



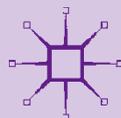
STUDIES IN
CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH



Childhood and Tween Girl Culture

Family, Media and Locality

Fiona MacDonald



Studies in Childhood and Youth

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Fiona MacDonald

Childhood and Tween Girl Culture

Family, Media and Locality

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Introduction

WHY TWEENS

In the twenty-first century we are bearing witness to changes in notions of childhood, parenting, and family life. ‘End of childhood’ discourses abound. At the centre of these concerns is the influence and impact of a rapidly expanding consumer-media culture. There are many arguments that suggest a consumer-media culture is intent on creating new stages of childhood. Stages that are defined not by children’s biological development but by their role as consumers. Of these new stages, it is the consumer-media tween culture, targeting girls aged between 9 and 14, which has caused the greatest public outcry. It is widely argued that tween-aged girls are being pressured to consume and adopt a highly sexualised appearance by a consumer-media tween culture which aims to create consumer personae of these girls. Yet the significance of consumption in the lives of young people is not a new phenomenon. Teenagers have long been recognised as a ‘specific group with a disposable income’ with a ‘distinct style expressed in the conspicuous consumption of records, clothes and leisure activities’ (Nayak and Kehily 2013, p. 134). Furthermore the ‘production of sexuality’ has long been offered to teenagers and young women through fashion items that confer ‘adult or teenage female beautification’ to underwear, clothing, and make-up (McRobbie 2008, p. 545).

The selective nature of the tween ‘stage’, targeting girls who no longer consider themselves children but are not yet teenagers, has raised

particular concerns about the consumer media's influence of this culturally ambiguous age. While 'age and gender' are the main determinants of membership, 'in fact class and cultural privilege saturate tweeniness' (Harris 2005, p. 211). The commercial personae of tween, the 'girlness' of her consumption choices, and the apparent sexualisation of girls by the potentially pernicious influence of the consumer-media tween culture have provoked widespread debates and calls for action in many Western developed nations. The girls' agentic subject position challenges our understandings of childhood vulnerability and innocence for this age group (Harris 2005; McRobbie 2008; Nayak and Kehily 2013). It is difficult for adults to acknowledge pre-teenage girls' agency while considering how their 'age and gender ... overlap and intersect in complicated ways with sexuality, race, ethnicity and social class' (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 223). The commercial aspect of tween culture targets the complex nature of the tween age group promoting products that acknowledge the girls' growing maturity and their desire to fashion a feminine self that is acceptable to their friends and peers. The prodigious nature of tween girl culture has essentially linked a commercial persona with this age group. There is a perception that the marketing persona of tween exists beyond its commercial entity. Within this framework tween girls are narrowly defined by their consumption activities and other important social and cultural influences are largely overlooked.

Understandings of girlhood and young, feminine identities in the local, social worlds that girls live in have long been explored by feminist and youth scholars as 'the street, school, and home remain significant spaces in young people's lives' (Harris 2004, p. 100; see also Aapola et al. 2005; Hey 1997; McRobbie 2008; Pomerantz 2008; Thorne 1993; Walkerdine 1990). Explorations of the absence of young women in youth cultures in the 1970s made way for the 'can-do' girls and girlpower of the 1990s (McRobbie 1994; Harris 2004). Critical analysis of the normative femininity presented to young girls in teenage magazines prevailed through the 1980s and 1990s (Durham 1998; McRobbie 1991). The significance of friendships to girls has been extensively explored from the 1990s (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008). Girlhood scholars have explored the complex juncture of difference, identity, race, class, sexuality, appearance, and gender practices in the many and varied local, social environments of girls (Nayak and Kehily 2013, p. 5). Within this scholarship the motivation for this book was to explore the shift in contemporary understandings of girlhood and 'young feminine identities that is offered' to pre-teen girls

who are positioned on the increasingly blurry boundaries of childhood in contemporary Western society (Harris 2005, p. 222). In this book I consider contemporary influences in the girls' everyday behaviours and practices and explore how they merge with pre-teen girls' consumption activities. My exploration was informed by the lack of engagement with the consumer-media tween culture demonstrated by the pre-teenage girls I knew, including my own daughter. While elements of the girls' lives were obviously influenced by consumer culture there was so much about these girls that existed outside these boundaries. While the girls liked to dress up and to go shopping their alignment with the tween girl culture was tenuous and their desire to consume motivated by a variety of factors.

As I reflected on their indifference towards tween culture I was reminded that even the most glittery and sparkly tween girls live ordinary, everyday lives beyond the fantasy worlds presented to them by the consumer-media tween culture. Yet tween scholarship and our broader cultural understandings of tween have largely focused our contemporary understandings of pre-teens on the globalised commercial personae of tween, overlooking the changing nature of other social and cultural influences in the girls' lives. Influences such as family, schools, and local neighbourhoods which have undergone their own changes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are less obvious in contemporary explorations of pre-teen culture. Calls to address this gap in our broader understandings of the tween age group have been made by governments around the world (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada 2011; The Children's Society 2009; The Senate 2008).

This book aims to present a different perspective of pre-teen girls' lives. In this book I present an exploration of the everyday nature of the lives of a class of 11- and 12-year-old tween girls and consider their behaviours and actions in relation to their desire to achieve a sense of belonging in their local spaces and places. My understandings are drawn from my year with a class of pre-teen girls in a Melbourne primary school. Spending the entire school year with these girls I developed valuable insights into the complex nature of their everyday actions and behaviours. The girls' desire to develop relationships with their friends and peers was pivotal to their ability to achieve a sense of belonging in this space. As I discovered, the complexities of the girls' considerations and negotiations of friendship and belonging in this space were often obscured by the outwardly simplistic nature of their actions and behaviours. The value of time was vital as I considered the nuanced and intricate meanings in the girls' behaviours and

practices over the entire school year. The links between the girls' desire for freedom, friendships and belonging, their consumption activities, family's social location, the school, and their local, social worlds were unmistakable. The girls' frustrations at their ambiguous place of in-betweenness, no longer children but not yet, and not wanting to be, teenagers was palpable.

My aim in shifting the focus from the global nature of tween to the local environment of school follows other girlhood scholars and introduces the significance of the girls' localised meaning-making (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008, Thorne 1993; Walkerdine 1990). In this space I consider the argument that the influence of the consumer-media tween culture is not independent of other important social and cultural influences in the lives of pre-teenage girls (Cook and Kaiser 2004). Throughout the book I explore how the girls' consumption activities are inherently entwined with the girls' desire for freedom and independence as they seek to achieve a sense of belonging in their own local, social worlds. I introduce the voices and insights of these 13 intriguingly ordinary girls to highlight how the things that matter to them are evident in their everyday considerations and negotiations of belonging. While this is an exploration of a group of tween girls it is also the 13 individual stories of the girls from Year 6C and their final year in primary school. I hope that the respect and admiration I had for the lives of these intriguing tween-aged girls is evident throughout this book. Their eagerness to share their lives with you in this book was contagious. While my analysis is undertaken through an adult lens I have attempted to move beyond our adult perceptions of the girls' behaviours and listened to the girls' understandings as they shared valuable insights into the meaning-making of their everyday practices. This is not knowledge of how these girls negotiate a tween identity, but, more importantly, it is knowledge of how ordinary 11- and 12-year-old girls might be fashioning their own sense of self, and belonging every day, in their own unique local, social worlds (MacDonald 2014).

ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

I begin this book with a brief overview of childhood as a stage separate from adulthood. I consider our existing understandings of girlhood and young, feminine identities alongside the diverse, shifting, and complex discourses of childhood that enabled the emergence of the tween phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century in Chap. 2. An overview

of the ethnographic study I conducted in the Melbourne primary school highlights the significance of local spaces to pre-teenage girls' negotiations of belonging. I introduce Pugh's concept, the economy of dignity, to demonstrate the framework for my exploration of the significance of belonging. In Chap. 3 I explore the meaning of shopping centres beyond their role as retail outlets to the girls. The chapter considers how the consuming practices of tweens, while influenced by the globalised aspect of the tween market, are undertaken in shopping centres and locations in their own social worlds (Nayak 2003). I separate the art of consuming from the act of consumption and acknowledge the girls' desire to 'hang out with their friends' in shopping centres as a key motivator that is distinctly independent from their desire to consume. Miles' (2010) argument that shopping centres have become 'theatres of their day' conveys the significance of these spaces outside the act of consumption. The girls' desire to frequent shopping centres as sites of negotiations of friendship and belonging introduces the girls' increasing desire for freedom and independence outside their familial relationships.

Chapter 4 acknowledges the consumption activities of the girls by exploring their desire for technology. While much has been written about the negative effects of the over-use of technology by young people the girls share valuable insights into the integration of technological devices into their own family leisure times. The girls revealed important insights into how technology brings families together, resulting in fun, memorable occasions. The chapter then shifts focus to the most desired consumer product for these tween girls, a mobile phone, and their emotional connection to this consumer product. In this discussion I draw on broader social concerns around mobile phone ownership for this age group to consider the girls' understandings, or frustrations, at the decisions of their parents of when is an appropriate age. Pugh's (2009) recognition that parents' own experiences inform their 'social antennae' or ability to understand the girls' desires is introduced and the girls' longing desire to incorporate mobile phone ownership into their negotiations of freedom and belonging with their friends and peers is explored.

This discussion flows into an exploration of the girls' desire to access social networking sites in Chap. 5. Boyd (2014) provides valuable insights into the value of social networking for teens which, I argue, are also relevant for this younger pre-teen age group. The girls' desire for social media and their understandings of the benefits to their negotiations of belonging with their friends and peers are considered. The girls reveal valuable

insights into the challenges facing parents of this age group when considering an appropriate age or stage to allow them to access social media and social networking sites. Chapter 6 explores the key concept of the girls' local, social worlds in this book. The significance of the school environment to the girls' first experiences of negotiating a sense of belonging outside of family is introduced. The social make-up of the girls' class is considered as the girls recognise that their place in 6C influences friendships and relationships. Outdoor spaces and the girls' activities and practices before school, at recess, and lunchtime are explored through my observations and the girls' insights. I consider the girls' capacity to maintain a sense of belonging with their friends by exploring conversations of which secondary school they will attend in Year 7.

In Chap. 7 I shift the focus away from the girls' consumption activities and consider the significance of their ordinary, everyday behaviour to their negotiations of friendship and belonging. Exploring the meaning behind the girls' everyday practices revealed valuable insights into the ways the girls negotiated their existing friendships, fear of exclusion, and the fragility of friendships. While ordinariness may not be as appealing as their engagement with the consumer-media tween culture the intricacy and nuanced nature of the girls' actions and behaviours demonstrated their competence and understanding of the practices required to achieve a sense of belonging in the school environment. The girls' engaging insights into the negative aspects of popularity and their cross-gendered friendships demonstrates their openness to sharing their insights and understandings of what it means to be a pre-teen.

Understanding the Local, Social Worlds of Pre-teens

CONSUMER-MEDIA, TWEEN CULTURE

In marketing circles the label ‘tween’ speaks volumes. Understandably so, as this gendered, target market is responsible for billions of dollars of sales around the globe. In 2012, the tween market was worth \$1.4 billion in sales in Australia, over £4 billion in the UK, and a staggering \$200 billion in the USA (Hales 2007; Marketing Profs 2012). The target of these global marketing strategies are girls aged anywhere between nine and fourteen, although six-year-old girls have been included in some definitions of ‘tween’. But why girls and not boys? Advertisers frequently argue that girls and boys like different products and that this gendered segregation is more noticeable in the consumption desires of children aged between ten and twelve (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Schor 2005). At the beginning of the twentieth century Russell and Tyler (2005, p. 227) argued that there is a preoccupation in the literature between ‘consumer culture in shaping social relations and identities’ and the ‘pursuit of an ideal femininity’ for ‘young girls particularly’ appears to be ‘honed largely through the capacity to function as effective consumer’. The founding editor of *Girls’ Life* magazine was more upfront in her explanation:

As tough as girls are, girls also represent predictable economic stuff—clothes, makeup, shoes, accessories. Guys just generally aren't as conscious of fashion—they prefer something simple like khakis (Phillips 1999, p. 126).

It has also been argued that globalisation offers 'young people possibilities for new forms of subjectivity and belonging' and the consumer-media tween girl culture offers this young age group of girls in Western developed nations a new young feminine girlness (Kehily and Nayak 2008, p. 325). While tween culture is a global phenomenon, its target audience is predominantly white, middle-class girls in Western developed nations; 'the headline of a magazine article [it] features white middle-class girls, about 11 and 12 years of age, shown wearing make-up, getting their hair done and "making out" with boys on their bedroom floors' (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 204). Harris (2005, p. 221) argues that tween represents an 'important shift in young feminine identities' in contemporary Western society and reveals much about the 'changing construction of girlhood in late modernity'. Tween is first and foremost a gendered phenomenon that has been described as a space 'within which feminine child-ness, that is, girlness, is entwined with consumption'. It is a space where girlness 'can be acquired through the purchase of the right products' (Harris 2005, p. 212). Girlhood scholars argue that the consumer-media tween culture targets just what it 'means to be a young girl in contemporary consumer society—to be a child, to be a consumer, and to be feminine' (Russell and Tyler 2002, p. 621). The tween age group bridges some crucial development stages but it is a 'space rather than a stage', a stage which only girls of a certain age can inhabit (Driscoll 2005, p. 224). Pre-teens are considered to be:

Torn between conflicting desires and pressures. They want to be independent, but the influence of their parents still holds sway. They want to be big, but they're still very close to being little. So it's not surprising that a whole market research industry has grown up to help advertisers figure out how to reach this group (McDonnell 2006, p. 117).

The 'tween' moniker implies that these girls are located in-between something and in a sense they are, positioned between childhood and the teenage years, although the boundaries on both sides are blurry. Fundamentally though, the term 'tween' describes 'a marketing device' that is creating 'a consumer cohort' out of this age group of girls (Harris 2005, p. 210). As a result much of our research and understandings of tween girls focuses on their consumption habits. Yet the age range targeted by tween culture is a

complex period in the girls' lives. In Western developed nations the girls are positioned in an increasingly ambiguous space between childhood and their teenage years, transitioning from primary to secondary school and experiencing the onset of puberty.

I'm going to take the opportunity here to clarify my use of the term 'consumer-media culture' in this book. The term 'consumer-media culture' has been used to describe a 'cultural form, which arises from this blend of consumption and information and communication media' (Kenway and Bullen 2001, p. 8). In this work I adopt a similar framework but am specifically referring to the culture of tween which is a targeted version of this concept. I use the phrase 'consumer-media tween culture' throughout this book to refer to those who combine, target, and benefit from the commercial tween phenomenon: the stakeholders, producers, marketers, advertisers, social media, and retailers. The key aim of the consumer-media tween culture is to socialise girls in consumption activities and to create a 'commercial persona' of the tween girl (Cook and Kaiser 2004). The socialisation of girls and young women through consumption activities is not new, as 'there has been a long history of commercial culture (in both instructional and pleasurable modes) directing itself towards the site of girlhood' (McRobbie 2008, p. 532). The works of Harris (2004), Kehily and Nayak (2008), and McRobbie (2008) provide valuable insights in the intersection of consumption and young, feminine identities. Yet the onslaught of the consumer-media tween culture suggests that new understandings of girlhood are required as traditional ideas of Western childhood as a state of innocence and vulnerability are challenged by the targeting of younger age groups of girls by the consumer-media tween (Harris 2005; McRobbie 2008; Nayak and Kehily 2013). Concerns around girls growing up too fast, premature sexualisation, and end of childhood discourses have been attributed to tween culture (Hamilton 2008; Lamb and Brown 2006; The Senate 2008).

The aim of this book is to respond to the calls for broader understandings of the role of other important influences in the pre-teen girl's everyday life. The Australian government's findings from the Senate's investigation into the *Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media* informed the focus of this book. The Senate report argued that there are a 'multiplicity of influences on children' in contemporary Australia and they suggested it is 'extremely difficult to disentangle the specific roles played by family, school, friends, society at large and the media' (2008, p. 9). Explorations of the premature sexualisation of young girls, concerns about them growing up too fast, and end of childhood discourses in contemporary Western societies have been carefully and well considered by

psychological, sociological, cultural, and feminist scholars. Renold et al.'s edited text 'Children, Sexuality and Sexualisation' (2015) brings together a range of these multidisciplinary responses to critical debates around children's sexual cultures. Kehily's (2004, 2009, 2012) explorations of childhood sexuality and Renolds' (2005) exploration of children's gender and sexual relations in primary schools have made significant contributions to understandings of pre-teens' sexuality and factors motivating concerns that girls are being encouraged to grow up too fast, or what Harris (2005) describes as the 'adult-eration' of young girls.

One of my key aims in spending a year with this group of pre-teens was to allow their actions and behaviours to inform the direction of my exploration. It was clear from my observations and conversations with these girls that there was a lot going on in their everyday lives. The desire to belong in these spaces was clearly evident and I made a decision to focus my work with the girls on understanding the girls' considerations and negotiations of belonging. I was also influenced by the Australian Senate's call for research to better understand the role of 'family, school, friends, society at large and the media' in the lives of pre-teens. This meant that issues around gender practices, sexualisation, and girls' growing up too fast were not explored. I am not arguing though that these issues were absent from this school environment. Issues around the girls' sexualisation arose throughout the year as the girls' emergent puberty, changing bodies, and interest in boys beyond friendship developed. These were particularly evident in Georgie's, Sally's, and Maddie's friendship group, 'I sometimes think could they be my boyfriend? Like in the near future or something. Like in high school, but not really that often' (Maddie 11). Likewise the gendered practices, particularly their gendered play around games of tiggy, basketball, and soccer, were clearly evident (Thorne 1993). Recognising the limitations of my exploration and the great work of feminist scholars around gender and the sexualisation of this age group I focused this book on the call for greater understandings of the vital role of family, friends, schools, and local communities in the everyday lives of pre-teen girls (The Senate 2008).

UNDERSTANDING PRE-TEENS: SHIFTING OUR FOCUS FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

It would be hard to argue that the concept of childhood consumption is anything but complex and the tween market challenges us to make sense of notions of naivety and vulnerability associated with childhood with the

worst aspect of a penetrating and potentially pernicious consumer culture. It is important to note that tween focus on girls in Western developed nations where pre-teens have access to their own spending money and shopping is a regular family activity. The tween phenomenon is divisive and engenders fervent debates, as opponents emphasise children's vulnerability and innocence and their susceptibility to the influences of advertising. The overt sexualisation of girls' fashions, make-up, and accessories evoke concerns and heated debates. It has been argued that our concerns around tweens are not that:

dissimilar to an earlier anxiety about the constitution of female teenagers as consumers, as needing to construct limited feminine identities for success, and as (hetero)sexualized at too young an age (Harris 2005, p. 213).

What we are witnessing is what Harris (2005) describes as the 'adult-eration' of girls taking place with younger age groups, particularly those who fall within the target age range of the tween market. Concerns about the messages being conveyed to the pre-teen age group have prompted government inquiries to be conducted to attempt to determine the influence of the tween consumer-media culture's influence over children and pre-teens. The tween concept has become so synonymous with this age group that I struggled with what to call my tween-aged participants in this book as the label 'tween' does in many ways describe the nature of their in-between position between childhood and their teenage years. I recognise though that retaining the label in this work further cements the consumer-media concept of tween which I am suggesting does not recognise the complex nature of the girls' lives. As a result I have adopted the term 'pre-teen' to describe these 11- and 12-year-old girls (Cook and Kaiser 2004).

The all-pervading nature of tween culture and our understandings of contemporary childhood have positioned these girls in a complex space of in-betweenness, no longer children but not yet teenagers. Promoted as a fantasy world of dress-ups, make-believe, and role-playing, the tween space is reminiscent of the girls' childhood and provides the girls with a 'place' to fashion their own young, feminine girlness (Harris 2005). A girlness that is more mature than childhood but not enough to be confused with the young females described in Youth Studies scholarship (Harris 2005; Nayak and Kehily 2013). While tween culture has been described as 'merely evidence that ever-younger people are being taken

seriously and given opportunities to express their desires, styles, and opinions in the public world, or at least its markets', this view conflicts with the more widely held concerns about girls 'growing up too fast' (Harris 2005, p. 213).

Furthermore the fantasy world of tween positions the girls within a globalised, almost placeless, consuming environment, yet the art of consumption does not take place in a vacuum and pre-teen girls' local, social worlds remain critical aspects of their gendered identity (Nayak and Kehily 2013). Even for this age group:

Consumption is not just about the purchasing of goods, but also about the ways in which they are used, appropriated and adapted, both individually and collectively. It is not just about goods, but also about services—not just about what you possess, but also about what you are able to do with it (Buckingham 2011, p. 2).

The need for greater understandings of the consumer-media tween culture's causal relationship with other social and cultural influences in the girls' lives is evident. While valuable explorations of the links between consumption and young, feminine identities are available the contemporary tween age group represents a significant shift as children, particularly girls, are 'gender differentiated as consumers' at an 'increasingly young age' (McRobbie 2008; p. 545, see also Harris 2004; Kehily and Nayak 2008). This book aims to explore the links between the girls' consumption activities and the roles of family, friends, school, and their local, social worlds in the pre-teens girls' everyday life. Stories of everyday life from 13 intriguingly 'ordinary' 11- and 12-year-old girls are shared here to provide new insights into the ways these pre-teens make sense of their consumption activities. The term 'ordinary' may seem like an unusual term to describe these special 11- and 12-year-old girls and does not reflect how I feel about the girls themselves. My use of the term 'ordinary' refers to the everyday nature of their lives and the regular and normal practices the girls exhibited daily. Far from being disillusioned by the 'ordinariness' of the girls these were the characteristics I was looking for when I chose a primary school for my exploration of pre-teen girls.

The nature of a primary school environment determines that these tweens are surrounded by the structure, regularity, and routineness of bells, classes, lessons, tests, conformity, expectations, and rules. Gendered

play practices are also evident in the games of tiggly, soccer, and basketball that took place every day. Not much has changed in many ways since Thorne's (1993) observation that 'boys and girls' activities divide in a familiar geography of gender' in the school space. In this school environment the spaces where 'girls predominate' were identifiable within two or three visits (Thorne 1993, p. 1). The school environment is also a place of fluidity and change, of interactions, negotiations, relationships, possibilities, outcomes, and consequences. Over the years the girls have negotiated the fluidity of this space and developed their own everyday practices which enable them to negotiate a place for themselves to belong in this complex, interactive space. The proficiency of the girls' actions and interactions are evident in the apparent 'simplicity' of their everyday practices. Far from the glittery, sparkling, and spectacular life that the commercial persona of tween promotes I observed complex negotiations: negotiations that were undertaken through the girls' well-versed, everyday actions and behaviours. I described these actions and behaviours as ordinary, everyday practices not because of their simplicity but rather to reflect their regularity and the competency of these girls in responding to the fluid nature of friendships and their ability to belong in this space. Far from the spectacular, glittery, and exciting practices of shopping, technology use, clothing, hair, and make-up that represent the commercial persona of tween I recognised the value in the girls' ordinary everyday practices. I was also inspired by the insightful work of George (2007), Hey (1997), and Pomerantz (2008) who explored the everyday lives of young girls in the familiar and local environment of school.

Understanding their ordinariness is of course not knowledge of how these pre-teen girls lived a tween identity but provides valuable insights into how their consumption activities mesh with their ordinary everyday negotiations and interactions. The girls acknowledge their desire to shop and demonstrate the importance of consumption activities. They revealed how intertwined the girls were with their desire to negotiate freedom and independence and to achieve a sense of belonging outside of their familial relationships. From the classrooms and playgrounds of their Melbourne primary school the girls remind us that pre-teen girls live their lives beyond the global market. They remind us that there are many influences in their everyday lives. The significance of family, friends, and their peers are clearly evident in the girls' narratives. The desire to belong with friends and peers in the local spaces they inhabit

is apparent. These 13 girls do not prove a pre-determined hypothesis about their lives, nor do they enable me to make transferrable claims from my findings. They do however remind us that context and their local, social worlds are intrinsically entwined with pre-teens consumption activities. The girls demonstrate the importance for us of understanding their localised desires so we can begin to understand their engagement with a consumer-media culture and the complexity of the in-between space that they inhabit.

THE IN-BETWEEN NATURE OF BELONGING

Studying children's consumption means looking not only at advertising and marketing, but also at the many other ways in which commercial forces and market relations affect children's environment and their social and cultural experiences. It is not only about toys or clothes or food, but also about media, about leisure and about education. Ultimately, it is not just about objects or commodities, but also about social meanings and pleasures (Buckingham 2011, p. 2).

The collaborators of the tween market focus on promoting the girls' young, feminine girlness through consumer products and services. Tween girls' love of shopping is not purely appearance based and is deeply embedded in their desire to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness outside their familial relationships. Like Buckingham, Pugh (2009, p. 6) argues that 'the key to children's consumer culture, to the explosion of parent buying and the question of what things mean to children, ... lies in their social experiences'. Pugh calls this 'system of social meanings' the children's 'economy of dignity'. She argues that children negotiate 'the terms of their social belonging' in their different social worlds 'according to their (shifting) consensus about what sort of objects or experiences are supposed to count for' (Pugh 2009, p. 7).

Yet the pre-teen girls' desire to belong is not inherently dependent upon their consumption activities. In my exploration of pre-teen girls' desire to belong I also consider the importance, and complex negotiations, of secure and supportive friendships. Hamm and Faircloth's (2005) school-based work on belonging with adolescents demonstrates the differences between friendship and achieving a sense of belonging. Beyond friendship it has been suggested that 'individuals feel a sense of belonging in communities in which they sense their own importance and perceive that they can

rely on other community members' (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62). For tween girls the friendship and acceptance of their peers and friends is vital. In this book I consider how friendships that are reliable, offer support, and enable the girls to have fun assist these pre-teen girls in achieving their desire to belong.

To understand the social experiences that influence these girls let's consider the pre-teen girl growing up in a developed Western nation. She's around 11- or 12-years old and is finishing off her primary school education as she prepares to transition into secondary schools and colleges. Her family remains influential in her life but friends are vital and she is looking to branch out and undertake activities outside her familial relationships. She is experiencing a significant period of physical, neurobiological, cognitive, and emotional development. No longer considering herself a child she does not yet, nor want to, identify as a teenager. She is positioned in an increasingly indeterminate, in-between space situated between her childhood and teenage years. Boys are not exempt from this transitional period, or the attention of the consumer market. To date though the spending capacity of pre-teen girls has been recognised as more lucrative. Beyond a consumer-media culture her family, friends, technologies, social media, schools, and local communities are all important social and cultural influences in the life of the tween girl. While I have described the 11- and 12-year-old girls as pre-teens in this book, there are occasions when the words 'child/children' are introduced in quotes such as Pugh's. In these instances I have adopted the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children definition, 'a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years' (UN 1989).

I would argue that Russell and Tyler's (2002, p. 621) three dimensions of being a 'young girl in contemporary consumer society' are now more accurately how to be no longer a child, to be 'a consumer, and to be feminine'. It is at this juncture where they are considered to be no longer a child, but not yet a teenager, that the girls' in-betweenness is most apparent. The in-between nature of the pre-teen girl is being increasingly determined by shifting cultural norms and practices which I discuss in this book. The girls' desire to be mature but not too mature creates tension within families and further complicates their ambiguous position. I consider the girls' in-betweenness by exploring the everyday lives of 13 pre-teen girls alongside key elements of their consuming lives; shopping centres, technology, social media, school, and their own local spaces.

DEFINITIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

An understanding of the complexity of tween culture is difficult though without first understanding the discourses and landscape of childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The vulnerability of children, their needs and rights are protected by the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which has committed to ‘respect and ensure the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children’ (UN 1989). Yet the children’s everyday experiences are determined by their location around the globe. Childhood in many developing nations continues to be under threat from poverty, homelessness, abuse, child labour, and preventable childhood diseases and illnesses. Children in Western developed nations face different challenges as issues of childhood obesity, abuse, educational outcomes, changing family structures, and child-rearing practices dominate the landscape. One of the greatest challenges facing childhood in Western nations is believed to be the threat of our consumer culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, parents, educationalists, social commentators, governments, and academics argued that our consumer culture was threatening children’s way of life and we were witnessing the ‘end of childhood’ (Kenway and Bullen 2001). Yet ‘commercial interests do not impinge upon or invade childhood’ as separate entities from children’s everyday lives (Buckingham 2011, p. 3). A consumer-media culture is a significant influence in tween girls’ lives but so too are the changing family structures, child-rearing practices, and technological advancements we have witnessed in Western developed nations during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It has been suggested though that a consumer-media culture is the largest social influence in the lives of children in Western developed nations, shaping their actions and behaviours, language, beliefs, food, music, appearance, and fashion (Cook 2004a, b; Pugh 2009; Seiter 1993).

CHANGING FAMILIES

For children in Western developed nations the family structure remains one of the most important social influences in their young lives. The need to recognise ‘new’ families in contemporary Western societies is clearly evident but ‘the notion of “family” continues to have strong resonance in everyday life as perhaps the main site of intimate connection, authenticity

and belonging' (Lindsay and Maher 2013, p. 3). While new ways of thinking of families emerge, they continue to be the most basic unit of Western society and the place most children are raised. Families continue to play a very important role in shaping the health and well-being of individual members (AIFS 2010; Lindsay and Maher 2013; Poole 2005).

While it is acknowledged that tweens are looking to move away from their familial relationships, the role of family in the girls' lives remains significant. It is difficult though to argue that the tween is an autonomous individual making her own choices outside of the family she is raised within. Young people themselves are not dismissive of their family and its influence. They continually remind us of the need to understand the significance of family relationships in their lives (Mission Australia 2010; Pugh 2009; Wyn et al. 2012). For these pre-teens their parents remain highly influential in their everyday lives. They provide the girls with a home, food, transport, care, and nurture. They are also the major financial providers for these tweens. Many of these girls do not receive pocket money and their ability to engage in consumer culture is heavily dependent on their parents.

CHILD-CENTRED CHILDHOOD

The latter stages of the twentieth century also saw a shift in children's leisure activities. '[T]he demise of the back yard and the child-friendly neighbourhood in which children played in streets which are no longer considered safe—too much traffic and haunted by fears of "stranger danger" had significant implications for children's unstructured outdoor activities' (Langer 2005, p. 164). Leisure activities shifted away from public spaces to private, home-based spaces. Children's lives became increasingly structured and supervised by adults.

Familiar with the medium of television, increasingly audio-visual, digital technologies and their media applications, such as TV, VCRs/DVDs, computer games, and the World Wide Web (www), emerged as home-based entertainment options for many children and families (Buckingham 2000). By the end of the twentieth century many children were accessing the internet and social media regularly. At the same time it has been suggested that children's needs were being given a higher priority in families, and children became increasingly influential in the spending habits of their families. Many Australian children were being raised in families with

increasing levels of disposable incomes. Double income families or families with one parent working full-time and the other part-time had become more prevalent.

While financial capacity remains a determining factor, many children in Western developed nations consider it normal to have their own room, television, iPad, Hi-Fi system, and the latest online games, mobile phone, and fashion trends (Buckingham 2011). It has been suggested that our shift from ‘making do’ to ‘having more’ is influencing the way we view childhood and the needs of children (Langer 2005; Poole 2005). Seiter (1993) argued that all developed societies are now heavily dependent on consumption for identity, acceptance, and to achieve a sense of belonging. It has been argued that one of the reasons the consumer media has been so successful with children is that it takes their needs and desires seriously (Schor 2005). The value of friendship groups, cultural affiliations, of being accepted and belonging with their peer groups are understood by advertisers who aim to ‘strengthen peer-group identification at an early age’ (Seiter 1993, p. 222). By the time they reach their pre-teen years the girls recognise the links between consumer products and experiences and their young, feminine identity (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Kline 1993).

A GENDERED MARKET: WHY GIRLS?

