Lang. Soc. **16**, 305–320. Printed in the United States of America

"Bexibùdim!": Ritualized sharing among Israeli children

TAMAR KATRIEL

School of Education
University of Haifa

"Reality may lie in the world of ideas but illusion demands that the body be fed." (Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and private*)

ABSTRACT

An ethnographic-folkloristic approach to the study of children's peer group culture is illustrated with a study of children's practice of and lore about the sharing of treats in ritualized exchanges that are a widely recognized feature of Israeli childhood culture. These exchanges are a taken-for-granted part of children's daily experiences yet become the topic of intense gossip and the measure of "character" when the norm of generalized reciprocity which underlies them is breached. The rules of verbal and nonverbal conduct associated with them are formulated, and the social function they play in delineating and reaffirming the boundaries of a child's larger, diffuse affiliative group is discussed. (Ethnography of communication, interaction rituals, exchange, communication competence, peer group culture)

INTRODUCTION

Sutton-Smith (1982) has recently argued for a performance-centered approach to the study of peer group relations, calling for a systematic elaboration of folklorists' insights into children's activities (e.g., Opie & Opie 1959). Stressing the value of studying games and play as activities which are central to children's mutual engagement and as points of entry into the study of social cognition and social learning, he says:

> We might reasonably infer that the most important thing to know about peer culture is what is going on there. That is, that we might learn more of structure and more of function if we first studied what the action is. And perhaps if we began with the performances that are central to children, our ideas of structure and function might also change considerably. We might even be less adult-centric and conservative in the way we are going about this matter (Sutton-Smith 1982:68).

The research project upon which this study is based focuses on stylized performances that have been identified as central to the lives of the children studied, but ones that would not be considered as games or play either by the children themselves or by adult observers. Rather, they constitute ritualized moments which are distinctive to the childhood world in which they are embedded and which punctuate the flow of social exchanges in that world. A number of such interactional junctures emerged from a year-long, exploratory study which included in-situ observations of children's exchanges in various settings as well as many unstructured conversations with them in which personal concerns and interpersonal relations were freely discussed. These exchanges are culturally situated communicative patterns and they manifest children's ability to interact meaningfully with each other in contexts which are central to their shared construction of their peer group life. The children observed and consulted in this study were all from middle-class Jewish homes, and most of them were inhabitants of a small town in northern Israel. Having identified ritualized sharing (*xibùdim*) as a significant social institution in children's lives, I proceeded to conduct naturalistic observations for over a month on a daily basis in a strategically selected location – the area surrounding a couple of popular candy stores and *falafel* stands (locally known as *hamerkaz* 'the center'). These observations were followed by open-ended (audiotaped) interviews with twenty preadolescents (aged 9–12) and ten younger children (aged 5–7) which were specifically concerned with ritualized sharing as I had observed and heard discussed. A similar procedure was followed in a previous ethnographic study of communication among Israeli children which focused on the agonistic ritual of *brogez* (Katriel 1985). In both cases, the patterns described are well-recognized features of Israeli childhood culture in general, although they may be subject to localized coloration.

In what follows I will present an analysis of ritualized sharing *(xibùdim)* among Israeli children and the stylized verbal and nonverbal symbolic acts which constitute it. In addition to its descriptive goal, this study seeks to promote a research perspective that would incorporate an appeal to the folklorists' spirit in studying children's communicative competence (Hymes 1972b) so that the role of ritualization as an expressive resource and a regulative force in children's lives can be more fully appreciated.

The twin terms *bexibùdim/bli xibùdim,* which are associated with ritualized sharing, are part of the childhood register of mainstream Israeli culture.[1] They are derived from the verb *lexabed,* whose literal meaning 'to respect' has been extended to refer to the offering of food, especially treats, in colloquial speech. In adult speech, the plural nominal form *kibudìm* is used to refer to gestures of respect in public life and is associated with people's pursuit of status. When applied to the children's world it refers specifically to the stylized sharing of treats and is pronounced with a glottal fricative rather than a glottal stop and with

the main stress on the second syllable rather than on the third. This child-marked, irregular, phonological pattern sets the term apart from its uses in adult contexts.[2] A similarly childlike slant is given by the use of the preposition *le* rather than the direct object marker *et* after the verb *lexabed*. Thus, *lexabed le* is child-marked and is heard as associated with ritualized sharing, while *lexabed et* refers to the showing of respect in other contexts and can also be associated with adult discourse.

