Rich Pasts and Future Horizons in the Anthropology of Children and Youth

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Rich Pasts, Future Horizons: A New Decade in the Anthropology of Children & Youth

Happy Spring! We are thrilled you opened the first 2020 issue of *NEOS,* the flagship publication of the Anthropology of Children & Youth Interest Group (ACYIG), American Anthropological Association (AAA). In this issue, we unveil the new look for *NEOS* and reflect on anthropological past, present, and future contributions to child and youth studies.

***NEOS* Survey Results.** In fall of 2019, we released an international survey to anthropological and interdisciplinary scholars, practitioners, and students working in child/youth studies. This survey was intended to support the *NEOS* Editorial Board and ACYIG Board in re-envisioning both the publication and larger interest group offerings in meaningful and sustainable ways. We sincerely appreciate everyone who disseminated and completed the survey. With your support, we received a total of $n = 76$ surveys! Respondents hailed from 15 countries, represented all sub-fields of anthropology, and held a strong primary employment origin (80%) in academia, followed by practitioner fields (11%), and other combinations or sectors (9%). Rich data emerged from survey findings. Here, we highlight select results that were central in orienting *NEOS* towards new horizons as a central space for rigorous, peer-reviewed, and timely scholarship in child and youth studies.

A focus on scholarship and impact: When asked about what ACYIG activities interest you the most, respondents indicated a focus on scholarly resources on children and youth, followed by the *NEOS* publication, and ACYIG blog posts on children/youth research and current events. When asked about what qualities were most important when choosing publications to read and/or submit work to, respondents ranked readership/impact as the number one quality, followed closely by the necessity for a peer-reviewed process, ease in dissemination of publication contents, fast publication timelines, and open access status.

Trends in digital scholarship and forward-thinking content: One of the key decisions to make as an Editorial Board was around moving *NEOS* to an online publication format to reflect digital dissemination and readership trends. Overwhelmingly, survey participants were in support of this change, with 73% indicating enthusiasm, 24% indicating no preference, and only a small portion (3%) holding some reservation. Coupled with this decision around publication format was an editorial eye toward content and structure. Here, the results of the survey demonstrated a strong preference for thematic issues based on current trends/events and anthropological sub-fields or specialized interests.

Uplifting your word: Qualitative results provided depth to quantitative findings, illustrating the importance of further cultivating the ACYIG community, extending the impact of *NEOS* scholarship, ensuring rigorous publication processes, and fostering opportunities to highlight scholars in our field. As one participant said, “I’ve been a member since the interest group began. I’ve always been excited about the group and

grateful for a home for children/youth studies . . .” and another echoed. “It is essential [to] have a community that shares a sense of the importance of children within cultural contexts.”

A new look for *NEOS*. Collectively, the results of the survey allowed our Editorial Board to re-imagine a new *NEOS* format. We made the following editorial decisions to best serve our readers and authors:

NEOS is now online: Yes, we moved to an online publication format! A one-click issue link alongside digital Tables of Content frame your entry into each *NEOS* issue. Each published piece within an issue also comes with its unique link, social media interfaces, and downloadable PDF format. Found an article of interest to your research lab? Share it on Facebook or Twitter with just one click! Love the whole issue and can’t wait to assign it as a special reading for your class this semester? Great! Share the whole issue link with your students or upload the PDF to your Learning Management System. In developing this new online version of *NEOS*, we paid special attention to the concerns voiced by some survey respondents who worried that taking *NEOS* online could jeopardize the downloadable and open-access nature of *NEOS*. We believe these changes not only maintain, but strengthen, both of these essential and long-standing characteristics of *NEOS*. Finally, note that as we work toward our next issue, we are exploring new website templates. Look out for a new aesthetics for *NEOS* coming soon!

Thematic issues have arrived: To elevate the impact of *NEOS* scholarship and cultivate expertise within child/youth anthropological communities, we are moving away from the generalized version of *NEOS* and into thematic issues. Each thematic issue will focus on cutting-edge topics of our time as well as specialty approaches to child/youth studies. We anticipate thematic issues will foster deepened trans- and inter-disciplinary dialogue as well as increase the contribution of anthropologists to the lives of children and youth. The CFP for each upcoming issue will be announced in the current issue of *NEOS* to support authors in preparing their work for submission.

Centering research and scholarship*:* The new structure of *NEOS* centers research and scholarship through two primary means: commentaries and original research articles. Original research articles undergo a rigorous double-blind peer-review process, and editorials are peer-reviewed by the Editorial Board. We have moved member news/announcements, teaching resources, and updates from the field to the ACYIG blog and social media platforms. This new structure will allow for real-time dissemination of member news while consolidating the mission of *NEOS* as a top-quality, leading publication for anthropological scholarship and research in child/youth studies.

In This Issue. We unveil the re-imagined *NEOS* publication through our first issue of the decade, entitled “Rich Pasts, Future Horizons: A New Decade in the Anthropology of Children & Youth.” In this issue, we weave a story that honors the past, grounds us in the present, and looks towards the future of anthropological scholarship on children and youth. The opening

invited commentary by founding member of ACYIG, Dr. Kristen Cheney, serves as an organizing framework for the issue. In this piece, Dr. Cheney discusses the bridge between anthropology and childhood studies as both central to the foundations of ACYIG and as a critical juncture for the future of anthropology if we are to develop a field that consistently recognizes young people as agents of socio-cultural transformation. In their invited commentary, ACYIG graduate student representatives, Rashmi Kumari and Smruthie Bala Kannan, implore us to continue bridge-building not only between and across disciplines but also geographies, particularly exploring some of the challenges of south/north transnational collaborations. Finally, in his closing commentary, Dr. David Fazzino draws from experiences with empowering youth education programs. He advocates for systematic solutions in praxis and pedagogy to youth marginalization, solutions that afford young people "the opportunity to reveal and root out marginalities and become their own guiding lights."

Together, these editorials create a picture of "Rich Pasts, Future Horizons" that the original research articles then scaffold around. Drawing from research in varied contexts ranging from the American Rocky Mountains to Bangalore, India, the authors raise a number of provocative methodological, theoretical, and ethical questions for us to consider. Vijitha Rajan reflects on the unique methodological challenges of conducting field research with migrant children, while Christos Panagiotopoulos and Jennifer McGuire pose questions about the ethics of child/youth research designs. Finally, Anastasia Badder and Rebecca Davis look at how Midwestern high schoolers negotiate lessons on "good Christian girlhood," joining others in calling for more research that explores how children learn, challenge, and negotiate religious subjectivity.

