



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

# Towards a Broader View of Hunter-Gatherer Sharing

Edited by Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem



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Edited by Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem

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Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem,  
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## Chapter 15

# Men hunt, women share: gender and contemporary Inuit subsistence relations

Magalie Quintal-Marineau & George W. Wenzel

Sharing, as lived by Inuit in Nunavut, Canada, and as depicted in the primary ethnographic literature, is a set of normatively structured and quasi-institutionalized practices that together are as critical to Inuit subsistence culture and its economic relations as is hunting. Moreover, as Inuit on numerous occasions have made clear, it is integral to their cultural ethos. According to Inuit, sharing is what sets them apart from *Qallunaat*; that is, Inuit are generous while non-Inuit behave selfishly. In no small way, *ningiqtuq* is a core cultural value.

The central focus in this paper is not on the transactional aspects of Inuit sharing – whether these are best described as generalized, delayed or balanced reciprocal relations, or a form of gifting, exchange or normatively dictated transfers (see Damas 1969, 1972; Wenzel 1991, 1995; Hunt 2000; Kishigami 2004). The focus here is on how money has affected the normative sharing system and how its antinomical effects on the modern mixed economy adaptation have made women increasingly important in the maintenance of the Inuit subsistence system and the expanded contribution of women within the traditional subsistence system.

This paper examines women's provisioning responsibilities and sharing practices *vis à vis* men's hunting in the community of Clyde River, Nunavut, focusing specifically on women's monetary contributions to subsistence practices. It seeks to understand how the specific gendered aspects of northern economic transformations, particularly increasing engagement in wage labour, have affected women's roles, responsibilities and obligations in subsistence practices.

### Methods

This paper uses primary data from a research project (Quintal-Marineau 2016) conducted in the community of Clyde River between 2010 and 2013 that focused on Inuit women's socioeconomic roles within their

family, community and at the territorial scale. A total of twenty-nine women and their families participated in the project (approximately 14 per cent of total population). Female participants show a wide variety of situations, ranging from full-time employed and head of their household, to unemployed women, highly involved in land-related work. In this research, all women participants were asked to record on a regular basis their personal and household income and expenditure for a one-week period (a minimum of two single week diaries were collected for each participant and overall 76 diaries were collected between April and October 2012). Diary keepers were also asked to participate in semi-structured interviews in which women discussed how resources are shared within their household, family, and extended family. These discussions, combined with economic diaries, illuminate the scope of women's responsibilities within and outside their household and the social and cultural meanings of their sharing.

These primary data and results are preceded by an overview of the traditional *ningiqtuq* system for the sharing of wild food resources in Clyde River (Wenzel 1981, 1995, 2000, 2013), as well as in other Iglulik Inuit communities (see Mary-Rousselière 1984). This overview, thus, culturally contextualizes within the Inuit social economy of transfers and reciprocity the contemporary situation between women, their hunter-spouses and money as a critical resource in the modern mixed economy that is lived in the Canadian North.

### *Ningiqtuq*: the traditional sharing system

The literature on the traditional Inuit sharing system has generally focused on the importance of men as, first, hunter-providers and, second, economic decision makers. The emphasis in this literature has been on two features of the system. The first is its structural

**Table 15.1.** Ningiqtuq interaction sets. \*Copper Inuit; partially present among Natsilingmiut Inuit (Van de Velde 1956).

Social context	Direction	Reference	Behavioural directive
1) <i>Ilagiit</i>	<i>Niqiliriiq</i> (see a & b below) a. Hunters>> <i>Isumataq</i> [sons, younger brothers>>male extended family head] [son-in-law>>father-in-law] b. <i>Isumataq</i> >>Households c. <i>Isumataq</i> Commensalism	<i>Tugagaujuq</i>  <i>Tigutuinnaq</i> [ <i>Tugagaujuq</i> - <i>Tigutuinnaq</i> are complementary]  <i>Nirriyaktuqtuq</i>	<i>Naalaqtuq</i>  <i>Naalaqtuq</i>  <i>Naalaqtuq</i>
2) Community	a. <i>Isumataq</i> Commensalism b. Open Distribution c. Ephemeral Task Group	<i>Nirriyaktuqtuq</i>  <i>Minaqtuq</i>  <i>Katujiyuk</i> [ <i>Taliqtuq</i> ]	<i>Ungayuk</i>  <i>Ungayuk</i>  <i>Naalaqtuq</i>
3) Inter-Personal	a. Invited Guests b. Food Gifts  c. 'Partnerships'	<i>Akpallugit</i>  <i>Paiyuktuq</i> [ <i>Quaktuaktuq</i> ] [ <i>Niqisuitaiyuq</i> ]  <i>Pigatigiit</i> * [ <i>Uummajusiutiit</i> ] [ <i>Niqitaitianaq</i> ]	<i>Ungayuk</i>  <i>Ungayuk</i>  <i>Ungayuk</i>