Children's sharing of treats in the form of *xibùdim* is a highly stylized communicative exchange. Observing repeated instances of it, one gets the sense of a patterned, ritualized, cooperative gesture.[3] The sharing of treats among Israeli children seems to have much in common with the many stylized gift exchanges, many of them involving foodstuffs, which have been studied by anthropologists (e.g., Mauss 1954; Cohen 1961; Firth 1973; Farb & Armelagos 1980; and references therein). Thus, ritualized sharing among Israeli children can be said to carry "an association of positive moral value" which is "linked to the notion that together with the transfer of the material object or service an element of the self is also offered" (Firth 1973:374). As my analysis reveals, the sharing of treats in *xibùdim* can be viewed as a ritualized gesture that functions to express and regulate social relationships within the peer group. A comment made by an eleven-year-old girl indicates partial awareness of the symbolic dimension of *xibùdim*. Explaining her insistence on getting a bite of her friend's treat, she said, "It's not that I will die if I don't get a bite of the popsicle, that I will die a day earlier or something, but it is simply . . . respect, as the word says." The forthcoming account should elucidate how the underlying notion of respect is interpreted by the children in our study and how it is played out in the ritual context of *xibùdim*.

The analysis of sharing as a ritual symbol follows Turner's (1977) "processual symbolic analysis" approach, which provides a framework for interpreting ritual symbols at three levels of meaning: exegetic, operational, and positional.[4] The *exegetic* meanings relate to the emic perspective which represents the meanings of the symbols from the "native's point of view" (Geertz 1976). They can be gleaned from people's spontaneous comments as well as their self-reflective accounts. *Operational* meanings relate to what the symbols mean from an external frame of reference; they are derived by the ethnographer observing the way they are used, their contexts of occurrence, and the composition of the groups involved. They are gleaned from focusing on what people do and say as part of their ongoing social activities rather than on what they say in reflecting upon them. *Positional* meanings refer to the "intertextuality" of the ritual symbols, that is, their relationship to other symbols and meanings found in the culture.

Thus, combining the ethnographic procedures of informant interviewing and nonparticipant observation (Spradley 1979, 1980), this study offers an analysis of the exegetical and operational meanings attending *xibùdim* as a symbolic

form. An analysis of the positional, intertextual meanings of the symbolic forms which shape Israeli children's peer group culture must await further studies of particular patterns.

RITUALIZED SHARING AS A COMMUNICATIVE EVENT

My observational notes include many descriptions of the following kinds (see Figure 1 for visual example):

1. Three boys are approaching the *kiosk* (kind of candy store). One says, "I'm buying a popsicle." He walks up to the counter. The other two tag along. He gets the popsicle, turns to face his friends, tilts it in their direction. Each takes a bite. The first says, "Give another one." The popsicle owner: "But not big." Again, he tilts it in their direction. The second opens his mouth wide as if to swallow it all, but takes a small bite. The owner acts startled and all three burst out laughing. They walk away, the owner eating his popsicle.

2. Two girls are approaching the *falafel* stand. One takes out money. The other says, "Are you buying?" She replies, "Yes, but it's my lunch and I'm eating it at home." She buys a *falafel* portion and does not offer the other a bite, although she waited for the buyer, and walks on with the *falafel* untouched. The other looks mildly annoyed. In later discussions with children, they said that claiming the *falafel* is your lunch is a typical "excuse." A child who uses it consistently runs the risk of being branded as a miser – *kamtzan* (for male) or *kamtzanit* (for female).

FIGURE 1: Two youths sharing a popsicle. (photograph by Guy Katriel)

3. A group of five children approaches the *falafel* stand. One exclaims "I'm buying." Another counters, "*Bexibùdim! Bexibùdim*!" in a melodious chant. He gets a *falafel* portion, holds it in his hands, and all take a bite in turn, with a gay clamor. After the third one has eaten, the buyer mutters, "*Hey, berax-manut*" (with pity) and offers it to the last child. He then eats his *falafel,* walking along with his friends.

4. A boy walks along the street, eating an ice cream; another boy, about the same age (about 12 or 13), approaches him from the opposite direction. They slow down, stop for a moment, and the first boy stretches out his arm, wordlessly offering the ice cream, his eyebrows raised inquisitively. The second boy bends over, bites off a bit, they both smile and walk on in their respective directions. No words have been exchanged.

These examples could be repeated many times, with endless small variations which manifest the same underlying pattern. The rules and meanings underlying them can be said to form an interactional "script" (Schank & Abelson 1977) and, as such, are to be distinguished from children's strategic uses of sweets in their efforts to gain immediate social advantage, such as gaining access to a game or attempting to appease a domineering child (Sluckin 1981) or exchanging sweets in "trades" (Mishler 1979).

In the case of ritualized sharing, as in all gift exchanges, the nonverbal act of transferring a material object is the focal element in the interaction rather than the verbal exchange involved. Verbalization does occur, but it plays a metacommunicative role somewhat similar to that played by nonverbal acts in conversation: It mainly prefaces, amplifies, punctuates, and regulates the nonverbal exchange. From a theoretical standpoint, therefore, the study of *xibùdim* provides an intriguing example of a role reversal between verbal and nonverbal components of interaction as they are usually studied.