Closing Thoughts. We hope this issue will critically reveal how pasts, presents, and futures are created not by individuals, but through collective action and community care. As we continue this dialogue on the future of the Anthropology of children and youth, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the current global health crisis we all find ourselves navigating. To this end, we look forward to receiving your contributions for the October 2020 issue, "Health & Well-Being in Uncertain Times: Centering Children & Youth," where we leverage *NEOS* as a space for these emergent conversations and engagement.

Many thanks for your shared reverence for past contributions and for co-generating with us new directions in child and youth studies. Stay well.

All the best,

Courtney L. Everson, PhD (Colorado State University)
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Advisory Board Update

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ACYIG has had a productive year. With the Department of Childhood Studies at Rutgers University Camden, we held our biennial conference last March, *Rethinking Child and Youth Marginalities: Movements, Narratives and Exchanges.* The three-day conference hosted 25 panels and 120 presenters from more than ten countries. We thank Christine El Ouardani (ACYIG), Sarada Balagopalan, Lauren Silver, Cati Coe, and Cindi Dell Clark (Rutgers), for their tremendous organizing work. We also sponsored a session at the 2019 AAA meetings: *Neoliberal Childhoods? Interrogating the "Neoliberal" in Haiti, the Netherlands, and the U.S.*

As we move into 2020, the leadership of ACYIG has changed substantially. We give thanks to past convenor Helen Vallianatos, past conference chairs Christine El Ouardani and Jaymelee Kim, past membership coordinator Amy Paugh, and past graduate student representative Lilia Rodriguez. We also thank outgoing *NEOS* editor Victoria Holec, webmaster: Scarlett Eisenhauer, and social media coordinator Maria Barbero. Thanks to everyone for their service! We welcome a number of new faces: Elisha Oliver (membership coordinator and AAA liaison), Patrick Beauchesne, Meredith Ellis, and Julie Pluies (conference chairs), Smruthi Bala Kannan and Rashmi Kumari (graduate student representatives). We also have two new co-editors for *NEOS,* Courtney Everson and Maria Barbero, and new members of our communication team: Kimberly P. Garza (webmaster), Megan O'Sullivan (social media coordinator), and Robin Valenzuela (website content coordinator). Finally, I am taking over as convenor.

We have a number of exciting initiatives planned. *NEOS* is moving to an online format. The conference chairs are planning our next conference *Transitions*, to take place in spring 2021 or 2022. We are expanding the four-field diversity of our membership, and plan on hosting some alternative social events at the AAA meetings. Stay tuned!

Finally, the AAA switch to Communities has negatively affected our communications and membership. Many find the system cumbersome, and others cannot access it because they are not AAA members. Therefore, we have created a new google group. We are transferring members over and hope to have the new listserv up and running soon.

I thank everyone who has helped with ACYIG in the past, and look forward to the next year!

October 2020 Call for Papers

Theme: Health & Well-Being in Uncertain Times: Centering Children & Youth

NEOS welcomes submissions for the October 2020 issue: *Health & Well-Being in Uncertain Times: Centering Children & Youth.* This issue will focus on how anthropologists and interdisciplinary scholars study, uplift, and center the health, illness, and well-being experiences of children and youth. We are especially interested in articles that speak to child/youth health during uncertain times, including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and changes in policy and practice that re-structure fundamental health systems for children.

We invite short-form original research articles (1,000 words max, excluding references), as well as commentaries (500 words max, excluding references) that address the issue's theme. *NEOS* also welcomes original research articles that—while not necessarily directly connected to the CFP theme—highlight recent "hot off the press" research in the field.

NEOS is an open-access publication of the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group of the American Anthropological Association. We publish research on childhood and youth from scholars working across the four fields of anthropology, as well from those interdisciplinary fields in conversation with anthropological theories and methods. Articles published in *NEOS* undergo a double-blind peer-review process, and commentaries are reviewed by the *NEOS* Editorial Team.

The deadline for submissions is August 24, 2020 (end of the day). For further information on the submission process, see the website at http://acyig.americananthro.org/neos/neos-submission-guidelines/.
Rolling submissions prior to August 24 are also welcome.

We ask that all authors planning to submit articles or commentaries email the *NEOS* editors no later than August 10, 2020 with a brief message about their intent to submit and short abstract of their commentary or article. *NEOS* Editors may be reached at acyig.editor@gmail.com.

Looking Back to Move Forward: Bridging Anthropology and Childhood Studies

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In 2007, when Susan Shepler and I founded ACYIG, the idea was to network the many anthropologists working on childhood and youth at the time. Childhood studies was still finding its feet as an interdisciplinary field in its own right, but many new ACYIG members felt that the discipline of anthropology was not taking young people seriously enough. Although ACYIG has done a lot to bring anthropology and childhood studies together, and its members have adeptly shown how the two disciplines can inform each other, many challenges and opportunities remain.

With the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2019, a number of reflections have been published on where childhood studies has been and where it is going. Spyrou suggests that we transcend 'children's voice' by centering "the unspoken and the unspeakable which can produce new and more sensitive representations of children" (Spyrou 2018, 86). Spyrou et al urge innovation through focus on young people's relationalities, questions of scale, and political economy, "from what childhood is to what childhood does" (Spyrou, Rosen, and Cook 2019, 8), while Stryker et al call on scholars of childhood and youth "to embrace and advance the relational, the historical, the political and the inclusive" (Stryker et al. 2019, 301).

Just as anthropologists have helped develop childhood studies by de-centering Western-centric understandings of childhoods/youth and contextualizing childhood(s) across cultures and societies, anthropologists—by virtue of their attention to context as well as reflexivity—are again uniquely poised to push the field in these new directions. We can do so by amplifying our already politically-engaged and policy-relevant work around young people, such as research on the ways young people are transforming our understandings of complex issues like contemporary migration (and detention), activism, and gender/sexuality.

