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TRANSFER OF CHILDREN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GRANDMOTHERS AMONG THE NAVAJO INDIANS

ABSTRACT. This paper explores informal fosterage patterns in 98 cases in the Navajo Tribe. It examines the cultural basis of social support offered by grandmothers in issues of substitute parenting. The majority of children in the sample were given to mother's mother. The precipitating factors in fosterage were: inability of parents to meet the needs of rearing their young, grandmother's needs, or cultural violations. Fosterage is an important mechanism for integration, versatility and resourcefulness for the tribe.

Key Words: fosterage, adoption, grandparent-grandchild relationships, exchange, reciprocity, Navajo, intergenerational relationships.

PROFILE OF FOSTERAGE AND THE NAVAJO

The family has been characterized as a matrix of intergenerational relationships reciprocally bound (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1985; Kornharber and Woodward 1985; Richardson 1964). Kornharber and Woodward (1985) maintain that the fiber which binds these relationships is established in the earlier generations and woven into the web of subsequent generations through the warp and woof of socialization and kinship. Validation of the worth of the fiber is demonstrated by the grandparents when they assume senior roles as caretakers, role models, historians, mentors and chief adjuncts to their children and their grandchildren. Moreover, in times of crisis and need the most common source of aid is from one's family support system (Perlman and Rook 1987).

Reciprocity, intimacy and social networks are the interactional characteristics of family social support between generations. An example of this interchange of resources can be seen in the transfer of care of the children from the biological mother to the care of another kin. It is a serviceable and useful process and myriad expressions of this behavior around the world attest to the creativity of families in providing for their progeny in this way. It provides a mechanism by which families can respond to physical needs and limited resources in a manner that meets normative expectations of the culture. One case in point is that of fosterage of grandchildren to their grandmothers.

This paper is a discussion of intergenerational patterns of fosterage found in a sample drawn from Navajo Indians of three locations in the southwestern United States: Torreon and Alamo, New Mexico, and Tuba city, Arizona. It examines the pattern of childrearing in contemporary situations in which grandmothers assume the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, and the integration of that pattern with cultural values.

The transfer of children to grandmothers in the three widely separated regions

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of the 18,000,000-acre Navajo Reservation and its environs, varies in form and process, and in historic precedent within and between sites.

The study stimulated such questions as: given the findings on transfer of Navajo children, what can be known about intergenerational family relationships among the Navajo, and in particular, what is the importance of three-generation breadth and depth in Navajo extended families; What functions does this transfer process serve in Navajo culture?

Fosterage

The concept of fosterage has not yet been fully defined and its use in the literature varies. It has been referred to as transfer, fosterage, adoption, child-circulation, child holding, baby-sitting, and more. For example, Herskovits (1937) referred to fostering as "quasi-adoption", and Firth (cited in Brady 1976:198) as "quasi-kinship – the simulation of kinship". Fonseca (1986:15) discusses it as child circulation, i.e., "the transfer of nurturance responsibility for a child from one adult to another."

Fosterage and adoption have been used as means of sheltering orphans, and providing the childless with progeny and heirs (Goody 1969), improving educational, economic, and living conditions (Fonseca 1986; Stack 1974), and providing a labor force (Cohen 1969) and, as a major survival strategy among some black urban families (Stack 1974). The fluidity of the term muddles the literature, and clouds the child's status in many societies.

Payne-Price (1981–82:134) differentiates fosterage from the more formal judicial action of adoption, stating that the latter is "a legal process by which a child is taken into a family and raised as a natural offspring; the biological parents give up all rights to the child ... fosterage [is] the raising of a child by people other than his/her natural or adoptive parents ... parents do not give up their rights to the child and may retrieve him/her. There is no permanent transfer of primary parental rights." In this paper fosterage is used to convey that informal transfer of young children to grandmothers for care.

History of Navajo Fosterage

Fosterage is an established, informal, but culturally validated practice among the Navajo; it occurs in response to one or more needs expressed by either the grandparents or the parents. Although the practice is common, not all children are given to others for parenting, nor are all children in a family given. Grandmothers who have not been asked to rear grandchildren, or have not asked to have them, state that there is no need to because, "my children are doing a good job of raising the grandchildren."

At the turn of the century, families were sending children to older Navajo to be helpers. Kluckhohn and Leighton (1948) and others (Shepardson and Hammond 1970; Reichard 1938), described how grandchildren served as eyes, ears, hands, and feet for their frail elderly grandparents. The grandchildren were

usually about eight years of age; their duties were, among other things, to haul water, chop wood, work in the fields, and herd sheep, from which they became known as "little sheepherders". Generally, the grandparent-grandchild alliance was described as the strongest bond in Navajo culture; this was a warm association in which perpetuation of traditional teaching could be effected. The fostered child became known to others as the *child of the grandparent*, changing in status from that of the biological grandchild. The biological mother withdrew from her role as parent to a more distant relationship, similar to that of an older sister. The grandchild lived with the grandparents until adulthood.

