GIVE-AND-TAKE

Navajo Grandmothers and the Role of Craftswomen

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Generally, the grandparent-grandchild alliance was described as the strongest bond in Navajo culture [apart from that of mother-child]; this was a warm association in which perpetuation of traditional teaching could be effected (Shomaker 1989:3).

The Navajo have always been matrilineal, with women holding a position of prestige in Navajo culture. . . . Weaving helps ensure the continuation of this position for women (Roessel 1983:595).

INTRODUCTION

Many Navajo grandmothers contribute to household productivity and the economic welfare of their families through their involvement in traditional craft activities such as weaving. Also, through these craft practices and related activities, grandmothers maintain and share broader cultural values, such as those of hard work, patience, humility, and traditional knowledge, with younger generations. In return, as both craftworkers and elders, these grandmothers are frequently accorded status and recognition because of their specialized knowledge and associated skills. Their craft activities reinforce social and economic relationships that might not otherwise be maintained.

That give-and-take—the contributions made and the benefits received—by weaving grandmothers in contemporary Navajo society is discussed in this chapter. Although the patterns described here are frequently mentioned in

informal ways (i.e., embedded in life histories, indirectly referred to in museum catalogs, and peripherally noted in other ethnographies), these patterns are a previously unexamined part of the larger picture of women's roles in Navajo society. Not all Navajo grandmothers are productive craftswomen, but for those who are, the craftwork provides meaning to their lives in significant ways. The experiences of those who weave—who number in the thousands if not tens of thousands on the Navajo Reservation today (Hedlund 1992:21, 23n.)—are emphasized in this study.

After a brief introduction to the roles of grandmothers in Navajo society and to the historical position of weaving among the Navajo, this chapter explores the contributory, advisory, and residual roles that weaving grandmothers may play within their households, communities, and tribe. In addition to positive aspects, role conflicts and strains for weaving grandmothers in the 1970s and 1980s are also briefly examined. For the most part, the unit of analysis for this study is the household and extended family residential group (often termed a "camp," although it is far from temporary); certain comments are also germane at the individual, community ("chapter"), and tribal levels.[1]

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on ethnographic field research, principally through participant observation, on the Navajo Reservation during the summers of 1978–82, 1985, and 1988, with periodic fieldwork at other times of the years, and on continuing visits with many individuals belonging to a number of Navajo extended families, at their homes and mine, over the past 12 years. The original study (Hedlund 1983) was based on data for 181 weavers in one central reservation community plus survey data from a number of other areas; since then, ethnographic information on many other weavers across the reservation has been compiled.[2] Although grandmothers were not an original focus of my research, it became clear to me during broader investigations that the behavior and values associated with weaving embody much of what grandmothers represent in Navajo society. It also became apparent that weaving plays a recognizable role in producing and maintaining a positive status for older women and helps provide a pathway to successful aging.[3] Descriptions of people and their actions have been excerpted and/or adapted from my field notes from 1978 through 1990 (Hedlund 1978–1990). Pseudonyms for individuals have been used throughout.

GRANDMOTHERS IN NAVAJO SOCIETY

Consanguineal (biological) concepts of kinship, affinal relationships (through marriage), and other behavioral parameters come into play when defining "grandmother" from the Navajo perspective. In this matrilineal society, in which descent is reckoned predominantly through the mother's line and one belongs to one's mother's clan (Aberle 1961), the mother's mother is called *shimá sání* (literally, "my old mother" or "my aged mother"), glossed in English as "my grandmother."[4] Whether or not they have biological children and grandchildren of their own, this maternal grandmother's sisters and the maternal grandfather's sisters are also called *shimá sání* and may play grandmotherly roles (as described below) within the family.[5] Other older female relatives belonging to the maternal grandmother's clan may be referred to as *shimá sání* as well. All may be considered "grandmothers" in a traditional Navajo way. In English, children often refer to their mother's mother as "my *real* grandmother" in order to distinguish her from other *shimá sání* and from the father's mother.

Father's mothers (and father's fathers) are most often referred to by the fully reciprocal term, *shinálí* (the father's parents use this term for their son's children and they in turn use it for their paternal grandparents). When speaking in English today, Navajo children will refer most often to their father's mother (or father's father) as "my *nálí*" rather than as "my grandmother." Bilingual paternal grandmothers will often switch between "my grandchild" and *"shinálí,"* depending on the context of discussion (i.e., when an English-speaking listener is present, the English form is more likely to be used, whereas with a bilingual or Navajo-speaking person, *shinálí,* the more specific referent, is more often used). Both maternal and paternal grandparents may refer to their grandchildren in English simply as "my grands."

The most significant difference between Navajo maternal and paternal grandmothers is the fact that the maternal grandmother and grandchild share the same clan and therefore a lineal descent, whereas the clans of the paternal grandmother and her grandchildren must, in this society with exogamous clan membership, almost always be different. Although a paternally linked relationship is acknowledged (one is said to be "born for" or "born into" one's father's clan), descent is not considered lineal (Witherspoon 1975:42).[6]

Considerable emphasis is placed by Navajos on the behavioral correlates of kin status—that is, one must *behave* like a family member in order to be considered a proper relative. Witherspoon (1975:21) observes:

> For those who follow American and European cultural beliefs, according to which "real" or "true" kinship is limited to those human beings who are blood relatives, it must be pointed out that Navajo define kinship in terms of action or behavior, not in terms of substance. . . . Kinship is discussed in terms of the acts of giving birth and sharing sustenance.

Thus "grandmothers" may be understood as those who behave as grandmothers should, whether or not they actually have biological grandchildren of their own or whether they are associated with the maternal or paternal side of the family.

