Daniel T. Cook, Ph.D.
Department Chair
Professor of Childhood Studies
dtcook@camden.rutgers.edu

Meredith A. Bak, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Childhood Studies
meredith.bak@rutgers.edu

Sarada Balagopalan, Ph.D.
Director of Graduate Studies
Associate Professor of Childhood Studies
sarada.balagopalan@rutgers.edu

Kate Cairns, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Childhood Studies
kate.cairns@rutgers.edu

Daniel Hart, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor of Psychology
daniel.hart@rutgers.edu

Wenhua Lu, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Childhood Studies
w.lu@rutgers.edu

Susan A. Miller, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Childhood Studies
millersa@camden.rutgers.edu

Lauren J. Silver, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Childhood Studies
ljsilver@camden.rutgers.edu

Lynne Vallone, Ph.D.
Professor of Childhood Studies
vallone@rutgers.edu

John Wall, Ph.D.
Professor of Religion and Childhood Studies
johnwall@camden.rutgers.edu

Anthony Wright, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Childhood Studies
Anthony.wright@rutgers.edu

Dr. Meredith A. Bak, Associate Professor of Childhood Studies
Playful Visions: Optical Toys and the Emergence of Children’s Media Culture
(The MIT Press, 2020)

In the nineteenth century, the kaleidoscope, the thaumatrope, the zootrope, the stereoscope, and other optical toys were standard accessories of a middle-class childhood, used both at home and at school. In Playful Visions, Meredith Bak argues that the optical toys of the nineteenth century were the “new media” of their era, teaching children to be discerning consumers of media—and also provoking anxieties similar to contemporary worries about children's screen time. Bak shows that optical toys—which produced visual effects ranging from a moving image to the illusion of depth—established and reinforced a new understanding of vision as an interpretive process. At the same time, the expansion of the middle class as well as education and labor reforms contributed to a new notion of childhood as a time of innocence and play. Modern media culture and the emergence of modern Western childhood are thus deeply interconnected.

Drawing on extensive archival research, Bak discusses, among other things, the circulation of optical toys, and the wide visibility gained by their appearance as printed templates and textual descriptions in periodicals; expanding conceptions of literacy, which came to include visual acuity; and how optical play allowed children to exercise a sense of visual mastery. She examines optical toys alongside related visual technologies including chromolithography—which inspired both chromatic delight and chromophobia. Finally, considering the contemporary use of optical toys in advertising, education, and art, Bak analyzes the endurance of nineteenth-century visual paradigms.

Daniel Cook, Professor of Childhood Studies
The Moral Project of Childhood: Motherhood, Material Life and Early Children’s Consumer Culture (NYU Press, 2020)

Examines the Protestant origins of motherhood and the child consumer.

Throughout history, the responsibility for children’s moral well-being has fallen into the laps of mothers. In The Moral Project of Childhood, the noted childhood studies scholar Daniel Thomas Cook illustrates how mothers in the nineteenth-century United States meticulously managed their children’s needs and wants, pleasures and pains, through the material world so as to produce the “child” as a moral project.

Drawing on a century of religiously-oriented child care advice in women’s periodicals, he examines how children ultimately came to be understood by mothers—and later, by commercial actors—as consumers. From concerns about taste, to forms of discipline and punishment, to play and toys, Cook delves into the social politics of motherhood, historical anxieties about childhood, and early children’s consumer culture. https://nyupress.org/9781479810260/the-moral-project-of-childhood/
Meredith Bak’s book, Playful Visions: Optical Toys and the Emergence of Children’s Media Culture, was published by MIT Press in 2020. She also published a peer-reviewed article on the horror film The Babadook (co-authored with Jason Middleton) in The Quarterly Review of Film and Video. She had three book chapters published this year; “Get Your Cape On: Target’s Invitation to the DC Universe,” (co-authored with Ethan Tussey) in Point of Sale: Analyzing Media Retail, ed. Daniel Herbert and Derek Johnson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019); “Abolitionist Action Heroes: Operation Underground Railroad and the Material Cultures of Philanthropy,” in Diverse Unfreedoms: The Afterlives and Transformations of Post-Transatlantic Bondages, ed. Sarada Balagopalan, Cati Coe, and Keith Michael Green (New York: Routledge, 2019); and “Between Technology & Toy: The Talking Doll as Abject Artifact,” in Abjection Incorporated: Mediating the Politics of Pleasure and Violence, ed. Maggie Hennefeld and Nicholas Sammond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020). In fall 2019, Bak was an invited PLAY-Track Bootcamp speaker at the Interacting Minds Centre at Aarhus University, Denmark. She also delivered a paper at the North American Victorian Studies Association (NAVSA). In spring 2020, Bak was a member of the inaugural cohort of Faculty Writing and Design Lab fellows at Rutgers-Camden.