aspects, notably the importance of consanguineal kinship, genealogical position within the viri-oriented extended family, and/or actor co-residence. In terms of behavioural framing, the dynamics of the system are that of a social economy in which the rules regulating social relations are integral to facilitating economic activity (see Damas 1972; Wenzel 1981, 1991, 1995, 2016). Inuit sharing, conceptually and in fact, is a socially embedded system. The second of its features is that the core material that shared, the currency so to speak, is harvested wild foods, mainly produced through cooperative male hunting.

The Inuit subsistence system, as a social economy, involves the production and distribution of local resources as well as the reproduction of social structural norms and the cultural values that underpin these norms (Lonner 1980; Wenzel 2000; Abele 2009). Through cooperative hunting, fishing, and gathering, Inuit produce considerable volumes of wild foods (country foods) that are shared collectively. Wenzel (2000, 63) describes sharing as a 'strategy by which participants achieve the widest possible intra-community distribution of resources', principally food and hunting resources, through a set of practices that include individual transfers and gifting, and generalized redistribution through various forms of commensalism among kin and co-residents (Wenzel 1995). Sharing and reciprocity (sometimes immediate, more

often delayed) between individuals are important features of this system and, in turn, to Inuit identity (Fienup-Riordan 1983; Wenzel, 1991; Stairs & Wenzel, 1993; Searles 2002; Collings 2014).

The reality of the *ningiqtuq* system (Table 15.1) is that it is a complex of social mechanisms that may function separately or overlap depending on an individual's positionality in relation to social place, to time and to residential location. But regardless of the mechanism, the inclusion as a provider and a receiver is regulated by the two primary behavioural referents, *naalaqtuq* (inter-generational rights and obligations) and *ungayuk* (intra-generational and co-residential solidarity). And while the system provides access without reference to gender, with only occasional exception control of resources is biased toward male authority.

In point of fact, the Canadian Inuit literature offers very little information on the role of women in the sharing system. For instance, Stefansson, who spent over a year travelling in the Copper Inuit region, makes only one reference to an active presence of women in sharing,

'The little adopted daughter of the house, a girl of seven or eight, had not begun to eat with the rest of us, for it was her task to take a small wooden platter and carry

four pieces of boiled meat to the four families who had none of their own to cook.' (1913, 176)

More often, references to sharing make no mention of the exact role of women or girls. Jenness (1922, 87), in his description of Copper Inuit *pigatigiit*, states that, 'Often within a community one man will show special courtesy to another by sending him the hind flippers of every seal that he catches....The two men thus become *upatitkattik*, "flipper associates"...' (authors' emphasis). While Jenness notes that seal associations included non-kin and such transfers were an act of 'courtesy', presumably the actual 'giving', as in Stefansson's mention, was through the medium of the successful hunter's wife or a daughter.

Gender has always been an important factor in Inuit subsistence organization. It is widely agreed that women and men traditionally performed distinct but complementary roles, with one married woman and man considered a 'working unit' (Giffen 1930; Kjellström 1973; Guemple 1986). While men were hunters, women maintained the household and supplied food by gathering herbs, berries, roots, and grass; women were also fishers and hunters of birds and smaller game (Giffen 1930). Though their work was mutually interdependent, many scholars have argued that authority over decision-making was unbalanced and the control of resources was biased toward male authority (Guemple 1995; Reimer 1996).

Historically, this organization of work provided the basis for resource production, distribution, and consumption, thus regulating the sharing of food and organizing economic life (Lonner 1980; Stairs & Wenzel 1993). Indeed, the flow of resources followed well-structured social principles in which a person's gender was one determinant of their status. Damas (1963) found social classification to be organized around three principles: genealogy, with structurally junior generations subordinate to members of older generations; relative age, making younger people 'follow, listen to and obey the older' (*ibid.*, 84); and male ascendancy, implying male advantages over women.