Making the step from age to gender-segregated marketing was arguably a natural progression for producers and advertisers who contend that girls and boys have different needs and desires (Getmemedia 2013). Gender segregation is considered to be particularly evident in children aged between ten and twelve where acceptance by their peers and developing a sense of belonging in different groups is increasingly important (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Linn 2005). Harris (2005, p. 212) suggests that ‘tween does the same work for young girls that female teen culture did for teenagers a decade or so ago: acknowledges them as having different interests and ideas from older females as well as boys their age’. While boys generally tend to favour sporting merchandise, girls are more interested in fashion and their own image, and the tween consumer-media culture targets these differences. Carefully targeted marketing and advertising campaigns offer consumption to tween girls as the best way to fashion their own young, feminine girlness (Harris 2005). This message follows on from key feminist message that girls are powerful, active agents and can be and can do anything they want to. It has been argued that young women are the

'most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity' and this message appears to have filtered through to the pre-teen age group (Harris 2004, p. 6). Marketers and advertisers acknowledge these messages but position the innocence and edge of young, feminine girlness with more traditional 'ideals of glamour and femininity' (Schor 2005, p. 45). The emergence of the tween market also highlights the ambiguity of Western boundaries around the status of childhood, placing tween girls in an indeterminate place between their childhood and teenage years. The tween market complicates this ambiguity further by building a 'commercial personae' of the subteen/tween girl, constructing the tween as a consumer 'by featuring 'her' personality and 'her' desires as they relate to the business of selling and merchandising clothing' (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 206).

THE EMERGENCE OF TWEEN CULTURE

The consumer-media tween culture bridges some 'crucial developmental' stages for young girls and tween which is best understood as 'a space rather than a stage—a cultural position that only girls of a certain age occupy or transit' (Driscoll 2005, p. 224). The girls begin to fashion their own feminine girlness outside their familial relationships and actively seek guidance from familiar and trusted social influences. The tween market promotes 'girlness' to these girls as confident, cool, and independent and suggests that being young and feminine, and being who you want to be is an achievable and pleasurable experience (Harris 2005).

The goods and services promoted under the auspices of the tween market are designed to respond to the developmental desires and needs of its target market, pre-teen girls. Its power though lies in its key aim, to socialise the girls in consumption activities and to create a 'commercial persona' of the pre-teen girl (Cook and Kaiser 2004).

Tween emerged as a demographic in their own right as previously adult experiences and interests such as sexuality, popular culture, money, and the occupation of public space are pushed back further and further into youth. Tween popular culture draws on and contributes to these changes by offering specific products and services for girls in the pre-teen age bracket who are now apparently interested in personal appearance and sexual attractiveness, like to shop for themselves, and experience a public identity in shopping malls, the Internet, and through images of girls like them in the media (Harris 2005, p. 210).

While anti-consumer groups argue that tween girls are incapable of questioning the limited subject positions offered to them, there is increasing evidence that these girls are agentic in the process and negotiate their own sense of self, drawing on a range of social and cultural influences (Pomerantz 2008; Harris 2005; Lundby 2013; Zaslow 2009). With increasingly indistinct boundaries between childhood and adulthood, pre-teen girls are caught in the middle of the tension of negotiating ‘new rules and rituals’ of being not quite a teenager but no longer considering themselves children (Finders 1997, p. 4). The consumer media works on the premise that the pre-teen girl is already appearance conscious and that her desire to craft her own identity is predominantly expressed through the fashioning of her own body. As a result the girls are targeted with fashions, accessories, and body images that are widely considered to sexualise young girls or encourage them to grow up too fast (Durham 1998). The ‘commercial personae’ of the pre-teen girl, the ambiguity of her age, the ‘girlness’ of her consumption choice, and her agentic subject position challenge many of our long-held discourses and understandings of childhood vulnerability, innocence, and sexuality (Harris 2004).

A PUBLIC OUTCRY

The sexualisation of childhood, provocative clothing, girls growing up too fast, and targeted marketing allegedly promoted by the tween marketers merge with end of childhood discourses as concerned parents, social commentators, and health professionals ignite debates about the tween market:

Ambiguous age identity boundaries for young girls, as found in their clothing, popular cultural icons and overall media representations, create a cultural space for their ensuing incessant sexualisation, regardless of whether emphasizing sexuality is an intended outcome (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 222).

The pre-teen age group remains within the boundaries of childhood and many adults focus on their innocence and vulnerability, but the girls are actively looking for autonomy as they develop a young, feminine self which positions them beyond their childhood years (Harris 2005).

In Australia the debates around tween culture resulted in a Federal Government Senate Inquiry and report into the ‘sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media’ (The Senate 2008).

In the UK a Body Confidence Campaign was established in 2010 to raise awareness of body-image issues and tackle causes of negative body image (Gov UK 2013). An All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into the causes and consequences of body-image dissatisfaction was conducted in the UK in 2011 (National Children's Bureau [NCB] 2012). In Canada the Chief Public Health Officer responded to calls to understand young people's body image, incorporating an exploration of body-image concerns in their exploration of *The Health and Well-being of Canadian Youth and Young Adults* (Public Health Agency of Canada 2011). The reports acknowledged that the inappropriate sexualisation of children was of increasing concern and presented significant cultural challenges. The debates highlighted the issues confronting the tween age group but argued it was difficult to determine the consumer media's effect as there are many influences in the girls' lives (The Senate 2008). It was stated though that pre-teen girls are amongst the most vulnerable in our society and it is the Australian government's responsibility to protect them.

THE FANTASY WORLD OF TWEEN

For girls 'the existence of a special community marked by age and gender, which is fun loving and global, is a compelling notion' (Harris 2005, p. 213). While pre-teens do not necessarily identify themselves as 'tweens', they like the idea of having a name or label that identifies them as being different from children and teenagers. The tween space offers girls a fantasy world of dress-ups, make-believe, and role-playing which is reminiscent of the girls' earlier childhood years and fundamentally links their desire for their own young, feminine, girlness with consumption. In this space young, feminine girlness is presented by the tween market through fashion, accessories, make-up, technology, and leisure activities in two distinctly different contexts. Marketers incorporate the playfulness of the girls' childhood, of dress-ups, and fairy tales into their production, creation, and marketing (Russell and Tyler 2002). In essence the tween fantasy promotes itself as a girlie space, focusing on the colour 'pink', glitter, and sparkles (Russell and Tyler 2002; Harris 2005; Linn 2005). Although the fantasy world of tween focuses on two distinctly different interpretations of the very girlie colour 'pink'. On the one hand tween is represented by the innocence and softness of the colour 'pink' combined with glittery girlie items, sparkly fashions that rekindle childhood memories (Harris 2005). Products such as purses, pyjamas, body lotions, and

make-up are adorned with glitter and the ‘innocent’ pink. On the other hand tween is promoted as sexy, through ‘tight, tight, belly-baring shirts, tiny halter tops, very short shorts, or tiny little skirts’ (Linn 2005, p. 132). This tween market makes hot pink the focus, combining the shade’s hotness with leather or lace, leopard prints, or the colour ‘black’ to promote a sexy edge (Lamb and Brown 2006). Products such as micro-mini shorts, tiny skirts, crop tops, thong-style underwear, and suggestive slogans promote a sexier, more mature look.

The desire to be in control of their mature, but young, feminine self places the pre-teen girl in conflict with long-held discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability. Yet Harris (2005) argues pre-teens are not trying to look like their older sisters or even to appear overtly sexual. The tween market has shifted the tween girls’ cultural landscape and the way girls understand the young, feminine identities that are available to them. Harris (2005, p. 222) argues that this shift has allowed ‘girls to move from a purely passive position to one of active protagonist, from consumer and “reader” of popular culture to agent and “writer”’. It is important, Harris (2005) argues, that we respond to this shift and consider how the tween market offers girls the opportunity to negotiate new meanings of young, feminine girliness.

Tweens’ fantasy worlds of innocence or edge actively promote fashion products that highlight the girls’ bodies and create a complex juncture that is considered by many to be at odds with the girls’ age and discourses of innocence and vulnerability. Parents, social commentators, and child advocates focus on these messages and products. They argue that the products are designed to encourage young girls to fashion a version of sexy before they are able to comprehend what this actually means. The outcry from parents, social commentators, and communities more broadly prompted governments around the world to respond to images and the apparent sexualisation of pre-teen girls (Gov UK 2013; NCB 2012; Public Health Agency of Canada 2011). The debates and concerns engendered scholarship which focuses on the penetrating and potentially pernicious influence of a consumer-media culture.

EMERGING PUBERTY

Adding to the complexity of this space is the onset of puberty and a rapid stage of development for many pre-teen girls. The tween market bridges some ‘crucial developmental’ stages. A significant height spurt

often commences around the age of ten and is followed by the hormonal changes which stimulate the growth of the reproductive organs. Tween girls' bodies are beginning to develop as breasts, hips, and body hair become noticeable and they experience their first menarche. During this period, which is recognised as one of awkwardness and uncertainty for many girls, they are increasingly encouraged to look after and enjoy their bodies. Girls are encouraged to be aware of their bodies, scrutinising them and identifying 'ways in which they deviate from the ideal images being presented to them' (Russell and Tyler 2002, p. 633). Girls are invited to believe that a young, feminine girlness is available to them through buying the right products. It is here, in the intricacies of these messages, that much of the public opposition to the tween market is situated. One of the key points of contention in debates about the tween market rests in arguments of what drives children's consumer culture. This is a very complex juncture, where childhood, consumer culture, identity, and a young, feminine appearance converge. The consumer media has fashioned a very lucrative market out of this intricate intersection.

SEXUALISATION OF PRE-TEEN GIRLS

Widespread concerns about the messages promoted to pre-teen girls in magazines and on billboards, in music videos and images through fashions, make-up, and accessories created for pre-teens resonate with parents, health professionals, social commentators, and researchers. The early sexualisation and consumption activities of the pre-teen have been explored around the globe (Jackson and Westrupp 2010; Kehily 2012; Renold 2005; Renold et al. 2015; Rush and La Nauze 2006). The intense focus on appearance and body image evident in tween marketing practices raises many concerns about the influence of the tween market on this age group. Tween girls themselves in Western developed nations, and young people aged 12–18 more broadly, identify body image as one of the three key challenges they face (Central YMCA 2016; Mission Australia 2010; NCB 2012). A parliamentary report on body-image issues in the UK 'found that 34 per cent of adolescent boys and 49 per cent of girls' had dieted to 'change their body shape' (Central YMCA 2016, p. 11).

Concerns around the sexualisation of young girls and the pressure from the consumer media's messages resulted in a number of inquiries

by Australian state and federal governments. It was argued that popular cultural icons—celebrities, actors, musicians, and sporting heroes—advertised clothing, merchandise, and accessories that promoted early sexualisation (The Senate 2008). Organisations such as the Australian Council on Children and the Media, and the Australian Psychological Society conducted their own research and provided parents with information of how to support their pre-teen girls—*Helping girls develop a positive self-image, a tip sheet for parents of girls of all ages* (APA 2007):

Girls get many messages about how they should look and behave. These messages can start when girls are very young, and not all of these are healthy messages. Girls may be told that what matters is how ‘hot’, or how ‘sexy’ they look or dress. These messages are evident on TV and across the Internet, in song lyrics and music videos. You see it in movies, electronic games, and clothing stores. They are powerful messages. Some of these messages encourage the sexualisation of girls from a very early age, before they are emotionally and physically ready (APA 2007).

The reports and investigations focused on the sexualisation of girls of all ages and their apparent vulnerable state. Concerns about the pre-teen age group were specifically highlighted by the Australian Senate who declared this group of girls to be the most vulnerable in Australian society, requiring greater protection by the government (The Senate 2008). Despite this concern the reports were inconclusive in their findings and declared that it was difficult to separate out the specific role played by the consumer media. Enduring discourses of innocence and vulnerability for pre-teen girls further complicate what has become a highly complex and arguably misrepresented, gendered age group. Similar studies and reports have been conducted around the world.

The 2015 the UK *Girlguiding Attitudes Survey* (Girlguiding 2015) introduced the girls’ voices to the debates and suggested that we could make it a better world for them if we could ‘change the sexualisation of women in our society—this is to make the UK a safer [...] and less judgemental place to live in’. Canada’s Women’s Health Network (CWHN 2016) focused on providing parents with information to support their daughters, encouraging parents to:

Make the time to talk to your daughter about what is going on in her life. Try to create a home environment where she will feel safe to talk to you about any concerns she has about her body.

It is been suggested that appearance is the cause of over half the bullying experienced by young people (Central YMCA 2016). Parents and child advocates are also concerned that the mature looks being promoted to the pre-teen girls are encouraging them to present a sexy appearance to others well before they are old enough to understand the message they may be conveying. Beautification items that were designed for adults or older teenagers, such as 3-inch heels, sexualised t-shirt messages, and barely there shorts, are amongst the many items identified by parents as being beyond their tween. Beauty negotiations and appearance are often complicated and the interlinked issues, and possible outcomes, for young girls of having a poor body image are widely recognised. The following have been identified as some of the major risks:

- Development of eating disorders in younger girls
- Depression and anxiety
- Increased self-objectification of girls
- Negative self-esteem
- Unhealthy dieting.

Despite the broader societal concerns around the sexualisation of pre-teens it has been argued that the girls themselves are not necessarily motivated by the desire to fashion their own sexy body from the tween market's products (Chan et al. 2011; Harris 2005; Kehily 2012). Pre-teen girls' perception of gender roles and identities are not necessarily fashioned around a 'sexy appearance':

Analysis of interviews and images found that tween girls' perceived gender roles for females were based on a mixture of traditional and contemporary role models. Interviewees were looking for liberation as well as presentable physical beauty in the consumption of media content. Tween girls in Hong Kong demonstrated conservatism in sexuality. Sexy appearance and pre-marital sexual relations were considered inappropriate (Chan et al. 2011, p. 78).

In the face of sexualised and appearance based messages it is difficult to acknowledge the pre-teen's agency but many scholars contend that the girls are not actively seeking a self which is sexualised or commodified by the products offered to them by the consumer market (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Driscoll 2008; Harris 2005). They argue that the pre-

teen girl is actually responding to how ‘gender identity is developed and organised; about the developmental role and limits of girlhood; and about the relationship between pleasure, commodities, femininity and ideology’ (Driscoll 2008, p. 25). Harris (2005) argues that the girls are actually responding to a shift in young feminine identities that are being offered to them in the fantasy worlds of tween. A shift, which Harris argues, allows girls to move from a passive role as a consumer of popular culture to exercising agency and taking up an active position in fashioning their bodies. Similarly Kehily (2012) asks us to consider how tween girls make sense of discourses and accepted norms as they negotiate their own young femininity. While pre-teens approach puberty and are encouraged to look after and enjoy their bodies, we are being challenged to adopt different perspectives from discourses of innocence and vulnerability and to consider the girls’ understandings of premature sexualisation or the increasing ‘diversity of girlhood experience’ (Kehily 2012, p. 266). Recognising the girls’ rejection of an overall sexualised appearance requires us to acknowledge the girls’ agency in fashioning their own appearance (Chan et al. 2011).

FASHIONING A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

It has been argued that pre-teen girls use style to express their internal desires through the exterior appearance of clothing, body shape, and accessories which assist them to negotiate a place for themselves with their friends and peers. A girl’s style is the public face of her body which becomes her message to others about the identity she is fashioning (Pomerantz 2008). Pomerantz suggests that through ‘our clothes, we are judged, looked at, wondered about, envied, remembered, discriminated against, lusted after, admired, respected and ignored’ (2008, p. 17). Pre-teen girls are concerned about their looks, their hair, whether a style is appropriate for an event, or whether they have the right hairstyle or make-up. The girls’ negotiations of style are evident in the ways they dress and present their bodies. The tween period has become a stage, through the influence of the consumer-media culture, where ‘style’ options are limited and conformity is almost demanded (Brookes and Kelly 2009; Harris 2005). Astute, experienced, even a critical consumer, the pre-teen girl works hard to choose a style from the limited options available to present a self that fits with the image she wants to present to her peers.

Like the subcultures that prevail in many of the teenage and youth markets the tween market responds by categorising these girls as a globalised ‘collective identity’, crossing national boundaries and presenting them with a narrow set of products and services. While it may appear that the products and services offered to the pre-teen girl are endless, it is widely considered that the young, feminine girlness being offered to the girls fits within a specific set of reference points (Russell and Tyler 2002). Evidence of the limited choices and possibilities are apparent as the tween actively engages in the decision-making process of how to present a young, feminine self that is acceptable to her and to her peers (Brookes and Kelly 2009). While pre-teen girls are not in control of the representations presented to them, tweens are not simply naive consumers but active agents in fashioning their own young, feminine girlness.

THE PRE-TEEN GIRLS’ DESIRE TO BELONG

The goods and services promoted under the auspices of the tween market are designed to respond to the developmental desires and needs of its target market. However its common interest, and subsequently its power, lies in its key aim: to socialise girls in consumption activities and to create a ‘commercial persona’ of the tween girl. As discussed here, and extensively in cultural consumption and media studies, childhood consumption is complex. The prodigious nature of tween market challenges us to consider how sociologies of childhood blend with consumption. The success of the tween phenomenon demands that we develop frameworks that enable us to consider its impact on girls in this target age group. Achieving a sense of belonging outside their familial relationships is considered to be a major protective factor in tweens’ health and well-being (Centre for Adolescent Health 2008).

Developing relationships with friends and peers is considered to be pivotal to the pre-teen girls’ ability to achieve a sense of belonging. It has been argued that pre-teen girls actively ‘do’ gender when they have an appreciative audience who respond positively to the young, feminine appearance they fashion (Pomerantz 2008). The girls are very aware of how to use goods and services from the consumer market to gain approval and acceptance from their friends and peers. The consumer market presents them an array of clothing, accessories, make-up, and beauty products to help them in fashioning their own unique look but, importantly, one that enables them to belong within their friendship groups. For the

pre-teen girl her appearance and the style she adopts is more than simply fashion. Her interpretation of style is her ‘mode of self-expression, identification, and agency’ (Pomerantz 2008, p. 3).

PRE-TEEN GIRLS’ ECONOMY OF DIGNITY

The call for new frameworks to explore children’s consumer culture recognises that there are intrinsic links between a child’s desire to belong and their consumption activity. Pugh (2009) responded by exploring children’s consumer culture through their own social experiences and asking the question: what do ‘things’ mean to children? She contends that children’s consumption activity is linked to their desire to be accepted by their friends and peers. She argues that children are motivated to actively work out amongst themselves how they can use consumer items to negotiate a way to belong amongst their peers in their own local, social worlds. The intensity of children’s consumption stems from their overwhelming desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups. Pugh calls this concept the *economy of dignity*. The term *economy* refers to the value that belonging means to each child, and *dignity* represents the ‘most basic sense of participation they can achieve in their social worlds’ (Pugh 2009, p. 7). As children navigate their local neighbourhoods and environments she argues that they recognise the unique culture in each and draw on their own experiences to work out how to negotiate ways to be accepted.

Pugh (2009) suggests that children are working together to shape their own *economies of dignity*, assigning meaning to goods, experiences, and services in their different spaces. Pugh suggests that children allocate a value to goods and experiences, transforming the meaning in different spaces for each unique group, or culture. While the marketers, advertisers, retailers, and producers of the consumer media promote specific products, the tween girl is acutely aware that she must understand and negotiate their meaning to the norms and practices of her own social worlds. The tween girl draws on her own social experiences to assign a value. The value of each token varies according to the different social worlds of the tween girl. The girls’ lives are far from stagnant and they regularly move in and out of different environments, moving from home to school, to family and sporting activities. The tween girls’ considerations of belonging are relentless, and extensive work goes into the tween girls’ negotiations. It is often the significance and influence of these localised, social worlds that is missing from explanations of why children consume. This

can cause tension between the tween girl and her parents or family as her ability to realise her desire is very much determined by her parents' own consumption practices. Parents' capacity to 'feel, ignore, or be oblivious' to their tween's emotional connection to their consumption desires are in turn shaped by their own 'histories and experiences' (Pugh 2009, p. 93). Pugh describes this as the parent's 'social antennae' which enables them to be sensitive to the tweens' desires. This is in turn influenced by the cultural norms and practices of the local community and groups in their 'social location'. Recognising the emotional significance of a product to their pre-teen daughter can influence a parent's consumption decision and assist the child to participate in their own social worlds, or not.

BEYOND GLOBAL: THE LOCAL, SOCIAL WORLDS OF PRE-TEENS

The speed and reach of the consumer media implies that the pre-teen girl lives in a globalised, almost placeless, environment, yet these explorations often leave out the ongoing significance of place in young people's lives (Nayak 2003; Nayak and Kehily 2013; NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). In the case of the pre-teen girl, her everyday life and her desire to belong unfolds in the many spaces she occupies: home, school, local neighbourhoods, sporting activities and, increasingly, her online communities. The tween's spaces and places automatically add texture and detail to her everyday activities and actions as she pursues her desire to belong with her peers. Even in our increasingly globalised economy 'global cultures, then, do not operate independently but connect and interact differently at national, regional or local scales' (Nayak 2003, p. 5). For the pre-teen girl the places that matter in her life are 'simultaneously global and local' as they create meanings in their own social worlds by reworking 'global processes' (Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 9).

The work of belonging for the pre-teen girl is complex and undertaken in the many interactional spaces she occupies: in homes, schools, shopping centres, recreational and sporting teams. In these spaces her negotiations and experiences of belonging are fluid and can change daily. It is the girls' attentiveness to the allocation of meaning to items, goods, experiences, and activities in these spaces that motivate her desire to consume. The significance of the globalised consumer media is acknowledged by Pugh and she is not alone in contesting widespread understandings that tweens are

situated in global, almost placeless, environments. While it has been suggested that we are witnessing the death of geography in the lives of young people, it has been argued that 'local places and geography now matter more than ever' (Nayak 2003, p. 5).

THE IN-BETWEENNESS OF PRE-TEENS

The tween phenomenon is premised on the understanding that these girls are positioned in an in-between space, no longer children but not yet teenagers. While many pre-teen girls are not sold on the concept of tween, there are aspects of this commercial persona that they identify with. The blurry boundaries and space of 'in-betweenness' that describes them as no longer a child, although not yet a teenager, was appealing to these pre-teens:

I think I'm like the highest stage, higher than a child, like almost a tween but not nearly (Holly 12);

Higher than child but not completely a tween, a teenager, no a tween, lower than a teenager (Maddie 12).

The concept of a glittery, pink or prematurely sexy tween was not as desirable 'I don't know, not bothered (about being a tween) I don't like that about tweens, the pink and purple stuff' (Susan 12).

While they no longer identified with being a child, the girls are not trying to look like their older sisters (Harris 2005). Pre-teen girls want to actively engage with products and services, images and ideals of the consumer media that will help them develop their own young, feminine girlness. Far from being dictated to by the market they are agentic agents in the process and want to maintain control over their decisions (Harris 2005; Russell and Tyler 2002).

The in-between nature of the consumer-media tween culture is not lost on the girls, and their understandings of in-betweenness mirrored many of the tween market's definitions. They reflected a more locally connected sense of how they experienced their own in-betweenness rather than the more global aspect of the tween market. There are links though between the consumer media's definition and the girls' understandings. While they were reluctant to align themselves entirely with the consumer media's definition, they identified closely with the concept of being separate and more mature than their childhood years:

Yes, no, a little bit, kind of, I'm not a teenager yet, unfortunately, just stuck in-between (Erin 12);

I think of myself as nearly a teenager (Lindi 11);

I think I'm a tween but nearly a teenager, both of them (Mollie 11).

For parents though, the ambiguous nature of this age group and the gendered nature of the marketing phenomenon provoke concerns around discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability and female sexuality (Cook and Kaiser 2004). As a result the girls' understanding of their space of in-betweenness was intensified as their parents responded with caution and hesitation to the girls' increasing desire for freedom and independence. The tension between the girls' desires and their parents' understandings of their negotiations of belonging was complex. In this book I argue that understanding the pre-teen girls' in-betweenness that is targeted by the consumer-media tween culture is vital to increasing our knowledge of the ambiguous nature of the tween girls' position.

AN ETHNOGRAPHY IN A MELBOURNE PRIMARY SCHOOL

In this book I introduce the understandings of 13 'ordinary' Melbourne pre-teen girls. As explained earlier the term 'ordinary' has been adopted to describe their usual and normal behaviours and is not the way I thought about these intriguing girls. Their insights and reflections enabled me to consider the significance of a range of social and cultural influences in the everyday lives of tween girls. These understandings and insights are drawn from a year-long reflexive ethnography I conducted in a Melbourne primary school. My work was exploratory and I am not claiming here that these understandings are representative or can be assumed for other tweens around the globe. I argue though that by stepping into the everyday local, social world of tweens I was able to gain valuable insights into the ways their consumption activities were intrinsically entwined with their desire to belong with their friends and peers. My project mirrored similar ethnographic studies with girls conducted around the globe (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008).

Outside her familial relationships, the school environment is arguably the most significant social world the pre-teen has to negotiate. As she moves through her school years, the pre-teen moves away from familial relationships and negotiates these complex social spaces for herself where

'affection, approval, affirmation have to be negotiated' and constantly reviewed (George 2007, p. 57). Making friends at school is often the first experience children have of negotiating and dealing with friendships outside the family. School environments have proven to be valuable spaces to conduct research with young girls. The pre-teen age group spans the primary years and the secondary years of schooling in many Western developed nations. There has been valuable work conducted with the older tween age groups but limited explorations of the younger, primary school-aged tweens (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008).

Organising access to a Melbourne primary school required ethics approval from Monash University and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Approval to conduct my study in Western Heights Primary School was obtained from the Regional Director and Principal. In consultation with the Principal and Vice Principal I was allocated a Year 6 class from the three available. My class teacher was the senior teacher at this level and had taught Year 6s for several years. A further determining factor was the allocation of girls in the class. All 14 had been in a larger all-girls class the year before, and the school was interested in observing their return to a mixed gender class. All names (school, principal, teachers, and girls) have been allocated pseudonyms in this book to protect their identities. A range of data collection methods were adopted. I began with observations in the classroom and playgrounds, taking field notes and making reflections. I took samples of their work and moved onto interviews and focus groups. I interviewed all the girls once and conducted 15 focus groups, representing 5 topics with 3 groups for each.

My ethnography aimed to identify, explore, and analyse the complex and shifting rules of engagement that shape the dynamics of belonging for 11–12-year-old girls. My aim was to give an 'ordinary' voice to our understandings of pre-teen girls' consumption activities and their everyday lives. To create an environment where I could hear their voices I spent an entire school year with one Year 6 class, developing relationships of trust with the 13 girls who agreed to participate. One of the girls decided that she didn't want to participate and her wishes were respected. I attended school with the girls one day a week for the entire school year. I also went with them on their Year 6 camp and several excursions during the year. I attended as necessary for interviews and focus groups. By focusing attentively on one group of girls I was able to contextualise their everyday practices over an extended period. This enabled me to consider the girls' common or usual practices and behaviours and to identify any irregular or uncharacteristic interactions or negotiations. I gained valuable insights by aligning myself

with the girls in the school environments, rather than adopting the more familiar roles of teachers or aides in this space.

UNDERTAKING THE ROLE OF LEAST ADULT

My own link to this project was significant as I became a part of my young participants' lives for an entire school year. The extended period in the school revealed the fluid and complex nature of the girls' friendships and negotiations of belonging. This necessitated a constant review of my relationship with them and consideration of my place in the school environment. My position as an adult researcher in this space required constant reflexivity as I negotiated my own unique space without aligning myself with the more traditional adult role of teacher or educator. I achieved this by spending my time at the school in the classroom, playgrounds, sporting fields, and library rather than the teachers' staffroom or other common areas. During my field work, and in my analysis and interpretation of the insights and reflections of these 13 enthusiastic, intriguing 'ordinary' girls, I was profoundly aware of my responsibilities to them, their families, and the stories I might tell. Throughout the year I explored the role of family, friends, school, and the local, social worlds in the girls' everyday lives. My analysis, framed by Pugh's concept, the *economy of dignity*, illuminated the tween experience as fundamentally about finding strategies for belonging within their local, social worlds. The girls' insights demonstrated how they allocated meanings to products, services, and norms through this process. The girls' revealed the complex and constant nature of their considerations and negotiations of belonging. In contrast to limited notions of pre-teens as naive, vulnerable, overly sexualised consumers, these girls' demonstrated their agentic subject positions. They also revealed how:

The case of the tween girl underscores, more generally, how social persons, cultural positions and consumption cannot be conceptualized as separate entities that occasionally come into contact with and influence each other; rather, they mutually constitute each other in multiple ways (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 224).

THIRTEEN INTRIGUINGLY ORDINARY LIVES

This aim of this book is to remind us about the importance of stepping back from the globalised nature of the consumer media's tween phenomenon and considering the significance of the local places and spaces where

pre-teen girls live their everyday lives. This book tells the story of my reflexive ethnography in a Melbourne primary school, Western Heights, and the significance of this and other local spaces in the lives of pre-teen girls. In doing so it also tells the stories of the 13 uniquely 'ordinary' girls with whom I shared their final year of primary school. Through their stories of shopping centres, consumption desires, family lives, and their negotiations of friendship and belonging I share with you the stories of these intriguing pre-teen girls. I wish I could say that this group of girls reflected the social and cultural milieu which can often be present in Melbourne primary schools but this was not the case. Western Heights is a white, middle-class school in an increasingly gentrified inner-western suburb. While several of the girls were being raised in lower middle-class families, the majority lived in middle-class families with parents working in the health, academic, education, sales, and retail sectors. At times one or other of the girls' parents experienced periods of unemployment, and for Holly, particularly, her father's search for work was a significant topic throughout the year. The girls' different socio-economic status within the definition of middle-class was most obvious in the holidays their families took throughout the year. Many of the girls shared stories of camping over the summer holiday break: Erin talked about her beachside holiday house, Lindi and Rachel's families headed to Bali for a mid-year break, and Susan's family travelled to the UK to visit family.

Their middle-class, urban childhood determined that consuming and shopping was an important part of their family leisure time and the girls regularly related stories of shopping adventures on weekends and during the holidays. With the exception of Alex, whose parents 'always buy', the girls' shopping adventures were not filled with the items they purchased but rather the experience of going shopping. This focus informs my exploration of shopping centres as 'theatres of their day' in Chap. 3. This group of girls were all born in Australia although many of their parents had immigrated with their families, the girls' grandparents, from Europe, the UK, and New Zealand. The influence of the girls' Italian, Greek, Mauritian, and Pacific Islander cultural backgrounds was evident in stories of birthday parties, spending time with grandparents, the foods they brought to school, and their family expectations, particularly for Hayley who spent considerable time looking after her younger siblings.

My insights into the girls' lives are, by necessity, filtered through my own experiences and analysis as I reached understandings influenced by my role as an adult friend and the 'least white middle-class adult' that I

could be with young people in the school environment. The girls' engagement with me and my project was contagious. They were excited that I was writing a book about them as Mollie (11) declared 'it was exciting because it was unexpected as well. It was different and exciting'. They were enthusiastic about the project but struggled with the need to protect their identities:

I was quickly surrounded by a group of girls, Lindi, Mollie, Kate, Susan and Holly. They were talking about my 'book' that they were going to be in and what their 'names' might be as well as the name for the school. Lindi wanted it to be Summer Heights High and she wanted to be Ja'mie (Summer Heights High is an Australian mockumentary television set that is set in the fictional Summer Heights High School. Ja'mie is the central character and an Australian male comedian and actor) (Field Notes).

Engaging these girls was not difficult as I offered them a unique and coveted opportunity for recognition in a public arena but unfortunately I took away their 'five minutes of fame' in an attempt to protect their identities from public scrutiny and to adhere to my ethical requirements. This was protection the girls did not seek nor desire. For these pre-teens the absence of their 'real identities' in this book robbed them of the opportunity to share their lives in a public space. Ethically I had no choice but the girls clearly demonstrated their desire for fame and to cultivate a public identity (Hopkins 2002). They spent many hours trying to convince me that they didn't want to be hidden and imploring me to use their real names and when I couldn't they wanted to choose their own pseudonyms. In the end though they were happy with the names I allocated when I shared with them the significance of the pseudonyms I chose.

My aim in this book is to share these unique, individual identities with you, albeit through pseudonyms, and the significant influences in their everyday lives. As I share their stories you will get to know the girls, some more than others, as their contributions in conversations were not always equal. While I had invited these 13 tween girls into the same public demonstration of their everyday lives, their participation reflected their usual contributions and conversations in class and with their friendship groups. As a result Lindi and Hayley shared their lives constantly and willingly: 'my personality: I am pretty funny ask any girls and I reckon they'll say yes. I have a great sense of humour and a bubbly personality' (Letter from Lindi 11). Others such as Erin and Alison were less open but provided considered insights in their contributions.

In an attempt to address the girls' desire for a public identity before I begin my story of their practices and negotiations, I have chosen to share with you the girls' own insights and understandings of the self they shared. By sharing the girls' stories in this way I hope to provide you with some insight into the young, feminine girlness that exists beyond the pseudonyms.

