

Medical Anthropology Quarterly

International Journal for the Analysis of Health | Society for Medical Anthropology

Title: Transitions, Access, Conversations: Editor's Introduction

Authors: Clarence C. Gravlee

Medical Anthropology Quarterly 27(1):in press; 2013.

This is the authors' post-print. Please cite the final version of the article, available at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1548-1387](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1548-1387)

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Clarence C. Gravlee

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Editor's Introduction

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Transitions, Access, Conversations

This issue of *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* is the first to appear since I became editor. It is a moment to express gratitude to my predecessors, Mark Luborsky and Andrea Sankar, for their stewardship and service, and to the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA) for entrusting me with the journal. It is also a time to reflect on what lies ahead for *MAQ*.

Mark and Andrea handed off a journal in excellent condition. Under their watch, the peer review process became more efficient and the reach of the journal grew. SMA records show that the average time from submission to a final editorial decision dropped from 114 days in 2007 to 63 in 2012. Meanwhile, in 2011, *MAQ*'s impact factor (a measure of how often articles in the journal are cited) reached an all-time high of 1.3. And this year, *MAQ* will become the first AAA journal to publish articles online ahead of print. Most important, the quality and diversity of articles that Mark and Andrea brought to print—including in this issue—are worthy of *MAQ*'s status as the flagship journal of the field. All of us in SMA owe Mark and Andrea our thanks.

The challenge now is to build on the journal's success during a time of rapid change in scholarly publishing. As I write this editorial, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) has just released a report on the future of its publishing program. The report conveys a sense of urgency to reduce the costs of producing AAA journals while expanding access to content. I believe it is in the best interest of the journal, the Society, and the discipline to pursue a model of

open-access publishing that makes *MAQ* content freely available without a subscription. The financial challenges are real but not insurmountable, and in the long run, it's a choice between openness or obsolescence.

MAQ is not likely to provide “gold” open access (Boellstorff 2012) during my term as editor, which coincides with the waning years of the AAA's current contract with Wiley-Blackwell, but the work to enable an open-access future starts now. We have begun by reducing the costs of the editorial office and investing the savings in a new digital infrastructure for the journal. The centerpiece is a website under development at <http://medanthroquarterly.org/>. The vision for the site is to provide freely accessible, supplementary content that will expand the reach of the journal and facilitate scholarly exchange of ideas. Following the successful example of *Cultural Anthropology* (<http://culanth.org>), we will establish opportunities for graduate students to advance their professional development by creating content for the website. In addition, with support from the University of Florida Libraries, we have established an institutional repository through which authors can provide unrestricted access to the final manuscript version of their articles (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/maq>). This repository secures *MAQ*'s status as a “green” open-access journal (Jackson 2011).

The platforms for scholarly publishing may be changing, but the editor's main job—bringing the best work to print—has not. For me, the appeal of editing lies in the opportunity to be part of a scholarly community. Editors have a responsibility to engage colleagues' ideas, ensure they are evaluated fairly and efficiently, communicate feedback to authors, and publish the best work that emerges from this process. The scholarly exchange built into peer review is

part of what drew me to academia in the first place, and I look forward to how my term as Editor of *MAQ* will transform me as a scholar.

The idea that the journal shapes the editor, rather than the other way around, may be unusual, if colleagues' reactions to my appointment are any guide. The most common reaction I have encountered is, "How exciting to be able to shape the field!" That's not how I see it at all. Rather, I am convinced by Tom Boellstorff's (2010a:177) view that a journal editor "works not as visionary but ringmaster."

Boellstorff argues that editors are obliged to publish the best work from multiple scholarly communities that make up a field, not to promote one vision over another. I like his metaphor of anthropology as a set of overlapping conversations that listen in on one another. This metaphor is uniquely important for a generalist journal like *American Anthropologist*, but I think it works for *MAQ*, too. It implies that the editor's job is to respect multiple scholarly communities within medical anthropology and to engage readers in the most important conversations taking place in each one. This approach makes it unlikely that every article will appeal to every reader, but every reader should find something valuable—perhaps provocative—in every issue of *MAQ* (see Bernard 1984; Boellstorff 2010b).

I invite you to take part in the conversation by sending your best scholarship to *MAQ*.

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