have food in your house?"

"Yeah...they will take it and we will not have any food."

A twelve-year-old girl who lived with her grandparents said that they told her not to talk "about everything that is important" because "if it is something for the house we don't talk about it because there is very little." If someone asked her, "what did you eat?" she might lie and say, "pancakes" so that others do not come and ask for bananas. Children across the range of middle childhood clearly know the negative consequences of talking about food and assert that their guardians instruct them not to talk.

I rarely actually observed adults telling children to hide and lie about familial possessions. This may be because adults give such instructions in private. Moreover, I was closest with my own family and since we had a store we generally did not need to hide goods. At

the same time, it is also possible that children and adults imagine that parents and guardians say out loud things that never really have to be said. Children could learn that they should not speak simply from seeing adults and other children hiding goods, as well as from other children embarrassing them when they transport food too obviously. Regardless, adults do sometimes tell children who are asking for something on behalf of another adult to go back to that adult and lie. For example, as reported in Chapter Four, a girl came back to her house with a request from her classificatory mother for rice. The girl's grown sister told her to "go and say that there is no more rice in this house" even though they definitely did have rice.

Adults also tell children to hide information and they sometimes scold children who spread information about adults. All the children, as we have seen, expect adults to punish them if they talk about things that adults do not want everyone to know. As support for their fears, while most adults supported and agreed with the children who spread the news of Honjo's abuse, one woman did not. A day after the incident Kāti and I were walking together. We passed a group of children. Kāti pounced. 'Why did you lie about Jujan (the adopted mother)?' She demanded. 'Why are you children making trouble?'

An explosion of sound burst from the children as they scrambled to defend themselves. 'It wasn't me!' One ten-year-old girl cried. 'It was Lena, she told me.'

'Not me,' another boy, also ten, claimed. 'Lena and Chase...it is really true, it was Lena who told me.'

'I only said a little bit,' the girl said defensively, trying to protect herself.

‘Do you know whose house that is?’ Tuni scolded the children, her hands on her hips. ‘Honjo’s house,’ implying that they had no business talking about something that had to do with someone else. She scolded them for spreading information about other people.

There was another occasion when Lacy told me breathlessly about an affair she was having with her neighbor’s husband. The night before our conversation the neighbor apparently caught them in the act. She stormed over to Lacy’s house and yelled at Lacy in front of Lacy’s classificatory children. Lacy said that she told the children not to tell anyone about what happened. Later when I was chatting with one of the children I brought up this affair. The girl hesitated, obviously unsure if she should talk to me. Then she clearly decided that I already knew about the affair so it was fine. She affirmed the story and said that Lacy had told her not to tell. ‘Did you tell anyone?’ I asked. ‘Only Chrilina,’ the girl responded, ‘because she already knew, everyone knows.’ In addition, a classificatory child of the neighbor Lacy cheated on told me that the neighbor also told him not to tell anyone about the incident. Because, he explained, she told him that if he talked “people will ask who fought.” He said that if someone asked him about it he would lie and say “I was sleeping” so that he did not have to say anything. Adults at least occasionally instruct children not to talk, socializing them into the need to hide.

Socialization of Shame Through Commands to Reveal

Although commands to lie and reprimands when children talk may teach children to hide out of fear, they do not teach children to feel shame (*āliklik*). Moreover, even though adults occasionally exert some pressure on children to hide, they also constantly explicitly command children to do things that are shameful for adults. It is partly through these activities, through running errands and revealing information in a way that adults avoid, that children slowly

become ashamed (*āliklik*) of their own actions. Eventually children start to hide not because an adult tells them to, because they fear punishment, or even because they fear that other children will embarrass (*kajook*) them, but rather because they start to take on the subjectivities of youth and adults.

Take Jaki, a fourteen-year-old girl. Jaki was in eighth grade. She still sang in Sunday school and hung out with children. More and more, however, she observed their play rather than partaking in it, deigning only to participate in the more grownup games like baseball. She also performed with some young women during a *keemem*, marking herself as a youth as well as a child. She admitted once to me that she was a *jiroñ* (young lady) right before denying it a second later. She had a boyfriend, everyone whispered, although like all Marshallese she denied it and it was impossible to tell if the rumors were true. Nonetheless, other children and her grown sister-in-law occasionally teased her about her supposed boyfriend.

One night Jaki walked over to her neighbor’s house and joined some children playing in the yard. “Sisina!” she called, naming her nine-year-old classificatory daughter. Jaki lived in a different house than Sisina and Sisina’s older sister Nomi but their families were very close (see Figure 3). The girls treated each other largely like co-resident kin.

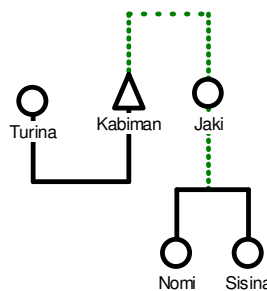


Figure 4: Jaki’s Network
Green (dotted) lines are classificatory relationships.

“What?” one girl responded. Then the children ignored Jaki, concentrating on their game of marbles.

Jaki interrupted them. “Is Kabiman there? Is Kabiman in the house?” A young man in his twenties, Kabiman was Jaki’s classificatory older brother. He and Jaki lived in the same household complex.

“He is not there,” a boy lied, trying to be annoying.

Jaki ignored him. She directed her attention at Sisina. “Go and say, ‘Hey Kabiman. Just come here.’ Say ‘Hey Kabiman! Turina says to bring one,’ what is it called? One....” Jaki’s true purpose for joining the children is now clear. Apparently Kabiman’s wife, Turina, told Jaki to pass on a message to her husband who was chatting with a group of men. Jaki, however, did not want to speak.

It seems unlikely that Jaki was uncomfortable with Kabiman. She and Kabiman were co-resident kin. But Kabiman happened to be relaxing in a crowd of men. My research assistant said that Jaki was “scared (*mijak*)” of the men. In the RMI, neither women nor men join groups of the opposite gender. In contrast, children often congregate as multi-gender groups. For example, the group of children playing marbles that night contained two boys and four girls. Jaki’s fear to interrupt a group of men marks her as more mature. In fact, Jaki’s behavior seems similar to that of a woman mentioned in Chapter Two who said that she was “ashamed (*āliklik*)” to go to the bathhouse while men could see. Perhaps, therefore, it would be correct to say that Jaki felt shame (*āliklik*) before adult peers, or at least something close to shame. Her feelings led her to try to hide, as youth and adults often do, by commanding a child to speak for her.

Unfortunately, she was still too much of a child to have much authority as an elder. The children ignored her for thirty seconds. When Sisina finally deigned to respond she offered the excuse that children give when they try to get out of mediating adult interactions. “Ugh, Jaki,” she said, “I am scared.”⁵ A couple of seconds later she repeated, “Jaki, I am scared!”

“Damn-it Sisina!” Jaki turned her attention to the other children. “Nomi!” she called. “You just go and tell Kabiman...”

“Ah girl, jeez,” Nomi said.

“You should go by yourself,” a boy told Jaki.

After a two minute break Jaki tried again. “Hey Tito, go and tell Kabiman...”

“I am scared,” Tito refused. My research assistant interpreted Tito’s utterance as instrumental. Tito was not really scared, my assistant claimed, he just did not want to stop playing.

“You just go tell him,” Jaki commanded.

“Aaaah.”

Jaki fell silent. Lacking the power to command obedience, she tried to work up the courage to go herself. After another three and a half minutes she finally slunk over to the house where the men were chatting. She hesitated, hiding behind the doorframe. As she stood there, knowing that she had been commanded to speak but fearing (or feeling shame) to do so, Sisina and Nomi came up behind her.

Jaki made one weak attempt. “Hey Kabiman,” she said softly. Then she stopped. It was too scary (or shameful). “Nomi,” she pleaded, “go and tell him.”

⁵ Sisina actually said “*jemijak*” which literally means “we are scared.” As discussed previously, people often use the inclusive first person plural to give their utterance more weight.

It was Sisina, the nine-year-old, who answered. “Okay, I will tell him. Hey Kabiman! Kabiman. Turina says to bring a bottle of soy sauce.”

Sisina had previously refused to help Jaki because she was afraid, or so she claimed. Clearly, however, when Sisina was not involved in a game of marbles that she did not want to leave, she was not actually afraid. Or perhaps she was truly a little afraid. Nonetheless, her fear was of neither the same quality nor quantity as Jaki’s. Jaki’s fear (or shame) prevented her from speaking, it made her huddle and hesitate behind the door. In contrast Sisina, in her child’s body and self, quickly overcame her fear and spoke.

In other words, unlike Jaki, Sisina was able to internalize her immaturity and, as a result, find the courage to come out of hiding. Sisina used the resource that indexes children as animators, reported speech. She abdicated responsibility for her words by marking them as the property of an adult.