Outside the Copper Inuit area, however, food sharing was and is predominantly regulated through kinship-based *naalaqtuq-ungayuq* relations and *isumataq* (family head; Elder) guidance, although a form of 'courtesy' transfers, *paiyuktuq*, still occurs with girls often dispatched to carry food gifts to proximal non-hunting elders and the ill. Thus, while *pigatigiit* and *paiyuktuq*-type sharing are typically understood as the *sine qua non* of generalized Inuit sharing, in fact, seal sharing partnerships were practiced by just

a few Central Arctic Coast societies (Damas 1969) and *paiyuktuq* most often occurred in very specific circumstances.

### Women, the mixed economy, sharing and subsistence

'...a subsistence economy is a highly specialized mode of production and distribution of not only goods and services, but of social forms...' (Lonner 1980, 5)

'...in the Baffin Inuit economy...cash has become as fully a part of the resource environment as food...' (Wenzel 1986)

In the Canadian North, the years following the Second World War until the founding of Nunavut in 1993 are sometimes termed 'The Government Era' in which government no longer was just an annual RCMP visit to a remote seasonal village. Rather colonization in earnest began in the early to mid-1950s, highlighted by Inuit gradually resettling in regional government-serviced settlements, the introduction of formal education and the providing of public health facilities were present, all supported by a nascent bureaucracy (Damas 2002; Wenzel 2008). It was also a time that saw a sea change in economic relations between Inuit and Euro-Canadians, the most substantive of which was the introduction of a monetized market system. This progressive integration of money and waged employment into Inuit subsistence system led researchers and government officials to predict that such drastic changes to hunting as a livelihood strategy would result in a full acculturation of individuals and the death of subsistence practices across the Arctic (Murphy & Steward 1956; Hughes 1965; Vallee 1962). Despite these predictions, traditional subsistence activities, including the production of wild foods for domestic use and as a medium of social connectivity, persists and continues to comprise an important organizing principal of Inuit society.

What emerged from this confluence of social and economic policies was a mixed economy in which Inuit, through the production of saleable commodities produced through hunting and/or the limited sale of their labour, accessed money for the technologies, such as snowmobiles and motorized boats, needed for hunting once centralization was completed (Wenzel 1989, 1991; Jorgensen 1990; Smith 1991). The melding of new technologies with traditional environmental skills and knowledge are by far the most visible aspects of the mixed economy. The incorporation of

snowmobiles, outboard engines, satellite telephones and GPS locators, however, belie the underlying reality that these incorporations are only the most apparent aspect of today's mixed economy adaptation. Most trenchant is that the successful co-production and interaction of two difficult to produce currencies, *niqituinnaq* and money, is the singular adaptive feature of modern Inuit subsistence culture. However, as will be discussed later, these two currencies function and are valued differently with traditional food reinforcing social and cultural connectivity ('Inuit are generous') and money as a facilitator of this.

Today, it is easy to view money as the consuming totality of Inuit economic life if only because that life is both startlingly expensive and that very few 'traditional' Inuit activities produce money. In this light, the mixed economy is a failing adaptation. On the other hand, forgotten is that the mixed economy flourished from the 1960s into the early 1980s, a period during which Inuit could successfully meet virtually all their monetary and socio-cultural needs from the sale of the byproducts – sealskins, walrus and narwhal ivory, polar bear hides – obtained through traditional food production (Wenzel 1991; Wenzel et al. 2016).

The immediate effects of the 1983 collapse of the world market for sealskin on the mixed economy were two fold. The most apparent was that access to money through the sale of animal byproducts (i.e. sealskins) from food harvesting was severely constrained, leading to a marked reduction in hunters' ability to operate or renew their equipment (see Wenzel 2016; Wenzel et al. 2016). The second was that wage employment shifted from being an option, albeit a problematic one given the paucity of available jobs, to a necessity in the face of ever-increasing costs of hunting.

The Federal and Territorial governments responded by expanding wage and transfer inputs to the mixed economy, although job creation has never been sufficient, hindered further by deficient skill level, especially in the case of many men literacy, and social assistance too minimal and restrictive. Moreover, men who do obtain employment are confronted by the problem of high opportunity costs as both wage employment and hunting required prodigious amounts of time. As one man put his dilemma, 'I took my job so I could buy a new snowmobile for hunting, but now if I stop working I cannot buy gas and parts. Now, if the weather is good, I only hunt on the weekend' (JQ, Clyde River, pers. comm.).