Using Hymes's (1972a) heuristic framework for the study of communicative events and beginning with the component of Instrumentality, after which the social institution of *xibùdim* is named, I will proceed to discuss the components of Setting, Act sequence, Participants, Key, Norms of interaction, and Ends as they are relevant to the analysis of *xibùdim* exchanges. Thus, I hope to provide the terms for a "cultural grammar" of *xibùdim,* which will lead to a more refined understanding of its role in Israeli children's construction of their social world.

Instrumentality

The symbolic dimension of food transfer as an expression of social meanings of affinity and relatedness is generally recognized in anthropological studies and is subject to local coloration and variation (Cohen 1961). Ritualized sharing among Israeli children falls under this overall pattern. Tracing the particular form of this interactional activity will provide some insight into the distinctive social meanings it is used to convey.

In Israeli children's lexicon, the term *lexabed* can be properly applied only to food items falling under the broad category of "snacks" or "treats." This includes all sweets and other nonsweet specialties such as *falafel* or a roll. Other items, such as a regular bread sandwich, are not included in this category. Thus, children insisted that the sharing of a bit of your sandwich with a friend would be a matter of mere giving (*latet*), while a bite of your roll would be considered an instance of treating (*lexabed*).

We see, then, that the particular symbolic material of *xibùdim* involves those food items in relation to which the subsistence aspect of food consumption is de-emphasized and instinctual gratification is foregrounded – those little "extras" that make life both symbolically and literally more palatable. Most of them are blatantly nonnutritious, relegated to the domain of fun and triviality. As such, they stand in contrast to the ordinary foods which contribute to children's main job as defined by their elders – growing up – and whose consumption is a matter of filial duty for many of these children.

Setting and scene

Although any offering of a food item which "qualifies" according to the above criteria will be referred to as *lexabed* regardless of time and place, ritualized sharing finds its quintessential expression in the social activity which the children in this study referred to as 'going to buy' (*lalexet liknot*). The verb "to buy," used in an irregular way, without specification of its direct object, is systematically employed to refer to the buying of treats, as in exclamations of "I'm buying!" (*ani kone*) or in inquiries: "Are you buying?" (*ata kone?*). As a twelve-year-old girl put it: "When we say 'buy' we know just what we mean."

The time and place of these purchases are significant in socially locating *xibùdim*: While the rules of ritualized sharing hold for all encounters, excursions to the *kiosk* or *falafel* stand most typically occur en route from school at the end of the school day or on the way home from some shared extracurricular activity in the afternoon. 'The walk home' (*haderex habajta*) has emerged as an important context for sociability among the children observed and interviewed for this project. Both spatially and temporally it is a liminal context (Turner 1969). Sandwiched between school and home, where life is basically dominated by "significant adults," the walk home serves the purpose of pure socialization among loosely demarcated small groups of children. Pilgrimages to the candy store provide much of the symbolic currency for this "betwixt and between" moment of life. Thus, the spatio-temporal location of the most paradigmatic context in which ritualized sharing is played out has implications with respect to what Hymes calls the scene, or the psychological definition of the situation involved. In this context sharing is not only a culturally appropriate form for the expression of social relations but it is also a culturally defining activity in that it serves to reaffirm the very reality of the peer group culture and its moral order.

Act sequence

The acts of exchange involved in *xibùdim* are clearly distinguished by children from such activities as trading or swapping on the one hand and the sharing practices involving "best friend" relations on the other. Whereas the former are referred to as *lexabed* ('to treat', a transitive verb form) and involve a token gift (as an index of commitment), the latter are referred to as *lehitxalek* ('to divide up', a reflexive verb form) and involve an equal distribution of the treat, accompanied by proddings to take more. Dividing is considered a personalized gesture whose rejection is interpreted as an insult; a refusal to take a token bite of someone's treat is not usually taken to heart, though it would be considered odd. None of this holds for ritualized sharing, which is a formalized rather than a personalized activity.[5]

A ritualized sharing event consists of a number of sequentially ordered, intertwined nonverbal and verbal acts. The observational notes cited earlier exemplify such exchanges. Let us, then, systematically specify the sequential structure of a typical *xibùdim* episode as it is played out "on the way home."