In some sense, however, her words were actually the property of Jaki, as Kabiman ascertained. After Sisina spoke he asked her who had really told her to pass on the message, “Turina or Jaki?”

“Turina,” Sisina said.

Kabiman knew better. “Where is she?”

Sisina giggled. “Here,” she said through her laughter. She was laughing because, of course, Turina was not there. Sisina was trying to protect Jaki, she recognized that even surrounded by children Jaki was not comfortable.^{iv}

Why was Jaki afraid (or ashamed) while Sisina was not? This whole sequence contained two acts of embedding, two acts of giving words to another to speak. First, Turina sent Jaki to

speak for her, to animate her request. By sending Jaki on this errand Turina positioned Jaki as a child. She sent her to do that which she was either too tired or too ashamed to do.

While often such commands serve to call children into child forms of being, in Jaki's case the command did the opposite. Rather than giving Jaki an opportunity to re-establish herself as a child by asking without fear or shame, Turina's command reinforced Jaki's insecurity with childhood. In many parts of her life, as we have seen, Jaki had already been feeling less and less like a child. Moreover, it is possible that Jaki had already had a bad experience animating commands that required talking to groups of men. Teenage girls talked to me about how young men would proposition and tease them. If a man or teenager spoke in such a manner while Jaki was running an errand, such an experience would have shown her that she was unable to successfully occupy the category of child. Regardless of whether Jaki had had such an experience she knew that individuals only a little older than her, people whom during childhood she considered fellow children, no longer gathered in gender-mixed groups.

In fact, many people whom Jaki considered her peers acted more like Turina than like Sisina—Turina who did not want to do that which she sent Jaki to do. Turina provided Jaki with a model. This model implied, despite Turina's command, that Jaki's own behavior was inappropriate. If Jaki had been younger such an implication would have reinforced the fact that children can do that which is inappropriate for adults. In Jaki's case, however, it made Jaki ashamed, shame that further drew her out of childhood and into young adulthood.

The second act of embedding affected both Jaki and Sisina. Jaki asked Sisina (and other children) to speak for her. Sisina, in contrast to Jaki, did perform her immaturity and re-establish

her status as a child. Such an experience must have further reinforced Jaki's sense that she was no longer really a child.

At the same time, returning to Kulick's (2003) idea of dual indexicality in which utterances reflect their surface propositional content and the opposite, Jaki's plea for help provided a model of what Sisina was not but eventually will become. Jaki provided a model of the future. Moreover, although at nine and fourteen Sisina and Jaki were relatively far apart in age, Sisina still considered Jaki a member of the community of children. As an example, at first Sisina refused to obey Jaki. Then, after Sisina gave the message to Kabiman she said, "Jaki give me one bracelet because it is done." Jaki was still close enough to being a peer that, as opposed to obeying a command, Sisina felt as if she had done her a favor for which she could be repaid.⁶ By recruiting Sisina to animate her words Jaki gave Sisina a picture of a future that was not terribly far away. By acting as a child Sisina defined herself in opposition to that future, thereby necessarily coming to imagine it.

Children on Jajikon have a very distinct sense of themselves as children. "The children (*ajri*) of this island have already stopped [playing that game]" a ten-year-old said. For older children, their understanding of themselves as children increasingly depends on contrasting their own behavior with that of the more mature. An eleven year old girl claimed that she did not have a crush on anyone because 'I am small, a child (*ajri*).' "I am a child (*ajri*)," Jilaba said, "so I am not afraid," 'I can go [watch men play basketball],' a thirteen year-old claimed, 'because I am a child (*ajri*).'

⁶ Jaki did not give Sisina a bracelet.

Even while these older children proclaim themselves to be immature and act as if they are immature when running errands, however, their opinions and evaluations of the world are increasingly mature. While younger children say that children hate and adults do not, nine out of ten children older than ten said, as adults say, that adults hate each other more than children and that adult hate is more real. “Children hate each other and then it is good between them,” Jilaba said to explain why child hate is not real, mirroring the reasoning of adults. An eleven-year-old mimicked adult ways of speaking when she said that children show-off because they “are small and they don’t know,” they don’t think about not-revealing things. We have already seen that older children are more likely to say that they would carry food on back path, more likely to take steps that would allow them to hide.

As children get older they explicitly linguistically mark their immaturity even as they struggle to maintain it, a struggle that entails understanding and imagining a future that comes closer every day. When adults and youth (like Jaki) send children on errands they provide children with a model of what mature people do. Adult commands put children in positions to feel shame. The model leads children to understand, to a certain extent, the adult world. The fact that adults put children in potentially shameful situations means that, increasingly, successfully performing their immaturity in order to run these errands becomes a struggle, a struggle to be children and not feel shame. As children’s peer group changes and people whom they consider to be like them refrain from such immature activity, they start to feel that shame. This shame means that children, like Jaki, are no longer able to pull off a performance of immaturity. Through expecting children to reveal that which adults will not, children are eventually forced into hiding and maturity.

The Passage to Young Adulthood

The next step in life is not adulthood. Young adults differ from adults in many ways. They lack responsibility for a home and children of their own. The proximity of childhood means that children are less likely to obey them, making it harder to send children to do that which they do not want to do. Nonetheless, youth do not play in multi-gender groups, they generally do not wander around with food or directly demand that their peers give, and like Jaki they often feel too much shame or fear to run errands like children.

This level of maturity that comes with young adulthood is something that children and youth both struggle against and embrace. In respect to the latter, children like the power that comes with age. At the same time, however, since adults continue to send them on errands, they necessarily struggle to be children so that they can run such errands even while they become more and more uncomfortable with immature behavior.

While all children, to a certain extent, struggle against the demands of maturity, girls seem to struggle significantly more than boys. Ten boys between the ages of ten and eleven claimed that they wanted to grow up and become *likao* (young men). Some mentioned qualities of young men, such as their strength and authority, that they admired. A ten-year-old said that he wanted to be a young man, because “they are strong...[and] they know how to fight.” Another ten-year-old said that he wanted to grow up so that he could “hit people.” When I asked a twelve year old boy and some older boys if they were “young men (*likao*)” they all said yes proudly and without hesitation.⁷

⁷ They may have also wanted to impress me, a girl, with their manliness.

In contrast, girls say that they do not want to be young women (*jiroñ*). Jaki and Tintin, fourteen and thirteen, protested to me that they were not “teenagers” but rather were “children.” I once asked Jaki if she was going to perform with youth or with Sunday school. She said that she would be with the “children” because she is not “youth.” I said, ‘but you are a young woman (*jiroñ*) now.’ Jaki laughed sheepishly and told me not to say “young woman (*jiroñ*).” Similarly, when I asked thirteen-year-old Rose if she was a young woman she retorted, defensively, that she was a “child (*ajri*).” My question prompted an older woman to contradict Rose, stating that Rose was indeed a young woman. Rose protested and blamed me for starting the conversation. “Elise,” she said, “you are really bad.”

Younger girls also expressed derision about young women (*jiroñ*) and a desire to stay children. Caroline, eleven, told me that if someone calls a girl a “*jiroñ*...they are immediately mad.” Two girls between eight and ten years old said that “it was bad” to be a young woman. One added that young women are bad because they have a bad way of being, a bad culture. “Childhood (*ajri*) is good,” an eleven-year-old asserted, implying that young womanhood is not.

Kinta, ten, said, “it is a little bit ok” to be a young woman.

“Do you want to be the size of Rose [thirteen]?” I asked.

“I only want to be the size of Kara,” Kinta said, mentioning a ten year old whom Kinta perceived to be younger than she.

This negative image of young women likely relates to negative images of the female body prevalent in Marshallese discourse. Several girls between ten and twelve years old gossiped one day about a thirteen-year-old girl who was “very young but has hairy armpits.” “We really

hate it that she has hairy armpits” a girl criticized, showing the dislike that younger girls have for the sexual characteristics of the mature.

Boys and girls have different degrees of happiness about the future. Both of them, however, are continuously put in positions in which they have to make decisions, albeit possibly unconscious ones, as to who they are going to be. Jaki, for whatever reason, agreed to run Turina’s errand. Perhaps she did not know that Kabiman was chatting with a bunch of men. Increasingly insecure in her childhood, however, she is less likely to agree to run such an errand in the future.

As for Sisina, at the moment her status as a child is secure. But Jaki has given her a model, and as Sisina grows she will, little by little, find herself unable to run errands that adults avoid. As she slowly becomes ashamed of her own behavior she will start, like Jaki, to try and outsource the errands to younger children. She will also start to refuse the errands entirely. As Turina has shown us, adults continue to send children on errands for as long as they will agree to go. Even in the beginning of middle childhood children sometimes refuse. As children get older they refuse more and more until, overcome by shame, they categorically refuse to do that which is inappropriate for adults.

