

# the legitimation of beliefs in a hunter-gatherer society: Bearlake Athapaskan knowledge and authority

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[The Dreamer's] answers made me realize that how you come to know something is as important as what you know.

—Robin Ridington, *Trail to Heaven*

[A]uthority is the very essence of social organization.

—Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture*

Anthropologists sometimes claim that northeastern Athapaskans (Dene) have distinctive beliefs concerning the fundamental significance of individual autonomy, an inherent association of certain forms of knowledge with supernatural power, and the importance of learning through personal experience. Robin Ridington (1968, 1978, 1988a, 1988b, 1990) does more than any other ethnographer to clarify the beliefs, although other anthropologists also describe these features of Dene cultures (Brody 1981; Christian and Gardner 1977; Goulet 1988; Hara 1980; Helm 1961, 1965; Honigmann 1946, 1954; MacNeish 1956; Moore and Wheelock 1990; Rushforth 1984, 1985, 1986; Rushforth with Chisholm 1991; Savishinsky 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975; Scollon and Scollon 1979; Sharp 1986, 1987, 1988a, 1988b; Slobodin 1970; Smith 1973, 1983, 1985, 1988). Northeastern Athapaskans affirm and highly value the inherent right of individuals to govern themselves freely and independently. Dene claim that people should avoid gratuitous intervention in others' affairs. They feel strongly that individuals should control their own lives and determine their own actions. Nevertheless, most Dene simultaneously acknowledge their interdependence with other people. They praise the generous person who cooperates enthusiastically with relatives, friends, and neighbors.

Dene conceptions of the relationship between knowledge and supernatural power are complex and subtle. Such conceptions also vary both within and between groups. Hence, anthropologists have difficulty providing detailed ethnographic accounts of these beliefs. Loosely stated, supernatural power derives from knowledge that an individual acquires during dreams and other intimate experiences. During such experiences, a person can come to "know a little bit about something." That person is then able through the force of thought to control various phenomena in the world. Thus empowered by knowledge, a person can interpret the universe, cure the sick, secure success in various activities, and foretell the future. "Animal helpers" are important throughout the process.

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*Anthropologists sometimes suggest that northeastern Athapaskan-speaking Indians have distinctive ideas about the relationships among individual autonomy, knowledge, and power. One feature of northeastern Athapaskan culture, as realized among the Bearlake Athapaskans, is the significance attributed to experiential knowledge and primary epistemic reasons in the justification of beliefs. Individual authority is based on and legitimated by primary knowledge. The epistemological and political significance of such knowledge derives from the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production. [knowledge, authority, hunter-gatherers, Athapaskan]*

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Dene usually prefer to learn by firsthand experience rather than by other means. Many of them consider experiential knowledge more likely than other forms of knowledge to be accurate, reliable, and therefore useful. In social labor and decision making, people customarily defer to those who have experiential knowledge about the activity or subject at hand. The significance of the Dene preference for experiential knowledge is, despite some recent attention, underemphasized by ethnographers. It has yet to be fully comprehended (*pace* Ridington 1988a:104, 1988b:74; Scollon and Scollon 1979:185).

In this article I propose to discuss selected aspects of the significance to Dene of learning through personal experience. I focus on the relationship between personal experience and knowledge among Sahtúot'jine ("Bearlake People"),<sup>1</sup> for this relationship is central to an understanding of Bearlake autonomy, knowledge, power, and authority; is relatively public (meaning that Bearlakers do not usually hesitate to discuss it and there is widespread agreement among them about it); and is accessible in the sense that it is not as exotic as other aspects of the belief system under consideration. I organize the remainder of the article into four sections. In the first, I review selected ideas from Western epistemology that are useful to an understanding of pertinent Sahtúot'jine beliefs and values. In the second, I discuss the Bearlake Athapaskan perspective on personal experience and knowledge. In the third, I offer an interpretation of the preference that Sahtúot'jine have for primary knowledge and epistemic justification. This preference and related social practices derive historically from the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production and are linked to Bearlake social relations of production: namely, to disengagement from private property and to egalitarian patterns of authority. In the final section, I offer a short summary and suggestions for future research.

## knowledge and the justification of beliefs

Philosophers concerned with propositional knowledge sometimes suggest that it consists of "justified true beliefs."<sup>2</sup> I assume here that *knowing* requires satisfaction of the three conditions implicated by this phrase. For an individual to know some proposition, she or he must believe it. It must be true. It must also be justified or warranted. These conditions may, however, be defined and satisfied differently in different cultural systems. Cultural systems are frameworks of intentionality that establish not only what objects, events, and actions are about but also what the appropriate belief states regarding those objects, events, and actions should be. There is no *truth* independent of individuals and of their culturally based interpretations of the world. Rather, truth is relative to conceptual systems (see Feyerabend 1962, 1965, 1975; Kuhn 1970a, 1970b; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; *pace* Davidson 1984:183–198). Since cultural systems vary and people may justify their beliefs in different culturally established ways, truth varies. If people consider a proposition *fully justified* within the context of their culture, the proposition is true relative to that system. Truth is dependent on full justification, and full justification implies truth and knowledge within a conceptual system.

Since truth and knowledge are based on the justification of beliefs, anthropologists should be interested in reasons for believing. Philosophers sometimes distinguish between "epistemic" and "nonepistemic" reasons for belief: epistemic reasons are "indicators that a proposition is true, whereas nonepistemic reasons are indicators that a belief state has a certain nonalethic feature" (Moser 1989:48).<sup>3</sup> In this article, I also distinguish between "primary" and "secondary" knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This distinction emphasizes the "causal ancestry of the reasons upon which a belief is based" (Swain 1981:196). Primary knowledge denotes fully justified beliefs that an individual acquires through his/her experiences, including social interactions. The evidential basis for such beliefs derives from personal experience with a "causally efficacious, spatiotemporally located event or state of affairs" (Swain 1981:196–202). Primary knowledge is based on primary epistemic evidence.<sup>5</sup> Secondary knowledge is not based directly on an

individual's experience or justified directly by primary epistemic evidence. Rather, secondary knowledge is justified immediately by other means, and only indirectly by primary experience.<sup>6</sup> According to Swain, secondary knowledge must be justified by reference to at least one instance of primary knowledge: "if knowledge can be said to have a foundation . . . [it] consists of propositions that are primarily known. . . . [I]nstances of secondary knowledge are [ultimately] dependent upon instances of primary knowledge" (1981:227–229).<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between primary and secondary knowledge implies that a person may acquire the latter through means less direct than the former. Sources of secondary knowledge might include oral literature (myths and historical or personal narratives), formal and informal instruction, gossip, hearsay, and written materials. One individual's primary knowledge may, through communication, become another person's secondary knowledge.