In this early and long-standing form of fosterage, the elderly person was in need of aid and was given a kinsman as a helper. Moreover, according to Kluckhohn (1944), giving a grandchild to its grandparents was understood as a demonstration of respect to the grandparents, as well as a means of minimizing friction with the elders and thus, in some instances, reducing the possibilities of the elders exercising witchcraft. Each recipient was indebted to the donor for such a gesture. Perhaps that form of assistance still exists, but is not readily apparent. More likely today is the situation in which an infant grandchild is given to the grandmother, and when the child becomes capable attends to some of the chores in the household until adulthood. But the original reason for the child being in the grandmother's home is not the grandmother's frailty. Moreover, when the grandchild is grown and the grandmother is in need it is more often the daughter, not the granddaughter, who provides care even though the granddaughter was identified to be the eventual caregiver.

A permutation of fosterage outside the Navajo clan and kinship system that is offered by the Mormon missionaries on the Navajo Reservation today is the practice of "placement." When the children are about eight years of age the Mormons offer the parents the opportunity to send their children to Mormon families in Utah to be reared there during the school year, attend schools off the Reservation, and be socialized into urban life. The children return home at the end of the spring term to spend the summer with their parents. If they wish to return to Utah in the fall, another Mormon family is selected so as to keep the children from becoming attached to their Mormon families and not wanting to return to their Navajo families. There are certain limitations to these arrangements, not the least of which is the emotional turmoil and identity ambiguity created by living in two distinctively different environments (Topper 1979).

In addition to the informal fosterage situations in the past, young Navajo children were formally adopted by missionaries and non-Navajo families who convinced Navajo parents that they could offer the children better homes and educations.

In recent times, Navajo adoption laws have been instituted that specifically require Navajo children to be preferentially adopted by the matrilineal grandmother. Adoption is handled by the Navajo Tribal Court. Maternal preference is strongly supported in both fosterage and adoption. If the maternal grandmother is not available, efforts are made to place the child with another maternal relative before seeking adoption with a relative of the father.

Moreover, the division of Social Welfare within the tribal legal system encourages Navajo to adopt Navajo and avoid putting the children in non-Navajo homes.

THE STUDY

Methodology and Sample

The study reported here is based on a sample of 98 cases of transfer of grandchildren to mother's mother (MM) or father's mother (FM). Cases were identified by health care workers, clinic staff, and relatives. After the first few cases were interviewed the sample became one of a snowballing effect, wherein those interviewed told of others in similar circumstances. The 98 instances reported here were made up of 26 cases from Torreon, 37 from Alamo, and 35 from the Tuba City area. Those transferred to the mother's mother constituted 82.5 percent of those reported in this paper, along with 17.2 percent transferred to the father's mother. (See Table I.)

TABLE I
Number of cases examined of children transferred to mother's mother and father's mother in Torreon, Alamo, and Tuba City

Area	Mother's Mother	Father's Mother	Total
Torreon	17	9	26
Alamo	32	5	37
Tuba City	32	3	35
Total	81 (82.5%)	17 (17.2%)	98

The primary question that grounded the interviews and from which all data emerged was, "What was the process by which you came to have your grandchild under your care?" From that, the woman described in detail the situation and activity preceding her acquisition of a child; the relationship she presently enjoyed with the child and the child's parents; advantages and disadvantages of the living arrangements for the three generations; and, the cultural expectations and consequences of acquiring a child in this manner.

The basic unit for interviewing families and gathering data was the household. Interviews were elicited from members of households in which grandchildren were given to grandmothers, as well as in 17 households where the potential for such giving existed but had not occurred. An interpreter from the community was employed in each of the three areas, but where possible the interviews were conducted in English. In all cases, interviews were conducted in the home with the grandmother who had been given a grandchild; in several cases the husband or other family members were also present and volunteered information and oftentimes elaborated on it from other perspectives. The interviews emphasized open-ended questions that flowed from previous discussion. The informant set the tone and the course of the conservation. Once the purpose of the inquiry had

been explained the women spoke freely and at length about their perspective of fosterage in their situations, and their expectations for the future kin relationships relevant to the fosterage.

Genealogies were developed, recorded and validated for all households in the sample. They were particularly valuable in understanding the pathway of fosterage. A useful secondary tool was mapping of the locations of dwellings in each camp visited.