The Role of Aged Selves in Cultural Reproduction

Although it is obvious that age, like gender and race, is embodied and performed we know surprisingly little about how performances and embodiments vary with age. In the RMI, children, youth, and adults take on subjectivities specific to their stage of life. Just as the police officer who yells “hey there!” transforms an individual into the subject of his or her call, running errands interpellate children into subjectivities that are opposed to other ways of being (Althusser

1971:127-186). Through performances of difference children and adults create difference, recreating childhood and adulthood.

Just as we know little about age specific subjectivities, we have yet to study the process through which age is made a part of people's habitus, part of people's conscious or unconscious sense of self. In the RMI, paradoxically, it is partly through acting immature that children eventually come to change and to discard not only childish behavior but also childish emotional reactions. The commands of elders to do that which adults should not provide models of the future, leading children to imagine the course of life and their place within it. Representations of the future "shape choices and trajectories" (Cole 2010:16). As children start to imagine themselves as peers to others who avoid such behavior, children become ashamed. They become unable or unwilling to abdicate responsibility for their words and actions. They leave childhood behind.

Conclusion

In the Marshall Islands good people are those who give. Kin give to kin, those with more power take care of those with less, and those with less power defer and give to those with more. In many ways, Jajikon seems to be the prototypical example of a place where life revolves around giving, where giving creates and reinforces social bonds.

And yet, even in Jajikon giving is not always good. Rather, giving to a neighbor means that one may not be able to give to one's mother; sharing with all of one's kin means that one may not be able to feed one's children. Everybody knows that all social relationships are not created equal and that it is more important to give to some and not to others.

For adults avoiding giving is difficult since refusing is shameful. Asking is also difficult, since asking is also shameful. To engage in exchange without feeling shame or losing face, adults hide. With speech and other signs they physically hide their goods or their status as possessors. They disguise their requests with indirect and ambiguous words that make it possible to plausibly deny that they ever asked for anything. They conceal dangerous feelings and threatening information, avoiding conflict.

Adults interpret these acts of hiding as meaningful. An adult walking with empty hands signals that she probably hid food in her house. An adult who says that he has no fish is probably lying. Adults in Jajikon are suspicious of each others' words. As a result, it is goods, as opposed to words, that carry the force of truth. When people give they are truthful. If they do not give, they are by definition liars. Consequently, while hiding is better than blatantly refusing to give, it is better still to outsource the burden of acting and speaking to someone else.

The only people in Jajikon willing to take up that burden are children, specifically children in middle childhood. Adults, in their maturity, have too much shame to carry goods or ask for things. Children in early childhood are too immature to obey. Children in middle childhood are simultaneously mature enough to obey and immature enough to not feel shame. Since children, according to adults, are not capable of meaningful deception, these older children are able to convincingly abdicate responsibility for their words and goods in a way that no one else can. Their acts of not-giving are not insulting, their acts of asking forgiven. Children's power comes not in spite of their immaturity but precisely because of it—because in their difference they make acts of not-giving, lying, and asking insignificant to adults, changing the status of the goods and words that they hold. Child-adult interactions represent unique sites through which avoiding giving takes place.

Just as adults assert, in the company of their peers children do things that adults never do. They prance around with lollipops, demand goods, refuse to give, and criticize each other. They engage in these seemingly face-threatening acts not because they lack face but because relations between children depend on different dynamics than relations between adults. Children are constantly engaged in a struggle for power, a struggle which requires much more direct and assertive speech than negotiations between adults. Only through refusing, demanding, and criticizing do children establish their rank as people to be feared, people whom other children must respect.

Ironically, while with each other children do often do things that adults never do, they prefer not to speak in such a manner to adults. Adults have the unambiguous authority of age, an authority that children fear to question. Since not-hiding is a tool in the quest for power, children

would prefer to hide with adults. Moreover, the children that prefer to hide the most, the older children, are the ones on whom adults depend to run these errands that require coming out of hiding.

Obedying adults requires overcoming children's fear of them. They manage to do so by performing their immaturity. Through reported speech children mark themselves both as children and as animators. By abdicating responsibility for their actions in a way that only children can they internalize their age. They come to feel like children, people who need not feel fear or shame and, consequently, need not hide. As children take on aged forms of being and feeling they define themselves in opposition to maturity, thereby simultaneously imagining it. Through doing that which adults may not children take on mature ways of speaking and feeling, slowly transforming themselves into adults.

As we have seen, in Jajikon giving cannot be understood without analyzing avoiding giving. Avoiding giving, in turn, cannot be understood without analyzing children and their unique communicative power to circulate goods and words in ways that adults cannot. These interactions between children and adults present a unique site not only where avoiding giving takes place, but through which culture is reproduced.

These findings have implications for analyses of places other than the Marshall Islands and for social processes other than exchange. Much of what I have presented is culturally and historically specific. It is much more difficult in the RMI than in many other places to get out of giving. Nonetheless, everywhere there must be signs, and the manipulation of signs, to mark things as the property of certain people and not others. Moreover, much of the literature on exchange has been written on the Pacific and almost all of it (if not all of it) excludes avoiding

giving and children. My research suggests that most of these works are, at the very best, incomplete, at the worst, incorrect.

Finally, my previous research in Guatemala, as well as disparate articles and sentences within larger works, have discussed the fact that children's lack of sociality gives them the power to do things that adults cannot (Berman 2011; Hotchkiss 1967; Schildkrout 1978). None of these works (including my own) sufficiently analyze this phenomenon and its implications. Nonetheless, they do suggest that the larger pattern of children's unique ability to do things adults cannot and thereby engage in economic, political, and social action should be applicable in places outside of the Marshall Islands.

Understanding that action requires recognizing that if age is semiotically embedded in people's negotiations of how to avoid giving and when to give, it is likely embedded in other social processes as well. I never imagined, before my fieldwork, that I would find out that children and inter-age interactions would be so central to a topic as fundamental to anthropology as exchange. Other recent work has shown that analysis of the life course lends new insights into globalization, social change, migration, and morality (Cole and Durham 2007; Cole 2010; Hickman 2011). Combined with my research, it seems clear that culture is aged in ways that we have only just begun to explore.

We know that social categories such as gender, race, class, and age are social constructs. While a significant body of literature focuses on how children take on gendered and racialized identities, however, we know relatively little about how it is that age comes to be. I have offered a comparative analysis that, by focusing on the construction and performance of age differences, reveals the linguistic and semiotic practices through which children learn to be and feel like

children. I also show how, as a consequence of taking on such aged selves, children eventually learn to feel and act like adults. My analysis is limited in that I do not address change. It is not hard to imagine, however, how children's performance of difference could go awry, how they could choose to reject the models that they define themselves against instead of eventually conforming to them.

Weiner (1992) argued that we should reframe analysis of economic activity from a focus on reciprocity to a focus on reproduction. For very different reasons, I come to the same conclusion. Age, by definition something that changes with time, is intimately intertwined with exchange and the dangers that accompany it. Engaging in exchange requires constantly re-enacting age-specific forms of habitus. As children become uncomfortable in their old roles they take on new ones. Through participating in the circulation of the material and semiotic world they reproduce culture as well. References Cited

Appendix: Transcripts

Transcription Conventions

- @ Burst of laughter
() Undecipherable speech
[] Overlapping speech
(()) Researcher's comment

Transcripts From Chapter 2

- ⁱ “She is a Bad Woman” Transcript 2.1
- 97 Deina *Ñe kwetal ñan ñweo imōn lijerā meer room en kwerool*
If you go to the house of my girlfriend and her husband, that room,
then you return
- 98 *Jejab deļoñ lok ñweieñ kiin bwe*
We don't enter that house anymore because
- 99 *pile ñweiiien kumi kañ.*
they pile up their stuff
- 100 *ñweiiien lien.*
that girl's stuff
- 101 Relin *Ke ri-pālle men en ippān.*
Because her husband is a white guy
- 102 Deina *Im kein rot ri-pālle en?*
And what type of white guy is he?
- 103 () *ke*
() then
- 104 *eñieñ raar tok im...*
there they came and
- 105 *im kwejelā ñweo imōn kar*
and do you know about their house that used to be
- 106 *rum eo an liTomi men?*
Tomi and her husband's room?
- 107 Relin *Mmm*
Yes
- 108 Deina *Emōj an lien kadeļoñ aolep kain.*
That girl filled the room up with everything
- 109 Relin *Ak ewi LaHouno im men?*
But where are Houno and his wife?
- 110 Deina *Eñōj erro etal jen ñweieñ.*
They already moved away from that house
- 111 Relin *Orōr!*
No shit!
- 112 Deina *Emōj () lien kadeļoñ aolep*

