



Gift exchange or *quid pro quo*? Temporality, ambiguity, and stigma in interactions between pedestrians and service-providing panhandlers

Mary Patrick¹

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic fieldwork with panhandlers who provide services while asking for money, informal interviews with pedestrians who have interacted with them, and formal interviews with twenty people who regularly interact with panhandlers, this article unpacks the relationship between temporality and ambiguity of meaning in exchange. In line with previous research, I find that providing a service while asking for money allows panhandlers to manage stigma by recasting their relationship with pedestrians who give as a market exchange. More surprisingly, I find that this kind of recasting makes giving less compelling for the pedestrians in fleeting encounters with panhandlers: they resist service provision in fleeting encounters with panhandlers on the grounds that the exchange is experienced as a coldly rational *quid pro quo*. In contrast, pedestrians who have long-term relationships with panhandlers experience the interaction as a gift exchange and the service as an expression of gratitude and subservience. The development of an open-ended temporal horizon and of a cycle of exchange, I argue, allows the service and the money given to operate as boundary objects, enabling panhandlers and pedestrians to attach different meanings to the exchange of money for services. This emergent ambiguity allows them to carry out interaction and exchange successfully. Contrary to models of interaction and everyday economic transactions that frame shared definitions of the situation as necessary for successful and repeated interactions, I find that ambiguity and polysemy may be productive and sustaining in interactions between participants from distinct social worlds.

Keywords Ambiguity · Boundary objects · Exchange · Panhandling · Stigma · Temporality

Giving money to panhandlers is form of gift-giving generally lacking any material re-gift (Hermer 2001), a giving structure understood to injure further the dignity and status

✉ Mary Patrick
Mary.Patrick@nyu.edu

¹ Department of Sociology, 295 Lafayette St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10012, USA

of the recipient and confer status on the giver (Blau 1964; Mauss [1923] 1990). In other words, “charity wounds” (Douglas 1990). In an ideal-typical interaction between panhandlers and pedestrians, panhandlers must trade their dignity for small change and pedestrians are able to exchange pocket change for a sense of superiority, generosity, and status. Despite Mauss’s call to “do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver,” panhandling remains an important source of income for the purchase of basic necessities for unhoused and other ultra-marginalized people (Gaetz et al. 2006; Goldstein 1993; Lankenau 1999a), often providing a small but necessary supplement to other forms of income (Hagan and McCarthy 1998; O’Flaherty 1996; Stark 1992)

In this article, I build on existing work that asks how panhandlers manage stigmatization, as both visibly marginalized people and as recipients of charity (e.g., Snow and Anderson 1987; Anderson et al. 1994; Lankenau 1999a, b). Panhandlers who provide services like holding the door and providing entertainment blur the lines between charitable giving and the informal market economy, changing the character of their interactions with pedestrians. While significant attention has been paid to the ways panhandlers work to manage stigma by reshaping their interactions with pedestrians, pedestrians’ responses to these forms of stigma management remain under-analyzed, despite the fact that pedestrian responses may be critical to the successful management of stigma. Existing research on interactions between panhandlers and pedestrians tends to frame them as either warm and positive (Dromi 2012) or problematic and tense (Duneier and Molotch 1999), without exploring the variation emergent in these interactions. Given the injurious structure of these interactions for panhandlers, how might panhandlers and pedestrians successfully carry out interactions and giving transactions that affirm both the panhandler’s dignity and the pedestrian’s sense of generosity and superiority? When does a panhandler’s reshaping the meaning of the interaction as an exchange bump up against pedestrians’ expectations, and when, in contrast, are both exchange and gift meanings successfully kept afloat, allowing them to carry out interaction and exchange successfully?

Through ethnographic fieldwork with panhandlers who provide services, while asking for money, and interviews and informal conversations with pedestrians, I examine how panhandlers use service provision to recast their relationships with those who give as an exchange of money for services, and I analyze how pedestrians, in turn, interpret and respond to this form of stigma management and resistance. Through a comparative analysis of both successful and unsuccessful interactions between pedestrians and men who provide services while asking for money, I show that the temporal structure of these relationships can help explain which instances of service provision are experienced as crass attempts to impose an unwanted debt on pedestrians, and which instances are sufficiently ambiguous to keep multiple meanings afloat and allow the service performed and the money given to operate as boundary objects. I demonstrate that the ambiguity of the meaning is productive in this case, allowing panhandlers to experience the service as a stage in an economic exchange and pedestrians to experience the service as part of an ongoing gift exchange. In contrast to a long tradition of models of interaction and economic activity that frame shared definitions of the situation as necessary building blocks for accomplishing smooth and seamless interactions and economic transactions, I demonstrate that ambiguity may be necessary for successful economic transactions and sustained patterns of interaction between

participants from distinct social worlds and with opposing interests and identity projects. Finally, I explore the implications of the relationship between temporality and ambiguity of meaning in interaction for future research in studies of interaction and informal forms of economic activity.

Ambiguity of meaning in interaction

How can panhandlers and pedestrians successfully carry out an interaction while defining these situations in distinct and opposing ways? Prevailing accounts of interaction treat shared definitions of a situation and shared meaning as crucial for smooth and seamless interactions (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1974). In Goffman's work, the absence of agreement over what is happening in a situation results in a "frame dispute" (Goffman 1974). In interactionism, common identification of the situation¹ not only allows for the successful unfolding of the present interaction but for "regularity, stability, and repetitiveness in the joint action" (Blumer 1969, p. 72). Group participants develop systems of shared meaning in interaction and draw on these shared meanings as a basis for future interactions (Fine 1979). An intersubjective grasp of reality is itself a product of interaction, and ordinary conversation tends towards repairing breakdowns of intersubjectivity through constant disambiguation (Schegloff 1992).

This conceptual scaffolding emerges in more contemporary instantiations of microsociology: within the concept of relational work, shared definitions of the type of situation participants are involved in are a key building block for economic activity (Zelizer 2005, 2012). Within this school of economic sociology, which focuses on the "primary doxa" of everyday economic affairs (Swedberg 2018), shared definitions of transactions and relations are part and parcel of the process of negotiating appropriate matches of relations, transactions, media, and meanings: "interpretive misalignment" leads to breakdown of relations (Mears 2015). In this framework, it is precisely in relationships and situations marked by ambiguity that more relational work is necessary (Bandelj 2012). In this informal process of matching relations, transactions, and media, constant clarification and negotiation of collective definitions of transactions is essential to the process of drawing boundaries between the relationship at hand and other similar relations (Zelizer 2005, 2012).

A smaller body of research has departed from these traditions by exploring the productive aspects of ambiguity for interaction and exchange (Lainer-Vos 2012, 2013a, b; Tavory 2009; Star and Griesemer 2016). Ambiguity in this approach encompasses both polysemy and vagueness (Levine 1988), an openness of meaning in interactions that allows multiple meanings to stay afloat and potentially allows different participants of the interaction to draw on or emphasize distinct and even opposing meanings. Ambiguity is managed and performed in certain face-to-face interactions, as in the case of flirtation, in which potential futures are put into play without either participant clarifying the situation as a romantic one (Tavory 2009). In the case of economic transactions, certain exchange structures may be employed to obfuscate the fact that an exchange is occurring and mitigate exchange taboos (Rossman 2014).