Alex's thoughts: I am an only child. I love shopping and will go anywhere in Australia to find the best shops, I prefer Harbourtown in Queensland. I enjoy surfing the net. I like reading and writing but maths is not my favourite. I don't like school because I have to wake up early but I will work hard. I enjoy a range of sports such as netball and swimming and often go to the beach to body surf. I have a hermit crab and gold fish for pets. A quiet girl, I get annoyed when people see me as lacking in confidence.

Alison's thoughts: I am the youngest of three sisters and I'm very messy. My sisters are in their 20s so I am almost an only child. I love going on the computer and using my Nintendo DS. I have had a great start to the year although I hate coming to school as it is hard work. Maths is a favourite but I don't like sports. I like having friends at school. My family went camping in country Victoria during the Christmas holidays. *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is my favourite movie.

Erin's thoughts: I am the older of two girls. I am not so keen on my younger sister, (I don't yet have that many responsibilities except for my sister. That's not really a responsibility, that's just a curse). I am a quiet achiever and very clever. I try my hardest to complete my work. My favourite subjects are maths, arts and sports. I am really looking forward to school this year. I help people when they need help. My family went to our holiday place at the beach during the Christmas holidays. I like running around going crazy and eating ice cream.

Georgie's thoughts: I am the eldest of two sisters who live with my mum and stepdad. I stay with my dad every second weekend. I like hanging out with friends and having sleep overs. I like going on MSN (a social networking site). I like school because I have friends here. I came to Western Heights in Year 5 and I like coming to school here. I like boys and have a boyfriend: 'They [boys] can be boyfriends. As I've got one, which is different from anyone else in this room'.

Hayley's thoughts: I have a family of seven—mum, dad, two sisters, one brother, my grandmother, and myself. I am the eldest. I have a cat called Smokey. I help out a lot at home and think this is really unfair.

‘Holidays can be boring, when you’ve got nothing to do. Especially when you’ve got three brothers and sisters to look after’. I like music, own a horse and like school as I have friends here. I like sport, maths, music, and art. My family went camping at the beach in the Christmas holidays.

Holly’s thoughts: I am the eldest of two girls. I am a positive person and like scrapbooking, reading, dancing, and playing sport, particularly netball. I like school as I have fun with my friends. I like most subjects especially sport and LOTE (Language Other Than English). I am very excited and looking forward to a brilliant year. I have a cat and dog. My family went camping at the beach during the Christmas holidays and I went boogie boarding. ‘I just like them [surf brands], anything I like is cool’.

Kate’s thoughts: I am the youngest of three, I have an older sister and brother. I love playing with my friends, mucking around, being ‘me’, and playing basketball for two different teams, including a representative side. I am excited about the year. I like to see friends at school and learning new things. I describe myself as a ‘great student, completes all tasks, enjoys most subjects, never gives up on the hardest subject’. I play the drums. My family is going overseas to visit my mum’s family this year.

Lindi’s thoughts: I am the eldest of two and have a younger brother. I have a dog named Jackie. I play basketball almost every day of the week and play in representative teams for my basketball association. I am a self-confessed very funny girl, ‘I like to laugh and I think I’m pretty funny’. I like coming to school as I have friends here and I enjoy playing with them. I am the only girl who wrote to Mrs Brookes during the year and my letter says the best thing about me is: ‘my personality: I am pretty funny, ask any girl and I recon (sic) they’ll say yes. I have a great sense of humour and a bubbly personality’.

Maddie’s thoughts: I am an only child. I live with my mother and step-father. I look very much like my mum: ‘Like I’m sort of like a miniature version of her [Mum] ’cause I look so much like her. Yeah she’s sometimes says I’m her clone’. I like reading, playing with my pets, Nintendo and doing homework—when it’s fun. I like school because I enjoy being with my friends and learning. I like sport and am looking forward to learning a lot of things that I need to know in Grade 6 and Year 7. I went camping in the mountains over summer and saw lots of cockatoos.

Mollie’s thoughts: I am the eldest of two girls. I love playing with my two dogs, playing piano and playing netball. I play netball with Sally and Holly. I like school because I catch up with my friends. My favourite subjects are spelling, art, and sport. I describe myself as always happy and

enthusiastic. I went to the mountains for my Christmas holiday. I get frustrated with my increasing levels of responsibility: 'Well they force me to make my bed and it... no I've got better things to do than fold a bed'.

Rachel's thoughts: I am a quiet member of the class. I have two older stepbrothers. I do gymnastics and like learning how to do better splits and backbends. I am hoping to do ballet, drama and dance this year. I like school as the teachers make learning fun and I want to stay here next year. 'Having boys in my classroom feels really weird after last year. I was hoping for boys in my classroom because I was always in a boy and girls grade'.

Sally's thoughts: I am the youngest of four sisters. I have two dogs. I think I am really funny and very talented. I love singing and playing with friends, and of course, homework. I like learning at school particularly maths and seeing friends. 'I'm very intelligent and a great helper when jobs need to be done'. I like hanging around in the classroom during recess, lunch, and after school. I play netball on the weekend with Holly and Mollie.

Susan's thoughts: I am the youngest of two girls. I have a dog, Bella, who is very cute. I have a positive attitude, try my best and behave well and responsibly. I like reading, sleeping, watching old classic movies with my family, and mucking around. I love athletics and netball, I am very good at running. I like coming to school and am glad because lots of my friends are in this class, I think it is the best in the school:

They're [friends] sort of like me, they like stuff that I like, they're fun, they do weird things. When it was my birthday they walked me around the school yelling out, 'it's Susan's birthday', sort of embarrassing.

Pre-teen Girls' Desire for Freedom and Independence

PRE-TEEN GIRLS: BORN TO SHOP, OR FASHIONED COMMERCIAL PERSONAE

The 'tween market' has firmly established pre-teen girls as commercial personae responsible for billions of dollars of sales around the world annually. Their potential doesn't end with their own spending capacity though as marketing experts claim, the girls are influential in the family's purchases (Media Scope 2012). It has been suggested that up to '60 per cent of all pre-teens today have substantially influenced their parents' final decision on which car to buy' (Democratic Media 2012). Pre-teen girls have been socialised in the art of consuming since birth, as going shopping with family is recognised as an important part of their family's leisure activities (Langer 2005; Kline 1993). The girls' desire to shop is central to the cultural landscape of tween and the consumption of products and services is fundamental to its success. Identified as a distinctly lucrative market, with their own disposable incomes and leisure time, advertisers and marketers directly target this age group. Messages promoting products, services, and experiences desired by pre-teens are relentless and communicated through a variety of media forums, including social media, television, music videos, celebrity endorsements, and magazines. While many argue that pre-teen girls are incapable of discerning the marketer's intent, it has been widely argued that they recognise the shrewd marketing intent and are aware

that promotions or messages are designed to lure them into buying (Cook 2004a; Harris 2005).

Not surprisingly tween scholarship has focused our understandings of pre-teens on the girls' consumption activities. Sociologists, cultural studies, and feminist scholars have raised the profile of the pre-teen age group (Cook 2004a; Harris 2005; Jennings 2014; Russell and Tyler 2002). However, the focus on consumption has made it difficult to separate their consumption practices and consider other important social and cultural influences in the girls' lives (The Senate 2008). The Australian Government Senate Inquiry Report, *Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media*, recognised that it would be difficult to 'disentangle the specific roles played by family, friends, society at large and the media' for tweens and to determine the 'causal relationship involved' (The Senate 2008, p. 9).

One of the favourite activities for the girls from Western Heights Primary School was to go shopping, but consuming was not always their primary motivation. In this chapter I consider the ways the girls' consumption desires and practices can be explained by their increasing desire for freedom and independence. The role of shopping centres or malls as 'theatres of their day' and places to extend their friendship interactions demonstrates the girls' increasing desire to move outside the familiar confines of their familial relationships. Their desire to shop without being aligned with tween culture demonstrates the girls' desire to maintain command of their own decisions. While many argue that pre-teens are the victims of the consumer-media tween culture, scholars argue that we need 'to take seriously the ways tweenie offers girls an agentic, albeit limited, subject position that they are able to negotiate and play with' (Harris 2005, p. 222). As I discovered, these pre-teen girls were actively engaged in their consumption decisions. The girls' understanding of the links between their appearance and acceptance by their peers was clearly evident and they were creative in the ways they used clothing to delineate friendship groups (Pomerantz 2008).

I LIKE SHOPPING BUT I'M NOT A GIRLIE, GIRL

Shopping was recognised as an important leisure activity for these pre-teen girls who have been taught the pleasures of consumption and socialised into a culture of wanting more from birth. Alex was very engaged and proud of her regular consumption activities:

We [my family] read magazines, mostly all we talk about is shopping, my No. 1 favourite activity. There's always pretty stuff, you always add to your collection, or if there's nothing better to do I can't find anything else but shopping. Sometimes I play on the computer but mostly I go shopping (Alex 11).

Alex didn't identify with the concept of tween though. Shopping for Alex was a regular family activity and she suggests that her mum and dad went every weekend and 'they always buy. But sometimes I have to wait [for something] then I don't want it' (Alex 11). Shopping was definitely an activity enjoyed by the other girls:

'I like shopping but I'm not like, I'm not a girlie girl' (Holly 12);

'I want to go shopping more often' (Maddie 11);

'I'm not a shopping person' (Holly 12);

'I am, I am' (Lindi 11, Holly 12, Mollie 12).

While they enjoyed the experience of shopping, the girls did not directly align themselves with tween culture: 'born to buy, I don't know. I'm not bothered [about being a tween]. I don't like that about tweens, the pink and purple stuff' (Susan 12). Others got caught up in the age definitions of tween and did not identify with the consuming aspect—'9 and below is sort of like a kid, then 10, 11, 12 is like the tweenie thing and then 13, [a] teenager' (Maddie 11). While they appreciated their connection to tween being different from a child (I think I'm a tween, nearly a teenager, both of them [Mollie 12]), the girls didn't appreciate the restrictions they associated with the commercial persona of consumer-media tween culture (Russell and Tyler 2002). They were however in tune with the marketing intent of tween girls' culture. 'I used to like that shop [*Just Jeans*] but I don't like it now. They say that I'm a size 6 and I'm not' (Kate 12). They were also very aware of the social links between consumer goods and their identity and the role appearance played in being accepted by the friends and peers. These pre-teen girls 'used style in the careful and creative cultivation of an image' even within the constraints of a compulsory school uniform (Pomerantz 2008, p. 149).

NEGOTIATING FRIENDSHIPS

The value of friendships to girls is widely recognised in academic scholarship although much of our research has focused on secondary school girls' friendships (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008). Studies such as McLeod's and Yates' (2006, p. 216) with 12–18-year-old Australian teenagers report that for many secondary-school-aged girls 'there is an intense preoccupation with being a good friend and displaying the right qualities of friendship: trust, honesty, loyalty'. The pre-teens in my study were no different and identified the qualities in their friends that made them fun:

Well Susan, she's my best friend, we've kinda been best friends for a very long time and we always make each other laugh no matter what. And Holly, she's kinda weird but funny and Lindi, well we've got a lot in common so we're really good friends in that way and we make each other laugh (Kate 12);

She's (Erin) good to keep secrets and we have this thing we just click and, we're very [alike], everyone thinks that we're like sisters, twins (Alex 11);

Someone that's nice, that would be there for you and everything that likes the same things you like but kinda are different in their own little way and they have to be trustworthy too and honest (Lindi 11).

These girls recognised though that friendships were unpredictable and required extensive and ongoing negotiations. Negotiating friendships in the school spaces since Prep the girls were very aware of the complex nature of this task. Making friends at school was arguably the first experience these girls had of negotiating friendship outside of the unconditional love of family. The girls had discovered over the years that 'affection, approval, [and] affirmation' have to be constantly negotiated with friends, but they recognised the value in their efforts (George 2007, p. 1):

Well I think you wouldn't be able to do lots of things or get far if you didn't have friends. They encourage you, sort of like family but not exactly. Friends are more like people you can just have fun with, they're like you and families are more like love and yeah that's the difference (Susan 12).

The girls recognised there were different norms and practices governing the process of making friends and these were often unique for different groups and individuals.

ADOPTING THE APPROPRIATE NORMS AND PRACTICES

Understanding group norms and practices was essential for the girls as they entered into negotiations of friendship. The age of primary school girls and the apparent fluid nature of friendships in primary school, the constant making and breaking up of friendships, has arguably oversimplified the complexity of the girls' negotiations of friendship (George 2007). This viewpoint may also have contributed to an inability to recognise that this age group of girls are already pre-occupied by their friendships. The desire for acceptance and to experience the sense of belonging associated with friendship was compelling for these pre-teen girls (Hamm and Faircloth 2005). Studies reveal the considerable time and 'emotional energy' the girls invest every day in negotiating their friendships (George 2007). Experiences of exclusion can be distressing and stayed with the girls throughout their primary school years:

That happened to me once. There was these two girls and I wanted to play with them. Amanda and that other girl, Gemma. And they always used to play with their Beanie Kids and I wanted to play, and she's like, 'okay you can play if you tell me what this Beanie Kids name is'. And I'm like 'I don't know, I don't play with Beanie Kids' and she's like, 'well you can't play then' (Lindi 12).

While positive reflections reveal the importance of friends it is the girls' response to the question of how they would feel if they didn't have friends that reveal the true significance of belonging with friends and in friendship groups:

Yes it's important 'cause you might lost your self-confidence if there's no-one to play with' (Susan 12);

Well mostly I would feel really sad if I didn't have anyone to play with (Holly 12);

Yeah it would make me feel lonely without friends. When I was in Prep, I can still remember this day, the saddest day, I hated it (Georgie 11).

Anxiety-ridden considerations and negotiations of friendship were a constant for the girls, yet their relentless and complex nature was not always evident. It has been argued that social exclusion for girls is often

situated within outwardly subtle everyday negotiations and interactions (Pomerantz 2008; Svahn and Evaldsson 2011).

THE SUBTLETY OF SHORTS

In many instances the girls' appearance or items of clothing delineated the boundaries of acceptance. The significance of a simple item to the girls' ability to belong demonstrated the creativeness of Susan and her friendship group. As the weather grew colder I made notes about the girls' uniform choices as skirts and shorts made way for trousers and jumpers:

Western Heights' uniform trousers for girls are tight fitting, almost ballet type or lycra pants which cling to their legs. This is in stark contrast to the shorts, baggy and loose fitting, which Susan and Kate regularly wear. These girls always wear shorts, blue tops and now their Western Heights Year 6 jumpers. I comment on the girls' shorts, suggesting that the morning is cold. Susan tells me that they [her friendship group] have an agreement not to wear trousers to school. So that's why they wear their shorts all the time. The girls have obviously discussed their uniforms and have made a decision for conformity to ensure no-one looks different on any given day (Field Notes).

Susan's clarification of my observation revealed the complex considerations that can be hidden behind the compulsory nature of school uniform. The decision to wear shorts created a norm for this group which they adhered to throughout the year (Pomerantz 2008). Clearly the wearing of school shorts was not exclusive to this group of girls; however, they had chosen this item to demarcate their friendship group from the other girls. It could be argued that this was a simple decision of conformity, but the girls' considerations of exclusiveness were intentional. Throughout the year Susan and her friends found other subtle ways to delineate their groups by adding an accessory to their uniform. At times they had on the same earrings, bracelets, or badges.

Holly, Susan, Mollie and Lindi are all wearing badges today. Little orange bears they bought the previous year to raise funds for a student who had been diagnosed with diabetes. They are all wearing them on the peaked corner of their white collars (Field Notes).

In negotiating these practices the girls' created their own norms and practices, and boundaries for their group (Pomerantz 2008). The girls' capacity to contemplate, and negotiate, their groups' affiliation out of a compulsory school uniform was highly nuanced and creative.

CONFORMITY AT ALL TIMES

While Susan and her friends demonstrated how the sameness of a school uniform can be utilised in creative ways to define friends, the presence of a school uniform imposed a level of conformity on the girls' appearance. There were times throughout the year though where the girls were given the opportunity to wear their own clothing. My findings reflected Pomerantz's (2008, p. 152) that 'while style offered girls the chance to dress for parts they wanted to play as a creative form of identity construction and negotiation ... it also constrained girls within identity categories that felt nonnegotiable in the school'. It was early in the year that these pre-teen girls spent three weeks attending an intensive school swimming programme at a popular Melbourne beach. The programme was lots of fun (although the water was cold) and the students participated in programmes familiar to the lifeguards who patrol our Australian beaches. This included swimming activities, surfboarding, lifesaving practices, and beach running. The girls were encouraged to wear wetsuits or rash vests over their bathers if they owned them as the water was cold:

The beach could be described as a confronting place for young girls concerned about body image or their shape but there was little evidence of discomfort or embarrassment today. I have observed fear of the water, jelly fish and the risks of taking on unfamiliar challenges but not a fear of looking different. The range of bathers and wetsuits was interesting with the majority of students opting to wear $\frac{3}{4}$ wetsuits or rash shirts over their bathers. Lindi, Mollie, Holly, Kate and Susan all wore wetsuits, as did Erin and Rachel; the remainder wore rash shirts over their bathers and, with the exception of Sally, board shorts over their bathers. Rachel's wetsuit looked relatively new. As a hesitant swimmer, frightened of the water and unsure of herself, it is possible she had purchased her wetsuit specifically for the beach programme. This may reflect her concerns about fitting in (Field Notes).

On their first beach I noted that Lindi, Holly, Kate, and Susan emerged from the bus with pink-and-blue sunblock drawings on their arms, faces,

and legs. The colours and design are consistent for all and I suggest the girls have found a new way of defining their friendship group. While Susan and her friends found a variety of ways to adorn their school uniform with items that defined their friendship group, it was not always easy with a compulsory school uniform for the girls to negotiate their own style. School camp offers the girls another chance to present their own style to their friends:

The students in Mr. G.'s class dressed comfortably and casually for the three days of camp. They wore very similar clothing—tracksuits, leggings and jeans most of the time, although Lindi has denim shorts on for day two. Zip-up tops with hoods were very popular. The most creative and colourful items appeared to be their slippers, Pj's and beanies (Camp Notes).

The extensive pre-camp discussions about what to wear resulted in a level of conformity of jeans and t-shirts or tops that was striking. Even the colours and logos were muted and there were no bright or fluoro colours to be seen. While some of the girls wore pyjamas with suggestive or fun logos (Maddie wore a pyjama top which said 'I'm a pussy cat by day' on the front and 'tiger by night' on the back), the most unique items amongst the girls' clothing were their beanies:

Beanies were a real fashion statement on camp although even these demonstrated a level of similarity and conformity. Lindi and Mollie had similar beanies but different colours on when we went for a night walk. The night was cool and there were many beanies on display, some home knitted and others shop brought. A number of girls wore soft, crochet style beanies with bobbles that hung down below their ears (Camp Notes).

As I reflect on this practice and Susan's group decision to wear shorts maybe it is the subtle differences in their appearance that appeal to these girls. With an increasing desire for acceptance they are still finding their way with their friends and peers. It could be argued that smaller items like badges, earrings, or beanies represent the small steps the girls are prepared to take as they seek acceptance from their peers. These items can be easily removed if the girls step into a space and recognise that they stand out as being different. While they are keen to develop their own sense of self, not fitting in or getting your appearance wrong is a real fear.

The opportunity to dress up for the camp disco was another chance for the girls to present their sense of self to their peers. However, conformity was very evident. While Sally chose to wear a dress there was little evidence of clothing that stood out or drew attention:

Clothing for the disco was again casual. The girls had on jeans or trousers with a nice top although Sally has on a pink, dropped-waist dress with a pink cardigan. I know they have all spent considerable time preparing themselves. Hair, showers, getting dressed all took considerable time and when I popped into Hayley and Rachel's cabin for a chat there was a very sweet aroma of perfume powder. Hayley told me it was Rachel's toiletries as she has much nicer ones. 'Classy' I think was the word Hayley used to describe Rachel, in clothes as well as scented girls toiletries. I know that the importance of 'getting it right' though had consumed many of them leading up to camp (Field Notes).

As I reflected on my expectations of the girls revealing different appearances and clothing on camp I am reminded that my attempts to take on the role of least adult in the space do not remove my adult expectations or anticipations (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; Mandell 1991). I had anticipated that camp would give the girls an opportunity to be different but they were more interested in conforming to the group norms and practices of camp and, most importantly, maintaining their ability to fit it. While the camp location was unfamiliar and obviously not Western Heights Primary School, the complex 'social networks and peer group cultures' the girls negotiate in the school environment were still evident here (Valentine 2001, p. 142).

NEGOTIATING LOCAL, SOCIAL WORLDS

The desire to belong and accepted by their friends and peers is one of the greatest concerns of the pre-teen girl and it does not take place in a vacuum (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008). While the speed and reach of the consumer media suggests that the pre-teen girl lives and belongs in a globalised, almost placeless, environment, these explorations do not recognise the ongoing significance of place in their lives. As Nayak (2003, p. 5) argues, it is important to recognise the global cultures that influence the girls' commercial personae are not operating independently but 'connect and interact differently at national, regional or local scales'.

In this local space the girls' familiar social and cultural norms and practices informed the ways they formulated meaning for the products and messages presented to them by the globalised consumer-media tween culture.

The girls' desire to belong unfolded in the many local spaces they occupied: home, school, local neighbourhoods, sporting activities, online communities, and shopping centres and malls. These spaces were not purely a backdrop for the girls' negotiations of friendship and belonging. They provided the context for the girls' understandings of the value of particular experiences, goods, services, activities, cultural rules and norms. They also appealed to the girls as familiar, local spaces to spend time with friends. Already familiar with the significance of the school environment to their considerations of friendship, the girls were looking to shift their friendship negotiations to other local spaces. Their homes, churches, sporting clubs, local leisure centres, and shopping centres all featured prominently as alternate spaces to share with friends.

Throughout the year the girls entered into and negotiated a variety of local spaces, most commonly with their family. However, the desire to spend more time with their friends was emerging. The girls' homes were obviously very familiar spaces for these pre-teens, and their reflections throughout the year revealed much about the ongoing and complex negotiations they entered into even in these very familiar spaces. For Susan, the physical challenges of sharing a bedroom with her older sister required daily negotiations. As she stated quite tersely one morning, it's:

Very annoying. 'cause she [sister] has to get up at 6.30 to take two trains to secondary school. And she has to turn the light on and make a lot of noise, which means I usually wake up about 6.30 as well. And she reads until really late at night which is kind of annoying (Susan 12).

In contrast, Hayley's ongoing negotiations around family chores enabled her to pursue two of her passions. Firstly, 'I've been trying to do all the chores around the house 'cause I get to go to horse riding', and secondly, 'cause I made a friend there'. The opportunity for a friendship outside of the school environment was particularly significant for Hayley who struggled to make strong connections with the girls in 6C. Hayley's excitement was palpable when she was invited on a weekend away with one of the Year 6 girls from another class:

Hayley and Pippi bounce past me. They are excited but not about school. They inform me that they spent ages talking on the phone last night as they planned their weekend away. Pippi's family has invited Hayley to go away this weekend and they are both very excited. Hayley is particularly glowing, as she tells me she's never been to this beachside town before but I suspect that glow comes as much from being asked to spend a weekend with a friend rather than the destination (Field Notes).

These girls have been negotiating friendships and a place to belong in this space for many years. While negotiations of friendship activities outside of school may have been mainly facilitated up to now by their parents, the girls were well aware there are unique rules for making friends and that these differ depending on the group and the space (George 2007; Hey 1997; Kehily et al. 2002; Pomerantz 2008) The girls enjoyed inviting friends into their homes and making their own fun:

I usually have a friend over every second weekend but if not I'll just, like hang around, do something. I invited Lindi, Susan and Holly, it was really fun one time. I invited them over just to muck around. We had nachos and then we went to the movies and that was really funny. We were very loud and everyone could hear us (Kate 12);

Someone, I think it was April, I can't remember, Maddie and Sally came over to my place. They were over at my place for about 5 hours. We played a game of Monopoly and then Maddie went 'I'm rich' and threw her money everywhere and my room was a mess after that (Georgie 11).

Negotiating friendships in their familiar spaces was a natural first step for the girls in their desire for freedom and independence. As their desire for freedom to spend time with friends increased, the girls looked for familiar local spaces that provided them with known rules and understandings. Home was the most obvious place for the girls to invite their friends to but another popular destination for these girls was their sporting teams and venues: 'netball keeps you fit and healthy' (Mollie 12) and 'it's fun, you make more friends' (Lindi 12). Holly, Sally, Susan, and Mollie all played netball and Kate and Lindi played basketball:

My basketball, is very influential. I play or train almost every day. Sometimes after basketball I go to a friends' house or they come to come. Yeah nearly every Sunday after training I would go to Kate's house but I don't do that anymore (Lindi 12).

The girls all played for Western Heights Primary School teams but a number of the girls were also in local representative sides, and sport dominated their weekly after-school and weekend activities. On our way back from an excursion we walked past Susan's house and she mentioned that Holly was going to her house after school. She goes every Tuesday as they have netball training and they go together. The same invitation is not forthcoming for Sally and Mollie which is particularly significant for Mollie who is part of Holly and Susan's friendship group.

Shopping centres or local shopping strips were also familiar local spaces for these girls. (Russell and Tyler 2002). 'Well on Friday I went to DFO [Direct Factory Outlets with multiple bargain outlets of major brands]', on 'Saturday we went to *Highpoint* [Australia's fourth largest shopping centre in Melbourne's western suburbs]' (Alex 11). While it has been argued that pre-teens regularly shop with their friends and peers, these girls suggested that to date this is an activity more commonly undertaken with their family (Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Minahan and Huddleston 2010):

We (family) went to the one [DFO] in Spencer Street. And we kinda got lost on the tram 'cause we didn't know where we were going, so we decided to get off at DFO and have a look. Shopping was special 'cause I had birthday money to spend.

However, the desire to share this leisure activity with their friends and the longing for autonomy and independence to shop with friends is evident. Having spent their early years shopping with family, shopping centres are considered one of the most familiar environments for the girls. They all have their favourite and most familiar shopping location. They experience shopping as a social activity; shopping is, after all, 'fundamentally a social activity, providing a site for developing social relations' (Nayak and Kehily 2013, p. 136). While the girls were motivated by a desire to consume—'I like it when I get to go and get all the things that I like' (Maddie 12), their desire to negotiate familiar local spaces to fashion an identity and find a place to belong with friends was increasing.

FROM FAMILIES TO FRIENDS: A NATURAL PROGRESSION

While the pernicious nature of a consuming culture is widely debated, it has been argued that families shopping together can build memories and transfer the values of this leisure activity from one generation to another

(Neeley 2005). For many pre-teens their emotional connection with the act of consumption is demonstrable: 'the excitement builds inside me' (Alex 11). She shops every weekend with her mum and dad, mainly 'buying clothes for her and her mum' but 'pretty much everything for dad'. She declares shopping as a regular and very much shared family activity. Her parents always buy and this is the main leisure activity for her family—'sometimes I play on my Nintendo and that, the computer. But yeah shopping's mostly the thing we do'. She wrote a poem *Shopping* about her families shopping practices.

She described how the 'excitement builds inside me' and I stop to ask her about it. She says she shops every weekend with her mum and dad. Her mum buys clothes and her dad buys everything. She says they always buy, 'but sometimes I have to wait then I don't want it' (Alex 11 & Field Notes).

Increasingly though, shopping for these pre-teens is linked with their desire to move beyond this family leisure activity. The social links between consumer goods and identity are understood by pre-teen girls. The pre-teen's desire to shop blends with a desire for friendships, autonomy, and independence outside her familial relationships (Lundby 2013). As Pugh suggests, children navigate their way in their social worlds 'with what they are given', and these pre-teen girls had been given the message that shopping centres and outlets were familiar and trusted places (2009, p. 214).

SHOPPING CENTRES: 'THEATRES OF THEIR DAY'

In Australia shopping takes place in large shopping centres, strip shopping in local neighbourhoods, and central business districts of cities and larger towns. DFOs (Direct Factory Outlets) are popular and online shopping continues to grow. Pre-teen girls are very familiar with their local shopping centres and the outlets they prefer. While shopping spaces offer pre-teen girls the opportunity to consume, they also represent important, and familiar, cultural spaces for the girls to negotiate friendships and identity (McRobbie 2008; Russell and Tyler 2002). Regular visits with their family have imparted valuable norms and rituals that offer pre-teen girls vital reference points to draw on as they negotiate relationships outside their family (Neeley 2005). With the shift in children's play and activities from the outdoors to indoors, Miles (2010, p. 113) poses the idea that shopping places hold appeal in contemporary societies because there 'is simply

nowhere else to go'. Alongside the fantasy world of tweens, Miles (2010, p. 93) suggests that shopping places have become 'theatres of their day' offering individuals a level of enjoyment and a space to escape from everyday life, even when the act of consumption does not transpire. Shopping centres 'dominate our urban landscape' and have been designed to be loud and bright, providing a stimulating and exciting social environment (Miles 2010, p. 93).

While the act of consuming is the intention of these spaces, they also offer a social experience for these girls 'that incorporates a sense of place' so that their visits to the shopping centre 'becomes more important than the actual purchase' (Miles 2010, p. 100). The importance of these local spaces beyond the actual act of consuming was not lost on these pre-teen girls. Promoting shopping centres and outlets as fantasy worlds of dress-ups, make-believe, and role-playing evocated memories of childhood games and interactions for the girls (Cody 2012; Harris 2005). Local shopping centres were identified by the girls in my study as important cultural spaces to negotiate friendships and to achieve a sense of belonging. As they reflected on their expectations of visiting shopping centres with friends, they anticipated feelings of 'fun', a place that: 'makes you feel sort of happy' and somewhere where 'you just you feel like you want to hang around' (Georgie 11, Alex 11). Links between the girls' desire for freedom and independence from their familial relationships and visiting their local shopping centres with friends were evident: 'you get more trust', reflects Sally (11), 'cause you can go to the movies and you don't have to have someone watch over you'.

Movie theatres in Australia are often incorporated into our larger shopping centres and *Highpoint* was no exception. It was often a visit to the movies to see the latest film that fuelled the girls' desire to go to *Highpoint* with their friends:

I think it was a few weeks ago, me, Maddie, Georgie and Lucas went to the movies. They went to my house first. We saw *Mall Cop*, it was good (Sally 11);

We went to the movies and that was really funny. We went to the restaurant right next to it and we were laughing so much that the guy walked up and said they can hear you next door you know (Kate 12).

The smaller shop centres, such as *Altona Gate* and *Werribee Plaza* didn't have the breadth of shops of *Highpoint* or the movie theatre attached but

the girls were equally familiar with these spaces. While the girls identified their local shopping centres as places they would like to spend time with friends exploring a new sense of freedom and independence their parents though were not always as sensitive to the girls' requests, 'I've never been out before by myself, I'm not allowed to' (Alex 11).

NEXT YEAR ... EVERYTHING OPENS UP

The girls' parents consistently told the girls they could not go shopping or to the movies without adults or older siblings present: 'I want more freedom, to go out shopping more, but my sister still has to come' (Sally 12). The desire to go to shopping centres or movies alone was clearly evident for all the girls: 'I want to go out shopping all by myself' (Georgie 11), 'go to places by myself' (Hayley 12), 'go places on my own' (Erin 12), and 'go to *Highpoint* alone' (Lindi 12).

While the girls suggested they wanted to go alone they clearly wanted to shop with their friends without parents or other family members supervising. The girls suggested their parents were overly restrictive in responding to their desire and requests for freedom and independence. The girls felt they were being perceived as children rather than pre-teens who were capable of pursuing their own activities without supervision or monitoring. As the parent of a pre-teen girl I recognised that the transition for these parents was challenging. In contemplating this decision I suggest that tween debates and discourses of innocence and vulnerability have blurred our ability to recognise these young girls as individuals outside of the commercial personae the tween market has created. The debates around the tween market have left us in a precarious place of uncertainty of how to respond to these young girls' desire to incorporate consumption spaces into their interactions with friends. The challenge I suggest is to understand how pre-teen girls might engage in these familiar and local spaces of consumption without being overwhelmed by the messages from the consumer-media tween culture (McRobbie 2008). The girls' frustrations were further enhanced by their parents' explanations:

You know what's weird, like this year we're not old enough to travel to places like *Highpoint* but next year some of us will be travelling to the other side of the city by ourselves. It's like this year I'm not allowed to do anything on my own, like concerts, but next year ... everything opens up. Why can't we just do it now? (Kate 12).

