

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

MALE NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS LIVING IN GREATER  
TOKYO: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

By

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# **Male Native English-speaking Teachers Living in Greater Tokyo: An Autoethnographic Analysis**

## **Abstract**

A male native English-speaking teacher will be able to live successfully in Greater Tokyo if he is able to associate this megalopolis as being (1) a place where he has developed strong intimate relationships; (2) a place that is perceived to be safe and economically beneficial; and (3) a place where sociocultural expectations are perceived to be non-invasive and moderately liberating at the same time. This proposition is based on a combination of critical analysis of ten participant questionnaires and autoethnographic research. Eight males currently living in Tokyo and two males no longer living here were selected for this project. Although this research cannot claim to be a formal representation of the subculture being studied, it did unearth a variety of sociocultural phenomena.

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I remember waiting for an elevator with my three-year-old daughter and my newborn son in one of Tokyo's massive Yodobashi Camera stores. We were first in line, and the elevator was clearly marked with baby carriage and handicap signs. As the doors opened, a crowd of able-bodied people immediately started to push past us in order to get on. No one appeared to even notice that I, a 193 cm tall white male, was pushing a baby carriage while worrying about my young half-Japanese daughter's safety. The three of us did manage to bump and jostle our way onto the elevator, but while I stood there watching people press up against my half-Japanese son's carriage, I privately asked myself, "What are you doing here?" By "here," I meant Greater Tokyo and by "doing," I meant living here for fourteen years. The research undertaken for this project was designed to help me, and hopefully others, better understand the answer to this question.

In March 2011, I began an inductive research journey with the goal of answering the question, "Why do male <sup>1</sup>native English-speaking teachers live in Greater Tokyo?" in order to establish the critical challenges and strategies for overcoming the hurdles so current teachers and in-coming novice teachers may live here successfully. To further clarify my objectives, I was not interested in comparing Greater Tokyo to other areas around the world or in Japan. I was primarily concerned with the factors that contributed to an individual's choice to reside in this unique metropolis. The findings presented in this paper stem from an interdisciplinary approach to research, which combines autoethnography and critical analysis of the participants' answers to a questionnaire. As a member of the community being researched, I will reveal a variety of personal opinions and experiences throughout this piece, and hope that my writing style, "complete with

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<sup>1</sup> English language teachers whose first language is English.

colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness” (Gergen and Gergen 14) will not only be entertaining but also respectful of answers provided by respondents.

## **Background**

Tokyo Prefecture is commonly perceived to be one gigantic city, but in reality, it is a combination of twenty-three city wards, twenty-six cities, five towns and eight villages. According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s official website, “As of October 1, 2009, the population of Tokyo is estimated to be 12.989 million.” The Tokyo Megalopolis, or the Greater Tokyo Area, however, also includes Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures. According to the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ official website, these prefectures combine with Tokyo to form the largest metropolitan area in the world with an estimated total population of over 35 million people. In the Quality of Living Worldwide City Rankings 2010 survey (Mercer Human Resource Consulting), Tokyo ranks fortieth overall in terms of living standards. This same company lists Tokyo as the second most expensive city in the world in its Worldwide Cost of Living Survey 2010 – City Rankings survey. These are not exactly ringing endorsements for individuals currently living in Tokyo, or for those of us who are thinking about moving here to teach English.

Tokyo can be an extremely stressful place for native English-speaking teachers. According to the Canadian Consular Affairs’ webpage entitled “Teaching English in Japan,” “Living in Japan can be exciting and stimulating, but it can also be confusing, frustrating and overwhelming at times.” I agree with this assessment and have literally seen foreigners collapse in public while admitting to being overwhelmed by their

surroundings. The psychological pressures that come from living in Greater Tokyo are very real, and thus any study focusing on this social phenomenon will hopefully lead to a better understanding of what foreigners must deal with daily. One of Tokyo's leading foreign magazine publications, the *Metropolis*, prints numerous features describing the living conditions here. In "Looking Good: Health, Beauty and Fitness: Mad City," Daneeta Loretta Saft discusses possible counselling resources:

On any given day in Tokyo, it seems half of the people around me are going crazy. Stressful work environments, unhealthy lifestyles, culture shock, and homesickness all associated with living in a foreign environment add to whatever psycho-baggage we've brought with us.

In "Sojourner Adjustment: The Case of Foreigners in Japan," Tsai Hsiao-Ying discusses the idea of culture shock and divides sojourner adjustment into "two broad domains: psychological and sociocultural" (523). He writes, "In the case of foreigners in Japan, the general tendency seems to amount to a pessimistic picture of a sojourner's prospect of overcoming culture shock" (533). However, while comparing Asian and non-Asian perceptions of Japan, Tsai notes that "on the whole, groups acculturated in a Western style environment adjusted more easily to Japanese culture, at least as far as their attitudes were concerned" (530). According to my research, Tsai's analysis regarding Westerners appears to be correct.

For over fourteen years, and specifically over the last four years, I have actively participated in discussions with other foreigners about many of the negative and positive aspects that come with living in the world's largest metropolitan area. The most common

complaints focus on cultural and communication barriers, homesickness, cramped living quarters, and extremely crowded trains. However, when conversations focus on Tokyo's crime rate, the convenient transit system and or the restaurant and entertainment industry, the majority of foreigners tend to praise this city. From my experience, foreigners living in Tokyo cannot completely avoid the stressful living conditions they so often complain about, but they can significantly alter their perceptions of this city, simply by focussing on many of its positive attributes.

