

# Anthropology News

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*Anthropology News*, the official newspaper of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), is published monthly, except for June, July and August.

The mission of the AAA is to advance anthropology as the science that studies humankind in all its aspects, through archaeological, biological, ethnological and linguistic research; and to foster the use of anthropological knowledge in addressing human problems. *Anthropology News* (AN) advances this mission by providing members with news of association business; discussions of issues of vital importance to the discipline; and information on publications, professional job opportunities, research funding availability, meetings and other items of importance to members. AN promotes the discipline of anthropology and the interests of anthropologists across all subfields.

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## Response to "Taking the Next Step"

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Dr González' and Dr Gusterson's article regarding the use of anthropology in Disney's market research (AN 50[6]). I appreciate their concern about the ethics of using anthropology's theories, methodologies and practitioners for consumer research. Unlike academic research, which is conducted in an open environment with the intention of being shared to further our society's general understanding of social and cultural issues, consumer research, as you know, is conducted within the confines of a competitive marketplace and is intrinsically closed as a result. That said, I feel it is important to understand that anyone who participates in research for us has volunteered in advance to take part in consumer research, which they are informed will be used to help companies develop better products, marketing messages and sales techniques. They are also informed that the results of such research are proprietary and will not be shared with them. Participants, or parents of participants, must sign

a consent form prior to participation acknowledging that they understand both the overall, market-driven purpose of consumer research and the proprietary nature of its findings. Moreover, in the boys' research that you reference in your article, participants and their parents were informed that the research was being conducted for a major entertainment company that serves children and families. Immediately following the research session, the participants were informed it was for Disney.

Obviously, such disclaimers about the intentions and limitations of consumer research do not address the fundamental ethical problem you and the discipline of anthropology find at the heart of closed research. However, in reality, anthropology and those trained in the field are having increasing influence on the way consumer research gets conducted and interpreted. Given this increasing influence, I hope we can approach each other's fields with understanding, openness and respect.

**Kelly Peña**

Disney Channels Worldwide and  
Disney ABC Cable Networks Group 

## 2009 AAA Photo Contest

AN thanks everyone who submitted their work for the 2009 AAA Photo Contest. We again received an enthusiastic response to the call for entries and we truly appreciate your participation.

Selected photos will appear in AN in the spring.



## Commentary Policy

AN commentaries are designed to explore diverse views of the discipline from an anthropological perspective. Commentaries reflect the views of the authors; their publication does not signify endorsement by AN or the AAA. Authors are expected to verify all factual information included in the text.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Maintaining a balance between work and other aspects of life can be difficult for both academic and practicing anthropologists. Some cite inflexible educational or professional infrastructures or the challenges of doing local anthropology as barriers to maintaining a healthy and comfortable work-life balance. In September 2008 we introduced an ongoing commentary series addressing these challenges, as well as strategies developed to meet them. This series will conclude in December 2009.

## Single Parenting in the Field

KRISTEN GHODSEE  
BOWDOIN C

The number of single parents working as anthropologists today is growing—a reflection of changing family formations and an increasing percentage of senior women in the profession. Without a partner to provide backup childcare, there are a myriad of challenges sole caregivers face. In addition to the personal and profes-

sional difficulties of parenting a child (or children) on one's own, anthropologists often have to negotiate the need for extensive foreign travel and long periods of fieldwork. This presents a variety of logistical problems, from procuring the necessary visas for a long-term stay to finding an appropriate school. There are issues of safety and childcare, and of dealing with the language training and cultural adjustment

of someone who is entirely dependent on you. Finally, parents doing fieldwork abroad encounter sometimes radically different parenting standards. As anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn (U Colorado) wrote to me about taking her five-year-old son to Tbilisi, Georgia, "One challenge...is that my kid is exposed to *all* sorts of things that violate just about every tenet of

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## Parenting

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American motherhood available. Seatbelts? Non-existent. Second hand smoke? Ubiquitous."