Kate's bewilderment is indicative of the girls' frustrations at having their desire for freedom thwarted throughout the year. Comments of 'not yet', 'next year', 'you are too young' are regularly related. However, as Hayley (12) points out, 'well most of, my parents say I'm too young. But I don't see why I'm too young, 'cause next year I'm just the same age until my birthday'. While I am not suggesting that the girls' parents are unaware of the social role of shopping centres, I am suggesting that there is a limited understanding of the emotional connection the girls feel, particularly as shopping centres have become important social spaces in contemporary Western nations. The gap between the girls' desire for freedom and to negotiate friendships in their familiar shopping spaces places them at odds with their parents' understanding of their key function, to sell the products the consumer-media tween culture promotes.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HANGING OUT

Explanations of the dilemma facing parents of pre-teens may also be located in concerns surrounding stranger danger, inappropriate behaviour by young people in shopping centres, as well as the seemingly endless products and services that generate a desire to consume in the pre-teen girl (Lamb and Brown 2006; Linn 2005). While the social aspect of shopping centres and other consumption spaces are widely recognised, they play a significant role in the social relationships and negotiations of freedom for pre-teen girls. Studies of pre-teens' engagement such as Russell and Tyler's (2002) *Thank Heaven for Little Girls* and Drake-Bridges and Burgess' (2010) *Personal Preferences of Tween Shoppers* have made valuable contributions to our understandings of pre-teens' engagement in specific retail outlets. As the girls increase their interactions with friends outside of school and their family, the significance of local, social spaces such as shopping centres increases. The girls are looking for opportunities to share time together independent of their families:

'I just enjoy hanging around with them 'cause we all, we have lots of fun' (Erin 12);

'We all like the same things', to engage in the opportunity to laugh together as, 'we like to be fun and funny and entertaining' (Mollie 12).

THE IN-BETWEENNESS OF FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE

Shopping has become an important social activity in Western developed nations and is central to the consumer-media tween culture. An engagement with the broader consumer-media culture was clearly evident in the everyday lives of these pre-teen girls. The girls demonstrated though that their shopping practices were not aligned with the consumer-media tween culture exclusively. While they expressed their enjoyment of shopping and buying things for themselves, the girls were reluctant to be defined by the 'born to shop' concept of tween culture. The desire to share their leisure time with friends was clearly evident and these pre-teen girls had very definite ideas of the activities that wanted to open up for them during their final year of primary school. Having friends and a place to belong were key motivating factors for these girls. The girls were looking for spaces to explore their increasing desire for freedom and independence with friends. They were looking for the opportunity to 'get trusted to go out, hang out with your friends' (Erin 12).

Shopping centres and outlets were recognised as familiar spaces where their interactions with friends could move from the supervision of parents and families. Shopping centres have been identified as the new leisure spaces entertaining and offering a space to escape from everyday life. Tween culture has made it difficult to shift our thinking from the consumption aspects of shopping centres and malls for this age group (Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Russell and Tyler 2002). Yet it is important to remember that the social role shopping centres play for adults is what these girls desire. These important social spaces, or 'theatres of their day', have become the 'places that matter' to pre-teen girls. Explorations of their significance to pre-teen girls' negotiations of friendship and belonging will assist us to better understand the role they play (Lundby 2013; Pugh 2009).

The decision as to whether they were given permission to explore these spaces with friends remains with their parents who may not be sensitive to the emotional connect of their desire to 'shop' with friends. The girls believed they were ready for this freedom—'I'm 12 now I can handle this' (Hayley 12), but their parents were not obviously in agreement. Their parents' responses of 'next year', 'not this year', or 'you are too young' further frustrated the girls. For them they were simply reminders of their place of in-betweenness, no longer a child but not yet a teenager.

Consuming Technology

PRE-TEEN GIRLS' TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN DESIRES

It would be remiss to write about pre-teen girls without an exploration of their consumption activities. The label 'born to shop' has not emerged from nothing and these girls have been socialised to consume since birth (Pitman 2005). They do not 'suddenly become consumers as young adults or teenagers' (Cook 2004a, p. 145). Pre-teen girls' consumption habits and their motivation to consume have been widely explored around the globe (Buckingham 2011; Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Siegel et al. 2004). The girls recognise the links between consumer goods and identity (Buckingham 2011; Cook 2004b; Pomerantz 2008). Much has been written about the clothes, make-up, and accessories designed to help the girls fashion their own style and identity (Pomerantz 2008). Scholars provide valuable and insightful studies of the girls' appearance based consumption activities (Pomerantz 2008; Russell and Tyler 2002). Even in a school environment where uniform is compulsory the girls' use of clothing, make-up, and accessories in negotiations of belonging makes a contribution to this scholarship. Pre-teens' consumption desires are broad and there are many products and services beyond clothes and accessories that are designed to target the girls' desires. A key aim of my work with pre-teen girls was to enable their voices to direct my understandings and focus on issues and activities that were relevant to them. For these pre-teens, in this space, their greatest expressed desire was for technology, and lots of

it. From iPods to laptops, digital cameras, and mobile phones, the girls wanted it all. They identified items such as mobile phones and iPods as reflecting their growing maturity. Even at the age of 11 and 12 these girls recognised that ‘when you get older you want more stuff, like mobiles, laptops and stuff like that’ (Rachel 11).

According to the US-based *Scholastic* books this desire is normal practice, as they argue that a pre-teen girl will at some point during this period ‘feel an almost irresistible force tugging at her’, which will be her desire for technology (Scholastic 2016). The technology identified by *Scholastic* includes the girls’ desire for online social media sites such as MySpace. For these pre-teens their desire for technological devices and online social media was evident but also extensive and, as a result, I am separating these desires, covering their technological longings here and their longing to join social media sites in the following chapter. In this exploration of technology I separate their desire for technology into two distinctly different sections. While much has been written about the negative effects of children’s technology use, these pre-teen girls shared their family’s engagement with technology. The girls share stories of technological devices that were embraced by their family, bringing them together to have fun and creating memories (Lott 2013; Pea et al. 2012; RCN 2016b). In the first part of this chapter I introduce their families’ experiences. Reflections such as Maddie’s story of her family’s game of Wii reveal valuable insight into families coming together to use technology in their leisure activities. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the technological product which was the girls’ greatest desire, a mobile phone. While a Wii brought Maddie’s family together, this consumer product will ultimately assist her and her friends to pursue the freedom and independence they desire.

The consumer-media tween culture promotes goods and products to pre-teen girls, seeking to create the desire to buy. However, marketers and advertisers are very aware that creating a desire in a pre-teen girl is not sufficient as her decision-making and consumer practices are intrinsically embedded in her local worlds. It is important to remember that pre-teen girls’ parents make the final decision about their consumption activity, particularly for expensive products like phones and laptops. The pre-teen girls’ consumption decisions are ultimately shaped by her family’s financial capacity and a social antenna that recognises the emotional value of the product. Marketers and advertisers know that to create the desire and understanding in both parties they have to create two distinctly different

messages. Creating or responding to the pre-teen girls' desire is important but equally so is creating a product that is acceptable and valued by the girls' parents, compelling them to buy.

Having chosen not to interview the girls' parents I cannot comment on their individual decisions but their agreement or reluctance was significant to my exploration. In an attempt to understand their parents' decisions I have drawn from broader social concerns around pre-teen and children's desire for technology. From the girls' responses and their conversations I am able to glean a level of insight into their parents' approval and often refusal in response to the girls' desire for a range of technological products. Drawing on broader social concerns enabled me to provide some insight into the possible motivations of this group of parents (MacDonald 2012). My insights understandably are filtered through the eyes of an 11 or 12 year old but, as I discovered when conducting research with this age group, it is difficult to separate the girls' narratives from their families. The girls' narratives and their families are inherently entwined and as a result provide valuable insights into their families' understanding of broader cultural norms and their own unique family practices (Pugh 2009, p. 93).

I begin this chapter with an exploration of the girls' desire for technological products and the way families have incorporated these into their leisure time. The girls' stories contrast with wider held concerns about the impact of technological devices on family leisure time. My motivation to include this discussion is to highlight the ways technological products can be embraced by families. From here the focus shifts as I explore the girls' overwhelming desire for technology that ultimately will assist them to explore freedom and independence outside their familial relationships. I introduce the girls' overwhelming desire to own a mobile phone. I contrast the girls' desires and expectations to own a mobile phone with wider social concerns around what age is appropriate for mobile phone ownership. I consider the tension that results from the girls' emotional connection to mobile phone ownership and the cultural norms that arguably inform their parents' decision-making.

TECHNOLOGY: UNITING PRE-TEENS AND FAMILIES

Exploring pre-teen girls' consumption activities in a primary school environment where a school uniform was compulsory could be limiting. This was far from the case though as the girls' consumption desires were clearly evident: 'I want an iPod, xBox 360, PS3 dresses, more money, Michael

Jackson CDs and a bigger room' (Georgie 11). It was also interesting to see how consumer products found their way to school over the course of the year—'It's Lindi's birthday. I comment on her yellow smiley earrings and she tells me they were a present from Mollie for her birthday' (Reflections). The school's advice to students to leave expensive items at home was clearly not adhered to. It was intriguing to see the number of iPods that emerged from pockets and bags when the girls' music teacher asked the students if they had access to one to record their creative endeavours during class.

There were inevitably two groups for each technological item, not surprisingly those who owned one and those who wanted to. It was clear from the girls' conversations that a phone was the most highly desired item on their 'list' of desired technology. The girls' lists included mobile phones, Nintendo DSs, Digital cameras, laptops, iPods, Xbox, Apple Mac, and tablets. The girls' desire was to own the products for their own purposes but there were instances where the family owned the technological device. Family leisure time was more evident when the product was owned by the family and not the girls. Maddie's enthusiasm for the family's new Wii was unforgettable: 'when we, (my mum, stepdad and me) first got our Wii we stayed up really late, like 2 o'clock in the morning, to play' (Maddie 11).

Maddie's enthusiasm about the fun she had with her family in the early morning hours was contagious. It was easy to 'see' Maddie, her mum, and stepdad lined up in front of the TV, caught up in their new toy, getting them 'off the couch and moving' and being entertained at the same time (PR Newswire 2007). The family fun was obvious and the lateness for Maddie in this moment irrelevant. Contrast this image with the often repeated advice that children's technology use needs to be 'managed': 'we've [mum and sons] had to have a lot of discussions about how much you might be on that [online] versus studying' (RCN 2016b). In a similar fashion Alex shared a weekend afternoon spent with her dad and close family friends playing with *Singstar*:

Well I play tennis, I play with my dad and we play a bit. And this weekend was a bit special because we went to my godbrother and godsister's house. And we played *Singstar* [Playstation game], it was fun (Alex 11).

Alex's insight into this 'special' day again demonstrates how new technologies can be utilised to create fun family activities. The image of Alex, her dad, and her 'godsiblings' singing and making up songs together is

intriguing, particularly as Alex is the most ‘born to shop’ pre-teen in this group of girls. She describes her family as ‘all shopaholics’ and provides us with some valuable insights into how important the act of consuming is to her family’s leisure activities:

Mostly all we (Rachel) talk about is shopping, my No. 1 favourite activity. There’s always pretty stuff, you add to your collection, there’s nothing better to do. I can’t find anything else but shopping. Sometimes I play on the computer but mostly I go shopping. I go shopping with Mum and Dad. I’ve shopped in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. We are all shopaholics in my family (Alex 11).

While Alex argues that her family constantly shops, her story of a weekend afternoon on *Singstar* reveals how they utilise their purchases in family leisure activities. Alex’s suggestion that this was ‘special’ indicates the pleasure she gained from this time spent with her dad and technology. In contrast, Susan’s favourite family activity takes a step back in time but the activity is still focused around a technological product: ‘well on Saturdays we all camp out in the lounge room and watch old classics. Like, just old movies, like *Gone with the Wind* and stuff’ (Susan 12).

New technologies have overtaken items such as television when we consider the products children and pre-teens desire. Susan’s insights though reveal another opportunity where family togetherness and leisure time combine with technology at the centre of the activity. Susan loves to watch old classic movies, and it is clear to see that she is influenced by the emotional connection of sitting down with her family in front of a screen in the lounge. At a time where families are ‘spending more time in the home’, insights such as Susan’s are valuable as we build up understandings of the ways Australian families negotiate family time and relationships with the complex issue of consumption (Buckingham 2011, p. 148).

The girls’ reflections of family activities that combine with technological devices provided valuable insights into the ways contemporary families are spending their leisure time. Other desired items for the girls included iPods, Xboxs, DSs, and Laptops. While we may bemoan the time children and pre-teens spend on technology, there is evidence here that products are being used to create new leisure activities for families. Customers of the Nintendo Wii suggested that the ‘Wii help[ed] them [family members] to stay active and fit and also gives them another reason to be together as a family’ (PR Newswire 2007). Ultimately though, the product that was the

girls' greatest desire would assist them to move away from their familial relationships and the family times they share. The girls' desire to own a mobile phone, the type of phone they would choose, and how they would use it, was overwhelming and constantly the topic of conversation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS

Pre-teen girls are not unlike teenagers who we know want to find ways to experience freedom and independence. They are keen to experience the 'sense of belonging and connectedness that friendship brings' (Pratt and George 2005, pp. 23–24). These pre-teens were no different as they shared the things they liked about their friends:

I don't know, they [friends] are just really nice and friendly and easy to get along with. She [Hayley] is just funny and yeah she's nice and friendly and yeah (Mollie 12);

They sort of just make you feel like, you want to be hung around with. Makes you feel sort of special (Rachel 11);

Well Susan, she's my best friend, we've kinda been best friends for a very long time and we always make each other laugh no matter what. And Holly, she's kinda weird but funny and Lindi, well we've got a lot in common so we're really good friends in that way and we make each other laugh (Kate 12);

She's (Erin) good to keep secrets and we have this thing we just click and, we're very, everyone thinks that we're like sisters, twins (Alex 11).

Being excluded by their friends and peers was a constant fear for these pre-teen girls. Having no friends, or no one to play with at school, was a constant consideration for the girls. The girls were constantly negotiating with their friends and peers to protect themselves from this reality (Hamm and Faircloth 2005; Thorne 1993). The girls who had been at Western Heights Primary since Prep had options available to them that they had nurtured in their earlier years. Although as Sally points out, there are no guarantees that they will let you join in with them in the playground:

I was just playing with them because Maddie and Georgie aren't here today and that's who I normally play with. I felt a bit lonely 'cause there wasn't

really much to do but then, I wasn't playing with them I was playing with some other people—I was hoping they would let me play with them as well (Sally 11).

For Georgie, Hayley, and Rachel (who had only arrived at Western Heights Primary School the previous year) the negotiations were harder as they had to find a place for themselves amongst girls who had spent the past six years together, albeit not always as friends:

'Cause it's happened to me over a couple of times, I've had this friend and she looked really nice and everything. We were friends for a couple of weeks and then we weren't ever playing with each other and everything, because she met these new friends and then, I was all alone. Then I found new friends and it became better and better and yeah. So it was like this really good thing, then there was this problem and then I found a solution (Georgie 11).

Georgie recognised that friendship negotiations don't always work out favourably. They require constant evaluation and consideration to ensure that her time at Western Heights Primary School is not spent 'being lonely', 'sad', or 'losing self-confidence', 'being depressed' or worse, 'not belonging'. As identified in previous school studies of friendship and belonging, these girls were very familiar with the intricacies of their current friendships and the complex negotiations they have undertaken (George 2007; Hamm and Faircloth 2005; Pugh 2009). They recognise that their friendships have changed throughout their primary school years and that their current friends had not always been as appealing. The girls in Susan's group share their recollections of pre-friendship negotiations from Year 3 when they didn't always like the girls who made up their tight friendship group now:

I don't know but at the start I didn't actually like Susan (Lindi 12);

I know (Susan 12);

Because she was dragging Kate away from us (Lindi 12);

I was friends with her 'cause I was with Lindi and I started being friends with Susan and then moved towards her, and then stopped playing with Lindi (Kate 12);

And then Lindi didn't like me (Susan 12);

I tried to introduce them together but they were just like, no (Kate 12);

And now, and now we've got our handshakes and everything (Holly 12);

And now, now we're like friends (Susan 12);

It's kind of like a full circle you know (Mollie 12).

As George (2007, p. 57) suggests, 'friendship is neither simple nor universal' but the girls' subjective position in complex negotiations was insightful and highly nuanced. They recognised that friendships were fluid and consistently changing. The constancy and complexity of changing friendships ensured they were skilled negotiators in this space (Thorne 1993). They had also been supported in friendship negotiations in their earlier primary school years by their teachers and parents. Despite the everyday challenges the girls' interactions and negotiations 'certainly provided the necessary and minimum conditions for access of forms of acceptable sociality' in the school space (Hey 1997, p. 127).

TAKING CONTROL OF FRIENDSHIP NEGOTIATIONS

The girls recognised that their parents and teachers had often assisted them in their friendship negotiations. The girls remembered difficult negotiations that were assisted by teachers who intervened in an attempt to help them work through the complex issues they faced:

Oh maybe in Year 2 [I had no one to play with] this girl Allie, we're good friends now, but she was a bully and it got so bad it got to the stage where we had to have a meeting with Mrs Jones (Vice-Principal) and our teacher, sat down with some of the girls around a table [to help us be friends] and that wasn't great (Lindi 11).

Experiences like Lindi's were evident throughout the girls' reflections of earlier primary school years, yet they suggested that teachers' interventions were not always appreciated. Lindi's aversion to adult intervention was apparent during her Year 5 all-girls experience when her parents approached her teacher with concerns about a changing friendship. Lindi

acknowledged that the friendship had changed but insisted there was nothing that needed to be rectified or fixed; their friendship had simply changed. The girls did not actively seek assistance from their parents but there were occasions when the external intervention made negotiations of friendship easier. Moving to Western Heights Primary School in Year 5 was a difficult period for Rachel. Although she moved schools with Hayley she was concerned about how she would be accepted by the other girls. While the friendship between Rachel and Hayley was not as strong now, they both suggested that making the move together helped them to settle into Western Heights Primary School (George 2007). A connection between her mum and Alex's aunty also helped to make the transition a little easier: 'well Alex's aunty and my mum worked together last year and her aunty told my mum about Alex and then we became best friends' (Rachel 11).

Despite this successful outcome the girls were more focused on undertaking their own negotiations of friendship. These girls are not dissimilar to teenagers who are looking for new ways to negotiate freedom and independence outside their familial relationships (Bond 2010a; Boyd 2014). While pre-teens don't identify themselves as teenagers, they clearly see themselves as having left their childhood behind and they wanted some recognition of their increasing maturity and capabilities (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Harris 2005). Looking for new ways to communicate with their friends outside of school the girls' greatest desire was to own 'a mobile phone, that's all I want' (Holly 12). For those who already owned one, a newer up-to-date version was desired—'I know, I want to get a new mobile phone now' (Mollie 12). A mobile phone's link to negotiations of friendship and the possibility of freedom and independence drove the girls' desire. The girls identified a phone as an important communication tool to navigate friendships and their longed for freedom outside their familial relationships (Bond 2014). The girls' engagement with technology was not dissimilar to comments you may align from teenagers. Lindi (11) suggests, 'I keep in touch with technology'. The girls clearly identified owning a mobile phone as creating new opportunities for them to keep in touch with their friends and minimise the risk of being left out of conversations, or worse, being excluded. Being given permission to own a mobile phone also acknowledged their increasing maturity. The ability to communicate directly with friends was embraced by those who owned one:

Yeah I have a mobile phone, and my friend has one and we have phone conversations. We make plans, we were going to... we were going to go

ice skating but I was, or she was busy, so we rang and changed [our plans] (Mollie 12).

The girls without a phone were frustrated with their parents' decisions, not convinced that their parents recognised the importance of their social connection to mobile phone ownership. Mobile phone ownership is ultimately not the sole decision of pre-teen girls though as their consumption activities remain largely dependent on their family's financial capacity and approval.

CONFLICTING DESIRES

While the girls were motivated by a desire to communicate with friends, it would appear that their parents' considerations of mobile phone ownership were influenced in different ways. Hayley tried to relate her parents' refusal back to the rules that operate within her home but found their explanation did not fit with other family guidelines: 'Like, not having a mobile phone that's not a rule, but they won't let me' (Hayley 12). While it is difficult to understand their parents' motivations, agreeing to the girls request for a mobile phone may enable them to experience a 'sense of security' that results from being able to be constantly in contact (Bond 2014, p. 2). If the girls were not granted freedom outside the family's influence it could also be argued that they didn't need to own a mobile phone. The challenge for the girls was to ensure their parents recognised their emotional connection to owning a phone. Inexperienced users, reliant on their parents' approval to use their phones, there were many layers of control parents could negotiate. They could phone or text the girls at any stage, making the response to their calls a condition of ownership. Further complicating the girls' negotiations was their financial dependence as they did not have part-time jobs and were reliant on their parents to purchase and support an ongoing mobile phone plan. The decision of which phone to purchase was also important as increasingly 'sophisticated smart phones are making their ways into the hands of the younger pre-teens' (Ross 2008). While there is some appeal in the physical aspect of a phone, the primary motivation for these pre-teen girls was to communicate with friends, negotiate their friendships and activities and, if they were lucky enough to own a smartphone, access the internet.

The girls' frustration were intensified by their parents' inability to recognise the localised nature of their desires. These pre-teens argued that

they weren't asking to communicate with strangers. Their focus was on their local environment and their existing relationships. They wanted to communicate and interact with their peers from school, church, sporting endeavours, and their family friends (Bond 2010a, 2014). Planning their weekend away at the beach would have been easier and more fun if Hayley and her friend had been able to contact each other on their own mobile phones. Mobile phones introduced new layers of decision-making for the girls' parents who tried to make sense of the cultural norms around mobile phone ownership for this age group amidst the girls' desire for increased freedom. The cost of the phone and their girls' ability to look after their phones was one consideration. The girls' desire to use their phone to negotiate their friendships beyond their familial relationships was another consideration. The links between the girls' increasing desire for freedom and independence and mobile phone ownership could be quite confronting for some parents. For those considering smartphones, the issue of online access and activity was another key concern. Smartphones enabled the girls to access the internet in addition to making calls and texting (Parenting 2013). This benefit opened up the opportunity for the girls to access the World Wide Web from their phone. The girls weren't all convinced about these benefits; 'I think iPhones are too fancy' (Hayley 12), although Alex had a different opinion—'I think they're cool' (Alex 11). As their parents tried to make sense of the girls' desires and their emotional connection to mobile phone ownership the girls were not shy in sharing their frustrations. As Lindi (12) declares, 'it's not fair, and I think you're [parents] really mean'.

WHAT AGE IS APPROPRIATE?

These girls suggested that mobile phone ownership had become an accepted cultural norm for pre-teens in Western nations. Erin's (11) declaration 'can you believe it, I don't have a laptop, a mobile phone, an iPod or anything like that' demonstrates the unfairness she feels at not being allowed to join her peers in owning a mobile phone or other modern technology. The limited number of mobile phones amongst this group suggests that this understanding is clearly not espoused by her parents. Like most aspects of parenting though there are no set rules of how to interpret cultural norms when making decisions. The rapidly changing nature of technology makes the establishment of cultural norms fluid and in constant flux. Without speaking to the girls' parents it is difficult to determine

their specific concerns about mobile phone ownership but it appears that they are operating under different and arguably ‘competing cultural ideas or frame[works]’ than those asserted by the girls (Pugh 2009, p. 54). In Australia, and other Western nations, the decision to give an 11 or 12 year old a mobile phone is complex and is considered to be deeply embedded in the girls’ own family relationships (Lindsay and Maher 2013).

Estimates from an Australian study undertaken in 2009 suggest that a third of children under the age of 14 owned a mobile phone. This study showed that mobile phone ownership increased with a child’s age. Up to 85 per cent of 15–18-year-olds owned their own phones compared to 31 per cent of 8–10-year-olds and 69 per cent in the 11–14 age groups (ABS 2011; ACMA 2010). It was estimated in 2013 that 35 per cent of Australian primary school children, primarily between the ages of 8 and 11, had their own mobile phones, with similar statistics reflected in nations around the globe (ACMA 2016). In the UK four in ten children aged 5–15 (42 per cent) have a mobile phone of some kind and one in three (35 per cent) children aged 5–15 have a smartphone. The likelihood of owning a smartphone increases with the age of the child, at just 4 per cent of 5–7s, one in four 8–11s (24 per cent), and seven in ten 12–15s (69 per cent) (Ofcom 2015). The pre-teen age group and the girls in my study were part of this steep trajectory towards mobile phone ownership. While exact figures of smartphone ownership for this age group in Australia were not available, it is estimated that around 69 per cent of teenagers owned a smartphone (Raco 2014).

Research suggests that parents are being asked to consider a range of issues including health, biological, and developmental issues when making their decision around mobile phone ownership. Concerns around the rapid physiological changes and developing nervous systems facing this age group are present, specifically around radiation exposure, headaches and fatigue from mobile phone use (Inyang et al. 2010; Zheng et al. 2015). Fatigue is raised as a common concern for parents who are worried about the addictive nature of mobile phones keeping their child up late at night talking with friends. Worry about the direct links to online sites from smartphones merge with concerns of bullying, harassment, and cyber-safety as parents feel they are unable to effectively monitor their pre-teens’ usage (Inyang et al. 2010; Pea et al. 2012; Zheng et al. 2015). Parents are also confronted with the financial responsibility of phones, plans, or unexpected bills from inexperienced users. The pre-teen age group are unlikely to be financially independent, and none of the girls in my study had part-time jobs. This is not unusual though as young Australians tend to start

looking for part-time work when they are 14 years and over. Added to these parental concerns are the widely debated concerns around the practice of sexting. I will return to this concern shortly. Lindsay and Maher (2013, p. 35) suggest that consumption decisions in families are complex, but their main motivation is on ‘maintaining and sustaining family’. Despite their frustrations, these girls still respected their parents’ decision-making: ‘when your Mum say’s you’re not old enough to do that [own a phone], then no you can’t do that yet’ (Georgie 11).

FAMILY INFLUENCE

While the majority of these girls longed for a mobile phone, Mollie, Maddie, and Georgie were the proud owners of one. Mollie (11) said she just persevered; ‘I just kept asking my mum and dad and they gave me one [a mobile phone]’. ‘It works’, she declares. It is difficult, without speaking to them, to ascertain why her parents gave her permission but it could be argued that in some way they recognised and understood her connection to the social freedom a mobile phone offered. They may also have been working under different understandings of the cultural norms for this group of girls. Mollie argues that all it took was perseverance but the negotiations were not as straightforward for the remaining girls. At the very least I suggest that the girls’ overwhelming desire to own a mobile phone presents their parents with, arguably, the largest (financial) and complex consumption decision to date. There are no rules for parents around when a child is ready to own a mobile phone, so understanding broader cultural norms and their own social antennae play a significant role in their decision-making (Bond 2014). Parents are encouraged to establish why their pre-teen wants a phone and to speak to the parents of her friends to gain an understanding of the cultural norms at work in their specific location (Parenting 2016; RCN 2016a). This advice obviously works on the assumption that there are connections between the girls’ parents that enable them to approach other parents for advice. Connections between Mollie’s and the other girls’ parents were not obvious and it would appear that they functioned independently of other parents in her friendship groups. In this instance their independent status worked in her favour, as Mollie’s mobile phone ownership was not replicated by her friends.

It is difficult to know whether the girls’ parents spoke to each other about their mobile phone decisions. Throughout the year it was evident that some parents communicated about the girls and their circle of

friends—‘yep we are having netball tonight and Holly always comes to my place before it so we can just walk up’ (Susan 12). While Susan and Holly may have initiated this after-school plan, their parents are obviously a party to this arrangement and communicate with each other about the girls. The members of Susan’s group often spend time together outside of school hours. This is evident in their discussions of weekend and holiday activities when two or all of them have got together to go to a movie or attend birthday parties. The connectedness between these parents was evident when the girls spent the day playing football, Australian Rules style, at the Victorian state finals. Kate’s mum came out to watch and at the end of the last game she organised to take Holly and Susan home with her. Lindi had already gone home with her dad but there was no suggestion from either parent that they would also take Mollie, who had spent the whole day with this group of girls:

Mollie’s connection to this group is not always tight but today was one of the occasions when she was clearly a part of their activities. By excluding Mollie from the trip home, Kate’s mum has further reinforced the friendship of Kate, Holly and Susan (Field Notes).

Mollie’s location on the periphery of Susan’s group was obvious from the start of the year and I made many notes about her limited connectedness to this group:

Mollie’s friend Pippi [a fellow student] is not here today and it is interesting to observe her in relation to the bigger group of Lindi, Susan, Kate and Holly. Mollie has strong affiliations with these girls but is not an integral part of the group. Without Pippi she is looking a little unsure of herself as she functions as a peripheral member on the outer edge of the group (Field Notes).

Wanting to ascertain Mollie’s awareness of her complex negotiations of friendship I asked her about her negotiation of groups in the classroom:

Who would be your group in the classroom? (Researcher);

Oh four? Maybe me, Hayley and Pippi, and maybe, that’s a hard one (Mollie);

Yeah, maybe Rachel ’cause I get along well with her as well (Mollie).

Mollie has not made any reference to Susan's group at this stage, despite spending the majority of her time in the playground with them. She turned instead to other friends in the class as her preferred partners when working in groups of four or less. Increasing the group size to five or more though brings Susan and her group into consideration:

Yeah that's fair, what about five? (Me);

Oh that would be um, Kate, Susan, Lindi and Holly 'cause they're my best friends (Mollie 12).

Mollie's next statement appears to defend her place in her preferred group: 'I don't have a problem; it's just that I have Hayley and Pippi as well' (Mollie 12). Despite her attempt to assure me it was all fine with her, Mollie's comments clearly indicate an awareness of her peripheral and arguably precarious location in this friendship group. They also demonstrate an understanding of the limitations to her belonging with this group. Mollie's understanding of the complex nature of her friendships and her considerations and negotiations of belonging within the class are highly nuanced. She has clearly given consideration to her own actions and behaviours. While Mollie appeared comfortable with her friendship options I pondered how influential parents are in the girls' considerations of friendship (MacDonald 2014).

My day at the state football finals provided some insights. Offering to drive some of the girls home after school sporting events is not an unusual practice. It does, however, demonstrate a relationship between the parents and families. In offering to drive Susan and Holly home, Kate's mum was not obviously excluding Mollie; however, in doing so she has affirmed the friendship of these girls and reinforced Mollie's place on their periphery. The relationship between the parents was obvious as the girls were only allowed to leave with Kate's mum with permission from their parents. An established connection and communication between their parents certainly smoothens the way for particular friendships but not others, enabling activities for Kate, Susan, Lindi, and Holly that were not possible for Mollie. While the social location of pre-teens' parents was not the focus of my research, it added another layer of complexity to the girls' friendships. There was evidence in the girls' stories of 'familial and community forms of control' family connections influencing the girls' con-

siderations and negotiations of friendships (Hey 1997, p. 134). I would argue that these girls intuitively understood that there was a social order that was influenced by their parents' social location (Pugh 2009). The girls recognised that this social order enabled some friendships to develop more than others and assisted them to achieve a greater sense of belonging with some of the girls.

Alongside Mollie's experiences with her friendship group it was Georgie's relationship with her boyfriend, Nigel, which demonstrated the significance of parents' influence and control in the girls' everyday negotiations of friendship and belonging. Georgie arrived at Western Heights in Year 5 and had found it difficult to make friends and form connections with the girls. Her attempts to be friends with some of the other girls reveal her desire to fit in and belong straight away:

I walked in the door and I heard someone say, she's got brown hair and she's like me. I was a bit lonely then I met Alison and Alice. I'm not so good friends with Alana, I still talk to Alice, but not much, about once a month. I talk to Alison a lot and then I met Sally and Maddie. You don't want to be all lonely and sitting there. Having friends is a good thing (Georgie 11).

Georgie formed part of the tenuous friendship of Sally, Maddie, and herself. It was around mid-year that Georgie announced that she had a boyfriend, Nigel. He lived with his dad and they were family friends of Georgie's ('well my mum and that are good friends with Nigel, we know his dad and we're good friends' Georgie 11). Struggling to find a place to fit in and belong with her other Year 6 peers also enabled Georgie to have someone to play with at recess and lunchtime and to achieve a sense of belonging:

Well as you already know he's my BF, my boyfriend, yeah well he's helped me feel like I belong here because I've known him for 2 years and he's been here longer than I have. He's a family, family, like really good family friend. So he's helped out a lot and he was nice and everything and yeah (Georgie 12).

Georgie identifies the significance of their family connection to their relationships. I would argue too that their families conveyed approval for the relationship, enabling them to communicate and spend time together outside of the school environment. The friendship Nigel offered, the intersec-

tion of their family's social location, and similar family practices enabled Georgie to achieve a sense of belonging at school that was not satisfied by her small, and somewhat fractured, friendship group (Hamm and Faircloth 2005). What is less clear though is their parents' awareness of the influence and control they have over the girls' negotiations of friendships.