The conversations I have had with other foreigners about the living condition in Tokyo have provided me with some unique insights into the various perceptions of this city. According to Teun van Dijk in "Discourse and Racism," "Much of what we learn about the world is derived from such everyday conversations with family members, friends, and colleagues" (150). I may have learned a lot from these conversations, but I am also aware that my individual impressions of Tokyo have been, and still are, heavily influenced by my own political, social and cultural biases. Before starting the project, I had formulated a rather naïve opinion about why native English-speaking teachers actually live here. However, in order to avoid overlooking certain lines of inquiry, I sought the opinions of ten male native English-speaking teachers and formally asked them to participate in this project. These participants were sent fifteen open-ended questions via email and were asked to write down in-depth responses. The questions were presented in a random order and were designed to be as objective as possible. All of the questions were viewed to be of equal importance, and it was hoped that the total sum of the participants' answers would point to specific observable facts and or general observable themes. Individuals were asked to write down their answers because writing

offers “a powerful avenue towards finding out what one thinks, feels, knows, understands, remembers. It can enable fruitful and open exploration of potential thoughts and ideas” (Bolton et al. 13). I believed, and continue to believe, that the act of writing enabled research participants to focus on their answers, which, in turn, provided me with much deeper and reflective responses.

From the outset, I did not believe that I would be able to produce a paper that claimed to speak on behalf of all of the foreigners living in Greater Tokyo. This is why I decided to limit my focus to the native English-speaking subculture living here. I did, however, have every intention of including a female perspective, and I am deeply indebted to five female colleagues for sharing their thoughts and feelings with me about their lives in Tokyo. After in-depth conversations with these women, I realized that there are significant differences between the male and female perceptions of Greater Tokyo. Thus, in order to maintain manageable results, I specifically concentrated on ten males from various backgrounds. Now that this project has been completed, I am hopeful that it might inspire a similar project focused specifically on the female perspective.

### **Methods**

The groundwork for this project concentrated on generating grounded theory and thus exploratory research was an important focus. As an inductive researcher, I did my best to assume naïveté about the phenomenon of interest being studied and used the exploratory phase to acquire new insights, particularly through the perceptions of those who were involved with this project (Palys 73). In *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, Ted Palys writes:



Qualitative researchers believe that understanding people's perceptions requires getting close to "research participants" or "informants" or "collaborators." You must spend time with them, get to know them, feel close to them, be able to empathize with their concerns, perhaps even be one of them, if you hope to *truly* understand (11).

Native English teachers in Tokyo are members of a subculture living within a larger non-Japanese expatriate subculture all within the dominant Japanese culture. I believe an individual can only "truly understand" this subculture by being a member of it. As a member of this community for over fourteen years, I have both my own personal experiences from which to draw and ready access to numerous potential research participants. Despite having access to so many potential participants, I was optimistic that strategically sampling ten insightful informants would best serve the purposes of this project. I believed, and continue to believe, that an ideal informant was someone very familiar with living and teaching English in Tokyo.

The best sampling method using informants familiar with the city is purposive sampling. According to Palys, purposive sampling is a nonprobabilistic sampling procedure that allows a researcher to seek specific locations and or people because they meet a certain criterion (142). Among the countless examples that demonstrate the effectiveness of this sampling method are Paul Cunningham's "Social Valuing of Ogasawara as a Place and Space Among Ethnic Host," John Sherry and Eduardo Camargo's "'May Your Life Be Marvelous:' English Language Labelling and the Semiotics of Japanese Promotion," and Maho Kasahara and Ann Turnbull's "Meaning of

Family-Professional Partnerships: Japanese Mothers' Perspectives.” However, I concur with Palys' observation that “sampling is always ‘purposive’ to some degree, since identifying a target population invariably expresses the researcher’s interests and objectives” (142). Although I did not aim for formal representation, I believe that by purposefully selecting my research participants, I could ensure interest.

### **Methods of Analysis**

After all of the data had been gathered from the research participants, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyze it. According to Rebecca Rogers in *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education*:

Although there is no formula for conducting CDA, researchers who use CDA are concerned with a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of language and discourse in the construction and representation of this social world, and a methodology that allows them to describe, interpret, and explain such relationships (3).

In “The Study of Discourse: An Introduction,” van Dijk describes CDA in a similar fashion:

Critical discourse analysis focuses on social problems and not on scholarly paradigms, and tries to understand and solve such problems with any kind of method, theory or description that may be relevant – taking into account the experiences and perspectives of the participants (xl).

Of course, some theorists claim that the term “critical” in CDA “means that an analysis cannot be neutral or free of values” (Renkema 282). But my question to these theorists would be, can any form of analysis legitimately claim to be “neutral or free of values?” There are also those who may argue that my analysis is more in line with theories on discourse analysis, but like James Gee in “Discourse Analysis: What Makes it Critical?”

My view is that there are solid linguistic, even grammatical, grounds on which to argue that all language in interaction is inherently political and, thus, that all discourse analysis, if it is to be true to its subject matter (i.e., language in use) and in that sense scientific, must be critical discourse analysis (34).

During the initial stages of analysis, each questionnaire was examined in its original format. After several readings, the individual responses to each question were grouped together and studied once again. In other words, each question was written down at the top of a page and was then followed by ten separate responses. This new format was analyzed repeatedly and then cross-referenced with the original questionnaire format. Potential themes were identified. When a potential theme had been partially determined, the questionnaires were read again with this particular theme in mind. If, for example, a theme dealing with economic matters was deemed to be important, all of the responses were specifically examined for any references that mentioned economic or socioeconomic reasons for living in Tokyo. Although this process did not specifically follow van Dijk’s methods of analysis outlined in “Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity,” it was heavily influenced by his theories. Thus, I attempted to analyze the questionnaires on a cognitive, social and political level while focussing on the roles the

discourse played, both locally and globally (118). The process of analysis was repeated until specific sociological, socioeconomic and or sociocultural themes eventually emerged.