¹ For a discussion of important differences between the symbolic interactionist concept of a situation and Goffman's concept of frames, see Gonos (1977).

Ambiguity has been studied not only at the level of interactional frames but also in the multivocal character of objects. As Star and Griesemer (2016) argued, action is often coordinated through boundary objects—objects that have different meanings in different social worlds but whose structure is common enough to enable diverse groups to cooperate and to share information. Boundary objects do not inherently contain productive interpretive flexibility; rather, they acquire this property through a gradual process of “equipping work” (Vinck 2011) and through their position in a network of relations (Lainer-Vos 2013a, b).

Incorporating a boundary objects framework into the study of interaction and exchange helps shed light on the productive aspects of ambiguity for sustaining successful exchanges between groups from distinct social worlds. Lainer-Vos (2012, 2013a, b) analyzes the role of ambiguity of meaning in exchange in his analysis of Irish and American diaspora bonds. Actors may bring diverse and opposing interests to an exchange, and boundary objects allow actors to play up different meanings. Overcoming the tendency toward clarifying meanings and sustaining ambiguity requires creating a “zone of indeterminacy,” an institutional context in which actors can exchange objects without sharing a consensus around the meaning of the exchange (Lainer-Vos 2013b). In the case of diaspora bonds under study, the time gap between subscription and maturation deferred explicit clarifications of the meaning of the bond and allowed the bond to operate as a boundary object: American Jews were able to play up the gift framing of the bond, while the Israeli government emphasized that the bond was a loan. In contrast, the Irish bond program failed due to delayed delivery of bond certificates, a glitch that created distrust among subscribers and brought out clarifications of the meaning of the bond. I take advantage of the analytical leverage provided by Lainer-Vos’s work on the productive aspects of ambiguity in blurring the lines between gift exchange and market exchange, bringing these two sets of literature into conversation with literature on stigma management.

Temporality and gift exchange

A significant body of work in both anthropology and sociology has explored how participants in an exchange define and experience the transfer as a gift exchange or a market exchange.² Sociologists and anthropologists have long viewed gift exchanges as a kind of social glue, reinforcing bonds of solidarity between participants to the exchange (Blau 1964; Malinowski 1922; Mauss [1923] 1990; Sahlin 1972). Gifts exert pressure on the recipient to respond, entangling the participants in a cycle of reciprocity. Unreciprocated gifts confer status on the giver and injure the status of the recipient (Blau 1964). Market exchange, in contrast, is constituted by devices that facilitate explicit calculation (Callon and Muniesa 2005), producing independence between the participants and signaling a greater degree of surface-level equality via the effacing of statuses (de la Pradelle 2006).

² Anthropologists have diverged on the question of whether gift exchange and market exchange are opposite sides of a continuum or altogether discontinuous categories. For a discussion of this divergence, which is rooted in part in disagreement over the meaning of Mauss’s work, see Parry (1986).

While sociologists and anthropologists have offered useful ideal types for analyzing the distinctions between gift exchange and market exchange, in practice the two may be difficult to disentangle. Bourdieu (1977, 1997) emphasizes the role of the time lag and the dissimilarity between gift and counter-gift, which allow participants to experience the sequence as a gift exchange rather than as a “harsh exchange of equivalents” (Bourdieu 1997). Rather than producing independence between the participants, the time lag enables participants to experience the exchange “as a discontinuous series of free and generous acts” (Bourdieu 1997). Llewellyn (2011a, b) challenges the need for a time lag and for the experience of “discontinuity” between gift and counter-gift, citing observations of gift exchange participants invoking past debts and future obligations in conversation. In this article, I shift the focus away from the time lag and examine other features of temporality that help structure the meaning of an exchange, including the relationship to the past and future and the development of a rhythmic cycle of exchange.

Stigma management

In the case under study, achieving ambiguity in exchange is key to the process of stigma management. The major analytical frameworks for analyzing the management of stigma come from Goffman (1963). In Goffman’s work, stigma management mainly takes the form of strategic self-presentation and information control—individuals’ efforts to hide the marks of their spoiled identities from others in interaction. More recently, researchers have tried to connect individual stigma to macro-level forces and structural factors (Link and Phelan 2001; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004). A significant body of research on homeless, “street,” or otherwise marginalized people has contributed to our understanding of stigma management, resulting in a series of studies that ask how ultra-marginalized people work to carve out a space for dignity and self-respect in a position of extreme constraint. In an influential article, Snow and Anderson (1987) examine the practices that homeless people use to manage inconsistencies between their social identities and their desired self-conceptions, such as verbal boundary work. Since then, others have examined the practices that marginalized people use as a form of stigma management and boundary work, including engaging in visible labor practices to distinguish themselves from supposedly lazy, non-working street people (Duneier 2000; Gowan 2010), developing relationships with the non-marginalized (Lankenau 1999b; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004), using dramaturgical routines to get pedestrians’ attention (Lankenau 1999a) and attempting to pass as a non-homeless person (Anderson et al. 1994).

Much of this literature touches on practices of stigma management that require the compliance or participation of more powerful pedestrians (Lankenau 1999a, b; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004) or supposedly equalize the relationship between the marginalized person and the non-marginalized people who live in the same community and walk the same streets (Gowan 2010; Anderson et al. 1994). But we know relatively little about how pedestrians experience and respond to these forms of stigma management and resistance. In Duneier and Molotch (1999) work on the efforts of marginalized men to reclaim power in their interactions with middle-class women, the

result is forced and problematic interactions. Dromi (2012), in contrast, focuses on the non-problematic and even warm interactions between panhandlers and pedestrians, providing fodder for pedestrians to construct themselves as moral persons.³ Of course, interactions between panhandlers and pedestrians are neither exclusively problematic nor exclusively seamless occasions for connection, warmth, and the construction of a positive sense of self. Rather than taking for granted the presence of an “awkward tenseness” (Duneier and Molotch 1999) in interactions between panhandlers and pedestrians, I examine some of the conditions in which such awkwardness and tension arises, as well as the conditions for more supportive and cooperative interactions.

Settings and methods

This article combines three forms of data: 1) observations of panhandlers and pedestrians, 2) informal, one-on-one conversations with panhandlers and pedestrians, and 3) semi-structured interviews with New York residents about their experiences with panhandlers. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms. I spent ten months conducting observations of three panhandlers, Michael, Roy, and David, in Manhattan and Brooklyn, while they provided services to pedestrians and asked pedestrians for money. In total, I conducted observations with panhandlers for two to four hours on 77 days over the ten-month period. I met and developed an ongoing relationship with David, whose “spot” is in the neighborhood where I live, before I began conducting fieldwork for the project. I approached Michael and Roy specifically for the purposes of conducting observations for the project. These men were given written consent forms, which they signed. I also verbally discussed the information on the consent forms with them in detail, in case any of the men had trouble reading the form but did not want to say so.