PRE-TEENS' DESIRE OR CORPORATE POWER

The limited number of pre-teens with mobile phones in this group restricts my ability to contribute to discussions around pre-teens' mobile phone usage, inappropriate or otherwise. There were some insights though:

Well me and Pippi we usually text each other and then well sometimes we call each other. Sometimes we call to make plans (Mollie 12);

I would like to have MSN to talk to my friends at home, not on the mobile phone which uses money. I would ring them around twice a week. They don't have phones. Mainly I ring Sally and Georgie to have a chat. Occasionally we organise stuff (Maddie 12).

My findings enabled me to consider one of the key points of contention surrounding the tween market. Divisive arguments of whether it is pre-teen girls' choice or the corporate power of marketers, producers, advertisers, or retailers who drive this targeted consumer market resonate around the globe (Hamilton 2008; Lamb and Brown 2006). While anti-consumer groups argue that pre-teen girls are incapable of understanding the consumer media's intent, research suggests that they are agentic in their consumption desires (Harris 2005; Pomerantz 2008; Russell and Tyler 2002). While the pre-teen's role in her consumption choices may challenge our understandings of childhood innocence and vulnerability, it would be difficult to argue that the desire demonstrated by these pre-teen girls is generated solely by marketing campaigns (Cook and Kaiser 2004). To argue this would be to ignore the cultural norms and social milieu that influence the girls' desire for freedom and negotiations of belonging in their everyday lives.

My findings suggest that these girls are 'highly knowledgeable about the multifaceted use of mobile phones' and unquestioning about their ability to manage them (Bond 2010a, p. 526). The girls conveyed a confidence which suggested they considered themselves to be instant, expert

users of this technology, aware of the dangers, but convinced that they were equipped to deal with issues that arose. Familiar with mobile phone use within their families these confident pre-teens believed they were equipped to deal with the ‘dangers’ of owning a mobile phone. While mobile phone ownership was clearly top of their list of desires, the actual make or type of phone they wanted to own was less evident. While the girls differentiated between a mobile phone and a smartphone there was limited discussion about the make they wanted. This may be a result of limited knowledge of the different makes available but I would contribute some of their lack of choice to their understanding that they would receive a second-hand phone passed down to them from their parents or older siblings. Their lack of conversation about make or type also reinforces my understandings that it was the communication aspects of the phone that was the most desired aspect of this technology.

WHO BEARS THE COST

With 76 per cent of 12–14-year-old Australians and 77 per cent of 12–15s in the UK now owning a mobile phone it could be argued that ownership has become an accepted cultural norm for this age group (ABS 2011; ACMA 2010; Langer 2005; Ofcom 2015). Interestingly though Inyang et al. (2010) found that socio-economic status may be relevant to mobile phone usage for Australian children and adolescents. While it could be assumed that lower socio-economic groups are more restricted by financial constraints, Inyang et al.’s (2010) study found that the least regular usage is found in the highest socio-economic group. While he suggests further exploration is required to consider this specific demographic, it could be argued that mobile phone ownership for this age group spans the different socio-economic groups. The increasing levels of mobile phone ownership for this age group suggest that it has become an accepted part of our broader cultural norms for children in the 8–15 age group (ABS 2011; ACMA 2010). Inyang et al.’s (2010) findings suggest that beyond factors such as financial capacity, cultural norms are influencing parental decisions for mobile phone ownership in the pre-teen age group.

It is less evident though who bears the cost of pre-teens’ inappropriate mobile phone usage. While excessive monthly mobile phones bills are of concern for parents, arguably their greatest concern is the issue of ‘sexting’. While there has been limited research into the rate of sexting amongst the pre-teen age group, there is evidence of their engage-

ment with the practice and it is considered to be of concern to many parents (Campbell and Park 2014; Hasinoff 2012; Mitchell et al. 2012; Ringrose et al. 2012). Ringrose et al. (2012, p. 7) argue that the greatest threat for young people's technology usage is not stranger danger but the 'technology-mediate sexual pressure from their peers'. The practice of sexting can be described as the creation of sexually explicit messages or images that are shared by sending or posting via mobile phones, the internet, or other electronic devices. Girls are most likely to be affected by this 'non gender-neutral practice' (Ringrose et al. 2012, p. 7). There was no evidence here of the girls sexting or receiving inappropriate requests to share sexually explicit messages. However this does not mean it didn't occur. While government inquiries and explorations of the incidence of sexting for young people are being undertaken, very little is known about the level at which the younger pre-teen age groups are affected (Bond 2010b, Dobson et al. 2012, Ringrose et al. 2012).

The purchase of a mobile phone for Mollie, Maddie, and Georgie indicates that their parents have considered the cost and risks of their ownerships and acknowledged their emotional connection to this new communication medium. The girls' awareness of this, and understanding of the ongoing cost and responsibility of owning a mobile phone, is difficult to determine. While the girls acknowledged some of the risks, the issues of sexting or conversations about financial affordability were non-existent. The absence of concerns around sexting may have been the girls' hesitancy to discuss these with me, or their parents' reluctance to bring the issue to their attention at this age. A possible explanation for the cost aspect could be an increasing financial resilience in Australian families, many of whom are increasingly able to be more responsive to the increasing consumption desires of each family member (Langer 2005; Lindsay and Maher 2013; Poole 2005). Although, the increasing incidence of families seeking assistance for financial crises is a reminder that not all families are in a position to respond to the technological desires of pre-teens (The Age 2016). For many families an understanding of the girls' desire is insufficient if the family budget is unable to respond to these expensive requests. It is important to note that for these girls smartphones were not obviously part of their parents' considerations. With statistics indicating that mobile phone ownership is occurring at younger ages the financial aspects of mobile phone ownership are an important consideration for parents. For these pre-teens, at least, a new phone was not automatically

part of their desire as some girls anticipated a phone being handed down from their older siblings or parents.

The price of mobile phones was rarely discussed, with Hayley (12) the only one who revealed some insight into her family's capacity to purchase consumer goods: 'Maybe because families are busy now, especially if you have other siblings. Like you have to go, to get more money and yeah'. It is difficult to understand the reasons behind this absence. However increasing levels of disposable incomes in Australian families may be reducing the conversations, and ultimately awareness, of how children's consumer habits are incorporated into the family's financial considerations. Ultimately though, there is a cost to families and mobile phone usage amongst young people has been shown to incur considerable debt (Inyang et al. 2010). Having given their approval, it would appear that Mollie's, Maddie's, and Georgie's parents have considered the cost of a mobile phone to be within their financial capacity. While pre-teens are considered to exert significant influence over the family's consumption decisions, my findings suggest that there are some products that are not a straightforward financial decision. In the case of mobile phones I argue that cost may have been the motivation for parents to refuse their girls' requests; however, it is possible that their social antennae was influenced by other significant social concerns and understandings of cultural norms.

TOO YOUNG ... BUT WHY?

Arguably the greatest frustration for these pre-teen girls was to be constantly told, 'you are too young' or 'next year'. They found this response difficult to make sense of, particularly when they believed that their parents were likely to agree to their mobile phone ownership even though they will be the same age. The key to their frustration I suggest lies not in their age but rather in their parents' social antennae regarding the changes to take place for the girls in the next year or so. For Australian pre-teens, the next year sees them making the transition from primary to secondary school. There are three key providers of education in Australia: government (or public), catholic, and independent organisations. Particularly in the government sector there is a general trend to send primary-school-aged children to their local primary school. This attitude shifts for secondary school where parents start to shop around for the 'best education' and some children travel significant distances to attend their secondary school. While there are no written rules, it is becoming an accepted part

of Australian culture that young people are be given a mobile phone as part of their transition to secondary school (RCN 2016a). Inyang et al. (2010) suggest in their study that mobile phone ownership is viewed as a status symbol by young Australians. I reflected on the increasing ownership for this age group as almost a rite of passage that has become a part of the transition from primary to secondary school. Hayley demonstrates the connection, when she declares:

Well you didn't want it last year but this year, because you're going off to high (secondary) school. Most parents say I'm too young. But I don't see why I'm too young, 'cause next I'm just the same age but, until my birthday, and I get a phone at the start of the year (Hayley 12).

Whether mobile phone ownership for pre-teens is a rite of passage, a status symbol, or deeply entrenched in Australian cultural norms, the decision of when to purchase a child their own mobile phone appears to stem not from the girls' shift from childhood to their teenage years but one that has been influenced by our educational system. The transition from primary to secondary school for Australian children occurs when they are aged between 11 and 13. In many rural and regional environments children go to their local schools and don't add any additional travel to their school day. In Australian cities, and larger regional cities and towns, parents invoke their right to choose the most appropriate education for their children. In many instances this results in children and young people travelling on buses, trams, and trains across cities and for extended periods of time. The desire to keep in touch with children during their daily commutes has seen in mobile phone ownership becoming more prevalent at this time. The increasing numbers of mobile phone ownership during this period appears to support this (ABS 2011; ACMA 2010).

Hayley's argument is valid and her frustrations are real. She turned 12 in June and will not turn 13 until the same time next year so the issue in her mind is not about her age but her parents using this as an excuse to delay her desire. Understanding her parents' motivations did not ease Hayley's frustrations. Susan and Erin struggled too with their parents' decisions. The 'not yet' responses and unwavering refusal to consider a mobile phone in their final year of primary school only furthered the girls' frustrations with their place of in-betweenness.

Educational issues are a major consideration for parents when considering when to agree to mobile phone ownership for their pre-teen. Reports

that young people stay up late, hiding phones in bedrooms so they can communicate with their friends during the night or early morning has been identified as a concern for parents and teachers. Studies have found that there are links between mobile phone usage and sleep deprivation which can ultimately result in poor academic performances (Inyang et al. 2010; Pea et al. 2012). Further explorations of mobile phone usage in this age group suggest that they may be used to exclude others from conversations. Issues around bullying, harassment, and intimidation are also considered to be concerning for Australian parents as mobile phone usage restricts their awareness, and control, of interactions taking place between their pre-teen and her peers (Davie et al. 2004).

TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN IN-BETWEENNESS

The position of in-betweenness, which I argue underpins the broader concept of tween, was clearly evident in the parents' comments and the girls' frustrations. The response of 'not yet', 'next year', 'you are too young' from their parents reinforced the girls' understanding of their ambiguous position of in-betweenness, positioned between their childhood and teenage years. While their parents acknowledged the girls' increasing desire for freedom and independence and demonstrated a respect for the girls' growing maturity, in many ways these were not always appreciated by the girls. They acknowledged that some parental decisions recognised their increasing maturity: 'they respect me a lot more. Because they trust me to do things, like walking the dog on my own, things like that' (Sally 12). The girls even understood that increased household chores, caring for siblings, staying home alone, or even having their own bedroom were all demonstrations of their growing maturity—"cause you're getting older now and they sort of have to trust you, and when they do they let you do stuff' (Erin 12). While the girls recognised their parents' attempts, they were more interested in them understanding that consumer products such as mobile phones were the key markers of the independence and maturity they desired.

The girls entered Year 6 at around the same stage that their desire for freedom and independence outside of home increased. The girls were very aware of the significance of their transition from primary school to secondary school but they didn't want this to be the motivation for their parents to delay approval. Their play dates and get-togethers with friends outside of school hours during their earlier primary school years had

largely been negotiated by their parents. The necessity for ownership of a mobile phone during these years had been minimal, although the girls had already taken control over some of their negotiations of friendship outside of school, using their parents' home phones to communicate. They identified a mobile phone as a key element in their ability to engage with their peers without supervision or intervention. The girls didn't want to be told to wait, their desire to communicate with their friends and peers was compelling, and they wanted their mobile phone now. They considered their request for a mobile phone to be reasonable and had identified ownership as an accepted cultural norm for their age group. Confident in their ability to use and manage a mobile phone they were largely unaware of the complex social and cultural milieu that surrounds the pre-teen age group and their consumption desires.

There is however, for parents of pre-teens, a large gap between supporting and encouraging a tween's independence and responsibility through inexpensive family activities, and supporting a desire for independence through the ownership of expensive up-to-date technology, particularly technology which opens up a new world of constant connectivity and possible online activities that cannot be constantly monitored. Debates and considerations of the appropriate age for mobile phone ownership in Australia and other Western developed nations abound. This is a complex and complicated space where cultural norms, local practices, social commentary, children's development, psychology, cultural norms, and local practices contribute to the parents' social antennae. While it could be argued that mobile phone ownership for this age group has become a cultural norm, the girls' desires and expectations conflict with their parents' understandings and accepted local practices. The girls identify freedom from owning a mobile phone, yet parents are being advised that they can extend their level of control while allowing increased independence for their child or pre-teen:

One way for you and your child to contact each other whenever you need to. It can give you peace of mind and help keep your child safe when she's out without adult supervision (RCN 2016a).

I am not advocating here for earlier mobile phone ownership for these girls, as the decision is inherently complex. There has been limited research of the younger pre-teen age groups' mobile phone usage and much of our understanding is adapted from explorations of teen and adolescent usage. I

want though to highlight the disparity that exists between the girls' desires and their parents' understandings of cultural norms that compounds the girls' feelings of in-betweenness. If the girls' desire stems from a motivation to communicate and negotiate friendships, their parents' appear to be motivated by a desire to extend their parental control over the increasing freedom of their pre-teen. This suggests that the girls' emotional connection to owning a mobile phone is not fully understood by parents. It is not possible to understand this disparity without speaking to the girls' parents; however, there are clear indications that they are being influenced by differing cultural norms. The challenge for pre-teens' parents is to consider their understanding of the debates, social commentary, and other parents' views alongside the girls' emotional connection to using a mobile phone to negotiate friendships.

The level of mobile phone ownership for 8–12-year-olds has increased dramatically and the pre-teen age group is positioned on the sharp trajectory of ownership that occurs, in Australia and other Western developed nations, between the ages of 8 (31 per cent) and 15 (85 per cent) (ABS 2011; ACMA 2010). My understandings from this group of pre-teen girls and their parents suggest that there remains a confusion around what is the appropriate age, and the motivations for agreeing to ownerships. While these pre-teens recognise mobile phone ownership as an accepted cultural norm, their parents are left trying to make sense of the many conflicting messages and advice. Delaying or promising their approval ('next year' or 'not yet') indicates that their considerations focus on maintaining connectivity at all times as their pre-teen explores the new freedom and independence secondary school offers (ACMA 2016).

Stepping Stones to Facebook

UNDERAGE NETWORKING

Lots of kids will come in in the morning and it's—sure, it's hi, how are you, blah, blah, blah, the greetings are all there and then it's—well when I was playing against you online last night, this, that and all the other. ... and that, to me, seems extraordinary. One, given how young they are and two, knowing that a lot of the parents are not afraid of telling me, they don't have unlimited access to this, that or the other, but they've got accounts of everything (Fiona, Year 5/6 teacher, 2015).

Social networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat are likely to be familiar to most of us but sites such as Stardoll, Moshi Monsters, and Club Penguin may not be. The sites may, however, be familiar to the 'kids' Fiona refers to here. Fiona is a Year 5/6 teacher in a Melbourne primary school and she is reflecting on the nightly usage of social networking sites by her 11- and 12-year-old students. Fiona's insights support findings that suggest social networking usage amongst the under 13s is widespread. While social networking is acknowledged as a common practice for young people, many sites, including Facebook and Snapchat, restrict access to those aged 13 years and below. Legal restrictions for social media sites such as Facebook are designed to limit access for the younger pre-teen age groups but studies suggest that this is not an effective deterrent. In the UK, Ofcom's *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report* identified that 22 per cent of children aged between

8 and 12 have an active Facebook, Bebo, or MySpace profile (Ofcom 2013). While this represented a decrease from 30 per cent in 2012, the report identified an increase in the number of different social networking sites being used, including Twitter and Tumblr. In Australia, the Australia Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found that 78 per cent of 8–9-year-olds and 92 per cent of 10–11-year-olds have used a social network (ACMA 2013a).

The most popular social network amongst this younger age group was identified as YouTube but Facebook featured in the top four. While youth researchers around the globe have provided us with invaluable insights into the digital worlds teenagers and young people inhabit, much less is known about the online usage of the under 13s (Boyd 2014; Robards 2012). The rapidly increasing numbers of younger children using social networking sites demonstrate its importance to their social lives. The advice to parents of primary-school-aged children wanting to access social networking is to understand their desire to access social networking, get to know the sites they want to use, and set up ‘internet house rules’ (Mumsnet 2016; RCN 2016c). Yet not all underage users seek permission from their parents before signing up to social networking sites.

Despite their underage status the social media desires of these young people have been increasingly catered for over the last 5–10 years. Alongside social networking sites designed for the over 13s there are now multiple social networking sites that have been designed specifically for the under 13s. Sites such as Moshi Monsters, Stardoll, and Club Penguin have been designed for younger social networkers. A visit to the Moshi Monster website, (Moshi Monsters 2015) reveals an engaging but extremely child-like homepage where you can play games, collect a ‘moshling’, or adopt a pet monster. I would suggest that the childlike design and activities may be already missing the mark for the pre-teen age group. It could also be argued that sites for the younger age groups market themselves as multi-player online games, appealing to girls through fantasy worlds of make-believe and role-playing which are reminiscent of their earlier childhood years. The ability to connect with other game players introduces the concept of networking with friends. Research suggests that by the time they are 11 or 12 these young social networkers have already moved on and are actively engaging with sites designed for a more mature audience (ACMA 2013a; Mumsnet 2016; Ofcom 2015). While Moshi Monsters and Club Penguin are popular amongst the under 13s, YouTube and Facebook are commonly visited sites (ACMA 2013a; Ofcom 2015). By the time these

underage users turn 12, Facebook has overtaken the appeal of younger social networking sites and is the most popular site for this age group (Mumsnet 2016).

My insights into underage social networking emerged from my work with 11- and 12-year-old pre-teens. Although social media was not a topic I raised with the girls, they were already advocates of the benefits; as Holly (11) reflects, 'it's just cool how you don't really have to ring anybody and if they're online you can just talk to them'. While pre-teen girls actively desire, and in many cases engage with, social networking sites, exploration of their online practices has only recently emerged (Davis and James 2013; Shin et al. 2012). The girls' underage status and the challenges of talking to this age group about their social networking, in some instances without approval, make it difficult to explore their online practices. The girls' insights however reveal a noticeable tension between their parents' objections and the girls' desire to access social networking sites—'I want to have an email address, MSN and stuff 'cause I'm not allowed [to have one]' (Susan 12). While there are similarities between this tension and that evident in considerations of mobile phone ownership, there are distinct differences. The girls' insights demonstrate a greater understanding of the 'good' and 'not so good' aspects of social networking. They were more aware of their parents' concerns about the risks and dangers of social networking than mobile phone ownership. There is less evidence of their parents' desire to make them wait until 'next year' or just 'not yet' although these 'explanations' are still present. While Georgie's (11) reflection is a little extreme ('I'm not allowed Facebook. I think she [Mum] said until I'm 31 or something'), the broader messages around online privacy and strangers are evident in the girls' discussions about their social networking practices (Davis and James 2013; Shin et al. 2012). However, if we acknowledge that pre-teens, like teens, 'are not compelled by gadgetry as such—they are compelled by friendship' (Boyd 2014, p. 18) there may be less to be concerned about. Social networking, even at this age, is about connecting with friends and pursuing their desire to belong.

In this chapter I draw on the broader debates surrounding underage social networking for this age group. Boyd (2014) provides valuable insights into the importance of social networking to teens and in this chapter I draw from her work as I explore the significance of online activity for the younger pre-teen girl. This approach enables me to consider the girls' insights and reflections of their online social networking desire in line with their parents' concerns and broader social debates. While there

is a focus on the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of social networking for this age group, I introduce the girls’ desire to incorporate online networking into their everyday negotiations of belonging with their friends and peers. The girls’ emotional connection to MSN and Facebook, and their parents’ capacity to recognise their desire to communicate with their friends outside school hours, is considered (Shin et al. 2012). I explore how pre-teens’ desire and parents’ responses contribute to the girls’ increasing sense of in-betweenness.

DEFINITIONS

It is timely here to define the key terms I use in this chapter. There is a difference between the concept of social media and social networking, and Boyd’s insightful work offers me clear definitions. Boyd defines social media as:

The set of sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their content (2014, p. 6).

On the other hand, ‘social network sites were designed for social networking’ (Boyd 2014, p. 7). While earlier sites focused on the sharing of ‘interests, tastes, or passions’ and even match-making, social networking sites provide individuals with a ‘platform to connect with their friends’ (Boyd 2014, p. 7). Boyd argues that ‘social network sites changed the essence of online communities’, making friendships their key focus. She argues that these sites and services now lie at the heart of our contemporary culture.

The focus of the girls’ argument for social networking access is to communicate online with their known friends and peers. Their arguments to parents emphasise the localised nature of their desire, yet their engagement with online networking automatically enables them to become a member of the multitude of online communities. Boyd argues that teens’ enduring desire for social connection and autonomy is being expressed in ‘*networked publics*’:

Publics provide a space and a community for people to gather, connect, and help construct society as we understand it. Networked publics are publics both in the spatial sense and in the sense of an imagined community. They

are built on and through social media and other emergent technologies. As spaces, the networked publics that exist because of social media allow people to gather and connect, hang out, and joke around (2014, pp. 9–10).

Boyd provides a greater overview of ‘networked publics’ in her work and acknowledges the broader scholarly framework of her use of the term ‘public’. I have adopted the term here as it introduces the largely unknown and almost limitless communities these pre-teen girls can join the instant they sign up to social networking sites. Boyd’s concept of networked publics also challenged me to consider the full extent of this global medium for these girls’ who had an arguably limited grasp of the potential of their desire. My focus mirrored theirs, as I considered their desire to access social networking sites to communicate with their friends and peers within their existing local, social worlds.

The girls’ argued that their online usage would focus on their existing friends and peers in their own social worlds. Their arguments were compelling in many ways. It is here though, in their online usage and practices, that the intersection of the girls’ local and global cultures is particularly evident. For the most part the girls’ desires were locally focused and they identified social networking sites as the next step to communicating with friends outside of school. It was easy to argue that the girls’ desire for online social networking was an extension of their negotiations of belonging in the school environment:

You can talk to your friends without having to go to their house or coming to school or meeting up, it’s a quick and easy way to talk to your friends and stuff (Georgie 11).

This was, of course, naive. Stepping into the online world of social networking the girls are automatically and instantly a part of a wider ‘public’ and unknown communities. While the girls were excited about the localised appeal of online practices, they have a limited understanding of the endless possibilities of their online activity.

The girls’ online interactions saw many of their playground arguments cross the school-and-home divide. Their online communications intensified their disagreements. Reflecting on the girls’ early online practices I would suggest the girls were unprepared for the differences between their online negotiations of friendship and their everyday face-to-face interactions. The girls’ attempts at resolving online disagreements with

their peers in the school environment caused angst for some as they identified the challenges of negotiating their online networks. The girls recognised and mirrored their parents' concerns about their online usage in many ways but did not demonstrate a thorough understanding of why they found the concept so threatening (Boyd 2008).

MSN offered the girls the ability to sign up as members without age restrictions. The site enabled them to upload, store, and transmit photos, video, music, emails, and instant messages, the most common activity of these girls. While MSN was not as recognisable as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or YouTube, it was the site their parents were most comfortable allowing them access to. While Facebook was highly desired, and described by Hayley (11) and Holly (11) as 'awesome', MSN was the site they all used. For their parents, MSN may have enabled them to allow the girls to access a less confronting social networking site than Facebook. For the girls, access to any form of social media was a significant achievement, enabling them to communicate with, be visible, and accepted by their friends and peers.

FLEDGLING NETWORKERS

These girls are clearly fledgling users of social media and there is much to be learnt from their experiences. Their social networking site of choice was MSN, Microsoft's web portal, which offered news, sport, money, games, videos, entertainment and celebrity gossip, weather, shopping, Messenger, and much more:

I think it's good to have MSN 'cause then you can talk to your friends without having to go to their house or coming to school or meeting up, it's a quick and easy way to talk to your friends and stuff (Georgie 11).

There was limited evidence however of the girls' engagement with this social media site as a place for information. Only Alex and Rachel openly expressed their engagement with the information and celebrity aspect of MSN:

We [Rachel] and I are both into sort of the same stuff fashion, music, gossip, yeah just about anything. We talk about celebrity stuff, yeah, well when you look into MSN this thing pops up about all this gossip that's happening. That's where I get mine (Alex 11).

Alex and Rachel's regular and obvious interest in gossip, celebrities, and shopping formed an important part of their friendship. For the remaining girls it was the communication aspect of MSN that appealed and their desire to use MSN as a social networking site was unquestionable:

Yeah I have an email account which is good and yeah, I don't play much on it but I do go on it and talk to people. Sometimes I go on websites but mainly talk to people on MSN (Holly 12);

I don't know [what we talk about] school and what happened. There's a lot of stuff that we talk about, like what we did on the weekend or what we're going to do on the weekend (Lindi 11).

While Holly readily uses MSN, the decision for her parents was not straightforward as she declared that they were initially very hesitant about allowing her access. Holly revealed that it was their recognition of her desire to communicate with her known friends and peers through this online platform that swayed their decision. In giving her permission they appeared to have followed the recommendations to parents around children's social networking use: setting her up in a communal space at home, negotiating boundaries around her usage time, and registering as friends so they could check her activity at any stage (Mumsnet 2016; RCN 2016c). Attending the school camp with Holly's mum later in the year confirmed this approach but also revealed her enjoyment at being able to communicate with Holly through this online platform. The ability to recognise Holly's emotional connection to social networking enabled her family to propose a workable solution which addressed their concerns and supported Holly as she developed her own online networking practices.

TAKING CLASSROOM FRIENDSHIP AND BELONGING ONLINE

The girls' desire to access social networking sites is fundamentally about identifying another strategy and platform to negotiate friendships and a sense of belonging within their own local, social worlds. The localised nature of the girls' desire, their focus on existing friendships and taking their offline relationships into online networks was clearly evident in the girls' desire. The girls identified that social networking sites expanded the avenues available to them to pursue their negotiations, albeit through a complex and largely unknown medium. They identified social network-

ing as another avenue to express their increasing desire for new levels of freedom and independence outside their familial relationships. Their motivation and enthusiasm for these sites was palpable and they were ever hopeful that their parents would recognise their emotional connection to the possibilities of social networking.

The girls' focus was to utilise this new communication medium to expand their negotiations of friendship and to create an online social world, closely linked to but separate from the social world of school. The girls' online networks mirrored their existing friendships and peer groups in the classroom wherever possible:

Well I get to chat to my friends when I don't see them. I talk to Rachel, Alex, Sally and Georgie and my cousins (Alison 11);

I don't talk to Alex much, not often Alison but they're really good and the make conversations interesting on MSN. Also Lucas, I've got his MSN. Yeah I've got a couple of people's [email address] Maddie, I've got Sally and Rachel. I've got Mollie's and Pippi's (Georgie 11);

I have a few of the girls' and boys' email addresses from the class. I have my favourites and then friends. That way if you're at home you can still talk to them (Sally 12).

Those with MSN embraced the additional platform to negotiate friendship with their school friends and peers. With only 14 girls in 6C, and some not allowed to access MSN ('Lindi and Holly have MSN but Susan doesn't so I can't talk to her' [Kate 12]), the girls' immediate networking opportunities were limited. While access to MSN did not automatically determine friendships, it shifted some friendship opportunities and created new connections online. The friendship groups of 6C were tight knit, but MSN offered the girls a new layer of friendship and belonging to negotiate which did not directly align with their class groups. Friendships such as Sally and Mollie's, who rarely spent together in the school environment, were fostered during their online communication. The names of girls from the other Year 6 classes were also prevalent as the girls sought to increase their contact list:

If they're online you can just talk to them really quick. I have 46 contacts, Kate, Lindi, Mollie, I think Sally has one, umm, and oh, there's lots of,

almost all the girls in the grade 'cause they all have one and then there's girls from the other grade and my cousin and my uncle and my mum. And the guide leader. I like to chat to Danielle from the other class and Kate and Lindi the most (Holly 12).

The excitement of being allowed access to MSN saw the girls wanting to make the most of the time they had and interact with others who were online at the same time. The limitations of their class and broader primary school environment, combined with the restrictions some parents placed on the girls' access to social networking sites, determined that the girls actively sought the addresses of their peers with online access, even the boys. The girls were keen to expand their number of contacts and friends, happily talking about the new friends they interacted with online but weren't usually a part of their everyday face-to-face groups. This opened up friendships that were not evident in the classroom or playgrounds of Western Heights Primary School. Rachel (11) mentioned online friendships with Lindi and Sally, which were not obvious in the school environment. Online friendship with male classmates whom the girls often described as 'annoying, disgusting and dirty' (Erin 12) were also revealed. The girls' MSN friendship with Lucas enabled Maddie, Sally, and Georgie to invite him to join them on a weekend outing to the movies, fostering a friendship which began online and then developed in the classroom throughout the year:

I talk to Alex, Alison, David, Sam, Pippi, Lindi, lots of people (Rachel 11);

They (boys) can be friends with like, girls as well. Like Lucas is friends with Maddie and Sally (Georgie 11).

The girls' enthusiasm for this new communication platform made it difficult though for those, like Susan and Erin, whose parents were unwavering in their decision to refuse the girls permission to join MSN or any social networking sites. These non-users missed out on the opportunities presented to the other girls by this new communication platform. The girls were aware of the conversations between their friends and peers that took place online, overnight and on weekends. They understood that they weren't a party to those conversations. While I looked for similarities, the non-users' parents were not representative of any particular social class

or socio-economic status. The parents who refused the girls access at this stage were not representative of any particular social marker. Maddie didn't have access but it appeared that was because her family didn't currently have access to the internet at home but that was about to change. They were no clear demographic links between Hayley's, Erin's, and Susan's parents but all were steadfast in their decision to refuse access to MSN or any social networking sites for the girls. The girls' frustrations with their parents' decision was palpable:

Well they [friends] all have MSN and I'm not allowed to have it yet. I will at the end of this year or next year and then I'll get all of theirs [contact details] and then we can talk and organise things. [I'm] annoyed at my mum and my dad, it's just annoying 'cause everyone has it, but yet I don't know, my sister doesn't have it. I don't know what reasons they would give (Susan 12).

While she is annoyed with her parents here, Susan's frustrations were not always evident. In earlier focus groups she would always respond with 'I don't mind' or 'it doesn't matter' when asked about her parents' decision to refuse her access. While respectful of her parents' decision, Susan's frustrations grew throughout the year as the other members of her close-knit friendship group increased their use of MSN. Susan's tight friendship group were very supportive though and accommodating of her position, happily making allowances for her parents' refusal and they made an effort to keep her connected: 'I still stay in touch with Susan, and she doesn't go on MSN' (Holly 12).

Pugh (2009) argues that parents don't go out of their way to refuse their child's desires just for the sake of doing so. Susan's parents clearly have a definite position on mobile phone and social networking use as her older sister, who is in Year 8, hasn't been given permission either. While it is impossible to determine their motivations, anomalies have been identified in previous studies with parents in higher socio-economic groups, although this requires further investigation to confirm the relationship (Inyang et al. 2010). Susan questioned her parents' decisions but did not go against their wishes. She did not follow the arguably common practice of other frustrated underage networkers and sign up without her parents' approval. She was aware though that her inability to join a social networking was a significant part of her cultural landscape that she was excluded from.

PARENTAL CONCERNS

It is widely acknowledged that there are a number of potential risks for young people accessing social networking sites (Boyd 2014; ACMA 2013a; Ofcom 2015). These can include issues around privacy and security, being approached by strangers, identity fraud, exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and more (ACMA 2013a, b; Mumsnet 2016; Ofcom 2013). While the decision to allow mobile phone ownership could be considered advantageous to parents wanting to extend their control over their pre-teens' desire for freedom and independence, it is difficult to propose the same argument for access to social networking. The girls who have been granted access suggested that their parents established boundaries when giving approval although their usage indicates that the girls do not find these to be restricting. Focusing their request for access to social networking on their desire to negotiate existing friendships and known peers may have assisted their parents' decision-making.