But what can childhood studies do for anthropology? Unfortunately, I think we are still figuring out how to get anthropology to take childhood seriously. Even 13 years after its inception, ACYIG must walk the line between providing a space for like-minded scholars interested in childhood and youth, and creating a splinter group—though our intention was, in fact, to help mainstream some of the central tenants of childhood studies, such as agency and methodological innovation, in anthropological praxis. In this, I believe we still struggle to gain a foothold because of the ways in which scholarship about young people sometimes gets dismissed by the academy (Cheney 2019).

However, considerations of how the young experience some of the transformative events of our current historical moment—from Coronavirus to climate change—will help

anthropology to widen its view to not only finally examine age and generation as valid intersections of experience similar to class, race, and gender (Cheney 2007, 15), but also to recognize young people's contributions to those cultural transformations currently taking place in the world around us.

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Holistic Pedagogical Approaches and Youth Empowerment

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Two recent geographically disparate youth education experiences, one in Pennsylvania and the other in the Federated States of Micronesia, highlight the value of cross-disciplinary engagement and collaboration to empower youth through holistic pedagogical approaches.

The first is Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania's ANCHOR Program (2020) for fifteen to eighteen-year-olds involved in the foster care in Pennsylvania. It is an intensive one-week residential program with year-long support and mentoring. The residential program matches students up with courses and activities that align with their interests. I co-led workshops with Bloomsburg University undergraduate Anthropology students, including hands-on activities in archaeology and agroecology in 2017 and 2018. During one of these workshops, in the late July mid-afternoon sun, students worked to weed and prepare beds for transplanting out seedlings. One student, "Kim," from inner-city Philadelphia, admiring the agrarian landscape and sweeping views, exclaimed that it was very pretty and looked "like a postcard." She said she had never seen anything as beautiful as this and it was part of what inspired her to continue her studies. This impressed upon me the importance of innovative, place-based and holistic pedagogical approaches to inspire youth.

This was reinforced again in summer 2018 as I volunteered at Kosrae State Historic Preservation Office (KSHPO) in Kosrae State, Federated States of Micronesia, to co-lead an ethnographic field school for high school students between their junior and senior years. This trained youth in ethnographic methods and provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their lives, culture, and participate in an exchange of information and ideas with elders from throughout the island. We supplemented this with field visits to natural features of the island where guides, staff, and youth interacted with one another to learn more about animal behavior. We summited Mount Oma with nearly 360-degree views of Kosrae on the final day. Although many of these youth could literally see their home communities from the summit, none of them had previously been into the forest. I saw that same look on the faces of these youth that Kim had nearly a year before. They were in awe of what was around them, of what they could accomplish, and elated to have the opportunity to feel like they belonged somewhere. Holistic educational programming had created this sense of empowerment by holding a space for them.

These moments of joy, of knowing that adults have their backs, and knowing that they have a vision for the future that is better off today than it was yesterday are a result of program participation. This joy and knowing counters the shadows or marginalities which come in a variety of forms and scales. Marginalities that are produced through climate change, colonialism, dependency for Micronesians. The shadows of structural violence along the lines of race, gender, and class. If the conditions which produce these marginalities are systematic, then so too must be our solutions in praxis and pedagogy. Implementing such solutions

ensures that youth may shape their future by reconciling the past with the present, providing them with the opportunity to reveal and root out marginalities and become their own guiding lights.

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Collaborations Across Global North-South: Considering Opportunities and Challenges

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Scholarly engagement around the issues of childhood and youth is often "knocking at the backdoor of academia that is adult-centric" and, in turn, centered around hegemonic discourses (Cox 2019). What logically follows is a critique of normative childhoods – carefree, school- going, dependent—conceived as centered in the Global North context. Such critique calls for further investigation of the existing and emerging forms of childhoods that defy this norm, and scholarship on childhoods that goes past the North-South binary to pay attention to flows of people, material, and ideas (Balagopalan 2019)

As PhD students of childhood studies working in India, we often find that scholarship emerging from institutions in the Global South informs our work in productive ways. Likewise, we have found a significant flow of conceptual knowledge from the Global North to the South, especially around the scholarship on child rights and protection. However, the representation of the scholarship from the Global South in the forums that are mostly situated in the Global North is often skewed.

As a step towards balancing this asymmetrical representation of scholarship from the Majority world, at ACYIG there has been discussion about publishing a thematic issue of *NEOS* that centers Global South scholarship. In this commentary, as a first of many such efforts, we highlight some of the issues and challenges we face in such collaborations. We also highlight some possible questions/directions towards addressing these concerns.

Challenges, Responses, and Considerations in Transnational Collaborations

The challenges of transnational collaborations are varied and complex. The quotidian details of the collaborations, such as scheduling meetings across time-zones, linguistic differences, financial barriers to travel, and access to similar academic communities, are often situated in and complicated by structural inequities. Such inequities can include differential access to library and journal resources, and unequal value of currencies. Further, colonial legacies of unequal power relations among the various academic institutions are often shadows that underlie these inequities. Some existing academic collaborations have attempted a range of solutions to bridge these gaps, including video conferencing, ability-based financial contributions, and decolonizing praxis in designing interactions.

While these solutions, along with technological affordances, have certainly helped cultivate diverse representation of scholarly voices, much more is needed to expand the existing scholarship to include non-normative childhoods not only in the Global North scholarship but also to engage with the Global South scholarship that continuously challenges our understandings of childhoods. For example, Kay Tisdall and Samantha Punch's (2012) critique of Childhood Studies invites us to pay particular attention to the "intricacies, complexities, tensions, ambiguities and ambivalences of children and young people's lives across both Majority and Minority World contexts" (p.259). Rather than slipping into the binary where childhoods and youth in the Minority world context are normative, and those in the Majority world context are the "non-" or the "multiple-", scholarly collaborations can historicize, and engage in ways in which the non-normative childhoods and "local" childhoods interact with and are shaped by normative or hegemonic ideas and global flows (Hanson *et al*. 2018).