After critically analyzing the questionnaires, the results were then compared with four years of autobiographical notes. These notes were an essential part of the research process, and provided me with an opportunity to incorporate elements of my own life as a male native English-speaking teacher living in Tokyo into the writing process of this project. In *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research*, Kim Etherington describes this style of writing:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that has been described as a ‘blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one’s own life experience when writing about others’ (Scott-Hoy 2002, p.276); a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay 1997) (139).

In this paper, I have included my self within the social context, but I am keenly aware that there are those who may view this writing style as being somewhat self-indulgent, solipsistic or even narcissistic (Etherington 141). In *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form*, Susan Krieger helps explain why this form of critique exists:

Social science is premised on minimizing the self, viewing it as a contaminant, transcending it, denying it, protecting its

vulnerability, yet nonetheless mobilizing it as a tool for representing experience (116).

I could “minimize” my self in this paper and write it with an “objective” voice, but would that make it any more “neutral or free of values?” I don’t think it would. In fact, like James Clifford in “Introduction: Partial Truths,” I will argue that using an objective voice merely follows the traditional Western approach of excluding “subjectivity (in the name of objectivity)” (5). I also believe that it would be hypocritical of me to ask fellow members of Tokyo’s native English-speaking subculture to reveal private information and or certain vulnerabilities about themselves while at the same time choosing to omit my own private feelings and or thoughts. Ruth Behar explains in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*, “We ask for revelations from others but we reveal little or nothing about ourselves; we make others vulnerable but we ourselves remain invulnerable” (273). The combination of CDA and autoethnography has provided me with an opportunity to present an informative and entertaining paper, which, I am convinced, is not overly self-indulgent.

### **Research Participants**

Eight males currently living in Tokyo and two males no longer living here were selected for this project. Four participants were American, two were British, two were Canadian, one was Australian and one was a New Zealander. The ages of the individuals ranged from thirty-six to sixty-five, and everyone was given a pseudonym in order to conceal true identities. The selections were based on the following criteria:

1. A relationship of trust had already been established and therefore each participant should have felt comfortable

discussing his or her life in Tokyo on a meaningful and private level. Intimate conversations about this subject had already taken place and thus any problems regarding true feelings and honest answers were not anticipated.

2. Each subject has taught and lived in a variety of different environments in Tokyo. These varying experiences will hopefully have helped the participants to develop a more informed opinion about why they continue to live in Tokyo, or, why they left.

Research participants were emailed fifteen questions (see Appendix A) about living in Tokyo. Each subject was asked to sign a letter of consent and was allowed to terminate his participation in the research process at any time. Because I was also a member of the community being studied and I was worried about missing any potential lines of inquiry, each participant was asked to offer any advice or additional information that he felt may have been relevant to this study.

## **Results**

In order to present the research findings in a clear and concise manner, brief summaries of the answers to the questionnaires will be provided. These introductory explanations will follow the same order as the questionnaire's questions. However, because many of the participants' answers often overlap or are interrelated, the critical analysis of the data will focus on the responses from a global perspective. This global analysis will first concentrate on answering the initial part of the research question, "Why do male native English-speaking teachers live in Greater Tokyo?" The following

sections will then outline the critical hurdles that native English-speaking teachers are confronted with while living here and potential strategies for overcoming these hurdles. The themes that emerged during data analysis are not considered to be mutually exclusive, and like the respondents' answers, the subsequent theories often overlap or are interrelated.

### **The Questions and the Responses**

The first two questions in the questionnaire asked participants why they first came to Tokyo and how long they have lived here for. The two respondents no longer in Tokyo indicated that they lived here for one, and nine and a half years respectively. They also noted that they originally came to this city because they were interested in traveling and experiencing another culture. The eight participants currently in Tokyo, have been living here for, four, thirteen, fifteen, seventeen, eighteen, twenty-two, over thirty and over forty years respectively. Each participant gave a variety of answers for why he originally moved here, but six respondents specifically cited work or work-related reasons. The other two individuals identified cultural and academic interests as being a primary draw.

In question 3a, participants were asked if they agreed with the following description of Tokyo:

Despite its indiscreet wealth, Tokyo has been aptly described as a “high-tech slum,” a cluttered urban mass that appears to evolve organically, layer upon squeezed layer. Like giant third-world cities, its exact perimeters are sometimes hard to define, the ribbon development of its crowded suburbs melting into an

anonymous sprawl, a vigorous anti-beauty (Mansfield).

Five participants somewhat agreed with this assessment, four disagreed, and one participant gave a neutral response when he wrote, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Despite the fact that five participants did agree with the above statement, it should be pointed out that no one completely embraced it, specifically with regard to Mansfield’s use of the word “slum.”

Question 3b followed up on 3a and asked participants why they think so many native English-speaking teachers decide to live in Tokyo. Respondents were also asked to provide as many examples as possible and thus numerous answers were given. Economic and or work-related factors were mentioned by nine of the participants while safety was mentioned four times. The restaurant and entertainment industry, overall convenience, and travel opportunities were all mentioned three times. Family, friendly people, Japanese women, culture, living in a cosmopolitan city, and living anonymously and or escapism were all mentioned twice.

