



Society for Psychological Anthropology NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020

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cover photo: The cover image shows calendar pages on a sickbed; it was taken at Shanghai Yujinxiang Depression and Bipolar Support Group's Mental Health Art Exhibition. It depicts how a patient with major depression experiences time through their illness.

photo by: Hua (Miranda) Wu is a Ph.D. Candidate in psychological and medical anthropology at University of California San Diego (UCSD). Her research interests include the phenomenology of life experience, temporal-spatial aspects of everyday life, the anthropology of the body, as well as emotional experience and expression in East Asian contexts. Miranda collaborates with Fudan University's anthropological team to explore the culturally shaped experience of mental health and subjective well-being both in communities in Shanghai and across the Yangtze Delta region of China. Her dissertation specifically investigates emotional experience, health management, and understanding mental health across several generations.

From the SPA President: **Black Lives Matter**

Dear Fellow SPA Members,

I hope this newsletter finds you all well and healthy.

In May, I circulated a statement about current events and the importance of standing in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Here, I'd like to say more about why I think this is a particularly critical issue for the SPA, and to outline some specific steps I propose to begin to move us forward.

Psychological Anthropology Needs to Reckon with Race

Our subdiscipline of psychological anthropology, like the field of anthropology more generally, has a fraught relationship with race. While many of us self-identify as non- or anti-racist, and may be actively involved in anti-racist and decolonizing activities on our own campuses and in our personal lives, it remains the case that psychological anthropology has always been, and continues to be, overwhelmingly white.

This is a huge problem on multiple levels, not the least of which is the fact that our lack of diversity becomes self-perpetuating.

First, as a white space (intentional or not), psychological anthropology as a subdiscipline and the SPA as a Society can feel profoundly unwelcoming to BIPOC student and professional members of the AAA. No matter how much we may believe in inclusion and say (and mean) we welcome everyone, the current composition of our Society communicates a very different message, keeping people out and keeping many of our BIPOC colleagues within the SPA feeling marginalized.

Second, this lack of diversity risks impoverishing our collective intellectual work in that it allows us

to bracket questions of race/ racism except when we choose to engage with it on our own terms. Certainly, not all of us conduct research that focuses specifically on race or racism: in fact, most of us do not. This in and of itself is not a problem. But race is not just present in the context of overt racism--it is a critical factor in all research, a point on which I have been personally remiss in my own work and am actively working to correct. This does not mean that everyone has to talk about race all the time, or that we have to talk about race to the exclusion of other priorities. But silence on race and its impacts on all aspects of human life, from subjectivity to health to engagements with us as ethnographers, implicitly elides the importance of race and racial difference in people's lives and in our constitution of knowledge. By not talking about race (including whiteness) in the work we do, we risk enabling the perpetuation of the anthropological gaze as unmarked (i.e., white) and race as something that is either extrinsic to human experience or tacked on to an otherwise universalized subject.

Third, our lack of diversity means we are collectively missing out on the brilliant scholarship and intellectual contributions of many BIPOC anthropologists with whom we can productively be in conversation and from whom we can learn. If we're not aware of them, we don't engage with them, we don't cite them, our students don't read them, and the cycle continues.

Preliminary Action Steps

Given the self-perpetuating nature of the whiteness of the SPA and the kinds of problematic effects this brings, what can we do to make change? How can we encourage BIPOC colleagues to join us? How can we broaden our engagements with race in our own work? How can we more fully engage with the work and intellectual community of BIPOC scholars?

I want to emphasize that I come at these changes from a position of deep affection and respect for the SPA and for what our ancestors have worked so hard to build. This is an amazing Society and intellectual community. This mobilization for change is not about tearing down our foundations, but rather broadening and strengthening them so the SPA can continue to grow and flourish, and so that future generations of scholars can further build on what we leave behind.

In this spirit, I propose 8 preliminary action steps which are currently under discussion by the SPA Board:

1. Expand our current Underrepresented Minority Scholarships for the AAA and SPA meetings to include more money for more people.
2. Add fee-reduction scholarships for section dues for BIPOC students and professionals.
3. Institute an annual graduate student paper prize for work specifically addressing racial inequality and injustice.
4. Amplify the work of our BIPOC colleagues (students as well as professionals) with features on the front page of the SPA website, in the SPA column in AN, and in the SPA newsletter.
5. Create a "Decolonize your Psychological Anthropology Syllabus" webinar that will be available on the SPA Vimeo website.
6. Partner with the ABA on panels and events at AAA meetings.
7. Reach out to our BIPOC members and invite them into positions of leadership within the SPA (sitting on the board, holding various editorial positions, serving on conference committees, etc.) while also being mindful that these colleagues are often overburdened with such obligations at their home institutions.
8. Use the medium of the 2021 SPA Biennial (including invited panels, workshops, and the Plenary) to engage issues of race and racism, with particular attention to the interrogation of race in the field of psychological anthropology.

These are preliminary steps and they are by no means comprehensive. They will not undo over a

century of problems in our discipline, nor will they bring change overnight. Change will take time and deliberate focus and attention. It will take uncomfortable conversations and choices that are difficult. And this is not the be-all-end-all of the shifts that need to happen within the SPA: a focus on race in no way minimizes the importance of other concerns. But it will start to move us in the right direction.