Prior work in *NEOS* and ACYIG has centered ethics, reflexivity, and care as research praxis. While presenting a nuanced understanding of the agency and voice of the participants in their research, scholars have also underscored how young people are embedded in, and add value to, their home communities and global contexts (e.g., Sinervo and Cheney 2019, Duncan and Finn 2018, Vanderbilt 2019). Bringing such a research praxis to relationships within academia, however, can often be logistically difficult and interrupted by institutional discourses of discipline and merit. However, doing so can undoubtedly expand historical and theoretical perspectives on non-normative conceptualizations of childhoods.

Reflecting on these issues, we pose three questions for consideration in the decade forward: What would academic collaborations that are sensitive to and resist the existing unequal power relationships between Minority and Majority world contexts look like? How can organizational spaces pave the way for representation and collaborations to occur with ethics, reflexivity, respect, and care? And finally, how would the theoretical landscape in the anthropology of children and youth be further enriched by such collaborations?

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Ethnography and Migrant Children: Perspectives and Challenges

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Introduction

In this article, I share some of the methodological reflections that are emerging from my doctoral study with migrant children in the Indian city of Bangalore. The study aims to explore educational experiences of children belonging to internally migrating families in India. The nature of this migration is largely short-term and circular, and most children are either dropped out of school or are never enrolled in school. I employed ethnographic methods during the fieldwork to explore migrant children's everyday experiences in the city and the educational landscapes in which they are situated.

Epistemological shifts in social theories of childhood have enabled researchers to understand childhood(s) as socially constructed and children as active beings engaged in making their world. This newly formed theoretical inclination has become an "obligatory act of faith" (Nieuwenhuys 2013) among researchers of childhood(s) and education. Methodologically, this has resulted in the construction of ethnography, in new sociology of childhood, as uniquely capable of making sense of children's voices and lives (James and Prout 2005). Despite such epistemological and methodological convictions around ethnographically researching children's lives, fieldwork was less straightforward in its manifestations. Building on how traditional ethnographic ideals are getting revamped across multiple contours in current times, this article reflects upon some unique challenges that arise from my research with migrant children.

Ethnographic Presence

One challenge is presented by the complex patterns of mobility that migrant families in the city have. Various cross-cutting dimensions define the migrant population profile in the city, such as the nature of migration (e.g., inter-state/intra-district/inter-district), residence in the city (e.g., government allotted land/private land/worksite/slum/street) and labour sectors in which migrants are employed (e.g., construction/rag picking/domestic work/sanitation work). Along with this complex profile, migrant families and children frequently move between the village and the city, or between different worksites within the city. Selecting one site and a set of participants from within this complex profile was challenging because of its uneasy alignment with the traditional ethnographic requirement of "prolonged engagement" of the researcher in a "particular spatial location" for a "particular time period" and with a "particular set of participants." Research with migrant children disrupts the above-mentioned ethnographic ideals through their complex profiles and mobile lives.

The methodological principle that a "place" can be understood "by just staying there" is increasingly questioned (Merry 2000) in contemporary research. De-essentializing fixed spatial and temporal ethnographic ideals around childhood, Stryker and Yngvesson (2013, p.298) pose the question, "what kinds of 'fixed' and 'fluid' relational contexts and trajectories of children's circulation (the act of living life in multiple physical and social locations) can be identified that shape both figurations of childhood and the lived experiences of children?" In this light, it is important to deconstruct the spatial and temporal modalities of ethnographic research in order to meaningfully engage with the lives of migrant children. Fieldwork for this doctoral study was done for thirteen months in Bangalore between January 2017 and May 2018. Schools run by three NGOs in the city were chosen as specific sites for studying children's educational experiences. On the one hand, this delimited the study and thereby helped address the question of fixing ethnographic "place." On the other hand, this methodological choice became a trade-off for the ethnographic ideal of "fixed" set of participants, as migrant children enrolled in the NGO schools often "entered" and "exited" according to the mobility patterns of their families, defying the "place-centred" ideals of modern schooling. This trade off, initially perceived as an ethnographic roadblock, provided in effect, a vantage point to understand how "immobile" schools engage with educational inclusion of "mobile" childhoods (see Rajan 2019 for a detailed field narrative). The methodological combination of "static" researcher and "mobile" participants, thus, becomes a site for critical engagement rather than a limiting ethnographic anomaly

Constructing the "Other"

Another challenge is presented by how ethnographic research has evolved traditionally through the construction of the "other." Anthropological discourse around the field as "a place set apart from the urban" (that is: "agrarian," "pastoral," "wild" and "a site of culture") is intricately tied to the idea of ethnographic fieldwork being a project of studying "otherness" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The understanding of field immersion in "remote" and "bounded" fields as the "totem" of anthropological disciplinary identity has resulted in "ethnographic panopticism" (Coleman and Collins 2006, p.5). This has increased relevance in understanding the lived realities of migrant children, as marginalized children have been dominantly constructed by colonial research discourse as subjects of "ethnographic gaze" (Balagopalan 2014). In this background, it becomes imperative to question one's own ideas of "field," "self," and the "other" in regard to the research subjects. While ethnography claims to have the capacity to listen to the "powerless," "voiceless," and the "marginalized," one must ask, "who is listening and how are the voices of the 'other' understood and represented?". "Giving voices" to children could also mean that "children are disabled and need a helping hand," which may, in turn, result in subsuming diverse childhoods into a single category (James 2007).

On the one hand, migrant children are dominantly constructed as the "other" for being outside the normative locations of childhood and schooling and thereby passive objects of state and NGO governance. On the other hand, migrant children actively engage with their marginal locations, which in turn are reflective of the exclusionary contexts of education and development in India. Therefore, how the researcher constructs the "other" migrant childhood(s) is not merely a methodological question, but also an epistemological one.

Balagopalan (2019) notes two dominant, overarching approaches that have critiqued the global child rights imaginary. The first is understanding how the plurality of childhoods in multiple contexts contest the global ideal of childhood. The second is problematizing how childhoods on the margins become objects of governance in modern neoliberal discourse around child rights. By employing a post-colonial lens, she argues for a third approach that foregrounds historical and structural modes of exclusionary citizenship that children on the margins are already framed in. Such epistemological modalities around how marginal childhoods are understood and engaged with in contemporary research, influence how migrant childhoods- those which do not fit into the spatial and temporal ideals of both childhood and schooling- are methodologically engaged. It requires the researcher to problematize how migrant childhoods are constructed and circulated and be aware of how one's own methodological alignment may reinforce the politics around the understanding of childhoods.