I developed closer relationships with David and Michael, who have a more consistent presence in their spots, than with Roy, whose housing situation is more unstable and whose presence in his spot is more unpredictable. Michael and David both had routine days on which they appeared: David was almost always at his “spot” on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and Michael was always at his spot on Mondays and Tuesdays, with a mix of days later in the week. For Roy, on the other hand, the days of the week that he panhandled and the frequency of his panhandling were in constant flux. As I discuss below, these differences in their schedules and rhythms had implications for their ability to develop and benefit from longer-term relationships with pedestrians.

I occasionally stood with them while they asked for money, making myself a part of the interaction, whether I wanted to be or not. More often, when conducting observations of the interactions, I observed from a short distance away, taking down notes on my cellphone and making audio recordings of the interaction. I occasionally assisted by gesturing in the direction of oncoming pedestrians, if the panhandler had his back

³ Additionally, both Lankenau (1999a) and Hermer (2001) suggest that pedestrians would be more willing to give to pedestrians who are providing some kind of service in return, but they do not offer empirical data to support this.

turned to them. I chose to observe panhandlers from a short distance away after realizing that my presence in the interaction with pedestrians might have an influence on their giving behavior and might change the nature of the interaction, and after noticing that standing right next to the panhandlers prompted them, particularly Michael, to engage with me in casual conversation and distracted them from asking people for money.

As a means of investigating the giver perspective, I also interviewed 20 New York residents who regularly come into contact with panhandlers. During these interviews, I asked them to recount stories about specific interactions with panhandlers and probed them on both their in-the-moment responses to these interactions and their retroactive interpretations of these interactions. I recruited interview participants by posting flyers in businesses in Manhattan and Brooklyn and asking participants to refer friends or family members who would be interested in participating in the study. I found eighteen of these twenty participants directly through the flyer, and all of my participants lived in Manhattan or Brooklyn. The sample skewed young and the majority were college-educated. Of the twenty interview participants, eleven were female and nine were male. Based on self-identification on a demographic survey given prior to the interview, two participants identified as black or African American, one as mixed race, two as Latino/a, one as Asian, and fourteen as white.

I engaged in abductive analysis (Tavory and Timmermans 2014) in the process of collecting and analyzing my interview data. I initially suspected that givers might be more interested in giving money to panhandlers who were providing some kind of service, based on my own assumptions about the relationship between visible forms of work and ideas about the deserving poor. I began coding and analyzing after conducting only a few interviews, and these first few interviews quickly challenged my ideas about the relationship between a panhandler's service provision and pedestrian giving behavior. I kept the same interview schedule, but allowed the interview to veer in the direction of emerging themes, rather than trying to shoehorn the interview to fit with my original theoretical ideas about the relationship between panhandlers' visible labor and pedestrians' perceptions of deservingness. I moved back and forth repeatedly between theory and data and changed coding schemes multiple times to eliminate theoretical ideas that proved irrelevant and to adapt to emerging themes in the data.

This study is limited in several ways. For example, I was only able to observe male panhandlers, primarily because female panhandlers providing services were difficult to find. The gender of the panhandler likely shapes the meaning-making processes that emerge in interaction, but because I only observed male panhandlers, I am unable to draw conclusions about how gender shapes these interactions. In addition to varying the panhandlers' gender, the study would also have benefited from more variation in the services being offered. For example, panhandlers offering more tangible goods might change the pedestrians' perceptions of these interactions, perhaps prompting them to "purchase" the good for its own sake rather than perceiving the offering as unwanted.

Moreover, interviewing participants about their experiences with panhandlers was useful, but this method placed limitations on the study. During the interview, I elicited retroactive constructions of interactions with panhandlers, constrained by the limits of memory and verbal articulation and by the tendencies to moralize these situations retroactively and to present oneself and one's behavior positively. With a few

exceptions, the stories recounted in the interviews were mainly confined to interactions with panhandlers that the participant came across only once, and during my fieldwork with panhandlers I observed multiple givers who developed long-term relationships with panhandlers, a distinction that ultimately proved to be meaningful for understanding the relationship between temporal structure and the meaning of the service.

To manage some of these limitations, I had informal conversations with three individuals who regularly give money to Michael and David, and an informal conversation with one individual whom I observed was avoiding interaction with David. These conversations took place immediately after I observed their interactions with panhandlers, allowing me to ask specific questions about what I observed and allowing givers to reflect on an interaction immediately after it happened, preventing discussions of giving that were abstracted from particular situations. The participants I spoke with immediately after their interactions with panhandlers offer a slightly more random slice of givers, because participating did not require responding to a flyer or being referred by another participant.

Using services to recast unilateral giving structures as exchange

Michael holds the door for customers coming in and out of a Duane Reade pharmacy on Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village, a block west of Washington Square Park. A 33 year-old skinny black guy standing at about 5'6", he's talkative and energetic. Michael spends most nights at his girlfriend's apartment an hour away in Rockaway, Queens. On the first day we meet, I learn that Michael's girlfriend thinks he comes to Manhattan every day for a "regular job." I come back and see Michael a few days later, and after observing some of his interactions with pedestrians, I ask him if he ever feels bad about lying to his girlfriend about what he does here. He says "what your girl don't know ... won't hurt 'er." He tells me that holding the door is better, after all, than robbing and stealing, and says he learned from his past, after "going down the wrong path" and ending up in prison. When I ask Michael what he got arrested for, he says:

What did I get arrested for? Drugs, and ... violence. This [he makes a gun with his index finger and thumb]. I didn't kill nobody, I didn't shoot nobody, but I had it. I didn't do that though. But I had it. Back in the day. Like I said, I chose the wrong path. If I was to do that instead of this now, I'd be a idiot. But what am I gonna do, be with a woman and be broke? Not that she carin' about my money but... She's lookin at you like, *he got a job*, or whatever, *he could provide*, that's looking good on you. You comin' to the table with nothin' at all? It makes you look like a loser. I'm not that kinda individual. Before I rob and steal and do all that crazy shit that these dudes do nowadays, I'd rather come out here and do this. I'd rather do this. I don't shake the cup. That's doin' way too much, cuz I'm not homeless. Why I'm shakin' cups? Why I'm shaking a cup when I can be out here doin' something? I don't need anybody feelin' sorry. That's doin' too much.
(audio recording and field notes)

According to Michael, he holds the door for pedestrians because it allows him to bring money to the table in his romantic relationship, without resorting to either criminal

activity or traditional, unreciprocated forms of soliciting money from pedestrians (“shaking a cup”). He chooses instead to “do something,” preferring the money earned from door holding to money earned from pedestrians who feel “sorry” for him. Michael also regularly referred to the practice of being “on the door” as “business.” This is not to suggest that providing a service while asking for money is an unequivocally dignifying or empowering activity for Michael; after all, Michael keeps it secret from his girlfriend. But Michael does seem to experience it as communicating a more desirable social identity in a position of extreme constraint. For Michael, “shaking a cup” signifies homelessness and poverty, but it also signifies a specific type of relationship between him and the strangers who give him money, in which he is the object of sympathy and charity. Michael even told me that he thought he would make more money if he was just “shaking a cup,” instead of holding the door, though he has never tried it.