The girls' parents had a number of possible actions they could have adopted when establishing their own boundaries. They may have 'friended' their pre-teen online as Rachel's and Holly's mothers had done—'I just go on the computer and talk to friends and talk to my mum' (Rachel 11). It is also possible that they regularly monitored the girls' usage and discussed their online practices, like Alison (11) who 'talks to Mum about how to use MSN, how to block people and deal with big issues' (she deals with small issues on her own). There is also the issue of respecting the girls' right to privacy which is recommended for users over the age of 13 but it was not clear how these parents of under 13s responded (Mathiesen 2013; Mumsnet 2016; RCN 2016c). There are recommendations from other parents that extensive monitoring is necessary for the underage networker: 'my children were on social networking sites from before the age of 13. I monitored them closely and there's never been anything untoward on their walls' (Mumsnet 2016). While parents have a legal right to monitor their child's usage it does not mean that this was the best thing to do ethically (Mathiesen 2013). The extent of the parents' ongoing actions to minimise the risk for the girls' online usage was not clear in my discussions with this girls. It is suggested though, that even at this age parents are:

More accustomed to their children being online. For the majority it is more of a norm and given that nothing untoward has happened so far, most parents relax and allow their children greater freedoms. The rules become more

focussed on enforcing time limits than being centred around direct supervision. Content does continue to be monitored but not as closely, in particular for those children and young people who have their own laptops (ACMA 2013b, p. 17).

These findings provide some explanation as to why more girls in this group had been given permission to join online social networking sites than to own mobile phones. It was unclear though whether the girls' online use was undertaken with their parents' approval or even knowledge (ACMA 2013a; eSafety Commission 2016).

PRE-TEEN GIRLS' ONLINE PRACTICES

By the time they reach their pre-teens girls have already engaged with the more childlike social networking sites available to them. These girls were no different, as Rachel declared, 'I have a farm town on *Farmerama*' (Rachel 11), a site that was designed to appeal to her games from early childhood. Studies revealed that by the time these girls reach the age of 11 or 12, Facebook had become their most popular social networking site (ACMA 2013a; Ofcom 2013). It was no surprise to discover that the girls understood the concept of social networking and the technical aspects of online networking. They have been working with varying technological devices since early childhood. Their grasp of the broader 'social complexity' of globalised, networked publics, particularly during their early networking experiences, was less sophisticated (Boyd 2014; Davis and James 2013). As the year went on though, the girls' understandings became more nuanced. They talked to friends about their own experiences and concerns about others' online practices. While they sought assistance from parents if things went wrong, the majority of their online practices were developed through experience or with assistance from their friends. With 36 per cent of 12–13-year-olds visiting social networking sites daily, it is not surprising that their knowledge and understanding of online practices expands quickly and it becomes part of the daily 'social lifeline' for the girls (ACMA 2013a). At this stage though these pre-teens reported less regular visits:

I go on maybe once a week 'cause I see them at school. In the holidays I might go on twice, maybe three times a week (Kate 12);

[I] mainly use it on the weekends but sometimes before school but not very often. Sometimes I use MSN I only went on and left offline messages. I know they'll read it and send me one. It's like a message (Georgie 11).

A number of factors could have contributed to the girls' less regular usage. This group of girls were very active with many of them training and playing multiple games of netball and basketball throughout the week. They were still very much involved in family activities and there were very few occasions when they were left home alone. This is consistent with the ACMA's (2013b) findings that younger primary school usage tends to fit in and around their other activities. It is during their older primary school years that children begin to move towards the online usage and behaviours of teenagers (ACMA 2013b; Ofcom 2015). There was evidence of parental rule-setting in the girls' limited usage. Some parents instigated time frames or asked the girls to sit in communal areas at home when they were online. This supports ACMA (2013a, p. 5) findings that younger children 'are heavily monitored and supervised in their use of the internet'. These pre-teens were on the boundary of the supervision recommended for primary-school-aged children and the less stringent monitoring of teenagers' usage. Holly's parents made being accepted as a friend a condition in their approval. As the year progressed though, the girls turned 12 and they became more experienced social networkers. The opportunities for their parents to supervise lessened and the girls increasingly accessed social media from computers in their bedrooms. There was evidence of Boyd's (2014, p. 47) suggestion that teenagers use social media to create an uninterrupted space in the same way that they 'use their bedrooms to create a space for hanging out with friends'. At the same time their usage increased, with 62 per cent of 14–15-year-olds identified as visiting social networking sites daily (ACMA 2013a).

The girls' reflections of their online behaviours provided me with valuable insights into pre-teens' early experiences on social networking. The girls demonstrated how they incorporated their online communication mediums into negotiations of friendships and belonging. With busy schedules it was arguably easier to catch up with friends online than organise a get-together elsewhere. Access to MSN and for some, Facebook, introduced a new layer of opportunity to their navigations of friendships and a sense of belonging. Adapting quickly to the new technology the girls embraced the possibilities of friendship negotiations the platform presents to them. Their confidence in their ability to understand the norms

of MSN was evident and the girls adopted new behaviours and practices for their online activity. Negotiations of friendships and belonging were brought into the home, and often their bedrooms. The girls' ability to retreat from the constancy of their face-to-face interactions in the school yard to their homes at the end of the day was diminished.

Goffman's (1967) metaphor of the theatre enables me to consider how intrusive online activities could be for the girls. Many of the girls appeared to access MSN from computers and tablets in their bedrooms or quiet study areas. Bringing their online activity into their bedroom potentially shifted the way they used this private space. They no longer had a place where they could relax and 'step out of character' to remove themselves from the pressure to perform (Goffman 1967). To date, 'the front region' or the 'stage' where the girls' performances took place had been the classroom and the school environment but their online presence blurred the boundaries behind school and their home. The 'back region' in their homes was no longer private, particularly when webcams were used—'I have webcam so I can see my friends' (Rachel 11). Interestingly though the girls were not concerned about this possible intrusion into their home and private life. They embraced the opportunity to 'meet' with their friends more regularly and interact with each other from this quiet, largely uninterrupted space (Boyd 2014). They identified the benefits of being able to confirm whom they were interacting with online through webcam. As Alex suggests though it didn't take them long to discover that 'the properties of social media' make it increasingly difficult for them to create boundaries between their public spaces and their online spaces (Boyd 2014, p. 47).

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

While the girls were eager to take their existing friendship online, this platform brings their negotiations into their homes, and often, the intimacy of their bedrooms. The blurring of the boundaries between their interactions in the school environment and their online interactions adds a very complex and largely unknown layer to their negotiations of friendship and belonging. While the girls may have spoken to each other over home phones or, for some, on mobiles, the intersection of school issues and home has arguably been less complex, and more transparent for parents. The opportunity to retreat from the constant demands of negotiations in the school environment has also diminished. The scrutiny of peers and

the capacity to get their negotiations wrong was ever present (Boyd 2014; Goffman 1967; Pugh 2009). The ability to leave arguments or disagreements at school became more challenging. Arguments or disagreements between the girls were often amplified and prolonged as a result of their online engagement with the issues:

Well last week we had this fight thing and emails were going around and everything. And I thought that was a bit harsh. So mostly this is the bit I don't like, MSN causes fights, they start about little things on MSN. You resolve it on MSN it but then you just make it about MSN. And then all this bad stuff, hating happens and it's just because you talked on the computer, not in real life. I had a fight last year about this thing called Red Faces and it completely broke a friendship and this was over MSN. Makes it worse when it's on email, like Rachel sent an email [this week] and it was really harsh to Alison. But I resolved it with Alison already, I think that email made it worse but Alison was okay with me but with Rachel she was a bit off (Alex 11).

Alex goes on to suggest that there are less emotions involved when communicating with her friends online, although I would argue that her recollection here suggests a high level of emotional engagement. Alex highlights here the girls' tendency to consider MSN as a separate communication medium in different interactions and practices. She distinguishes between her face-to-face conversations, what she refers to as 'real life', and her online interactions, suggesting that the non-resolution of their argument was the computer's fault. She is questioning the value of interactions which appears to cause more fights than those that take place in the school environment. Alex implies that conversations that took place face-to-face were more predictable than those taking place online. This was not a surprise; after all the girls have been negotiating friendships face-to-face throughout their primary school years. The ability to distinguish between reality or what Alex describes as her 'real life' and the largely unknown world of the 'computer' and online communities is challenging and it is not surprising that Alex and the girls struggled with this concept.

Her recollection of this online disagreement with Rachel and Alison reveals highly unpleasant friendship negotiations that also suggest a level of bullying between the girls as Rachel's email to Alison is perceived to be 'harsh' and critical. Alex also suggests that the emails 'going around' were sent without the censorship of time and reflection. She considers

the emails to be unnecessary and inflammatory, creating prolonged angst between Alison and Rachel. The girls' attempts to resolve their disputes suggest a reluctance to seek adult assistance to help them with their negotiations getting complicated. It could be argued that their parents and teachers were not aware of these interactions and the levels of angst that resulted. While school teachers and parents may be able to intervene in verbal or exclusionary disputes that take place in the school environment, it is difficult to offer assistance or guidance to the girls when their conversations and negotiations take place 'silently' online.

IS THAT YOU?

One of the greatest dangers facing young people on social networking sites is knowing whom they are actually talking to. The risk of a stranger taking on a different identity and pretending to be someone they are not is concerning for parents and the girls mirror these concerns. There wasn't clear evidence of any of these girls being approached by strangers with any evil intent but Sally (11) related a story of feeling uncomfortable when being approached by a stranger—'I met this guy on Facebook, he was really nice but I've only got his Facebook account'. Sally had no other details or who this 'guy' was, or even if he was who he said he was. Knowing that she shouldn't interact with strangers online she did not pursue this 'friendship'. The messages of concern from her parents about the dangers of friending strangers online were clearly evident here. The girls were all familiar with the possibility of stranger danger or someone impersonating someone else. They had strategies at hand to use if they were approached by someone they didn't know:

I ask if someone has MSN and then you add them. Some people request you and you can accept or decline them and if I don't know the person I decline them (Alison 11).

The risks of stranger danger for these girls emerge out of the concept that individuals actively adopt a 'different identity' for their online practices. Being aware of whom their child is connecting with online is of concern to many parents. Nearly 20 per cent of parents with children aged between 5 and 15 years raised the issue of stranger danger as one of their primary concerns when agreeing to their requests for access to social networking sites (Ofcom 2013). Boyd (2014) suggests though that being some-

one different online for teenagers is not necessarily about wanting to be a different person. She argues that teenagers engage in identity work in response to the norms and practices they perceive from a particular site. She argues that ‘context matters’ as they move between different sites. In a similar fashion to the differing interactions in the many spaces of Western Heights Primary School, their interactions online will eventually take place in different social networking sites and communities. As they become more experienced on social media the girls moved between different sites, interacting with different groups of friends and classmates and adopting the differing norms and practices of each.

At this stage though the girls were focused on extending their ‘real life’ friendship negotiations on MSN and making sense of the site’s norms and practices. They were, however, sceptical with the online practices of one of their friends, Rachel, who they argued was a ‘different person’ online. Several of the girls raised their concerns about Rachel’s MSN identity and clearly felt uncomfortable with her online practices:

Lately I’ve been talking to Rachel and it sounds like she’s a different person. I wouldn’t really think it was Rachel. I’ve also got webcam so I can see her while she’s typing, so I know it is her (Sally 12).

Sally was particularly unsettled by Rachel’s unfamiliar ‘identity’ and her online practices and was unsure of how to respond to her. While the girls were not specific about the ‘identity’ Rachel portrayed online, it was clear from our conversations that they felt she was trying to ‘be someone different’ from the ‘identity’ they knew in the school environment (Alex 11). Like Alex, it could be argued that Rachel was making sense of this new online platform and was trying to find a way to create an online self that was different from her face-to-face identity. She may have been attempting to present a self to the others that she believed would be ‘well received’ by her peers and was unaware of their concerns (Boyd 2008, p. 129). This may have been Rachel’s motivation, but for Sally and the other girls who had begun their social networking experience with clear messages about stranger danger, her online behaviour was disturbing. Rachel though did not convey any insight into the girls’ concerns about her online practices. She spoke positively about her online interactions, suggesting that she chats regularly about ‘stuff with Alex, Alison, Lindi, David and Sam and enjoys being able to keep in touch with friends out of school’ (Rachel 11).

Sally raised the presence of webcam, using it in this instance to reassure herself that she was speaking with Rachel as she could see her typing at the computer. While it is recommended that parents set up younger users' computers in communal spaces it is evident that the girls' online practices are often undertaken in bedrooms or studies. Sally's concerns about Rachel's online practices were sufficient for her to use her webcam to check on whom she was talking to. It could be argued that the presence of webcams blurred the boundaries between the girls' public identity in the school environment with the private realm of home, or more specifically their bedrooms. The girls' comments did not reveal any concern about this potential intrusion and they were unperturbed by the 'presence' of others in their bedrooms. In this instance the 'interplay between the public and private realm' in the girls' lives appeared to be almost secondary or insignificant as Rachel and Sally focused on their online negotiations of friendship (Lincoln 2013, p. 121). It was obvious though that Sally had taken concerns around stranger danger seriously.

Sally's experience with one of her older sisters may have contributed to her attention to this online risk. Sally reflected on how easy it can be to pretend you are someone online whom you are not: 'My sister went on my account, 'cause she knew my password, and so she could log on for me, and then she went on and started talking to Rachel' (Sally 12). Sally was clearly not comfortable with her sister's deception but didn't appear to know how to deal with it. This may have been the result of her older sister's influence, or commitment to monitoring Sally's usage, that enabled Sally to access Facebook while most of her peers were refused permission. Older siblings are often considered to be helpful in supervising and guiding their younger siblings' online practices but they have also been identified as the 'conduit for exposure to broader content and at an earlier age' (ACMA 2013b, p. 5). This appeared to be the case for Sally and also Alison where their family structure enabled the girls' social networking access. Alison's situation was similar; she too had sisters in their 20s who took on some of the responsibility for monitoring and guiding her online practices. While she didn't yet have Facebook, Alison (12) declared that 'my sister [22 year old] said if I get one [a Facebook account] she has to know the password'. While their sisters' assistance was well-intentioned, the question of whether it was appropriate for them to monitor the girls' social networking accounts is caught up with broader debates around the pre-teen age groups' social media usage (Mathiesen 2013). The presence

of older siblings made it difficult to ascertain parents' role in Sally's and Alison's social networking activity.

DANGERS LURKING ONLINE

Parents around the globe express concerns about the risks their pre-teens, and children more broadly, may encounter as they access social media and specifically social networking sites (ACMA 2013a; Mumsnet 2016; Ofcom 2015). Concerns that can manifest in a variety of ways:

- abusive texts and emails;
- hurtful messages, images or videos;
- imitating others online;
- excluding others online;
- humiliating others online;
- nasty online gossip and chat;
- offensive or illegal content (eSafety Commission 2016).

While the girls had an understanding of these potential risks, it could be argued they did not 'automatically have the skills to navigate what unfolds' (Boyd 2014, p. 13). Parents are encouraged to help their pre-teen 'get the most out of social networking and avoid its downsides' (RCN 2016c). With increasing numbers of pre-teens and younger children accessing social networking sites, understanding their online practices is vital. Parenting information sites recommend that parents 'build trust by having regular, respectful conversations with your child that show him you understand how important social networking is' (RCN 2016c). Others suggest that 'teaching children to stay safe on the internet rather than banning them from it is the way to go' (Mumsnet 2016).

The magnitude of the World Wide Web makes the task of keeping pre-teens safe online extremely challenging. For most parents it is the unknown that is the most confronting and social networking introduces multitudes of unknowns. While the girls' initial desires were to communicate with friends and to decline or avoid anyone they didn't already know, the possibilities of new friendships opened up communities and networked publics that they could not have imagined. It is evident from the girls' insights that their parents' concerns, and even fears, have been conveyed to them. While they felt confident in declining strangers' requests to friend them, and could identify concerns about their friends' online

practices, it was less clear how they would deal with more severe risks or dangers. Lindi (11) revealed in an aside that her ‘MSN got hacked’ once and her response was to tell her mum. Talking to mum—‘because I tell her everything’ (Alex 11)—was a common response when I asked the girls how they would respond to uncomfortable online behaviours. It was not clear though whether the girls’ concerns about Rachel’s altered online persona or Sally’s awkwardness with her sister for using her password and impersonating her warranted the intervention or assistance from an adult.

FEARFUL OF FACEBOOK

While the girls talk openly about MSN and their increasing familiarity with this social networking site, there was a noticeable shift in their confidence when they introduced Facebook into our conversations. To the best of my knowledge Sally was the only one who had access to Facebook; the others were a little in awe of this site and cautious as they had taken on board their parents’ concerns:

I don’t go on MySpace or Facebook, I just go on MSN (Alison 11);

That Facebook and stuff it can be dangerous and so I’m not allowed (Georgie 11);

I don’t go on MySpace or Facebook, I just go on MSN (Alison 12).

With access to Facebook illegal for this age group—the legal age is 13—it would appear that their parents’ concerns were sufficient for the girls to be cautious. It has been reported that there are in excess of 5 million underage Facebook users, so somewhere parents are allowing pre-teens to join up, or pre-teens are doing so without their parents’ permission or knowledge (Phelps 2011). Aside from Sally there were other students at Western Heights Primary who were active members of Facebook. The girls related stories of being approached by some of their peers to join up. They appeared to be quite comfortable though informing others of their parents’ decision:

I was talking to David about Facebook and he asked if I had one. I said no I’m not allowed, and he asked why. I said I’m just not allowed and he said ‘Oh, just get one’ (Georgie 11).

NOT SO IN-BETWEEN

With the majority of girls allowed to use the MSN site, there was limited evidence of social networking access being linked to the girls' transition from primary to secondary school. Even Erin and Susan who were hopefully anticipating permission to use social networking sites did not relate stories of being asked to wait, or promises that they could join up 'next year' when they went to their new secondary schools. The girls recognised their parents were resolute in their decision and were not going to revisit their refusal at this stage. For Susan, whose Year 8 sister hadn't yet been given permission, her desires may again be thwarted next year.

CONFLICTING CULTURAL NORMS

These pre-teen girls were operating under the understanding that membership of social networking sites was an accepted cultural norm for their age group. While it is evident that some underage networkers sign up without their parents' permission or knowledge, these girls generally adhered to their parents' decisions, although not without frustration. As a result, Erin's capacity to engage in online social networking is intrinsically linked to her parents' understandings of accepted cultural norms, issues, and concerns debated in the broader cultural landscape of children's social media access. She is reliant on her parents' values and their emotional sensitivity to her desire. Erin's and Sally's parents may have taken on board the many debates and broader social concerns of perceived risks for children on online platforms in making their decision. Parents' decisions are far from easy, and for Erin and Sally, this places them outside the norm for their friendship group and restricts their ability to stay connected with their friends outside of school hours. The remaining parents have agreed to the girls' requests to join MSN. While it is likely they have considered the same debates and concerns about potential online risks for these girls, they have decided that allowing their daughter access to the MSN social networking site is acceptable to them at this stage. Parents, like Holly's, appear to have been sensitive to her emotional desire when deciding to give her permission to use social networking sites as a new platform to communicate with her existing friends and peers.

What can be argued from my insights is that these parents did not appear to be opposed to the concept of social media or selective social networking sites for pre-teen girls. It appeared that they were aware of

the cultural norms of social networking access for this age group as well as the broader debates and concerns about online risks. While there were some exceptions as Susan, Erin, and Hayley can attest to, these parents appeared to be informed about the pros and cons of allowing their pre-teen daughter to use social networking sites. They were however selective in their approval. The girls were not being given complete autonomy to access social networking sites, and permission was specifically given for MSN and not for other sites more generally. It would appear that MSN was viewed differently by these parents, offering them a less confronting social networking medium to support the girls' early experiences on social networking sites rather than banning them.

UNDERSTANDING THE 92 PER CENT

This is by no means an extensive study of pre-teen girls' social networking desire and usage. However, these thirteen 11- and 12-year-old girls have provided us with some valuable insights into the online practices they have adopted. The need for insights such as these, which contribute to our understandings of underage social networking practices, is clear. The number of younger children, including pre-teens, accessing social networking is increasing. In 2013 an Australian survey revealed that 78 per cent of 8–9-year-olds, and 92 per cent of 10–11-year-olds accessed a social networking site at some time (ACMA 2013a). With over 5 million underage social networkers on Facebook, developing our understandings of their online practices is vital (Phelps 2011).

The girls shared their desire to include social networking sites in their everyday negotiations of friendship and belonging. Focusing on their local, social worlds the girls revealed that their desire to sign up to social networking sites such as MSN and Facebook stems from their aim to use this online platform to extend their communication opportunities with their existing friends and peer groups. The girls demonstrated good insight into the benefits of social networking in their everyday lives and also the potential risks and dangers they may experience online. Understanding their parents' concerns may have contributed to their adherence to their decision. While I chose not to speak to the girls' parents, I developed an understanding of the cultural norms that influenced their decision-making and capacity to recognise the girls' emotional connection to social networking. There is also a real possibility that some of the girls' parents were unaware of their pre-teens' activity on MSN. Understanding the extent of

this deception, even with my relationship with the girls, is difficult, trying to establish the extent of this more broadly would be very challenging.

As a parent myself I recognised that the decision of when or whether to allow an 11 or 12 year old access to social networking sites such as MSN or Facebook was complex and influenced by their own family relationships and practices (Lindsay and Maher 2013). These pre-teens, like teens and other young people, were learning to navigate their new networked publics. They are searching for new ways to communicate and connect with their friends outside of school hours. With limited understandings of the online social networking practices of the under 12s, the aim of this chapter has been to introduce the desire for, and understandings of, social networking through the eyes of 11- and 12-year-old girls. These girls have provided us with valuable insights into the desire to utilise social networking sites in their negotiations of friendships and to interact with their known peers. The girls' insights reveal the localised nature of their usage and the complex nature of the early usage. While these do not prove or disprove our existing knowledge, they make a valuable contribution to our limited understandings of underage social networking practices.

Consuming Spaces: Pre-teens Negotiating Their Social Worlds

SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

While the concept of globalisation suggests that we are witnessing a decline in the significance of young people's geographies, it has been argued that place and geography matter more than ever in their lives (Nayak 2003; Nayak and Kehily 2013). The significance of local, social worlds in the lives of pre-teen is the key focus of this book. The global focus works to emphasise the processes of consumption and diverts, to some extent, our attention from other important social and cultural influences in pre-teen girls' lives (Cook and Kaiser 2004). Global cultures however 'do not operate independently' of local geographies but rather connect and interact with existing local and national cultures in complex and nuanced ways (Nayak 2003, p. 5). The consumer-media tween culture implies the girls grow up in almost placeless environments, yet the significance of 9–14-year-olds' local, social world is difficult to ignore. Introducing the girls' local spaces to this book embeds the significance of these interactions and adds a rich 'texture and detail' to this exploration of the pre-teen girls' lives (Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 9). Introducing the local context of pre-teens enables me to consider how products that are designed and promoted by a global consumer media are acquired and ultimately assigned meaning by the girls in their own local, social worlds.

These links are particularly obvious for pre-teen girls, as the presence of others and the relevance of 'place' in their lives is fundamental. At the

very basic local level pre-teen girls make sense of their actions and practices within family structures. Pre-teen girls' consumption activities are heavily influenced by the consumption practices of the families they live within. Despite the pre-teen's desire to fashion a self and acceptance outside her familial relationships, she recognises the value and support of her family and continues to appreciate 'the protective umbrella provided by their [her] family' (Siegel et al. 2004, p. 45). While the family has been recognised in the field of youth research, its influence is often assumed rather than investigated and is considered 'a background factor, juxtaposed against the peer group', deemed to be the most significant relationship in the life of young people (Wyn et al. 2012, p. 4). In research with pre-teens the family's capacity to support the girls' consumption activities is widely acknowledged but there are limited works that explore how their influence unfolds in the girls' everyday experiences.

The pre-teen girl's desire to belong takes place in the many local spaces she occupies: home, school, local neighbourhoods, sporting activities, and, increasingly, her online communities. The places that are important in the life of pre-teen girls are both global and local as they 'experience and rework global processes' (Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 18) and messages creating meaning in their own social worlds. The significance of place in the everyday lives of pre-teen girls has been demonstrated in a number of influential ethnographic works at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Hey's (1997) exploration of UK friendships and Pomerantz's (2008) insights into the significance of style for Canadian school girls take us into their secondary school environments. George's (2007) consideration of London school girls' friendships considers their transition from primary to secondary school and the experiences of younger girls in a primary school setting. Hey, George, and Pomerantz respectfully explore friendships and identity within school environments and make significant and valuable contributions to the scholarship of girls, friendships, and the significance of place. Yet there is a key difference between these predominantly late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century explorations of this age group of girls and this book. Hey, George, and Pomerantz's work reflects girlhood studies of this period, working within a structure of friendships and appearance. The consumer media's tween phenomenon is largely absent. This is not an oversight but rather an acknowledgement that the culture of tween gained momentum at the end of the twentieth and start of the twenty-first century. The rapid advance of tween culture focused girlhood studies for this age group

on the significance of consumption and positioned our understandings of the girls firmly within the context of a globalised world (Chan et al. 2011; Cody 2012; Cook and Kaiser 2004; Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Lundby 2013). The speed and reach of the tween phenomenon now makes it difficult to consider the 9–14-year-old age group of girls without acknowledging its commercial persona. While the significance of place and the pre-teen girls' local, social worlds are acknowledged, their influence in the girls' everyday lives is often assumed, further limiting our understandings of this complex age group. Understanding the context of the pre-teen girls' everyday life is important though, as:

Contexts do more than mould the future; they also shape the present, in the guise of their own particular economies of dignity ... Contexts shape children's relationships to consumption, to need and desire, and to difference, as well as their capacity for empathy and tolerance. Contexts shape not just where children are going, but how it feels to be where they are (Pugh 2009, p. 180).

The need to develop greater understandings of the context of pre-teen girls' lives and the 'multiplicity of influences' in their lives was highlighted in government inquiries in Australia and other Western developed nations (NCB 2012; The Senate 2008). Understanding social and cultural influences in the pre-teens' life requires us to shift our focus away from the globalised nature of the consumer media and step instead into the local, social worlds of pre-teen girls and allow their voices to direct our understandings. The shift does not ignore the influence of the consumer-media tween culture but acknowledges the meanings girls assign to its messages are intertwined in a variety of ways with family, friends, school, and their local geographies. Through this process the girls remain inherently entwined in, and influenced by, their local, cultural environments (Buckingham 2011). Understanding the girls' local spaces and places recognises the value of pre-teen girls' experiences, goods, services, and activities. Context adds texture to the social and cultural rules and norms that govern the spaces the pre-teen girl inhabits. Focusing on the girls' everyday negotiations in their local spaces and places recognises that their consumption activities cannot be considered in isolation from their 'unique social aspect and cultural position' (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 223).

In this chapter I introduce the role of family and the girls' local, social worlds. The discussion enables me to highlight the localised nature of the

girls' meaning-making and desires. I consider how their desire to move away from their familial relationships is intrinsically informed by their own unique family practices. The role of school in the girls' lives is explored and I introduce Western Heights Primary School. The significance of Western Heights Primary School's formal and informal spaces to the girls' negotiations of belonging is considered. The chapter differs from the previous chapters as my observations and field notes inspire many of the issues discussed here as distinct from the girls' responses in interviews and focus groups. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the girls' significant transition from primary to secondary school. I consider the impact that getting secondary school selection right can have on their ability to maintain a sense of belonging amongst their friends and peers as they complete their final year of primary school.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

It is difficult to argue that the pre-teen girl is an 'autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency' outside of the family she is raised within (Smart 2007, p. 28). While the demise or decline of the contemporary family structure is widely debated, 'family life continues to be of importance to individuals, and families continue to provide love and support for family members' (Morgan 2011, p. 4). Moving beyond definitions of 'what families are' to 'what families do' enables us to consider the family practices that influence and support its members to undertake both individual and collective pursuits (Morgan 2011, p. 3). While our understandings of families in the lives of pre-teen girls are limited, they are not as dismissive and continue to remind us of the significance of family relationship in their lives:

They take me everywhere, and they don't need to, and they do, you know. 'Cause sometimes I have games in Geelong (Lindi 12);

They taught me. They like gave me education, they gave me freedom, they give you wealth, they give you health. They give you a family. They give you life. They help you. They give you a home to live under. They give you food on the table (Sally 11);

I guess Dad takes me to school or I'd have to walk and then I'd be really late. I'd have to start walking earlier (Holly 12).

While new ways of thinking about the make-up of families and the role they play in contemporary Western nations are being considered, some fundamental things about families do not change. Most importantly, they remain the basic unit of society—a unit in which much ‘communication, caring and sharing’ occurs—and, importantly, the site in which most children are raised. As such, families play a central role in shaping the health and well-being of all immediate family members (Hayes et al. 2010, p. 11).

Families are pivotal to the pre-teens’ ability to consume and their consumption activities are incorporated into the family’s decision-making. It has been argued that consumption negotiations are undertaken ‘with each other and for each other’, as families take a rational approach to their ability to respond to members’ requests (Lindsay and Maher 2013, p. 150). The approach offers parents a way to negotiate the diverse consuming pressures that they face. Lindsay and Maher suggest that relational consumption in families ‘is about care, connection and belonging’ for the individual members and for the family as a whole. Consumption negotiations between parents, families, and pre-teen girls involve complex layers of desire, understanding, memories, difference, and cultural meanings that are invoked by both parties (Martens et al. 2004; Morgan 2011; Pugh 2009):

I started watching M movies when I was in grade 2 (Kate 12);

I watched an M movie and then I had to ring my mum to see if it was okay, remember that (Lindi 11).

The relationship between the pre-teen’s consumption activities and her family’s ‘consumption orientations’ is further complicated by her deep-seated desire to belong and to shape her own *economy of dignity* in the spaces and places outside her familial relationships (Martens et al. 2004; Pugh 2009).

UNDERSTANDING THE PRE-TEEN GIRLS’ LOCAL, SOCIAL WORLDS

Far from being disconnected from the important places in their lives, Buckingham (2011) suggests that children are inherently entwined and influenced by the cultural environments in which they live. The girls’ local, social worlds provided me with valuable insights into how the messages,

products, and experiences they consumed were ‘reworked in ways that respond to the values and norms of the local environment, offering points of negotiation, connection and dissonance’ (Kehily and Nayak 2008, p. 340). Buckingham (2011, p. 94) coined the phrase ‘glocalization’ to describe the ways children appropriate products designed for global consumption in their local, everyday lives. The links between the global and the local were clearly evident here. The girls’ meaning-making is “mutually constitutive”, as places not only shape youth identities, but youth identities also shape and influence the character of places’ (Nayak 2003, p. 28). The girls’ place in an urban city in Australia, within 10 kilometres of the centre of Melbourne is significant. Their location to the west of the city is also significant as the suburbs in any city take on their own unique characteristics, history, diversity, cultural influences, and demographics.

The suburb of Western Heights is located in the inner-western suburbs of Melbourne. The suburb was a traditional working-class area of Melbourne with small suburban house blocks, housing many blue-collar workers during the twentieth century. However, towards the end of the twentieth century the area was redeveloped and has become increasingly gentrified. The area is known for its quaint street-shopping strips and proximity to the western side of Port Phillip Bay. Western Heights retains a mix of older residents and newer couples and families with the average age of the suburb’s population being 36. The majority of residents in the Western Heights area were born in Australia and English is spoken as their first language. Ninety per cent of the residents are employed across a range of occupations (Qpzm Local Stats Australia 2013).

There are few public housing commission residences and the high-rise apartment blocks which dominate the physical landscape of other inner-Melbourne suburbs are absent. Western Heights Primary School is reflective of this relatively middle-class, homogenous community although many of their students come from surrounding areas. The localised nature of the girls’ lives is evident in their daily conversations, such as Mollie’s (11) description of her weekend:

Well on Friday I went to DFO [Direct Factory Outlet] at Spencer Street [Melbourne’s main train station]. I play [netball] on Saturdays and training on Fridays. We do the training in the [school] hall and the games at Altona.

Altona is clearly a sporting hub for these western suburbs pre-teens, while *Highpoint* (the largest shopping centre in Melbourne’s western suburbs)

is a popular shopping destination. ‘*Highpoint* is cool’, according to Mollie (11), although other western suburbs shopping centres rate a mention: ‘I go to *Altona Gate*’ (Georgie 11) and ‘I go to *Werribee Plaza*, I like it when I get to go and get all the things that I like’ (Alison 11).

There are many locations that would be ideal spaces to engage with pre-teen girls. Retail outlets such as Supre, JJ’s, Just Jeans, H&M, or Cotton On are popular retail outlets for this age group (Russell and Tyler 2002). Sporting clubs, movie theatres, and even church communities are popular local spaces but the significance of a primary school environment is difficult to overlook. For most Australian pre-teens, school is the most significant environment outside their familial relationships (Mission Australia 2010). Beyond the curriculum and teaching pedagogies the school space has been recognised as a significant place in shaping the identities of children and young people (George 2007; Kehily et al. 2002). There are important understandings of the everyday lives of pre-teen girls that can be gleaned by engaging with them in their school environments (George 2007; Hey 1997; Kehily et al. 2002; Pomerantz 2008). Previous ethnographies focus mainly on the secondary school years and as a result there are limited explorations of the younger pre-teen age group, although George’s (2007) study considered younger girls’ transitions from primary to secondary school.