How You Can Help

I ask all of you for your support in these efforts. Knowing so many of you personally, I know how committed you are to equality and inclusion, and how enthusiastic you are about making change. I encourage all of our members to be active participants in these matters and to propose additional practices, policies, or initiatives you feel are needed (you can email me directly at rjlester@wustl.edu, or contact anyone on the SPA Board). Stay tuned for additional opportunities to jump in and get involved. This is our Society. We have the opportunity--and, indeed, are obliged--to create the kind of community to which we aspire.

Warmest regards,



Rebecca Lester
SPA President

AAA MENTORING EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Breakfast Mentoring Crash Course: Research Methods, Publication, and Professionalization for Psychological and Medical Anthropologists

by Lauren Cubellis

The Society for Psychological Anthropology (SPA) and the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA) will be hosting the 5th Annual Mentoring Event at the 2020 AAA Meetings. Participants will get the chance to engage in discussions between mentors (SPA and/or SMA members with a professional or academic appointments) and mentees (graduate student members of the SPA and/or SMA). Through these discussions, mentors and mentees will have the opportunity to explore pertinent topics to professional development, and to learn from each other about anthropological practice and the challenges faced at different stages of an anthropological career. Even though the AAA Meetings will not be held in person, the SPA and SMA are committed to providing mentorship and guidance to our graduate students. We will be holding this event virtually during the meeting dates, and will have more information about scheduling as the AAA continues to develop its virtual conference plans.

Mentoring topics may include, but are not limited to: 1) qualitative methods (e.g. how to choose between qualitative coding software); 2) publishing tips (e.g. how to select a journal, how to write a cover letter, how to address comments, what to do if an article is rejected); 3) special research topics (e.g. engaging beyond academia; Anthropology and Global Health); 4) grant writing tips: (e.g. FAQs for NIH/NSF/Wenner Gren, how to address reviewer comments); 5) professionalization (e.g. where to look for post-docs, how to approach faculty interviews, or on-campus job visit tips, how to transition from academia to other professional fields).

We are very excited to be able to offer this event again. Feedback from participants has been very positive, and continues to encourage us to create and support opportunities to connect graduate students and faculty across departments and institutions. We anticipate that the 5th installation of this event will continue to increase the research and professional skills of mentees as well as broaden the professional networks of mentees and mentors alike.

Information on registration for both mentors and mentees will follow in September 2020, so please stay tuned!

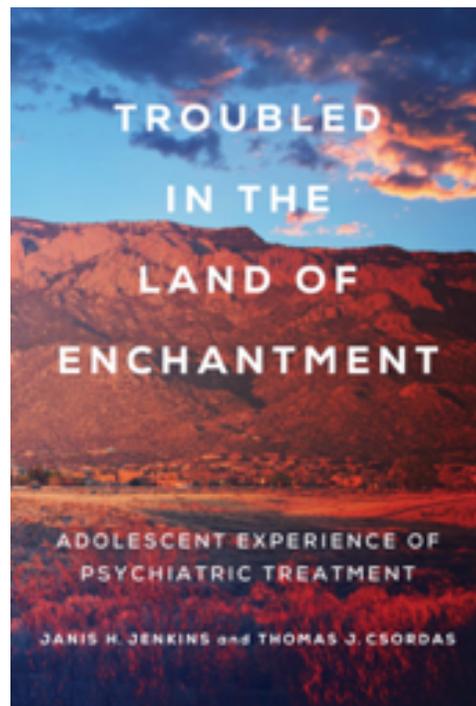
We look forward to having you join us! If you have any questions, feel free to email Lauren Cubellis at Cubellis@wustl.edu or Richard Powis at Richard.powis@wustl.edu.

Author's Intro with Janis Jenkins and Thomas Csordas

This column provides a platform for authors to summarize the significance of their upcoming and/or recently published books in Psychological Anthropology in a short, approachable venue. It provides readers the chance to learn about the significance of the latest research, straight from the source! If you would like to be featured in this column, please contact the Newsletter Editors at spa.an.submissions@gmail.com

There is little of greater importance to the mission of anthropology than understanding lived experience, for it is the locus of what it means to be human. The challenge of our book *Troubled in the Land of Enchantment: Adolescent Experience of Psychiatric Treatment* is to engage the lived experience of adolescents who have been inpatients in a psychiatric hospital, tracing their trajectories through the mental health treatment system under the regime of managed care. Our goal is to recognize their hopes for having a life in the face of extraordinary conditions of precarity and affliction. In terms of ethnographic situatedness, New Mexico is a place we have known for nearly three decades, returning for various lengths of time for research independently or in collaboration. The fieldwork for this project required engagement with difficult and often painful life situations faced by children, clinicians, and families. These situations could at times be overwhelming, and the work we and our research team conducted entailed a daily roil of empathy, contradiction, exhaustion, and immediacy.

