

Exchange

1. In Anthropology some insights have come from observing simpler societies and then applying what we learn to our own society
 - a. There are some things in our society that we take for granted that are of very recent origin:
 - i. Social Security
 - ii. Corporations
 - iii. Money
 - b. How are the functions that these institutions perform accomplished in societies that don't have such institutions?
 - i. One answer is that everyone provided enough for themselves and so they don't need to share or trade.
 - ii. But no matter how self-sufficient people are, no one person can do it by themselves.
2. **Another Answer: The "barter" system** – It was suggested that "barter" preceded money and market exchanges in social evolution.
 - a. Barter doesn't involve money
 - b. Still governed by equivalents: 1 donkey = 300 ears of corn
 - c. In this system, everyone is trying to get the best deal possible
 - d. You can barter with strangers as well as with people you know
 - e. System similar to barter: "silent trade"
 - i. If you want to barter with someone you would otherwise fight against, you would put out your item for barter in an agreed upon place and come back the next day to see if someone had taken your item and left something in return.
 - f. But barter doesn't really describe what's going on.
3. **New way of thinking: Marcel Mauss' short essay on "The Gift"**
 - a. 1920's- Mauss was part of a group who called themselves Sociologist, but they looked at many different cultures

- b. Colleague of Emile Durkheim
- c. Would read many field studies of cultures around the world and rethink their meaning
- d. Paradox: Mauss was a very sloppy scholar (poor referencing, incorrect facts) and yet he presented very interesting ideas that opened many people's eyes to a new way of conceiving exchange.
- e. Mauss suggested that in simple societies, much of the economy goes through no-market exchanges. These can be called "gifts" except that many of our assumptions about gifts are false
- f. The more people thought about Mauss' essay, the more they saw examples of "gift" exchange in many different societies.
 - i. Realized that exchange is one of the fundamental characteristics of human society. It's a basic form of human organization.
 - ii. If you think about most of our close primate relative, they don't exchange beyond the relationship of mother and child. Besides that, it's every individual for itself.
 - 1. That doesn't mean that there aren't advantages to living in a troupe, but they all feed themselves independently.
 - iii. But in all human societies, exchange is crucial. Probably part of the evolutionary transition to being fully human.

4. **Examples of exchange: The Kuna in Panama**

- a. People would invite Prof Howe in from the street to have something to eat or drink. They thought that restaurants were immoral, because you had to pay to get something to eat.
 - i. The Kuna were very proud that they would invite people in off the street to feed them and not expect anything in return.
 - ii. Now, many Kuna live in the city and eat in restaurants. They are troubled and ambivalent about this practice.
- b. When a man catches fish and brings them home to his wife, the wife immediately begins giving the fish away to her relatives, until only about a quarter of the original catch remains.

- c. If a family's banana fields were not producing any fruit at the time, a person could ask his neighbor for permission to take some bananas from his field.
- d. A chief arrived from another village and while he sang to the villagers in the meetinghouse, some of the village leaders organized a collection of 2000 fish for the chief as a gift.
 - i. The next time a chief came around, they organized a collection of thatch leaves.
- e. Later that year some people who lived on the mainland arrived. It was said that these people were the poor relatives of the people in this tribe. The visitors were given food, blankets, ammunition for their shotguns, and all sorts of provisions.

5. Material Benefits of Sharing and Exchange

- a. Notion that hunting encourages exchange, because you often can't eat all the meat you've got before it goes bad. It makes more sense to exchange it.
- b. Containers were a key to this development in human evolution: a large leaf, a piece of skin, a crude basket
 - i. Means that someone can collect things for later exchange.
- c. Studies show that there are material advantages to sharing.
 - i. Hunting is uncertain, sharing evens out the wild fluctuations of this practice.
 - ii. This works out in a lot of context:
 - 1. People on welfare (in one study) - By sharing at the beginning of the month when the check came in, it meant that people did better, on average, than if they had not shared their check.
 - 2. Found that people were much more likely to exchange things that people in the middle class would never loan: beds, TV's, couches.