The behavioral models for both *shimá sání* and *shinálí* are closely related since either may have a significant impact on the socialization of their "grandchildren," providing affection, informal discipline, food and other forms of subsistence, financial support, and even an alternate home for the children of their male and female children.[7]

The considerable range of actual relationships possible between maternal or paternal grandparents, their grandchildren, and other relatives should be emphasized. In fact, variations in individual roles and family relationships within each of these groups, although empirically untested, may indeed be greater than any between-group differences.[8] Extended households may be matrilocal or patrilocal, or residence may alternate between the two, affecting the amount of time that children spend with their grandparents. Neolocal residence, in which a nuclear or single-parent family lives apart from either set of grandparents, is increasingly common. Also, because household composition does not remain static through life, grandmothers may have varied contacts with and many different roles within their families through time.[9] Because of these varied patterns, grandmothers referred to here may belong to either the maternal or the paternal side of a family as long as they conform to the Navajo *behavioral* standards for "grandmother" status. What, then, are these ideal characteristics?

The basis for all forms of Navajo kinship, including grandmothers, is *k'é,* meaning "kindness, love, cooperation, thoughtfulness, friendliness, and peacefulness" (Witherspoon 1983:524). Both parents and grandparents are expected to provide affection, discipline, instruction, and economic assistance to their children. Leighton and Kluckhohn, in the classic publication *Children of the People* (1947:102–3), note that the relationship of grandparents with their grandchildren ideally is very warm, loving, solicitous, and indulgent.

Grandmothers' roles, representing a conservative and family-oriented perspective, form the baseline for the most traditional aspects of women's roles.

Grandmothers' roles are closely linked to the behavioral expectations for all women in Navajo society regardless of age or particular status. Frisbie (1982:12) underlines several persistent standards of ideal behavior for traditional women: "dignity, strength, energy, self-sufficiency, stability, and supremacy in the hogan and the immediate kin world." From an extensive survey of ethnographies and life histories, she summarizes the "skills, behavioral traits, and personality characteristics that were valued for women in traditional times":

> Women were to be industrious, healthy, supple, strong and energetic, and good runners. Instead of being lazy, they were to be willing to work hard all their lives, in any kind of weather, for their husbands, children, and their property. They were to get married; if you lived without a man "you will be as though without arms and legs" (Dyk and Dyk 1980:480). They were to possess pleasant, good natured, friendly, wise, and generous dispositions, and they were not to be mean, quarrelsome, sassy, or physically abusive. They were to look beautiful, not ugly; thin, not real heavy or skinny; and at the time of marriage, they were to be young and virginal. They were to have patience and were not to get jealous; while being faithful themselves, they were not to demand absolute constancy from a man. They were not to run around, drink, gamble, gossip or cause trouble; rather, they were to stay home, caring for children, relatives, and visitors. They were to be honest, moral, and modest and restrained in front of men and strangers; they were to bring honor to their family, thus carving out a respected place in the community (pp. 19–20).

Traditional Navajo women are active in both domestic and wider community spheres. Domestic responsibilities, shared to varying degrees with male members of the family, include childbirth and childrearing, housekeeping, food preparation, farming, hauling supplies, animal husbandry, arts and crafts production, and involvement in ritual knowledge and performances. The documentary record for activities outside the home is not as complete, but traditional women appear to have played limited but occasionally significant roles in military and political exploits as well as in community-based social and religious events and in regional trading (Frisbie 1982).

Many of the Navajo expectations about grandmothering may be understood through the pervasive and somewhat ironic balance maintained between communal responsibility and individual autonomy. This dualism, which Witherspoon (1983:533) has termed complementary rather than contradictory, has received much discussion in the literature (Aberle 1961, 1963; Witherspoon

1975, 1983:533–35; Lamphere 1977). Grandmothers in particular demonstrate this duality as figures of considerable experience and therefore authority while simultaneously being somewhat removed from the nuclear family arena.

With the maturing of their own children and the decline of their parents, a subtle and implicit increase in responsibility—"for herself, for her younger kin and affines, for the care of her dependent parents and for the maintenance of society"—marks those with grandmother status (Counts 1985:50). This is an extension of the mother's roles rather than a radical departure from the ways of earlier life. Ideal behavioral attributes of the grandmother as head of an extended family or household include participation in the socialization of children through discipline and instruction (often in the form of example setting), making decisions on the scheduling and conduct of extended family activities—trips, major expenditures, livestock events, home improvements, religious ceremonies—and contributing to the family's economic well-being (often through sheepholding but also with grazing permits, pension and government assistance checks, and craft sales).

Lamphere notes:

> The primary kin (parents and married children) who live within shouting distance and who are in daily cooperation, especially for livestock and agricultural activities, and who jointly make use of the same area of land, form a regular pattern of communication and cooperative effort. Specifiable patterns of authority indicate that the older couple in an extended family residence group are the main requesters who organize herding and cultivating activities (1977:85).
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> In general, the older couple is *t'áá bee bóholníih* (he is [they are] the boss, or it's up to him [them] to decide) for most situations and is in the position of making requests for aid of their children and spouses, especially in matters concerning livestock, fields, and transportation. The younger couples are most often in the position of giving aid or asking for loans or help with a ceremony (1977:84).

On the other hand, grandmothers may enjoy considerable autonomy from the day-to-day responsibilities of childcare and household maintenance. The concept of *t'áá bee bóholníih*—"it's up to him or her"—may be turned around here to mean that each individual has a right to decide for himself, that no one should have authority over another person. Grandmothers may actually relinquish what authority they once had in favor of a more distant and removed presence in the household.

Navajo weaving itself provides opportunities for grandmothers to maintain

a balance between authority and autonomy in the extended family and establishes a platform from which to participate in the household on several levels (contributory, advisory, residual) while maintaining personal independence. The responsibilities and freedoms acquired with the position of grandmother appear to be reflected through the weaving enterprise. Indeed, although not universally practiced, weaving appears to embody some of the key aspects of being a Navajo grandmother.

