

home about oral sex and sex toys, narrowly avoiding a three-year prison term because of it. We don't object when a wife is forced to give oral sex to her husband, and after clamping down, as it were, is hauled away on assault and battery charges while the husband walks away. Tennessee's "paramour clause" led to the forced separation of a ten-year lesbian partnership when a custody judge, without the prompting of any party in the case, imposed the order. The list here is long (these were taken from *Best Sex Writing 2010*, by Rachel Kramer Bussel, for the curious reader). It reminds us that the nature of change is often replete with incomprehensible contradictions, and that, even at the micro-level, change is far more than simple pronouncements on a dated policy.

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## Society for Linguistic Anthropology

MARK ALLEN PETERSON AND JAMES STANLAW,  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

### Musical *Mushaf*

By Mark Allen Peterson (Miami U)

Last February I was thinking about the relationship of medium and message because some of the Egyptian lists to which I belong were abuzz with commentaries on the Grand Mufti of Egypt's decision to issue a decree against Qur'anic recitations as ringtones on cell phones.

In Egypt, uses of verses from the Qur'an in personal media have been steadily rising in popularity not only as ringtones, but also on screen savers, pre-programmed text messages and similar new channels. As soon as new media emerge, people find ways to integrate them into their popular piety. In an age of neoliberal capitalism, companies respond rapidly to such popularizations, so that long before the theologians can respond, such tones can be selected from your mobile phone company, taken from websites, and downloaded from TV station sites that advertise them on their broadcasts.

The Qur'an itself is a spoken document, meant to be recited and heard, not merely read. It was revealed by God to mankind through the oral medium of a human prophet and not written down, except in bits and pieces, until after his death. Even then the authoritative reference was the text as memorized and recited by Muhammad's followers. The oral text is a mimetic representation of the very words of God. The written text, by contrast, is but a representation of a representation, useful for teaching, study and reflection but offering a quite different relationship to the word of God than recitation. There is a theory

of media implied in this, and it is this that the Grand Mufti is seeking to articulate in relation to ringtones.

There are many rules governing the physical Qur'an, or *mushaf* (pronounced mus•haf). The book should sit above other books; it should never be marred, dropped or torn; and it must be disposed of in fire with proper ceremony, never thrown away (rather like US rituals for disposing of a flag). These rules—and there are many more, some authoritative, some popular—pose problems when applied across media genres. Does the ban on throwing away the Qur'an apply to lengthy quotations published in newspapers? Most would say no, yet I know of people who clip the Qur'anic verses from each newspaper and store them until they can be properly destroyed.

Electronic media introduces new problems. Must a computer disk containing the text of the Qur'an always sit on top of my pile of CDs? What kind of rules govern digital displays? One devout Egyptian, Youm, told me that the Grand Mufti's decree argued that putting verses into ringtones violated the holiness of the Qur'an. Muslims should properly use the Qur'an for instruction and worship. Its use in ringtones undermines and debases the legitimacy of the Qur'an. But the contemporary *da'wa* (religious learning) movement seeks to fill the Egyptian soundscape with Qur'anic recitation, lectures and sermons as a way to elevate, inspire and transform people, in contrast to what they see as the debasing nature of most popular music. So why not ringtones?

"God's book must be holy in our lives and we should stay clear of actions that debase it, such as placing the Qur'an in our cars or putting its verses as ringtones," Youm said. The reference is to the common practice of putting small copies of the Qur'an on the dashboard of the car to ward off accidents, the evil eye, ill luck and car thieves. This is often condemned by sheikhs as focusing on the *mushaf* rather than the message.

I pointed out to Youm that in my field notes I had conversations with drivers who dismissed this argument, which they have heard from the pulpits, saying that to trust the Qur'an to ward off evil is an expression of faith in its holiness. He did not respond, but another list correspondent, Sabie, pointed out that as ringtones, Quranic verses are interrupted as we answer the phone call. This distorts their meanings and violates the word of God, he said.

These arguments are theological, but also they are metadiscourses on communication, efforts to theorize the complicated relationships between medium and message in the face of new media. The "mediation" of media inevitably involves bodies interacting with things, and the permutations of this seem endless, and endlessly fascinating.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw ([stanlaw@ilstu.edu](mailto:stanlaw@ilstu.edu)) or Mark Peterson ([petersm2@muohio.edu](mailto:petersm2@muohio.edu)).

## Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### SMA Notes from the Field: Applying Anthropology to Health and "Wealth" in the US

By Jessica Tomiko Anders (NeighborWorks America)

Although consumer-based financial education programs have been around for several decades, financial education has increasingly become a tool adapted by community development practitioners (particularly those working on affordable housing programs), community organizers and others who recognize that "health" and "wealth" often go hand-in-hand. For example, because of her unstable financial situation, an underemployed pregnant woman with gestational diabetes might miss some of her prenatal visits due to work, or her diabetes might be poorly controlled because the nearest health clinic is far away and finding reliable transportation is difficult. This, in turn, could result in a newborn with macrosomia (high birth weight), which can produce immediate and long-term negative health impacts.

Success Measures is a participatory outcome-based evaluation social enterprise within NeighborWorks America, whose mission is to provide training and technical assistance to organizations and foundations. In 2008, a group of our clients asked Success Measures to create a set of measures to evaluate attitudinal and behavioral change among individuals who engage in financial education and asset building programs. A review of the literature indicated that many such programs tracked changes in knowledge but lacked outcome evaluation tools (surveys and interviews) to measure behavioral and attitudinal changes among participants. We also found that a clinical health model was often used to describe outcomes—programs were described as "interventions" delivered by organizations that sought to "diagnose" the key issues participants were "presenting" when they sought financial education training.

Although we moved forward with three main goals, this article specifically addresses the second goal: To develop a set of user-friendly data collection tools reflecting participants' language about financial attitudes and behaviors that could be mapped to a broader evaluation framework reflecting common language used by practitioners and researchers in this arena. Crucial to this process was our aim to create a set of measures that could be used by a variety of organizations rather than a set of tools to evaluate a specific program. First, we convened an initial working group of 27 researchers, funders and organization staff who identified common "dimensions of change" they expected participants to experience. In two subsequent meetings, we folded in additional working group