### **Bearlake knowledge, power, and fully justified beliefs**

Sahtúot'íne make a distinction similar, if not identical, to the one between primary and secondary knowledge. Bearlake consultants discussed the distinction using these terms: *yek'éodehshq* (she [or he] knows it), *'ekw'i yek'éodehshq* (she [or he] knows it straight, directly; she [or he] knows the truth), and *bech'agoni'a yek'éodehshq* (she [or he] knows it indirectly). Additional phrases were used to clarify the difference between "straight" (*'ekw'i*) and "indirect" (*bech'agoni'a*) knowing: *'ekw'i gots'ede* (people are speaking the truth), *bech'agoni'a gots'ede* (people are speaking indirectly, around it [not touching directly on the topic]), and *'edjt'échine libó ch'agoni'a whetq* (the pencil is almost [but not quite] touching the cup). Bearlakers thus use the conventional metaphor of knowing something "straight" or "directly" to denote both knowing something through experience and knowing the truth. In my discussions with one consultant about the ways that Bearlakers know, he used phrases such as *gots'edi ghádé yek'éodehshq* (through living she [or he] knows it), *náts'etee ghádé yek'éodehshq* (through dreaming she [or he] knows it), and *'edjt'é ghádé yek'éodehshq* (through books she [or he] knows it) to clarify his views.

Bearlakers, like other Dene, place greater value on knowledge gained through and justified by personal experience than on knowledge acquired and warranted through other means. Sahtúot'íne prefer to justify knowledge by reference to primary epistemic evidence, which provides them with their strongest reasons for believing. In Bearlake culture and society, moreover, fully warranted beliefs customarily necessitate primary epistemic evidence. Sahtúot'íne religious beliefs epitomize this relationship between experience and knowledge. As noted, supernatural power or "medicine" derives from knowledge that someone acquires during dreams and other personal encounters. During these experiences, an individual comes to "know a little bit about something." He or she is then capable of controlling worldly phenomena.

Individuals acquire independently the experiential knowledge that engenders supernatural power. Supernatural power is, according to my consultants, based exclusively on primary knowledge. In this regard, Bearlakers judge *dreams* to be a source of primary knowledge. In Bearlake ontology, dreams are real; the phenomena one encounters in dreams are tangible, substantive. The experiential knowledge that a person assimilates while dreaming is no less authentic than the knowledge that she or he acquires through other experiences. Medicine is based on and inherent to this primary knowledge, which cannot be acquired from others.<sup>8</sup> An individual cannot transfer his or her primary knowledge and power to someone else. Therefore, medicine is not exchanged or inherited.

In the preceding paragraph, I used the term "acquired." Strictly speaking, this term is misleading because it implies something about Bearlake knowledge and power that is incorrect. Sahtúot'íne do not objectify these phenomena. They do not conceive of either as object or commodity. Rather, they judge knowledge and power to be attributes, qualities, or character-

istics of animate beings, including some animals. A person assimilates and integrates such qualities into his or her being. Knowledge and power are not objects that someone “grasps.” The phrase Bearlakers use to label an individual with medicine is *Dene 'ik'ǭ hę̄l̄i* (a person is power [*hę̄l̄i* means “it is”]), not \**Dene 'ik'ǭ gots'ę̄* (\*a person has power [the asterisk denotes an unacceptable usage]). These phrases may be compared to *Dene h́uzha hę̄l̄i* (a person is shy) and *Dene lidí gots'ę̄* (a person has tea).<sup>9</sup>

Three additional points concerning Bearlake concepts of knowledge and power are pertinent to the discussion at hand. First, as noted, primary knowledge is the foundation of power. In turn, power provides the basis for human agency. Although my understanding of the relationships among knowledge, power, and agency is incomplete, I would argue that for some Sahtúot'įne, an individual's ability to act and to control people, animals, and other phenomena is determined by his or her knowledge and associated power. The more knowledge and power a person integrates, the better able she or he is to control the world. People vary in the knowledge and power they assimilate: adults usually integrate more than children and adolescents, men more than women.

Second, the conceptual framework under consideration plays an important role in Sahtúot'įne understandings and interpretations of the world. Bearlakers frequently refer to knowledge, power, and their use by individuals when explaining how and why events take place.<sup>10</sup> That is, this cultural framework frequently provides an inferential basis for knowing (see note 3). For example, when a man has exceptional success hunting moose, Sahtúot'įne attribute his achievements to the knowledge and power that he has assimilated through dreams and other experiences. Within this framework of meaning and moral responsibility, a hunter could never be so fortunate without medicine. Therefore, if a hunter is unusually successful, it follows for Bearlakers that he has the requisite knowledge and power. One person's extraordinary success at hunting is, for someone else, evidence of the former's knowledge and power.

Third, one Bearlaker can never actually share primary knowledge of another's knowledge and power. One person must learn of another's knowledge and power by observing the latter's actions and applying the relevant explanatory framework. People know and justify their knowledge of a hunter's medicine, for example, using their own epistemic evidence of his accomplishments. They justify their knowledge through their own experiences, not by reference to anyone's, including the hunter's, verbal reports. Someone's assertion that she or he is knowledgeable and powerful would not fully justify the belief that that person “knows a little bit about something.” To the contrary, Sahtúot'įne would be likely to take such claims as evidence that the speaker lacked knowledge and power. *Knowing* that a Bearlaker is knowledgeable and powerful requires experiences of the effects of that person's medicine.<sup>11</sup>

The claim that Bearlakers prefer to justify knowledge by primary epistemic evidence does not imply that they acquire most of their knowledge through direct experience, eschew all forms of secondary knowledge, and fail to abstract or generalize from experience. Reference to primary experience is simply the culturally preferred mode of legitimation for knowledge. People who speak from primary experience, all else being equal, are granted greater credibility and authority than others. Nevertheless, Sahtúot'įne recognize that individuals are finite, have limited experiences, and must frequently rely on secondary knowledge in a wide range of circumstances. Accordingly, they acknowledge a variety of additional epistemic and nonepistemic reasons for believing, reasons that are not based on primary experience. Secondary knowledge acquired through oral literature, conversation, and gossip is particularly important.<sup>12</sup> Recitations of oral literature, for example, provide people with secondary knowledge of Bearlake beliefs, values, and norms, and help to focus attention on the crucial features of real-life events.<sup>13</sup> Bearlake “Distant Time” stories describe the mythological past, highlight numerous instances of both appropriate and misguided actions of animate beings, explain the origins of many characteristics of the contemporary world, and justify various features of Bearlake knowledge and belief.<sup>14</sup> The secondary knowledge Bearlakers acquire through such myths is

legitimated in part by tradition and in part by the narrator's authority. The latter is based on his or her personal experiences and knowledge. After telling a Distant Time story, for example, a narrator might conclude by referring to his or her own primary knowledge of features of the myth. After reciting a myth about Wolverine that explains particular characteristics of contemporary wolverine behavior, a storyteller might recount his or her personal experiences with those animals. The personal experiences with wolverines verify the myth's content. After reciting a Distant Time story about events that occurred at a specific place, a narrator might refer to his or her personal experiences in that location. Those experiences provide primary epistemic evidence that validates the myth's truth. A narrator's primary knowledge of large stains on the cliffs near Fort Norman provides evidence that Yamodéya (a mythological hunter and traveler) killed giant beavers near there and then stretched their hides to dry on the cliffs.