The essential outcome of this process was a socio-economic landscape in which a few Inuit became cash-secure but with little time, while a majority continued to have time but were (and are) cash-poor. Harvesting and sharing, the twin elements of Inuit

subsistence culture continued, but not without friction between the two sectors of the mixed economy, a situation exacerbated not only by the increasing monetary costs of hunting but also by an expansion of material wants as a greater and greater variety of goods and services entered the North.

Today, in most northern communities, while wage employment constitutes the most effective way to access money and despite the opportunity costs that many Inuit men live, hunting has continuing importance in male Inuit cultural identity (Dorais 1997; Searles 2002; Tulloch 2015). Similarly, demonstration of traditional domestic skills remains a critical part of Inuit women's identity (Ready 2016). At the same time, it is also increasingly the case that wage employment has become an important part of Nunavummiut female identity. Indeed, Inuit women are well positioned to hold employment as they attain higher levels of education, show a preference for permanent, full-time wage engagement and have fewer opportunity conflicts than men (Quintal-Marineau 2017). Therefore, Nunavummiut women, through their wages, have become important providers of money to men.

This situation is not unique to Nunavut. Kuokkanen (2011) generally notes that in many contemporary indigenous communities, wage labour is more consistent and permanent among women, while comparable research in Alaska (Kleinfeld et al. 1981, 1983; Jolles 1997) and in Greenland (Dybbroe 1988) have identified a similar economic dynamic. Chabot (2003) reports the case of a young woman in Nunavik (Arctic Québec) receiving country food from her nephew while financially contributing to the fuel expenses and maintenance of his snowmobile. According to Natcher (2009, 90), gender influences the way money circulates within the Nunavummiut household: 'A father may receive money from his daughter who is employed in the community daycare facility. With the money the father purchases fuel and supplies to fish for Arctic char.' Rasmussen (2009, 527) mentions similar findings in Greenland, where 'a successful male hunter or fisherman very often has to be funded by wage income generated by his wife' (see also Rauhut et al. 2008). Finally, in Alaska, a few authors report women's wage employment supporting male harvesting activities (Fogel-Chance 1993; Lee 2002).

In order to understand the expanded economic role of women in Nunavut, a critical focus is the emphasis Inuit women place on country foods for the health of their families (Borré 1994). Women participants often mentioned that food and feeding their families was their main domestic responsibility: 'I have to make sure my family is healthy and this means



feeding them with good food' (Joan, 50 year old Clyde River resident). Much of literature on Inuit women and food has emphasized their 'traditional' role as food processors and preparers (Giffen 1930; Kjellstrom 1973; Briggs 1974), at best the domestic support of male hunters/food producers. This dichotomization, like many other aspects of contemporary Inuit life and livelihood, is changing as women are becoming important food providers through their wages.

*Niqituinnaq* is not simply a source of energy; it has strong cultural importance and 'serves as an important vehicle in the production of meaning and identity' (Searles 2002, 55; see also Lupton 1996). As Bodenhorn (1993, 184) puts it: 'Access to cash is necessary for survival; access to *niqituinnaq*, real food, is necessary for social identity'. Food is thus an aspect of collective identity – of being Inuit – through not only what is eaten, but how it is acquired, distributed, and with whom and how it is eaten. Consequently, being able to provide food to one's family that is adequate in quantity and that is cultural congruent is important both for cultural as for health considerations (Borré 1994).

Today, just as Inuit families live in a mixed economy, they also live a mixed food system, combining country and store-bought foods in different proportions according to the availability of traditional foods and individual preferences. While many men continue to hunt, fish and gather to provide local foods to their family, an important aspect of food 'production' has shifted into the hands of women as the monetary costs of hunting require an investment of time that puts men, should they have jobs, more than women in serious conflict with the demands of wage employment. Numerous scholars have remarked that traditional food production has become increasingly expensive and that access to sufficient money has a direct influence on harvesting productivity (Quigley & McBride 1987; Wenzel 1991, 2000, 2016; Duhaime et al. 2002; Natcher 2009).

Since the 1980s, the work-hunt dichotomy has increased pressure on all those who have wage incomes, but especially on those earners who are in subordinate generational or gender position to related harvesters (Wenzel 2000, 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that full-time and part-time employed women are more frequently involved in financially provisioning harvesting activities than those dependent on social transfer income.