The next two questions asked participants about the possible psychological and or sociological factors that draw individuals to Greater Tokyo, and if personality traits affected a native English speaker’s choice to live here. The answers to question four mirrored the responses to question 3b, and one respondent even wrote, “some of the same answers as given in 3b.” For question five, five respondents did believe that individual personality traits affected a person’s choice to live in Tokyo, three did not, and two participants were not sure one way or the other. Those who thought personality traits did affect a person’s choice to live in Tokyo indicated that some people are just not “prepared or suitable for life in a metropolis.”



The following three questions asked respondents to describe the lifestyle adjustments they needed to make when they first moved to Tokyo, their interactions with Japanese people, and to compare the living conditions here with their native countries. A variety of answers were given for question number six, but living in smaller accommodations was cited most frequently at six times and getting used to crowded public spaces was cited five times. When discussing their interactions with Japanese people, eight participants suggested they had positive relationships, one individual claimed his interactions were “superficial,” and one described his interactions as being “minimal.” Despite the frequent references to cramped living conditions and crowded spaces, only two respondents indicated that the living conditions in their home countries were better than those in Tokyo. Two participants claimed Tokyo offered better living conditions, while the other six made general comparisons without drawing any definite conclusions.

Questions nine, ten and eleven, addressed the health related issues that come with living in Greater Tokyo as well as the most and least stressful aspects about living here. Three participants responded that they did not have any health related concerns. Six other participants identified air quality and three of these individuals also mentioned the stress from living in a big city as being possible health related risks. One other participant also mentioned stress from “the perceived feeling of being misunderstood by the Japanese” as being his number one health related concern. Despite the fact that air pollution was numerically the number one health related concern, five of the participants cited crowded commuting conditions as being the most stressful part about living in

Tokyo. <sup>2</sup>Noise pollution (2), small apartments (1), not having an active political voice (1), communication problems (1), a general lack of space (1), traffic jams (1), and possible earthquakes (1), were also cited as being some of the stressful features that come with living in Tokyo. Only one respondent indicated that he didn't find anything stressful about living here. When discussing the least stressful part about living in Tokyo, crime and or personal safety issues were mentioned four times. <sup>3</sup>The “amazing postal service (1),” beautiful women (1), convenience (1), and not having any “obligatory social obligations (1)” were also mentioned.

The next two questions asked the respondents why they currently live in Tokyo and if there were any social or political circumstances that would cause them to consider leaving this city. Not surprisingly, the answers regarding why one currently lives in Tokyo mirrored the previous answers given throughout the questionnaire. Once again, work or economic reasons, food, culture, and intimate relationships, were all mentioned numerous times by the eight participants. Of these eight participants, three mentioned that they could not foresee themselves leaving Tokyo, while five individuals mentioned economic factors as being a possible reason to leave. War and elevated racial tensions were also cited as possible reasons for leaving.

The final question in the questionnaire asked participants to make any additional comments that they felt would be important with regard to this research project. Five respondents did not make any additional comments and one participant indicated that maximum distribution of the questionnaire might help with the research process. Four

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<sup>2</sup>Bracketed numbers indicate the number of times each was cited.

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respondents did make insightful recommendations, but these astute observations will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

### **Why do male native English-speaking teachers live in Greater Tokyo?**

After critical analysis of the data, three common and intertwining themes emerged which help explain the possible answers to the question above. These themes have been divided into three distinct subsections, the sociological, the economic and the sociocultural reasons for living in Tokyo. The sociological and economic themes outlined in this paper are not necessarily unique to the Greater Tokyo environment. The data pointing towards the sociocultural reasons for living in this massive metropolis however, is quite surprising, and reveals some intriguing perspectives on a native English-speaking teacher's life in Tokyo. It does not reflect common mainstream ideas and even reveals elements of a postmodern existence.

### **Living in Tokyo: The Sociological Factors**

As the summaries of the answers to the questionnaires indicate, the most common sociological reasons for living in Greater Tokyo revolve around an individual's perceptions of Japanese people, perceptions of the city itself, and intimate relationships with family and friends. According to the data, almost all of the participants in this project describe Japanese people in a positive manner. Words like, "humble", "respectful," "hard working," "kind" and "considerate" are used throughout the questionnaires. Despite this positive perception, the majority of individuals do not, excluding spouses and family members, necessarily have very close Japanese friends. Carl, one of the single men participating in this project, calls his interactions with Japanese people superficial, "especially when compared with the interactions of those

from other countries.” This is an interesting point. Over the last four years, I have actively listened to people talk about their friends in Tokyo and it appears that the overwhelming majority of foreigners do have cordial relations with Japanese people and yet their closest friends are not Japanese. Brian, a married man who has been living here for four years, provides answers that help support this argument because he claims that he likes living in Tokyo and thinks Japanese people are very polite, kind and genuine, but he also admits that he has “no close Japanese friends.” When asked to make any additional comments about this study, Albert, a single man, also refers to this phenomenon when he writes, “I think you should be asking yourself why so many foreigners live in Tokyo yet still insist on working with and hanging out with other foreigners.” Based on these observations, one can conclude that having close intimate relationships with Japanese people, excluding romantic or family relations, is not necessarily a prerequisite for being content in this massive metropolis.