Yet over the years, as one or the other of us have given presentations about the lives of our young participants and their families, we have grown impatient with academic or medical audiences' response to the gravity of the life conditions we described with reductive summations such as "sad," "tragic," or "depressing." Rather than statements of care or compassion, such rhetorical moves appeared to be geared more towards creating distance from the gravity and complexity of lives forged by multiplicities of affliction and legacies of structural violence. If it was hard for some audiences to hear this in the comfort of a conference room or lecture hall, how did they – or *would* they – imagine these lives lived on a day to day basis? During our research, we aimed to understand, through engaged listening, the lives of troubled young persons in a manner that deflects moral and political cynicism or sentimentality. This book is a move toward ethnographic knowledge that provides a foundation for transformative change toward healthcare equity for poor communities and regions within the United States – incongruously represented as a "wealthy" nation yet notoriously pocked by stark and ever-



increasing inequality. We wish this ethnography to be a foundation for social change to redress the scarcity and inadequacy of mental healthcare for those who need it most. These are squarely matters of ethnographic knowledge grounded in lived experience and political will grounded in ethical sensibility.

Through funding from NIMH for which we were Co-Principal Investigators, this interdisciplinary research project began in 2005, and data collection actively continued through 2011. We based the work at the Children's Psychiatric Center (CPC) at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. All participants entered the project as inpatients at CPC, and initial interviews often took place in the hospital. While this work included ethnographic observation and interviews with clinicians in this residential inpatient environment, it cannot be described as a "clinical ethnography." This is because our intent was to develop an understanding of youth and family experience not only while the youth were hospitalized, but after discharge over time and across settings, as an element of developmental trajectory, course of illness, and transformation of how they interpreted their dynamic situations. Accordingly, we conducted ethnographic

observation and interviews as well as research diagnostic interviews in their homes and other institutional settings, following the youth over time with additional interviews at approximately six months and one year after their discharge. We ended with 47 adolescents and their families (25 boys and 22 girls whose ages ranged from 12-17 with a mean age of 14.7 years), representing a remarkably complex ethnic hybridity that includes Native American, Hispanic/o, Latinx, and Euro or "Anglo" American identities, among other blends of ethnic self-identification.

Our opening chapter establishes the conceptual orientation of our work with respect to lived experience, social inequality, and engaged struggle, as well as critiques the constructs of adolescence and adolescent mental health. We sketch out the ethnographic terrain of New Mexico and examine the CPC in the context of the broader mental health care system. We describe the scope of our study and introduce the cohort of youth who shared their experience with us. The second chapter examines admission narratives – the stories of adolescents and their parents about how they ended up in the hospital. How they narrate these events is a critical point of entry into describing their lived experience, and from a research standpoint is the primary experience held in common by these diverse youth from different parts of the state and with distinct diagnostic and demographic profiles. Chapter three tackles the issue of what is troubling these troubled youth, defining their problems across dimensions of the moral and economic milieu, systematic research reliable psychiatric diagnostic categories, life experiences, etiological concepts articulated by the youth and their families, conceptions of illness and normalcy, and the structured *discourse of diagnosis*. In chapter four we provide a close analysis of anger, the single most prominent emotional phenomenon in the lived experience of these troubled youth. Simultaneously understandable as a symptom of illness, an emotional response to the frustrations of illness, and a human phenomenon subject to cultural variation in expression and experience, anger provides the occasion to examine in detail the experience of two of our participants, an angry boy and an angry girl. Our fifth chapter examines the experience of psychiatric treatment as the trajectory of each person through

the treatment system, defining the subjectivity of each troubled youth as someone with a psychiatric disorder or disorders. This includes their comparisons of different treatment facilities, their evaluations of whether and how treatment helped or harmed them, their use of or resistance to "coping skills," and their experience of a dizzying array of psycho-pharmaceutical medications. We describe detailed treatment trajectories for a number of the youth, enriched with the narrative intersubjectivity created by juxtaposing their parents' accounts of those same trajectories. Chapter six places the future and the possibility of having a life against the background of what it means to have a life that is severely disrupted. We address the issue of hope and introduce the concept of temporal horizons to describe the physiognomy and possibility of the future across the diversity among the forty-seven lives we encountered. We conclude with a reflection on research diagnostic categories and narrative ethnographic data, subjectivity and institutional structure, possibility and constraint, all in the face of structural violence that undermines the dignity of troubled youth, adopting a stance that we summarize in the aphorism "recognize suffering, support *struggle*."

In the course of our work with troubled youth and their sometimes equally troubled parents, our own ethnographic affects have ranged from sympathy to incredulity. Throughout the work, however, we have endeavored to remain as faithful as possible to the lived experience of those who chose to speak with us. Our hope is that *Troubled in the Land of Enchantment* will be received as a work that 1) contributes to the corpus of ethnography grounded in experiential specificity and the a body of anthropological thinking on subjectivity understood as a relatively enduring but circumstantially transformable structure of experience, and that 2) offers data of relevance to clinicians who treat troubled youth, who are responsible for developing treatment programs or who design, implement, and assess mental health policy.

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520343528/troubled-in-the-land-of-enchantment>

Janis H. Jenkins is Professor of Anthropology and Psychiatry and Director of the Center for Global Mental Health at UC San Diego. Her books include *Extraordinary Conditions: Culture and Experience in Mental Illness*; *Pharmaceutical Self: Global Shaping of Experience in an Age of Psychopharmacology*; and *Schizophrenia Culture, Subjectivity: The Edge of Experience*.