In contemporary Clyde River, Inuit women's involvement in traditional food production is twofold. First, they hunt, fish, and gather to different degrees at different periods of the year. Among the twenty-nine participants, only two (7 per cent) women did not engage in any harvesting activity during the year of

the research and fifteen (52 per cent) women engaged in harvesting activities that they self-financed. Second, women not only participate in harvesting activities, they also contribute financial support to related male harvesters.

In fact, those with wage positions supported male harvesting activities at a higher rate (75 per cent) than those dependent on transfer payments (10 per cent). Also, two (7 per cent) women that were not in the labour force at the time of the research supported harvesting activities; one of whom is retired but still has access to significant income and a young college student who uses her student stipend to pay gas for her partner's hunting. Overall, among the sample population, seventeen (59 per cent) women mentioned that they had supported harvesting activities over the previous year and twelve (41 per cent) women had not. Within the 'non-support' cohort, four (14 per cent) had done so the year before when they had access to greater income. Another three (10 per cent) women stated that they would support their spouse if he should hunt.

These numbers suggest that women's contribution/support is dynamic; fluctuates according to their working status as well as their partner's ability to harvest. For example, a young woman in her mid-twenties had recently withdrawn from the labour force for a maternity leave. As she now lived on a much-reduced income and was the only one with wages in her household, she was not able to support her partner's hunting anymore although she had done so the years before. Her partner managed to continue hunting, but less frequently and was not able to finance a caribou hunt that year.

Moreover, women's contributions ranged from the woman who monthly transferred CDN\$300.00 to her spouse for hunting supplies to a woman who purchased a rifle and second-hand ATV for her partner for some CDN\$3,000.00 and another who secured a CDN\$60,000 loan for a large boat and engines. The commonest form of support provided by women was to buy gas and food for hunting trips by male kinspersons with women, especially during weekends participating. One woman spoke particularly expansively of her situation, as every weekend she and her family, weather permitting, went to their cabin for hunting, fishing and, in summer, berry picking (and, as she added, just to relax). Regarding these trips, she recorded in her diary the camp food expenditures (approximately CDN\$200.00) or cash transfers (up to CDN\$1,000.00) to her husband so he could purchase fuel, oil and other needed items.

Some women also provided much larger and expensive items of equipment, such as rifles, snow-

mobiles, engines and boats, or engine parts. Those involved in such expenditures and transfers were all full-time, well-paid workers. One young woman employed full-time with a partner dedicated to and successful at hunting said,

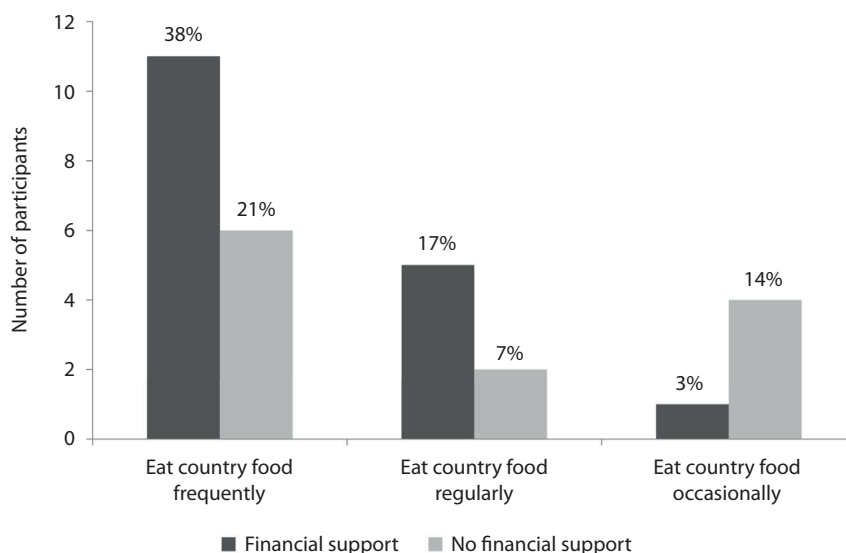
'I just bought a second-hand Honda for CDN\$2000 from someone in the community. And this summer I also bought a rifle, second-hand too, for my husband to hunt. It was CDN\$1000 and it included ammunition. I think if men are real hunters, like hunting regularly, I agree with women working and men hunting. I like my situation, especially 'cause I always want country food so it's okay for me if he hunts and I work' (Laura, 28 year old Clyde River resident).