Therefore, a key task of this study, in addition to negotiating the hierarchical adult-child relationship, is to understand migrant children's marginality through ethically sensible ethnographic encounters. One of the ways in which this is done in this study is through understanding and engaging with migrant child subjects as agentic beings who are negotiating sites of multiple childhoods, while being situated concurrently in marginal contexts of migration and development. In this framework, ethnographic research becomes a site of "education" that enables one "to attend" and "to follow along" without predispositions (Ingold 2014). For example, children's work in the city is seen in the dominant discourse either as an anomaly to universal childhood or as a celebration of multiple childhood(s). A constructive ethnographic engagement would stand afar from such essentializations in all stages of research (Rajan 2018) and attempt to understand children's experiences through active facilitation and observation of their own voices and participation (Jacquemin 2004; Lundy 2007).

Scholars, particularly those situated in the global South, often need to critically reflect upon the essentialized notions of childhood, and the political implications of the construction of knowledge around children and childhoods (de Castro 2020). It is in this light that I problematize ethnographic ideals around researching migrant childhoods and emphasize the need for employing epistemologically and methodologically just approaches while researching childhoods on the margins.

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Broadening our Ethical Horizons: Children and Youth Beyond 'Vulnerability'

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Anthropologists have long been mediating the institutional decision-making of ethical committees with the complicated realities of a field-based practice. Ethnographies engaging with 'vulnerable' populations are scrutinized by well-meaning ethics committees seeking to ensure ethical research practices. But in the name of ethics, protection and vulnerability, and through our collective best intentions, we sometimes commit to unethical choices for both our research participants and ourselves. Engaging with established discussions within anthropology, I consider where our ethical engagements lie in situations of conflicting moral dilemmas. Through a partial discussion of my research experience within the French juvenile rehabilitation system between 2018-2020, I propound some ethical and methodological questions to consider when imagining research with populations considered vulnerable in the anthropological horizons of the future. In doing so, I argue that the meaning of ethical research within ethnography surpasses data collection and management, and diffuses into intersubjective and relational ethics, as well as processes of notetaking, transcription and ethnographic writing, thus escaping the narrow confines of IRB decision-making.

Reproducing vulnerability and tacit exclusion

It had already been a year-long ethnographic journey, when I retreated at a secluded corner of the French countryside in July 2019 to take some distance from my mostly-Parisian field site. It was an opportunity to organize my notes and discuss the state of my ethnography with my advisors, while planning for another year. During this short getaway, I transcribed all my hand-written notes, and prospected the data I had gathered. I printed everything and distributed the ink-filled pages on the floor, trying to get a sense of what I had documented. Reading through my notes, I felt pride and shame. I had come a long way in a year. My notetaking had gradually changed, and my understanding of the field had radically evolved. Looking at my ethnographic data brought back vivid memories of people, spaces and times, actions and reactions unfolding as if I was reliving them. But one thing was noticeably missing: the youth.

My research takes place in the juvenile rehabilitation system in France, in youth detention centers, and spaces of juvenile justice and healthcare. At the outset, I set out to give voice to the adjudicated adolescents, to document their experiences in the rehabilitation process, and their encounters with specialized educators, mental health professionals and judicial institutions. Obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my ethnography was an adventure, but one that I genuinely enjoyed. The ethics committee of my university invited me on a continuous debate about ethical research, through which my project came closer to maturity. In order to obtain IRB approval, however, after having obtained the necessary authorizations from my field site interlocutors, I had to agree not to take notes while in the presence of adolescents. The IRB committee considered such notetaking as an added psychological risk to participants.

Local researchers in France normally take notes after obtaining the consent of institutions and

research participants, and sometimes also record dialogues with adolescents (Chauvier 2008). Contrary to French local practices and ethical standards, and notwithstanding the consent and anonymization of research participants, I had to agree not to take notes in the presence of adolescents. It was a difficult decision, but I had little to no negotiating power, and complied with the intention of protecting my younger research participants. At that stage, the repercussions of such a pivotal methodological change were unclear to me.

Moral dilemmas beyond consent

My notebooks were filled with deep descriptions of meetings with adult professionals, detailed accounts of institutional reunions, and faithful transcriptions of individual interviews. Initially, I would try to recall what the adolescents told me, or how they interacted with judicial personnel and mental health experts. But at the end of a long day, by the time I got an opportunity to isolate, concentrate and document the unique details of exchanges with youth, I wasn't able to. I always remembered the gist of events and most of what had happened during my visit in a youth detention center. Though I was never capable of faithfully reconstructing an adolescent's discourse, scanty phrases jolted back to memory. But making sense of them would require filling in gaps with purely subjective memories. In the absence of ethnographic notes, I confronted a moral dilemma: do I skip these fuzzy memories, or do I fill in the gaps with my own voice? Should I replace the adolescent's voices with mine, so my ethnographic narrative seems fluid and complete?

That was not what I wanted, nor where my moral engagement stood. And so, gradually, I began disinvesting in these spaces where I couldn't take notes. The voices of the youth started to fade, to disappear from my notes, in favor of subjective descriptions and detailed discourses of adult caretakers and institutional actors. My ethnographic gaze ultimately shifted, from the adolescents to the caretaking professionals, and that shift was what I was observing in my transcribed notes. On the wood flooring where I laid my printed notes, laid a failure – a personal, disciplinary, and institutional failure. Under the veil of ethics, protection, and vulnerability, and with the blessings of an ethics committee, I was contributing to further silencing the adjudicated and marginalized youth.

The ethnographic mindset as ethical research

Debates over the compatibility of ethnographic research with IRB decision-making strategies often come up in anthropological discussions. Researchers on childhood and youth have recognized an absence of consensus in defining 'vulnerability' (Coleman, 2009), and advocated for more relational and intersubjective apprehensions of ethics, grounded in the encounter between researcher and research participants (Meloni et al. 2015). Anthropologists have questioned the ready-made standards of modern ethical research because they silence and homogenize 'vulnerable' populations, including prisoners, mental health patients and children and youth, among others (Swauger 2009). A relational consideration of ethics invites us to consider multiple spaces of diffracted moral dilemmas, beyond the mere definition of a population as 'vulnerable'. Ethical research with youth is not limited to IRB or other institutional decisions on research proposals and data gathering. It is inevitably diffused in the ways we treat and respect our participants when transcribing our notes and writing an ethnography, when we "assume a final interpretation and a definitive reading" of our fieldnotes (Crapanzano 1986, p.51).