WEAVING AMONG THE NAVAJO

Estimates run anywhere from 12,000 (Sunset 1987:106) to 28,000 (Roessel 1983:596) adult weavers on the Navajo Reservation in the early 1980s. Although no reliable statistics are available, informal surveys and one community study have shown that a significant number of these weavers—at least half—are over 45 years of age, with many in their late fifties and sixties (Hedlund 1983:317, table 12.3). In fact, an overriding concern for traders and collectors during much of the twentieth century was that *only* older women were weaving and that with their eventual decline no one would carry on the tradition.

In contrast to this mid-twentieth-century emphasis on middle-aged and older weavers, a growing number of younger women have become interested in the craft since the 1970s. Although still clearly in the minority, these are women who have young families and who want to work at home but still earn income or who recognize weaving as a part of Navajo culture and heritage that they would like to maintain. A few have discovered that their artistic efforts may be highly rewarding both personally and financially. Skipping a generation, many of these women in their twenties and thirties now look to their grandmothers rather than their mothers for guidance in the craft.

For at least the past three centuries, Navajo weavers of the American Southwest have produced cloth by hand on their upright looms. Tools and basic techniques were initially borrowed from neighboring Pueblo peoples, probably sometime during the seventeenth century. Traditionally women's work, weaving was accomplished at home, integrated into the daily round of domestic activities. Little evidence survives concerning individual weavers' lives prior to the twentieth century, but the historical framework for the craft is well known. Well into the nineteenth century, the weaving of wool blankets and garments was maintained both for domestic use and for regional and intertribal trade. By the third quarter of that century, however, dramatic changes began taking place within the craft as Navajos faced the growing economic, social, and political upheaval of U.S. western expansion. Weavers no longer sold to native clientele;

the production of blankets and garments was rapidly replaced by the making of rugs and other decorative items geared to a commercial Anglo market. Styles and materials changed in response to the outside market's tastes (Wheat 1977, 1981; Kent 1985).

Today women weavers have maintained their dominance in production that still takes place at home. Female kin networks provide continuity in passing weaving skills on to the next generation, although educational programs outside the home are an additional source for learning to weave. Some of these craftswomen receive sizable incomes from their work, and these funds have a significant impact on individual family budgets; others are small-scale operators whose weaving contributes relatively small amounts to the household till. Very few weavers work without any monetary return for their rugs.

Like their predecessors, who borrowed Pueblo and Spanish styles and materials, weavers remain responsive to outside trends, from the selection of color schemes, design motifs, and materials to the ways woven goods are marketed and distributed. Sales strategies, formerly limited to barter and credit transactions with local trading posts, have been augmented with cash sales to craft stores, galleries, and museums. Since the 1960s boom in native crafts, weavers have enjoyed increased attention from national and international markets, although most still find it difficult to earn sufficient income from the craft alone.

Navajo weavers working in the traditional idiom are naturally associated with traditional cultural values and activities.[10] Weaving is associated with stability, self-sufficiency, and the "old ways" of subsistence, even as it is a sign of outward communication with a foreign market. Families and entire communities show pride in having members who weave, despite the fact that this sort of pride is not a conspicuously indigenous or traditional value itself.

Yet in recent decades, opportunities for varied self-expression and innovation on the traditional base have grown out of the broad spectrum of lifestyles and alternative role models available to people on the reservation. Trends have included the development of new rug styles, the incorporation of new materials, the discovery of new marketing outlets, and, most importantly, the expansion of weaving beyond a household subsistence enterprise into a recognized, albeit incipient profession. These trends have been reinforced by the arts and crafts market, always seeking elements of tradition coupled with innovation. The range of weaving practices has diversified, with the women taking a variety of approaches, from lucrative profession to barely bread-and-butter production and from highly artful enterprise to homely hobby (Hedlund 1983).

Navajo weavers contribute to traditional social and economic systems as well as interacting with outside markets. Although no longer uniformly practiced

by all, weaving is still acknowledged at individual, household, community, and tribal levels as an important and useful, but not requisite, activity for women. Some girls are encouraged to learn how to weave; some women are positively sanctioned when they do. Many who do not actively practice the craft nevertheless associate it with the ideal Navajo woman's identity (Roessel 1981). I next examine whether grandmothers who are weavers make certain contributions and receive other benefits especially because of their combined status as grandmothers and weavers.

NAVAJO GRANDMOTHERS AS CRAFTSWOMEN

Grandmothers who weave have a variety of options in performing their craft, depending on their individual life circumstances, including the socioeconomics of their household, their family configuration, their health, and, of course, personal inclinations. Weaving may continue much as it did earlier when a woman's children were growing up, or it may increase or decrease. Increased production can be associated with new freedoms from raising a family, whereas reduced production may be related to physical restrictions or to activities given higher priority due to other roles of the grandmother (for instance, arranging and presiding over religious ceremonies or traveling to visit relatives).

From a study of Mesoamerican peasant communities, Press and McKool (1972, as cited in Fry 1980:4) suggest that four "prestige-generating" components may be responsible for the statuses associated with aging and may have universal validity:

(1) *Advisory:* as manifested in seeking out and obtaining advice from older people as well as the degree to which it is heeded;
(2) *Contributory:* as apparent in older people participating in and contributing to social activities;
(3) *Control:* as seen in the influence an older individual exerts over others through a monopoly over resources and supernatural sanctions;
(4) *Residual:* as evidenced in the retention of prestige through association with former statuses and competencies.

The recorded activities of Navajo grandmothers in my research range from direct craft contributions, to cooperative efforts, to teaching and serving as role models and culture bearers, to indirect support through household administration and childcare. Modifying Press and McKool's categories in accord with basic Navajo cultural propensities, I suggest that these activities correspond

with three of the basic prestige-generating modes, organized here by descending degrees of direct participation:[11]

(1) *Contributory:* direct participation and collaboration in craft production and specific contribution to the family's social and economic life;
(2) *Advisory:* instructional and cooperative efforts in which grandmothers share their expertise in craft technology and cultural lore;
(3) *Residual:* knowledge of craft technology, aesthetics, and lore reflecting a set of larger cultural values in which the grandmother provides a role model for cultural competence.