One chilly Tuesday afternoon in January, a woman who looks to be in her sixties with dyed dark red hair walks up to the Duane Reade. Michael pulls the door open and says his usual, “Spare any change, ma’am?” As she approaches the open door, she looks down at the ground as she waves her hand out in front of her chest, seeming to signal that she is not interested in an interaction with Michael. Michael keeps the door held open, but shifts his body away from her, perhaps to signal that he expects nothing in return, and says “Have a nice day,” freeing her from responding to his request. She walks through the open door, saying nothing, and is on her way.

I observed pedestrians in fleeting interactions with panhandlers give money or goods very rarely. In one such instance, Michael held the door for a white man and woman, approximately in their twenties, entering the Duane Reade. The woman opens and walks through the adjacent door, avoiding Michael’s open door, and her companion follows behind her. A few minutes later, they return. The man opens the door that Michael had held open for them, and as he does this Michael grabs the handle and holds it open for them. The woman, following behind her companion, hands Michael a bottle of orange Gatorade. Michael smiles and thanks them. As they walk away, Michael looks towards me and smiles, shaking his head and holding up the Gatorade bottle for me to see, and asks me if I want it. The couple thus resists Michael’s attempt to facilitate an exchange of money for door-holding, but recode the interaction as more like an act of charity by returning with a bottle of Gatorade.

I go to the Duane Reade one day to look for Michael and instead see someone else holding the door for pedestrians at Michael’s spot. I meet Roy, a tall, hefty 45-year-old black man. Unlike Michael, Roy does not currently have housing. I observe hundreds of interactions—or attempts at interactions—between Roy and the customers entering and exiting Duane Reade. Roy shuffles his feet, moving constantly between the door to Duane Reade and the middle of the sidewalk, smiling and shaking his cup while repeating his mantra, “Can you help me get something? I just need a million dollars! Just a million dollars.” A young twenty-something white woman walks up to the Duane Reade and Roy holds the door on the left open as she walks up, shaking the cup filled with change and saying, “Can you help me get something?” She swerves slightly to avoid Roy and the open door, and she opens the adjacent door on the right side, staring straight ahead in silence. I observed dozens of similar interactions between pedestrians and Roy and Michael, in which the solicited person shifts course to avoid the open door and open an adjacent door themselves.

When I ask Roy why he holds the door when he asks for money, he replies straightforwardly, “To make money.” But later in our conversation, he says, “It’s me doing something respectable. I don’t want to be sitting on the ground there just begging, saying *please help me, God help me!*” When asked how he started holding the door, Roy said, “I ... I’m just trying to show the people I’m respectable. I’m a gentleman. I’m saying, hey man, I’m just like you, coming out every day—almost every day—doing something for myself. I know it’s not much.” Roy frames the act as both akin to work (“coming out every day,” and “doing something for myself,”) and as the behavior of a gentleman who offers a favor to others, differentiating his relations with passersby from that of someone “just begging.”

David can be found standing between two stairway exits in the Borough Hall subway station five or six days a week. David is a tall, thin, outgoing 65-year-old black man originally from Crown Heights, Brooklyn. I stand next to David as he sings oldies like “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” and tells jokes to passersby. When I ask David about his singing, he says, “I just like to make people smile” and “I’m giving ‘em something back.” Coupled with this sense of contribution is an emphasis that this is *work*: he proudly tells me that he gets song requests from pedestrians, and he is careful to emphasize his structured weekly “work schedule,” often complaining about appointments that cause disruptions to this schedule.

Like some of the men on the street in *Sidewalk* (Duneier 2000), David is careful to draw boundaries between himself and other panhandlers. When I point out that David seems to know a lot of the people who pass by, he tells me, “That’s the thing. I don’t take advantage of people.... You know what I’m saying. Um—either you’re gonna say yes, or you’re gonna say no, and I leave it at that. I’m not standin’ there sayin’ *oh, I’ve just seen you with a one-dollar bill, you gotta give me something.*” By singing to pedestrians who pass by, he engages in work that he sees as more dignifying than standing outside of a bank or “tak(ing) advantage” of people. Rather than trying to pressure pedestrians to give or use their guilt against them, he suggests that he allows pedestrians to give him money voluntarily in return for his songs.

The pedestrian perspective

The individuals I interviewed about their experiences with panhandlers mainly recounted fleeting interactions, and expressed, overall, resentment, and discomfort over encounters with panhandlers who provide services.⁴ There were some exceptions: some were willing to “buy” the service for its own sake, if they actually desired the service. When I asked Nick, a 24 year-old black male who works in neuroscience research, if he gives money to people performing on the street, he said,

... if like I’m particularly blown away or impressed by like whatever feat they did, um....The one time I remember giving to like a performer was taking the

⁴ One exceptional participant, Andy, a 33-year-old working class white male, never gives to panhandlers or engages with them, and he was unfazed by service-providing panhandlers and even suggested that it was more respectable than “doing nothing.” The remaining participants expressed discomfort or frustration as they recounted fleeting interactions with panhandlers who provide services.

shuttle between Grand Central and Times Square, and this guy did this like very cool, awesome beat box rap and I just thought it was really impressive. And I was like, I didn't even like wanna clap but I was like so impressed.... If someone can get me to do that, it's like, alright, I'm definitely, I'll reward you for that.

Nick suggests that he gives to street performers if he's "particularly blown away or impressed," but not otherwise. When I ask him how he felt after giving to that performer, he says,

Um, I don't even really look at it like the same way cuz I feel like it's more of a quid pro quo, like, service, like they did me a service, they came on the subway and entertained, so I don't really feel like, oh, I did like a good thing, I just feel like I was a customer and I got my money's worth.... I think I take it more like, maybe a cold stance.

In contrast to his "cold stance," Nick tells me about experiencing a sense of connection and a sense of his own generosity the last time he gave money to a panhandler, someone who was not providing anything in return for giving:

... it was this person lying on the street near Union Square, um, and he definitely had a cup out, and I just realized it's like, kinda chilly and this guy's lying there with like a really ragged mattress and I felt very compelled, I had like a few coins on me, so I'm like, yeah, I mean I'm not, I hate loose change anyway, so I just took it all and just put it in his cup.... I do remember just like kinda seeing him smile and I could see how appreciative he was, like, when—it was just a few coins, but I could see that that like, meant so much to him, so I'm like, oh, I'm glad I just made this guy's life a little less ... can I swear on this? A little less shitty, than you know, it otherwise might've been.

Other interview participants shared Nick's tendency to take a "cold stance" toward panhandlers who are providing services and to buy the service only for its own sake. When asked whether she gives to people who provide entertainment while asking for money, Anita, a 54-year-old Latina woman who works as a nurse, said,

If I like the music, maybe sometimes I'll give them money. But I don't think about it like they're begging for money and I'm being generous for donating. It's more like I give to them to reward them for playing music that I like. I gave to this guy who was drumming in the West 4th Station, because it made me wanna get up and dance.

I ask her whether she gives to anyone whose music she does not like, and she responds, "When someone comes on the subway car and you know, is playing this awful music that you don't want to hear and you know, they look homeless or sort of bedraggled, I might feel guilty, but I don't give them money." When I asked why, she said, "I just don't like feeling pressured to donate money. You wanna get money from me for nothing, you show me that you'll be grateful."