Study Areas

The sample was drawn from three locations of the Navajo territory: Torreon and Alamo, New Mexico, and Tuba City, Arizona. Each is distinctly different in terms of physiography and culture. Tuba City is on the Reservation in the jurisdiction of the Western Navajo Agency, Alamo is an outlying enclave of Reservation land in New Mexico, while Torreon is an area of the Eastern Navajo Agency but outside the Reservation boundaries in what is referred to as the "checkerboard." The communities contrast in size, population density, degree of isolation, availability of roads and resources, and proximity to Agency headquarters. They are also dissimilar in their relationships with the main Reservation, and in their degrees of observation of and adherence to traditional Navajo religion. The Navajo of the three areas share in a common history and language, in their recognition of the Navajo tribal jurisdiction, and in social and political structure. In general, the social structure of the Navajo culture is egalitarian and matrilineal, with a predominance of matrilocal residence patterns developed in extended family camps.

Tuba City is the largest community on the Reservation, with an estimated 5,045 inhabitants. It is remarkably different from either Alamo or Torreon. There is ample evidence of conservative traditional beliefs of Navajo religion and culture, despite the area being affected by the disruption resulting from the Joint Use Area dispute with the Hopis (a disagreement of long-standing over control of certain lands), modest tourist trade and proliferation of various non-Navajo religious missionaries.

Alamo and Torreon are more similar than either is to Tuba City; both have much smaller populations, greater isolation, and fewer resources. Alamo has three Protestant churches, almost no evidence of Navajo religion, and only one medicine man. Torreon is influenced by a variety of churches in addition to the Navajo religion, indigenous camp churches, and very active medicine men.

The degree of isolation contributed to the differences among the three areas, Tuba City has a hospital and legal services, making formal adoption and court orders more prominent in transfer of children to others for rearing, than in Torreon or Alamo. Tuba City has less clan concentration and depth of extended families (Levy 1962), compared with Alamo. Alamo has more indication of grandmother intervention than collateral-relative intervention, and a greater incidence of parenting needs.

Profile of Relevant Navajo Culture

Navajo demographics

It is estimated that the Navajo population is increasing at about two percent annually. The Navajo estimate their population at about 150,000. The 1980 Bureau of Census tabulation, however lists it as 110,433, which leads to a 1988 estimate of about 130,000. Of the 1980 official total, there were 13,983 married couples, 4,822 households with no husband present, and an average of 4.70 persons per household. The average age was 22, and only 4.5 percent of the total population were over 65 years of age.

Kinship structure

The fundamental unit of Navajo organization is the nuclear family of a woman, her husband, and their unmarried children. The relationships which unite these people are the kinship bond of mother and children and the affine bond of husband and wife. The unity represented in these two bonds is expressed through the concept of *k'éí* (Witherspoon 1975:120,37; 1977:95–116). A more general form of solidarity is *k'é* which expresses a relationship of compassion, friendship, cooperation and enduring solidarity. It implies a bond of continuous obligation, assistance, generosity and goodwill. *K'éí* is a special form of *k'é* reserved especially for relatives by descent, e.g., in the word *shik'éí*, "my relatives by descent", and is the basic guide for behavior with relatives. It is an ideal relationship in the social structure of the Navajo whereby peacefulness, harmony, and social order are sought. *K'éí* expresses a bond of continuous obligation (Witherspoon 1975:82–89; 1977:37, 111). Witherspoon (1975:22) asserts that solidarity comes from sharing and is the basis of family social structure; without it there is no family. "Kinsmen are those who sustain each other's life by helping one another, protecting one another, and by the giving or sharing of food and other items of subsistence" (Witherspoon 1975:22).

Within the extended nuclear family the child has a relationship of *k'éí* with the mother, the father, and the grandparents, but the bond between the mother and children is the strongest, most intense, and most enduring. Not only does the bond gain strength through maternal birth and care, but it is reinforced by a common bond of clanship as well (Lamphere 1977:70,81). It develops from the mother giving life to, and sharing sustenance with, her children. There is affection and warmth in emotional behavior. This series of actions expresses the bond and is the ideal *k'éí* (Witherspoon 1977:85; 1975:20). Children are taught by mother and other kin the importance of respect for their mothers.

The value of "mother" is further reinforced by the positive influence given to women in Navajo myths and legends. Myths depict the Navajo woman in a protective, nurturing role that provides the foundation for a stable society. The character and position of women is one of warmth and strength. The "... mother, and by extension her mother before her, is the cardinal nourisher granting life, food, gifts, and clan identity" (Harrison 1973:209).

