

# **BELOVED CONSUMERS, FRAUGHT CYPHERS: YOUNG PEOPLE, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND MEDIA HISTORY**

*Colloquium Series*

---



**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2016**

**501 CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING**

# WELCOME



*The study of young people as both profitable consumers and romanticized citizens has become increasingly pertinent in the current cultural landscape, where discussions on age-appropriate entertainment, underage corruption via online social media, and teen-targeted movie franchises permeate both America's popular press and academic debate. This Faculty Research Colloquium sets out to explore the fraught relationship between young consumers and American mass media as it has been unfurling for the last one hundred years. As the organizer, I am thankful to all who donated their time, labor, and resources to bring this gathering to life.*

*Diana W. Anselmo*

*Postdoctoral Fellow in Film Studies*

# WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR OUR SPONSORS

---

THE HUMANITIES CENTER



FILM STUDIES PROGRAM



GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S  
STUDIES PROGRAM



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

The DIETRICH School of  
Arts & Sciences

**HUMANITIES  
CENTER**

*Wherever the human mind leads*

Gender, Sexuality, &  
Women's Studies Program

An interdisciplinary academic program focusing on excellence in  
teaching and research relating to gender, sexuality, and women.



# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS



**10:00 AM**

**BREAKFAST & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*

**10:30 AM**

**FIRST PANEL: CHILDREN, TECHNOLOGY, AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*

Pamela Wojcik, University of Notre Dame

## **Fantasies of Neglect: Imagining the Urban Child**

This paper investigates how cities have been simultaneously demonized as dangerous spaces unfit for children and romanticized as wondrous playgrounds that foster a child's imagination and independence. Looking at shifts in the representation of the urban child, with particular interest in the child's relation to city streets, Wojcik considers changing discourses on children's neglect, mobility, and autonomy.

Meghan Chandler, Santa Monica College

## **Course Correction: How X-ray and Home Imaging Technologies Provided a New Hope for the Future**

In the midst of the American Great Depression — a time characterized by social upheaval and economic uncertainty — new initiatives to safeguard American families arose from medical, political, and commercial sectors. Unifying these efforts was a shared rhetorical focus on “the child” as the most vulnerable to loss and in need of protection. This paper will analyze two case studies drawn from the medical sciences and print culture: T. Wingate Todd’s 1935 X-ray study of childhood growth and Eastman Kodak’s series of 1935 advertisements that marketed home photography and movie equipment as vital ways to ensure the future maturation and successful growth of American children. Both of these case studies reveal how imaging technologies were used to manage time and direct childhood development, while also shaping larger ideologies surrounding class, social standing, and the nation’s future.

Meredith Bak, Rutgers-Camden

## **"It's Alive!" Technologies of Animation in Contemporary Toys**

Animation is commonly evoked in marketing rhetoric for children’s toys. Advertisements promise that technologically-enhanced toys “come to life!” by walking, talking, or otherwise appearing animate. Conversely, such toys are frequently attributed with the power to bring kids’ imaginations “to life.” My paper overviews a series of case studies of historical and

contemporary animate toys, from talking dolls to augmented reality platforms, tracing discursive, technological, and material constructions of animation. Part of a larger project, I investigate how animate toys have changed over the past century, how they register broader attitudes toward children, play, and technology, and ask why liveliness persists as a desired attribute.

**12:30 PM**

**LUNCH FOR PRESENTERS**

*156 Cathedral of Learning, Croghan-Schenley Ballroom*

**2:00 PM**

**SECOND PANEL: FEMALE YOUTH, CONSUMER CULTURE, AND MEDIA ACTIVISM**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*

Tyler Bickford, University of Pittsburgh

**The Whiteness of Tween Innocence: Taylor Swift and the Racialization of Childhood**

The tween music and media industries expanded dramatically during the 2000s. While the term "tween" itself foregrounds age distinctions--targeting consumer demographics between childhood and adolescence--many critics have focused on the industry's overriding investments in femininity and racial whiteness. In this paper I try to unpack how age categories are central to the industry's logics of gender and race through an analysis of moments in Taylor Swift's early and middle career, focusing on media around the release of her albums *Fearless* (2008), *Speak Now* (2010), and *Red* (2012). In particular I show how Swift's repeated identification of childhood as white and feminine and white femininity as childish are a central and ongoing feature of her semiotics of white femininity. With the release of each album she ritually disavows celebrations of "breakout" mainstream success while reaffirming her vulnerability and innocence through paired tropes of whiteness and childishness. I build especially on the work of Robin Bernstein on the racialization of innocence and Lauren Berlant on genres of feminine complaint to think through how the age categories of consumer media demographics have come to stand in for discourses about race, gender, white grievance, and identity politics.

Sarah Projansky, University of Utah

**Mainstreaming Anti-Rape Activism: Title IX and the College-Girl Hero**

In 2001, the U.S. government began to use Title IX to require universities to work toward sexual violence prevention. As a result, today over 100 schools are under investigation. Concomitantly, the relationship between Title IX and campus sexual assault is often in the news, including the CNN Oscar-nominated documentary *The Hunting Ground* (2015) and *Mattress Performance* (Carry That Weight) (2014-2015), Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz's senior thesis performance piece. In this talk, I focus on these two case studies, arguing that media coverage offers a decidedly feminist perspective on sexual violence (e.g., victim/survivors are credible and the university structure is a contributing factor in sexual assault), and does so by

representing youthful college-girl heroes as the necessary fulcrum for social change.

Emilie Zaslow, Pace University

**“Baby Doll, You Made the World a Little Bit Better by Speaking out for What You Believe in:”  
Narratives of Political Action in the American Girl Collection**

With over 150 million American Girl books sold in the last 30 years, the narratives of the fourteen girls from what is now called the BeForever collection are a part of our cultural discourse about girls’ lives. American Girl has routinely been criticized for reifying normative femininity and ethnocentrism, sanitizing American history, celebrating consumption, and reinforcing a ‘good girl’ identity. Yet there has been little analysis of how American Girl imagines and represents political labor produced by the girl protagonists and how their political work interacts with their domestic work, their maternal relationships, and their understanding of gender and nation. As neo-historical fiction, these series books simultaneously narrate nostalgia for a femininity of the past and celebrate girls’ challenge to the normative gender, race, and class identities ascribed to them by their mothers and/or the historical realities of their fictitious times. I explore how the characters represent a range of challenges to social norms including questioning whose voices have value, neoliberal commodity activism, and activist positions in social change movements.

**4:00 PM**

**COFFEE BREAK**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*

**4:15PM**

**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS PRESENTATION**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*

Clare Withers and Jeanann Haas, Hillman Library

**5:15 PM**

**RECEPTION**

*501 Cathedral of Learning*