113 That () girl filled up that room with everything
mweiuk im
 stuff and
 114 *Leeñ ekijoñ etal im lõk tutu,*
 That man always goes and bathes
 115 *Eoktak loan room en an leeñ le*
 Girl, the stuff in that room is completely different
 116 *kiin mweiiien.*
 from the stuff before
 117 Relin *Akō erro ej kiki*
 But when those two sleep
 118 *elōñ ke aerro ruuṃ?*
 do they have a room?
 119 Deina *An won?*
 Who?
 120 Relin *Jarron,*
 Those guys
LiRina im men?
 Rina and her husband?
 121 Deina *Rej kiki ilo room kā jo.*
 They sleep in the rooms over there
 122 Relin *Emōj etke ejaam kanne lõk [ej men bwe ren=]*
 Its all full, why did they fill it, [just so that they can=]
 123 Deina *[joñan an nana lien]*
 [that's how bad she is]
 124 *=ren jab bar etal ñan mweien*
 they (other people) won't be able to go back to that house
 125 Deina ()
 126 *eee eo,*
 ah!
 127 *Bōlen*
 Maybe
 128 Relin *Lien ke ekar jab baj kōñaan wōt Aini*
 The girl, she only likes Aini
 129 Deina *Iññā lijerā ejjab mij e ke*
 Yeah my girlfriend doesn't know about it
 130 Relin *Ejjab ke?*
 She doesn't?
 131 Deina *Ejjab*
 She doesn't
 132 Relin @
 133 Deina @
 134 Deina *Iba nana lien,*

- 135 I say that woman is bad,
Eṃool ke lien enana?
Is it true that she is a bad woman?
- 136 Relin *Aet,*
Yes,
[Lale mōk] keemem eo an ɭaddik en erūtto.
[Just think] about the first birthday of her oldest son.
- 137 Deina *[Āinwōt]*
[It's like]
- 138 *Ekwe*
Okay
- 139 Relin *Āinwōt elukkuun*
Its like she was really
- 140 *kūbboṅ kōn men ko wōj*
stingy with everything
- 141 Deina *Iññā le*
Girl, that's right
- 142 Relin *Dike an armej ran ro [()]*
She hated it when people [()]
- 143 *tōp,*
claimed,
- 144 *[Relak ba rej tōptōp...]*
They said that they were going to claim items...

ii

“Always asking for oil” Transcript 2.2

- 297 Kāti *Ke ij ba*
Because I say
- 298 *ñā inaaj lukkuun dāpiji wōt bwe en lōñ aō pineep*
I am going really hold onto it so that I will have coconut oil
- 299 *Kōnke kwejelā ña ñe ñe juon ekajjitōk iban dāpiji*
Because you know me, if, if someone asks me for something I won't
hold onto it
- 300 Lacy *Im ɭak mōj*
And then when it's all gone
- 301 *ajej im ɭak bwe en kōkōkapit*
you share it so that they can oil themselves
- 302 *emaat kapite aje... leddik e*
there is nothing left to oil, this girl
- 303 Kāti *Jekdoṅ ñe jeba reba*
Regardless of whether I say it, if they say
- 304 *“Letok jidik”*
“Give me a little”
- 305 *Emōj jāliklik im*

306 It's over, I am ashamed/hesitate and
 ekwe
 ok
 307 Lacy *Won ne ej kajjitōk jidik le?*
 Who asks for a little, girl?
 308 Kāti *Orōrōr*
 Damn!
 309 *Iien eo ar wōr aō pineep le*
 Girl, that time when I had oil
 310 *LiJujan ar itok im teiñi teiñi teiñi*
 Jujan came and poured it out poured it out poured it out
 311 Lacy *Ah bwe lio en elukkuun booļ iu ilo mweo imōn etke ejjab kapineep?*
 But that girl, she has a lot of sprouted coconuts at her house, why
 doesn't she make coconut oil?
 312 Kāti *Kwejjab roñ*
 You aren't listening
 313 *lak lōñ an*
 when she had some
 314 *iļak etal im baj iakweļap*
 I went and just begged insistently
 315 *Āinwōt epen an letok le*
 It's like it's hard for her to give it to me, girl
 316 *Etal im iāliklik im*
 I became ashamed and
 317 *ekwe emōj.*
 it was over.
 318 *Emōj bwe komiini pineep ne am ña inaaļ make kōmman aō*
 Its over because you are stingy with that oil of yours, I will make my
 own myself.
 319 *Ña ke i*
 As for me
 320 *Katom ejjab makoko in kōmman aō pineep*
 Katom ((Kāti's husband)) is not unwilling to make my oil ((help her
 harvest the coconuts for the oil)).

Transcripts From Chapter 3

iii

“Girl, give me gum!” Transcript 3.1

507 Imon *Etal im ba Hukira en letok kijō bwil*
 Go and tell Hukira that she should give me my gum.
 508 Deina @@
 509 *Akō etan...*
 But um...

- 510 Kaio *Kajjitōk bwil ak elukkuun bwijin armej ilo ob en*
Ask for gum when there are so many people on that dock!
- 511 Imon *Ekwe,*
Okay
- 512 *Ba,*
Say,
- 513 *“Ña inaaɟ ba ñan e”*
“I will go tell her” (what Kaio should have responded to Kaio)
- 514 *“Letok kijō bwil luweo bwe elukkuun lab aō lose ñan family ne”*
“Give me my food girl because I am broke from supporting my in-laws”
- 515 Deina @ @
- 516 Kaio @ @ @ @ @

iv

“That Food Isn’t Worth It” Transcript 3.2

- 1021 Sofia *Ak kwejelā Iba en tal bōktok bwilitudek.*
But you know that I told him to bring some bwilitudek (breadfruit cooked with coconut)
- 1022 *Eba, “kwejelā ñe en kar bar juon kain ibōktok.”*
He said, “You know I would have brought if it had been another type of food.”
- 1023 *“Ak mōñā le iban baajkōłtok ijene.”*
“But, girl, I won’t bike there for that type of food”
- 1024 Caitlin @
- 1025 Sofia *Iba, “ejjab kije men en.*
I said “it’s not your food
- 1026 *Kab ejjab am...”*
And it’s not your...”
- 1027 *“Ak jekaroñta iban etal.”*
“Regardless, I won’t go.” (the man said this to Sofia)
- 1028 Imon *Ta eo?*
What happened?
- 1029 Sofia *bwilitudek eo*
The breadfruit with coconut
- 1030 *Ikar ba en tal bōktok wōt kōkein ke kōmjel*
I told him to just bring it to us earlier, when we were three ((people.))

Transcripts From Chapter 4

- v “What Did They Bring?” Transcript 4.1
- 231 Diāmon *Relukkuun mane erro Roro ke jibboñ*
They really hit him and Roro in the morning
- 232 Humtok *Eita?*
What’s that?
- 233 Diāmon *Relukkuun mane erro*
They really hit those two
- 234 *Baba*
Dad
- 235 Ajiji *Bwe?*
Why?
- 236 Diāmon *Kōn erro ikkure kōn wa en*
Because they were playing with that vehicle
- 237 Ajiji *Wa rot?*
Which vehicle?
- 238 Diāmon *Wa en waan Ārtur*
Ārtur’s truck
- 239 Angela *Wa rot en?*
Which vehicle is that?
- 240 Diāmon *Iiūñ*
Yeah
- 241 Mariana *Emōj aer ()*
Are they done ()
- 242 Abe *Raar erake ke?*
Were they spreading it out ((water from the ocean))?
- 243 Humtok *Eita Ārtur ejjab bōke?*
Why didn’t Ārtur bring it ((the truck)) back?
- 244 *Aer walk tok?*
Did they walk back?
- 245 Diāmon *Ejorrāān*
It is broken.
- 246 Marianna *Ejorrāān?*
It is broken?
- 247 Abe *Ejjab jorrāān*
It isn’t broken.
- 248 Humtok *Ja=*
No=
- 249 Angela *Ejjab jorrāān rekar*
It isn’t broken they
- 250 Mariana *Etal im joļoke*

- 251 Diāmon Go and throw it away ((to another child, separate conversation.))
Etan elōñ etan bar kain kan?
 And is there, what's the name of those thing again?
- 252 *Emaat kiaj*
 The gas is gone
- 253 *Etan bar kijoñ en?*
 What are the names of those guys?
- 254 *Bamy im, Jimon*
 Bamy and, Jimon
- 255 Mariana *Ta ko raar būkwōji?*
 What did they bring to you? ((in the other town))
- 256 Diāmon *Mōñā wōt*
 257 Only food
Pilawā im raij im
 Flour and rice and
- 258 *etan bar kurij im*
 what's it called, cooking oil and
- 259 Abe *Won?*
 Who?
- 260 Diāmon *Eta le baking powder im mōj*
 Dude! Baking powder and that's all.

vi

“The Limes are Gone” Transcript 4.2

- 161 Kanut *Ah Mariana ejjeļok ļaim ke?*
 Hey Mariana aren't there any limes
- 162 Mariana *Wōdded joñan an kar baj taujin ke jibboñ*
 Damn, there were almost a thousand this morning
- 163 Kanut *Weeak. ikar ba kwōn [jilkintok]*
 What?! I said that you should send some
- 164 Mariana *[Ah laAjiji] iba en bōkwōji ejjab būkwōji ak e itok im baajkōli rōkeañļok.*
 Ugh, that Ajiji, I said he should take them to you but he didn't take them to you, instead he went and rode his bike to the south.
- 165 Kanut *Orōr ñan ia?*
 Damn, where to?
- 166 Mariana *Mōn Mōre.*
 ((The name of a house on the south side.))
- 167 Kanut *Orōr*
 Damn
- 168 Mariana *Jeñak lio enaaj taiki*
 Who knows what she (woman who lives in the house) is going to do with it.

