

**COMMENTS ON W. DENHAM'S "ALYAWARRA KINSHIP, INFANT  
CARRYING, AND ALLOPARENTING"  
AND THE REVIEW OF IT BY HERLOSKY *ET AL.*,  
"ALLOMATERNAL CARE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONS AMONG CONTEMPORARY  
FORAGERS"**

**F.K. LEHMAN**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN  
f-lehman@illinois.edu

**COPYRIGHT 2015  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED BY AUTHOR**

**SUBMITTED: DECEMBER 15, 2015      ACCEPTED: DECEMBER 16, 2015**

**MATHEMATICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CULTURAL THEORY:  
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
ISSN 1544-5879**

COMMENTS ON W. DENHAM'S "ALYAWARRA KINSHIP, INFANT CARRYING, AND  
ALLOPARENTING", AND THE REVIEW OF IT BY HERLOSKY *ET AL.*,  
"ALLOMATERNAL CARE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONS  
AMONG CONTEMPORARY FORAGERS"

F.K. LEHMAN

Regarding a possible theory about the distribution of alloparenting, which is what Denham's ethnographic paper is at least implicitly dealing with and which is nicely addressed by the Herlosky *et al* review of Denham, especially the broad range of the relevant literature, something more needs to be addressed. Most of all Denham's paper and the literature cited in the review seem concerned with what appears to be a sort of bio-evolutionary basis for alloparenting; a perspective that hardly considers the importance of larger scale socio-cultural factors at all directly, factors which do not lend themselves simply to bio-evolutionary analysis. What I want to do here is address the latter factors more directly without disputing the bio-evolutionary analysis.

Any thorough analysis of the matter seems to require a view of how independent as socio-political entities family households are felt to be culturally. My ethnographic data, largely from my old work with the Chin peoples of upland Western Burma, where it is particularly common for women other than a baby's mother to not only carry, but also to severally nurse the infant seem to show that women are prone, *culturally*, to do this with other village babies in general simply because they like babies as such, and therefore treat them as available for care, including unsolicited suckling; my data come from how Chin village women treated our own infant boy whilst we lived in one of their villages for two years. On the other hand, in Western countries, the feeling seems to be that the baby is MINE and so YOU better leave it alone unless I ask otherwise. MY kid is simply not YOURS! Relatively to one's own baby. others especially non-kin or distant kin are likely to be treated as *strangers*. We "westerners" eventually tell kids to beware of strangers, remember.

All this in turn has to do, ecologically/evolutionarily, with what characterizes post-industrial, developed societies, where, politically and regarding competition for resources, individual family household are treated, conceptually and also politically as separated from each other, even in spite of village-and-kinship connections, although the latter do modify the treatment of other households as strangers. The resources are very different from those which hunter-gatherer and purely agricultural societies depend upon, namely, communally possessed natural resources which everyone can help anyone access. For more developed societies it's a matter of income from employment in the business and industrial economy, and this tends to put every family in competition with every other, i.e., as if all others were strangers.