The role of the grandparents in the lives of the grandchildren is very warm,

loving, solicitous, and indulgent (Leighton and Kluckhohn 1948:102–103). "The proportion of the children ... who have been wholly or partially reared by grandparents, sister of the mother or other relatives ... is surprisingly high" (Leighton and Kluckhohn 1948:46). This is more typical, however, of the mothers' mothers than fathers' mothers because of the predominance of matrilocal residence patterns and clan structure that provide the maternal grandparents and grandchildren more contact and a common clan they were all born into (Aberle 1961:171–172). In terms of kinship structure, the paternal grandparents are removed from their grandchildren by two links of affinity and two links of descent. In addition, the maternal grandfather is also distanced structurally from his grandchildren because his major clan is different from that of his wife's clan. In essence, this makes him an affine to his grandchildren.

Clan Importance and Social Bonds

All Navajo belong to clans. It is a major mark of identity, and clan siblings and relatives are as valuable as those established by lineage. Although clan identity begins with kinship it extends beyond it. The mother becomes the connecting link between the children and all other relatives. One considers all persons of one's mother's clan to be clan brothers and sisters even if blood lines may not be traceable. The mother's clan is the most prominent in Navajo structure, although a total of six clan relationships are recognized by each person. In order of clan importance, from greater to lesser: one is born "into" one's mother's clan, born "for" one's father's clan, and given recognition of a relationship with each of the grandparents' clans. Substantial recognition is given to one's kinsmen established by clan, as well as those established by blood. One may not marry a member of one's mother's clan even if one is unable to trace blood ties. To break this taboo would constitute incest (Aberle 1961:109–111; Lamphere 1977:87; Witherspoon 1977:95–110).

Clan identity also establishes the relationship of people within a family. Clan identity is reflected in terms of address to family and clan members. When someone is asked who she is, she will reply with her identity in her mother's clan, and perhaps add the clan she was "born for." The mother's clan is that of a "mother" to the child. As an abstract concept the clan is referred to as *shimá*, "my mother". All the people of that clan are collectively "my mother". Through the maternal lineage, a child will call the mother *shimá* and the maternal grandmother *shimásání*, or "my aged mother". By the same token the mother's sisters are referred to as *shimá yazhí*, or "my little mother", and are also of the same clan as the child.

The importance of social as well as genealogical distance is also expressed in titles of address. Maternal relatives are closer than parental ones. When this distance is perceived as having been altered, titles of address change to reflect this perception. As Kluckhohn and Leighton (1948:58) noted, and is still exhibited today, "some relationships are foreshortened, so that the children of the mother's sisters, for example, are addressed with the same word as actual biological brothers and sisters, just as the mother's sisters are also called

"mother'." This occurs regularly when a child is being reared by a grandmother. *Shimásání* is changed to *shimá*. The maternal grandmother term, *shimásání*, has been used for paternal grandmother instead of *shinálí*, if the grandchildren are living in a camp where grandchildren are close to them and *shimásání* better expresses the relationship between the generations, i.e., a stronger sense of bond between the two generations.

Norms Endorsing Fosterage and Family Interaction

The norms of reciprocity are culturally defined. There are many prescriptions for being a "good Navajo." They are predicated on the assumption that one receives help when in need and offers it when able. Lamphere (1977:36) identified the norms of such aid as: Take care of your possessions, your parents, your children and the aged; help your wife and her family, and anybody in need.

Findings

Factors that lead to fosterage

The major precipitating factor found in fosterage of grandchildren to grandmothers currently was the inability demonstrated by the parents to meet the needs of rearing their young. This was a major change from historical precedents when older grandchildren were given to frail grandparents to assist in household and herding tasks. Five themes emerged from the data; four involved assistance from the grandmothers for resolution.

The closest parallels to fosterage patterns of the past were those instances in which the grandmother was given a grandchild as a sign of respect. In addition, six grandmothers had indicated they were lonely and would like to have a child around as a companion, that they would like to rear another child. One grandchild was chosen by both grandmother and grandfather to live with them and be groomed as a medicine man. Only one child was given to the grandmother to become a sheep herder. In this situation the grandmother had one of the largest herds in the community.

The most prevalent precipitating factor for fosterage, however, was a deficit in parenting skills in situations where a combination of variables combined to create an unhealthy living environment for the grandchildren. Many, but not all, were precipitated by alcohol-use, immaturity, and poverty. The grandchildren were seen by the grandmothers as neglected, rejected, or abandoned. The parents who recognized the seriousness of the situation often gave one or all of the children to a grandmother. In other cases, the grandmother simply exercised her authority as the older generation and took the children to her home and reared them.

The next most common problems precipitating fosterage were those creating a change in the parent's lifestyle. Most often it was death of a parent, a job off the Reservation or remarriage. In instances of remarriage the mothers reported that the second husband did not want the children of the first husband living in his

house. It created considerable friction, and the children were given to the grandmother in order to preserve harmony in the second marriage.