Kate Cairns contributed an invited commentary in Focaal: Journal of Historical Anthropology entitled “Children, reproductive labor, and intergenerational solidarity.” Her chapter on the role of imagined futures in the construction of rural childhoods was published in the edited collection Our Rural Selves: Memory and the Visual in Canadian Childhoods. She also coauthored, with Norah MacKendrick and Josée Johnston, an article in Aeon magazine on the pressures mothers face to raise an “organic child” and the need for collective solutions that provide nutritious, sustainable options for all children. In 2019, Kate joined the editorial boards of Contemporary Sociology and Curriculum Inquiry. She presented key insights from her research with youth gardens to a network of non-profit groups in Camden. In spring 2020, Kate learned that she will be promoted to Associate Professor with tenure and was honored to receive the Presidential Fellowship for Teaching Excellence. She continues her research exploring young people’s perspectives on environmental justice in Camden.

Daniel Hart is returning to his work on youth civic engagement and lowering the voting age. With Mary Mitsdarffer and Robert Emmons (Fine Arts), he has been working on a training video illustrating principles of good youth groups and civic engagement. Dan is also working with Sarah Allred (Walter Rand Institute) and Bob Atkins (New Jersey Health Initiatives) on preparing youth in South Jersey to do COVID-19 contact tracing in collaboration with the Cumberland County Health Department. Dan and Bob are also working (slowly) on a book about good youth group practices. Finally, Dan is learning a lot as he works with Charlotte Markey (Psychology) and Doug Zacher (Public Policy) on a book to be published by Cambridge University Press tentatively entitled Be Your Best Self: The Body Image Book for Boys.
Sarada Balagopalan is working on several papers associated with her current book project, Young Defenders: American Youth, Patriotism and Nationalism, 1890-1939. One – “Patriot Games” is focused on lessons of patriotism embedded in youth sports, particularly American Legion Junior baseball. Another is focused on the meaning and practice of children’s philanthropy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the past year, she has contributed an entry on historical methods to the SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies, and reviews in The Journal of History of Childhood & Youth, among other journals. Like scholars and historians everywhere, she mourns the cancelation of conferences, closure of archives, and the lack of access to library books in the age of COVID-19. She was particularly disappointed to miss the Berkshire Women’s History Conference where she was scheduled to present new research on Grace Gallatin Seton - world traveler, big game hunter, club woman, and suffragist – as part of a larger project on intergenerational cooperation/conflict in 20th century women’s rights movements.

Dan Cook is excited to announce the publication of the SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies in May. This four-volume, 1.1 million word transnational and transdisciplinary reference work comprised of nearly 600 entries authored by scholars, practitioners and experts from across the spectrum of the ever-transforming field of childhood studies. A number of the contributors are affiliated with the Childhood Studies department and Rutgers-Camden campus. In February, Cook also saw the publication of his sole-authored The Moral Project of Childhood: Motherhood, Material Life and Early Children’s Consumer Culture with NYU Press. Last September, he visited the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University where he delivered the keynote talk, “Play and Its Duplicitities,” at the 2nd WERA-IRN conference on extended education. Cook published his last editorial, “The Wages of Constructivism,” for the journal Childhood in May, stepping down as co-Editor after 12 years of service.

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Lauren Silver published an article in Children’s Geographies on “Transformative Childhood Studies,” a framework guided by young people’s stories and theories as urgent provocation for childhood studies scholars. Lauren continues to write blogs and articles in TCS, queer reproductive justice & kinship, and is completing an invited chapter in the edited volume, Survivor Criminology. She is currently engaged in youth participatory action research with a Camden-based arts organization, supported by a Rutgers-Camden Provost Catalyst Grant. Lauren is writing her new book, Youth Pathways Across Camden: Narratives of Resistance, Transformation, and Celebration. She organized a panel on radical methodologies with several childhood studies graduate students for the 2020 Society for Applied Anthropology Meeting (canceled, COVID) and was an invited interlocutor for the Graduate Center, CUNY Book Salon for Wendy Luttrell’s Children Framing Childhoods (rescheduled, COVID). Lauren continues her Rutgers-Camden Provost-appointment as the Faculty Director of Engaged Learning and Scholarship. She co-developed University-wide criteria and guidelines for evaluating publicly engaged scholarship for tenure and promotion, implemented a certificate in Civic Engagement and Social Change, and facilitated six colloquiums in community engaged scholarship for colleagues.