The primary reason given by the women in Quintal-Marineau's sample for why they monetarily support various male kinspersons' harvesting is that it gives them greater assurance of country food. Indeed, the women mentioned how difficult access to traditional food in desired quantities is for those without a hunter in their household or among their kindred. As Figure 15.1 shows, 38 per cent of the women in the Clyde River sample reported eating country food frequently (more than 3 times per week) and 17 per cent doing so regularly (at least once per week), only 3 per cent who provided funding stated that their traditional food consumption was less than

one meal per week. Of those who did not or could not contribute funds to harvesting, only eight (28 per cent) reported eating country food either frequently or regularly each week.

Separate research with a small sample of unemployed or underemployed Clyde River hunters (n=21), provides some perspective from the male side of gender and sharing (Wenzel 2016). Focal in the project was frequency of harvesting activity (average number of trips per week), the state of winter harvesting gear (snowmobiles), and with whom the informant hunted and/or shared.

Fourteen reported that their activity was limited to two to three trips per month unless they could travel as a passenger with another hunter. The main explanations provided for their respective low activity frequencies were poor condition of their equipment and/or lack of funds for gasoline and oil. Two hunters reported hunting six and seven times per month, but because of the age and condition of their machines, they limited the range of their activities away from the town to approximately 25 km. (Their explanations for self-imposing a distance limit on their hunting was that in case of a mechanical breakdown, they would be able to walk back to town.) All but three of the 16 had wives or female partners, six of whom worked part-time low paying jobs, while the other 10 lived in social transfer dependent households. All were occasionally successful hunters, catching perhaps one seal per four or five trips, while one of the two 'distance-limited' men caught just one seal, but also nearly 400 ptarmigan (a small grouse-like bird that is resident



**Figure 15.1.** Frequency of country food consumption for female participants according to their financial support for harvesting activities (Quintal-Marineau 2016).

in the Clyde River area year-round) the preceding 13 months. The remaining five hunters were notable in that while they were all unemployed (two, however, did occasional seasonal work as transport drivers for adventure travel tourists), they estimated that they hunted at least three times a week. Not surprisingly, all were generally solid producers of country food.

Four reported that they were able to do so because they had a spouse or daughter(s) who were full-time wage earners (one had both). The fifth differed from the other four frequent hunters in that he was the younger sibling of a high wage brother. This older brother rarely hunted, himself, but every year or two transferred his slightly used equipment to his younger sibling, as well as frequently paying his fuel costs.

### Discussion

Both classic ethnographic and more recent research on Canadian Inuit subsistence culture and economy almost exclusively relegate the role of women to one of domestic maintainer and as handler of traditional resources harvested by their male partners with little direct involvement in the production and sharing of food. What women do has been, and often still is, characterized as ‘complementary’ to men’s foraging activities – that is, in support of men’s extractive efforts (Giffen 1930; Guemple 1986, 1995; Dowsley 2014). With respect to sharing, excepting a few early ethnographic references (Stefansson 1913, Jenness 1922) and the recent work of Harder (Harder, 2010; Harder & Wenzel 2012; see also Lee 2002; Todd 2016; Quintal-Marineau 2016, 2017), there is virtually no mention of women as active contributors, as opposed to being recipients, to the *ningiqtuq* resource sharing system.

Quintal-Marineau (2016, 2017), however, suggests that women, while not necessarily or always directly involved in food sharing (allocation and distribution), have through their growing engagement with wage employment become important providers of what has long been recognized as the scarcest resource needed for successful food harvesting: money (Usher 1981; Wenzel 1989, 1991; Wenzel et al. 2016; Duhaime et al. 2002; Chabot 2003; Lambden et al. 2006). In this regard, Quintal-Marineau’s work somewhat reflects results from economic research on Inuit women’s workforce participation in Greenlandic and Alaskan urban centres (Kleinfeld et al. 1981; Condon 1987; Dybbroe 1988; Fogel-Chance 1993; Bodenhorn 1993; see also Kuokkanen 2011); however, only recently have women’s provisioning of wild food harvesting within the overall northern economic setting begun to be examined.

The sharing practices of women in Clyde River also highlight the emergence of an economic model that is articulating around a new gender dynamic, in which women who are wage earners allow economic space for men to work as full-time hunters. This expanded role regarding division of labour is particularly interesting in informing the work or hunt dilemma (Wenzel 1991, 2016), which has resulted in some men choosing to engage in only occasional casual and/or seasonal wage work rather than full-time employment. The data presented here show that women from Clyde River who engage in wage employment make direct and indirect contributions to the harvesting activities of spouses, children, and other relatives. In many households, conducting land-related activities is made possible by female financial contributions. To a substantial degree, women provide the cash that enables hunters to continue food provisioning activities, thus securing both the traditional (*niqitinnaq*) and modern (cash) resources essential to the mixed economy adaptation.