Some of the participants acknowledge that they do not have any close Japanese friends, but they also repeatedly insinuate that they are quite attracted to Japanese women. Albert writes, “It never ceases to amaze me how you can sometimes meet a Japanese girl whose beauty is immeasurable yet she is still humble.” He then begrudgingly states that this particular situation “would never happen in Australia.” Brian addresses this issue while discussing the least stressful part about living in Tokyo simply by writing, “Beautiful women.” Eric, a man married to a Japanese woman, also sarcastically mentions this topic while providing a list of reasons for living in Tokyo when he writes, “girls (should I have put that first?)” Admittedly, these comments may come across as being rather crude or obtuse, but I will argue that they are remarkably

tame when compared to my observations of other foreign men discussing their lives in Japan. In fact, I have asked numerous men and women why they think male native English-speaking teachers live in Tokyo and the overwhelming majority of these people explain in no uncertain terms, “because of the women.”

Other common sociological factors frequently mentioned in the questionnaires tend to focus on an individual’s perceptions of Tokyo as a city. According to the data, Tokyo is commonly viewed to be a convenient and entertaining city that is also a “major hub for international flights.” And, not surprisingly, the food and restaurant industry is repeatedly mentioned as being one of Tokyo’s most enduring features. However, one factor that does not appear to directly influence a participant’s level of contentment emerges when an individual considers this city from an aesthetic standpoint. Frank, a middle-aged man currently living with his Japanese partner, agreed with Mansfield’s assessment in question 3a. He describes Tokyo as being “cluttered, chaotic, with little sense of a true center” but admits that he enjoys living here. Allen and Bob, the two men no longer living in Tokyo, also agreed with Mansfield’s assessment, but Allen points out that his negative perceptions of the cityscape did not prevent him from enjoying the time he spent here. Like Brian and Dan, two men married to Japanese women, I do not think Tokyo is “an anonymous sprawl” and instead see it as a product of many distinct towns with their “own territory, groups, festivals, history and craftsmen.” Thus, after reading the various opinions, one can conclude that perceptions about Tokyo’s aesthetic beauty are not a primary factor when considering a male native English-speaking teachers overall level of contentment while living in this city.

The one sociological factor that, with the exception of Gordon, every participant identifies as being an extremely positive aspect of living in Tokyo, relates to the city's low crime rate. Allen calls Tokyo "remarkably safe" and states that he never once felt that his personal safety was threatened while he lived here. Carl and Dan also identify "worrying about crime" and or "worrying about violence" as being the least stressful part about living in Tokyo. As a young father with two children, I too will argue that Tokyo's low crime rate makes living here a lot less stressful. This perceived lack of violence and crime within Japanese urban areas has also garnered an enormous amount of interest throughout Western societies. T.D. Westermann and J.W. Burfeind offer a somewhat simplified yet plausible theory about this phenomenon:

In Japan, the core values of group-relatedness, respect for tradition, harmony, and hierarchy have led to very strong forms of informal social control. The ethnically homogeneous Japanese stress conformity to group norms, and individuals prize the approval of the groups that monitor their behaviors and provide their identities. As a consequence, there is relatively little crime, and the structures of formal social control operate with effectiveness (149).

In *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, John Braithwaite claims that "shaming as a feature of Japanese culture" (63) helps contribute to Japan's low crime rates. Regardless of which theories one subscribes to, the fact that nine out of ten participants in this project directly refer to Tokyo as being a safe place to live in terms of crime, makes this the third most important benefit of living here.

According to the data, the most important sociological reason for living in Tokyo involves intimate relationships with family and friends. The four married participants currently living here, Brian, Dan, Eric and Henry, all identified their Japanese spouses and or family commitments as being a determining factor for why they either came to, or, are now currently living here. Frank also identified his relationship with his Japanese partner as being an important reason for living in Tokyo. Although Albert and Carl have never been married, they too indicate that they have developed intimate relationships here and these relationships help explain why they continue to live here. Gordon, a man who has been living in Tokyo for over forty-five years, does not mention his family directly, but he also indicates that he thinks many foreigners probably live in Tokyo because of their family obligations. The two men no longer living in Tokyo do not cite familial obligations or long-term personal connections, which helps explain why they no longer live here. I concur with the eight participants currently living here and would cite family commitments as being the most important sociological reason for living in Tokyo.

### **Living in Tokyo: The Economic Factors**

The research for this project specifically focussed on English teachers living in Greater Tokyo, but direct questions about occupations and financial matters were never introduced. Despite this fact, a global evaluation of the questionnaires reveals that all ten respondents mention economic factors as being one of Tokyo's primary attractions. Albert, for example, does not indicate that he originally moved to Tokyo for work-related reasons, but, when asked to make any additional comments about this project, wrote:

I haven't mentioned economic reasons in any of my answers  
but that is going to be a big factor for a lot of people. There are

so many opportunities for people to work in different jobs here and that is probably the sole reason why a lot of people live in Tokyo.

When asked why he thought English teachers live here, Frank also mentioned the economic factors as being a primary draw:

Despite the stress and high costs, until recently wages in the English language teaching industry have been much higher than those in most places. I think this is the biggest reason why English teachers decide to live here.

Henry specifically discusses his opinions about the job market in Tokyo when he writes, “Employment opportunities are better here than other places in Japan.” Thus, after reading these comments, and many others like them, one can conclude that living in Tokyo is often perceived to be economically beneficial, which, based on participant responses, is one of the two most important reasons for living here.