In situations in which the workload was too heavy for the mother, the grandmother was sought as a resource. This was evident in situations where the new mothers were still in high school, and although they cared for their new babies, they did not have sufficient time to mother them. There were nine instances in which the mother was unwed, but this was not counted as important in and of itself as a reason for fosterage.

Grandmothers were also an asset to the mothers who had large families, new twins, or fragile children. One of the children would be given to or taken by the grandmother. This was true even where there were twins. Only one would go to live with the grandmother. Where a child was particularly fragile and the grandmother's wisdom was valued, the child was also given.

Marrying a clan sibling is a breach of a cultural taboo and is considered incest. In one such instance the couple married off the Reservation without checking each other's clans. When they returned to the Reservation their parents pointed out the cultural violation. The marriage was dissolved and the child born soon after was given to the maternal grandmother.

The reason for the transfer of a child are shown in Table II.

TABLE II
Reason for transfer of children to grandmothers

	Reason	Occurrence by site			
		Torreon	Alamo	Tuba City	Total
1.	Grandmother's needs	8	6	1	15
2.	Poor parenting skills	6	15	17	38
3.	Change in parent's life	10	9	15	34
4.	Parental workload	2	10	7	19
5.	Cultural violation	-	-	1	1
	Total	26	40	41	107

(*Note*: Totals may represent more than one cause for a single transfer. In some cases two or three variables were involved in a single situation.)

The Fostered Child

The majority of cases of fosterage involved children, two years of age and under, of either sex. Sex of the child was not a concern in fosterage. Of all children in the sample, 56 percent were female, 44 percent male. In all cases the new caregiver was expected to act as mother and teacher to her charge, attending to such skills as weaving, housework, and cooking.

The majority of times only one child was transferred, but in times of immediate crisis such as death of a parent several children were transferred at once. The pattern is evident in Table III. Of the total number of 53 grandmothers

receiving grandchildren, 29 received only one child. It was rare for them to receive more than three children. The three situations in Alamo and Tuba City where grandmothers assumed parenting for five or six children followed the death of the children's mothers.

TABLE III
Number of children fostered per family by location

	Location						
No. Children			Torreon		Alamo		Tuba City
Fostered per Family	MM	FM	MM	FM	MM	FM	Total Families
1	7	6	7	1	8	–	29
2	3	–	5	2	2	–	12
3	–	1	3	–	3	1	8
4	1	–	–	–		–	1
5	–	–	–	–	1	–	1
6	–	–	1	–	1	–	2
Total families	11	7	16	3	15	1	53

(MM = Mother's mother; FM=father's mother)

TABLE IV
Number of mothers' mothers and fathers' mothers receiving grandchildren for fosterage

Location	Mothers' mothers	No. children	Fathers' mothers	No. children
Torreon	11	17	7	9
Alamo	16	32	3	5
Tuba City	15	32	1	3
Total Grandmothers	42		11	(53)
Total Children		81		17 (98)

The Recipient

The mother's mother was the most prevalent recipient in the sample, as shown in Table I. The recipient-grandmothers today are 45 to 60 years old and in good health. There is stated preference for not only transfer of children to mother's mother, but only to women, so even when a child is given to its grandparents it is given to the mother of the couple. The predominance of giving to mother's mother is even more pronounced if one looks at families where children were transferred rather than when treating each child transferred as a single case. As shown in Table IV, of 53 grandmothers who took 98 grandchildren in fosterage, the number of actual children transferred in each situation varied. The number of children ranged from one to six per grandmother. But the number of fathers'

mothers receiving grandchildren was considerably less when compared to the number of mothers' mothers participating in this informal fosterage. Only 17 children were fostered to 11 of fathers' mothers, as compared to 81 children reared by 42 of mothers' mothers.

Major factors influencing this were the matrilocal living arrangements and the strong mother-daughter relationships prevalent among the Navajo. One turns to members of one's own camp as a first resource when in need of assistance. A typical example was that of a daughter living in a matrilocal camp with her mother, and when she gained employment in town she left her own daughter with the grandmother, knowing that she could not adequately care for the child and work in an urban setting.

Daughters who were not living with their mothers oftentimes travelled to their mothers' camps to give the mothers the children in fosterage. An example is Ella, age 20. Soon after Sally was born, Ella travelled from New York to the Navajo Reservation in order to give her child to her mother, Sarah, age 68. It was Ella's sixth child. She had been living with her husband in the east, but they separated during the pregnancy. Ella was returning to her mother's camp when she went into premature labor and delivered in Ohio. When Sally gained enough weight to be discharged, Ella and her children took a bus back to the Reservation. Three of the children were put in a boarding school. Sally and the other three were left with Ella's mother, Sarah. But Sally was specifically given as gift to the grandmother Sarah, with the stipulation that Sally would be Sarah's child; she would be well-cared for and taught how to be a "good Navajo", just as would the other three children. But when Sally was grown she would reciprocate with care for her maternal grandmother. Ella asked her mother to take the baby because Ella feared for her health; the baby was very small and had health problems. Ella also had no way of rearing her children unless she worked, but could not care for an infant if she worked. Moreover, she considered her mother an expert at the task of mothering.

