

of time and energy: culture wars. More specifically, the issue of same-sex marriage is just not percolating to the top as it has in the past. None of the candidates have taken up the idea as a *cause célèbre*, and there is an odd silence from those formerly passionate about this particular issue. What has changed? Is the media no longer pumped up about it? Are the same groups who expended so much political energy on this issue in the past now focused on something entirely different? Or have they fallen so out of favor that they are no longer heard? Is it possible that the terms of the issue have somehow changed? Central to the argument in the past was the idea of “family.” Opponents of same-sex marriage built their case on a particular concept of “family” and how it was crucial for success in childrearing, with a particular configuration required to raise a child. This time around, however, this argument lacks punch. Given that our social problems have not exactly been “fixed,” have families somehow changed?

I’m reading the column *Modern Love* in a national newspaper, which this issue is titled “A Support Group is My Higher Power.” It tells the story of a mother who, lacking any religious conviction herself, joins a Jewish Mother’s Support group due to her daughter’s severe, often life-threatening depression and mental instability. The mother is not Jewish, and the humorous introductions on this revelation are a statement in and of themselves about social relations in the US set against a painful experience as a parent.

The column paints a sad picture of how mental illness and depression are so well hidden among US families and how, too often, parents (note the “s”—we’re talking about the nuclear family here: mom, dad, sis, brother, dog) are often forced to make very painful choices about treatment. The column describes how too many parents hide their child from relatives and others in order to conceal this terrible problem. “Bringing children into the world and raising them is an act of optimism relying on obstinate hope for the future...” Indeed it is. And it raises challenging and perplexing questions about the nature of families in general, and the idea of what constitutes a “stable” family in particular.

This particular factor—stability—has been used as a political tennis ball by one component of the far right conservative ideology to paint a portrait of utter horror over the very idea of “gay marriage.” We *must* have, so the argument goes, a mommy and a daddy or those poor little children will grow up so... warped. What, though, *is* a stable family? If in fact a measurable percentage of US nuclear families struggle with this particular well-kept secret, what does it mean to suggest that somehow, having mom and dad around means that the kids are going to be all right?

The kids are clearly *not* all right.

It doesn’t matter much if the underlying causes of this problem are familial, societal or environmental. The needs of children are

pretty basic: love, care, food and shelter. Those who are able to provide these things—all of these things, together—are doing what parents must do, and in most cases are doing it well. The question in campaign terms is whether or not the respective candidates—one of whom is now our new president-elect—will be able to step past the political rhetoric and work to ensure that *all* types of family configurations are acceptable, even desirable. “Stable” families, it seems, are those that can “deliver the goods” regardless of any particular orientation they might claim.

SOLGA Elections and the Annual Meeting

The recent AAA elections brought a new voice into the SOLGA board. Karen Nakamura was elected to the position of co-chair. Our congratulations to Karen, and best wishes for a productive term. Also, a reminder that the annual meeting will see a lot of SOLGA-related events: many sessions, a business meeting, a board meeting and an important discussion on SOLGA as a name. We encourage you to check the AAA website and online program for SOLGA-related events and we welcome your participation in all of these.

Join us. SOLGA wants you! Visit www.solga.org for news, mentors, listserv and more. Please send any comments, suggestions and ideas for new columns, or just say “hi” to David Houston at dlrh+an@uvm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

“Words That Work” in an Election (if You Don’t Put Descartes before the Horse)

By James Stanlaw

By the time this reaches your mailbox, the presidential election will be upon us. With things neck and neck in mid-September, it is time once again to look at our resident linguistic political pundits, George Lakoff and Frank Luntz, to see how both the blues and the reds are using language to get their donkeys and elephants in order.

We first checked in with Lakoff and Luntz back in the December 2006 AN column during the last Congressional elections. Both have been quite busy being media talking heads (for the left and right, respectively) and on the blogosphere. Both coincidentally have also just written new books. Lakoff’s *The Political Mind: Why You Can’t Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* came out this summer. Luntz’s *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear* (2007) has just been updated with the latest 2008 candidate gaffs and the top ten sound bites of the campaign so far. But it has been the surprise appearance of vice presidential contender Sarah

Palin that is making both advisors work overtime.