Consistent with past literature on the pressures of the gift, Anita suggests that the unsolicited service makes her feel “pressured” to give money, creating a debt that she needs to repay. But she also expects an expression of gratitude in return for her donations to panhandlers, and suggests that she is unable to experience a sense of gratitude in this interaction (“you show me that you’ll be grateful”). This frustration stems in large part due to the temporal structure of the interaction: to give to a stranger who is offering a service while asking for money, and who the pedestrian never expects to see again, is to repay the debt imposed by the service and to close the exchange.

Other participants echoed these complaints about the unsolicited nature of the service, noting both the pressures of the gift and the coldness of the exchange transaction. Kevin, a 30-year-old white male who works as a stockbroker, also emphasized the unsolicited nature of the service when he brought up the “squeegee men” in our conversation about panhandlers who provide services, suggesting that the service renders him unable to feel sympathetic towards the person asking for money:

For instance, the squeegee guys that used to be around. They got rid of that. They would just wash your window without asking you and then demand payment, when you didn’t give them payment they’d be pissed because they wasted their Windex, time and effort and product. I didn’t ask the person for the service, I don’t wanna give them money for the service they provided that I didn’t want. If someone’s passively sitting there, then maybe I feel sorry or, I may consider the donation in a different sense.

When asked if she would feel good after giving to someone who held the door for her, Jessica, a 26-year-old white female who works as an administrative assistant in a hospital, suggested that the provision of a service renders the interaction too impersonal and prevents her from feeling appreciated:

No ... it’s like ... are they appreciative, or is it just onto the next? ... I think it’s kind of just like, thanks and then they’re going on to the next person. So you’re kind of like, why did I have to pay for someone to open my door, when I felt forced ... instead of my—that feeling that I actually wanted to.

For Jessica, the provision of a service in her brief interaction with a panhandler routinizes the interaction, stripping it of the interaction of a personalized quality that she expects from an interaction with a panhandler (“are they appreciative, or is it just onto the next?”).

When asked why she would give to a more passive panhandler but not a door holder, Jen, a 23-year-old white female who works in advertising, emphasizes the perceived lack of gratitude offered by a service-providing panhandler:

I don’t know, it’s weird, because I guess I’d really rather give the money even when I’m getting nothing. The door holding ... it’s like, it’s unwanted, it’s almost worse than getting nothing at all. When you give to like a person just sitting there, it’s like you decided to do it, and you can feel good about it, or feel like, okay, I made that person’s day better. I think if they’re giving you something it’s like, well, how am I supposed to feel good about deciding to pay you for this service when

you kind of forced me to. I don't know, I guess maybe I feel better about it when I just acted on my own accord and when I don't get anything back for doing it.

Jen experiences the service as pressuring her to give, inhibiting the sense that she is giving freely and that she can feel good about giving. Several participants echoed the forced quality of the interaction, suggesting that the service imposes a debt on them that they need to repay. When asked about panhandlers who hold the door for her, Linda, a 25-year-old female of mixed race who works in an art gallery, expressed anger towards the perceived attempt to impose an obligation on her: "I feel like I'm supposed to feel obligated but then I get mad and keep walking." Dennis, a 59-year-old white male actor, expressed frustration with the same situation: "Someone expecting something, giving something and wanting something back, I guess it's an expectation that I don't want."

Participating in what feels more like a *quid pro quo* is experienced as particularly egregious against the backdrop of a set of expectations about giving without getting anything in return, which tends to express the giver's superiority and status over the recipient (Llewellyn 2011b; Herrmann 1997; Douglas 1990). These participants express resentment over the shift away from an exchange of money for appreciation and, presumably, superiority and status. They reject panhandlers' service provision on the grounds that it is too much like "an economic exchange," or "a *quid pro quo*" and they feel as if a debt is being imposed on them, preventing them from giving freely ("like I owe you or something") and preventing the panhandler would from expressing gratitude or appreciation in return ("are they appreciative?") They do not assess the interaction on the same moral grounds and they experience it as coldly rational ("I take it more like, maybe a cold stance"). The provision of a service in a fleeting interaction with the panhandler shifts the interactional frame from an interaction, in which a charitable benefactor gives money to a needy beneficiary and creates a debt to be repaid with gratitude, to a customer-service provider interaction, which is characterized by an independence of the participants and feels inappropriate for the relationship. The vast majority of the stories recounted by my interview participants refer to fleeting, bounded interactions with panhandlers, but I saw a strikingly different pattern observing pairs of panhandlers and pedestrians in long-term relationships with one another.

Long-term relations between panhandlers and pedestrians

While I'm talking with David one day, a young black woman, Shawna, walks up with a plastic bag and a ten- and five-dollar bill in her hands. Because David has a bad knee that limits his mobility, David had previously given Shawna cash to buy him chips and a drink (the "grape" she refers to below). Shawna is coming down into the subway station to bring David the snacks and his change. David stops talking to me, mid-sentence, and starts singing the chorus of "My Girl" as Shawna walks up. She looks at me and says hi, smiling, and then turns to David, handing him the bag of food and the bills.

Shawna: I didn't see fruit punch. I got grape, I hope that's okay. Love you.

David: Okay, baby.

Shawna: I'll see you around. [she starts to walk away, and stops when David starts again]

David: OH! They're doin' a second inspection on the boiler room.... So they could do a certificate of occupancy. [This is in reference to David moving into a subsidized apartment, which is delayed due to inspections in the building.]

Shawna: Right.

David: So I can finally ... you know what I'm saying.

Shawna: Hallelujah!

David: You know, you know!

Shawna: Just let me know when I can come decorate!

David: The people, they opened up one building.

Shawna: Let me know when your building open up so I can come in and decorate. [starting to walk away]. Alright? See ya later.

David: Alright, thank you. Appreciate your kindness.

Shawna [halfway toward the stairs]: Have a good one!

She walks out the same way she came, and David and I continue talking. I ask him how they met, and he says “Just by standin’ here.... She goes to the gym, she goin’ to the gym to work out. I stopped her one day and I sang a song that she liked, so, ever since then, she start comin’ down. She comes, brings food, like I said, brings water, and like um, some little things that somebody need help with, you know. That’s beautiful.”

Shawna provides David with a service (using his money to buy snacks for him, because he has limited physical mobility), and gives him her own cash as well as food, water, and supplies like deodorant that she has purchased herself. David sings for Shawna, in what appears to be personalized way (“My Girl”), and also verbalizes his gratitude. In this interaction, the chain of actions that we could categorize as gifts makes it difficult to categorize clearly a gift and counter-gift: each gift recalls and anticipates the next. David starts singing her a song as she walks up, “My Girl,” surely anticipating that she comes bearing the snacks he asked for. Although they both provide a service of some kind, the relationship appears to be asymmetrical: the only expression of gratitude during the interaction comes from David (“Appreciate your kindness”). There are two types of indebtedness here that continue over time: the indebtedness that David experiences as a result of the inequality between the gift of singing and the gift of money, food, and water, and the indebtedness that Shawna experiences as a more fortunate person who feels sympathy for David’s situation.

