PACIFIC STUDIES

SPECIAL ISSUE
NEGOTIATING GRANDPARENTING:
STYLES AND STRATEGIES IN A CHANGING PACIFIC

GUEST EDITORS' PREFACE

IN SOCIETIES AROUND THE WORLD, population aging is engaging more women and men in the experience of grandparenting, and the duration of the experience is increasing. In response, grandparent research has seen a significant expansion and diversification across disciplines and settings, first in the societies of North America and Europe, although studies in African and Asian settings soon followed.

This collection of contributions from anthropology and cognate disciplines extends the reach of the research to a selection of Pacific societies and to a different set of grandparenting contexts. The relatively recent emergence of population aging in most parts of the Pacific, and the local histories, social structures, and cultural attitudes and values shaping the contemporary practice of grandparenting, afford new comparative perspectives and can inform the development of concepts and theories. The larger contexts of kinship structure and overall status of older people in society, which have distinguished anthropology's research of grandparenting in the past, continue as core contexts but other, more immediate ones such as individual life history, family change, community networks, residential environment, and so on have become increasingly relevant.

From the first stages of planning the collection, it has been our objective to examine grandparenting in the Pacific in the broad context of ongoing change in the grandparent role worldwide. We chose definition and relevance of the role as our focus. The project has its origins in a series of sessions at annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO). In accordance with the ASAO format, we began with an open, informal session to recruit potential participants and identify specific topics of interest. This was followed by a phase of working sessions for which

1

continuing participants prepared papers for review and discussion. The discussions identified shared issues and themes that would guide the next round of paper development. A final, formal symposium was devoted to further examination of the issues and themes and their implications.

All of the contributors have completed extended field research in one or more Pacific societies. The studies on which the articles draw involved firsthand field research in the societies the articles feature. The studies were all designed for research of wider topics—the demography of aging, the epidemiology of aging, the processes of social aging, and various forms of social development and change. In some cases, aspects of grandparenting were a planned topic of inquiry; in others they became one as the study progressed. Either way, the wider studies facilitated contextualization of the grandparent material and aided interpretation and comparison. Our collective reviews and discussions identified three recurring themes of change: *i)* intersection of being a grandparent and having senior status in society, *ii)* diversity in styles or ways of grandparenting, and *iii)* grandparenting as a strategy for coping with societal and other macrolevel social and cultural change.

The first theme recalls anthropology's longstanding attention to the position of older people in society as a context, but it also speaks directly to our focal question about change in definition and management of the grandparenting role. Our studies point up the importance of considering self-definitions, as well as variation by gender, ethnicity, and urban/rural environment. The styles theme connects with a well-established area of interest in the newer, multidisciplinary, grandparenting research. Our Pacific analyses suggest development of existing typologies for cross-cultural and cross-societal application and, again, the relevance of gender, ethnicity, age and other conditioning factors. The theme of grandparenting as a strategy for coping with sociocultural change contributes to a new perspective. Our Pacific evidence includes adaptation to change in education, economy, family organization, living arrangements, migration patterns, and attitudes and values. The perspective could guide future research and comparison. It also has theoretical relevance beyond grandparenting, for example, to our understanding of family systems, age as a principle of organization, and aging and modernization.

The grandparent/senior status theme receives more attention in some of the articles but is generally present. The styles and strategies themes, on the other hand, are each more developed in some articles, less so in others, and thus, defined the order of presentation.

We join the other authors in acknowledging significant contributions to the project's development and quality by others. Ann Chowning and McRose

Elu with Rod Mitchell prepared papers for the ASAO working sessions and enriched those discussions. Dorothy Counts filled the critical role of discussant for the working and symposium sessions. David Counts, Ward Goodenough, Alan Howard, and Eugene Ogan contributed valuable comments and suggestions as audience participants. We are deeply grateful to Dorothy Counts for writing the collection's introduction and to Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon and Alan Howard for agreeing to co-author its epilogue.

M. Jocelyn Armstrong
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Juliana Flinn
University of Arkansas at Little Rock