Us Weekly—which along with *People* and the *National Enquirer* I dutifully read for research purposes—scored a coup being the first celebrity-gossip journal to boast a cover story on Palin’s life (along with reporting on David Duchovny’s sexual addiction and Jennifer Aniston’s long-awaited reappearance on TV) in its September 15 issue. Titled objectively enough “Babies, Lies and Scandal,” this story actually goes to the heart of the issues that both Lakoff and Luntz are talking about.

Lakoff, a linguist and cognitive scientist at UC Berkeley, has been arguing for the past decade that humans ultimately conceive of the world metaphorically, and locate their thinking through figurative language. As for politics, Lakoff claims that the frames Americans eventually follow are either the authoritarian “strict father” model or the “nurturing parent” model. The Republicans tend to be the tough dads, stressing individual responsibility, discipline and a strong hand, if necessary, at home and abroad. Democrats are like latter-day hippies, stressing empathy, communalism, patience and finding the potential in each human being. Republicans have been successful recently because they understand that opinions on issues and candidates are often primal and emotional, and couch their language accordingly. For Lakoff, Democrats have failed because they stress rational discourse, using the language of the eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hume, or Chomsky’s favorite, René Descartes—in a twenty-first century world filled with terrorism, collapsing towers and families, and disappearing moral values.

While Luntz would probably loath admitting this, all his polls and evidence would seem to indicate that Lakoff is on to something. Luntz has made a name for himself in providing language advice to the Republican Party and any number of other (mostly) conservative associations (even though it is hard to imagine that FOX News would hire an Oxford PhD to be an on-air commentator). For example, he has taught several administrations of Republicans to always say “personalization” instead of “privatization,” and to keep their messages simple, short and consistent.

Lakoff says that the choice of Sarah Palin reflects Republican “expert understanding of the political mind and political marketing” (www.alternet.org/module/printversion/97193). Her main job is “to speak the language of conservatism...and use the advantages that conservatives have in dominating political discourse.” He believes the typical Democratic responses—focusing on external realities like her inexperience and anti-feminism—may be irrelevant. As a “pretty, perky, feminine, Bible-toting” family-values mom who hunts, she is going to be a difficult opponent. According to Lakoff, the only hope the Democrats have is



to attack the whole conservative movement as an “un-American” and “harmful” ideology—they “need to call an extremist an extremist” regardless of personal attributes.

Luntz seems ready for the assault. Speaking to delegates at the Republican Convention he said they should substitute “accountability” for Obama’s theme of “change.” And as for the presentation of Palin, Luntz’s advice was to “sell her as a mother of five.” “Her family status is very powerful. But selling her as a mayor of a community that has less people than are in this room doesn’t work” (as reported by the *Wall Street Journal’s* Aaron Ruitkoff). We will soon see whose words were the ones that worked, and what the electorate actually heard.

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

Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SMA Notes from the Field: Lumbee Mothers and Infant Care

By Jada L Brooks (Duke U) and Sharron L Docherty (Duke U)

Although culture is so fully integrated and embedded in practices related to health and well-being, nurse researchers often overlook opportunities to study and reflect upon the influence of culture on health care practices such as parenting. As pediatric nurse researchers in the field of parental adaptation to providing care to infants and children born prematurely, we have had the privilege of observing and documenting critical aspects of how culture impacts maternal role development and parenting, as well as infant health, development and well being. The two examples provided below will highlight important aspects of our research experiences with mothers and infants belonging to the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, an American Indian tribe consisting of more than 55,000 members located primarily in Robeson County.

The first research opportunity occurred through a longitudinal study of parental role attainment with medically fragile infants (NINR: R01 NR02868 PI: Miles) born in North Carolina. Within this study of 83 medically fragile infants and their mothers, was a subset of eight who identified themselves as Lumbee Indian. The influence of culture on parental role attainment was not a stated aim of this study, but during weekly study team conferences, we began to discuss our observations of the profound impact that the distinct culture of the Lumbee tribe had on parenting these infants who were seriously ill at birth, dependent upon technology for survival, and at risk for having a life-long chronic illness once

discharged from the hospital. Data collection methods employed in this study included structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observations of mother-infant interactions.