We see throughout the brief interaction between David and Shawna evidence that the interaction—and the gift exchange that takes place in it and partly constitutes it—

extends their shared past and pitches toward the future. The interaction extends a past situation in which David asked Shawna to buy him chips and a drink and gave her money to do so. They have developed a set of habits with a rhythmic structure and each draw on a shared body of knowledge, from past interactions, about David's housing situation ("So I can finally ... you know what I'm saying.") The interaction signals not only continuity between the past and present but also between the present and future: Shawna signals that this is not a bounded interaction as she bids farewell ("I'll see you" and "See ya later") and includes a projection of future favors ("Just let me know when I can come decorate"). These conversational signals serve as the kind of "adhesive" that Zerubavel (2003) argues signals continuity from the past to the present and the future. In a cognitive process he calls mnemonic pasting, Zerubavel argues that these adhesive practices can help link together periods of time that would otherwise be discrete units: "a series of altogether separate shots are essentially pasted together to form a seemingly seamless film ... such mnemonic pasting helps us mentally link transform series of noncontiguous points in time into seemingly unbroken historical continua." This kind of mnemonic pasting is situated in contrast to mnemonic "cutting," or the creation of phenomenological brackets that allows a chunk of time to be experienced as discontinuous with those that precede and follow it.

In the case of a fleeting, bounded interaction, giving money to David in response to his singing would, in a sense, close the exchange and create an experience of a "harsh exchange of equivalents" that creates independence between the participants. In this case, in which the interaction is located on an open temporal horizon, giving to David plants seeds for future gifts and for keeping up a cycle of reciprocity. Shawna and David have a rhythm of repeated interactions: Shawna comes most Saturdays bearing food and water, picks up snacks for David, and sometimes gives David cash, and David sings songs for her and expresses his gratitude. The cyclical nature of the relationship and the continuity of the present interaction with both the past and future change the meaning of the service, shifting its meaning from a stage in a coldly rational *quid pro quo* situation to a stage in a continuous cycle of reciprocity. There is no need for a temporal lag or for phenomenological bracketing that allows the different phases of the exchange to be experienced as discontinuous from one another. One gift, singing, anticipates and immediately precedes the receipt of a food delivery. At the end of the interaction, debts remain unsettled. The relationship of reciprocity between David and Shawna seems both to reinforce and be reinforced by the open horizon of their relationship and by the relationship's rhythmic structure.

One Saturday in April, as if on cue, Shawna comes down to give food to David while I am standing with him talking. As she starts to walk away, I follow her and ask her if I can ask her about her friendship with David. She responds that she is on a tight schedule and I offer to walk back with her to the gym so we can walk and talk.⁵ When I tell her I'm writing about David, she says she had been curious about why I have been hanging around, and I feel embarrassed to confirm her suspicion that I do not have completely pure motives for being friends with David. I ask her how long she has been friends with David, and she tells me she has been coming to the gym nearby for a long time and started talking with him about a year ago. When I ask her about David's

⁵ I did not audio record my conversation with Shawna but took notes during and immediately after our conversation. I use quotation marks only when I am very confident that quotations are verbatim.

singing, she smiles and says, “that’s his personality. That’s David.” She tells me he asks her for song requests so that he can sing her songs that she likes, and she tells me he even learned the words to a few new songs for her. She adds that “he doesn’t need to do that” (sing) and says, “he does what he can for me.” She talks about how positive David is, even despite waiting for months for a place to live that is not a shelter.

For Shawna, the unsolicited nature of the act (“he doesn’t need to do that”) gets recoded as positive. While, in the case of fleeting interactions, the unsolicited nature of the service gets interpreted as a pressure on the giver to engage in an unwanted exchange, here its meaning gets inverted: she interprets it as voluntary and not contingent on the receipt of a return gift. She acknowledges that he is trying (but failing) to repay a debt, and her superiority in the interaction remains intact as he repays her with an inferior gift (“he does what he can for me”). There is no need for misrecognition (Bourdieu 1977) of his effort to return the favor and repay his debt. The exchange remains unequal and confers status on the more powerful giver (Blau 1964). As the beneficiary to her ongoing charitable giving, he is, in a sense, continuously indebted to her.

This is not simply an exchange of gifts for David, however. In the absence of clarification practices that make this an unequivocal case of gift exchange, multiple meanings can stay afloat in their interactions. For example, David tells me proudly that Shawna “pays good money to hear me sing.” While David clearly experiences a connection with Shawna and even emphasizes her kindness, he also emphasizes the aspects of their exchange that more closely resemble a market exchange: her giving is payment for a service worth purchasing.

If an open temporal horizon is critical for the development of productive ambiguity in this case, how should we make sense of individuals who regularly see David but do not give? One Monday morning around 10 am in July 2016, I observe David as he sings songs to pedestrians. He is holding a cup filled with change and singing “Stop! In The Name of Love” when a white, middle-aged man in a suit walks up the stairs from the train and past David, averting his eyes and exiting up another set of stairs onto Court Street in Downtown Brooklyn. The man stops at the top of the stairs to look at his phone, and I approach him and persuade him to talk to me about David. The man, Phil, tells me that he does not give money to any panhandlers at all, because it’s “easier to just turn off, than to engage.” Phil works as a CPA in the area and tells me he sees David regularly. When I ask him how he feels about David’s singing, he says, “Yeah, you know, he doesn’t really bother me. I can understand that he’s probably fallen on some hard times and, you know, he’s here trying to make a living. But like I said, I just kind of turn off. I have so much going on in my head when I’m going into work. I just don’t pay attention. It’s a self-preservation thing, I guess.”

Phil offers a useful negative case: despite the open temporal horizon of their relationship, Phil averts his eyes. He does not engage and does not give, and he has not developed any bond of solidarity with David. Although Phil does not give money, the open temporal horizon of their relationship does seem to soften the blow of David’s offering of a service, and the service gets recoded as “trying to make a living” rather than an imposed indebtedness. We might think, accordingly, of the open temporal horizon of the relationship as a kind of necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of a cycle of exchange and of a bond of solidarity.

Readers may wonder if givers like Shawna would be likely to give regardless of the temporal structure of the situation. While Shawna did not remember and thus could not recount her first interaction with David, Lisa, another regular supporter, contrasts her first interaction with David with subsequent interactions. One Saturday afternoon in August, Lisa, a blonde white woman in her thirties, walks into the station and approaches David as he's singing. She seems to have already pulled money for David out of her purse: she walks down the station stairs with a few dollars in her hand and hands it to him, smiling with closed lips. David stops singing and says, "Appreciate your kindness. You have a beautiful day now. I'll see you next week." "See you," she responds, her first words in the interaction, turning back to wave goodbye as she walks off. I approach her and ask her about David. Lisa is a journalist who recently moved from Manhattan to Park Slope, a nearby neighborhood known for its popularity among young, white, wealthy couples starting families. Lisa takes the 2 or 3 train to Borough Hall every weekend to go to the nearby Trader Joe's supermarket. She recalls the first time she met David:

It was my first time coming to this one [Trader Joe's] and I was like, kind of trying to navigate where I was going. I remember seeing him and him saying something like, can you spare some change, I'll sing you a song, and I kind of walked off. Like, normally I like to at least acknowledge the person, or say something to them, but I didn't ask for you to sing for me. I feel terrible saying it now, but like, I felt like it was supposed to make me feel obligated, like as if he's saying, why wouldn't you give to me if you can get something out of it? Or like I was putting money into a machine and a song would come out. It didn't feel right.