The economic benefits of living and teaching in Tokyo appear to be obvious, but what would happen if the perceived career opportunities no longer existed? Throughout his questionnaire, Dan consistently mentions work-related issues as being primary factors for his choice to reside in Tokyo. However, when asked if there were any social or political circumstances that would make him consider leaving Tokyo, he wrote, “an incredible job opportunity in another country.” Brian also notes that he would consider leaving Tokyo “if the English teaching industry goes down the toilet.” Comments from these individuals indicate that their level of contentment in Tokyo is directly related to their economic standings. I will argue that the economic benefits of living in Tokyo do



not supersede familial commitments. However, if the economic advantages of living in another country helped me provide a better lifestyle for my family, like Dan, I too would consider leaving Tokyo. Allen, makes comments that reflect these same sentiments when he writes, "I've always felt that in Tokyo I would not be able to provide my family with the lifestyle that I would like to as it is just too expensive." All of these answers, combined with numerous other comments in the questionnaires, further suggest that these native English-speaking teachers do consider economic factors to be the second, if not the most, important reason for living in Tokyo.

### **Living in Tokyo: The Sociocultural Expectations**

While discussing Japan's low crime rates in *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, Braithwaite writes, "Much as I admire the crime control achievements of Japan, I would not want to live there because I think I would find the informal pressures to conformity oppressive" (158). Braithwaite's statement arguably reflects numerous articles published about Japan's "rigid cultural rules" and or the social pressures to conform in a group-oriented society. In *Doing Business With Japan: Successful Strategies for Intercultural Communication*, Kazuo Nishiyama discusses how foreigners should interact with Japanese people:

They must learn Japanese social customs and proper protocol before jumping into establishing interpersonal contact with them. Foreigners need to learn different forms of greeting, social manners, and gift-giving customs (187).

Nishiyama then goes on to explain the different ways of greeting Japanese people and points out that "choosing a wrong form of greeting can become a cause of

embarrassment” (188). Arguably, Braithwaite and Nishiyama have presented common, if not stereotypical, views of Japanese culture and society. However, the data collected from the ten native English-speaking teachers in this project, points to a much different perspective on the issues of conformity within Tokyo. To be clear, a question referencing conformity was never formally introduced, but critical analysis has revealed that the majority of participants actually find living in Tokyo to be less restrictive in terms of cultural and or social obligations. In fact, when asked about the least stressful part about living in Greater Tokyo, Gordon responded, “Not being forced to conform or have obligatory social obligations.” Bob expresses similar sentiments when he writes, “Expectations with regard to professional achievement and social standing are markedly lower for foreigners allowing for a relatively stress free lifestyle.”

Like Gordon and Bob, the majority of participants in this project do not find “informal pressures to conformity oppressive” and instead, they often refer to this city as a place where one can live “anonymously as a foreigner.” In *Imagining Canada: An Outsider’s Hope For a Global Future*, Pico Iyer compares America and Japan:

In Japan, by easy contrast, I’m in the middle of a classically exclusionary culture which tries to hang on to its traditions, and preserve its sense of self in the accelerating world, by drawing firm boundaries around itself and stripsearching people who look like me. Even the foreigner who lives there for fifty years and speaks flawless Japanese will always and only be called *gaijin*, or “outsider person” (30).

It is true that foreigners living in Japan are considered to be “outsiders” or gaijin, but unlike Iyer, the participants in this project do not necessarily perceive this sociocultural phenomenon in a negative manner. So, why do some foreigners resent Japan’s “exclusionary culture” while others don’t appear to be bothered by it? Perhaps it is Gordon who best answers this question when he responds to Mansfield’s comments about Tokyo being a “high-tech slum,” an “anonymous sprawl” and “a vigorous anti-beauty.”

Remarks such as this one are typically made by foreigners who go to lengths to present themselves as experts, which is rarely the case, in my opinion. Normally they have been here long enough to become frustrated by their own inability to understand and/or accept the fact that non-Japanese will always be outsiders (gaijin). Accordingly, it negatively prejudices their perceptions and comments on things Japanese in general.

I will argue that Gordon’s ideas not only apply to Mansfield’s comments, they also apply to the comments made above by Braithwaite and Iyer.

Unlike Iyer, the majority of participants in this project appear to be at peace with the idea that they will always be “outsiders” or gaijin in Japan. Only Bob, one of the participants no longer living here, described feeling like “a second class citizen.” Dan, did acknowledge the fact that he felt like he did not have an active voice in Japanese society, but he also rather astutely outlined how foreigners often cope with very low sociocultural expectations:

Tokyo offers a life floating above culture (in the foreign community) i.e. cultureless, or a chance to immerse oneself in

a new culture. This attracts people to the city, and you find the ones immersed in culture in love with Japan, the ones who float, quite happy to continue being in that position of no obvious ties.

Dan's "floating above culture" analysis in many respects resembles Stephen Bonnycastle's theories on what a postmodern physical setting might feel like. *In Search of Authority: An Introductory Guide to Literary Theory*, Bonnycastle describes his image of a postmodern metropolis:

New, strange images, sounds, and smells would surround you. You would not feel fenced in by others' expectations; you would feel free; you would (with some knowledge of your environment) be able to choose your way of living to a degree that was unthinkable fifty years ago anywhere in North America. And you could switch back and forth between radically incompatible lifestyles. You could be speaking English one moment, and Cantonese the next. The city could become a friendly labyrinth, offering endless possibilities and strange new combinations of experiences (233).

As most of the participants point out, Tokyo is an exciting place to live, and the sheer vastness of the city allows an individual like Brian to feel like he can be "invisible" on the city streets. These individuals also view Tokyo as a place where one is not fenced in by others' sociocultural expectations, which, in turn, provides them with an incredible amount of freedom that they would not otherwise find in their home counties. In essence,

being a foreigner in a city like Tokyo, a place often associated with a high degree of rigid cultural obligations, is actually a place where male native English teachers tend to be less concerned about issues of conformity. Thus, for me, and for many of the participants in this project, living in Tokyo feels a lot like Bonnycastle's description above, which, I will argue, is incredibly liberating.