A second nursing study, currently in progress, is examining the interactive behaviors between Lumbee mothers and their premature infants (NINR: 1F31 NR010851-01 PI: Brooks) using naturalistic observation methods. Mothers’ responses to having a premature infant in a neonatal intensive care unit, as well as their experiences of parenting a prematurely born child, are also being explored using semi-structured interviews. Major advantages to examining Lumbee mothers and their infants include the accessibility and opportunity to research parenting practices within one of the largest American Indian tribes in the United States. The ability to describe the effects of Lumbee culture on maternal role development and parenting practices will potentially improve knowledge of cultural influences and enhance nursing approaches designed to improve child development in ethnically diverse cultures.

We have learned that there are critical aspects central to the design of studies with vulnerable American Indian groups like the Lumbee that have positive effects on the sample recruited and data collected. First and foremost, the research questions under study should be relevant and important to the participants and to the tribe. Next, collaboration with tribal officials and key members of the community is imperative to help convey the importance of a study and to aid in successful recruitment and retention of participants. The inclusion of a person of American Indian descent on the research team not only makes the above two design plans feasible but also plays a powerful role in helping interpret the data.

From what we have observed thus far, the Lumbee culture has a clear influence on mothers of prematurely born infants. These mothers struggle to develop their maternal role and their relationship with their infant, while dealing with the competing demands of learning how to use the complex technology required by their infant, as well as provide their frequent and intensive health care needs. The Lumbee cultural influences can most simply be divided into those that assist maternal role attainment or act as a barrier. Lumbee culture is fostered by a close knit community base from which mothers develop and enhance their roles in caring for a prematurely born child at risk for chronic illness. Further, the involvement of extended family reinforces the maternal role and parenting practices seen among these mothers. However, these identified strengths within the Lumbee culture may not be enough to offset the disparities experienced by some mothers, as limited access to resources and health care services may make parenting a premature infant difficult.

As these studies emphasize, we must remember that research is one of the many tools nurses possess that can influence health

care practices. Medical anthropology research can be used to advance nurses’ understanding and insight into the world of culture that they encounter on a daily basis.

To share your field research or submit other contributions to this column please contact SMA Contributing Editor Kathleen Ragsdale (kathleen.ragsdale@ssrc.msstate.edu).

Society for Psychological Anthropology

BAMBI CHAPIN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SPA Events at the Upcoming AAA Meeting

The Annual SPA Members Meeting and Reception will be held Friday evening, November 21 at the AAA meeting in San Francisco, CA. The business portion of the meeting will begin at 6:15 and include a discussion of plans for the upcoming SPA Biennial and announcements of the winners of the Stirling, Boyer and Condon Prizes. A reception, with snacks and a cash bar, will follow and continue until 8:30, after which our student members will adjourn to a nearby pub. All SPA members and guests are invited to the meeting and reception—the first 25 students to arrive get a free drink!

The 2008 AAA Annual Meeting schedule offers five SPA invited sessions and more than a dozen other panels reviewed by SPA. Many of these panels are co-sponsored by other sections and interest groups, reflecting the extent to which psychological anthropology is in dialogue with medical anthropology, linguistics, anthropology of religion, evolutionary anthropology, regional studies and others.

Many of these panels focus specifically on children and youth, including several organized by the newly formed Anthropology of Children and Childhood Interest Group. On Wednesday afternoon there will be an invited roundtable examining the methodological and ethical issues involved in “Working with Children.” On Thursday afternoon, there will be an invited session calling for “Collaboration in the Study of Childhood” that examines learning from different perspectives. In addition, look for five other SPA-reviewed panels that examine the lives of children and youth in different contexts.

Two other invited sessions investigate links between biology, culture and medicine. On Thursday morning, “The Encultured Brain: Neuroanthropology and Interdisciplinary Engagement” will “explore the implications of new findings in the neurosciences for our understanding of culture, human development and behavior.” Then Friday afternoon, medical and psychological anthropologists present, discuss and respond to efforts made to incorporate cultural difference into medical and psychiatric treatment in the panel “Integrating ‘Local’ and ‘Western’