In spite of the many logistical and psychological issues to be managed, bringing one's family into the field can be a very rewarding experience for all parties involved. The presence of a child can dramatically alter a cultural anthropologist's positionality vis-à-vis her research subjects, integrating her more deeply into certain communities. Long before I became a single parent myself, I remember reading *All Our Kin* (1974), which Carol Stack wrote after several years of fieldwork in the mid-sixties with her young son. Kevin offered Stack a way into to the tight-knit community of single black mothers in "The Flats," who formed a variety of non-traditional kinship bonds in order to raise their children collectively, and much of the ethnography was informed by her own single motherhood. Stack reflected on this experience over a decade later in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*,

From Ruby and countless other single parents in The Flats, I learned how rights and responsibilities for children were distributed within and across kin groups. As single parents, they were far less isolated from kin and informal supports than the few white single parents I knew in the middle-class world of academics in the late 1960s. During my stay in the Flats, I was learning what I later came to realize were feminist strategies for surviving as a single parent within networks of friends and extended kin.

Stack's status as a single mother was the key that allowed her intimate access to the community of women she studied.

between the ages of four and six. Bringing her daily to a little playground in the central square gave me the invaluable opportunity to chat with other mothers watching their own children from the benches. Many of these women had husbands who had fled the town in search of jobs, leaving the women and children to fend for themselves. The proper care for our children was a constant topic of conversation, overcoming all social, religious and generational barriers.

Eventually, these mothers began to invite my daughter for play dates in their homes, opening doors that I know otherwise might have remained closed. When my daughter fell ill, the entire town mobilized to help me and used their connections in the local hospital so that I could see a specialist. During that time, I learned much about local networks of patronage and the different social and economic fissures that had appeared within the community after the closing of the mines. But as much as I learned from the other mothers, they also learned from me, carefully watching my interactions with my daughter and ever curious about family relations in the West.

This is not to make my fieldwork sound easy, to downplay the many real challenges I faced in the field, or to ignore how my ability to interact with informants was also compromised by the presence of my daughter. So many fascinating adult conversations were interrupted by urgent demands for food or necessary trips to the potty (where teaching a four-year-old girl to use a squat toilet was a consistently exasperating and messy endeavor). Evening events were often off limits to me, as were many scholarly conferences or other official events. Working in Central Asia, Dunn reports some of the same

## A Word of Encouragement

Not only was my research enriched by my daughter's presence, but I also felt that living in Bulgaria allowed me to discover an ideal type of work-family balance, where I could spend more time with her than I would have back

Kristiana, I am sure I would have wasted much more time reading novels, watching TV, writing emails to friends or just sleeping. Being a single parent means you have to be incredibly patient, organized and disciplined—traits that can be very useful when you



The author's daughter (far right) with her newfound Bulgarian playmates.

Photo courtesy Kristen Ghodsee

in the United States. Yes, there were all sorts of unique challenges associated with having a four-year-old in Bulgaria, but I never lost sight of the challenges I faced as a single parent back home. In some respects it was easier to live in a Balkan culture, where people have a more leisurely attitude toward work and where children are welcome everywhere. I had fewer time constraints or set responsibilities; if she got sick, I could just be with her, something that is much more difficult when your schedule is filled with university teaching and service commitments.

At home in the US, time with family and time at work are either/or choices; I am wracked with guilt if I spend too much time doing either one at the expense of the other. In Bulgaria, I was able to spend quality time with my daughter while doing research. In fact, the time management skills that I had developed to maximize productivity while my daughter was in daycare back home trained me not to squander a single moment of her nap time in the field. Although I was almost always "on duty" as a parent, I managed to scribble out reams of notes and observations while she slept or played alone on the floor of our small flat. Without

are negotiating your way through another culture for an extended period of time.

Finally, although my daughter was very young, I think living in Bulgaria was a valuable experience for her as well. She was exposed to social, cultural and economic diversity at a very formative age, and spent more time than usual with her far less hurried and more relaxed mother. Kristiana learned the value of empathy and of trying to understand people by walking that proverbial mile in their shoes. Now that she is seven, she only remembers some of the names of children she played with on the playground, but she does clearly recall the regular exaltations of the call to prayer, the sticky sweet taste of her favorite Bulgarian candies, the gentle and smiling faces of the doting grandmothers, and the idea that the world is both a very big and a very small place at the same time.

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## COMMENTARY

### Opportunities and Challenges

I had a similar experience during my fieldwork with a community of newly devout Muslim women in a small, rural, de-industrialized mining town in south-central Bulgaria. Between 2005 and 2007, I spent about a year in the country when my daughter, Kristiana, was

frustrations with the way in which limited fieldwork hours can also mean limited opportunities to study certain topics, as well as a change in the pace of research. Even with these caveats, however, I would not discourage any parent from bringing their child with them into the field.