Spending a year in a primary school environment enabled me to focus on the ‘powerful presence’ of school as the key site where the pre-teen girl begins to move away from her family (Lareau 2003). Spending a year with these 11- and 12-year-old pre-teen girls was a privilege. Sharing this space with the girls provided me with the opportunity to gain valuable insights into the ways these pre-teen girls negotiated the primary school environment. Beyond the physical shape of the school, and the ‘rules and regulations that give it social structure’, I was able to develop an understanding of the reciprocal process that works to shape and influence the girls’ sense of identity and belonging and the overall character of this place (Pomerantz 2008, p. 69; see also Thorne 1993). I gained valuable understandings of how the complex, cultural environment of school compelled the girls to interact with, and respond to, the practices and actions of others within this complex cultural environment.

Western Heights Primary is recognised as a desirable and sought-after government primary school. The school website declares that it is a ‘leading education provider in Western Heights and the surrounding suburbs’. The popularity of the school has seen its enrolments increase from 348 in

1995 to 626 in 2014. Over 70 per cent of their students live outside the immediate local neighbourhood and 24 per cent of the students are from families whose first language is not English. Western Heights Primary School credits itself as achieving above-average results for literacy and numeracy for many years, as well as presenting itself as a leading school in relation to other activities such as sports teams, chess tournaments, music performances, art shows and exhibitions. From the position of ‘least adult’ in this space I aligned myself with the girls, sitting at the back of their classroom, sharing their recess and lunchtimes in the playground, developing a relationship of adult friend with the girls (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; Mandell 1991). I was determined to learn from the girls and to ‘challenge the deep assumption’ that I already knew what the girls would be ‘like’ (Thorne 1993, p. 12). While the speed and reach of the tween phenomenon may imply that these girls live in an almost placeless environment, my understandings demonstrate that Western Heights Primary School and their place in 6C continued to play a significant role in their negotiations of friendship and belonging in their final year of primary school (George 2007; Hey 1997; Kehily et al. 2002).

THE INFORMAL SPACES OF SCHOOLS

A primary school space is common to the majority of Australian pre-teens, yet every school is different, influenced by the school’s facilities, its feel or culture, the Principal and teaching staff, curriculum, policies, students, and families. The success of Western Heights Primary School is measured in a number of different ways. While the school is an important physical structure in the local community, its reputation as a sought-after destination for children reflects the ways the buildings are given a purpose by the many people who work and learn here. The school exudes an aura of success and advantage about it which is difficult to quantify but tangible amongst the students:

We at Western Heights are proud of our school
 A place we’ll always recall
 It aims to prepare us for our life ahead
 To work hard, be honest, and stand tall (School song).

Success is reflected in the school values, its history, students’ code of conduct, the presentation of its website, and its achievements as noted

by the Department of Education and Training. The school regularly reminded the students of Western Heights' expectations, particularly when representing the school at sport or out in the community on excursions: 'yeah representing the school and if you did something bad or something and people saw that and they'd think oh, that's not a good school' (Hayley 12). Beyond their reputation, national curriculum, teaching pedagogy, and academic outcomes, schools take on a role of assisting young people to interact with others and develop a sense of belonging and well-being. The education process 'involves not only shaping children's minds but also their bodies' (Valentine 2001, p. 144). Australian children attend school from the age of six and by the time they reach the age of 11 or 12 Australian girls have spent around seven years in kindergarten and primary school and are preparing to transition into secondary schools and colleges. The experience of school is not the same for adults and children:

Two worlds make up the school. First, there is the world of the institution. This is the adult-controlled formal school world of official structures: of timetables, and lessons organized on a principle of spatial segregation by age. Then there is the informal world of the children themselves: of social networks and peer group cultures (Valentine 2001, p. 142).

While I acknowledged the formal aspect of Western Heights Primary School and the structure they gave my study, it was the informal world these girls negotiated that provided me with the greatest insights into pre-teens' everyday lives. Every school 'make[s] choices about how they operate and the values they transmit', creating their own unique context for children who attend (McLeod and Yates 2006, p. 220). Pomerantz describes the school as the 'institutional glue that binds the identities of the students together' (2008, p. 68). While the physical aspect of school is evident in the classroom, corridors, and playgrounds, Pomerantz argues that it takes on an 'identity of its own' one 'that shapes and colours everything that occurs within it' (2008, p. 68). The school's identity is simultaneously shaped and influenced by the students, teachers, parents, and other individuals (Nayak 2003). External forces play a role; the school's physical location, its reputation in the wider community, and its educational outcomes influence how others view the school. In the same way that shopping centres have been described as 'theatres of their time', schools have also been referred to as a stage that bears witness to a myriad of stories (Miles 2010; Pomerantz 2008). The build-

ings, classes, corridors, and outdoor play spaces that make up Western Heights Primary School are the stage that enabled the considerations and negotiations of belonging for these pre-teen girls. As Thorne (1993, p. 27) argues, ‘schools are physically set up to maximize the surveillance of students’, but these girls managed to negotiate their friendships without excessive scrutiny or intervention from teachers and other supervising adults.

NEGOTIATIONS OF BELONGING IN THE CLASSROOM

The classroom is where I first meet the girls of 6C. Introducing myself to the girls and explaining my presence I am given a table at the back of the room. My position at the back of the classroom enabled me to observe the nuances of the girls’ interactions and behaviours. The students were inquisitive for the first few days and every so often one of the 14 girls or 12 boys will turn around and glance my way. Lindi was particularly inquisitive, turning around regularly throughout the day to see what I was doing (Field Notes).

After a few visits I was no longer a novelty and the girls and boys became accustomed to my presence. The classroom was where I began to make observations of the girls and began to develop my understandings of their interactions and friendships. The boys were an intriguing element of my work and ensured that the context of a co-educational class was incorporated into my work. While they were not directly involved in my project, these cross-gendered peers played a significant role in the girls’ negotiations of friendship (Rose 2007). Mr G., the girls’ teacher, facilitated many of the classroom interactions through the allocation of seating arrangements, reading and maths groups. The seating arrangements changed regularly but it was uncommon for Mr G. to place friendship groups together. After the girls’ single-gendered Year 5 experience he was keen to mix the genders as much as possible. As a result the girls had to constantly negotiate workable friendship with the other girls, and male classmates. I reflected on some of these negotiations:

There were four groups and I opted to sit with the smallest group which included Pippi, Kate, Holly, Lindi and one of their male classmates, Pat. Lindi made the statement that ‘this is an all-girls group’ and asked how ‘Patina’ (a male classmate named Pat) liked being in their group. Smiling

widely at Pat he smiled back. The banter went backwards and forwards between the two of them for a minute or so before the others started to ask what it was they needed to do (Field Notes).

While there were no girlfriend/boyfriend relationships between the female and male students in 6C, the appeal of their male classmates as friends was evident throughout the year:

I don't really stick to girls because I think they feel more confident with boys. And they can be like fun to play with, because if you play with girls they might not want to play the same things I like 'cause they want to play imaginary things like, where boys want to play Star Wars or something like that. So that's a bit more fun and they're like, I don't know (Sally 11).

The girls recognised the value of their friendships with the boys in the class:

They can be nice, so like a friend you know. You can be friends with them you don't feel scared to just be like 'eergh... you're a boy' (Lindi 12);

Like they can be your friends rather than not being your friends, like I said with three groups of girls and big boy group. They can be friends with like, girls as well. Like Lucas is friends with like Emma and Lea (Georgie 11);

I play with them like if they are a friend, like I don't really notice how I feel like as me and the future, I kind of like them just a friend that I'm doing stuff with. But it does make me wonder about the future (Sally 11).

Their friendships extended into the playgrounds and there were often games of tiggly (a game of tag or chasing) with both girls and boys from 6C joining in (Thorne 1993; Willett 2013). The games of tiggly were played over several different spaces in the playground and 'played out in the presence of many other children' some who were participants and many who weren't (Richards 2012, p. 380). As I discovered 'establishing who was or was not a participant' in the games of tiggly was a 'significant consideration' for Lindi and her friends:

Tiggly is okay if everyone, when you just play everyone starts to come in and then you don't know and then they say you're it and they weren't even playing from the start and you're like, you're not playing are you? And then

they're just like yeah Maddison said I could and she wasn't even playing from the start (Lindi 12);

And then like, then it gets really unpredictable and you might be running looking for someone who you know is playing and then someone just all of a sudden, you see runs all around and out of your view. And you're like oh, they must be playing (Holly 12).

The boys from 6C were an integral part of the girls' playground games and activities. While the boys are not recorded as participants in this project, they were very much a part of my ethnography and as much as possible I kept them informed of the progress of my work. I wanted them to feel they were a part of the project and it was important to me that they understood why I was there. It didn't take long to work out the friendship groups in 6C. While it was easier to observe the girls' friendships in the playground, where Mr G.'s determination to mix the genders in his class had minimal influence, their interactions and negotiations of friendship were evident in the classroom:

Kate, Lindi, Susan and Holly are standing in a group sharing food before they head out the door to recess. After school Maddie, Sally and Georgie stayed around to chat. In the middle of the room was a group made up of Erin, Rachel, Alex and Alison (Field Notes).

ALL GIRLS

The girls had all been in the same all-girls Year 5 class so were very familiar with each other. They still invested time in their considerations and negotiations of friendships. From the beginning of the year it was obvious that Lindi, Susan, Kate, and Holly formed a tight friendship group: 'Well if you have like the best group of friends you know, you know that you fit in and that's like the point' (Holly 11). There were two obvious pairings within the group, Susan and Kate, and Holly and Lindi, and the girls' movement from a group of four to two pairs was seamless. During an interview Lindi provided me with valuable insights into the negotiations the girls had undertaken to safeguard their groupings:

I would choose Holly 'cause at the start of the year we're like, partners for the year and I'm like, yeah. And that's what Kate and Susan did and that's what Pippi and Mollie did. So it worked out really good. But if we need like

a four we do me, Holly, Susan and Kate. But if it's a three we don't know, we're like, one of us has to go with Mollie and Pippi. One of us just puts our hand up and it doesn't really matter (Lindi 11).

Understanding the uncertainty or discomfort of working with partners or groups outside their friendship circle these girls actively negotiated practices that eliminated this possibility. The negotiations worked well for them throughout the year, moving easily between group or partner work ensuring they had a place to belong. While the arrangements worked for these girls, I would argue that restricting access to their friendship group limited opportunities for other girls in the class to interact with them. Their decision also cemented the place of Mollie and Pippi on the periphery of their tight-knit friendship group.

The girls all had a vested interest in negotiations with classmates, male and female, outside their own friendship group as it enabled them to feel a sense of belonging even when their close friends are absent: 'well it feels okay [when they are away] 'cause I know there's still lots of my friends like Hayley and Susan and Erin and all that' (Sally 11). The girls' negotiations in the classroom were ongoing; however, it was their interactions in the outdoor spaces of Western Heights Primary School that offered the greatest insight into the constant and complex negotiations of belonging for these pre-teens.

PRE-TEENS GIRLS' INFORMAL USE OF OUTDOOR SPACES

The main building at Western Heights Primary School is a long, rectangular, single-storied building, surrounded by playgrounds, play equipment, a sand pit, soccer pitch, and a small football oval, most of which were made out of synthetic turf. A synthetic netball and basketball courts doubled as tennis courts, an athletics track, volleyball and handball courts. It is almost as if the designer thought about every game the students could want to play and then incorporated all of those in the outdoor spaces. The formality and structure of these spaces for specific games and activities worked to 'determine what social actions' and games the girls engaged in although the students were creative in the ways they used them (Marsh and Richards 2013, p. 2). The dedicated sporting fields and courts were regularly used for different versions of the games they were designed for. The soccer pitch was home to many games as the students played their own mini versions of games with their friends. With over 600 students in the

outdoor spaces of Western Heights Primary School the result could often be described as a chaotic mix of students of all ages running, kicking and, by necessity, avoiding. The gymnasium and other portable classrooms surrounded the play areas, creating boundaries for the students, and the canteen/eating area bordered the soccer pitch. There are specific spaces and play equipment that were formally allocated to each year level and there are many that the students assigned their own creative activities to on an informal basis. Rows of bamboo trees along the school building were popular places for hide-and-seek, and a large chess board in an out-of-the-way corner was creatively used as a dance floor by students throughout the year. The spaces between buildings, walkways, and the play equipment also provided the students with many small alternate spaces.

Kate, Susan, Holly, Lindi, and often Mollie played together at every opportunity but the friendships of the other girls were more fluid. Although I learnt very quickly where I might find the different groups of 6C girls:

The girls are fairly consistent in the spaces they use and tend to gravitate to the same locations each recess and lunchtime. This may be the result of knowing where they can locate their friends but also because they know they have 'claimed' this area for their activities. The girls are not often confronted by other students attempting to take over the spaces and there appears to be a level of understanding/respect for these girls in the final year of primary school. It could also be argued that the Year 6 students' behaviours contributed to the younger grades avoidance of the spaces they inhabited. I witnessed, on several occasions, groups of Year 6 girls walking around the playground in groups of 3 or 4. While this is not an unusual activity it was the linking of arms and striding purposefully around the playground that stood out. The practice demonstrated a sense of togetherness which was intriguing but a powerful presence that in this space suggested a level of power and authority over the younger students (Term One Review).

Some of the 6C girls chose to undertake quieter activities during their recess and lunchtime (Willett 2013). The stairs and landing leading from the Year 6 area into the back playground was a popular space. I would be assured of finding at least two of them, and often six, sitting on the concrete stair and landing:

It's warm, 28C, and as I head outside I find Maddie and Georgie, tucked into the corner of the landing at the top of the stairs making up board

games. They said they like it here because it's outside but shady and away from the noise of the playground. Maddie also says no-one else comes up here and they can make their board games without being interrupted (Field Notes).

As they did not want to join in the more physical activities below them, the steps offered these girls a quieter space, not completely removed from the other students but enough that they could engage in their own activities with limited interruptions (Thorne 1993). The raised platform enabled them to oversee the activities and interactions occurring in the back playground and oval areas so they remained connected in their own fashion. Another popular space in the playground was 'the circuit'. The long, rectangular main building of Western Heights Primary School, positioned slightly off centre in the school grounds created a circular track which I refer to as 'the circuit'.

This fortuitous space enabled the girls to walk laps around the school. On their journey they passed through or by all the outdoor play spaces. The circuit provided the girls with a purposeful activity that enabled them to discretely observe the activities of their friends and peers. My field notes are full of observations of the girls' use of this popular space, walking in small groups or large, looking for friends, playing tiggly with the boys, or hiding when they didn't want to be seen (Thorne 1993). Mr G. and I often talked about the cohesiveness of his class and how the playground games and activities spilt over and benefited group work and interactions within the class. He suggested this was a complete contrast from his class the previous year who were quite distant from each other. He was very happy to see this year's group having fun with each other in class and outdoors in the playgrounds. Not surprisingly though, friendships were not always straightforward.

NEGOTIATING GENDERED SPACES

Observing the girls' use of the outdoor spaces at Western Heights Primary School enabled me to gain some interesting insights into the ways students used the outdoor spaces. The gendered separation of the girls' games was obvious from the outset with many areas such as the soccer pitch and small football oval used predominantly by the boys (Thorne 1993). Western Heights Primary School students' play spaces reflected those observed

by Thorne (1993, p. 83) in her ethnography of an American elementary school at the end of the twentieth century:

Boys control as much as ten times more space than girls, when one adds up the area of large playing fields (plus basketball courts) ... and compares it with the much smaller areas (for jump rope, hopscotch, foursquare, and doing tricks on the bars) where girls predominate.

There were occasions when girls would join in the games but more often than not they were busy with their own games in smaller playground spaces or the circuit, as I will discuss shortly. There were also many occasions when the girls were playing around the edges of the 'boys' spaces, aware that the 'spatial separation' of the soccer pitch formed a boundary they found difficult to cross. This was where I would often find Hayley, 'In the back playground Hayley is standing in the soccer goals ostensibly playing soccer with the boys but she is more engaged in conversations with Rachel who is sitting behind the goals' (Field Notes).

Knowingly or unknowingly the students created gendered play areas, particularly for the boys who would play their games largely uninterrupted by their female peers. I took a particular interest in this gendered activity on the soccer pitch as this was Hayley's favourite space at Western Heights Primary School: 'ever since I came to Western Heights my favourite sport is soccer ... yes, I'm often next to the soccer field, [its] probably my favourite place to play' (Hayley 11). She was often in the vicinity of the soccer pitch, hanging around the edges or sometimes playing with the young students who made do with the football oval as they could not always find a space for themselves on the busy soccer pitch: 'Hayley is playing soccer with some Grade 3 and 4 boys on the football oval' (Field Notes).

While there was no rule that stated the girls couldn't use the soccer pitch at any time, the gendered exclusion was sanctioned by the leadership team and teachers who allowed the gendered division to take place. Their response was to have dedicated 'no boys' or 'girls only' soccer days reinforcing the gender 'divisions and larger patterns of inequality' in the ways some sections of the playground space were separated as 'boy' spaces (Thorne 1993, p. 83). This was an interesting response yet the all-girl days demonstrated the ways these spaces could be utilised differently:

It's a girls' soccer day, and no boys are allowed on the synthetic soccer pitch as the girls have free reign for the day. Kate and Susan are sitting in the

middle of the pitch, enjoying the sun. There are a few girls kicking a soccer ball around and others sitting around the edges. They use this space in very different ways than the boys. Where there would normally be 50/60 students actively engaged in multiple soccer matches today there are probably 20 girls on the whole pitch, some kicking a ball and others sitting and chatting (Field Notes).

The boys struggled with the girls' 'misuse' of the pitch and asked if they could go on anyway as the girls weren't utilising the whole space or in what they deemed an appropriate manner. There was evidence of a 'claimed entitlement' that the space could only be used for the purpose of its design (Thorne 1993, p. 83). The boys' position was arguably supported by the teaching staff, and even the Principal Mr T.

Once there was no girls on the oval so Mr T. said 'oh yeah the boys can go on the oval' and all of a sudden the girls go on the oval and say 'what are you doing here, you're not allowed to be here' (Hayley 11).

I was surprised at the inequity of the soccer pitch usage but can understand the leadership team and teacher attempting to address the problem of what was often an overcrowded space in the playground (Price 2011; Richards 2012; Thorne 1993). For the girls, who treated their 'day' on the pitch as a novelty and were very aware of the need to defend their right, even on these infrequent days, to be allowed to use the space the way they wanted to:

I love it when we have girls' days. We went on there and we were spinning and spinning and rolling, and like (Holly 12);

Oh that was so cool (Kate 12);

And then they're [boys] like, no one is playing soccer, can we please go on there, no-one is playing (Holly 12);

Yeah they think it's just for soccer but it's not, it's for everything (Lindi 11);

Oh do you remember that time that we sat in the middle of the oval (Kate 12);

We had a strike, yes, yes, we had a strike from the girls (Kate 12);

We sat in the middle and then everyone was playing soccer around us (Holly 12);

and then the boys came over and asked us to move (Maddie);

We were just sitting there and then the teacher said ‘excuse me girls you need to Go’. And then the boys, then the boys came and they’re like, ‘what are you doing, move’. And we’re like ‘no’ (Lindi 11).

In line with Willett’s (2013, p. 36) observations from her ethnographic study in UK primary schools there was no particular ‘type’ or label, like ‘tomboy’, I would have described for Hayley’s desire to play this ‘traditionally gendered’ game. I would argue instead that Hayley’s desire more closely reflects the messages of ‘can-do’ girls and ‘girl power’ she has grown up with (Harris 2004). Encouraged by this mantra Hayley is motivated and ‘encouraged to take further action to achieve’ her goal (McRobbie 2008, p. 545).

NEGOTIATING UNCOMFORTABLE SPACES

The outdoor spaces became stages for the girls’ negotiations of friendship and belonging in many different ways. Sometimes the spaces even assisted the girls to avoid interacting with their friends when friendships splintered or the inevitable disagreements occurred. The significance of the outdoor spaces for avoiding uncomfortable interactions was no more evident than on a cold June winter’s day. I observed Sally:

Purposefully striding around the school. Asking whether she was looking for her friends, she indicated that she didn’t want to find them and went on her way. Not long after her friends, Georgie, Maddie and Alison walked around the corner. Maddie said they were looking for Sally as they’d had a bit of a fight and they wanted to catch up with her. Sally soon appears around the corner and is clearly upset, walking up to Maddie accusing her of ‘sidelining her’. Attempting to diffuse the interaction, Maddie suggested to Sally that ‘stuff like this always happens’. Sally was not being placated though, and her response to Maddie, ‘you sidelined me just like you sidelined me on my birthday two years ago’ revealed the deeply held hurt that she had been holding onto (Field Notes).

On this particular day the circuit enabled Sally to avoid her friends without having to find somewhere to hide in a corner of the playground, or inside

in the library or classroom. Perhaps it bought her time to walk her annoyance off or to diffuse her anger at her friends. Clearly holding onto and relating her current hurt to previous experiences from their earlier years, she wasn't ready to confront them yet and for a while the circuit gave her some reprieve. The circuit enabled Sally to be angry and experience her hurt but ultimately the circuit facilitated a confrontation between the girls, forcing the renegotiations of friendships. Friendship upheavals such as these were a constant throughout the year often translating to challenging periods in the playground. While there are teachers on yard duty by Year 6 there are few adult interventions in the girls' activities and they largely negotiate their own place to belong in this large, complex space. Despite the knowledge that their play was constantly supervised and observed by teachers, the girls appeared to forget at times that their games and interactions were under the scrutiny of adults (James et al. 1998; Richards 2012). That is, until adults remind them of their surveillance: 'like last year this boy had icy poles and he was on the oval and he [the Principal] goes, over the speaker, "so and so no eating on the oval" and we're just like, "oh he's watching"' (Hayley 12).

For Maddie, the presence of a caring adult working in the outdoor spaces of Western Heights Primary School enabled her to negotiate a period of fractured friendships that made her time in the playgrounds lonely and long. It was an October morning towards the end of Term 3 when I came across Maddie walking alone around the playground and I stopped to chat:

Maddie is walking around on her own, looking for Rob, the handyman/gardener. He is probably in his 60s, a nice, caring man to have around the school. The kids are all very friendly with him and he is often talks to them about their playground activities. I chat for a little while with Maddie who tells me she knows he's here as his car is over there, she points behind her outside the playground. She wants to find him because he is good to talk to and she can help him to plant things.

I feel for Maddie as she walks off. Her friendship group of Sally, Georgie and herself has almost disintegrated and she is left looking for someone to help her get through recess and lunch time in the playground. Georgie is besotted with her boyfriend and she spends no time with her girlfriends. Sally is often with the Year 5 boys, playing tiggy. Whether by choice or exclusion Maddie is not involved in the same games (Field Notes).

A position in the garden beds alongside the handyman/gardener is not necessarily a place many 11- and 12-year-old girls would consider to assist them achieve a sense of belonging in the school environment. Yet a sense of belonging is not simply about the presence of friends; ‘the emotional attachment to and security in the setting that comes from feeling valued by and valuing of the community’ plays a significant role (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62). I didn’t consider Maddie’s connection with Rob to be inappropriate; to be truthful it made me feel sad that an 11 year old with 500 other students running around felt the need to spend her outdoor time with an adult but Maddie’s need was clearly evident. At least for this period of her final year of primary school Maddie felt the need for unique negotiations to achieve a sense of belonging. More significantly she did not have to succumb to the fear of spending her recess and lunch-times alone, a prospect all the girls dreaded:

[Without friends] I would feel like I wouldn’t belong (Mollie 12);

Like this isn’t the school for me and I don’t feel like I wouldn’t belong you know (Lindi 12);

It makes you feel like you only want to stay home (Alison 12).

While the friendship groups in 6C worked for the most part, the girls maintained close friends with students in the other Year 6 classes. Hayley’s constant companion in the playground, Elena, was from Miss Lambert’s class. As was Lindi’s best mate, Tracey. Listening to the girls’ description of their Year 5 all-girls class I wondered how different my explorations of pre-teen girls would have been if I had spent their Year 5 with them or even been allocated to Miss Andrew’s or Miss Lambert’s class.

SURPRISING COMPANIONS

It is a common practice in Australian primary school to allocate Year 6 students to the new Preps to give them someone to help them through their first few weeks of primary school. Joint activities for these Year 6 girls and their Prep buddies included shared reading sessions, eating lunch, and taking them out into the playgrounds at recess and lunchtime. The girls of 6C took their role very seriously and often spent time in the early weeks playing with their Prep buddies:

Kate walks past holding hands with her Prep buddy, Elizabeth, who she introduces to me. They sit down on the seat around the big tree behind me and Elizabeth is very quickly the centre of attention. Lindi, Kate, Erin and two other Year 6 girls sit with Elizabeth asking her questions, doting over her, allowing her to lean against them, fixing her dress when it rides up. She appears to be enjoying their company (Field Notes).

As the year moved on their Prep buddies became more comfortable in this space and the need for the big girls to help them out diminished. But the relationship was not always one way as these Prep girls were often seen in the company of 6C girls when it was the bigger girls who needed to have someone to play with. For Sally and Maddie particularly who were often looking for someone to play with, their Prep buddies provided them with another option in the playground:

At lunch time I again walked around looking for the students. Steff and Alicia were walking together near the canteen. Sally and Maddie were sitting with their Prep buddies and a couple of extra Preps. Sally introduced me to the 4 girls they were playing with.

DOES CLASS MATTER?

There are three Year 6 classes at Western Heights Primary School, one taught by Mr G., and the others by Miss Andrew and Miss Lambert. The Principal allocated me to Mr G.'s class. There were several reasons motivating his decision. Mr G. was the most experienced teacher at this year level, the girls were all moving back from an experimental all-girls class in Year 5, and the Principal was keen to see how they reintegrated with their male peers. Having experienced a year without boys the girls were well placed to consider how their absence impacted on their work performance and their ability to achieve a sense of belonging in the class. Western Heights Primary School had previously run all-boys classes in Year 5 due to an imbalance in their enrolment numbers. Adopting the argument that there are many social/emotional and academic benefits to students and teachers in running single-gendered grades the school extended this initiative and introduced an all-girls Year 5 class (Gannon and Sawyer 2014; Price 2011). All 13 girls introduced in this book were members of the trial Year 5 class and then allocated to Mr G.'s co-educational Year 6 class. Their vibrant, young Year 5 teacher, Miss Fletcher, created many opportunities

for the girls throughout the year. The girls shared with me some of the advantages they identified in their ‘quieter’ classroom:

Well there weren’t as many interruptions and it was much quieter (Erin 12);

It’s a more free environment I suppose because the boys are like, they’re kind of like louder and so it’s concentration. It was easier to concentrate last year (Sally 11).

The girls felt they could share more and delve deeper into topics particularly those of a sensitive nature:

Oh yeah it was more relaxed, like we would, well I would share more because they would understand more because they’re girls (Kate 12);

Last year I actually felt that I could do more and say more and I could just be myself (Lindi 12).

Removing boys from this Year 5 class positioned these pre-teen girls in a different space than their peers in co-educational classes (Price 2011; Rose 2007). The experimental nature of the trial year focused additional attention on the girls as the teacher and leadership team were determined to make the class a success. The girls enjoyed the experience: ‘It was just all girls and it was fun. Having a fun teacher as well, she used to teach us always properly and stuff’ (Rachel 11). The girls recognised that the absence of boys impacted on their ability to negotiate friendships and a sense of belonging:

Like Georgie was saying [I] don’t really stick to girls because I think I feel more confident with boys. Well I have some of the boys as my friends but I don’t know what they think of me as a friend’ (Sally 12).

The girls recognised that the boys’ presence had an impact on their ability to learn and to develop a sense of belonging in the class but they weren’t dismissive of the benefit of having them in the classroom (Hamm and Faircloth 2005). Lindi even suggested that their absence needed to be recognised in some way that ‘I was sort of like the boy of the class last year’. She ‘fessed up’, suggesting that ‘last year I actually wanted to be in the mixed class because they had such a good class, you know and I

regret saying this but I actually missed them [boys]' (Lindi 12). Despite the noise, the interruptions, and the positive influence of Miss Fletcher, the majority of girls felt that their mixed-gendered Year 6 class with Mr G. offered them a better learning environment and more enjoyable social environment:

I thought that I would learn a lot better when I was with the girls' class. I don't know if it was Miss Fletcher 'cause she has a different teaching style to what I'm used to. But I didn't learn as much as I have this year. It was really weird. I don't know if it was the boys or if it was the teacher, I don't know (Kate 12);

I prefer to be in a mixed grade rather than an all girls' grade, it's sort of annoying just girls (Maddie 12).

Interestingly, from an educational perspective, the girls' results did not demonstrate improvement or academic outcomes above their co-educated peers, and the single-gendered girls' class was not repeated. The girls demonstrated further insights into the significance of class composition in relation to my work. Holly and her friends pointed out that my findings may have been different if I had worked with Miss Lambert's or Miss Andrew's class:

You got assigned or picked a good grade. 'Cause if you were in the other grades you'd get a different intention [outcome]' (Holly 12);

Like Miss A.'s grade, they're some [the popular kids] of them. Probably about three people (Holly 12);

There's always a class that is boyfriend and girlfriends class. They're always the popular ones (Kate 12);

Yeah, popular. There's popular boys, there's 2 popular boys in Miss Andrew's class and then the rest of them are in Miss Lambert's class (Lindi 12);

There's just certain people when they are in a class they influence the other people (Kate 12).

The girls clearly identified that a different group of students would have impacted on their Year 6 experience at Western Heights Primary School.

They recognised that the ‘popular’ girls and boys, partnering up with girlfriends and boyfriends, influenced the make-up of a class (George 2007). The girls suggested that they were happy to be in their class without the ‘popular’ kids and free of the additional hassles and dramas that can come with more intimate relationships. But what about those popular kids who knew I was here exploring other girls’ lives. I wondered at times how aware they were of my presence. My thoughts were answered one lunch-time in a very visual display:

I was sitting at the table under the shade in the far corner of the front playground. I have my daily notes and pen on the table in front of me. I hadn’t been there long when seven Grade 6 girls from Miss Lambert’s class moved into the space. Forming two rows, three in front and three behind, the girls started dancing and a performed to a Jessica Mauboy song, *Burn*. Aware of my presence but uninhibited they performed back flips, dance moves and sang. One of the girls gave the others feedback and they would stop, listen to her advice, and then start all over again. I exchanged eye contact with the girls but there were no words spoken and few smiles (Field Notes).

I was initially surprised by the apparent lack of self-consciousness but became more aware of their confident and assured poise. I was intrigued by the statement they were making. I was the outsider here and they reminded me that my intrusion into their playground spaces was not necessarily appreciated (James et al. 1998; Thorne 1993). They were also making a statement at my apparent lack of interest in their lives. They knew I was working with the girls from 6C and were arguably questioning why I had chosen not to work with them. Finishing their dance the girls moved off together without a word being spoken.

The need for individuals to make choices and take charge of their lives in pursuit of a self-project at the beginning of the twenty-first century is well documented and ‘the benchmark for achieving a successful identity is no longer adherence to a set of normative characteristics, but instead a capacity for self-invention’ (Harris 2004, p. 6). Girls in particular are being encouraged to consider themselves as a ‘celebrity project’, looking to gain a public profile as the fashion a sense of self (Hopkins 2002). I had given the girls in 6C the opportunity to ‘be famous’, at least in their eyes, as they declared the fame of being in my ‘book’ as ‘cool and exciting, it’s like, part of it is about you, you know, and a lot of people will read it, so that’s really cool’ (Lindi 11). I had not afforded that opportunity

and possibility to the girls who danced in front of me. While a number of these girls were clearly dancers the performance was not all about the dance. My presence at their performance was intentional and their dance was designed to send the message that I was the outsider here, in their playground, but also in overlooking them as research subjects with voices that wanted to be heard.

