

Annual Meeting. Bear with me; I will aspire to clarity and brevity, hopefully with some measure of success.

The recent Annual Meeting once again provided a forum for an amazing variety of ideas and perspectives. Listening to the various papers, I am struck by the variety of forms we study. The span is so rich that there are moments when we might wonder if there is anything new to discover, to study or to analyze.

I've spent a lot of time over the past four years looking at one specific category of what I will reluctantly term marginalized groups. Fieldwork to gauge sentiment and sensibilities of gay and lesbian citizens of Vermont yielded data as well as a lot of personal growth. Much later reflection on how all of my informants fit into the whole community that is Vermont led me to a different sort of perspective: marginalization. Despite a major legal change that legitimized a segment of the community that had lived very much in the shadows for so many years, this same segment continues to be a marginalized part of the whole Vermont social community. The fieldwork collection process had been a kind of siren song, leading me to a tacit acceptance of a non-existent truism: pass a law that ushered in sweeping changes and presto—those most affected by the law would be magically accepted, brought back from the hinterland of marginal existence, warmly embraced as interesting, vibrant members of the community. Were it so simple as this.

As I listened to one particular paper at the fall meeting—a cogent perspective on SM practice and how at one point deep-seated biases worked to prevent a shared event—I realized how little difference it made to deploy institutionalized power such as law in the defense or support of a marginalized group. Vermont law was enacted to sanction a clearly marginalized part of society in what was clearly intended to be a positive act. The result was stunted by preconceived ideas about what it was to be gay or lesbian, ideas that generalized behavior and pushed this entire segment of the state's population well into the margins. In the SM study, fearful opponents used law to reinforce a negative publicity campaign that led to a complete rejection of an already highly marginalized group. In this case, the negative reaction from the local community arose in large part simply because of the *idea* of what this particular practice "really meant." In both cases it took little more than public perception and belief to bypass or use as a weapon the same legal institutions designed to protect these same marginalized groups.

Marginalization is often subtle. It can happen despite the best intentions of law. It can happen because of misconceptions and biases, often stated with intent. These are the easy cases. When we set out to understand any particular segment of a social collection we run the risk of our own embedded notions masking the less visible, even acting to preserve and promote the process of marginalization.

Enculturated beliefs are part of being a member of any society. These beliefs help make a map of

social boundaries, often with distressing results. Those living "on the margins" share many of these same beliefs, yet are often excluded, sometimes forcefully, from the social mainstream simply by virtue of being different. The realities of practice do nothing to abate attitudes that are learned and lived out through larger social processes and institutions. Even face-to-face encounters lack the cogency to persuade and build alliances rather than enemies. While these may seem obvious and overstated conclusions to the problem of understanding difference, I've only recently begun to appreciate just how subtle the complexities are and how deeply engrained the preconceptions that shape understanding are, and how this acts to uphold and reinforce preexisting conditions that, in spite of best efforts to the contrary, can hold people solidly in a particular social space. Much more needs to happen to change attitudes and move past the margins.

Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas for new columns or other material to David Houston at [dhrh+an@uvm.edu](mailto:dhrh+an@uvm.edu).

## Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,  
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### Graffiti Photos: Language and Art in Japanese Girls' Culture

By Laura Miller (Loyola U)

After spending the day shopping, Yasuko and her 16-year-old friend Mie decide to take a photograph of themselves with a Polaroid camera. They pull two freshly purchased bras out of their shopping bags, place them on their heads, and shoot. When the snapshot is dry, Mie uses pink and turquoise markers to write *Baka!! Kabutte shimatta!* ("Idiots!! Damn, they wore them on their heads!") in big characters at the top and bottom of the photo. I doubt this was quite what George Eastman, the inventor of the first readily accessible camera, had in mind when he said "you press the button, we do the rest." For many adolescent Japanese girls, the photograph is not "finished" until it has been embellished with colored ink captions, naughty words or decorative motifs.

