

The logo for the Anthropology Book Forum, featuring a stylized blue and white circular design on the left. The text "Anthropology Book Forum" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font against a dark blue background.

Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

Kishigami, Nobuhiro. 2021. *Food Sharing in Human Societies: Anthropological Perspectives*, Springer Nature Singapore, ISBN: 9789811678103

In this relatively slim volume, Nobuhiro Kishigami provides a deep examination of an aspect of hunter-gatherer economic systems that is as critical to these systems as is the hunting and harvesting that provide the “stuff” that peoples like Inuit, Ache and Aka rely on for cultural and nutritional sustenance. This volume is a product of solid scholarship and is an important contribution to a growing literature focused on food sharing. However, before taking an in-depth look at the volume’s substance, I should note that the book’s primary title, *Food Sharing in Human Societies*, suggests a breadth that encompasses food sharing under a range of societal and economic types. More accurately, however, *Food Sharing* is an expansive work focused on food practices by hunter-gatherer cultures.

Kishigami opens with a comprehensive overview of the theories and thinking about what sharing is and the how’s and why’s of the practice. It is followed by three chapters of detailed case studies (Chapters Two, Three, and Four). Chapter Five offers a broader and more comparative discussion about food sharing in terms of bio-physical and socio-cultural factors that are relevant to the theoretical approaches that have been applied in the case societies. It should be noted that two of the presented cases (from Nunavik/Northern Québec and North Alaska) are ones to which Kishigami has directly contributed through his extensive field studies among the Québec Nunavimmiut and Alaskan Inupiat whalers, while those from Greenland, the Central African Republic and Paraguay rely on the theoretical approaches to food sharing taken in the original investigations.

Food Sharing’s introductory chapter very usefully presents theoretical approaches to sharing as developed through two main theoretical lenses, behavioral ecology and what I term (to borrow from economic anthropology) as a substantivist approach, and how these have been analytically applied to explain why hunter-gatherers share. Here, Kishigami very usefully provides definitions of the terminology of sharing (importantly of such concepts as gifting and generalized reciprocity) and then presents the different explanations developed within these two theoretical approaches on what is essentially a generalized feature in hunter-gatherers economies. Because interpretations of food sharing are frequently derived in specific research situations already framed by a particular theoretical approach, comparison between cases can be difficult and so this first chapter will be useful to some readers.

This overview is followed by three chapters (Two, Three, Four) of case studies, the focus of which is sharing as practiced by five societies living in very different ecological, political and economic environments. This approach allows the reader to comparatively evaluate the cases in terms of the specific environments that surround and influence each society. He then analyzes

each in terms of one or more of the modes of thought presented in the volume's introductory chapter and that was analytically employed in the original studies from which the cases are drawn. Kishigami concludes *Food Sharing* with a discussion of how particular hypotheses (such as resource abundance, camp population size, kinship relations and/or co-residential proximity, display and status, and tolerated theft to name a few) explain food sharing (or not) in the context of the various analytical approaches in which they are discussed.

While this book is an excellent addition to a growing literature on food sharing, there are a few things that to me are somewhat problematic. One is the scope as suggested by the book's title. *Food Sharing*, as already noted, focuses, except for what amounts to a few brief mentions, on hunter-gatherer societies; indeed, the preponderance of anthropological research on food sharing is especially focused on so-called subsistence economy cultures. A second is that there is some "repetitive-redundancy" as Dr. Kishigami returns in several places to the issue of reciprocity with regards to sharing. The conceptual and practical problem with the term, despite its long use in the literature, is already well-explained in his first chapter.

Last, and seminal to understanding what divides the two main theoretical approaches (behavioral ecology and societal substantivist) is an explanation of the unit of analysis which underlie and are seen as separating them. What is not discussed with clarity is that the behavioral ecology, rooted as it is in evolutionary theory, focuses on the actions and behaviors of individuals, while the substantivist lens centers on, if you will, the cultural ethos that makes food sharing a broader, normative socioeconomic feature of hunter-gatherers.

These "complaints" aside, there are many more "likes" than can be accommodated in this review. An important one is that the case studies that are included in the substantive and the concluding chapters are not presented through a single theoretical lens. Rather the cases are exposed to a range of hypotheses, allowing readers to weigh the explanatory power of one or more without necessarily having to refer to the original research (but that never hurts).

Another is the depth of the Inupiat and Nunavimmiut case studies. This is not surprising because, as noted above, the author has directly contributed to our knowledge of sharing in both these Inuit situations. These examples underscore how sharing can be affected by a variety of situational factors – from the size of a package of energy to the structural relations within a group. For me, this depth brings out a complexity about sharing, namely that it is both a "grand" and a nuanced concept. (An important note: the rich Akulivik example of Nunavimmiut sharing is based almost exclusively on Kishigami's own research which to the best of my knowledge has to date only appeared in Japanese.)

This comparative style of presentation carries with it the possibility of discerning overlap between research approaches that mutes the split between a purely behavioral and an equally strict substantivist explanation. Essentially what is seen through one lens as tolerated theft or status signaling is in the other a manifestation that those in need have a right to food (or other critical resource – for instance water). Thus, an individual's signaling or demand for a share can be accepted – at least until they are carried beyond the normative limits of cultural tolerance. Kishigami does not always present the cases in this light, but the possibility of overlap between

demand by a needy person and the obligation of a food-holder may relate more to whether the analytical lens has a micro (on the individual) or macro (on the group) focus.

In closing, Kishigami does an admirable job in providing a very comprehensive and useful bibliography. For all the reasons noted above, plus more that I have not mentioned, *Food Sharing in Human Societies: Anthropological Perspectives* is an important volume and solid contribution to the literature on sharing that is useful to specialists and accessible to students.

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