These approaches are detailed below and illustrated with examples from fieldwork on the Navajo Reservation.

Contributory. Weaving provides distinct opportunities for direct and valued contributions to the social and economic welfare of the extended family. The roles associated with grandmotherly status often encourage craft activities, although they are moderated by each woman's physical capabilities. For grandmothers who are still strong and active, weaving may remain the same as or increase from earlier periods of life and may operate in concert with other contributory activities. It may also become a collaborative activity between grandmother and grandchildren, contributing to socialization processes, household cohesion, and the family economy.

Showing continuity with the past, grandmothers may maintain their earlier weaving practices with little change from before. Weaving is viewed as integral to the traditional roles of a Navajo woman. No dramatic change may take place when a woman gains status as grandmother, because grandmothering can be viewed as an extension of being a mother. Weaving that was conducted while performing myriad household duties and participating in other family activities may simply continue as a natural part of a woman's daily routine. Grandmothering may have little impact on weaving either because the grandmother has entered the role gradually through relationships with her sister's children's children and others who are, in the Navajo way, also considered as grandchildren or because the grandmother is living at some distance from her children and has had little exposure to the extended family either before or after becoming a grandmother.

> Corinne, in her late forties, has woven since she was a little girl. She married when still in her teens and began having children right away. Now several of her adult daughters and one son have children about the same age as her own youngest child. As grandmother and mother, she

Elsie Jim Wilson and grandchildren, Navajo Nation, Arizona. Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund, 1981.

weaves surrounded by small children who are indistinguishable (to an outsider) as her children or grandchildren. Several of her older daughters often have jobs outside the home, but because she weaves on a full-time basis, they all share household maintenance activities (cooking, cleaning, childcare, sheep and goat tending, and so forth), balanced with their respective jobs. If she must concentrate on a big project, her older daughters care for her children as well as their own. The sale of Corinne's rugs provides her major source of cash income and pays for almost all of her own household expenses, including a recent remodeling of her home and a pickup truck and gasoline.

Grandmothers who are still vital may become more proficient than ever. Once the family has grown up, more time may be available to concentrate on one's own creative work and its marketing. The decrease in intense family

obligations plus the cumulative experience and maturation of a craftsperson allows some grandmothers to weave whenever and however they please. Often this leads to more lucrative production and greater contributions to household finances.

> Geraldine's weaving fairly exploded after her only child grew up and started raising a family of his own. For the first time she had the time to spend planning and thinking about her work, she had some capital to expend on partially processed raw materials, and, most of all, she had the quiet to concentrate on perfecting her weaving technique. Her brother built her a weaving shed, separate from the house, where no one could disturb her looms, tools, and yarns. When her young grandchildren come to visit from their off-reservation home, she protectively locks up the shed and returns to it only after they leave.

Because many restrictions on a woman's social relationships beyond the family are removed as she grows older (Brown 1985:7), grandmothers gain freedom of movement that younger women do not enjoy. Navajos commonly tease about older women who are "travelers—always going places." Whether visiting grandchildren away at school, relatives across the reservation, or simply a trading post never visited before, they can take advantage of new opportunities both to see different rug styles and to market their own goods.

> "Retirement" is the joke for Marie, a young grandmother in her fifties, whose family says she is more active now than when the kids were growing up. In addition to weaving at home, she also teaches workshops and at several schools and does museum/gallery demonstrations that take her out of state regularly. In her travels she has gathered new dyes and different commercial yarns to try. She has also found new outlets in which to sell her work.

More often than not, weavers receive cash for their work today, although credit and trade are still employed in some posts and rug rooms. Prices received for a rug generally depend on the relative technical quality of the weaving and the visual appeal of the design and may range from $10 to $200 per square foot. It is entirely up to the weaver how her earnings should be spent, but money derived from rug sales usually provides direct support for the craftwoman's household and residential group—groceries, clothing, transportation, household supplies, livestock needs, and so forth.

At fifty-five, Sarah is a relatively young grandmother, with six sons, one daughter, and four grandchildren. All but one son who is away at college live in her residence unit. Because she takes a "professional" approach to weaving, most household work is delegated to her daughter and daughters-in-law in residence while her weaving takes precedence for her. In fact, she has worked forty hours per week as a weaving demonstrator outside of the home for years. Several years ago she "retired" and gave up her hourly wage from the Park Service job so that she could catch up on her private orders at home. She is still healthy and active, able to continue a full day's work at her loom. Her income from commissioned rugs is quite high because of her reputation for fine quality of work. Because of weaving, her frame house is more elaborately furnished than most in the community, complete with a gas-operated refrigerator.

Although grandmothers are eventually free from raising their own children, they often serve as caretakers for their grandchildren while their daughters work outside the home. In rural areas where daycare means a cooperative family enterprise, grandmothers who weave are ideal candidates for "childcare specialists." Craftwork coupled with childcare is an ideal combination, both taking place at home, with flexible scheduling.

Wilma spends a great deal of her time at her loom. So do her out-of-school grandchildren, whose divorced mother commutes to work and leaves them with Grandma each day. This provides Wilma with doubly useful roles.

For a period of several months during one year Marie moved to her married son's modern frame house in town. She left her own house in the hands of several older daughters and their children. This move served a variety of purposes—she could set up a large loom with a special rug and not be concerned that her work would get soiled from her own dirt floor hogan, she could weave during the evening with the electric lights, and she could stay warm with the central heating instead of constantly tending her woodstove. In exchange, she watched her son's two smaller children, along with her own baby daughter, while the son and his wife were at work.