Conclusion

The promising future horizon in the anthropology of and with children and youth, is filled with opportunities to challenge and contextualize the current meanings of 'vulnerability'. How are ethnographers contributing to "educating ethics committees" in shifting from tacit exclusion, towards respect, attention, and caring for vulnerable research participants (Lederman 2007)? To acknowledge the complexity of ethical research within anthropology, is to consider transcription and writing processes, as well as intersubjective and dynamic relations with research participants, as inextricable spaces of creative ethical decision-making. During this next decade, we need ethnography-specific research guidelines to guide ethics committees in making informed and ethnography-sensible decisions about our research, which unfathomably escape the confines of biomedical ethics research protocols. Anthropologists and ethical committees alike need collaborative actions to resist the normalized use of vulnerability, ethics and protection as implicit silencing mechanisms.

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Conducting "Deaf-friendly" Research with Children

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At the World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Paris, Ardavan Guity presented a co-authored paper entitled "Ethical Concerns of Sign Language Work with the Deaf Communities: One Deaf Iranian Man's Journey from Researched to Researcher" **(**Hochgesang and Guity 2019). Guity spoke about researchers who came to his school in Iran, conducted research on the students, and then left behind questions and confusion. Guity and his peers were not adequately informed about the process or their critical role within it. He vividly described his sense of disempowerment as a research subject. Guity's story exemplifies the psychological harm researchers cause when they research *on* deaf children rather than *with* them.

What Guity described is not an anomaly. Asymmetry in social power is intrinsically present whenever adults conduct research *on* children. This can be magnified by hearing researchers' attitudes, which may mirror their society's audism and pathologizing deficit views of deafness (see Graham and Horejes 2017).[1] Previous research with deaf individuals demonstrates that participants may experience disempowerment during the research process and are generally distrustful of hearing researchers (Singleton *et. al* 2014; 2017). Power imbalances, coupled with language inaccessibility, results in deaf people lacking control in research about them.

Hearing researchers with little understanding about deaf communities have conducted "ethically abusive" research (Harris *et. al* 2009). As not only members of this marginalized group, but also minors, deaf children could be considered especially "vulnerable" to such abuse. However, depicting children as victims undermines their competence (Thomas and O'Kane 1998)—regardless of deafness. Further, an overprotective stance not only fails to respect children's competencies, it can also exclude them from studies about their lives (Alderson and Morrow 2012; Morrow and Richards 1996; Skelton 2008). A deaf-friendly, child-friendly research approach recognizes children's competencies, considers the diversity of linguistic backgrounds, and engages participants in the research process from inception to dissemination. While there are numerous principles and processes that constitute a deaf-friendly, child-friendly research approach, I use the informed assent process as one example to illustrate how the foundation of this approach rests on the respectful relationship between researcher(s) and deaf children.

[1] Following a growing number of academics who are moving away from the static and dichotomous d/Deaf distinction—where "deaf" is used for people who do not associate with deaf communities and "Deaf" for culturally deaf individuals—I use "deaf" throughout this article not to echo medicalized views, but to respect the fluidity of deaf identities and subjectivities.

Deaf Children as Informed Research Collaborators

Informed assent is not a task to complete to begin ethnographic research. Obtaining informed assent is an ongoing process which can reveal children's capabilities to act as "research collaborators" in genuine partnerships (Conroy and Harcourt 2009). Children's human rights, including the right to be consulted on matters affecting their lives, are guaranteed by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Minors may be legally unable to consent to research participation in most cases, but this does not void their right to assent or dissent.

Children have the capacity to assent if the researcher establishes the necessary conditions. In the mid-1980s, the "new" sociology of childhood positioned children as agentic social actors, but this agency does not preclude the need for "child-friendly" methods and research techniques (Allerton 2016). Their developing capabilities can be acknowledged without underestimating their competency. In the same way, deaf children's potential linguistic challenges can be acknowledged without framing these children as vulnerable or incompetent.

Deaf-friendly research is conducted *with* instead of *on* deaf people (Singleton *et. al* 2017; emphasis in original). Researching *with* deaf people requires that research practices be "culturally/linguistically accessible" (Singleton *et. al*. 2014, p. 64). To provide informed assent, children must be given appropriate and accessible information (Dockett and Perry 2011). As I describe in the next section, it is problematic to assume that deaf-friendly informed assent is necessarily made accessible by using the local sign language alone.

Informed Assent across Communication Modalities

Guity's presentation was a catalyst to revisit my experiences seven years prior as a novice ethnographer working with deaf children/youth in Japan. While my research during that initial 15-month period primarily involved mainstreamed students and emerging signers, I also had the opportunity to conduct participant observation in the junior high school division of Japan's only bilingual (Japanese Sign Language-Japanese)-bicultural (Deaf-Japanese) school for the deaf, Meisei Gakuen. This school was also one of the research sites in the "Deaf Kindergartens in Three Countries: Japan, France, and the United States" study, led by Joseph Tobin, Thomas Horejes, and Joseph M. Valente.

Deaf-friendly educational research includes deaf educators in the process (Singleton *et. al* 2017). As a hearing white American adult conducting research with deaf Japanese children, my positionality as an outsider was unmistakable. As an inexperienced fieldworker, I was fortunate to have the support (and patience) of the deaf educators in the school. I can now identify that my approach to gaining assent was deaf-friendly insomuch as it was facilitated by the cultural brokering of these educators as well as the students' subjectivities.

Context plays a significant role in determining a child's agency and competency. Since research with deaf children often occurs in educational settings, the school is an important context. At Meisei Gakuen, the junior high school students were fluent JSL signers who were implicitly taught to appreciate "Deaf Gain" (Bauman and Murray 2014) and empowered to ask questions. During the parallel process of gaining consent from parents/guardians and assent from junior high school students (ages 12 to 15), homeroom teachers helped to explain the project and the students' role within it. The accessible and straightforward "child-friendly"

information leaflet that I had prepared in Japanese was only a starting point. Meisei Gakuen's deaf educators' emic understandings were invaluable in allowing these students to make informed decisions.