These annotated "graffiti photos" are an expressive new art form that reflects some unique linguistic and cultural practices among the "Ko-



Eat Bear. Photo by Laura Miller.



Black Faces. Photo by Laura Miller.

gals" (*kogyaru*), a subgroup of young women aged 14 to 22 who are largely defined by their fashion statements: knee-length socks hanging around the ankles, bleached hair, gaudy make-up, and short school uniform skirts. Ko-gals—a moniker probably derived from a clipping of the Japanese word for high school student (*kôkôsei*) combined with the English loanword "girl"—even have their own magazines such as *Egg* and *Cawaii!*, each of which has a readership of around 300,000. Since the early 1990s these publications have celebrated the independence, impertinent panache, and self-confident sexuality of the Ko-gal lifestyle.

Adolescent girls in Japan have often pioneered many new linguistic trends, including novel ways of writing. For example, the exaggerated globular curves of "round script" (*marumoji*) became an orthographic fashion in the 1980s, and largely reflected the cult of cuteness that was also seen in many other cultural products such as speech, clothing, food and music. More enduring are other unconventional orthographic practices, including stars, hearts, emoticons, and non-native punctuation (especially exclamation points) used with wild abandon. One longstanding practice found in girls' writing is to use the notation that represents the concept of "squared" in mathematics ( $x^2$ ) to express intensity. A photo that has "cute<sup>2</sup>" (*kawaii<sup>2</sup>*) written on it would be read as "cute cute" (*kawaii kawaii*). Unusual sizes, colors, or script elements also are called on to indicate emphasis or emotional intensity.

Orthography and the judicious use of English borrowings are the main devices used in graffiti photo construction. The expressive power of the Japanese language is perhaps given its fullest play in the area of writing because of its four writing systems: Chinese characters, two syllabaries, and the Roman alphabet. The plurality of scripts



Girl Days. Photo by Laura Miller.

available to graffiti photo writers allows innovation on a scale not possible in a language with a single script. And English—mostly of the made-in-Japan variety—offers extra creative resources to graffiti photo artists.

Both English and orthographic styling—always with humor and a touch of the absurd—are used to play with gender definitions and conventions. For example, in one graffiti photo, two girls have drawn black moustaches and black pipes on their faces. The text, which is in English and all capital letters, says “WE ARE BOSS.” Their photographic cross-dressing tries to replicate the stereotypical male boss of 1930s American gangster movies. Another technique used to tweak gender roles in graffiti photos is to challenge the expected women’s speech register. The Japanese language associates gender identity with a complex set of sentence-final particles. One of the supposedly “male” sentence particles is *zo*, which is thought to make a sentence seem especially forceful. In one graffiti photo, a young woman is holding a very small stuffed bear to her mouth. Pink and purple ink is used to write “I’m hungry so I’m gonna eat Mr. Bear!!” (*hara hetta kara kuma-san kû zo!!*). Not only is the putatively “male” particle *zo* found here, the expression used to say “I’m hungry” (*hara hetta*) is also typically masculine speech.

Graffiti photos are becoming ubiquitous, and have now even leaked into the mainstream media, crossing both age and gender barriers. Increasingly, magazines are imitating their uneven and idiosyncratic styles, and companies like McDonald’s (fast food) and SkinLife (acne medicine) have used pseudo-graffiti in their advertisements. Although the majority of those who produce graffiti photos are still junior high and high school girls, many couples are also making them during courtship, and some young mothers create graffiti photos of themselves with their children or spouses, indicating that they retain this

aspect of girls’ culture as they transition into adulthood.

However, regardless of this increasing popularity, graffiti photos still remain the main symbolic currency of Ko-gal society. Photographs supplemented with written words are providing a new method for forging social bonds and creating a community of girls separate from their parent’s culture. In addition, together with other forms of popular culture, such as fashion and music, graffiti photos underscore a growing generational divide and point to a shift in values and attitudes. Graffiti photos are only one part of the culture of contemporary girlhood, yet they offer a point of entry into the complexities and concerns found therein.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw ([stanlaw@ilstu.edu](mailto:stanlaw@ilstu.edu)) or Mark Peterson ([petersm1@muohio.edu](mailto:petersm1@muohio.edu)).