1. *Opening:* announcement of intention to buy. This may simply take the form of an explicit declaration of intentions, either to buy or, somewhat euphemistically, to go through the "center," i.e., to pass by a cluster of candy stores on the way home (see Figure 1). Alternatively, one may say nothing but display the fact that one is in possession of some money. Choice between these various strategies depends on the extent to which one is prepared to commit oneself to share one's treat, as it is generally understood that buying implies sharing with those in one's company. Clearly, an explicit announcement fully commits one to share with the children who will tag along. These various strategies provide different solutions to the interactional problem created by the tension between the desire to focus social attention on oneself, which one accomplishes by declaring an intention to buy, and the desire to keep as much as possible of the treat to oneself, which is defeated by that same declaration. Ritualized sharing in *xibùdim* institutionalizes both the buyer's momentary focal position and the demand placed on him or her for instinctual control with respect to what the children take to be one's natural greediness. Both are brought to the fore, and into conflict, in the opening move.

2. *Acknowledgment:* display of interest by the others. A child's declaration of his or her intention to buy is typically countered by near-formulaic inquiries: "What are you buying?" "Really? You got money?" These usually vocal and animated interest-displays establish the others as potential recipients in the sharing of whatever is going to be purchased. At the same time, these displays implicitly reaffirm everyone's commitment to the symbolic role of snacks in demarcating as well as revitalizing children's peer group relations. Thus, a child who remains obviously indifferent to another's declaration that he or she is going to buy may be asked: "*ma jesh lexa?*" 'What's the matter with you?' In the

children's lore, a normal, spirited child shows a healthy interest in sweets, an interest which is expected to be routinely displayed in ritualized sharing exchanges.

Bexibùdim!/bli xibùdim! At times explicit reference to ritualized sharing is made either by the buyer or by the children who accompany him or her. The prospective buyer may immediately follow his or her declaration of intentions with the exclamation "*(Aval) bli xibùdim!*" 'but without sharing', thereby suspending the rules of ritualized sharing, which would otherwise be expected to hold. Similarly, the others may follow the buyer's declaration of his or her intention to buy with the exclamation "*Bexibùdim! bexibùdim!*" uttered in a kind of melodious chant, reinforcing the rules of *xibùdim* before the buyer has had a chance to suspend them. These exclamations most often take the form of a teasing, gamelike contest as to who will get his or her word in first, but may, at times, be seriously intended. Consider the following observational note:

> Three boys (10–11 years old) are approaching the *falafel* stand. One says, "I am going to buy a *falafel. Bli xibùdim!*" He buys half a portion. One of the other boys faces him and says, "*ten li bis*" 'give me a bite'. The boy with the *falafel* says, "I can't. I just said *bli xibùdim.*" The other boy turns away, seeming to accept the claim.

In this case, the built-in option of suspending the norms of *xibùdim* is itself interpreted as a binding norm. A similar case was told to me by a twelve-year-old girl, who denigrated a girl who had refused to share a snack using the same argument. She said sneeringly, "So what if she had already said *bli xibùdim?* She just didn't want to share her snack." Whether strategically or playfully employed, the exclamations *bexibùdim/bli xibùdim* function as metacomments on the social institution of ritualized sharing in such a way as to bring out the underlying pattern of "reluctant sharing" associated with it (Cohen 1961:322) as well as its negotiable and manipulable features.

3. Purchase: The child with the money makes the purchase, the others play a subsidiary role as onlookers. At times, suggestions are made as to the selection of the snack to be purchased, but these are not rigorously advanced. Choice of snack is the uncontested right of the child who spends the money. Questions as to whether others had a say in this were routinely answered: "It's his money, not theirs."

4. Offering: Having made the purchase, the child who has bought the snack offers a bite to the children around him or her, one after the other. At times, this is simply done gesturally, by tilting the hand that holds the treat; at times, the nonverbal gesture is accompanied by a verbal prompt "*rotse*?" 'want some?' or "*kax*" 'take some', or "*kax bis*" 'take a bite' or "*kax lek*" 'take a lick', in the case of ice cream. Each of the children takes a small bite or a lick of the proferred snack and then the owner eats what is left. When there are many children vying for a bite, it is common to hear them prompt the snack owner to give a bite. This

interactional moment is described by the children as one in which everybody is jumping all over the child who got the snack (''*kulam mitnaplim alav*''). It seems rather strange, given the generally upheld rules of ritualized sharing, and seems more a matter of children's playful dramatization of the event than a real concern as to whether they are, indeed, going to get their share. The stylized clamoring for one's share as well as the option of calling out ''*bli xibùdim*'' both serve to prevent children's ritualized sharing from becoming a routinized, taken-for-granted interactional pattern. However compelling it is as a social form, part of its vitality lies in the ever-present option of suspending the rules governing its enactment.

5. *Recycling:* Sometimes one of the children triggers another round (*od sivuv*) by asking for another bite when everybody has had theirs. This is acceptable when there are not many children around so that the buyer does not need to fear that he or she will be deprived of his or her fair share (see section on norms). When such fear exists, the standard response is: ''*ve ma jisha'er li*?'' 'and what will be left for me?'. This response encapsulates the tension between self-gratification and social accommodation which is played out both symbolically and materially in the social institution of *xibùdim*.