Grandmothers may collaborate on rugs with their grandchildren and other family members. Roles within Navajo craft production are not as rigidly defined as sometimes portrayed in the literature (the one woman/one sheep/one

rug approach), and considerable latitude exists in role specialization. Many rugs are woven as collective enterprises rather than exclusive creations. One woman may take charge of the planning and may advise on the execution of a weaving project, with several relatives contributing to the spinning, dyeing, weaving, and finishing of a rug. It is natural that a grandmother, with experience and specialized knowledge, participate in such collaborations or provide auxiliary help.[12] The presence of an accomplished artisan can be influential in sustaining the high quality and monetary value of the rugs produced. Later I will describe how the name of a well-known grandmother may be used to increase the value of a rug without her direct involvement in its creation.

> As many as six or seven weavers can be found working at their respective looms under the shady ramada built in Barbara's family camp. Her daughter and granddaughter weave side by side, with her own loom a short distance away. Across the way two of her nieces (also called "daughters") work on their rugs on opposite sides of the same loom. One of her own sisters and, sometimes, another daughter also weave here. Smaller children and several puppies play nearby. The weavers take unofficial turns watching the children, while Barbara and her sister, both grandmothers, supervise the younger women's weaving and troubleshoot problems on any of the looms.

Some grandmothers contribute to the group effort by spinning yarn and doing other simple yet essential tasks (carding, skeining or winding yarn, stirring dye pots, and so forth), allowing others to excel in the more demanding activities such as designing and executing complex patterns. When younger women are employed outside the home or are going to school and simultaneously maintaining weaving projects, help from grandmothers in this way can be invaluable.

> Irene was once a very proficient weaver. Born in 1924 and rather frail now, she only weaves a small and very ordinary rug once in a while. She now belongs to a fairly large group of "occasional" weavers who do not sustain the craft over long periods. It is hard on her eyes and painful for her arthritic limbs. She does, however, supply several younger weavers with her own handspun yarn. This she does while herding sheep or while supervising her son as he cares for her cornfields. None of her own daughters weave, but Irene's role as spinner is important to other clan relatives in the community even if her own weaving has diminished. With three sons, four daughters, 19 grandchildren, and several great-

"grands," the income she derives from spinning (she is generally paid by the skein) supplements the subsistence earned from both her flocks and fields and from welfare funds. It thus provides a modicum of independence from her offspring, such that she still maintains two residences, one within the family camp and the other near her cornfields.

Sometimes weaving assistance becomes reciprocal between generations:

Rita's daughter, Ellen, first began weaving as an adult in the mid-1970s under her mother's tutelage. The mother set up the loom and at the very end undertook the difficult process of inserting the very last threads. In the intervening years Rita has lost some of her strength, and it is Ellen who now sets up their looms and who puts in the finishing threads while her mother weaves the middle portion. Mother and daughter share the proceeds from their jointly woven rugs in proportion to their contributions to the work.

Beyond basic maintenance or enhancement of rug production, grandmothers also may share responsibility for selling rugs. A grandmother may accompany her granddaughter to a trading post or other rug dealer and may enter into negotiations for a good price (although it is always acknowledged that the actual rug maker has final say on any decision to sell). Another grandmother may need assistance from a grandchild in selling a rug, often in the form of transportation or translation services.

Continued craft production is only possible as long as a woman's health is good and her back, hands, and eyes remain relatively strong. Even on an occasional basis, weaving requires physical activity that many older grandmothers cannot sustain, and those who are contributory decline in numbers as age increases. Extant weaving quality and local market tolerance for flaws in older women's work varies considerably, however. Some traders express a special fondness for the "grandma rugs," as Hubbell Trading Post's manager, Bill Malone, dubs them. Household contributions in this case may be viewed as minimal self-maintenance; that is, as at least enough for the grandmother to avoid being an overburdening financial or emotional drain on the rest of the family.

Over 75 years old and with failing eyesight, Shirley continues to weave fair-looking rugs that are still marketable. Her products are not as fine as they once were and she has slowed down considerably, but she is able to devote much more time to her craft now than when she was actively

raising the family. In fact, weaving is one of the few activities she pursues these days, as she rarely leaves her residence unit. Weaving is her sole source of earned income, which is supplemented by government subsidies. Her husband died some years ago, and although she sleeps and weaves in her own hogan, usually one of her grandchildren comes to lead her to one of her two daughters' nearby houses for meals.

Even when the quality of a woman's rugs has decreased considerably, weaving may sustain her autonomy and thereby contribute to her family's well-being by keeping the aging relative happily occupied and out of harm's way.

Although over 70 and restricted with severe arthritis, Joanna has two homes—a winter home with electricity and a summer cabin in the cool mountains. She has always divided the year between them, moving the family and a few possessions—especially her weaving tools—back and forth seasonally. Now her children are grown and married, with children, jobs, and lives of their own; some live in nearby towns while others have moved out of state. Because her husband is gone and she is getting frail, her children take turns visiting and doing household chores and general maintenance for her. Her grandchildren visit but only occasionally because they go to school and have other preoccupations. Living alone, Joanna spends most of her time seated at her loom, her days punctuated by occasional visits from family members and a few remaining friends.

Advisory. Many grandmothers have considerable specialized knowledge of and experience with weaving. They teach and provide advice to both beginning and more accomplished weavers. These instructional and cooperative efforts in which grandmothers share their expertise in craft technology and in cultural lore represent a more subtle form of involvement and status gain than the contributory mechanisms just discussed. The grandmother may assume an advisory role when she is no longer physically able to sustain an active production schedule, but she is just as likely to fulfill such a role while she is still active as an extension of a sharing and role-modeling pattern set earlier in life. Advisory capacities are intermediate between and may be maintained simultaneously with contributory and residual capacities.