Thomas J. Csordas is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, James Y. Chan Presidential Chair in Global Health and Director of the Global Health Program at UC San Diego. His books include *The Sacred Self; Embodiment and Experience; Language, Charisma, and Creativity; Body/Meaning/Healing; and Transnational Transcendence*.

Author's Intro with Elizabeth Fein

This column provides a platform for authors to summarize the significance of their upcoming and/or recently published books in *Psychological Anthropology* in a short, approachable venue. It provides readers the chance to learn about the significance of the latest research, straight from the source! If you would like to be featured in this column, please contact the Newsletter Editors at spa.an.submissions@gmail.com

"Do you have autism?" my eleven-year-old friend Sylvester asks me one afternoon, as we are lying on the lawn outside the Unity Center, trying to make bows and arrows out of sticks and Scotch tape.

"Why?" I respond. "Do I seem like I do?"

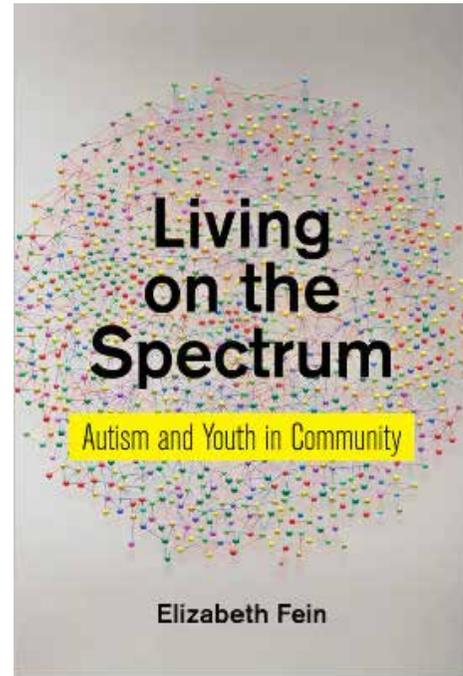
"Yes" he answers impatiently, as if it ought to be obvious to me.

"How come?"

"You're fun. And you're weird. You play with swords. And you come here. And you came to my birthday party."

Autism is a contested and complex condition. In some contexts, it is portrayed as a devastating disease, exclusively damaging in its impact. At other times, it is portrayed as a fundamental aspect of the self, bringing valued strengths as well as vulnerabilities. How do young people growing up with an autism spectrum diagnosis negotiate this conflict, in the context of their own developing identities?

Living on the Spectrum: Autism and Youth in Community is a clinical ethnography that explores how meanings of autism are developed and deployed by people on the autism spectrum, their families, and the professionals who work with them, in the contexts of their daily lives. When I first began this research, I was fascinated by the way that autism seemed to take place somewhere between individual psychology and culture, challenging the idea that these two arenas could be understood separately from each other. In my training as a clinical psychologist, learning diagnostic assessment and psychotherapy at clinics serving children and adults diagnosed with



developmental disabilities, I learned all about the “social cognitive deficits” that are often thought to be associated with autism. But I also saw what a thin and decontextualized sense of sociality – what it is, how it works, why anyone would want to engage in it – was evoked in these clinical formulations. As a psychological anthropologist, I wanted to understand how autism happens in the actual social worlds where people engage in the ongoing work of connection with each other. So I spent two years in places that bring people on the autism spectrum together – classrooms and clinics and support groups, community centers and summer camps, research labs and conferences – along the East Coast of the United States. I learned to swordfight; I bowled at a bowling league for young adults on the spectrum; I hung out at birthday parties; I ran focus groups at a science fiction convention. A few years later, I went back to follow up with some of the youth on the autism spectrum that I had known as teenagers, to see how they had handled the tricky transition into young adulthood.

“Living on the Spectrum” is a book about their experiences and insights, but it’s also a book about the broader context within which they do their creative and interpretive work. As they grapple with questions about the meanings of autism – as a disease, as a hardwired neurogenetic identity, or as something else entirely, something disruptively wondrous and strange – they are also navigating a paradigm shift in psychiatric diagnosis. I argue that a “neurodevelopmental turn” in American psychiatry – away from diagnosing psychiatric disorders as discrete disease entities delineated through lists of symptoms, and toward the detection, prevention and remediation of biologically-based abnormalities in universal human capacities for perception, attention, memory, self-regulation and learning – is producing new kinds of diagnostic entities, among which “the autism spectrum” is most prominent. These conditions are characterized by multivalent patterns of strengths as well as vulnerabilities, deeply bound up in our sense of who we are and how we perceive and process the world around us. Medicalized models of autism, grounded as they are in older infrastructures that posit the healthy self as continuous, bounded and impermeable, cannot fully account for the experiences of youth with such diagnoses. Instead, these youth look outside of medicine to an alternate shared mythology drawn from fantasy literature, video games, and other multimedia speculative fictions to conceptualize and convey their shared experiences of hybridity and multiplicity. In doing so, they are pioneering more inclusive notions of what makes us who we are.