Participants

Only children are considered potential partners for the exchange of treats in *xibùdim;* the suggestion that ritualized sharing may involve adults made many children laugh. It is a standard joke for adults to ask children for a bite in a playful vein.

Children's initial answer to the question of who would be offered a bite of their treat tended to be an emphatic ''Everybody!'' (*kulam*). Further probing, however, revealed that ''everybody'' denoted a rather well-defined group in each given case. It extended beyond one's clique and included, first of all, all the children in the school class as well as any other casual friends and acquaintances. One child said he would offer a bite to ''any child I might stop and talk to for a minute on the street,'' identifying the offer of a bite as the functional equivalent of a greeting in an ''acquaintanceship relation,'' which, according to Goffman (1963), is an aspect of all social relationships built on mutual personal identification.

Participants in *xibùdim* are, therefore, nonintimates as well as nonstrangers; they constitute the undifferentiated reference group or ''crowd'' natively referred to as *haxevre*. Engaging in ritualized sharing is one of the means of reaffirming the relationship among them.

Notably, as in the case of pronominal reference in the verbal domain (e.g., Friedrich 1972; Varenne 1978), the offering of a treat can both signal the existence of a particular social relationship and establish one. The latter is particularly so in uncertain or marginal cases when acquaintanceship has not been formally established either on an interpersonal or an institutional basis (e.g.,

shared membership in a larger group). Thus, a gray area of social relatedness can be clarified by communicative means, such as *xibùdim* or pronominal usage, whichever the case might be.

Key

The interactional tone which accompanies ritualized sharing is that of a smooth, stylized interaction ritual, much like a casual greeting. The episode is sometimes punctuated by moments marked by a higher level of excitement or "arousal" (Harre & Secord 1972). These may be playful in nature, as when a child is "jumped on" by all the others clamoring for a bite, or it may be serious, as when one of the social imperatives associated with *xibùdim* is breached in one of the ways to be indicated in the next section.

Norms of interaction

Like many other token gifts, the sharing of treats in *xibùdim* is a matter of social imperatives rather than individual choice for Israeli preadolescents and adolescents. Children in this age range spoke of it as something you must do even though you would prefer not to. Younger children, on the other hand, considered sharing, which they similarly referred to as *lexabed* 'to treat', as a matter of personal choice rather than an impersonal display of social recognition. They said things such as "I offer a bite when I feel like it" or "I'll give her some if she gives me some." The institutionalized nature of ritualized sharing is only gradually learned; the learning seems to go through a stage of overtly negotiated reciprocity to a stage in which reciprocity is symbolically incorporated into the normative, impersonal structure of *xibùdim*. From a developmental standpoint, then, these findings seem to corroborate the basic outlines of Piaget's ([1932] 1965) views on children's moral development. It is my hope that when additional, comparable data related to children's normative and expressive order become available, insights derived from children's communication behavior can shed further light on this important aspect of human development.

Norms of obligation. Since I have considered ritualized sharing in a gift-exchange framework, a useful way of formulating the interactional norms governing it would be by reference to the three sets of norms for such exchanges as originally formulated by Mauss (1954) and further elaborated by Firth (1973): (a) the obligation to give, (b) the obligation to receive, (c) the obligation to repay. Let us consider them one by one.

The obligation to give has been discussed earlier and was shown to be mainly constrained by the social membership of the participants. Two types of norms emerged from the children's talk: the obligation to share with "everybody" and the obligation to share equally with them. The obligation to give was sometimes

expressed in terms of the formulaic expression 'the one who eats alone dies alone' (*mi sheoxel levad met levad*).

The obligation to give equally was most often expressed as the injunction against *lekape'ax* 'to deprive, or cause a disadvantage'. The egalitarian force of the norm mandates that one should equally acknowledge everybody in one's diffuse social network by including them in the round of *xibùdim*. Not including someone in such a round is considered a most severe act of social negation (''cutting'' in Goffman's [1963] terms). This was vividly brought home to me when I had occasion to observe – and later discuss – an instance of a clash between two interactional frames: ritualized sharing in *xibùdim* and the interactional norms of disengagement which regulate conflict relations in the context of a *brogez* agonistic episode (Katriel 1985). In this particular instance, a child included a *brogez* partner in a round of *xibùdim* although – in accordance with the rules of *brogez* – he refrained from speaking to him, looking at him, or mentioning his name. In accounting for his act he said that since the child he was *brogez* with was ''standing with everybody else'' he could not just be ignored. He invoked the injunction against *lekape'ax* 'causing disadvantage', which for him, in this case at least, was strong enough to override the normally rigid rules of *brogez*. I would speculate that the fact that the social imperatives of *xibùdim* prevailed has to do with the grave cost in reputation that attends the refusal to share. Children whose reluctance to share is so strong that they regularly fail to abide by the norms of *xibùdim* are labeled *kamtzan/it* 'miser' or *xazir/a* 'pig', labels whose social consequences in terms of loss of status and prestige most children would rather avoid.