Bearlake personal narratives also constitute an important source of secondary knowledge. Such narratives (which are based on a speaker's experiences) inform others about the world and about both effective and ineffective responses to particular circumstances that the narrator has encountered and knows. Hearers later use this secondary knowledge to interpret their own experiences and actions. For hearers, such secondary knowledge is justified by reference to the speaker's authority, which is established by his or her primary knowledge. If, for example, a man intended to travel in an area of Bearlake territory of which he had no firsthand experience, he would probably seek secondary knowledge of features of the landscape and of the animals in the region. He would not demand explicit, formal instruction. Rather, he would go to men who have primary knowledge of the area and ask them about their experiences there. If he heard someone tell of having broken through the ice when crossing a river at a particular location, he would as a matter of course either check the ice at that spot before crossing it or avoid that place altogether. As indicated, such secondary knowledge is legitimated in part by reference to the speaker's authority. Upon hearing such accounts, Bearlakers would quite likely want to verify experientially the accuracy of their secondary knowledge. Depending on the speaker's authority in the example under consideration, the hearer might say he believed or even knew that ice at a specific spot was likely to be dangerous, but demand firsthand experience to justify his secondary knowledge fully.<sup>15</sup>

The Sahtúot'íne preference for primary knowledge and epistemic justification of belief has implications for individual and group actions. This cultural framework creates and constrains Bearlake social practices that have unintended consequences for other features of Bearlake culture and society.<sup>16</sup> One of such consequences is the cultural and social reproduction of the preference for primary knowledge. Other consequences, which I will discuss in the next section, pertain specifically to the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production. Some of the social practices that are created and constrained by, and that also act to legitimate and reproduce, the preference for primary knowledge require discussion.

First, Sahtúot'íne are often reluctant to speak explicitly as authorities, especially about topics for which they lack primary experience and knowledge. Coupled with this reluctance is an equally strong reluctance to accept others' knowledgeable assertions without sufficient justification. Sufficient justification, as indicated, normally requires reference to primary experience. Further, as someone's personal experience, primary knowledge, and power increase in specific domains (such as moose hunting), his or her authority within those particular domains also increases. Authority in one domain does not, however, usually transfer to another. Being an authority about moose hunting, for example, does not normally entail being an authority about fishing as well.

Second, Sahtúot'íne hesitate to speak for and frequently resist speaking about others. Whenever possible, Bearlakers avoid committing others to some course of action. They also avoid reporting others' actions and thoughts whenever doing so could be construed as unwarranted intervention in those people's affairs. Sahtúot'íne especially hesitate to describe or talk about others' knowledge and power. Nevertheless, they do gossip within the social constraints im-

posed by the general demand for primary epistemic evidence. Gossip serves as an important source of secondary knowledge in the community.

Third, Sahtúot'jne hesitate to direct others' actions and frequently resist accepting direction (Rushforth 1985). As Bearlakers often say, "*Dene 'adiyóné 'edeegha k'áowe*," or "Every person is his or her own boss" ("boss" may be translated as "authority," in both of its basic senses; see below). This principle and associated practices establish a context in which people make relatively few requests of others. However, since Bearlakers consider generosity important, they expect that people will comply with all reasonable requests.

Bearlakers combine these practices with negative sanctions on individuals who act contrary to received practices and principles. For example, Sahtúot'jne severely criticize people who are "proud," "bossy," and "lazy." Proud individuals sometimes claim expertise without having primary knowledge. They exaggerate their experience. They profess to have knowledge and power, rather than allowing their actions to provide others with the necessary evidence. Bossy people intervene gratuitously in others' lives, denying others the right to make their own decisions based on their own experiences and knowledge. Dependent and lazy people rely on others' experience, knowledge, and power; being lazy, they neither work hard nor actively seek knowledge and power of their own. Lazy people have no authority.

Sahtúot'jne highly praise the "capable person" (*dene 'ehdadíyee*), who obtains his or her knowledge, power, and hence abilities through experience. The capable person demonstrates his or her knowledge, power, and abilities through actions, not words. Traditionally, such an individual was likely to lead a Sahtúot'jne band. Mythological accounts also reflect the importance of such people. Distant Time stories frequently recount the deeds of capable persons who travel to supernatural worlds and return with new knowledge (fully justified experientially) that is especially useful in the natural world. These stories provide positive examples of individuals who assimilate knowledge and power through personal experience and who then use both for the benefit of the people. Such stories legitimate through tradition the individual, autonomous pursuit of primary knowledge. The stories rationalize the priority Bearlakers give to personal experience in the justification of beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, traditional Bearlake educational practices are shaped by and act to reproduce the preference for primary knowledge. If, for one reason or another, people can't learn directly from their own experiences, they prefer to learn by "watching people who know how to do things." Next, they prefer to learn informally by hearing mythical, historical, or personal narratives. They would rather not be told formally and authoritatively that something is the case, what to do, or how to do it. These preferences are closely reflected in social practice. Formal instruction among Sahtúot'jne was rare in the past and remains so (although they do attend the Canadian schools). Bearlakers explicitly contrast the modern educational practices of Western schools with the traditional educational practices associated with life in the "bush." Such educational preferences and practices are directly related to the justification of beliefs. Bearlakers prefer to learn through personal experience because it supplies the strongest reasons and justifications for knowing. They prefer to learn by watching people who know how to do things because personal observations provide a form of primary epistemic evidence. They prefer indirect, informal instruction through oral literature to explicit instruction because the former does not impose the authority of the narrator on the hearer. For example, a man telling of having broken through the ice would not normally say, "I know that the ice is thin at this location, so go around it." He would merely report having broken through the ice under specified conditions. The story indirectly informs the hearer that the ice is likely to be thin if the same conditions are encountered again. Later, the hearer can confirm the truth of the message through his or her own personal experience. The hearer is not directly forced to accept the authority of the speaker. Bearlakers eschew formal instruction because such instruction does not provide full justification for beliefs and because it violates traditional tenets of nonintervention.