6. The value of things Much of what gift exchange does is social, not just material.

- a. We needed to be concerned with the social effects of the gifts.
- b. In Western culture, we're more concerned with the value of the individual gift.
- c. Mauss gave examples from Malinowski's work with the Trobriand Islanders.
 - i. Trobriand Islanders have a ring of exchange between several islands called the Kula Ring.
 - ii. People sail in canoes through hundreds of miles of ocean to give a gift of arm shells in one direction, and in the other direction they give a gift of necklaces. These gifts are extremely valuable to the people and people know the names of specific arm shells or necklaces. Though no one becomes any wealthier from the exchange, the people go through great lengths to trade these items, even with enemies.
 - iii. Malinowski thought that the Trobriand Islanders didn't really understand that these were just the same few arm shells and necklaces circulating around, but it turns out that "Kula" means, "ring". The people understood very well that these gifts kept coming back around.
- d. We also think of gifts as being voluntary
- e. Mauss said, No: gifts are obligatory. You must give. You must receive.
 - i. Mauss overstates the case, there's a lot of room for independent decision.
 - ii. You can choose not to give or to give less
 - iii. But Mauss did well to counteract our idea of gift-giving as entirely voluntary.
- f. Market exchanges were thought to be more self-interested because one is maximizing material things.
- g. We see gifts as altruistic

- h. Mauss says that just because something is a gift doesn't mean it is altruistic. Even when not maximizing material returns, one is maximizing social benefits.
- i. Certain gifts may be more altruistic than others. Malinowski claimed this for Trobriand gifts between husbands and wives.
 - i. But gifts between husbands and wives are still a form of exchange for services. May not be as altruistic as supposed

7. Defining relationships through exchange

- a. Many societies talk about exchanges and what they want in return as a way to indicate the quality of the social relationship:
 - i. "Take the stuff and you'd better get it back to me next week."
 - ii. "Take your time, get it back to me at your leisure"
 - iii. "Don't worry about it, you can have it."
- b. For example, claims of altruism are part of the way we use "gifts" to create relationships.
- c. The Kuna, even though they feed everyone, will notice who doesn't extend the same courtesy to their neighbors. Even their poor cousins from the mainland invite the men from the village to go hunting on their land where the game is much more dense than it is along the coast.
- d. Gift giving can be antagonistic
- e. Gift giving is a very complicated and emotional process.
 - i. In "Number Our Days" no one wanted to take any gifts because they didn't want to feel dependant.
- f. We only receive from certain people.
- g. Mauss looked at why people give things back. Why not take the gift and run?
 - i. Mauss got it wrong. Citing the Maori of New Zealand, he said that gifts had a certain spirit called a "hau" and if you didn't give gifts back you would disrespect the "hau". But this is not the way the Maori understand "hau".

- ii. But this is useful in alerting us to how people think about gifts as special.
- h. The answer is almost too obvious: you give things back because it is all part of the system. If you don't reciprocate, no social benefits, and you are out of the game.
 - i. You give something material for something immaterial: social alliances.
 - ii. In many cultures you become a chief by giving many gift.
 - iii. If you just keep the goods, you forfeit the social relationships.
- i. In most gift exchanges, people come out even. If not, then we recognize it as exploitation
- j. Sometimes, there may be no material things.
 - i. In Washington DC, there are often favors, introductions, and information that are exchanged.

8. An example introduced by Mauss of status through giving: The Potlatch

- a. Takes place among the Indians of the North West Coast of North America
 - i. Chiefs would competitively give things away like cars, sheets of copper, and blankets
 - ii. Sometimes they would even burn these good
 - iii. Outsiders were very fascinated, and appalled, by this practice.
 - iv. The Canadian government outlawed potlatches, saying that you couldn't get more than a few people together for a give exchange.
 - v. Mauss and others found this wild, frantic kind of gift giving puzzling.
 - vi. For many pre-state societies, the system of chief ship often depends on this kind of aristocratic gift giving.
- b. In many societies there are "big men".
 - i. They don't inherit their position.
 - ii. They gain status buy their ability to muster people in the community for massive gift giving.
 - iii. It becomes competitive gift giving.