The obligation to receive is not as pronounced as the obligation to give. While a refusal to give is socially sanctioned and labeled, a refusal to receive is not so marked. Someone who consistently refuses to participate in *xibùdim* – even on the receiving end of it – is, however, expected to offer some account and, some children maintained, would be marginal (*batsad*, literally 'on the side') in social space. Children contrasted this with the personal, more acutely felt affront involved in the repeated refusals of a close friend to share in one's treats.

A major issue that is normatively regulated and both seriously and playfully negotiated in *xibùdim* exchanges is the size of the bite appropriate in their context. The general rule I have been able to deduce is as follows: The bite size has to be regulated so that everybody can get a share, leaving about half of the treat to its owner. A child who takes too big a bite is accused of being a pig (*xazir*), while a child whose bite is too small can be asked: ''What are you, a bird?'' (*ma ata, tsipor?*) and be urged to take another bite by the owner, who is usually as anxious to avoid appearing as a miser as the other child is anxious to avoid appearing as a pig.

This concern with bite size has yielded the category of a ''normal bite'' (*bis normali*). The following description by an eleven-year-old girl brings out the careful computational work involved in the assessment of a normal bite:

> Before I give of my snack I plan for myself, in my head, how far he (the receiver) should go, how far it would be normal, and also when I take a bite, I take as much as I expect they would take from me, or less. You can sort of tell how much on the thing you are eating.

When the group is big, it may be necessary to ask the last kids to "take pity" (*beraxmanut*) and take smaller bites. When there are few kids around, the size of the bites tends to remain the same or be a little bigger, but there may be two or three rounds of sharing. The second round is often instigated by one of the receivers; some kids testified that they are too bashful to ask for a second round, although they may actively instigate the first. Others testified that they sometimes manipulate the situation by taking a less than normal bite, with the expectation that they will be offered another bite (claiming that two small bites make more than one big one).

The obligation to repay in *xibùdim* is diffuse and generalized since each child offers a bite to all present every time he or she gets a treat. Thus, reciprocity is built into the very structure of ritualized sharing and serves as one of its major underlying themes. Notably, this reciprocity is not a matter of interpersonally negotiated relations between individuals but is a matter of generalized, diffuse commitment within the group. However, I have found that children keep rather close track of their peers' compliance or noncompliance with the rules of *xibùdim*, using this monitoring both to guide their future behavior and to appraise their peers. This interpersonal bookkeeping is explicitly invoked when the generalized rules of sharing are not effectively upheld ("You never give me so why should I give you" or "But I shared with you last week" and the like). Comments about sharing and nonsharing behaviors are also invoked in gossip about others: One of the social facts relevant to the appraisal of character among children relates to conduct in relation to ritualized sharing, especially when it is inappropriate. In such discussions, both matters of deference and matters of demeanor (Goffman 1967) are addressed, and their concrete articulations as well as the subtle interplay between these two fundamental aspects of social life are elaborated upon.

Avoidance strategies. There are, however, widely recognized ways of getting around the norms of *xibùdim*: They are particularly effective in the case of more substantive foodstuffs such as a roll, which can be salvaged from one's peers by claiming that "it is my breakfast," or *falafel*, which can be claimed to be one's lunch or supper. This claim in effect removes the item of food from the category of "snacks" and puts it in the category of "meals," so that the rules of *xibùdim* cease to be applicable. Another claim frequently mentioned as a way of extricating oneself from the injunction to share is the claim "I have to give half to my brother/sister." Siblings, apparently, have a prerogative on one's snacks, a right that is defined in terms extrinsic to the peer group culture. Having to share with them is considered a semiacceptable excuse not to share with others, per-

haps because the sacrificial gesture has been reaffirmed, though in an extraneous relational context. Another claim I heard, one which was severely ridiculed by several of my informants, was that one cannot share one's treat because of "no eating from mouth to mouth" (*lo oxlim mipe lepe*) for hygienic reasons. This argument invokes the adult value system concerning hygienic behavior, which is blatantly extrinsic to the children's world. This may account for the fact that this "excuse" was considered particularly objectionable by many children.