## knowledge and the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production

Anthropologists interpret northeastern Athapaskan beliefs about individual autonomy, knowledge, and power in a number of ways, referring variously to worldview or cognition (Brody 1981; Ridington 1988a; Scollon and Scollon 1979), to ethos or culture and personality (Helm 1961; Helm, De Vos, and Carterette 1963; Honigmann 1949, 1954, 1975, 1981; Savishinsky 1975; Slobodin 1960), and to the adaptation of these peoples to their subarctic environment (Ridington 1988a, 1988b; Sharp 1988a). I suggest that the beliefs may also be profitably interpreted from a political-economic perspective. The Sahtúot'íne preference for primary knowledge and the implications of this preference for the construction and legitimation of fully justified beliefs and authority derive, I argue, from the Bearlakers' mode of production.<sup>18</sup>

The primary features of the hunter-gatherer mode of production, as defined by various contemporary theorists (for example, Asch 1979a, 1979b, 1982; Barnard and Woodburn 1988; Cashdan 1980; Gibson 1985; Hindess and Hirst 1975; Ingold 1983, 1987; Ingold, Riches, and Woodburn 1988; Keenan 1981; Layton 1986; Leacock 1982; Leacock and Lee 1982a; Lee 1981; Meillassoux 1972, 1973; Tanner 1979; Testart 1982, 1987, 1988; Woodburn 1982), are disengagement from private property; the appropriation of naturally reproducing resources; a relatively simple material technology; egalitarian forms of exchange; social flexibility; spatial mobility; informal leadership; an emphasis on personal autonomy, individuality, cooperation, generosity, and equality; and domination by kinship. The traditional Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production was immediate-return, noncompetitive, and egalitarian.<sup>19</sup> Bearlakers allowed free and equal access to the naturally reproducing resources on which they depended (primarily fish, caribou, moose, and other fauna found in their subarctic environment). They possessed a simple stone, bone, wood, and hide technology but a subtle and intricate technical knowledge of productive resources and strategies. They stored relatively few of their resources, and reciprocity characterized their system of distribution and exchange. They were spatially mobile and socially flexible, traveling great distances over the course of the year and forming groups of various sizes to hunt, fish, and, after the arrival of Europeans, trap. Leadership among Sahtúot'íne was informal, situational, and transient: having little or no socially sanctioned coercive power, leaders commanded respect and exerted influence by virtue of their knowledge, abilities, and willingness to "provide for the people." Individuals and families were mostly free to pursue their own ends, although they often cooperated if they shared interests. Sahtúot'íne placed great value on personal autonomy, individuality, generosity, cooperation, and equality. Their kinship system structured economic, political, and other social relationships; social classes and other forms of hierarchy were absent.

Not only did the Sahtúot'íne preference for primary knowledge and social practices that this preference motivates, rationalizes, and legitimates grow out of their hunter-gatherer mode of production,<sup>20</sup> but the preference and practices persist: the contemporary Bearlake mode of production retains most of these features despite its intersection with capitalism.<sup>21</sup> In the ensuing discussion I concentrate on how the epistemological preference and associated social practices are related both to disengagement from private property, coupled with equality of access to technical and symbolic knowledge, and to patterns of authority, leadership, and decision making.

Members of Bearlake society today have equal access (with certain constraints imposed by age and gender) to the means and forces of production, which are not privately owned and over which the people maintain collective dominion (cf. Leacock and Lee 1982b:9; Woodburn 1982:45); they either own collectively or do not own productive resources such as land, animals, and plants.<sup>22</sup> There is, however, one significant limitation on such free accessibility. A Sahtúot'íne convention prohibits one Bearlaker from occupying and appropriating resources from a productive site that is already being used by another until the former obtains the latter's permission. During trapping season, for example, a man who first breaks trail through an area

has essentially exclusive rights over trapping in that region until he removes his traps. After that, another Bearlaker may set his traps there. A man who first sets his fishnet in the water at a particular location retains control of that fishing site and the fish he obtains there until he extracts his net. While the first man's fishnet is in the water, no one else may place a net that limits the man's catch. A man who first discovers and marks a beaver den reserves the right to harvest the beavers that inhabit it. Other Sahtúot'jne will not infringe on that right without the discoverer's permission.

Bearlakers enjoy similarly equal access to knowledge and power.<sup>23</sup> In Marxist theory, technical knowledge is part of labor power, which, coupled with means of production, constitutes a force of production. In many hunter-gatherer societies, tools may be privately owned while anyone (of the proper age and gender) may have access to the materials required for the making of tools. In its sophistication and complexity, technical knowledge among hunter-gatherers is, however, often more interesting than actual material technology.<sup>24</sup> For hunter-gatherers, technical knowledge includes at the least a knowledge both of productive resources (places, animals, and plants) and of productive techniques and strategies. The definition, legitimation, control, association with authority, and reproduction of such knowledge among hunter-gatherers, including Sahtúot'jne, are critical issues.

Equal access to the forces of production, including technical knowledge, is probably characteristic of most noncompetitive, egalitarian hunter-gatherers (although few data supporting this claim have been collected). I do not mean to suggest that such property relations are characteristic of all hunter-gatherers or that there is inevitable consistency of access among hunter-gatherers to all forces of production. Some groups may afford their members equal access to land and productive resources but unequal access to technical knowledge,<sup>25</sup> while others may afford unequal access to the means of production but equal access to technical knowledge (the Northern Athapaskan Tutchone may be an example [Legros 1985]). Such contradictions in relations of production might generate social conflict and constitute potential sources of social and cultural change. Conversely, sociocultural stability among hunter-gatherers might derive in part from an absence of these contradictions. Such contradictions do not occur in Bearlake culture and society.

Moreover, the members of Sahtúot'jne society have equal access not only to technical knowledge but also to nontechnical or symbolic knowledge. Actually, they make no clearcut distinction between the two. As noted earlier, a person may use the knowledge she or he assimilates in dreams for productive purposes. Bearlakers use supernatural power to control and appropriate productive resources, and the primary evidence that someone has power lies in his or her productive success. At any rate, all Bearlakers may dream and otherwise assimilate nontechnical knowledge through a variety of experiences. Traditionally, Bearlakers were highly mobile, which allowed for a wide range of personal experiences in different parts of their territory.