Because grandmothers are expert weavers and because they are available while sitting at their looms, teaching others to weave often falls to them. Many young weavers credit their grandmothers as much as their mothers with getting them started. Some have memories of going to "Grandma's sheep camp in the summer" and learning to weave there. Others remember their grandmothers

coming to their home or living in their common residential unit and allowing the young girls to watch them as they wove. A number of mothers have encouraged their daughters to seek help from their more experienced grandmothers rather than from themselves.

> Jenelle's mother, Jean, is a good weaver, but Jean admits that her own mother is even better—more experienced, with a wider range of styles and techniques. Jean asked Jenelle's grandmother to set up a first loom for the granddaughter and arranged for Jenelle to spend the summer with her grandmother at sheep camp.

Grandmothers or grandparents who live alone often have grandchildren come and live with them. Sometimes this occurs on a temporary basis, for instance, during the summer, when school is out, but at other times informal fosterage, or more formal adoption, occurs, in which the grandmother (or grandparents) and grandchild form a more permanent nuclear family. Shomaker (1989, 1990) has recently documented fosterage practices in three Navajo communities and observes that while earlier reports mention children who were given to grandparents to take care of chores and give aid as their elders grew older and more frail, today grandparents more commonly become foster parents to benefit the child, not themselves. Reasons for fosterage range from incompetent parenting to economic hardships. More often than not, it is a daughter rather than the grandchild who is available to help aging grandparents after the foster children (biological grandchildren) have been raised. The cultural benefits accruing from the grandparent-grandchild relationship include most notably "the validation of Navajo values and grooming of intergenerational relationships" (Shomaker 1990:28).

> Sally grew up with her grandmother, while the other kids in her family were raised by her mother. She says that they had too many kids to be all together at home. At her grandparent's, there was always something to eat. Her grandmother wove big rugs very well. Sally also says that she learned everything from her grandmother by watching and imitating. Her grandmother never "taught," that is, lectured, her directly. Now Sally can make twills, two faced, and belt weaves as well as regular tapestry weaves, just as her grandmother could.
>
> Mary's son spent as much time with his grandmother as he could during the summer. It was from her, one year when he was about eight, that he borrowed some yarns and learned to weave a small mat. His grandmother said that even though his own mother ignored his interest,

she herself encouraged him. She is proud of his accomplishments, even though (or perhaps because?) it is uncommon for a Navajo man to weave.

The Navajo way of teaching is through demonstration—showing, not through lecturing, providing lessons, and making rules. Thus grandmothers often remain detached from any authoritarian or controlling position while still holding a certain amount of responsibility for weaving-socialization processes, just as they do in the other Navajo realms of childrearing and socialization (Leighton and Kluckhohn 1947).

Carol's grandmother showed her how to weave when she was a little girl. "I just sat there and watched her," she says, "Later, she helped me make a little loom and I just put the yarns into it, like she did. She wouldn't talk to me about the ways that it should be done—just show me. And then she would let me do it myself."

Not all grandmothers, of course, are effective teachers, nor are their pupils always successful learners. Young girls, used to the didactics of the modern school system, occasionally object that their grandmothers "don't know how to teach" properly and are often abrupt and unhelpful. They are, it is complained, "too old-fashioned."

Donna called her grandmother "mean" and said that she would not teach Donna how to weave. She would not explain how or why things were done a certain way. She would not set up a loom for Donna but instead expected the girl to watch her at work and to copy what she was doing. This old-fashioned way of learning was not how Donna and her schoolmates worked in their classes; they expected instruction and specific guidance. The grandmother, on the other hand, felt that if Donna couldn't watch patiently and learn to correct her own mistakes, then she wouldn't ever really understand how to weave. Teasingly, she called her "lazy." She wanted her granddaughter to learn how to weave but did not feel it was her job to direct each step.

Jenelle was eight when their grandmother set up a small loom for her when she spent the summer at her sheep camp. At the end of the summer Jenelle was not yet finished. Neither the grandmother nor the mother coerced her into completing it. After it was laid aside, the web became hopelessly tangled and was eventually discarded. Several years later, Jenelle asked her grandmother to set up another loom for her, which she did. This loom, also incomplete at summer's end, went home with Jenelle.

Only when Jenelle's mother would sit next to her and help with each weft passage would the girl weave. Because of school and other activities, Jenelle was still not finished with her small rug after two years.

Residual. Maxwell and Silverman (1970; cited in Fry 1980:4), in their cross-cultural study of 26 societies, conclude not surprisingly that "esteem of the elderly is related to the useful knowledge they control." Whether they continue to weave actively or not, grandmothers' knowledge of craft technology, aesthetics, and related lore remains a significant resource for following generations. Moreover, what makes Navajo weaving particularly special is that knowledge about the craft is often generalizable to other parts of the Navajo world and belief system. While grandchildren are taught or shown the tools, materials, and techniques of weaving, they may also be introduced to broader cultural beliefs and appropriate behavior. Through weaving, Navajo grandmothers can provide important role models to younger people and serve as resources about traditional life and thought. Once again, this knowledge often resides with a grandmother and is imparted to grandchildren whether she is actively weaving or "retired" from the craft.

To the Navajo, the concept of "making a living" refers to more than merely earning income but to *appropriate* ways of sustaining one's life.[13] Traditional values concerning subsistence activities—being active and productive, maintaining self-reliance, balancing your needs with those of others, retaining a closeness with the land, raising healthy livestock and crops—provide directions on *how* to live, not just how to acquire the wherewithal to live. "Making a living" represents an array of activities that contribute to a total way of life, including attitudes about that life. Weaving represents a productive set of tasks and thought processes on both economic and social levels and so represents the continued ability to make a "good living," or to live a good life. Based on the use of sheep's wool, it is a direct extension of raising sheep and living close to the land, both central issues in the right way to make a living.