I wanted *Living on the Spectrum* to be a book that could be enjoyed by the student I was when I first started thinking about this project: just out of college, looking toward graduate school, interested in mental health research but wanting something more than the quantitative work I saw foregrounded in many psychology departments. It’s a lively read, appropriate for undergraduate and graduate classes. I also hoped to engage with questions within the anthropology and sociology of neuroscience about how neuroscientific knowledge production is influencing our senses of who we are. What I saw being left out of many of these accounts was a recognition of how neurocognitive difference itself shapes the uptake, circulation and transformation of neuroscientific discourse. How have the kinds of interpretive, cognitive and perceptual styles associated with autism affected the growing prevalence and power of autism as an organizing concept? This book is a clinical ethnography because the ways of seeing I’ve developed through my clinical training serve as both a lens and an object of analysis. As such, I hope the book makes a case for the relevance of clinical training to ethnographic work, and for the usefulness of ethnography for investigating questions of psychological distress and well-being.

Sylvester’s question highlights the continuities between autism and ethnography. Both are ways of observing, encountering, participating in, and creating shared worlds; both are endeavors characterized by unusual and particular sensitivities; both take approaches that can come across as analytical or even detached, but that are always deeply embedded in interpersonal, cultural and historical contexts. While I don’t identify as having autism myself, in the sense that it has been delineated by clinical manuals and medical research infrastructures, Sylvester – along with many of the other people in *Living on the Spectrum* – invites us to consider how a different and wider range of life experiences might co-exist with each other in consequential ways. His invitation is one that I hope this book will amplify.

Elizabeth Fein is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Duquesne University and a licensed psychologist in the state of Pennsylvania. She received her Ph.D. in 2012 from the University of Chicago Department of Comparative Human Development. Along with Clarice Rios, she is the co-editor of *Autism in Translation: An Intercultural Conversation on Autism Spectrum Conditions*. She curates the Virtual Salons for the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (SQIP), a section of APA’s Division of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, and sings with the Pittsburgh synthpop band Take Me With You.

MENTORING MATTERS - KIM ALLEN

The SPA is deeply committed to mentoring students and young professionals. This column features the voices of exemplary mentor-scholars in Psychological Anthropology. They share tips and strategies as well as offer guidance that they learned as they went through the process of graduate school, including conducting research, writing up, applying for jobs, etc. If you would like to be featured or nominate someone to be featured here, please contact the Newsletter Editors at spa.an.submissions@gmail.com

Mentoring: It takes a village

'Mentor' is a verb and noun—to be a mentor and to mentor. It is an inherently unequal relationship as one party seeks to learn, do or be something that the other party has already experienced. It's a relationship involving helping and advising as one moves through a process of bringing into existence something more or different in oneself. These added dimensions of time and space are characteristic of mentoring, which aims to foster change and development in a person—to mentor or to be a mentor suggests becoming.

Like you, I became an anthropologist over a period of years involving study, reflection, engagement in ethnographic practices, and mentorship. I share my mentor, the late Dr. Dottie Holland, with dozens of anthropologists and ethnographers. Without her mentorship, I would not have pursued my Ph.D. nor stayed the course to earn my degree. She is the epitome of an anthropologist—ever curious, interested in the everyday and engaged. Although I'm not a practicing anthropologist—I don't teach or conduct research—I am an anthropologist. And not simply because I've earned a degree. I am an anthropologist because I engage with the world, including in my work as an educator, as the anthropologist I was trained by Dr. Holland to be—inquisitive, interested and theoretically grounded in the concepts of History in Person, Communities of Practice and Figured Worlds. These ideas inform the mentoring relationships that have fostered my becoming an anthropologist and educator, and they inform the mentoring relationships I strive to provide to undergraduate business students as the director of the Kenan Scholars program at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School.

As the director, my work involves supporting students in becoming *future business leaders committed to changing the world for the better*. This work is organized around three core areas: internships in both the public and private sectors, research, and mentorship. Scholars spend sophomore summer working in the public sector and the junior summer employed in the private sector. During the senior year they undertake an independent research project under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Notably, each class of scholars is supported by its own board of mentors, a 12-15 person board comprised of recent MBA graduates, government and public officials, business school faculty, and professionals from both the public and private sectors. Most relevant here is the Kenan Scholars Board of Mentors.

Our mission is to support students in becoming leaders who use their business knowledge and skills for the betterment of all. Upon graduation, a majority secure employment in corporate America while others serve as public officials or work in non-profits. Whatever the endeavor, they do so having spent their undergraduate years in critical reflection on the role of business and the economy and using their business skills and knowledge for purposes beyond fattening the bottom line. This shows up differently depending on the student's particular interests and passions. There's no one way to be a business leader committed to tackling complex societal problems and no one way to get there. It takes a village, hence we settled on a board of mentors rather than one-on-one mentoring to deliver this aspect of the program.

The benefits of a board over one-on-one mentoring are many, namely having a larger and more varied pool from which to draw social capital and to avoid a mismatch or lack of fit. Kenan Scholars is not for everyone; a particular kind of student is attracted to our mission--high-achieving with a predilection for service and an interest in the public good. Within Kenan-Flagler, they seek refuge among like-minded students who care about more than profit margins and ROIs. Yet for all their do-goodness and smarts, they are still becoming. And thus the need for advisors and helpers to model behaviors, attitudes and beliefs. They need information, direction, and counsel with problems and difficulties. Our aim is for mentors to be lifelong advocates and supporters, beyond college and into scholars' careers, that these relationships endure over time and space. This is reflected in how we structure and support them.