With women engaging in wage work and sharing their income with active hunter-kinspersons, the cultural norms of subsistence are maintained. More importantly, because men’s hunting, and by extension Inuit traditional food sharing practices, is highly dependent on women’s participation in the wage economy, it suggests that women’s role in modern subsistence practice is much more than a matter of simple ‘complementary’ contribution. Rather, women are positioned at the centre of food production. Though perceptions of the contribution of Inuit women to subsistence has long been limited to their domestic roles as sewers, cooks and the rearers of children and sometimes the foraging of small game and plant resources (Giffen 1930; Billison & Mancini 2007), the data presented here suggest that their roles in modern subsistence have both expanded and become, if anything, as critical as any time in the past. Women’s essential economic contribution challenges the perception still prevalent in the Inuit Studies literature that female roles are statically subordinate within the ethnographically ‘established’ traditional Inuit social structural narrative.

Socio-economic, if not yet socio-cultural, transformations in Nunavut have favoured Inuit women’s work in the wage economy, and they have become important earners within households. It is clear from the data presented here that women are assuming a wider array of responsibilities that are wider than those traditionally depicted.

This analysis of women’s sharing practices in the context of the northern mixed economy as an adaptive element in Inuit subsistence Culture suggests that



women's contributions extend far beyond household boundaries. In addition to earning money, women play a key role in the circulation of monetary resources by providing food and financial support to harvesting activities that are performed by male kin. In this manner, they sustain the continuous flow of *niqituinnaq* and the social relational system that facilitates traditional resource activities (Sahlins 1971; Wenzel 1991). At the same time, through the money they provide for country food production, women are reproducing the normative sharing behaviour, albeit through a novel medium, that underpins subsistence as a social economy.

As both traditional Inuit food production and modern household needs now depend on a continuous flow of money, women's contributions have become critical to the understanding of the modern Inuit economic adaptation, and women's socio-economic position within it. Overall, women's contributions maintain the normative cultural goal of Inuit subsistence – that is, the shared responsibility for kindred and community dietary and social well-being (Wenzel 1995, 51). Given their expanded responsibility, statements that Inuit women have become less active than men in the land economy misunderstands and underestimates their cultural and economic contribution to the mixed economy as an adaptation and to subsistence as an encompassing ethic.

'My husband is unemployed right now. But he hunts a lot. He hunts caribou, seal... everything... We usually always have country food in our house. Mostly every day we eat country food. The way we do it is that I pay all the bills and rent and for the food, too. I also give money to my husband when he has to buy some gas or hunting material. Every paycheque I usually transfer \$300 into his bank account so he can buy his hunting gear. But I am the one responsible for buying any material in this house! I bought the two ski-doo's that we have!' (Beatrice, 52 years old Clyde River resident)

### Postscript

There is another aspect to this new Inuit sharing-hunting relational dynamic between women and men to be more widely considered. As is obvious, the monetary contribution by women so male relations can hunt facilitates traditional food production and so, as we have emphasized throughout, has important material and socio-cultural substance. Indeed, women make it clear that a motivation in their monetary support of men's hunting is the food that may be produced.

Whether this money–*niqituinnaq* relationship constitutes a kind of balanced reciprocal exchange, or demand sharing, or sharing as pure transfer (see Widlock 2016, 3) is an important emerging question, but also one that is beyond the scope of the present paper and so will not be addressed here. Rather, if one considers that Inuit hunting is a relational activity that joins animals and humans to each other and that Inuit understand animals to be sentient beings (Rasmussen 1929, 1931; Wenzel 2004; Laugrand & Oosten 2015) sensitive to human motivations and attitudes, it is possible to consider women's sharing in an additional and quintessentially Inuit cultural dimension.

Stairs & Wenzel (1993) have posited that the generosity animals extend to humans includes, and may depend on, an animal knowing that the hunter will be generous with the food that is obtained. In the present economic environment, the monetary provisioning of hunting through hunters' wives, sisters and daughters can be seen as a new generosity that is an extension of the traditional contributions to hunting by women (Bodenhorn 1993, 2000) and is just as critical to successful harvesting as what men do, say or think.

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