- 169 *Joñan in won ejjab ba Lila ej kañ kilier im*
Who knows, maybe Lila (the woman) is eating the skin and
- 170 Angela *Ejjab ilak ba LiLiti kein ta kañi?*
No, I said to Liti (Lila's classificatory daughter who lives with her),
what are you
doing with those things?
- 171 *Eba ej kattar tok jimman bwe en liloki.*
She said that she is waiting for her grandfather to come to give them
to him.
- 172 Mariana *Ej ba ta le?*
What did she say, girl?
- 173 Angela *Eba ej kattar jimman bwe en liloki.*
She said that she is waiting for her grandfather to give them to him.
- 174 Mariana *Jen ia Rintob?*
From where, Rintob?

vii

“Only enough for us” Transcript 4.3

- 555 Rōna *Ejeraamman ke je?*
Did you have good fortune ((fishing)) dude?
- 556 Jin *Ebwe an ri-ṁwiin ṁōñā.*
It's enough for the people in this house.
- 557 Carl *LaRōna ah!*
Hey Rōna!
- 558 @@
- 559 *Eḷap am jeraamman.*
You have had good fortune ((fishing.))
- 560 Jin *Ejjab lukkuun jeraamman ak bōkan wōt ameañ ṁōñā.*
It's not a lot of good fortune but enough for us to eat.
- 561 Carl *Bōkan wōt an won?*
Enough only for who?
- 562 Jin *Bōkan ameañ ṁōñā ejjab bōkan an laCarl ṁōñā.*
Enough for us to eat, not enough for Carl to eat.

viii

“I Can See The Lime” Transcript 4.4

- 688 Jon *Kijed jol im lime.*
My food, salt and lime. ((Technically he used the first person plural
and said “our food.”))
- 689 *LiLiṇi*
Liṇi
- 690 Liṇi *Emaat*
It's gone (there is no more)
- 691 Jon *Ah ta ne jidik wōt?*
Hey what's that, just a little?

- 692 Liņi *Em ñe jidik wōt kwōn baj mōñā wōt?*
And if it is just a little why should you eat? ((Sarcastic))
- 693 Jon *Letok kijō lime*
Give me my lime
- 694 Liņi *Ekwe rājet ne*
Ok take the half

ix

“Why Doesn’t She Cook Her Own Rice?” Transcript 4.5

- 506 Rose *LiCatherine LiCelia ej ba kane lok kijen rajj.*
Catherine Celia said to fill a plate with rice for her.
- 507 Myrta *Etal im ba emaat rajj mwiin.*
Go and say that there is no more rice in this house.
- 508 Rose *Rajj mat?*
Cooked rice?
- 509 Myrta *Etke ejjab kōmat rajj mween?*
Why doesn’t she cook rice in her house?

Transcripts From Chapter 5

x

“Go Get Him Dog!” Transcript 5.1

- 53 Joj *Rōka jidik?*
Rōka, a little?
- 54 Rōka *Jab*
No
- 55 Kyle *LaRōka ah*
Rōka!
- 56 *Letok jidik kijō.*
Give me a little food.
- 57 Rōka *Ah kwaar jab letok kijō.*
Hey, you didn’t give me my food.
- 58 Kyle *Iban lewōj kein am ikkure.*
I won’t give you your toy.
- 59 *Lelikao*
A spinning shell
- 60 Rōka *Ta eo ta eo?*
What’s this, what’s this? ((Rōka might have a toy in his hand.))
- 61 Joj *Ah ekōtoto lo.*
Hey dude its windy. ((changing the subject))
- 61 Kyle *Bar je jikū.*
Here too.
- 62 Joj *Eh ekōtoto je jikū lo.*
Hey dude, it’s windy here. ((implying that they can’t play a game))
- 63 Kyle *Ejjab baj tōtoon.*

- It's probably going to get dirty.
 64 *Kwejjab baj jānij am jiiñlij ah elukkuun tōtoon ah.*
 Why don't you just change your shirt, it's really dirty.
 65 *Letok jidik kijō kwōn baj tōr wōt le?*
 Give me a little food why are you so greedy dude? (to Rōka)
 66 Rōka *Ah etke kwaar jab letok kijō?*
 Hey, why didn't you give me my food?
 67 Kyle *Kwejelā ñe kobar ba ña in lewōj kijōm jeban bar lewōj kijōm.*
 You know, if you tell me again to give you your food I won't give it
 to you.
 68 *Kōjro ilen.*
 We two come to... (singing)
 69 *Lale mejeoan ne.*
 Look at that breadfruit.
 70 *Jim* (no longer singing)
 71 *Jee*
 Go get him! ((to a dog, interjection used to sic a dog on something
 or someone))
 72 *Eowañ.*
 You're in for it. ((to Rōka))
 73 *Kidu ne ej tin kij yok kōn am jab lelok kijēn.*
 That dog is going to bite you because you didn't give him food.
 74 *Eowañ.*
 Oh boy, look out.
 75 *Eowañ bar kidu eowañ.*
 You are in for it, also from that other dog, watch out!
 76 *Eo...*((started to say *eowañ*)).
 77 *Kōpool! kijañ en kōpoolē.*
 Chase that guy, chase him! ((to the dog to chase Rōka))

xi

“He Said” Transcript 5.2

- 465 Karistin *Leō ta eo LaGeorge ej ba kwōj ba ej ba?*
 Dude what is it that George says you said he said?
 466 *Ej ba*
 He said
 467 *Ej ba kōn mweo.*
 He said about the house.
 468 Kyle *Ah e!*
 Ah!
 469 *[Ajiji]*
 [Ajiji
 470 Karistin *[Ah ej ba ejjab ba men eo kwōj ba]*
 [Ah he said he didn't say the thing you said]

- 471 Kyle [Eeee!]
 472 Ajiji [LaGeorge ej ba ta?]
 [What did George say?]
 473 Karistin [ej ba ej jab ba naan eo kwōj ba ñan ña.]
 [He said he didn't say the stuff that you said to me.]
 474 Kyle [LaJalaj ee eee!@@]
 [Jalaj hey hey!] ((Jalaj is a nickname for Ajiji.))
 475 Ajiji *Eo LaGeorge ewi LaGeorge?*
 Where is George where is George?
 476 Karistin *Ah!*
Ah!
 477 *Ej ba kwōj kōnnaan ke e ej rake.*
 He said you were talking when he was raking.
 478 *Kwolem Ajiji.*
 Your penis Ajiji.
 478 Abraham *Ah ej riab LaGeorge.*
Hey George is lying.
 479 Karistin *Ah etke ej ba ijajōb ba naan eo...*
 But why did he say he didn't say that...
 480 *"Boss en aō, LaAjiji ear ba."*
"My boss, Ajiji said it."

xii

“Don’t Be Lazy” Transcript 5.3

- 65 Liti ((walks toward Trint, who has a lollipop stick sticking out of his mouth, and gestures toward her mouth to indicate he should share with her.))
 66 Trint *Kwōj jab baj ae?*
 Why don't you just collect sprouted coconut?
 67 Liti *Kwe lukkuun tōr lo.* ((under her breath))
 Dude, you are really greedy.
 68 Trint *Eo.*
 Here
 69 ((Pretends to give food - but there is no candy left on the stick.))
 70 @@@

xiii

“What About Me?” Transcript 5.4

- 441 Jaki *LiNomi ah letok ña beñkol ilo beim.*
 Nomi give me the bracelet on your arm.
 442 Kāti *Eñne nein.*
 It is there on her ankle.
 443 Nomi *Akō ña?*
 Nut what about me?
 444 Jaki *Akō ewi beñkol eo am?*

- 445 Nomi But where is your bracelet?
Eñe neū.
Here on my ankle.
- 446 *Ij ba akō ña?*
I said, what about me?
- 447 Jaki *Bar*
Again
- 448 *kajjitōk.*
ask.
- 449 Nomi *E e e!*
Ahhhhhh!
- 450 Jaki @@
- 451 *Tal im ba jinōm en wia am.*
Go and tell your mother to buy you yours.
- 452 Nomi *LiJaki iban kwōnaaj aje beñkol e aō.*
Jaki I won't, you are going to share my bracelet.
- 453 Jaki *Ñan won?*
With whom?
- 454 Nomi *Ñan armej.*
With people.
- 455 Jaki *Won armej?*
Which person?
- 456 Nomi *Ah Barbra.*
Um...Barbra.