When the husband's mother was the recipient, the reason was generally proximity of location, or conflict between the mother's mother and the parents of the grandchild. This strategy was chosen if the father's mother was supportive of caring for the grandchild. In the situations where this occurred, the young couple was living in the husband's mother's camp and the children were using the Navajo term of address, *shimásání*, (old mother), instead of *shinálí* to address the patrilateral grandmother and grandfather.

Initiation of Fosterage

The transfer was initiated by the mother, the father, the grandmother, or the grandchild. In Alamo many more grandmothers intervened, but there were no reported instances in which a father or a grandchild asked to have the grandmother assume care and companionship of the grandchild. These initial transactions were as shown in Table V.

As shown in Table V, mothers asked to foster their children to their mothers when they were in need of assistance. However, they also gave their children to

their mothers when they thought the grandmother would benefit from such an alliance with a grandchild. There were transfers that carried with them a very warm message of honor and respect for the grandmother.

Fathers asked to have their children fostered only when their wives died, or when they thought their wives needed help because of the large family. Then they asked their own mothers to take the children, not the maternal grandmothers.

TABLE V
Initiation of transfer of young child to grandmother in Torreon, Alamo, and Tuba City

Person asking for transfer	Study Site			
	Torreon	Alamo	Tuba City	Total
Child's mother	18	13	13	44
Child's father	4	–	3	7
Recipient grandmother	3	24	17	44
Grandchild	1	–	2	3
Totals	26	37	35	98

Grandmothers seemed to have broad recognized authority among the parent generation. If the grandmother deemed that her daughters were not parenting adequately, or were too overburdened with mothering duties, she simply went to the daughter's house and announced that she was taking a grandchild. The most common reasons for such drastic measures were based on the grandmother's perception of situations occurring in the child's home.

She could also be more indirect. She could encourage a particular grandchild to stay at her hogan, ask for a young child, or ask for the child about to be born. They asked because they were lonely, liked to have a small child around, or worried about the cultural education of the grandchildren in Navajo culture.

On a few occasions a grandchild asked to live with the grandmother. They also refused to leave when a temporary arrangement had come to an end. These were difficult situations; oftentimes they came about because the mother had to take care of another sibling who was ill, in need of surgery, or away from home. When the crisis had resolved the mother came to take the fostered child home, but was refused by the child.

Consequences of Fosterage

Grandchild fosterage carried with it several different consequences: the child could be temporarily reared by the grandmother with the intent to return it to the mother; it could become a permanent member of the grandmother's residence, and seen as her child, but with no particular message of honor attached to it; it could be given to the grandmother as a symbolic gift, bearing the honor and respect for the grandmother one sees with gifts; or, it could culminate in a formal, legal adoption.

It was found that grandchildren were given as gifts, specifically as an act of respect toward the grandmother. That did not, however, negate the mother's need for help as well. Permanency of transfers depended solely on the situations that precipitated the original fosterage. It could be permanent because the mother could not cope or had died, or temporary, because of some short-term crisis in the mother's life. Initial transfers could eventually be converted to gifts.

When the mother gave the child as a gift to her mother it was only a gift so long as the child wanted to be with the mother's mother. Navajo recognize that the governing factor is the child's desires. The child could choose to leave and return to his biological mother, but this seldom happens because the bond between maternal grandmothers and their grandchildren is very strong. It is a desired relationship, highly valued.

In all permanent transfers, including gifts and adoptions, the grandchild became known as the offspring of the new mother (i.e., the grandmother) and the biological mother assumed a relationship similar to that of an older sister, relinquishing all rights and duties as a parent of the child. The grandmother developed a relationship of parent to child with the grandchild, and terminology changed to indicate this new closeness. The grandmother came to be called *shimá*, "my mother", by the grandchild, and the biological mother is referred to by name or sister kinship term, indicating greater distance from the child. In all cases the transfer created a new form of alliance between the grandmother and the grandchild and reaffirmed, possibly strengthening, an old bond between mother and daughter. This finding is evident in other literature on adoption and various forms of fosterage worldwide (e.g., Shore 1976:164–199).

In Table VI, following, is the breakdown of the number of agreement modes by which transfer occurred in each of the three areas.