Carolyn is a true crusader for weaving, sheep raising, and a traditional way of life. As a girl she attended Catholic schools, learned excellent English, and, in contrast, saw the value in her Navajo culture. She acknowledges contemporary changes on the reservation and because of these, although now over 65, she has attended Navajo Community College workshops and conferences on modern family welfare and health issues. Carolyn is a "revival" weaver in that she weaves less for economic reasons, according to her, than for its value as a marker of traditional Navajo life and its importance in retaining harmony and balance in the

> Navajo way. She takes an interest in the old style churro sheep and keeps samplers of many of the older saddle blanket weaves—her own mini-museum, as she calls it. She takes a direct interest in the education of her numerous grandchildren and frequently has several living with her, helping around the house and corrals.

Grandmothers and other elders are expected to maintain and disseminate traditional values such as those of hard work, patience, humility, and moderation. Weaving clearly exemplifies these values, and craftswomen embody them.

> During a *kinaaldá,* the puberty ceremony for young girls/women, tools from the loom are used to massage the body of the girl by an older and much esteemed woman in order to transform or "shape" the girl into a woman. These tools symbolically and literally represent aspects of traditional productivity and economic prosperity. Today they are often present in conjunction with modern symbols—car keys, cash, and other commercially manufactured valuables.

Recognizing the importance of intergenerational relationships in cultural preservation, several tribal programs in recent years have promoted grandparental contacts with children and young adults, using weaving as one of the linkages.

> Wilma was hired by the tribe to weave as a demonstrator in one of the local chapter houses. She is not strong enough to weave the large, handsome rugs that she used to make, but she is sharp enough to share her knowledge and values through weaving. Just her presence in the meeting-house provides a significant image, seated at a loom in the main hall, weaving rhythmically as others move in and out, preparing meals for the preschool and elderly program participants or working on Youth Corps projects. Workers occasionally stop to chat or admire her growing rug. Wilma reminds everyone of their own grandmothers and their special cultural heritage.
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> Barbara reported that the dorm mothers at her BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] boarding school were encouraged to spend time weaving or doing other crafts when they were not otherwise occupied. They were not hired to teach students, but it was hoped that their presence would be a positive and pervasive influence on children removed from the traditional activities of their homes. Barbara remembers watching a woman at her loom whenever she returned to the dorm from classes and between meals.

In a society in which knowledge and thought are considered tantamount to action; that is, where thinking the right thoughts and singing the right songs can powerfully control the world (Witherspoon 1977), knowing how to weave and understanding the philosophical and cultural background of the craft may be just as important as being a practicing, producing weaver.

> Shirley's failing eyesight prevents her from weaving rugs like those from her youth. Still, she works at her loom more often than not. Although none of her granddaughters, between the ages of four and 17, is learning to weave, they come around to watch from time to time. They are able to explain to a visitor just how she makes her rugs. Local traders consider her too old to contribute to the household economy—in their eyes she is "retired." But to her family, she still leads a productive life; she knows about weaving; she is a weaver.

Occasionally a grandmother's name on a rug's sales tag may be the only tangible contribution that she makes to the production of the rug. Certain family members have been known to use names of their well-known relatives (some quite elderly and unable to accomplish what the younger weavers could) to increase the prestige and price of a rug. Motivations for such misattributions may range from purely economic to an understanding at some level that, indeed, the grandmother was responsible for the creation of the rug even if she did not actually weave the entire piece.

> Stella posed proudly for a photograph, holding one of the rugs that her daughter-in-law had woven, as though it were her own. As she got older, weaving became physically too difficult for Stella to work at for hours on end, and yet she was still known as the best weaver in the area. Stella had taught her daughter-in-law how to weave, and the style of this little rug was almost indistinguishable from her own of a few years before. And besides, from time to time when her daughter-in-law wasn't working at the loom, Stella herself did weave small sections of this rug.

The impact of a grandmother's presence, of course, often remains long after she is gone. Examples set and lessons learned last for more than a single lifetime and may be passed on for several generations. Active craftswomen and noncraftswomen alike may credit their grandmothers and great-grandmothers with providing them with an appreciation for traditional ways. Weavers often acknowledge a grandmother for both the inspiration and the technical know-how to work at the loom.

Born in 1907 and raised by her grandmother (there were too many children to all stay with her mother), Bessie herself is now a grandmother to many children. She still recalls her own grandmother sitting at her loom, setting an example for how one should weave. Just as her grandmother "didn't teach me, she showed me," Bessie has never "taught" any of her granddaughters, but several have learned to weave "by watching me." Bessie weaves twills, two-faced rugs, and sash belts as well as regular tapestry rugs, just as her grandmother did.

Paula learned to weave from her older sister after their mother died, but she said the inspiration came from her grandmother. She and her sisters have a strong feeling of carrying on what the "old people" were doing. They worry that the traditions would be lost without their current efforts. Many bits of advice, warnings, and precautions about weaving came from Paula's grandfather, too. Ironically, Paula rarely follows any of the taboos that he taught her, but she remembers what she was told and hopes to teach her daughters the same things.

CONCLUSIONS

Through weaving, grandmothers' social responsibilities and cultural roles become symbolically manifest and pragmatically maintained in contemporary Navajo society. The practice of weaving represents opportunities to display and reinforce many valued aspects of culturally appropriate behavior—hard work, calm control, humility, resourcefulness, moderation. It provides a productive economic niche for many grandmothers and allows older women to continue working in their homes after other job opportunities have diminished. Many of these craftworkers also speak often of the personal satisfaction they derive from these creative activities.

Navajo grandmothers may gain or retain highly regarded status with their weaving activities through contributory, advisory, and residual roles. They participate in household economics and contribute to cultural integrity through continued craft production, through cooperative work and teaching, through role modeling, and through childcare and other localized tasks while they or others produce craft items. Knowledge and experience may be as valuable as actual production in many cases, especially where the knowledge of a traditional handmade craft has diminished with time in the general population.