xiv

“I’m Not Going To Rehearsal” Transcript 5.5

- 478 Elise *Kwōj ta?*
What are you doing?
- 479 Kinta *Tal ñan mōkañ eañ.*
Going to the north-side. (where the Protestant church is)
- 480 Elise *Ñe kwōj katak korumwij.*
If you are going to rehearsal you are late.
- 481 Kinta *Eh?*
Huh?
- 482 Elise *Ñe kwōj katak korumwij.*
If you are going to rehearsal you are late.
- 483 Kinta *Ijjab tin katak.*
I am not going to rehearsal.
- 484 Myrta *Kwe Seventh Day?*
Are you a member of Seventh Day? ((the name of a church on the south side)
- 485 *Assembly?*

- A member of Assembly? (there is an Assembly of God church in the middle of town)
- 486 Kinta *Ejjab*
No
- 487 Myrta *Ak etke kwejjab katak?*
So why aren't you going to rehearsal?
- 488 Jirna *Kinta kwōj tal ñan ia?*
Kinta where are you going?
- 489 Kinta *Eh?*
What?
- 490 Jirna *Kwōj tal ñan ia?*
Where are you going?
- 491 Kinta *Mōkañ eañ*
The north-side
- 492 Jirna *Im?*
And?
- 493 Myrta *Im katak ej riab ba ejjab tin katak.*
To rehearsal she is lying, saying she isn't going to rehearsal.

xv

“Bring Me My Fish” Transcript 5.6

- 441 Lance *LaCarl ah kwōjjab bōtok kijō ek le?*
Hey Carl man you didn't bring my fish?
- 442 *LaCarl*
Carl
- 443 *LaCarl*
Carl
- 444 *Tal bōktok kijō ek lo.*
Go and bring me my fish dude.
- 445 Carl *Emaat ek.*
The fish is gone.
- 446 Lance *LaCarl ah!*
Hey Carl!
- 447 *Tal im bōtok kijō ek.*
Go and bring me my fish

xvi

“Cheese Balls” Transcript 5.7

- 754 Liti *Kwaar mōñā ta?*
What did you eat?
- 755 Angela *Raij*
Rice
- 756 *kwe?*
You?
- 757 Liti *Chij ball*

- 758 Angela Cheese balls ((quietly with a big smile on her face))
Im bar ta...
 And what else... ((breaks off without finishing her sentence))
- 759 *Ah ejjab rajj le!*
 Hey, it wasn't rice girl!
- 560 Liti *Ah?*
 Yeah?
- 561 Angela *Ah binana im ek jol*
 Um, bananas and salt fish

xvii

“You Don’t Have Any” Transcript 5.8

- 268 Maji *Ij ba kwe jel?*
 I said is your mouth watering?
- 269 ()
- 270 Kiti *[Aaaaah]*
 Hey!
- 271 Maji *[Mmm]*
 272 *Kwaar jab ba.*
 You didn't say.
- 273 Kiti @@
 274 *Idike yok bwe kwōjjab letok kijō.*
 I hate you because you aren't giving me my food.
- 275 Maji *Iban kaļok ball eo*
 I won't show you the ball.
- 276 Kiti *Ak ña ijelā ewi.*
 But I know where it is.
- 277 Maji *Eh?*
 What?
- 278 Kiti *Ijelā*
 I know
- 279 Maji *Eh?*
 What?
- 280 Kiti *Ijelā*
 I know
- 281 *Ña ijelā ke ewi?*
 Don't I know where it is?
- 282 Maji *Ōkkōk mōñā jen lal kijen jatan.*
 Eew that's the devil's food, food from the ground.
- 283 Mariana *Elōñ ke bok ie?* ((Mariana is Maji's mother))
 Is there sand there (on the food)?
- 283 Maji *Ekōļok*
 Aaaaah
- 284 Kiti *Elōñ ke bok ie ke ejjelok?*

- Is there sand there or isn't there?
Kwe ne kwōnaaj jatan.
 You, you will be deviled. ((infected by the devil food))
- 285 Maji *Kwe ne*
 You there
- 286 Kiti *Kwe*
 You
- 287 Maji *Kwe*
 You
- 288 Kiti *Ekwe jab tok ñan mweien.*
 Ok, don't come to the house.
- 289 Maji *Ak mweo imō!*
 But it's my house!
- 290 Kiti *Mweo imōm mweo edik.*
 Your house is the small house.
- 291 Maji *Mweo imō e.*
 This is my house.
- 292 Kiti *Ejjab mweo imōm en.*
 That's not your house.
Mweo imōm en edik.
 Your house is that small one.
- 293 Maji *mweo imō e.*
 This is my house.
Ekwe rol ñan mweo imōm.
 Okay return to your house.
- 294 Kiti *Ekwe tal ñan mweo imōm.*
 Ok go to your house.

xviii

“It's My Lollipop” Transcript 5.9

- 112 Rōka ((Walks into church sucking on a lollipop.))
 113 Kinta *Tok kijō.*
 Give me my food.
- 112- Rōka ((no response - other children are talking about other things in these
 118 turns))
 119 Kinta *Aolepen.*
 All of it.
- 120 Kol *Ekwe letok bwe ña in kiji.*
 Ok give it to me so that I can bite it.
- 121 Liti *Emaat*
 There is no more.
- 122 Kol *Ekwe idike yok.*
 Ok I hate you ((to Rōka))
- 123 *Ña ij bwinbwin ñan lalem.*

- I am going to count to five.
- 124 Kinta ()
- 125 Kol *Juon*
One
- 126 *Ruo jilu emen*
Two three four
- 127 Rōka *Itok*
Come
- 128 *Ekwe kwōn itok.*
Ok you should come ((To Kol, indicating he will give Kol some food.))
- 129 Kinta *LaRōka ah letok kijed !*
Rōka ah give me my food!
- 130 Krino *LaRōka ah lelok kijen liKinta.*
Rōka ah give Kinta her food.
- 131 Kol *[Rōka ah tok kijō.]*
Rōka give me my food.
- 132 Kinta *[Koban lale eni.]*
You won't watch us playing tag.
- 133 Krino *Jab lelok kijen LaKol!*
Don't give Kol food!
- 134 ((10.4 second pause - another conversation between other children is taking place))
- 135 Kinta *LaRōka ah*
Rōka
- 136 ((6.4 second pause, the other children continue talking))
- 137 Kinta *LaRōka ah!*
Rōka
- 138 Rōka *[Eñe ippa]*
Here it is with me.
- 139 Kinta *Ah ñe koboke jim̄mam enaaj mane yok.*
Ah if you take it your grandfather will hit you.
- 140 Kol *Jidik wōt.*
Just a little.
- 141 Rōka *Ah iban.*
Ah I won't.
- 142 *Iban!*
I won't!
- 143 Kol ()

- 144 Kinta *Kijō!*
My food!
- 145-147 ((Other kids talking,))
- 148 Kol *Etan bar kain kane?*
What is the name of that kind of thing again?
- 149 *Ah ña kij jidik wōt.*
Ah I am only going to bite a little off.
- 150 Krino ((singing))
- 151 Krino *Letok kijō lo LaRōka lo.*
Rōka dude give me my food dude.
- 152-158 Kol ((changes the subject and yells at some younger children to sit down.))
- 159 Child *Ekōk letok kijō.*
Ugh give me my food.
- 160 Kol *Kwōn baj miin wōt le.*
Man, you are really stingy.

xix

“Lena is Greedy” Transcript 5.10

- 140 Jason *Ah LiLena kotōr LiLena.*
Ah Lena you are greedy Lena.
LiLena kwe tōr.
Lena you are greedy.
- 142 Roni *LiLena jab keroro bwe kwe tōr. @@*
Lena don't talk because you are greedy
- 143 Jason *Komiin LiLena kwe miin.*
You are stingy Lena you are stingy.
- 144 Roni *Elisa LiLena emiin.*
Elise, Lena is stingy.
- 145 Jason *[Emiin LiLena]*
[Lena is stingy]
- 146 Elise *[Etke?]*
[Why?]
- 147 Jason *Ejjab letok bwe jen jibwe men eo nejin.*
She doesn't give her toy to us so that we can hold it
- 148 Elise *Mmm*
Ooh
- 149 Chase *Ah mm*
Ah ooh
- 150 Roni *Miin*
Stingy
- 151 *An pepe.*
It's her decision.
- 152 Jason *Ah nejin im an pepe.*

Ah it is hers and it is her decision.