Equal access to experience is significant here because, from the perspective of any Bearlake individual, fully justified knowledge requires primary epistemic evidence. From a Bearlaker's point of view, his or her secondary knowledge is less than fully justified; the knowledge that she or he acquires from others, however useful and important, must be legitimated experientially. Hence, access to knowledge is a function of access to experience. Bearlake culture imposes few restrictions on the form, content, and nature of such access.<sup>26</sup> Sahtúot'jne are remarkably free to do what they choose, and people are extraordinarily reluctant to intervene in others' affairs (Rushforth 1984; Rushforth with Chisholm 1991). If someone wants to engage in some activity (practical or otherwise), she or he may.

The culturally constituted preference for primary knowledge and the associated social practices create resistance to the objectification, alienation, and commoditization of an individual's fully justified knowledge (the term "alienation" refers to a loss or lack of access to forces of production, productive activities, and values created by labor processes). Sahtúot'jne individ-

uals are not alienated from material productive forces or from productive activities, and they retain personal control over the products of their individual labors. For example, the meat and fish a man obtains through his own efforts belong to him and his family.<sup>27</sup>

People retain similar control over primary knowledge created by personal experience. Again, for Sahtúot'íne, such knowledge is not an object but an attribute or quality assimilated into a person's being. To be alienable, primary knowledge would have to be objectified and its relationship to individual experience severed, which has not occurred among Sahtúot'íne. Further, because one person's primary knowledge can only be transferred to another as secondary knowledge, primary knowledge is not alienated from the individual. Only secondary knowledge, which is less than fully justified, legitimate, and useful, can be transferred from one person to another.

A look at Bearlake medicine will help us understand the inalienable nature of primary knowledge among Sahtúot'íne. As indicated, an individual who assimilates knowledge and power through dreaming uses them to cure, control, predict events, and otherwise help members of the Bearlake community. Significantly, a person's medicine is expended in each of these activities. Medicine also becomes weaker as its possessor ages and when it is overtly discussed. The latter loss occurs in part because protective power must be expended during such discussions. The belief that this use of power is necessary motivates people to avoid talking about their medicine. If a person reveals his or her power, he or she normally does so (intentionally or unintentionally) in other ways. Thus, medicine has use value and can be usefully consumed. It cannot, however, be otherwise alienated from an individual. Medicine lacks exchange value.<sup>28</sup> In keeping with this conception, a Bearlaker is supposed to die without retaining any of his or her power, having used it for the benefit of the people.

The hunter-gatherer mode of production is normally associated with situational, informal, and transient leadership coupled with a preference for decision making by consensus (MacNeish 1956; Woodburn 1982:444ff.). Leaders are industrious, capable, generous, restrained in their use of authority, and "modest in demeanor" (Lee 1979:350). They do little to threaten the autonomy of other members of their groups (Woodburn 1982:445). The preference for primary knowledge contributes to the reproduction of such patterns in Bearlake authority, leadership, and decision making.

I focus here on the relationship between primary knowledge and two basic kinds of authority: the power to inspire justified belief in others (being a legitimate authority, having legitimate knowledge that, who, or how) and the power to influence the opinions and conduct of others (having legitimate authority or power over others). For Bearlakers, authority in the latter sense (authority<sub>2</sub>) is based on authority in the former sense (authority<sub>1</sub>). The ability to influence others' opinions and conduct is based in a person's primary knowledge. In the past, "generous" and "controlled" individuals with the requisite experience, knowledge, and power assumed authority and became leaders in Sahtúot'íne society (Rushforth 1984; Rushforth with Chisholm 1991).

Social practices associated with the priority Sahtúot'íne assign to primary knowledge and epistemic justification of beliefs have three related, unintended consequences pertinent to the cultural construction of legitimate authority and to the reproduction of Bearlake relations of production. First, persons possessing the most experience and primary knowledge (authority<sub>1</sub>) assume leadership (authority<sub>2</sub>) during productive processes. Second, the authority<sub>2</sub> of any one individual is limited. And third, authority<sub>2</sub> is not socially concentrated in ways that would encourage permanent class distinctions or other forms of social hierarchy.

For Sahtúot'íne, authority<sub>2</sub> during social labor processes is based on the authority<sub>1</sub> that derives from primary knowledge. That is, people with primary experience, knowledge, and power assume leadership in and control over productive activities. During the decision making or consensus making associated with such activities, the judgments of individuals with authority<sub>1</sub> are weighted more heavily than those of others. As indicated earlier, the most important evi-

dence that someone has the requisite knowledge and power comes from observation of his or her successes in relevant activities. This method of assigning leadership may thus help insure the success of productive activities, for at the very least it guarantees that individuals without authority, will not assume social positions that might jeopardize subsistence efforts.

Furthermore, because a person's authority is based on and legitimated by his or her primary knowledge, and because anyone's experience is finite, the authority of any one individual is intrinsically limited.<sup>29</sup> For example, people learn about specific regions around Bearlake primarily through their experiences in those areas. All else being equal, the more experience someone has in an area, the more primary knowledge she or he assimilates and the better that person knows that place. More than this, however, individuals who live in an area for a long time may become religiously connected to that place through the assimilation and use of medicine. If someone assimilates and repeatedly uses his or her power in a specific area, that area becomes potentially dangerous to other people, and if the latter begin to avoid it (as they sometimes do), such avoidance may come to represent a *de facto* ownership or tenure principle. One person can probably never know more than one place in this sense, and never more than a few areas well. Further, not everyone can know the same areas equally well; different people are associated with and know different places. Primary knowledge of land and productive resources is thus distributed differentially among Bearlakers. When Sahtúot'íne work together at a specific location, people with extensive primary knowledge of that location assume greater authority than individuals who lack such knowledge. The seasonal and cyclical distribution of resources insures that Sahtúot'íne must appropriate resources from various sites in any given year and through the years. Hence, various men assume greater or lesser authority depending on their primary knowledge of the relevant locations and of the productive techniques and strategies involved in the various forms of hunting, fishing, and trapping.<sup>30</sup> Since primary knowledge is limited, varied, and distributed throughout the Bearlake community, so too is authority.

Finally, the requirement that knowledge be justified through primary experience not only limits any particular person's authority but also limits the authority associated with or concentrated in a particular group at any one moment. Since Bearlake primary knowledge is not object or commodity and is not transferable (as fully legitimate primary knowledge) from one person to another, neither individuals nor collectivities may assume authority beyond the limits of finite human experience. And since primary knowledge is not passed from one generation to the next, authority is not accumulated transgenerationally; it is not permanently concentrated in individuals or groups through time. The inability to concentrate primary knowledge may militate against an emergence of social classes or other forms of social hierarchy based on differential access to knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the Sahtúot'íne preference for primary knowledge and construction of legitimate authority through reference to primary knowledge may be one factor promoting the persistence of egalitarian values and practices among these people. Such factors are receiving renewed anthropological attention (Brunton 1989; Flanagan and Rayner 1988a:3, 1988b; Rayner 1988; Upham 1990). The relevant preferences and practices have unintended consequences supportive of egalitarian beliefs and norms inherent to the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production. As Michel Foucault points out, privileged access to knowledge often gives individuals and groups an advantage in attempts to obtain power or control (1982). The Sahtúot'íne preference for primary knowledge acts to prevent the emergence of such inegalitarian access.