The relationship kicks off with a speed networking event. Akin to speed dating, the session commences over refreshments once scholars and mentors are paired. During each 3-minute round, participants talk and learn fun facts about one another. They practice their elevator speeches. A deck of cards containing fun questions about work and life in general helps keep the conversation going. At the end of each round, participants are directed to quickly move to the next station for the next round of questions and conversation. This process continues until all scholars and mentors have interacted with each other. In just a short while, everyone will have shared business cards, made new connections and learned valuable information about one another's interests, careers and life journeys. By the end, scholars and mentors will have made at least one coffee or lunch date or follow-up plan involving a call, email or worksite visit.

Three or four times a year, about 4 mentors share advice and wisdom over lunch in a panel moderated by a scholar. In this more formal setting, scholars can determine who they might want to get to know better and again are encouraged to make a date or schedule a follow-up action. Upon

request, the program will provide financial or logistical support for lunch dates, worksite visits or tickets to sporting or theatrical events. Mentors are invited to attend programs for the scholars such as workshops, symposia and roundtables. In addition, during two checkpoints in each semester, staff ask scholars to share what interactions they've had with mentors. Scholars are regularly encouraged to share news, seek guidance and express gratitude. Together, mentors and scholars create community through the *practice* of mentorship.

By graduation and *beyond*, students transform into professionals with leadership roles in their communities and places of employment. They do so having benefited from the empathy, encouragement, and advice of our version of a village elders, the Kenan Scholars Board of Mentors.

Kim Allen is the Kenan Scholars Program Director at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. She heads the institute's signature scholarship program, which provides a world-class, transformative scholarship experience for undergraduate and graduate students of Kenan-Flagler Business School. She comes to the institute from UNC's Carolina Center for Public Service.

Kim has more than 20 years of leadership experience in education, community engagement and nonprofit management in organizations such as UNC-Chapel Hill, the NAACP and the Martin Luther King, Jr. History & Public Policy Center, where she served as executive director.

She holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and a Bachelor of Science in Education and Social Policy from Northwestern University.

SPA/RLF Fellow Feature

Ipsita Dey

Reconstructing “Human” Worlds: Fijian Indian Experiences of “Making Kin” in Times of Political and Environmental Crisis

The SPA - Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship for pre-dissertation fieldwork allowed me to conduct preliminary ethnographic research during Summer 2019 in Sigatoka, Fiji. Sigatoka, known for its abandoned sugarcane plantations and severe environmental destruction caused by trash accumulation and sand mining, was my primary field site and ethnographic lens into the history of indentured labor and post-colonial reconstruction among the Fijian Indian community. Since the first ships carrying Indian human cargo arrived in Fiji in 1879, Fijian Indians have worked as indentured laborers on the country's (previously) numerous sugarcane plantations. Over time and through this process, Fijian Indians developed a local knowledge of land management and agricultural practices that combined Hindu devotional practices, Indian ancestral farming traditions, and a technical familiarity with the Fijian landscape. My initial research proposal was to work with local government officials, current students of agricultural studies at local high schools and universities, and descendants of sugarcane laborers to study these intersectional environmental practices surviving within the Fijian Indian community. In this report, I explain how my preliminary fieldwork on Fijian Indian environmental practices helped me identify more specific theoretical and ethnographic questions regarding multispecies kinships between Fijian Indians and the land/waterscape.

As I write this report, spaces of belonging and traditional kinship structures among the Fijian Indian community are rapidly changing or vanishing: the systematic displacement of Fijian Indian plantation workers from their ancestral sugarcane plantation home is tearing families apart; economic and existential futures are losing their certainty in the wake



Image 1: Dey interviews a 104 year old Fijian Indian sugarcane laborer who still lives on the sugarcane plantation where she was born

of apocalyptic narratives of irreversible climate change, foreclosing the potentialities imagined for and by generational descendants of plantation workers; and current political tensions and general anti-Fijian Indian sentiment preclude the possibility for their visibility and recognition on a national scale. Thus, as Fijian Indian communities continue to face political and racial marginalization, “kinship” emerged as an appropriate framework to think about how environmental practices are preserved and passed down within this community. My field notes and observations, however, challenged the classical definition of “kinship,” which privileges inter/intra-human relationships. In the process of ethnographic collaboration, I quickly learned that a radical reconstruction of personal and relational identity was occurring among my Fijian Indian interlocutors, who were redefining the environment (both the human and non-human actors within it) as a kind of “kin.”

At the Vivekananda Technical Institute, I worked with Fijian Indian students studying “Modern Farming Techniques” who performed religious rituals before planting seeds and tenderly cared for their sprouting buds. These students, many of whom had grown up in Fijian Indian squatter settlements, were (re)turning to the Fijian agricultural landscape in hopes of economic viability. The seedlings themselves carried hopes, dreams, and historical trauma of indentured labor and displacement; and seen as such holy vessels of memory, the seedlings became honored elders and treasured kin. Similarly, while at the funeral honoring the death of my host family’s patriarch, I observed as the soil itself became imbued with personal memory and sacred meaning where Avinash Uncle’s ashes mixed with the Earth. The soil where the ashes were buried was revered and worshipped in religious ritual: through the cremation process, kin became soil and in devotional practice, the soil became kin. Suggested or imagined kinships between Fijian Indians and the environment became more obvious at the Sigatoka Town Council. I shadowed a local government official as he attended meetings with non-profits to brainstorm how displaced Fijian Indians living in trash dump sites could learn to live “with” and “among” garbage. Using idiomatic language reminiscent of challenging familial relationships, trash was described as something to be made space for, to be lived with, and to be accepted despite its negative consequences, much like kin.