xx

“Only The Two of Us Will Eat” Transcript 5.11

- 273 Caje *LaKol!*
Kol!
- 274 Child *LaKol tok kijō lo!*
Kol dude give me my food!
- 275 Trint (singing)
- 276 Kol *Kōmmane beim*
Get your hand ready (Kol shares some of his food)
- 277 Trint (singing)
- 278 Child *LaKol letok kijō lo*
Kol dude, give me my food
- 279 Trint (singing)
- 280 Kol *Ah emōj aolep*
Hey, everybody has had some!
- 281 Child *[laKol!]*
[Kol!]
- 282 Child *[Orōr]*
[Shit!]
- 283 Krino *[ejjain mōj ña lo!]*
[Dude I never got any!]
- 284 Trint (singing)
- 285 Kol *Ōrra edik.*
Ugh it’s too small.
- 286 *Kōjro enaaaj mōñā nabōj.*
The two of us will eat outside.
- 287 *Kōjro wōt men e.*
This stuff is only for the two of us

xxi

“Just a Little” Transcript 5.12

- 117 Kyle *Kijō*
My food
- 118 Jaki *Ah leō enaaaj dik men ne.*
Hey man that thing ((the food)) will be ((too)) small.
Kein amro fry
It is for the two of us to fry
- 119 Kyle *[Ekwe jidik wōt.]*
[Ok just a little]
- 120 Abaram *[Koba ekwoj birin.]*
So you are saying that his butt is frozen.
((Abaram is referring to a conversation about the man in the moon
that Kyle interrupted by asking for food.))

- 121 Abaram *Koba ekwoj birin.*
You say that his butt is frozen.
- 122 Kyle *Ah!*
Hey!
- 123 *Jidik wōt*
Just a little

Transcripts From Chapter 6

ⁱ “Have Some Cake” Transcript 6.1

- 608 Catherine *Kōmro liCaroline etal im ba ren letok ukulele ñan buñniin.*
Caroline and I went to tell them that they should give us the
ukulele for the evening.
- 609 *Ital im reba*
I went and they said,
- 610 *“Itok im bok...”*
“Come and take [it]...”
- 611 *Ke kōmro ar tin etal ak reba*
When the two of us were about to leave they said
- 612 *“Catherine, Catherine, itok im*
“Catherine Catherine, come and
- 613 *itok im bobōk kijōm cake.”*
come and take your cake.”
- 614 *Im e...*
And he
- 615 *LaK...LaKevin elletok*
Kevin gave it to me
- 616 *Akō eba*
But he said,
- 617 *“Kein ta liṅe ke=*
What’s that girl=
618 Caroline *=won liNomi?*
=Who, Nomi?
- 619 Catherine *Emōj an*
They were done
Emōj an aolep mōñā.
Everybody had finished eating.
- 620 *Emōj an*
She had finished
- 621 *LiSisina mōñā.*
Sisina eating ((Sisina had finished eating.))
- 622 *Itok itok.*

I went closer and closer.
 623 *Ilak kar mijak.*
 Then I was scared.
 624 *Kaju*
 I immediately
 625 *ba LiCaroline en itok jen jo.*
 told Caroline that she should come from there.
 626 *Iba,*
 I said,
 627 *“Reletok men eo kijō” im ital jen im iba “komṃool” im reba,*
“Kattar kattar.”
 “They gave me my food” and I left there and I said, “thank you”
 and they said, “wait, wait.”
 628 *Reletok men eo kein karuo im iba,*
 They gave me a second one and I said,
 629 *[“Komṃool” relukkuun...]*
 “Thank you,” then they really...
 630 Kina *[Jete kijōṃ le?]*
 How many did you have girl?
 631 Catherine *Kevin ejjain baj ba (),*
 Kevin had not yet said (),
 632 *Bar kamṃoole.*
 Thanks again.
 633 *Ilukkuun,*
 I was really like,
 634 *“Oh! bar komṃool@@”*
 “Oh! Thank you again!”
 635 *Ilak tōtōñ.*
 Then I laughed.

ii

“I Am Scared of Him” Transcript 6.2

301 Kyle *Mama papa ej ba kaiḷok im kadeḷoñ kani.*
 Mama papa says to hurry and bring in the firewood.
 302 Mother *Ejjab etan*
 No um
 303 *kab ba mokta ke?*
 Didn’t I say it before?
 304 *Ke ekoba [at ne ippān*
 Because the shells are mixed with the
 305 *[bweq.]*
 [Husks.]
 306 Rebecca *[Mmm]*
 [Mmm]

- 307 Kyle *Ak lababa ej ba*
But papa says
- 308 Mother *Kwōn ba ilju bwe jen*
You should say tomorrow so that we can ((we will do it tomorrow))
- 309 *kajenolok lat jen bweo.*
separate the shells from the husks.
- 310 Rebecca *Bweo*
Husks
- 311 Kyle *Jemijake.*
I am scared of him. ((Kyle used the first person plural, thus perhaps it should be translated as, “He is scary.”))
- 312 Rebecca @@@@
- 313 Kyle @@@
- 314 Mother *Kōnke lukkuun kājjiṃaat.*
Because he is such a smart-ass.
- 315 *Tal im ba iba.*
Go and say I said it.
- 316 *Kwon ba ilju bwe enaaj kajenolok lat jen bweo ko bwe rekoba.*
You should say tomorrow because he will separate the shells from the husks because they are mixed up.
- 317 Rebecca *Bwe en bweo wōt ian, lat wōt ian.*
Because there should only be husks there, only shells over there.
- 318 *Bwe en kwōj kajenolok im in lik ia lat?*
When you separate them in the back where will you put the shells?
- 319 Mother *Maan wōt kōjām e*
Just in front of this door
- 320 *ak bweo jekein.*
and the husks over there.
- 321 Rebecca *Oooh*
Ah.
- 322 Regina *Ekōlōk!*
((An interjection of surprise.))
- 323 Kyle *Ah lo ah an laLance pāāk ne am!*
Hey, dude, that bag belongs to Lance!
- 324 Regina *Eñne turuṃ*
There it is (Lance’s bag) by you.
- 325 Rebecca *Emōj aer kajo tok pāāk*
They have separated the bags
- 326 Kyle *Kwe!*
You!
- 327 Rebecca *Jibboñ tata wōt ak emaat.*
It is early still but they are all gone. ((This could be translated incorrectly.))

328 Mother *Im kominaaj je!ā kane wōt bweḡ wōt ian*
 And will you all know to put only the husks here
 329 *!at wōt ian?*
 and the shells there?
 330 *Eh?*
 Huh?
 331 Lance *Jenaaj ñak.*
 We won't know.
 332 Kyle *Ekwe kwōn tin ba ñan lababa!*
 Ok, you should go tell papa!
 333 Rebecca *Kwe wōt [kwōn tin etal.]*
 Just you, [you should go.]
 334 Mother *[Kwe] kwe...*
 [You] You
 335 Regina *Kwe bweḡ ña !at*
 You do the husks, I'll do the shells
 336 Mother *Ah etal!!*
 Hey, go!!
 337 Regina *Kwe bweḡ*
 You husks
 338 Kyle *Ah bar kājjimaat eo e.*
 Hey, this one is a smart ass too. ((About Regina.))
 339 Regina *Ah kwe wōt, ak ña !at!*
 Hey you only, but I get the shells!
 340 Rebecca *E wōt !at*
 Only him with the shells. ((Only Kyle should pick up the shells.))
 341 *Ak e wōt bweḡ.*
 And her, just the husks.
 342 Regina *[Ekwe tal im kajenoloḡ.]*
 Okay, go and separate them.
 343 Mother *Ekwe [koḡi lok kane] ke !at wōt, !at wōt,*
 Ok, you all fill ((the bag)) with only shells, only shells
 344 *bweḡ wōt bweḡ wōt.*
 only husks, only husks.
 345 Regina *Aet*
 Yes
 346 Kyle *Ekwe ña ikōḡaan kakaiurir.*
 Okay I want to do it fast. ((Kyle leaves the house to do the work.))
 347 Lance *Ah e boñ!*
 But it is night!
 348 Regina *Emōj an moot!ḡok laKyle*
 Kyle has gone
 349 *kwe*