## conclusions

Sahtúot'íne epistemological preferences and practices, I argue, derive historically from the Bearlake hunter-gatherer mode of production and have served to sustain features of that mode

even in contemporary times, when the Bearlake social formation has intersected with capitalism. The priority Sahtúot'íne accord to primary knowledge and to the experiential legitimation of knowledge is related to their disengagement from private property. For Bearlakers, equal access to primary knowledge is consistent with like access to other means and forces of production. Among Bearlakers, primary knowledge is neither object nor commodity; it is not alienated from individuals except through useful consumption. Taken together, such Sahtúot'íne preferences and practices perhaps act to insure equal access to primary knowledge.

Sahtúot'íne authority is reproduced through the reproduction of primary knowledge. The Bearlake preference for primary knowledge and the association between primary knowledge and authority insure that enough authority, but not too much, is assigned to individuals for use in the direction of productive activities. The preference and association also guarantee that successful individuals who demonstrate the primary knowledge and power required to accomplish particular production tasks will assume authority during those tasks. Authority is *temporarily* concentrated in persons with socially significant primary knowledge. Nevertheless, the preference for such knowledge and the practices associated with this preference militate against *permanent* concentrations of knowledge and authority. Egalitarian principles and practices are supported. Social hierarchy is not promoted.

My opting for a political-economic interpretation of this cultural system is based not only on a belief that it accounts for the relevant facts, but also on a preliminary comparison of Sahtúot'íne beliefs with similar belief systems from other parts of the world. Janet Wall Hendricks' recent analysis of Shuar political discourse (1988) exemplifies the potential of such comparisons. According to Hendricks, the Amazonian Shuar lay a cultural emphasis on the intrinsic connection between power and technical or symbolic knowledge. Among the Shuar, she suggests, power is acquired through the control of technical and symbolic knowledge; power is necessary for survival; power is identified with knowledge; "the most valued experiential knowledge is that gained by travel to distant places"; "the most important knowledge is that of the 'real' world, the world seen in ordinary dreams and in visions induced by hallucinogenic substances"; and shamanistic power is "an exchangeable commodity . . . derived primarily from sources outside the group" (1988:221, 222). Hendricks' description of Shuar knowledge and power is similar to the one I sketch for Sahtúot'íne, although she underscores both the significance of foreign experiences to the Shuar and the commoditization of some forms of knowledge among those people. The two descriptions raise potentially important questions about the objectification, alienation, and commoditization of knowledge, questions that are crucial to discussions of culture persistence and change.

Knowledge and authority among the Pintupi Aborigines from Australia's Northern Territory are somewhat different. In Fred Myers' analysis of contemporary Pintupi "meetings," he suggests that

the normative foundation of Pintupi life has been *traditionally guaranteed* through a mythological construction known as The Dreaming: those critical events *external* to human action—retold in myth, song, and ritual—that created the present-day world of landscape, natural species, and social institutions. [Myers 1986a:436–437; emphasis added]

In Pintupi political rhetoric, speakers state and defend their positions by referring to authoritative sources (such as The Dreaming) that lie outside the Pintupi social world. Such external sources represent no challenge to the personal autonomy of the participants in social encounters, including meetings. According to Myers, such uses of "an authority external to the self" allow individuals to deny "subjectivity, personal will, and responsibility" (Myers 1986a:437). The denial is crucial in Pintupi efforts to overcome conflict and opposition and "to sustain and reproduce the shared identity that culturally underwrites their continued association" (Myers 1986a:433). Among the Pintupi, authority is based less on primary knowledge than on initiated men's secret ritual knowledge. When compared with the Bearlake and Shuar cases, the Pintupi case raises questions about the association or dissociation of primary knowledge and authority,

about secrecy, and about gender and age hierarchies in hunter-gatherer societies. A political-economic perspective on knowledge highlights the significance of these issues.

Although they are beyond the scope of this article, several additional questions about Bearlake primary knowledge, power, and authority merit further research. Ethnographically, a more detailed study of Sahtúot'íne epistemology would be useful because such studies of hunter-gatherers are scarce. The social distribution of primary and secondary knowledge among Sahtúot'íne also merits study. What are the relationships of various domains of knowledge to specific individuals? How do people create primary knowledge? How do differences in the experiences of men and women affect the distribution of primary knowledge, power, and authority? How does the exchange of secondary knowledge relate to other forms of exchange among Sahtúot'íne?<sup>22</sup> Further, a more comprehensive comparison of the Bearlake preferences and practices concerning primary knowledge with those of other peoples would be valuable. Comparison of the Sahtúot'íne with the Shuar (Hendricks 1988), the Hopi (Whiteley 1988), and the Pintupi (Myers 1986a, 1986b), for example, might illustrate interesting variation concerning the features discussed here. Such a comparison might in turn lead to a consideration of the conditions under which differential access to knowledge is institutionalized, secrecy is culturally sanctioned, social hierarchy or complexity is based on differential access to knowledge, authority is associated with secondary knowledge, knowledge is dissociated from authority, and knowledge is objectified, alienated, and commodified. The nature of knowledge and authority and their role in the production and reproduction of social life are at issue.

## notes

*Acknowledgments.* I appreciate the help of those colleagues who read and commented on an earlier draft of this article: Keith H. Basso, David M. Smith, Lois Stanford, Steadman Upham, and anonymous reviewers for the *American Ethnologist*. Their criticisms were appropriate and useful. I incorporated some of their suggestions, and my article is better for it. Any mistakes that remain are mine.

<sup>1</sup>Sahtúot'íne ("Bearlake People") take their name from the Great Bear Lake, which is located in the subarctic Mackenzie District of Canada's Northwest Territories. Bearlakers' closest cultural, social, and linguistic ties are with other Northwest Territories Dene ("The People," "northeastern Athapaskan-speaking Native People"), among them the Hare, Mountain, Dogrib, and Slave Indians. Bearlakers have slightly more distant ties with Beaver and Chipewyan Indians, Dene who reside in northern British Columbia and northern Alberta, respectively. My claims in this article pertain to the cultures and societies of these peoples. All of them speak Athapaskan languages that are ultimately related to other Athapaskan languages spoken in Alaska, the Yukon Territories, Alberta, British Columbia, and the western United States. Support for my descriptive and explanatory claims comes from data collected during field research among the Sahtúot'íne at various times between 1974 and 1980. The descriptive materials come from my field notes from those years.