## Society for Medical Anthropology

NANCY VUCKOVIC AND JANELLE TAYLOR,  
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### Editorial Vision for SMA Column

Several months each year, the SMA column brings readers time-sensitive announcements about conferences, fellowships and awards. Beyond this important function as a vehicle for this information, our goal is for the SMA column to serve as a space for substantive intellectual exchange and debate on matters of importance to all medical anthropologists. For the past year the column has focused on “Institutional Review Boards.” The most recent contribution to this call, by Helen McGough (U Washington), is featured as a Commentary in this month’s *AN*.

We propose a new topic of discussion—another subject that affects many of us, regardless of our home institutions or topic specialization: research funding. We invite submissions on the Pragmatics of Funding—from discussion of finding the right-fit funding source to insights into how peer review systems work, from explanations about the internal workings of funding organizations to advice about writing proposals that get funded. We hope that by featuring such pieces, the SMA column will serve as a means for transmitting institutional knowledge among medical anthropologists. If you’ve learned some lessons along the way that you wish someone had told *you* about, this is your opportunity to inform and aid your colleagues. We particularly welcome short (650 words) submissions. Please send in your contributions directly to us, or contact us (see emails below) if you have ideas or questions you’d like to discuss.

### Special Interest Group in Child Health

By Elisa Sobo (Children’s Hospital San Diego)

SMA is exploring the possibility of supporting a special interest group for child health (with “child” and “health” broadly defined). The pur-

pose of the group is to provide a forum for persons interested in all aspects of child health, including researchers, parents and providers. Members will meet to share information and ideas at the yearly AAA conference, and will communicate through a website maintained by SMA. Contact Elisa J Sobo, Children’s Hospital San Diego ([esobo@chsd.org](mailto:esobo@chsd.org)) with name, affiliation, interest area and email address.

### Ethnography in Diabetological Scenes

By Liliana Cora Saslavski (U Buenos Aires)

Diabetes treatment as a medical specialty was well developed throughout Argentina in the 1990s: it had academic institutions that were well known in large industrialized nations. Yet, at the same time, Argentina was suffering from the collapse of health institutions and all epidemiological statistics pointed at poor control over diabetes. There were no consistent official health policies for the population in general or for diabetics in particular.

The treatment efficacy crisis became the gist of my research, carried out between 1991 and 2001 in the endocrinology and nutrition departments of private and public hospitals of the city and province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. My field work showed the multifaceted nature of the crisis: it was different in the consulting room, the waiting room, for inpatients, for doctors during their case reviews, in the hospital corridors, the medical seminars or in medical assemblies in scientific societies. In all of these spaces, defined as diabetological scenes, the crisis became alive in the players’ actions.

For example, if we pause to consider the diabetes consultation as a scene, it becomes a social space where hybrid notions and action strategies pertaining to the disease are produced. Diverse contradictory pieces of knowledge and values are bundled together and mingle there, making the image of the disease more complex, and often undermining the traditional notions of medical efficiency. Diabetics, besides having their lives medicalized, must endure a moral judgment embedded in the biomedical act. The treatment becomes thus an axis around which the social life of the patient revolves, rather than a technical procedure.

For more information on this study, please contact the author at [lilchame@hotmail.com](mailto:lilchame@hotmail.com).

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to the SMA Contributing Editors Nancy Vuckovic ([nancy.vuckovic@kpchr.org](mailto:nancy.vuckovic@kpchr.org)) or Janelle Taylor ([jstaylor@u.washington.edu](mailto:jstaylor@u.washington.edu)).

## Society for Psychological Anthropology

REBECCA J LESTER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### Meeting Highlights?

I would love to be able to give you all thoughtful, engaged critiques of the many fantastic panels sponsored by the SPA at last November’s AAA