The texture and details of Navajo life are highly varied from region to region, community to community, and family to family. Moreover, the culture is undergoing considerable change in response to both internal and external

pressures. The preceding examples were drawn from a wide socioeconomic range of families living on the Navajo Reservation, but all have highlighted families who carry on certain traditional activities, including weaving. These families along with many others also acknowledge significant changes in their lives and those of their children. Nuclear families are increasingly separate from the extended family, especially from the older generation. Many children live apart from their grandparents and are not exposed to the traditional activities of their elders on a regular basis. Young adults, even while living on the reservation, are often involved in outside schooling and employment that take them away from their extended families and leave little time to pursue craft production.

As Navajo culture continues to change and evolve, the usefulness of traditional knowledge, and of the grandmothers' roles in embodying and transferring that knowledge, must be constantly reevaluated. On the one hand, modern Navajo society places less and less emphasis on traditional life and values, which have been replaced by an emphasis on formal education, jobs, and off-reservation priorities (housing, transportation, goods, and services). On the other hand, revitalization has occurred in the form of increased appreciation for those evanescent elements of Navajo heritage that, while perhaps no longer economically expedient, still function as social and religious markers and ethnic identifiers.

Interestingly, there is growing evidence that many young Navajo women in their twenties and thirties are learning to weave for the first time, at later ages than women from earlier generations.[14] Moving beyond a sense of weaving as an integral part of the ideal Navajo woman's roles, some of these young women perceive weaving as a means to professional status as Native American artists. This future generation of grandmothers and weavers may conceive of their roles in considerably different ways than their own grandmothers do.

Weaving represents meaningful activities for grandmothers on the Navajo Reservation today on several significant levels—economically, socially, and psychologically. Navajo weaving provides effective economic roles for older women in contemporary society, serves to establish and sustain significant intergenerational relationships, and provides avenues for the effective maintenance of grandmothers' autonomy and self-respect.

NOTES

1. An earlier, unpublished version of this chapter (Hedlund 1985) examined the craft production of both elderly Navajo weavers and Pueblo potters. This chapter is an outgrowth of that earlier presentation but focuses solely on Navajo weavers.

2. Data collected for individuals and family units include the types of rugs woven and tools and materials used; accounts of the learning, weaving, and marketing decision-making processes; demographic and biographic data; and specific explorations about weaving aesthetics and belief systems.

3. Studies of elderly people have often evolved in this manner, as Simič (1978:13) notes: "Most ethnographic sources including material on the aged are not the deliberate product of a specific problem orientation concerned directly with the question of aging, but rather the incorporation of data of gerontological interest has been the inevitable by-product of anthropology's so-called holistic approach, by which cultures are perceived in their totality as functionally integrated systems."

4. Kin terms are listed here from ego's perspective, in their first-person possessive form, generally consisting of the prefix *shi-* (my) plus the stem, in this case, *-má* (mother) plus the adjective *sání* (old). Alternatives would be to use only the stem (cf. Aberle 1961:196) or the impersonal pronoun form, *ha-* (one's). The orthography of Young and Morgan (1980:399–401) is used throughout this chapter.

5. This parallels the practice of referring to the mother's sisters as *shimá* (my mother) or as *shimá yá zhí* (my little mother). "Navajo often say, *'Ashįįhi* ('mother's clan') *ei shima adaat'e'* ('Those of my mother's clan are my mothers'). The person, as a cultural construct, of one's mother's matrilineal descent category is one's mother" (Witherspoon 1975:43).

6. The paternal clan term "born for," *báshíshchíín* ("I am born for him or it" [Lamphere 1977:87]), contrasts to the maternal clan term "born to," *nlíjí,* "I am, I belong." Witherspoon explains further: "[In addition to matrilineal descent,] Navajo culture also defines a child as a descendant of its father. All children whose fathers are members of the salt clan are put into a descent category called 'those born for the salt clan.' 'Born for' is the linguistic description of the father-child relationship according to descent reckonings. This category, however, excludes the father, and is therefore not patrilineal. . . . The affective and functional meanings that are part of this descent category are the same as those of the matrilineal descent categories. Those who are born for the same clan are not to marry, but are to be hospitable to each other and to give each other help in ceremonies" (1975:42).

7. Lamphere (1977:170) has documented for the Navajo cultural system the strength of both maternal and paternal kin ties and of local clan associations over any general clan membership.

8. A *nálí* may, in fact, come to be considered as *shimá* under certain circumstances. Witherspoon (1977:128) notes that in the case of patrilocal residence after a mother has died and the father and his children remain with his family, the children may switch from *shinálí* to *shimá* (my mother) in referring to their father's mother.

9. Lamphere (1977) has described this changing nature as part of the "development cycle" of domestic groups. For senior couples within the group, she notes, "As a couple becomes older, their position in relation to others in terms of authority and communication changes" (1977:84).

10. The term "tradition" is used here in a dynamic sense that includes notions of change and the incorporation of "foreign" ideas into indigenous ways rather than in the narrower, more conservative sense. Weaving itself is a borrowed "tradition" that has been embellished

over three centuries by Navajos in response to outside stimulus and markets. This more flexible and dynamic concept of what is considered to be contemporary "Navajoness" reflects the current cultural critique by Clifford (1988) and others.

11. Press and McKool's "control" category has been deleted, as monopolistic control is not an ideal nor a pragmatic Navajo orientation. Although it can be argued that at times Navajo individuals may gain and maintain control over others' actions, such behavior is overshadowed by the Navajo sense of individual autonomy and for the purposes of discussion may be subsumed into the other three categories.

12. It should be noted that this direction of a collaborative effort is not "control" in the sense that Brown (1985:7) suggests when she notes that elder women often gain increased authority and the right to extract labor from younger kin; in this, as in most Navajo undertakings, the individuals involved still retain their independence.

13. Terry Reynolds, now at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, first pointed out this concept to me.

14. In contrast, most women in earlier generations learned to weave during their preteen or teenage years.