The emerging and unarticulated forms of kinship that I witnessed – between humans and plants, humans and soil, humans and trash – challenged and tested my anthropological understanding of what counts as “human.” Because if “humans” and living/non-living “others” could be considered kin, what kinds of differences and distinctions between “humans” and “others” were disintegrating? Fijian Indians have entered a time of transition where normative modes of capitalistic production and extraction are no longer viable: the collapse of the plantation economy, the inability to fish and/or farm “like normal,” and the rapidly changing land/waterscape have all signaled an erosion of the nature-culture divide and a reorientation towards other beings or “critters” (Haraway 2015) co-habiting physical, personal, and spiritual spaces. Fijian Indians are facing a contemporary “boundary event” (Haraway et al. 2016) which requires a radical (re)definition and (re)categorization of what it fundamentally means to be “human” and what it means to be “kin.”



Image 2: Dey shadows an environmental survey research team

The preliminary fieldwork made possible by the generous SPA-RLF grant has been crucial in helping me identify my central research question: How are Fijian Indians “making kin” and making sense of a paradoxical world of both destruction and potentiality? Informed by the historical context of indentured servitude, the contemporary conditions of displacement and political marginalization, and a generational relationship with the Fijian landscape, in my upcoming dissertation fieldwork I will pay special attention to the intimate and liminal subtleties of Fijian Indian kinships with their rapidly changing environment.

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Ipsita Dey is a Ph.D. student in Anthropology at Princeton University with interests in psychological anthropology and the environmental humanities. Dey seeks to understand how human subjectivity, personhood, and agency are reconstructed and redefined in the process of making kinship with non-human actors of the environment. She works with Fijian Indians who have been displaced from their ancestral sugarcane plantation homes due to political marginalization and ethnic violence, yet still maintain a spiritual relationship with the Fijian land/waterscape.

A Festschrift Honoring Bob LeVine: A Book, a Working Conference, and a Day of Tributes

by Rebecca New

On March 8th, 2020, Robert A. LeVine was feted by several dozen former students, friends and colleagues at a day-long event at Harvard's Graduate School of Education (HGSE)—a joyous, fortunate, and serendipitous event.

The initial impetus for this occasion began almost five years earlier, at the 2015 SPA meeting in Boston, when I met with Bob to discuss a *Festschrift* in his honor. Bob was insistent that his students be central to such a commemorative publication.

The task of locating and communicating with his students was daunting. Bob began his academic career in 1958 at Northwestern University. He then worked at the University of Chicago and Harvard, until he retired in 1998. Even in retirement he continued to advise two dozen Harvard doctoral students and was a Visiting Professor at three universities! Yet, Bob's enthusiasm for this effort was compelling, so we began compiling a list of those he recalled as his students. As the list grew, I began locating and writing to former students from across the U.S. and internationally. In addition to soliciting proposals for chapters in Bob's honor for a traditional *Festschrift* academic publication, I invited memoirs for a second book, a more inclusive way for Bob's many students to celebrate him as a teacher, scholar, and mentor.

By late fall 2019, nineteen former students had proposed chapters for the academic *Festschrift* volume. Hidetada Shimizu joined me as co-editor and we invited six of Bob's colleagues as discussants. Memoirs continued to arrive, with promises of more to come. In January 2020, Harvard's Graduate School of Education announced a Centennial Celebration on March 6-7, 2020. Bob would be a featured speaker at the symposium "The History and Future of Human Development and Psychology at HGSE"—a program he helped build when he came to Harvard in 1976. Harvard alumna were invited, many of them Bob's former students.

The opportunity for an in-person celebration of Bob was evident. HGSE Professor Catherine Snow was



Image: Barbara Rogoff and Catherine Snow had an engaging conversation with Bob about the potentials of collaborative research on culture and human development.

quick to offer support for a satellite event in Bob's honor following the HGSE symposium. Rob Lemelson of UCLA was similarly encouraging in his initial response ---"I love Bob. Just let me know." In February, the Robert Lemelson Foundation awarded a grant for a "*Festschrift* Working Conference" honoring Robert A. LeVine.

In spite of the short lead-time, most *Festschrift* contributors were able to participate in the working conference, including Eileen Anderson-Fye, Suzanne Gaskins, Susan Holloway, John Hornstein, Suzanne Kirschner, Cathy Lewis, John Lucy, Rebecca New, Justus Ogembo, Barbara Rogoff, Meredith Rowe, Hidetada Shimizu, Marie-Anne Suizzo, Joseph Tobin, and Carol Worthman. *Festschrift* discussants Rick Shweder, Catherine Snow, Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Tom Weisner were also present. *Festschrift* contributors Byron Good, Audrie Kusserow, Diana Slaughter-Kotzin and Dan Wagner and discussants Jill Korbin and Mel Konner were unable to attend.