Lisa remembers her frustration with what felt too cold and depersonalized ("putting money into a machine and a song would come out") against the backdrop of her expectations of giving money to a panhandler. The closed temporal horizon of the interaction structured the meaning of the service as a stage in a crass quid pro quo. However, her experience of interacting with David began to shift as she returned to the neighborhood each weekend and continued seeing David. When asked how she started giving to David, she said,

I guess I kept coming to the Trader Joes and, you know, he's there a lot, in that same spot. We kept seeing each other, and I just started giving him money one day. I realized he was kind of a fixture here, and he's such a sweet man. Now that I'm more comfortable with him I just don't feel like he's trying to take advantage of me or something. I feel like he really enjoys himself there, singing to everyone, and I just feel like he has a warmth about him, like he really, really wants to show you he's thankful. I don't know, I just started to think about the whole thing differently.

Once Lisa realized that he was a "fixture" in the neighborhood, the temporal horizon of their relationship shifted. Like David and Shawna, David and Lisa developed a kind of rhythmic pattern, seeing each other every weekend. In their interaction, each stage of the gift sequence is continuous with the next: Lisa takes out her money as she approaches us and hands David a few dollars as he sings. Each interaction also recalls

and anticipates the next: David says, “See you next week,” relying on knowledge of the regularity of her visits in the past to anticipate interactions in the future, again applying “adhesive” to the interaction. With this change in temporal structure, new meanings become available: the service shifts from an attempt to force a coldly rational economic transaction (“money into a machine”) to an attempt to reciprocate her donations (“he really, really wants to show you he’s thankful”). In regard to his relationship with Lisa, in contrast, David emphasizes to me that she’s “one of my best customers,” again framing the interaction as akin to a business transaction.

Like David, Michael has developed some long-term relationships with pedestrians who live or work in the neighborhood. Michael is explicit about the benefit of seeing the same pedestrian more than once. One day, as I am standing on the other side of the sidewalk observing Michael while he holds the door at the Duane Reade, a white man in his forties walks up to the Duane Reade with his daughter, who looks about 11 or 12 years old. A young white couple comes towards the Duane Reade from the other direction. As both groups approach, Michael pulls the door open and looks at the white man in his forties, saying “spare any change?” The middle-aged man puts out his hand with his palm facing Michael, signaling no, and quickly walks through the open door. The couple follows immediately behind him, and the middle-aged man’s daughter has fallen behind and walks in behind the couple. I see the man stop inside the Duane Reade and look behind him, realizing that in his haste to walk past Michael, he had left his young daughter behind. She was not far behind him, and I see them reunite inside the Duane Reade. As I am watching, I tell Michael about the dad and daughter getting separated, and he laughs a long, hard laugh. I ask Michael why he thinks some people get so mad when he holds the door, and he responds as follows:

I mean like, I wouldn’t necessarily say they be mad, it’s just more like a feelin’, you know, that can go away, it is a feelin’ that goes away, matter of fact, as it comes, because when you leave my sight, when you leave my circumference, you not even thinkin’ about me no more. But I had people that give me money that never did before. But I had people say, I’m not givin’ to a gangster, and I’m sayin, don’t misconstrue me. But because of that, they start givin’ me, here, here, here, they never give to me before, they took a liking to me. A lot of individuals tell me to this day.

Michael takes pride in the fact that people who did not originally want to give him money take “a liking” to him, and start giving, “here, here, here.” Although he attributes their change of heart to his personality, it is worth considering whether a difference in temporal structure is responsible for the differences in responses to Michael and his door holding.

One day, months later, as I am standing nearby observing Michael, a blonde white woman in her sixties ambles up to the Duane Reade, rummaging through her purse as she walks up. Michael’s face lights up when he sees her, beaming at her. He opens the door as he says “How’s your day, ma’am!” “Oh, I’m surviving,” she says. Looking down into her purse and appearing to have realized she didn’t have any small bills, she says, “Let me get some change, I’ll be out in a minute,” She walks through the open door and into the Duane Reade. Michael looks to me and says, “This lady, she one of the ones who give to me *faithfully*. Nice lady.” Shortly after, she comes out and hands

him a five-dollar bill. He says, “Appreciate it! You have a beautiful day now.” She says, “Yep. I’ll see you around,” and starts to walk away.

I manage to flag her down and introduce myself. I tell her I am a graduate student writing about Michael and ask her if I can talk to her. She tells me her name is Margaret and agrees to talk to me, and we sit down inside of the Starbucks next to the Duane Reade. Before I ask any questions, she tells me that Michael is a good person to write about; that he has “a spark.” I tell her I think so too, and I ask her how she started giving money to Michael. Laughing, she tells me that her husband teases her about being a “bleeding heart liberal.” When I ask her about Michael holding the door, she tells me he’s “a polite kid,” and talks about how he always has a big smile on his face while he holds the door, even though “most people probably treat him like garbage,” emphasizing the uniqueness of her own relationship with Michael.

When I ask her if she gives to other panhandlers who hold the door, she says that usually “it feels like they’re pressuring you,” and she does not want to give money, but she can tell that Michael “appreciates whatever he can get” and “he seems like he really needs it.” She tells me that she only gives him small amounts, usually singles or even small change, and “he’s just so grateful every time.” I ask Margaret if she thinks he holds the door just to get money. She laughs at the question and says, “Of course!” But she also tells me a story about coming into the Duane Reade a few weeks before and telling Michael that she was in a rush. She says she did not give him any money and he held the door open for her, smiling, as she walked into the Duane Reade. Her acknowledgment that Michael is holding the door in the interest of getting money, coupled with her attempt to downplay this set of pragmatics, suggests that Margaret can experience and recognize multiple meanings in these interactions, even as she emphasizes one more than the other.

In this conversation, Margaret invokes her identity as a “bleeding heart liberal,” in reference to giving money to Michael. The interaction becomes personalized, relative to the cold impersonality of the fleeting interaction: she’s not just a one-time donor but a regular benefactor, who gives him money when she sees him unless she’s in a rush. She talks admiringly about how he holds the door with a smile even when people treat him like garbage, suggesting that the door holding is coded as a kind of subservience. In the same conversation, a panhandler holding the door is both “pressuring,” as in case of other panhandlers holding the door for her, and a mark of politeness, gratitude, and subservience, in the case of Michael. They are both continuously indebted to one another: Michael owes her a debt of gratitude, which she gladly accepts, and she is indebted to Michael, as “he really needs it.” At the end of each interaction, then, the exchange remains open. But when I asked him about his friendship with Margaret, he was careful to emphasize that Margaret is not a friend but an “associate.”