TABLE VI
Types of informal fosterage agreements to grandmothers in Torreon, Alamo, and Tuba City

	Torreon	Alamo	Tuba City	Total
Temporary	1	3	4	8
Temporary cum gift	1	–	1	2
Permanent	1	23	9	33
Gift	22	7	13	42
Adopted	–	–	8	8
Gift cum adopted	1	4	–	5
Total	26	37	35	98

In cases in which temporary fosterage had been converted to the status of a gift, the final conversion was decided by the biological mother. The original transaction was often initiated by the child's mother, but there were also times when the child was taken from the mother's care by one of the grandmothers of the child. If the child was given to either grandparent, the informants stated that the child was given specifically to the grandmother in either case.

Where transfer was to be a gift, the words to signify it were used: *awéé' baa yílyá*, "she gave me a baby (as a gift)." This offering was considered the finest gift the daughter could make to her mother; it was a gift of love, a gift from the heart. The Navajo also have a word for giving that simply implies transfer; it does not carry with it the depth of honor and status indicated in giving a gift. Generally, in both the gift-giving and the permanent-giving the conservation included comments like, "I am giving you my child. Take good care of her, raise her to be a good Navajo, and when you are old she will take care of you."

The grandchild was presented as a gift and the act was an indication of honor and respect toward the grandmother. As a result the child became an heir to the grandmother. In return, if, at some future time the grandmother became feeble the grandchild would minister to her. Many of the children had matured as helpers during their tenure with their grandmothers by the time of the project. However, it also occurred that elderly grandmothers received care from their own children after the fostered grandchildren had grown to adulthood and left the household.

The need for formal adoption was rarely voiced in relation to fosterage; it only occurred with five grandmothers. In Torreon a mother rejected her child and gave it to the maternal grandmother, who in turn formally adopted it. A similar situation occurred in Alamo where the parents of two children were alcoholics. The father's mother took the children "for their own good"; they were later acknowledged as having been given to the father's mother, who formally adopted them.

A second family also adopted two children in Alamo, but there is some debate about whether or not those children were actually adopted through the courts. There are no papers to substantiate the claim.

The final two cases of adoption that surfaced were in Tuba City. In both instances the mothers of the children died and the children were adopted by their maternal grandmothers. "It was the natural thing to do." The transfer was legalized through court action. The child's clan was changed to match that of the adoptive parents, and in one case the child's name was changed. Elaborate paper work was initiated to support this process. There were no other cases in the study where the grandmothers indicated a need to invoke a formal legal claim on the children. They stated that it was up to the children if they wanted to stay.

Discussion and Conclusions

The family support evident in Navajo fosterage cannot occur without the pre-existing family and clan network, geographic proximity, and a series of long-term relationships. The reciprocal relationships, interaction, advice, feedback and communication, as well as intimacy and trust serve the purpose of allowing family members to grow and develop, to cope during adversity, and to become more versatile and resourceful in acquiring necessary resources (Kane 1988; Mishel and Braden 1987; Perlman and Rook 1987).

If the manifest verbal statements and observable actions were taken as the

only evidence as to how and why fosterage occurred in Navajo extended families, one could readily conclude that the pattern of fosterage was governed by chance or serendipity because words and actions were often seemingly contradictory.

The patterns, however, were generally guided by cultural design. Young children were transferred to the maternal grandmother more often than to any other person. This action followed the recognized norms of the Navajo tribe. There is a very strong message that children should be kept within the tribe so they can be socialized into the Navajo values and traditions. The Navajo are well aware of the problems that result when their children are not reared within the culture.

The function of fosterage found during this study was as a means of finding child support in response to expressed needs. Where no need was evident children were not fostered for substitute parenting. However, the fosterage did not occur in the pattern described simply because these Navajo lived in matrilocal camps, or near each other. Fosterage occurred because the social structure encouraged it. That is, norms that endorse such a means of responding to needs are extant over time. It is known among Navajo that it is proper to seek help first from one's kin and members of the mother's clan into which one was born. In addition, such action is validated by Navajo expectations of mutual obligation to care for one another. These are the preconditions necessary before family support can begin to occur in cases of need, stress and adversity.

Family support is a process of nurturing, mutual obligations, emotional involvement, reciprocity, advice, and feedback. It is a means of coping during times of crisis. It is a means of minimizing ambiguity, of creating stability within a system, of endorsing cultural norms, and of regulating behavior to minimize deviance from the cultural norms. In the case of Navajo fosterage it provided a mechanism for integration of the youngest members of the tribe into the cultural socialization process even though the parents were absent or ineffectual. During crisis transition ambiguity results from not knowing what is to come. Children caught in this transition are in jeopardy of losing their sense of integration and identity as Navajo. Transfer to the maternal grandmother, a very strong identity in Navajo culture, provides for continuity for identity from grandmothers to grandchildren. If a child were adopted or placed in foster care off the Reservation there would be no Navajo mentor to provide this developmental phase of the child's life.