The morning of March 8th began early in Gutman Library, with a large gathering of *Festschrift* contributors and two dozen additional former students, friends and colleagues, including Paul Harris, Corky White, Parker Shipton, and Connie Cummings. Greetings and introductions were followed with remarks by Bob's colleagues.



Image: Festschrift Working Conference participants gathered for a group photo after a day of intense, emotional, and productive discussions about Bob's influences on their work.

Former Dean Pat Graham described Bob's leadership role in establishing HGSE's interdisciplinary program in Human Development and Psychology and as a board member of The Spencer Foundation. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco lauded Bob's insistence on integrating multiple disciplines in his own scholarship. Tom Weisner and Rick Shweder offered personal tributes to Bob, including his role in founding the SPA. Tom Weisner highlighted Bob's enduring "deep concern for psychoanalysis, culture theory and a wide range of cognitive and emotion theories in his research" and his fierce advocacy "for a fully contextual, international cultural psychology using a wide range of methods." Rick Shweder described Bob as "a virtuoso anthropological story teller....and ... those who have the skills and commitment to narrate the history of our calling are doing something of great value, that should itself be recognized and . . . applauded." Bob was an active listener to these stories of his long history in the field, occasionally responding if an anecdote required fact checking!

A "Conversation with Bob" followed with Barbara Rogoff and Catherine Snow, who invited Bob to reflect on his role in promoting interdisciplinary research in psychology and education. When asked whether he was encouraged about the future of such research, Bob cited examples from his own and other's research, but ended with a recurring critique: "You know, psychology regards itself as a discipline and it's...it's a problem!" [laughter] "What can I say? [...] they're just not, they don't want to include anthropology. I mean, if the journal *Child Development* was willing to publish ethnographic data along with psychological data, it would make a huge difference." Catherine Snow offered a more optimistic view, pointing out the interdisciplinary and culturally informed ways that some scholars now do their work. She went on to note that, given the number of students Bob has influenced [pointing to those in the room], "you've got quite a different picture of the intellectual landscape." Barbara Rogoff described the "growth of interstitial groups like the SPA" that exist between disciplines as "the most exciting places." Bob was energized by the discussion, as were we all.

After a mid-morning break, the focus shifted to the Festschrift Working Conference, beginning with a discussion of key concepts associated with Bob's scholarship, such as culture models, person-centered ethnography, and self in culture. Bob's previous remarks about interdisciplinary research inspired spirited exchanges among Festschrift contributors, who then met in small groups to consider how their proposed chapters addressed these and other aspects of Bob's scholarship. The full group reconvened for the final 2 hours. Note-takers shared highlights from the small group discussions, including new insights into Bob's work from those who studied with him at different times in his career. Several people emphasized the Festschrift volume's potential to use contemporary issues as a way to highlight the



Image: Bob made his way to a table for a memorable dinner, concluding a day he subsequently described as “a miracle.”

benefits of cross-cultural collaborative research; others noted the value of working conference discussions in clarifying and challenging initial ideas. Personal and emotional tributes to Bob were also shared. Bob was the final speaker, expressing appreciation and reflections on responses to his work.

The celebration continued with dinner in a local restaurant, where Bob and Sarah were joined by working conference participants and other guests, including Carola Suarez-Orozco, Sara Harkness and Charlie Super. After dinner, hugs were plentiful, as were promises of revised chapter abstracts and additional memoirs. It was a memorable conclusion to a day of celebration and intellectual exchange. Two days later, Harvard University closed due to COVID-19, and the world changed as we knew it. Bob continues to refer to that day in March --beginning with a morning of tributes, the *Festschrift* discussions, and dinner—as “a miracle.”

During the first months of COVID-19, the memoirs collection was edited and produced as a limited-edition publication (New, in press). A prospectus for the *Festschrift* volume is underway, drawing on ideas generated in the Working Conference (New & Shimizu, in preparation). For those interested, another publication of Bob’s selected papers is currently in press -- *The Cultural Psyche: The Selected Papers of Robert A. LeVine on Psycho social Science*, edited by Dinesh Sharma.

Rebecca New (Ed.D.,1984, HGSE) is Associate Professor of Education, Emerita, UNC - Chapel Hill. Her research on cultural models of child development includes a decades-long study of Italian early childhood education, and a recently completed ethnographic study of Chinese and Latinx immigrant parents of young children. She co-edited *Anthropology and Child Development: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (LeVine & New, 2008); and Bob proposed the title for her next book (following the *Festschrift* volume) -- *Approaching Reggio Emilia* --- contrasting US and Italian cultural models of early education.

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Image: This landscape view is of the farm a group of Sent-Down Youth used to work at during the Cultural Revolution in China. Image by Hua (Miranda) Wu.

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Your co-editors for the SPA column in the AAA Anthropology-News (Sugandh Gupta, Ellen Kozelka, and Amir Hampel) would like to hear from you! Do you have pictures from the field or any accolades, publications, or news you would like to share with SPA members? Throughout the year, SPA-AN features research by our members. If you have an idea for a piece or for a series, be in touch (spa.an.submissions@gmail.com)!