<sup>2</sup>I am concerned at this point with *propositional knowledge* (knowledge for some person *that* something is the case). I am not concerned, for example, with "knowing how" or "knowing who," although many of the things that I say about Bearlake knowledge apply equally to all forms of knowledge among these people. For a criticism of the definition of propositional knowledge as justified true beliefs, see, for example, Gettier (1963).

<sup>3</sup>"Alethic" refers to the necessary or contingent truth of propositions, "nonalethic" to the features of propositions that do not pertain to their truth. Epistemic justification requires evidence or warrant that makes a proposition "highly likely to be true" (Moser 1989:36). According to Moser, the evidential probability that a proposition is true is determined by the proposition's "evidential" and "inferential" bases. The evidential basis has to do with the nature of the evidence on which evidentially probable propositions are grounded; in the eyes of many or most philosophers, epistemic justification requires empirical evidence. The inferential basis concerns logical relations between evidence and propositions (Moser 1989:51). Nonepistemic reasons for belief include explanatory, moral, prudential, psychological, economic, and aesthetic ones (Moser 1989:48–49). These are reasons that a state of belief has some value, rather than indicators that a proposition is true. A person may, for example, have moral reasons to believe something even without epistemic evidence that it is true.

<sup>4</sup>I borrow these terms and the general idea underlying the distinction between primary and secondary knowledge from Swain (1981:196–240). However, my definitions of such knowledge differ somewhat from his. Except where I cite Swain directly, my account of this distinction should not be taken as an accurate and faithful representation of his position, which is more detailed than my own.

Other theorists make distinctions that are similar yet not equivalent to the one between primary and secondary knowledge. Lakoff and Johnson, for example, contrast direct with indirect knowledge (1980; Lakoff 1987:297ff.). Lakoff also differentiates “basic-level knowledge” from other knowledge and emphasizes the importance of “basic-level experience” as the source of basic-level knowledge. According to Lakoff, “Knowledge, like truth, depends on understanding, most centrally on our basic-level understanding of experience” (1987:299). Some theorists distinguish “basic knowledge” from other forms of knowledge—the former is knowledge that an individual has of his or her own “phenomenal and other mental states” (Swain 1981:224–225)—while other theorists differentiate “self-warranted” from other propositions (see Pastin 1975), and still others differentiate “self-evidential” from other propositions (see Du Bois 1986).

<sup>5</sup>This statement does not imply that direct experience or perception is not conceptually based or culturally mediated. Nor does it imply that the characteristics of what I label primary epistemic evidence are universally the same. What counts as primary epistemic evidence in one culture might not qualify in another. Bearlakers, for example, consider dreams primary.

<sup>6</sup>This definition incorporates the assumption that knowledge is perspectival or person-relative. Moreover, since an individual may know more than one thing, one aspect of a person’s knowledge may be dependent on another. Someone’s primary knowledge may be the basis of features of his or her secondary knowledge; someone may also acquire secondary knowledge by reasoning from his or her primary knowledge.

Here is an illustration of the distinction between primary and secondary knowledge. My knowing that most Bearlakers now reside in Fort Franklin is founded on firsthand experience in that community. I refer directly to primary epistemic evidence to justify my belief. Therefore, my knowledge is primary. If readers accept that they also now know that most Sahtúot’íne reside in Fort Franklin, they probably do so because they believe that I have empirical evidence to support my claim. This assumption (that my knowledge is epistemically justified and true) is one of their reasons for believing. Another of their reasons quite likely involves the authority that they attribute to the *American Ethnologist* and its manuscript review process: readers probably presume that professional anthropologists (or others “in a position to know”) reviewed this article before it was published and that these experts vouch for the accuracy of the statements I make. If readers lack primary epistemic evidence for the stated proposition and if they refer to a belief that I have empirical evidence for the proposition or to the authority of the *American Ethnologist* when justifying what they take to be a true belief, they have secondary knowledge that most Bearlakers live in Fort Franklin.

<sup>7</sup>I am aware of the philosophical and anthropological difficulties inherent to such “foundational” and “experiential” views of knowledge.

<sup>8</sup>The concept of “basic knowledge” is relevant here (see Pastin 1975; Swain 1981:224–227). “Basic knowledge” denotes an individual’s knowledge of his or her own “phenomenal and other mental states” (see note 4). Epistemologists sometimes contest the justificatory status of such knowledge and the relationship of basic knowledge to other knowledge (Swain 1981:224–225). Following the lead of those philosophers who argue that an individual cannot be mistaken about his or her own mental states (for example, a person cannot be mistaken that she or he is in pain), I suggest that an individual Bearlaker cannot be mistaken about his or her dreams. Dreams constitute basic knowledge. Such basic knowledge embodies supernatural power. Further, a person may have only secondary knowledge of another’s dreams. Such secondary knowledge normally derives from first-person reports. Such reports, however, would not fully justify one Bearlaker’s belief that another had power. I do not imply here that Bearlakers fail to differentiate states of dreaming from states of wakefulness. Bearlakers do distinguish the two—they merely consider dreams to be real. Knowledge acquired through dreams is experiential, primary. Smith emphasizes that Chipewyan people consider dreams to be real, not fundamentally different from other experiences (1988).

<sup>9</sup>In English, knowledge is frequently depicted as a concrete object, something to be grasped. Bearlakers do not generally employ such metaphors, but the Beaver Indians, another northeastern Athapaskan group, apparently do (Ridington 1988b:156). I am aware of the potential problems with arguments that invoke the concept of conventional metaphors. I would, in a more extended treatment, provide additional evidence supporting my description of Bearlake conceptions of knowledge.

<sup>10</sup>David M. Smith (1973, 1985, 1988) and Henry Sharp (1986, 1988a) make the same claim regarding Chipewyan Indians. They discuss the role *inkoze* (“medicine”) plays as an explanatory system.

<sup>11</sup>Sharp, again, makes a similar claim regarding the Chipewyan (1986:262).

<sup>12</sup>Other anthropologists make comparable arguments about the importance to northeastern Athapaskans of these means of communicating (for example, Christian and Gardner 1977; Ridington 1978, 1988b, 1990; Sharp 1988a).

<sup>13</sup>Ellen Basso cites a Dene consultant from Fort Norman who makes the same point (1978:693).