Another strategy involves the avoidance of a situation that would call for ritualized sharing, such as planning one's trip to the store in such a way as not to be accompanied by the "crowd" (as distinguished from close friends with whom the pattern of sharing is different and has a different role), or hiding the treat "under the shirt," as several informants phrased it. Children referred disdainfully to these practices, especially to the "misers" who "run home ahead of everybody else so that they can buy something at the store and keep it all to themselves," as one of them put it. At the same time, most of the informants admitted that they utilized these strategies from time to time, opting to share a treat only with a close friend or to keep it for themselves.

Ends

Ritualized sharing among Israeli children is a multifunctional communicative event which combines several underlying social themes and provides a ritual context in and through which children's notion of sociality is played out.

A major underlying theme in *xibùdim* is the tension between self-gratification and social accommodation. Greediness, as one form of self-interest, is both dramatized and socially "tamed" in ritualized sharing; the self is momentarily subordinated to impersonal social forms of conduct. Beyond the elaboration of specific norms related to particular patterns of sharing behavior, the very idea of "objectified" rules of conduct, which are independent of individual wills, is ritually entertained through participation in the social institution of *xibùdim*. At this very basic level, ritualized sharing has much in common with ritualized conflicts as in *brogez* (Katriel 1985), which similarly dramatizes what is probably the most fundamental and the most enduring source of tension in social life: that between self-gratification and self-assertion on the one hand and the ever-present need for some degree of accommodation to others on the other. This tension is, of course, the existential point from which a moral consciousness can begin to develop. From this standpoint, children's daily participation in ritualized sharing is an invaluable practice ground for social living and serves an important socializing function. In the context of *xibùdim*, the individual child is integrated into his or her social world by a process of compromise: Giving up some of his or her treat in the proper ritualistic way serves to reaffirm the child's affiliation in a broader, loosely structured social network – the world populated by the communal term "everybody." At the same time *xibùdim* establishes the

legitimacy of self-gratification. This is most appropriately symbolized by an act of symbolic sacrifice in which one's self-interest and primordial greed are controlled and subordinated to an idea of sociality shaped by particular cultural values, such as equality and generalized reciprocity.

Ritualized sharing also serves to delineate a particular domain of others. It demarcates the outer boundaries of a child's social world thus serving to objectify and to reaffirm the reality and standing of his or her larger, diffuse social group. As such, it functions as a communicative resource which children use to socialize each other in introducing subtle degrees of differentiation into their social world.

The aforementioned egalitarian values, as well as the privileged standing of in-group/out-group relations (with the school class or the youth movement group as major units of affiliation), are also promoted by the formal ideology and rhetoric of Israeli social education (Katriel & Nesher 1986). They represent deep-rooted cultural values that can be discerned in other cultural domains as well (Katriel 1986) and that children seem to have assimilated as part of their own peer group expressive repertoire.

On yet another level, ritualized sharing serves to reassert the very existence of children's peer group culture as such. This is suggested by a consideration of the particular symbolic materials utilized (snacks) and the social context in which they find their quintessential place – on the way home. This makes good sense from the standpoint of symbolic analysis: The way home represents a transitional moment temporally, spatially, and socially squeezed between the world of school and the world of home. Its autonomous existence is punctuated by children's pilgrimages to the local store, where they can actualize their equality and purchase power, underlining their temporary disengagement from school (where sweets are usually disallowed) and home (where they are often grudgingly tolerated). This is emphasized by the form the transfer often takes, a form that goes against the home- and school-based norms of hygiene which would disallow the passing of food "from mouth to mouth." The celebration of childhood in ritualized sharing accounts for its entertainment value, which, from the children's perspective, is probably its most salient feature.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of *xibùdim* has foregrounded one ritual pattern in the fabric of Israeli children's communicative life. Such communicative resources become particularly significant in that they provide templates for the demarcation and charting of its various experiential domains. In Harre's terms (1980:5), these patterns are important aspects of the children's "expressive order," which "involves a transformation of something personal into something public." It is precisely in this transformation of the personal into the public, the negotiation of self with others, that interactional forms play such a crucial role in providing shared patterns and

channels for the objectification and communication of one's subjectively experienced social reality. As we have seen, much of the import of ritualized sharing lies in the tension between self-gratification and public gesture which this ritual form elaborates upon.

The rules of *xibùdim,* whether verbal or nonverbal, contribute to the creation and maintenance of children's expressive order. Whether followed or not, they underlie the exchange of social messages in the sharing of treats. The specific contribution the rules of ritualized sharing make, in line with the etymology of *xibùdim,* is the communication of respect as this notion is conceptualized by the children in the context of their peer group life, that is, in terms of the notions of exclusion and inclusion. Ritualized sharing signals the social recognition of the party deferred to as included within the domain of one's social world, as having a social identity.