My experience there does not reflect the norm in Japan—or elsewhere in deaf education. Deaf-friendly protocol tends to be preoccupied with accessibility via sign language; however, this overlooks the situation in many schools today. Unlike in Meisei Gakuen where students are instilled with pride in being deaf and surrounded by deaf role models and JSL-fluent hearing allies, the majority of deaf children today are not exposed to cultural models of deafness or to sign language(s) during their education. Children in schools for the deaf may be taught through oral/aural methods (i.e. speech, lipreading, and auditory training). Moreover, increasingly children worldwide are being separated from signing peers and deaf adults in deaf schools as a result of "educational inclusion" through placement in local schools (Murray *et. al* 2018). The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) estimates that only one to two percent of deaf people are educated through sign language (WFD 2020). Therefore, the emphasis on signing as best deaf-friendly practice does not align with children's linguistic realities.

Accordingly, deaf-friendly, child-friendly social research should be flexible, inclusive, and adaptive to a spectrum of communication needs and preferences. To seek informed assent, research should be clearly explained across and via multiple communication modalities (sign, speech, and print). Text, visual aids, and opportunities to confirm and re-confirm information in the child's *chosen* communication modalities can ensure that deaf children of all linguistic backgrounds understand their participation in a research project and their right to opt out of it. Positioning deaf children as research collaborators means providing them opportunities to engage in the process of creating and implementing an inclusive child-friendly assent procedure.

Toward a New Decade of Deaf-friendly, Child-friendly Research

Anthropologists studying within deaf communities engage with theories, concepts, and literature from a wide range of disciplines, including deaf studies, disability studies, sociolinguistics, and education studies, and therefore need to be aware of the debates occurring within these fields. The 2000s saw an emphasis on community-engaged approaches (Singleton *et. al* 2015) and a call to "decenterize hearingness" with research conducted "by Deaf, for Deaf, and with Deaf people" (Harris *et. al* 2009, p. 116). Harris, Holmes, and Mertens state that this "does not necessarily exclude hearing researchers" while emphasizing the authority of deaf researchers in deaf-hearing researcher collaboration (2009, p. 116). Critical examinations of the role of deaf scholars along with deaf ontologies and epistemologies have also emerged in recent years (e.g., Kusters *et. al* 2017).

Deaf ethnographers can reflexively analyze their positionalities (Graham and Horejes 2017; Kusters 2015; Valente 2014), using these insights to bridge gaps between adult researchers and children. In contrast, with the exception of CODA (children of deaf adults), hearing researchers embody a hearing habitus and subjectivity. What does this mean for hearing anthropologists conducting research with deaf children? Although many anthropologists today research within their "own" communities, a tradition of outsiders who contrast etic perspective with emic ones

remains. Can hearing anthropologists work independently in ethnographies of deaf children? Moreover, should they? Is it possible to create balanced partnerships between hearing adults and deaf children? These are some of the questions to be answered in the coming decade of deaf-friendly, child-friendly research.

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"A low-key cowgirl who gets good grades": Learning to be a Good Christian Girl in an American Evangelical Bible Study Group

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Nearly two decades ago, Hirschfeld (2002) asked, "why don't anthropologists like children?" suggesting that 'mainstream' anthropology had so far ignored the roles children play in cultural production. While childhood studies has since exploded, the roles of children in religious processes remain under-examined (Csordas 2009, Fader 2009, and Lytra, Volk, & Gregory 2016 are notable exceptions). Fader (2009) calls for scholars to acknowledge children's active engagements with religion, arguing that exchanges between adults and children and children and their peers in the official religious and intimate spaces of their everyday lives offer fruitful sites for understanding how religion and religious subjectivities are learned, challenged, and take unintended or unpredictable forms (Kulick & Schieffelin 2006).

We aim to address this call with a short-term ethnography (Pink & Morgan 2013) of Christian girlhood in the American Rocky Mountains. Drawing on participant observation carried out over four weeks with two teen girls' bible study groups, we explore how ideas and modes of good Christian girlhood are learned and unintended consequences that emerge in the process. We focus on the ways that good Christian girlhood becomes entwined with socioeconomic status and family relations, creating a moral constellation that positions some of the girls as already failing.

Cool Girl or Cowgirl?: Becoming a Good Christian Girl

Tucked away in a small mountain town, two groups of girls and their bible study leader and youth pastor, Amy, come together for weekly meetings at a coffee shop.[1] This article will focus on one group, who Amy dubbed the "emo girls." These girls, all 14 years-old, white, and lower-middle-class, identify as non-Christians who are interested but, according to the girls themselves, "hesitant to fully dedicate" to the evangelical lifestyle. They met Amy at a church-led community youth group where she invited them to join her for further bible study, hoping to bring the girls to a life in Christ. Amy often picked the girls up after school for bible study as their parents did not take them. In addition to coffee shop drinks, she hosted the girls at her house for taco nights and treated them to restaurant dinners. Amy was their "best friend" and "like a mom" and she felt it was her responsibility to guide the girls through teenage life, even when they resisted her efforts.

With Amy, the girls learned new ways to reflect on and assess morality and experienced a "social and cosmological reorganization" as they learned new ways to understand the world

[1] All participant names are pseudonyms.

and possible subjectivities in it (Schieffelin 2002, S15). Whereas in other sectors of society, a girl could be cool or lame, the Christian world constructed people and actions as good or bad. In this new frame, the emo girls were both behaving immorally – being bad – and challenging this framework by sometimes re-inhabiting positions of coolness – acting as 'bad subjects' (Althusser 1971) by resisting Amy's calls to behave in appropriately Christian ways and adopt the subjectivity of Christian girlhood.