Despite the fact that Tokyo can be seen as a place where foreigners are liberated from "obligatory social obligations," many of the participants also point out that foreigners may come here because they have a "conscious or unconscious feeling of dissatisfaction with their own culture or country." Brian expresses this sentiment when he writes, "people who are outsiders in their own culture/country find it easy to fit in here somewhere." Frank also believes that "some people may be drawn here because they do not fit in back home." In "Panic Disorder Cases of Westerners in Japan," T. Akiyama et al. outline a similar argument when they identify "intensified feelings of alienation in their home countries" (444) as being primary motivating factors for why their psychiatric patients relocated to Japan. They also note that in "all cases, patients chose Japan as the destination of their move at least partly because of the nonaggressive nature of the culture" (444). These findings resemble the data collected from the ten participants in this project, which indicate that a male native English speaking teacher will choose to live in Tokyo if (1) he has developed strong intimate relationships here; (2) views Tokyo to be a safe and an economically beneficial environment; and (3) views the sociocultural expectations to be non-aggressive and moderately liberating at the same time.

## **The Critical Hurdles**

The majority of participants in this project have indicated that they perceive Tokyo to be a non-aggressive, safe, and an economically advantageous place to live. However, they also acknowledge that living in this city requires one to make significant lifestyle adjustments. Air quality, a lack of parks, noise pollution, traffic jams and the general stress that comes with living in a big city are all cited as being some of Tokyo's major drawbacks. These particular complaints resemble the health related concerns outlined by Yoshimasa Yamada in "Problems and Health Promoting Issues in Inner Cities in Japan."

Key areas to health promotion are improvements of air and water pollution and reductions in noise and bad smells; more green parks; improved disposal of waste and garbages, and industries for re-utilization of energy and resources; good quality houses and water; and extermination of rats, mites and insects (261).

Yamada makes extensive recommendations, but the only significant health related issues repeatedly mentioned by the English teachers in this project relate to their concerns about air quality and pollution levels. According to Allen, these concerns stem from "the sheer volume of vehicles on the road, especially diesel trucks and buses." Henry, however, is much more concerned with the "yellow sand and various airborne pollutants that arrive from China." Bob doesn't mention any specific causes of pollution, but he does say that the "pollution levels can affect respiratory function." Comments like these indicate that those people living in areas of the world where the air quality is considered to be quite

good should at least consider how Tokyo's air pollution might affect them when and if they ever choose to live here.

When considering the potential health related issues related to living in Tokyo, air quality is indeed mentioned the most times, but the two most common complaints levied against the living conditions here focus on cramped living spaces and overly crowded trains and or public spaces. With the exception of Henry and Gordon, two men who have been living in Tokyo for more than three and four decades respectively, all of the participants mention living in small apartments and or crowded trains as either being the most stressful part of living in this city, or the most significant lifestyle adjustment that needs to be made when one first moves here. Henry currently lives in a house and drives to work, which helps explain why he cites major traffic jams instead of crowded trains as being one of the most stressful factors about living in Tokyo. I will argue that a morning rush hour commute in an extremely crowded train is by far the most stressful aspect of living here. In fact, my opening story about boarding a crowded elevator and then asking myself why I live in Tokyo could easily have been framed into one of many disheartening rush hour train commutes.

One other complaint, or "critical challenge," worthy of mentioning, revolves around communication barriers. Five out of the ten participants speak very little Japanese and yet none of these individuals cite communication issues as being a significant problem while living in Tokyo. However, according to Frank and Eric, two very competent Japanese speakers, communication problems can be a source of frustration while living here. Frank writes, "I speak Japanese fairly well but sometimes get lost when speaking or communicating with officialdom." He then notes that situations like

“opening a bank account” or “getting cable TV installed” can be sources of stress “because of the difficulty of understanding what is being said or explained.” Eric claims that his “level of communication in Japanese is quite low” and blames his speaking ability for the limited communication he has with his in laws. However, these comments appear to reflect a high degree of modesty because Eric is arguably quite proficient in Japanese. As an individual fairly proficient in Japanese myself, I would even suggest that Eric’s communication problems are not language related, but more or less a reflection of the difficult intercultural relations one may have with in laws. In “English Speakers in Japanese Work Environments: An Analysis of Japanese Language Functions and Needs,” Carl Falsgraf, Noriko Fujii and Hiroko Kataoka discuss similar social phenomena and point out that higher Japanese proficiency levels tend to result in different kinds of frustrations and not necessarily better attitudes towards living in Japan (188). Based on this information, one can conclude that speaking Japanese in Tokyo may remove some basic communication obstacles, but it may also lead to a variety of other communication barriers.

### **Overcoming the Critical Hurdles**

In order for current male native English-speaking teachers and in-coming novice teachers to live successfully in Tokyo, a variety of lifestyle adjustments have been or will be necessary. As participants like Frank point out, individuals from Western backgrounds will have to get “used to living with less space, both in private and public.” Carl expresses similar sentiments when he explains that he “had to become accustomed to commuting and living in crowded conditions.” But how does one become accustomed to living in crowded conditions? According to Dan, “regular travel on crowded trains”



appears to have had an unconscious effect on his “concept of personal space.” This is an interesting observation, but I will argue that Allen’s comments regarding personality traits and the living conditions in Tokyo best outline how an individual can overcome, or at least cope with, Tokyo’s spatial constraints.

You have to be open-minded and adaptable to stay in Tokyo for any length of time as everyday you are forced to make compromises whether they be in the size and nature of your accommodations or having to stand on packed trains twice a day during your commute.