Tracing links between *xibùdim* and other interactional rituals identified among Israeli children, when additional ethnographic descriptions become available, is hoped to contribute to a better understanding of the expressive and moral orders of peer group cultures. Another issue that ought to be addressed in future research is the question of the extent to which, and the ways in which, children's interaction rituals reflect aspects of the wider culture in which they are embedded. This, it seems to me, can be best achieved by juxtaposing comparable studies of different cultures of childhood which will take ritual patterns of the type considered in this paper, and children's lore about them, as their point of departure.[6]

NOTES

1. A testimony to the widespread recognition of *xibùdim* as a social institution was given by the fact that during the time this study was underway a popular radio jingle advertising a snack used the chant "*bexibùdim*" with the sing-song tone I have encountered in my observations.

2. The shift away from word-final stress is typical of children's register in modern Hebrew and functions as an in-group marker. My notes contain dozens of examples of this child-marked stress pattern.

3. Fox (1977) provides an illuminating account of the social role of ritualized and stylized acts in his study of fighting among the men of Tory island.

4. For a recent discussion and application of this method to nonverbal elements in communication, see Conquergood (1984).

5. Irvine (1979) notes that one aspect of formality has to do with the invocation of positional identities.

6. There are a number of studies dealing with ritualized communicative acts among children of roughly the same ages we have been concerned with, for example, Boggs (1978) on verbal disputing; Morgan, O'Neill, & Harre (1979) on nicknaming; Goodwin (1980) on gossip disputes. Preliminary observations suggest that there are cultural differences in children's norms for sharing: Israeli children who spent time in the United States have noted that their American friends did not engage in ritualized sharing when buying a treat. On the other hand, I am told that, for Arab children, copresence defines the sharing circle even when no acquaintanceship relation holds.

REFERENCES

Boggs, S. (1978). The development of verbal disputing in part-Hawaiian children. *Language in Society* 7:325–44.

Cohen, Y. (1961). Food and its vicissitudes: A cross-cultural study of sharing and nonsharing. In Y. Cohen (ed.), *Social structure and personality.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 312–50.

Conquergood, D. (1984). Rhetoric and ritual: Implications of Victor Turner's dramaturgical theory for rhetorical criticism. Paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Association Convention, Seattle, Washington.
Farb, P., & Armelagos, G. (1980). *Consuming passions: The anthropology of eating*. New York: Washington Square Press.
Firth, R. (1973). *Symbols: Public and private*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Fox, R. (1977). The inherent rules of violence. In P. Collett (ed.), *Social rules and social behavior*. Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams. 132–49.
Friedrich, P. (1972). Social context and semantic feature: The Russian pronominal usage. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 270–300.
Geertz, C. (1976). "From the native's point of view": On the nature of anthropological understanding. In K. Basso & H. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in anthropology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. 221–37.
Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places*. New York: The Free Press.
_____ (1967). *Interaction ritual*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor.
Goodwin, M. (1980). He-said-she-said: Formal cultural procedures for the construction of a gossip dispute activity. *American Ethnologist* 7:764–95.
Harre, R. (1980). *Social being*. Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co.
Harre, R., & Secord, P. F. (1972). *The explanation of social behavior*. Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams.
Hymes, D. (1972a). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 35–71.
_____ (1972b). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (eds.), *Sociolinguistics*. Middlesex: Penguin Books. 269–93.
Irvine, J. (1979). Formality and informality in communicative events. *American Anthropologist* 18:773–90.
Katriel, T. (1985). *Brogez:* Ritual and strategy in Israeli children's conflicts. *Language in Society* 14:467–90.
_____ (1986). *Talking straight: Dugri speech in Israeli Sabra culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Katriel, T., & Nesher, P. (1986). *Gibush:* The rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture. *Comparative Education Review* 30:216–31.
Mauss, M. (1954). *The gift*. London: Cohen & West.
Mishler, E. (1979). Wou' you trade cookies with the popcorn? Talk of trades among six year olds. In O. Garnica & M. King (eds.), *Language, children & society*. Oxford: Pergamon. 221–36.
Morgan, J., O'Neill, C., & Harre, R. (1979). *Nicknames*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Opie, I., & Opie, P. (1959). *The lore and language of schoolchildren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Piaget, J. ([1932] 1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York: The Free Press.
Schank, R., & Abelson, R. (1977). *Scripts, plans, goals and understanding*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.
Sluckin, T. (1981). *Growing up in the playground*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
_____ (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
Sutton-Smith, B. (1982). A performance theory of peer relations. In K. M. Borman (ed.), *The social life of children in a changing society*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex. 65–77.
Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Turner, V. (1977). Symbols in African ritual. In J. Dolgin et al. (eds.), *Symbolic anthropology*. New York: Columbia University Press. 183–94.
Varenne, H. (1978). Culture as rhetoric: Patterning in the verbal interpretation of interaction between teachers and administrators in an American high school. *American Ethnologist* 5(4):635–50.