350 you
 etan
 um
 351 *kwe eo*
 you
 352 *kōmro lat*
 the two of us will do the husks
 353 Mother *Ba ke*
 Say
 354 *rej jjet [je ak elemen] ami naaj*
 They are sitting there but how are you going to... ((she is scolding
 them for sitting and not working.))
 355 Regina (
 356 Kyle *Ah ejje!ok am!*
 Hey you don't have any! ((You haven't filled your bag.))
 357 *Ekwe kwe tin mōk ba ñan lapapa.*
 Okay, you just go and tell papa. ((To Regina))
 358 Mother *Ah etal im ba!*
 Hey, go and tell him!
 359 Rebecca @@
 360 Mother [()]
 361 Regina *[ekwe emōj āinwōt laLance je edik]*
 [Okay that's it, this little part here is for Lance]
 362 Rebecca *Kwōn tin ba, "Limama ej ba ilju bwe en kajenolok lat jen bweo."*
 You should go say, "Mama says tomorrow so she can separate the
 shells from the husks."
 363 *Wōdded le eban tin ba le.*
 Damn dude he won't go tell him girl.
 364 Kyle *Etal im ba le liRegina.*
 Girl, go and tell him Regina.
 en tal
 she should go
 365 Mother *Etal LaTito im aljek*
 Tito go and haul them
 366 Kyle *Ebar kaniñiñi ah.*
 He is acting like a baby again.
 367 Tito *[Kwe]*
 [You] ((I.e., Kyle is the one acting like a baby.))
 368 Mother *[Ewōt] ewōt*
 It's raining, it's raining
 369 Rebecca *Bōlen un in an ba kade!oñ.*
 Maybe that is why he said to bring them in.
 370 *Bōlen eñak ke emōj an letok kabba eh le*

371 Maybe he doesn't know that they have given us a cover girl
Tarp.
tarp.

iii

“She is Such a Blabbermouth” Transcript 6.3

268 Caroline *Elukkuun lelõñiñi LiKaristin*
Karistin is such a blabbermouth

269 Kinta *Iññā*
Yeah

270 Rose *Lilõñiñi [men en].*
[She is] a blabbermouth.

271 Ruma *[Erri jodi ko aõ?]*
[Where are my shoes?]

272 Caroline *Ah ekaju ba ñan Lila*
Hey, she immediately told Lila

273 *kõn Ārtur.*
about Ārtur.

274 *Joñan aõ kütõtõ.*
I am so annoyed.

275 Kinta *Ikar ba*
I said

276 Rose *Lila eba ()*
Lila said ()

277 Caroline *Ej ba*
She said

278 *eba*
She said

279 *“Ekwe inaa j mōk kajjitōk ippān Ārtur ñe”*
“Okay I am just going to ask Ārtur.”

280 *Ñe euwaak ke*
If he answers right ((If he says it is true.))

281 *iban bar ba ñan e.”* ((this is what Lila said))
then I won't talk to him again.

282 *[ijjain] loe men kein*
I haven't seen these things

283 Rose *[bwe]*
because

284 *bwe etke lien elukkuun lelõñiñi?*
But why is that girl such a tattletale?

285 Carline *Iiuñ*
Yeah

286 *Jelak kõnnaan*
When we talk

- 287 *Jejjab kōnnaan ñan e.*
We don't talk to her.
- 288 *Ak ej lukkuun...*
But she is really...
- 289 Kinta *Ekar ba naan eo am ñan LiJilaba ke?*
Did she tell Jilaba what you said?

iv

“Go and Tell Kabiman” Transcript 6.4

- 147 Jaki *liSisina!*
Sisina!
- 148 Kinta *Eh?*
What?
- 149 Kyle *Ej riab*
She is lying ((about Sisina needing to do something))
- 150-151 ((Unrelated conversation between children.))
- 152 Jaki *Kabiman epād lo*
Is Kabiman in the
Kabiman epād ilo mweieñ?
Is Kabiman in that house?
- 153 Tito *[Ejako]*
[He is not there]
- 154 Jaki *[etal im ba]*
[Go and say]
- 155 *“Kabiman ah*
“Hey Kabiman
- 156 *itok mōk.”*
just come please.”
- 157-158 ((Unrelated conversation between other children.))
- 159 Jaki *“Kabiman ah.*
\ “Hey Kabiman.
- 160 *Turina ej ba bok juon” etan le...bok juon..*
Turina says to brings one” what’s it called girl...bring one
- 161-175 ((Unrelated conversation between children.))
(30 seconds)
- 176 Sisina *[ah liJaki jemijak]*
[Ugh, Jaki, it is scary.]
- 177 Jaki *[eññene]*
[There it is.] ((talking about the game of marbles))
- 178 Jilaba *ōkkōk*
Oh no!
- 179 *[imōk lale]*
[Let me see]
- 180 Sisina *[LiJaki jemijak!]*

- 181 Jaki [Jaki it is scary!]
Ōrra LiSisina
 Damn-it, Sisina
- 182 Kinta *Kwe im ña*
 You and me ((about the game of marbles))
kwe im ña
 you and me
- 183 Jaki *liNomi ah!*
 Nomi!
- 184 Kinta *[Jilaba im ña ukulele.]*
 [Jilaba and I will play the ukulele.]
- 185 Jaki *[kwe mōk ba Kabiman ah.]*
 [You just go and tell Kabiman.]
- 186 Nomi *Ah liō ōkkōk*
 Ah, girl, ugh
- 187 Kyle *Kwōn make etal.*
 You should go by yourself.

((2 minutes and eleven seconds later. Children were talking about marbles, songs, Easter, and other things.))

- 188 Jaki *[Tito etal] im ba Kabiman ah*
 Hey, Tito go and tell Kabiman
- 189-191 Kinta ((singing an Easter [song]))
 Tito *[()]*
- 182 Nomi *Ejjab ejjab” ilju eo raar keñtaan im lak [()]”*
 No, it’s not “the next day they suffered and then ()” (about the song)
- 183 Tito *[jemijak]*
 [It is scary]
- 184 Jaki *[kwōj tal wōt im ba.]*
 [You just go and tell him.]
- 185 Tito *[ooooh]*
 [Aaaah]

((3 minutes and 13 seconds later))

- 186 Jaki ((walks to door of the house where Kabiman is talking to a bunch of men. Stands the side of the door, slightly hidden. Doesn’t say anything for a while.))
- 187 ((Nomi, Sisina, and other children join Jaki at the door to the house, talk about numerous unrelated things.))

((2 minutes and 1 second later))

- 187 Jaki *LaKabiman e*
Hey Kabiman
- 188 *LiNomi etal im ba.*
Nomi go and tell him.
- 189 Sisina *[Ekwe ña itin ba.]*
[Okay I will tell him.]
- 190 Nomi *[Pijaik ()]*
[Film ()]
- 191 Sisina *Kabiman ah*
Hey Kabiman
- 192 *Kabiman*
- 193 *Turina ej ba [bok juon joiu.]*
Turina says to [bring a bottle of soy sauce.]
- 194 Nomi *[liJaki koruna kij ñan mweienmōmōm.]*
[Jaki accompany us to our house.]
- 195 Jaki *Im ña naaj et tok?*
And who will come with me? ((On the way back))
- 196 Nomi *Kōmro enaaj karwaan yok tok.*
The two of us will accompany you here.
- 197 Sisina *Juon im juon joiu im juon tuna.*
One and, one soy sauce and one can of tuna.
- 198 Kabiman *LiJaki ke Turina?*
Jaki or Turina?
- 199 Sisina *Turina*
Turina
- 200 Kabiman *Ewi?*
Where is she?
- 201 Sisina *@ @ @*
- 202 Sisina *@eñiō@*
@Here@
- 203 Nomi *Ej riab.*
She is lying.
- 204 *liJaki!*
Jaki!
- 205 Man *[LiNomi ah bōktok mōk teeñki ne am.]*
Hey Nomi, just bring that flashlight of yours. ((Talking about the camera on her head))
- 205 Sisina *[LiJaki letok juon ad beñkol bwe emōj am...]*
Jaki give me one of our bracelets because it is done...
- 206 Nomi *Ewi?*
Where?
- 207 *Ejjab teeñki men e.*

208 man This thing is not a flashlight.
Akō?
 But?

209 Nomi *Kein jermal @@*
 A work thing (laughing)

210 Jaki *LaKabiman ah*
 Hey Kabiman

211 *Kabiman* *Etal im ba ()*
 Go and say ()

212 Jaki *Rej ba kwōn*
 She (they) said you should

213 *Turina ear ba kwōn ()*
 Turina said that you should ()

214 Miku ()

215 Man *An limana ke?*
 Does it belong to the loose-tongued girl? ((They are referring to
 Elise Berman, calling her *limana* was a running joke.))

216 Jaki *Akō Kabiman*
 But Kabiman

217 *Turmina...*
 Turmina ((She messed up her name.))

218 *Turina ej ba kwōn etal*
 Turina says that you should go

219 Miku ()

220 Nomi *Pijaiki Kabiman*
 Film Kabiman

221 *Kabiman* *Ekwe ña naaj awōj.*
 Ok I will go to you.

222 *Inaaj būkiwōj.*
 I will bring it.

223 Imon *LaTito jēwaroñ.*
 Tito it is too noisy.

224 Jaki *Ej ba kiō ().*
 She says now ().

225 *Kabiman* *Ah ekwe kwōn tin ba.*
 Ok, you should go and tell her.

226 Jaki *Orōr*
 Ugh

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