Communication and cultural barriers may not be as formidable as the critical hurdles mentioned above, but these problems can, and still do, pose some significant challenges. According to Allen, as a native English speaker, “you have to be able to deal with the challenge of living in a city where although English is spoken and understood extensively, you will still face communication barriers on a daily basis.” As mentioned earlier, these daily communication barriers are not just language related, and they will not simply disappear when and if one learns to speak Japanese. In fact, the most significant communication barriers tend to be culturally related, which can undoubtedly result in a significant amount of stress.

How does one overcome Japanese cultural differences while living in Tokyo? According to Gordon, if a foreigner learns to “accept the fact that non-Japanese will always be outsiders” he will ultimately feel much more at peace while living here. Dan’s comment about foreigners “floating above culture” also indicates that he believes a foreigner does not necessarily have to fit in with Japanese cultural norms. Arguably,

especially to a novice in-coming teacher, Gordon and Dan's arguments may appear to help support or even reinforce Japan's "classically exclusionary culture." However, as Rita Simon and James Lynch point out in "A Comparative Assessment of Public Opinion Toward Immigrants and Immigration Policies," in Japan, "the concept of immigration does not exist in law or fact" (463). They also claim that a "foreign national can never become a Japanese citizen" (458). From my perspective, a male native English-speaking teacher can either accept the fact that he is an outsider "floating above culture," or, he can continually begrudge the Japanese government for not having a more extensive immigration policy. The second option is arguably quite virtuous, but the first option is without question a lot less stressful.

### **Conclusion**

On March 11, 2011 the largest earthquake in Japanese recorded history measuring a magnitude 9.0 struck the northeast coast of Japan. The earthquake triggered an enormous tsunami, which devastated numerous coastal towns, killed thousands of people, and subsequently resulted in the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. The eight participants currently living in Tokyo have had to cope with hundreds of aftershocks, rolling blackouts and numerous reports pertaining to contaminated water supplies and higher than normal levels of radiation in the atmosphere. I would be remiss not to mention this catastrophic event and the subsequent effects it has had on this research project. Fortunately, all of the questionnaires were submitted before March 11, and thus the participants' answers were not influenced in any way by the earthquake's overall impact on Japan. However, casual conversations with some of the participants have revealed that answers to follow-up email questions would undoubtedly be

influenced by the recent catastrophic events. Therefore, instead of allowing these recent tragedies to heavily influence the results of this project, I have been operating under the assumption that what the participants are currently experiencing is extremely abnormal, and not at all indicative of the everyday living conditions in Tokyo.

So, assuming that the living conditions in Tokyo will gradually return to “normal,” a male native English-speaking teacher will be able to live here successfully if he is able to associate this megalopolis as being (1) a place where he has developed strong intimate relationships; (2) a place that is perceived to be safe and economically beneficial; and (3) a place where sociocultural expectations are perceived to be non-invasive and moderately liberating at the same time. Of course, male native English speaking teachers currently living in Tokyo, as well as in-coming novice teachers thinking about moving here, have faced or will face significant critical lifestyle hurdles. These hurdles involve crowded living conditions and or cross-cultural communication barriers. There aren't any definite solutions for overcoming these obstacles, but individuals who have lived in Tokyo for an extended period of time encourage people to be open-minded, adaptable and willing to make compromises. Some participants also recommend accepting the fact that male native English-speaking foreigners living in Tokyo will always be considered outsiders. These recommendations may not appear to be politically correct, especially to those who come from countries with extensive immigration policies, but they do come from individuals with a vast amount of living experiences in Tokyo.

The research conducted for this project cannot claim to be a formal representation of the subculture being studied, but it did unearth a variety of sociocultural phenomena.

Hopefully, the findings presented in this paper will inspire future projects that specifically focus on a female perspective. Henry's additional comments regarding "maximum distribution" of the questionnaire in question fourteen, also address the intriguing possibility of approaching my initial research question from a quantitative perspective.

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## Appendix A

### Email Interview Questions

1. Why did you originally move/come to Greater Tokyo?
2. How long have you been living here?
- 3a. In the 2007 *Metropolis* article entitled “Blueprint for Living,” Stephen Mansfield describes Tokyo:

Despite its indiscreet wealth, Tokyo has been aptly described as a “high-tech slum,” a cluttered urban mass that appears to evolve organically, layer upon squeezed layer. Like giant third-world cities, its exact perimeters are sometimes hard to define, the ribbon development of its crowded suburbs melting into an anonymous sprawl, a vigorous anti-beauty.

Do you agree with this assessment?

- 3b. If Tokyo is “a vigorous anti-beauty,” stressful, expensive and not highly regarded in terms of living standards, why do so many native English teachers decide to live here? Please provide as many examples as you can think of.
4. What do you think the psychological and or sociological factors that draw people to Greater Tokyo?
5. Do individual personality traits affect a native English speaker’s choice to live in Tokyo and if so how?
6. Were there any necessary lifestyle adjustments you had to make in order to live in Greater Tokyo?
7. Could you describe your interactions with Japanese people?
8. Could you compare the living conditions in Greater Tokyo with the living conditions in your home country?
9. Are there any health related issues that come with living in Greater Tokyo?
10. What is the most stressful part about living in Greater Tokyo?
11. What is the least stressful part about living in Greater Tokyo?
12. Why do you live in Greater Tokyo now?

13. Are there any social or political circumstances that would make you consider leaving Greater Tokyo?

14. Could you please make any additional comments that you feel may be important to this study?