A child fostered to its grandmother is never without role modeling in what constitutes a Navajo identity. Even though the child is reared by the grandmother, the child's status is never not Navajo but generations telescope to preserve a mother-child nurturing relationship that integrates the child into Navajo culture. This is discussed by the Navajo in reference to tribesmen put in homes, orphanages, or foster care outside the Navajo culture. Navajo fosterage allows biological and cultural ties and identity to remain intact.

Moreover, the ambiguity of transition is minimized because cultural continuity is continued through an extended family, multi-generational relationship.

The actual process of family support in fosterage occurred because there was need, stress, or adversity. Either the mothers needed help so they could move into the surrounding urban areas and gain wage work, or they needed substitute parents for their children because skill and situations limited what they could offer their children, or they needed relief from parenting so they could come to grips with their own dysfunctionality. Growth and development of the parents occurred often in tandem with fosterage. They were free to develop in their own lives as they needed to without being encumbered by parenting demands. Moreover, the children were free to continue their growth and development as Navajo in the households of their grandmothers. In general, fosterage households were healthier than those from which the children were taken. The grandmothers tended to oversee the needs of their grandchildren better than did the children's actual mothers. In the grandmother generation there was also a need to continue parenting, and that need was fulfilled by having a grandchild under their tutelage. For some, it was a chance to make up for what they had not been able to do with their own children in earlier times.

Reciprocity was evident at many levels. Fosterage, just as birth itself, creates an obligation to the parent who gave sustenance and continuance of life, according to the informants. This has been characterized as "helping backwards" (Harrison 1973; Ladd 1957) wherein parents care "... for their children with the expectation of assistance in their old age, or mature adults help their parents because they had been cared for" (Harrison 1973:209). As grandchildren grew up they helped in the household as was expected. The child's mother was also evident in the household when possible. She also reciprocated to her mother for the care of the child. In cases where fosterage occurred enough years back that the grandchild is now grown and gone from the grandmother's house and the grandmother is frail it is usually the parent of the fostered child who offers care to the frail grandmother. This is not unusual. The child is in the stage of his or her own development where there is a need to be free or become established in early adulthood. The parent generation is finished with child rearing, their households are more settled, and they are now in a position of offering care to the elderly in the family. As a result of the extended family structure, the three generations helped one another as it fit their own needs for freedom from child rearing and growth and development. Through this three generational structure and normative expectations the tribe is able to care for and integrate its children within the tribal boundaries and in Navajo households, and provide for versatility and resourcefulness of its members.

Compliance with norms is made possible by reciprocity and clanship structure underlying family relationships. The grandparents are able to teach and guide the young children in socializing into their cultural roles. The parents are freed to seek wage work, develop in emotion and maturity, seek health care, or new marriage relationships; this would not have been possible without the aid of the grandparents. Both parent and child are allowed access to resources and the ability to use them to a greater advantage for growth and identity.

Fosterage ultimately provides a mechanism for greater integration and unity

within the tribe. It is positive in that the older generation is able to provide for its children and grandchildren in a constructive way that increases esteem and stability within the extended family structure. It is part of a process occurring over a lifespan. "It makes resources available at the appropriate time for continued growth and development of its members and promotes the responsiveness of the social network of the family in times of crisis" (Kane 1988:24). That's what happened among the Navajo: the resources became available because the grandmother and her children shared a cultural norm of how and when to help. It was this sharing that was the social support, not the actual resources per se.

When a mother leaves her child with the grandmother it minimizes ambiguity because the action is within the confines of Navajo normative expectations of proper behavior when one is in need.

Many of the seeming contradictions between what was said and what was carried out in the process of Navajo fosterage can be better understood if one analyzes it in relation to the family support system. Thus, when a mother devalued her child through abuse, neglect, poor parenting, and disregard, it seemed in contradiction to the normative expectations of Navajo ways. But when she turned to her mother for help, or allowed her mother to take the child and care for it, that was following the norms established in the Navajo value system. It would have been poor practice to put the child up for adoption outside of the tribe. Moreover, it would have created disunity and kept the child from having a sense of identity. It would have created blurred cultural boundaries. There would have been little or no opportunity for socialization into Navajo traditions and sense of identity. When the mother gave the child to her mother and withdrew from the child rearing responsibilities it might be perceived that the child had been abandoned, but the cultural norms support this practice because the mother's mother is an extension of the mother in lineage and clanship.

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