In discussions about what makes a good Christian girl, the group agreed that she covers herself up and does not have any sexual experience, unlike the societal image of the cool girl who has the right amount of sexual experience. In the course of one discussion, the group re-inhabited old positionings when one member, Sarah, confirmed that another, Emily, was not lame because she had sexual experience. At this mis-framing of premarital sex and resistance to appropriate Christian morality and subjecthood, a visibly agitated Amy spoke up:

> Amy: *So according to society you're a good person?*
>
> Emily: *I'm not a good person.*
>
> Amy: *I mean if that's what it takes then.*

Emily sank back into her chair and remained withdrawn for the rest of the meeting, understanding that she was being interpellated as a bad person and adopting the appropriate affective stance (Hymes 1974). Amy's correction had reconfigured Emily's choices not as cool or lame, but as bad in moral terms, and reprimanded Emily and Sarah for failing to frame those choices correctly. Sarah had affirmed Emily's social positioning in society, upholding her ability to act as a *cool* high school girl by engaging in sexual activity. This affirmation, however, subverted Amy's attempts to draw the girls into a Christian subjectivity, one which requires a girl to feel and express shame at her sexuality. Amy responded with a scenario that could not add up – society does not judge morality and sex and goodness are antithetical – requiring Emily to recognize herself as bad.

Later, Amy introduced a causal narrative to make sense of these failures. The girls were too deeply enmeshed in the chaotic and a/immoral societal realm. They did not come from "cohesive" and "stable" two-parent Christian households in which they might have received "good wisdom" – instead, their absent or unstable parents left them to fend for themselves in a "crazy culture" where people "have a hard time figuring out what's right and wrong." The emo girls did not have the right kinds of families, nor the resources to become good Christians.

The girls built on this logic by discursively constructing the image of a good Christian girl as one who is pretty, blonde, and a "low-key cowgirl." Owning a horse as a teenage girl implies access to economic resources and invested parents, and represented a lifestyle performed by Christian girls in their high school that the emo girls found unobtainable. One pretty, blonde cowgirl Christian at their school came from a "secure" upper-middle-class family with church-going parents and possessed a type of spiritual and financial security that the emo girls and Amy agreed they lacked. Though the group mocked this girl for being *too* good and uncool,

they regularly referenced her as an ideal Christian girl and actively compared themselves negatively to her. In constructing this cowgirl archetype, the emo girls reiterated the links between socioeconomics, what "the family looks like," and goodness in ways that precluded them from achieving that image.

Conclusion

Intended to help teenage girls build a relationship with God, this bible study group has not led to the straightforward acquisition of Christian cultural forms. Becoming a good Christian girl has been a fraught process as multiple frameworks are brought into contact and the girls learn that being Christian requires more than faith. Amy frames the emo girls' struggles as bad behavior and ignorance, but we might understand them as the result of intersecting moral, socioeconomic, and family ideologies that position these girls as doubly disadvantaged. Because of their difficult home lives, they lack the resources to achieve good Christian girlhood, nor are they living entirely in line with good Christian values so they cannot achieve the conditions of "stability." On being a good girl, Sarah and Emily lament, "We are really losing that game."

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Rebecca Davis graduated from the University of Luxembourg in 2019 with a Master's degree in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts with a dissertation on morality and goodness among American evangelical teenage girls. She is currently teaching at an international primary school in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

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About *NEOS*

NEOS is the flagship publication of the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG), American Anthropological Association. The bi-annual publication consists of peer-reviewed original short-form research articles as well as editor-reviewed commentaries and feature pieces. *NEOS* relies on the work of many volunteers, including the full editorial board, peer reviewers, the ACYIG communications team, and a multitude of advisory board members for both *NEOS* and ACYIG. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact acyig.editor@gmail.com.

ACYIG Interest Group

Launched in 2007 as an Interest Group within the American Anthropological Association, the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG) now boasts more than 1200 members in over ten countries. Members include academics and practitioners who publish on and work with, children all over the world. The need for an anthropological interest group concerned with children and childhood continues to center on the fact that, despite growing interest in the area of cross-cultural research on childhood, children's experiences, and children's rights, there are very few established places to discuss and publicize such work, especially outside the realm of education and health disciplines. To read more about ACYIG, visit our website at http://acyig.americananthro.org

Editorial Board

Co-Editor – Courtney L. Everson, PhD

Courtney L. Everson, PhD, is an Applied Medical Anthropologist with a long track record of community engagement, research, teaching, and leadership in health and human services, non-profit management, and higher education. She earned her Ph.D. in applied medical anthropology from Oregon State University with doctoral level minors in public health and women, gender, and sexuality studies. Dr. Everson is currently appointed as a Researcher with Colorado State University (CSU) in the Social Work Research Center (SWRC), School of Social Work, College of Health and Human Sciences. Here, she engages in team-based science to help transform the child welfare landscape and strengthen families through meaningful research-practice partnerships. As a mixed methodologist, Dr. Everson uses biosocial health frameworks and community-based approaches to study maternal- infant health, child well-being, child maltreatment prevention, youth development, and family functioning. In addition to being the new Co-Editor for *NEOS*, Dr. Everson serves as a Research Working Group member of the Academic Collaborative for Integrative Health, an Editorial Board member for the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, and a strategic consultant to higher education entities, governmental agencies, and non- profit organizations on issues of equity, complex systems evaluation, and anti-oppression.

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Maria is currently working on a book manuscript on south-south youth migration to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her work on migration in Argentina has been published in journals such as Race and Ethnic Studies, and the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies. Maria's research focuses on the migration-security nexus and how it impacts migrant populations in the Americas. She is particularly interested in the experiences of young people who straddle elusive boundaries between childhood and adulthood and how they experience state practices, discourses, and policies of protection and control. Maria has previously published work on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program in *Citizenship Studies* and is currently developing a research project which documents the experiences of migrant minors in Florida detention centers.

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Matilda Stubbs' primary research focuses on the anthropology of social service administration, specifically the role of documents and bureaucratic culture in U.S. child welfare, adoption, and foster care services. She also teaches on a range of other topics including automobility and vehicularity, visual and material culture, communication, tourism, and sensory studies. Her most recent project focuses on the global political economy of youth slime culture and ASMR on social media platforms.

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Alexea Howard, MA is a recent graduate from California State University, Long Beach whose focus is in Medical Anthropology. She graduated at the top of her class with awards such as Distinguished Graduate Student, Academic Excellence, and Best Thesis. Alexea earned her BA (Honors) in Anthropology with a focus in Medical and Psychological Anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles and received post-baccalaureate training in Psychology and Addiction Studies. Her research explores

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