When Margaret walked up to Michael, she was already rummaging through her purse, preparing to give him money. Although it is clear that there is a social distance between Margaret and Michael, it is different from the distance between David and Shawna. Margaret greets him like an old friend (“I’m surviving”) and signals an open horizon in their relationship (“I’ll see you around”). As in the case of David and Shawna, the service provision, as part of a long chain of give-and-take, becomes a positive, permanent part of Michael’s personality (“he’s a polite kid”), as opposed to a strategy of locking her into a one-time, unwanted exchange. Again, there is no need for Margaret to misrecognize Michael’s gift: “of course” he does it to make money. In fact,

her recognition that he does this to express his gratitude for her gifts seems to strengthen their relationship. But she also suggests that it is not completely conditional on the receiving of a donation from her, as she tells a story about a time when she did not have time to give money. Michael, she tells me, held the door open with a smile anyway. In this case, as with the other regular givers, the past relationship and the open time horizon seem to play a key role in whether an action gets categorized as part of a gift exchange or as a cold *quid pro quo*.

The open-temporal horizon in these relationships and the cyclical pattern of exchange, in combination with service-providing panhandlers' location at the boundary of panhandling and the informal service economy, allows the service performed and the money given to operate as a kind of boundary object, allowing multiple meanings to stay afloat without clarifying the meaning of the service and allowing each participant to emphasize the meanings that appeal to them. David and Michael both emphasize the business-like nature of their transactions, even while they display a sense of connection with their long-term givers. Margaret and Shawna, in contrast, experience the series of exchanges as a cycle of gift exchange, in which they are indebted to the less-resourced recipient of their gifts, and the recipient of their gifts is indebted to them due to the superiority of their gifts. There is no need for phenomenological bracketing of each stage in the gift exchange: each gift is experienced as continuous with the next and pitches toward a shared future, creating a productive ambiguity that sustains successful interactions. The production and maintenance of this ambiguity allows for David and Michael to manage stigma successfully and develop relationships with pedestrians that provide a regular source of income while affirming both panhandler and pedestrian.

Conclusion

Panhandlers offering services attempt to redefine their relationship with more powerful pedestrians as a more egalitarian service-provider/customer relationship, as opposed to the more degrading relationship between a charitable giver and needy recipient. Pedestrians who encounter service providing panhandlers in fleeting, bounded interactions with panhandlers reject this service provision: in the case of an interaction with no shared past and no foreseeable shared future, to give money in return for the service is to close the exchange, rendering it a "*quid pro quo*," to use one interview participant's words. In contrast, in the case of the long-term relationship between pedestrians and panhandlers, pedestrians experience being provided service as an expression of gratitude and subservience that strengthens the relationship. There is no need to experience each gift as "discontinuous" (Bourdieu 1997): the gift is both objectively part of an ongoing exchange of gifts and is experienced as such. But as this temporal structure opens up a new possible meaning, it does not eclipse or replace the older one: the service becomes a kind of boundary object, allowing the panhandler to emphasize the business-like nature of the transaction and the pedestrian to experience it as closer to a gift exchange. The exchange is located in a "zone of indeterminacy" (Lainer-Vos 2012): the panhandler can experience the exchange as an exchange of money for services, and the giver can interpret it as an ongoing gift exchange that confers status.

Individual characteristics are undoubtedly important in explaining some of the variation that emerges here, but a receding and opening of the temporal horizon can

make available a different meaning of the service in particular chains of interactions with specific pedestrians, enabling them to experience the exchange of money for services as distinct from a “harsh exchange of equivalents” (Bourdieu 1997) even as the panhandlers experience it as a more dignifying economic exchange. For Lisa, coming to the neighborhood most weekends and realizing that David was a “fixture” shifted the meanings of the service and of the interaction. On the other hand, some pedestrians, like Phil, will likely not participate in the interaction regardless of the temporal structure of their relationship. We can think about this kind of temporal structure, in which each stage in the gift relationship extends a shared past and pitches toward a shared future, as a kind of necessary but not sufficient condition for facilitating cooperative interactions.

Of course, developing this kind of regularity in interactions with pedestrians requires that the panhandlers themselves have at least a modicum of regularity in their lives. Both David and Michael, who have developed long-term relationships with pedestrians, have a place to sleep at night and therefore a level of stability and regularity that unhoused, more transient people may not have access to. Roy, whose living situation was more unstable and who found it more challenging to come to the same spot regularly, did not develop the same long-term relationships with pedestrians (or with me). This instability makes it more difficult for panhandlers to reap the potential benefits for generating regular income from pedestrians while also maintaining a sense of dignity tied to the perceived meaning of the transaction.

The finding that cooperative interactions between panhandlers and pedestrians emerge under conditions of ambiguity uncovers weaknesses in current models of interaction and economic activity. Rather than taking for granted that a lack of shared definition of the situation creates conflict and inhibits future interactions (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1974), future research should further interrogate the conditions in which ambiguity in interactional frames lead to cooperation as opposed to conflict, as well as the conditions in which ambiguity can be successfully maintained. With regard to economic activity more narrowly, concepts like relational work and relational packages (Mears 2015; Zelizer 2005, 2012) might be fruitfully extended to account for situations in which keeping multiple meanings afloat is necessary for carrying out economic activity. How does the process of matching transactions and media work in situations where ambiguity is necessary for carrying out economic transactions? In analyzing breakdowns of economic relations, rather than attributing breakdown to interpretative misalignment (Mears 2015), we might examine the role of clarification practices in revealing—and creating conflict over—opposing interpretations.

This work also contributes to our understanding of boundary objects in everyday life. The preceding analysis suggests that boundary objects are productive not only under conditions of “mixed economies of information” (Star and Griesemer 2016), but also under conditions of mixed moral and emotional orientations towards a cooperative act. While the panhandlers orient towards the interaction as an opportunity for stigma management, pedestrians who have developed long-term relationships with panhandlers orient towards the interaction more as an emotionally fulfilling gift exchange. Future work needs to continue analyzing how mixed moral and emotional orientations can be productively coordinated through boundary objects.

Sensitivity to the relationships among temporality, ambiguity of meaning in exchange, and stigma management might be fruitfully applied to a wide variety of empirical cases. How does temporality structure the meanings in interactions and exchanges, for example,

between service workers and their customers, between gestational surrogates and the mothers-to-be whose future genetic children they carry, and between sex workers and their customers? Future researchers in these areas might productively ask how these interactions are temporally structured: what is the temporal horizon of a given interaction, and how is the present interaction linked with past interactions and future interactions? In the case of sex work, does a sustained, ongoing exchange of money for sex over time make multiple meanings available, relative to a one-time exchange of money for sex? If so, does this emergent ambiguity have implications for the identity work and stigma management of the sex workers or their customers? Whether a gift or market exchange framing is more dignifying for the stigmatized person is likely to be highly variable and is another question yet to be studied. Future research in these areas could be well served by a focus on the productive aspects of ambiguity and on the role of temporality in either clarifying or blurring the meaning of exchange.

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Mary Patrick is a PhD student in Sociology at New York University. She has written with NYU graduate student Eliza Brown about the practice of freezing eggs for possible future fertilization. Patrick has also conducted research on ride-sharing drivers and their interactions with passengers.