Lynne Vallone was awarded a Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Research in 2019. In summer 2019, she gave two papers directly related to her manuscript-in-progress about the historical, visual and cultural constructions of the fetus: “The Silent Fetus” at the International Research Society for Children’s Literature conference in Stockholm, Sweden; and “Picturing the Fetal Narrator: The Fetus in 20th and 21st century Literature and Popular Culture” at the Coming of Age of the Public Fetus International Workshop in Uppsala, Sweden. The larger project, entitled “Fetus: A Biography,” is under contract with Reaktion Press (London). She had two short works published recently: an article on "Size" in the second edition of Keywords in Children's Literature (eds. Lissa Paul, Philip Nel and Nina Christiansen) and an article on "Children's Literature" in the Sage Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies (ed. Daniel T. Cook). She is also working on a newly re-imagined "anthology" of children's literature appropriate for the new generation of college students (in a COVID-19 and hopefully post-COVID world) for Norton, tentatively titled "Norton Approaches to Children's Literature" (with Lissa Paul).

Wenhua Lu continues her research on adolescent mental health and healthcare disparities. Her most recent article, published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, examines the national patterns, temporal trends, and factors related to adolescent mental health service use for major depression across service settings. Based on findings from her epidemiological studies, as well as qualitative interviews with different stakeholders (i.e., adolescents, parents, therapists), Dr. Lu is currently in the process of developing a culturally tailored intervention to engage Asian American adolescents with mental health service needs into treatment. In collaboration with colleagues from Rutgers University-Camden and East Carolina University, Lu is also co-editing a special issue on the topic of minority adolescent mental health and health care disparities for the journal Frontiers in Public Health. Since May 2019, Dr. Lu has published 3 articles in leading public health journals, such as the Journal of Adolescent Health and the American Journal of Health Behavior, and presented 6 peer-reviewed abstracts in prestigious conferences, including the annual meetings of the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Health Behavior. Dr. Lu has also submitted two external grant applications, including one SAMHSA grant application to evaluate the Project Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health (Project LAUNCH) of the Child Center of NY. The purpose of the Project LAUNCH is to promote the wellness of young children, from birth to 8 years of age, living in the Queens, NY neighborhoods of Jamaica and Far Rockaway, by enhancing the capacity of their home and school environments to better address their social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of their development.
John Wall is working on a book titled *Children and the Vote*, anticipated to be published in 2021, which is an examination of the history and current debates around children’s suffrage and an argument for the elimination of all voting ages. He published three recent articles on themes of childism, politics, and globalization: “Theorizing Children’s Global Citizenship: Reconstructionism and the Politics of Deep Interdependence” in *Global Studies of Childhood* (2019); “From Childhood Studies to Childism: Reconstructing the Scholarly and Social Imaginations” in *Children’s Geographies* (2019); and “Empowered Inclusion: Theorizing Global Justice for Children and Youth,” with Jonathan Josefsson, in *Globalizations* (2020). He also wrote a short article, “Empowering Children through Childism,” in *Montessori International* magazine. Before the coronavirus pandemic, he was due to present “From Childhood Studies to Childism” at both Linköping University and the University of Stockholm, Sweden (the first of which took place online instead), and “The Childism Institute” at Roskilde University, Denmark. These presentations are related to a two-year Rutgers Provost’s Fund grant that he received starting in January 2020 to develop the structure and further funding for a Childism Institute. He is co-PI for a further Global Rutgers grant for “Internationalizing the Curriculum” on campus that seeks to connect students to broader global opportunities. He gave a presentation for the Rutgers Camden Honors College on Halloween 2019 titled “Children as Embodiments of Evil.” In addition, he serves as an expert advisor on children’s suffrage for Amnesty International UK; as a faculty advisor for the Children’s Voice Association, in Finland; and as an Advisory Board member for a nation-wide, government-funded project on Ethical Practice Involving Children (EPIC), in Australia.

Anthony Wright submitted a co-authored article (with Dayana Shariff) on migration-related family separations as a distinct stressor that can affect familial relationships in the context of pediatric cancer treatment to the *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*. Anthony is currently working on two other articles related to his research with pediatric cancer patients, families, and professionals. The first focuses on the technological mediation of illness-related communication, particularly on the ways in which family members and patients use networked technologies to both research and narrate their condition. The second article looks at how the bodies and behaviors of pediatric cancer patients become racialized in the context of morally and affectively charged social interactions.

Anthony was also invited to contribute a co-authored publication (with Jurhamuti Velázquez Morales) to a special issue of *Global Studies of Childhood* on the theme of “Children’s Art in Times of Crisis.” This article is related to Anthony and Jurhamuti’s collaborative work among youth activists in Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico. Additionally, he was invited to discuss this work at a roundtable session on the theme of “multimodal ethnography” at the American Anthropological Association meetings later this fall.

Finally, Anthony was invited to contribute a blog post to *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*’s “Critical Care” blog series in June 2020. This post will focus on the marketing of wearable health technologies to children, analyzing it as an example of for-profit encroachments into health care.