<sup>14</sup>I borrow the term “Distant Time” stories from Richard Nelson, who writes about the Athapaskan-speaking Koyukon Indians of Alaska (1983).

<sup>15</sup>Parenthetically, the minute detail characteristic of Bearlake personal narratives adds not only to the secondary knowledge acquired by the hearers but also to the authority of the speakers.

<sup>16</sup>I use the phrase “creates and constrains” with reference to the sociology of Anthony Giddens (1976, 1979, 1984).

<sup>17</sup>The general Bearlake concern with the justification of beliefs is reflected in linguistic practices. When Sahtúot’íne communicate seriously (about important topics), they are fastidious in their treatment of evi-

dentiality, which pertains to the linguistic encoding of epistemology (see Chafe and Nichols 1986; Givón 1982). DeLancy (1990) provides notes on Hare Athapaskan evidentiality. In a more comprehensive description of Bearlake epistemology, linguistic evidentiality would require careful consideration and supply important data.

<sup>18</sup>In a more detailed historical analysis, I would examine other Bearlake modes of production. The hunter-gatherer mode of production discussed in this article existed before the Bearlakers came into contact with Europeans; after contact a mixed mode of production developed, one that was dominated by hunting-gathering but articulated with capitalism through the world fur trade. Michael Asch (1975, 1979a, 1979b, 1982) and Dominique Legros (1985) are two other anthropologists who invoke Marxist thought in their analyses of northern Athapaskan cultures and societies. Asch's insights into northeastern Athapaskan culture and society are particularly valuable. He provides a useful discussion of relevant Dene contact history.

<sup>19</sup>James Woodburn contrasts immediate-return with delayed-return systems (1980, 1982). In the latter, people have differing degrees of access to some valued resources. All or most farming and some hunter-gatherer societies are delayed-return. I provide more detail about the pertinent characteristics of Bearlake culture and society in other works (for example, Rushforth 1984, 1985; Rushforth with Chisholm 1991).

<sup>20</sup>I explicitly reject the covert functionalism inherent to Woodburn's discussion of leveling mechanisms (1980, 1982).

<sup>21</sup>Features that have partially changed include material technology, forms of exchange, and spatial mobility: the products of traditional technology have generally been replaced by items of Western manufacture, market exchange was introduced with the fur trade, and Bearlakers have been increasingly sedentary since World War II.

<sup>22</sup>An anonymous reviewer for the *American Ethnologist* suggested I emphasize that I am concerned here with internal relations among Sahtúot'íne rather than with "relations, say, between Dene and non-Native people." This is correct. The same reviewer pointed out that Asch's discussion of Dene property rights in "Wildlife: Defining the Animals the Dene Hunt and the Settlement of Aboriginal Rights Claims" complements the discussion at hand (1989). It does. Asch's second endnote (1989:217) is especially relevant.

<sup>23</sup>Because fully justified knowledge depends on primary epistemic evidence, there is actually an exclusive relationship between an individual and his or her primary knowledge. To some extent, the existence of this relationship contradicts the claim that Sahtúot'íne have free and equal access to all knowledge. Gender issues and the sexual division of labor are significant here: since men are largely responsible for hunting and fishing, for example, women's access to knowledge about these things is limited. This kind of restriction on access to personal experience impedes access to the fully justified knowledge deriving from such experience. Gender hierarchy in hunter-gatherer societies may derive in part from such limits on access to experience and knowledge.

<sup>24</sup>Marxists sometimes classify tools with, for example, raw materials as means of production, and they sometimes classify technical knowledge and skills as aspects of labor power. Taken together, means of production and labor power are productive forces. In the hunter-gatherer mode of production, the means of production are either naturally reproducing or relatively "simple." Labor power, including technological knowledge, is more complex. From an ecological perspective, Ridington makes a similar point about the technology of northeastern Athapaskans (1982:471, 1988a:107, 1988b:73). Labor power also presents more significant reproduction problems than means of production do.

<sup>25</sup>In some societies, for example, women have access to land and resources but are prevented from acquiring the technical knowledge to use them.

<sup>26</sup>The sexual division of labor is significant here. Because men's and women's productive activities differ, men and women have access to different experiences and different primary knowledge. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that I am dealing largely with men's knowledge. I do not develop this idea further here.

<sup>27</sup>For example, a successful moose hunter in some sense "owns" the moose meat that he obtains. This property relationship is symbolized by the successful hunter's gift of the moose hide to his partner. The partner's acceptance of the hide symbolically acknowledges the hunter's right to distribute the meat to people in the community, including himself. The hunter then distributes the meat throughout the group. It seems that an individual property relationship is a prerequisite to generosity and gift-giving, relations of distribution. Generosity is, from an internal Bearlake perspective, necessary to the reproduction of "naturally reproducing" resources (Rushforth with Chisholm 1991; see Ridington 1988b:150–151).

<sup>28</sup>There are two qualifications to these claims. First, it is apparently possible for someone to purposely abandon his or her power. Second, traditional shamans were "paid" (often a pair of moccasins or a drum) for their help.

<sup>29</sup>In functionalist terms, the preference for primary knowledge acts as a kind of "leveling mechanism" (Woodburn 1980, 1982) in noncompetitive egalitarian societies.

<sup>30</sup>Further, hunters can't be in two places simultaneously and technical knowledge can lose its currency and accuracy. Some technical knowledge has a limiting time factor (for example, knowing that there are presently moose at Willow Lake), and the authority based on such knowledge is accordingly also limited. Therefore, individuals must seek to update such primary knowledge and related authority by participating in necessary economic activities. The demand for currency of knowledge and authority thus fosters continued participation in productive activities; that is, such participation is an unintended consequence of the pursuit of primary knowledge. These points are consistent with the ways in which mobility "subverts" the permanent concentration of authority (see Woodburn 1982).

<sup>31</sup>See Peter Whiteley's *Deliberate Acts* (1988) for an important discussion of social hierarchy and differential access to knowledge among the Hopi Indians of northern Arizona. In Hopi as in Sahtúot'ine society, legitimate access to and control of knowledge is the basis of power and authority. However, the Hopi accord people differing degrees of access to knowledge and, like other Puebloan peoples, emphasize secrecy in some domains. Religious sodalities control systems of knowledge, and access to secret knowledge comes through membership in and particularly leadership of those sodalities. According to Whiteley, such differential access helps to create distinct social classes among the Hopi.

<sup>32</sup>An anonymous reviewer for the *American Ethnologist* said that "one might . . . think of knowledge as one, among many, potential and realized media of exchange . . . and . . . consider its relation to other such media in Bearlake life." This suggestion is appropriate. The issue merits investigation beyond this article.

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