THE EVERYDAY INFLUENCE OF FAMILY

The understandings, or ‘voices’, of the 13 girls from 6C clearly inform the insights into pre-teens’ lives in this book. There were however many voices influencing and informing the stories that the girls shared. The significance of family and their influence in the girls’ everyday lives was ever present. Throughout the year the girls shared stories of the lives they lived outside the school environment, and deeply embedded in these conversations were valuable insights into their family life. Through their stories these pre-teens enabled me to gain an understanding of the ongoing significance of family and their unique family practices in their lives. These are clearly not researched evidence of broader understandings of family life but rather insights into the ongoing relationship between these pre-teen girls and their family. Filtered through the eyes of 11- and 12-year-olds these pre-teens shared stories of family fun and intimacy:

I always play up to Dad. He’s like ‘sit up here this will be really funny, you’ll love it’ and then, I’m like ‘Dad, I’m going to get in trouble [with Mum]’ (Kate 12).

They shared their own experiences of the practicalities of everyday life in their homes:

Dad works really late and then Mum has to try and cook the dinner and you know, get everything clean and then she gets tired and she has to go to bed at 12 o’clock and then she expects us to help (Holly 12).

The girls’ frustrations and disappointment with their family was evident at times: ‘I actually don’t know how I have fun with them [family]. I’m definitely not going to say I have fun with them cleaning ’cause I don’t’ (Hayley 11). The other girls often complained about daily chores and increasing expectations but their insights were balanced with stories of

fun times, or rewards for helping: 'I finally finished it [cleaning my room] I finished it on Sunday. That's what I had to do to get the tickets to the Pink concert' (Maddie 12). There were also insights that may have made the girls' parents feel uncomfortable if they knew they were being shared: 'I can't believe that they wrote a song about him [Dad] called *The Boy Does Nothing*' (Lindi 11). Siblings were often the brunt of many a complaint or frustration:

My sister is very annoying. When I'm on the computer she asks me to hurry up and I just take longer 'cause it annoys her (Maddie 11);

Mine's [brother] 50/50, he can be really cute and then he can be really aghh (Lindi 11).

There were many occasions though where the girls shared with me the fun times they had with family at home. Some of the girls had a good sense of humour and enjoyed having fun:

One night, it was so fun, everyone was out and I just put on my bed socks and I was sliding around the house (Kate 11);

'Cause my mum owns a hairdressing salon I have heaps [of magazines] and they're all just ... so I just look at the pictures I don't read (Cathy 11);

I went camping when it was my birthday and they let me choose where I wanted to go (Maddie 12).

My insights into the girls' family lives are included here because they provide valuable understandings of the ongoing significance of parents and family for pre-teens. At an age where young people are looking to move beyond their familial relationships the girls' ongoing reliance on family is significant. The girls recognised that their family influenced them to be the type of person they are:

Family is very important to me (Susan 12);

Family because they are always helping me to make the right decisions (Erin 12);

Well, they like, I don't know how to put it ... if you've done something wrong they'll tell you you've done something wrong ... and if you've done

something good they're like happy. Sometimes they show it and sometimes I just know (Hayley 12).

The girls' parents were aware that I was spending time with the girls as they have given their approval for the girls to talk with me. They also received a copy of my regular newsletter, *Mrs Brookes' Blurb*, designed to keep them and the girls up to date with my progress. There were times though when I reflected on their awareness of intrinsic links between the girls' stories and their own family narrative. Insights into their parents' values and understandings of social norms are weaved throughout the girls' stories. There were stories told of parents who spend their lives driving the girls to sporting activities, one who regularly suffered from migraines, parents who worked excessively, those out of work, weekend visits to non-custodial parents, and overhearing heated arguments between parents. Alex related stories of school holidays spent with her grandma in the country, as her parents both worked.

Studies of girls' friendships 'have found that the socio economic status of the girls' family background is highly influential' (George 2007, p. 16). The girls of 6C's nuanced considerations and negotiations of friendships demonstrated closer links between families with similar socio-economic status, values, and cultural norms. I chose though not to ask demographic questions of the girls or their parents, yet the socio-economic status of the girls was clearly evident through the stories of these 11- and 12-year-old girls (MacDonald 2012). I argue too that at some instinctive level these girls were conscious of their differences of their family and their own unique family practices. There was some suggestion that these girls may only now be beginning to question differences: 'do you have barbecues for Christmas? Do all the people have barbecues, I'm guessing they do' (Alex 11). The experience resonated for Erin who recalled, 'yeah, sometimes Dad makes a lamb on the spit for us' (Erin 12). For Alison and the other girls though this was an unfamiliar event: 'what? I don't do that' (Alison 11). As Morgan suggests (2011, p. 134), 'family members frequently talk about each other' ... the 'telling of stories is a key family practice just as stories are woven into many, probably all, areas of social life'.

Unsurprisingly parents' decisions and their social location constantly influenced these girls. It was Georgie's experience with the school production though that most clearly demonstrated the consequences of family decisions for the girls:

Georgie had been a part of all the class rehearsals, costume and make-up planning designs leading up to the evening performance. When I arrived at school on the big day, the classroom was a hive of activity but Georgie lounged around the classroom. The other students, boys and girls, twittered with excitement as Lindi's mum (a hairdresser) was working with the girls' hair and make-up ready for the class performance of Michael Jackson's hit song, *Bad*. Observing Georgie's lack of engagement I asked her what was wrong. She informed me that her mum was working for the next few days and couldn't look after her and her little sister so they were being taken to a country Victorian town that afternoon to stay with her grandmother for a few days. She was going to miss the performance and had to watch her friends' excitement and preparation for the remainder of the day.

At some level Georgie's mum had missed the significance of belonging and it would be easy to judge her. She was clearly busy at work and Georgie's dad lives a long way away so isn't able to step in and help. Whatever her reasons, her own social location and understandings of the importance of school performances failed to recognise the significance for Georgie to be there tonight. Unfortunately it was Georgie who was left with no place to belong with her peers on this special day (Field Notes).

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

It is difficult to know whether my presence and relationship with the girls facilitated the sharing of more intimate and sensitive information. It was important that the girls were allowed to 'speak for themselves', yet as George (2007, p. 39) suggests, 'the extent to which the girls in my study ever felt free of the power relationship that exists between themselves as pre-adolescents and myself as an adult is hard to discern' (Mandell 1991). I was, however, very aware of my position as a middle-class white female whose 'agenda was in part to appropriate parts of their lives for my own use' (Hey 1997, p. 49, in George 2007). My methodology was framed to create relationships with these girls that enabled intimate conversations by being different from those they experienced with teachers in this space. I discovered the success of this approach when I discovered Mr G.'s limited knowledge of the girls' lives outside of school. There was clearly a difference in the level of sharing of their lives between me and Mr G. As Hayley pointed out, I was different:

Yes, yes, you're a good one. Because normally the teachers are all, if it's a cold day, normally the teachers are all in the staffroom with the heaters on

having a cup of coffee and stuff and on a hot day they're in there having ice creams (Hayley 12).

The relationship I built with the girls enabled me to have rich and ongoing conversations with the girls about family practices and decisions that were important to them. We talked about the influence of the ways family decisions influenced many family members in their lives, from grandparents to siblings, and the girls' frustrations at parents' decisions which continue to restrict the freedom they desired. To demonstrate how family decisions influenced the girls' playground conversations I consider how the girls' secondary school choices influenced their ability to negotiate a place to belong during their final year at primary school.

GOOD SCHOOL, BAD SCHOOL CONVERSATIONS

It is widely acknowledged that a child's sense of belonging and connectedness to their school plays a major role in their engagement with learning and subsequent educational outcomes (Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) 2016). The education system in Australia was designed for children to attend a school in close proximity to their home and traditionally there have been three options: public or government schools, independent or private schools, and Catholic schools. Australian parents are akin to those around the globe and take their role as consumers of their children's education very seriously. While traditionally parents 'shop around' for the perceived best education for their children their choices have focused on differences in the independent or Catholic systems and the select-entry, high-performing schools in the public system (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Healey 2009; Tsolidis 2009). The increasing number of specialist and select-entry public secondary school has changed the landscape of public education in Australia. Public secondary school education in Australia can now be arguably separated into two groups, selective or highly desirable schools and disadvantaged schools. Parents strive to get their children's public education 'right' and invest hours, arguably days, facilitating their acceptance in a selective or highly desirable secondary school. Conversations about where to send their child for secondary school begin from the moment of birth and increase through the pre-kindergarten and primary school years. While we understand parents' perspectives it is less clear how the consumption of education impacts on the true consumers in this decision, children and young people.

The period of transition to secondary school can be disruptive. The impact of multiple factors, including the presence of friends and peers, a sense of belonging, teachers' support, and academic expectations can have positive or negative effects on students (Hanewald 2013). The public schools' selection process takes place during the students' final year in primary school, Year 6, and cannot be organised earlier. We know that parents are heavily invested in the decision, concerned about future study and career opportunities for their child, but how aware are 11- and 12-year-olds of the significance of this decision? How aware are they of the increasing divide between the selective or highly desirable schools and those labelled disadvantaged? Having spent time with the girls during the selection process I suggest that they were very aware, although their concerns and conversations are arguably different than those they have with their parents. Conversations between the girls and their peers in the playground revolve around the 'good' schools and 'bad' or 'worst' schools that are possibilities for these girls. The girls describe their schools as 'good' as opposed to others that they openly describe as 'bad' or 'worst'. They suggest that there is a:

'List' of schools and they would want to go to one on the top of the list (Maddie 12);

There are some good schools and some bad schools and you wanted to get into one of those good schools (Mollie 12);

I just hoped I would get into the school I wanted to get into (Maddie 12).

There were multiple conversations in the playground as students visited secondary schools and colleges with their parents and families. The girls 'visited them [schools] and heard stories from other people', from their parents, 'adults and then other kids about things that they do there and stuff' (Karen 11). As part of that process they begin to form their own ideas of where they would like to attend secondary school. Or, as I have discovered, they began to allocate secondary schools and colleges to the categories of 'good schools' and 'bad schools'. The girls' parents had already considered the schools that they wanted the girls to attend and they talked to them about these:

My parents, well not my Dad 'cause he was at work, but my Mum talked to me about which school I wanted to go to. She bought home this big

bunch of high school brochures and stuff. But they didn't really suit. Not many high schools I looked at suited me. But Flinders City seemed my type. 'Cause of the music programmes and ... (Hayley 12).

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

I don't really get my say unless it's affecting me but with high [secondary] schools I really wanted to go to Westgate High but they took me to Mount St Anne's [a Catholic girls school]. I did like it but I sort of still wanted to go to [Westgate High], but I did like it and I'm going to Mt St Anne's now. And I feel good about that because I'm going with Alison and Lindi and a few of the girls [from the other Year 6 classes] (Alex 11).

Thankfully Alex and her parents were able to reach an acceptable outcome. Similarly Alison was happy as she said about Mount St Anne's: 'That was the only place I wanted to go to and that's where I got into' (Alison 11). The rest of the girls were hoping to go a range of schools in the surrounding suburbs but also across the city. Interestingly there was a focus on girls' schools for this group but it is difficult to determine if their Year 5 experience influenced them or their parents. Susan and Sally will be going to the all-girls secondary schools their older sisters attend. Susan's is a private all-girls on the other side of the city while Sally's Catholic girls school is not far from here. Kate and Holly were desperate to get into an all-girls public school, describing their preference as 'cool'. Maddie and Mollie are also hoping to get into an all-girls stream at another local secondary college and Hayley to a local public school. All will have to wait though until August when Victorian public secondary schools convey decisions about enrolment preferences. Erin's family were arguably making the biggest decision about their secondary school choice for her:

Well like, we might, well we're probably moving so I can get into a high school and they talked to, like the whole, like me and my sister about it. So yeah, they [told] us if we were okay with that and stuff. 'Cause Ashleigh [younger sister] will probably have to change schools (Erin 12).

While the decision to move into the zoned area of their chosen secondary school for Erin and her sister may confirm that she will be attending, the significance of this change is not lost on Erin. She avoided the conversations about secondary school choice knowing that her parents' decision

in relation to the value of a good education was different from the others. Her parents were prepared to sell up and move houses to ensure she could go to what they considered the ‘best’ school for her. Even Susan, who is going to a private girls’ school in Melbourne found it challenging to join in the conversation about school choice with her friends. While other parents may consider her acceptance at a private girls’ school a good outcome, Susan sought reassurance from me on several occasions. She was looking for clarification that her school was a good school as it’s not the one her friends will be attending.

What happens though for those girls who know that they won’t be accepted in the ‘good’ schools? How do these girls negotiate a place to belong when the schools they will be attending are at the bottom of the list? How do they face the remainder of the year knowing that the conversations of transition and moving on will be challenging? I remember clearly my conversation with Georgie as we bumped into each other walking to school one August morning:

We talked about the secondary school she was going to, as well as not wanting to catch a train, she doesn’t want to go where she is going. She named two others [schools] she would have preferred to go to, one I understand is particularly difficult to gain entry into. She said her mum didn’t want her to go to her other preferences, so it wasn’t an option (Field Notes).

Feeling dejected about our education system and recognising her family’s failure to enrol her in a good school at the age of 12 is a very sad place to begin such an important transition. Georgie didn’t understand the broader significance of school choice in regard to ‘social cohesion or social fragmentation’ (Tsolidis 2009). Nor was she likely to be aware of ‘the types of students who gain access to higher education and the types of schools that do and don’t facilitate this access’ (Tsolidis 2009, p. 8). She was however aware that her school didn’t enable her to join in the celebrations and conversations with those who have been informed they have been accepted at one of their preferred ‘good schools’. While ‘the importance of school transitions for pupil adjustment, particularly their impact on later well-being and attainment, remains contested’, Georgie’s dejection suggests that she is aware that her ability to maintain a level of dignity with her peers, at least for these conversations, is limited (West et al. 2010, p. 21).

HAVING NOTHING TO SAY

My aim in this chapter has been to provide a context for the everyday negotiations of friendship and belonging for these pre-teen girls. The chapter acknowledges that the work of belonging for these girls is undertaken in the complex interactional spaces they occupy and that in many instances these influences are interlinked. I chose a Melbourne primary school as the ‘place’ for this exploration as school is acknowledged as one of the most significant places in pre-teen girls lives. The final year of primary school plays an even more significant role for pre-teens in many Western developed nations as they look forward to their transition to secondary schools and colleges. The primary school is also the site where three important influences in the life of 11- and 12-year-old pre-teen girls—family, friends, and school—merge and entwine.

The girls’ negotiations of belonging that were introduced here could be described as everyday interactions yet their work is considered intricate and highly nuanced. Taking the initiative to set up ‘partners for the year’ demonstrated the significance of Lindi and her friends’ negotiations but also revealed the fear of having no friends to work or play with. Integrating back into a co-educational environment after a year in an all-girls Year 5 class adds another layer to the girls’ negotiations as they reacquainted themselves with the presence of boys in their class. The constant, ongoing investment of all the girls to ensure they have friends in the class, boys or girls, was evident in their negotiations. These pre-teens appear to be well versed in this process, undertaking their negotiations in an inconspicuous but highly effective manner. Their negotiations in the playground areas were even more nuanced. Without the close supervision of teachers the girls actively utilised the outdoor areas to negotiate quiet spaces and physical games and activities. They developed avoidance strategies and ways to achieve a sense of belonging when friendships fractured or the winter colds and flus caught up with their friends, leaving them alone at recess and lunchtime. Maddie’s connection with the school handyman/gardener revealed the significance of having someone to help you belong when friendships get tough. Hayley’s place on the side of the soccer pitch, longing to join in, demonstrates the exclusion from gendered spaces for these 11- and 12-year-old girls.

Importantly the school space enables me to demonstrate the intermingling of family, friends, and schools as significant influences in the pre-

teen girls' everyday life. The girls' conversations and interactions were filled with references to family and their family practices. Good or bad, the girls share their stories of family with their friends, almost testing to see if their family practices are similar, or arguably, acceptable. The significance of the family's social location was not lost on the girls and their friendship interactions often aligned with families who had similar values and understanding of cultural norms. Evidence of the interlinking of family decisions with schoolyard conversations was demonstrated through a discussion of secondary school choices. While conversations regarding secondary school choice between parents are widely acknowledged, introducing the girls' conversations provide valuable insight into the complex negotiations the girls entered into to ensure their place of belonging for the remainder of their primary school years. Having nothing to say in this 'good' school, 'bad' school conversation did nothing to assist the girls whose parents were unable to achieve the desired educational outcome.

The Everyday Nature of Pre-teen Girls' Lives

ENGAGING WITH PRE-TEENS' ORDINARY EVERYDAY PRACTICES

The girls' considerations and negotiations of friendship and belonging were not always entwined with their consumption activities. Their actions and behaviours though were designed to maintain friendships and achieve the sense of belonging they desired. The girls constantly reviewed the changing nature of their friendships and engaged in practices that enabled them to align themselves with their friends and peers. The desire to be 'liked, respected, and valued' by their peers in this space was vital to the girls, and their friendships worked to mitigate their 'negative experiences' in this space (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 73). Their negotiations of friendships were intricate and often complex but the girls were well versed in the practices required of them in this space. They demonstrated an advanced competence in their negotiations of friendships and belonging that belied their age. While their actions appeared unremarkable at times their considerations and intent were far from effortless.

While the ordinariness of the girls' actions may not be as appealing as their engagement with the consumer-media tween culture by taking the time to explore their significance, I discovered valuable insights into the ways these pre-teen girls negotiate their everyday lives through their ordinary, everyday practices (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; James and James 2004; Kehily 2015). If we consider our lives, our own actions and

practices have the ‘potential to become everyday’ and ordinary if we execute them often enough, and the same was true for these girls (Highmore 2011). The girls’ considerations and negotiations of friendship were evident in their interactions, conversations, silences, and even their absences. The openness of the girls provided me with an opportunity to develop a rich understanding of the value of the ‘ordinary obviousness’ in their practices and actions (Walkerdine 1990). Increasingly, their negotiations were taking place outside the school space, by phone, online, and in their increasing freedom and independence. The girls’ ability to recognise and respond to the constantly changing norms and practices of their friendships revealed insights and understandings of the importance of achieving a sense of belonging in their local, social worlds for these pre-teen girls.

In this chapter I consider the ‘distinctive friendship cultures’ that primary school girls construct from their everyday negotiations and interactions (George 2007, pp. 4–5). I explore the ‘sense of belonging’ the girls desire in their school environment and the ‘security they experience’ by ‘feeling valued’ in this space (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62). The conceptual framework for this discussion, as it has been throughout this book, is Pugh’s concept, ‘the economy of dignity’, where ‘children make themselves audible, and therefore present’ amongst their peers (2009, p. 51). While Pugh’s ‘economy of dignity’ links children’s engagement with consumer culture and with their social worlds, it also acknowledges their desire to belong in these spaces. Pugh (2009, p. 53) suggests that children are concerned about ‘gaining the standing to take part in their social worlds’. She argues that children want to “‘save face,” to rescue the social citizenship that enables their sense of belonging in a group, but also to establish it in the first place, and through varied and creative means’ (Pugh 2009, p. 53).

PRIMARY SCHOOL FRIENDSHIPS

The significance of ‘making’ and ‘breaking’ of friendships for young girls has been widely explored by feminist scholars (George 2007; Hey 1997; Kehily 2012; McRobbie 2008). The fluid nature of girls’ friendships in primary schools, which have often been ‘characterised by teachers, parents and educational researchers as “malicious, bitchy, catty and resentful”’ are considered to be ‘an inevitable and almost a “natural” and routine part’ of the girls’ school experience (George 2007, p. 4). These pre-teen girls recognised the constantly changing nature of their friendships. While for

the most part the friendship of 6C stayed firm for their final year of primary school, the girls recognised that their current friendships were not always evident in their earlier years:

In Grade 3 or 4 Lindi was like, 'no offence but I don't really like Susan' and Susan was like, 'no offence but I don't really like Lindi (Kate 12);

And now, it's just like, we have the best groups of friends, you know, you know that you fit in and that's like the point (Holly 12).

While explorations of friendship practices for teenagers have been widely explored, this age group have traditionally been explored through developmental and psychological frameworks (George 2007; Suckling and Temple 2006). As a result there has been little exploration of negotiations of friendship and belonging with the younger primary-school-aged pre-teens within sociological frameworks (Lundby 2013; Svahn and Evaldsson 2011). Yet 'school-based peer relations, such as peer acceptance and friendship' have been identified as a key source of the 'experiences that support students' sense of belonging' in a school environment (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62; see also Osterman 2000). George (2007, p. 5) suggests that there has been a 'tendency to oversimplify how young children construct their friendships'. If we question the agentic subject position of this age group it would be easy to overlook the 'complexities of the school experience' in the girls' ordinary, everyday actions and behaviours (Sargeant 2012, p. 190). The benefit of time though enabled me to recognise the girls' agentic subject position and understand the significance of the girls' actions and behaviours in the girls' desire to negotiate their own unique and 'distinctive friendship cultures' (George 2007; Suckling and Temple 2006).

FRIENDSHIP AFFILIATIONS

My early observations of the friendship groupings in 6C suggested there were two main friendship groups. My initial thoughts were that the 14 girls in 6C separated into a group of six—Lindi, Holly, Susan, Kate, Mollie, and Pippi (who chose not to participate in my study)—and a larger group of eight girls; Maddie, Alex, Georgie, Erin, Sally, Alison, Hayley, and Rachel. I quickly discovered though that my initial observations were incorrect, as the girls found a place to belong within much tighter friend-

ships and peer groups. The smaller group of six girls stood out as being the tightest group but as I discovered they functioned with a core group of four—Lindi, Holly, Susan, and Kate with two peripheral members, Mollie and Pippi. While Mollie and Pippi often paired up, Mollie tended to move fluidly between this group and other class members, particularly Hayley and Rachel. Mollie’s ability to recognise and respond to the social nuances of different circumstances was discerning at times. Her understandings of her place on the periphery of Lindi’s friendship groups were discussed in Chap. 4. The larger group of eight girls proved to be more complicated than my first observations. These girls functioned as two groups, a group of five, Rachel, Alison, Erin, Alex, and Hayley, and a smaller, often fractured group of three, Sally, Georgie, and Maddie. While the girls’ classroom friendships for the most part transferred into their playground groups, Hayley generally spent her time outside with her best friend, Emily, from Miss Lambert’s Year 6 class.

THE VALUE IN THE GIRLS ORDINARY, EVERYDAY PRACTICES

Far from being disillusioned by the ordinary elements of the girls’ everyday practices, I was intrigued by the complex and highly nuanced nature of their understandings and negotiations. Like scholars before me I had the opportunity to consider how ‘caught in the threads of that ordinary life’ was the ‘basis for understanding’ the girls’ subjectivity (Walkerline 1990, p. 162). Referring to the girls’ practices as commonplace or ordinary may appear insensitive but it in no way reflected my opinion of these 13 intriguing girls. The concept of ordinariness mirrored my thoughts about the everyday and constant nature of their negotiations and practices. As I discovered, the girls’ practices were not simply the ‘obscure background’ for the stories that they shared (de Certeau 1988). The subtleness of the girls’ interactions was intriguing and I took particular care in my observations to make note of repeated actions and behaviours. Spending time with the girls in their playground spaces and their specialist classes as well as their classroom environment enabled me to observe the girls in different context in the primary school space. Having the privilege of sharing their entire school year enabled me to witness the girls’ actions and behaviours in one-off events like their school production and their many sporting events. The everyday nature of their actions determined

that I was not witnessing the girls' negotiations of a tween identity but more importantly they were understandings of how ordinary pre-teen girls make sense of, and live, every day in their own social worlds.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FRIENDSHIP

While the girls' desire to own a mobile phone or access social networking sites may have been overwhelming, their greatest concern, and the issue they spent the most time on, was ensuring they had friends in this space. They were happy to share the attributes they liked in their friends:

Lindi, Kate, Susan and Mollie are all very cool. Susan's a really good actor even though she is shy, Lindi's just really cool, like she's nice and funny, and Mollie. Mollie's always there, she's always there and she's really nice and friendly and yeah (Holly 12);

Alex, Alison and Erin just understand stuff and if I have something going on and I tell them they know, they understand what's going on. Their personality it's really good and they're really kind. Yeah that's it (Rachel 11);

Well we [Rachel] both laugh easily, so yeah we like talking to each other we're very talkative and we're like crazy, so yeah (Sally 11).

The 'intimate and supportive friendships' experienced by the girls protected them to some degree from their fear of being excluded (Hamm and Faircloth 2005). The intimacy and support of friendships such as these was not afforded to all though and some of the girls experienced periods of exclusion throughout the year.

THE VERY REAL FEAR OF BEING EXCLUDED

Exclusion was more evident in the playground where class-organised groups and activities were unable to provide support or protection for girls who were feeling uncertain or vulnerable in their friendship groups (Richards 2012; Thorne 1993). Unfortunately the exclusion that I witnessed in the playgrounds was often experienced by the same small group of girls whom I described as being almost a friendship of convenience, coming together in the absence of alternative options within the class. These girls had to work harder on their friendship negotiations to

ensure they weren't left alone in the playground. Within this small group it was often Sally who experienced ongoing periods of exclusion:

Maddie and Georgie are normally my first preference to play with but sometimes they don't want to play with me. Oh they don't really say why not, they just kind of like walk off sort of thing or else they just say 'can we play together this time'. Doesn't make me feel very nice 'cause they're kinda like leaving me. It feels a bit weird 'cause me and Maddie have known each other since Prep and Georgie is pretty new to the school so I kinda feel a bit left out. I say that I think you guys are being a bit unfair 'cause I wanted to play as well. It doesn't really work out because when me and Maddie have a fight she just expects it to be better and she starts talking to me again but I still know what she's done but I just go along with it (Sally 11).

Sally is unfortunately very familiar with the exclusionary behaviours of Maddie and Georgie and the capricious nature of friendships. Her experience of being 'sidelined' as discussed in Chap. 6 and excluded by her friends contributed to her current feelings of isolation. It appeared that the 'flow of intricate, subtle and seemingly innocent everyday peer group interactions' were often uncomfortable for Sally (Svahn and Evaldsson 2011, p. 505). Sally's small friendship group could not safeguard her from the ever-present possibility of being excluded. The level of her dejection was evident when she introduced the concept of 'rejection' into our discussion, declaring that 'rejection' is basically a bad word. I couldn't disagree with her. Unfortunately she experienced exclusion and loneliness yet again when she found herself alone later in the year when Georgie spent her playground time with her boyfriend Nigel. This time though Sally had adapted her actions and behaviours and found new friends or playmates with a group of Year 5 boys, joining in with their games of tiggly. As previously discussed, Maddie found a space to belong with Rob the gardener.

There were times throughout the year that I contemplated whether the friendship of Sally, Maddie, and Georgie was formed as a 'contingency friendship', where the absence of other friendships determined that the girls form friendships which do not have a solid connection (Pratt and George 2005). The often splintered nature of their connection and their regular disagreements suggested that they may have cobbled together a friendship to help them through this final year of primary school. It was evident though that they spent time together out

of school, more so than the larger friendship group of Hayley, Alex, and the other girls.

Sally, Maddie, and Georgie stuck together throughout their final year at Western Heights Primary School, surviving Georgie's relationship with Nigel, finding their own unconventional places and spaces to belong when their sense of belonging was shaken. While the girls with stronger friendship ties did not experience the level of exclusion that Sally had, they also feared the prospect of being left alone when their friends were absent. For some it was the absence of their friends through illness, transition days, extended family holidays, and sporting activities that reminded the girls of the importance of nurturing alternative friendships.

There was once, they all went to the Melbourne Girls thing [transition day]. I was a bit angry at them, oh they got the day off, why didn't I just get the day off too. I played with Mollie and Pippi 'cause you need to have someone to play with (Susan 12).

Regardless of the strength of their friendship group the girls of 6C all nurtured alternate friendships to fall back. The need for there to be 'always be someone here, so I'll play with them' was strong (Rachel 11). With a severe bout of flu in the middle of winter the girls all had to consider their friendship options at times as many of their regular friends were absent:

Yeah it's like only me, Susan and Mollie today. If they weren't here I'd probably play with, it depends who I felt like playing with, I might play with Rachel and Hayley and all that or I might play with girls in another grade (Holly 12);

On Friday I didn't really play with anyone 'cause both Sally and Georgie weren't here. I sort of played with Alex, Rachel and Alison. Then you don't get really, really lonely. Sally was like that on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 'cause both me Georgie weren't here so she had no one to play with and she said it got very boring. I wouldn't want to go to school if I didn't have friends (Maddie 12).

It was clear that these girls, like those in Hey's (1997) and George's (2007) work 'found the experience of exclusion distressing and debilitating' (George 2007, p. 92).

THE FRAGILITY OF FRIENDSHIPS

The girls had a highly nuanced sense of the fragility of friendships, having spent six years in this space negotiating with their peers (Richards 2012; Thorne 1993). Their experiences in earlier primary school years reminded them that friendships were fluid and the work they put into their negotiations each year did not safeguard them into the next:

I met Alison, Alice and Alana when I first came. I'm not so good friends with Alana, I still talk to Alice but not much, about once a month and I talk to Alison a lot. And then I met Sally and Maddie (Georgie 11);

When I was like in Grade 3 or 4 I think. Because Emma she had a different friend and I remember one day, we were playing and I thought just because she was my friend she'd want to hang out with me at lunch and she didn't show up so I looked for her and she was playing with her friend. And she was only playing with me because, because her friend wasn't there just for then. So I felt really upset because she wasn't playing with me then. And it was like that whole year I didn't really have anyone to play with, anyone to talk to (Sally 11).

I feel for Sally who clearly finds the exclusion by her peers distressing. Developing an understanding of where we fit in is challenging and the lessons learnt from previous experiences inform the girls' current practices (George and Browne 2000). Sometimes though the stories had a different ending where girls overcame significant differences to become friends in the later stages of primary school:

Tracey was in my class in Prep but she kinda bullied me in Prep and then in Year 1 we were in separate classes but I was in room 5 and she was in this room, and somehow we liked each other, we talked to each other across the hall, and now she's one of my best friends (Lindi 12).

The girls who have been here since Prep have developed good understandings of their peers and where they might 'fit in' (George and Browne 2000). Newcomers Hayley, Rachel, and Georgie were at a disadvantage but, having come from experiences of exclusion and loneliness, the girls were determined to establish friendships: 'I was so excited to be in an all-girls class' (Georgie 11).

YOU DON'T NEED A BFF (BEST FRIEND FOREVER)

The girls were very concerned about having friends in this space but they were less concerned with the need to identify a best friend amongst their friendship group. Studies have shown that primary school girls can identify the leaders in their 'friendship groups' as the 'best' friends they would like to have rather than the one they actually have (George and Browne 2000, p. 292). While Lindi stood out in the class for her constant comments and bubbly personality she was not the leader of her friendship group. It has been suggested that best friends are important to primary school girls but these girls were not convinced that it was essential (George 2007; George and Browne 2000):

Yeah, but like, but like, she didn't achieve anything and she just ended up staying the same. Which is fine cause she plays with people, they're just not her best friend. You don't need a best friend (Holly 12);

You don't need a best friend to be happy, yeah but you need friends (Mollie 12);

Cause I don't have an actual best friend, but you're all my best friend (Holly 12).

There are a number of possible reasons for their indifference but the absence of identifiable leaders with the girls' friendship groups may have contributed. The girls who identified a best friend within their friendship group did so because of their connection and relationship with the other girls:

Susan she's my best friend, we've kinda been best friends for a very long time and we always make each other laugh no matter what. Holly she's really weird but funny and Lindi, well, we've got a lot in common so we're really good friends in that way and we make each other laugh (Kate 12);

Kate, Lindi and Holly are my best friends. Mollie maybe, except she's not really a best friends, she's like almost (Susan 12).

Secure in their friendships it would appear that the emotional attachment and value they gained from their friendship group was sufficient for

the girls to develop a sense of connectedness and belonging that did not require the presence of a best friend (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62).

WHEN BELONGING IS JUST NOT POSSIBLE

While a best friend wasn't essential, it was imperative to these girls that they developed friendships that provided them with the support the girls needed to achieve a sense of belonging. The girls all recognised that the absence of friends would influence them to change schools in an attempt 'fit in':

I'd probably move [schools] (Kate 12);

I'd feel depressed every day and then she'd (Mum) say to me, 'okay you can move' (Holly 12).

Reaching the level of contemplating moving schools resonated with Hayley, Rachel, and Georgie, who chose to move schools to escape overwhelming feelings of exclusion and loneliness. Hayley and Rachel had moved together from their smaller primary school as the result of exclusion by their peers:

It was just really important to me [to have friends] 'cause I hadn't had a lot of friends before, only Hayley. It was a really little school and people used to bully us as well. I felt really sad and I told my Mum I wanted to leave but she didn't believe me for a while but then she started to say 'you should leave'. It was better moving with Hayley because I know her (Rachel 11).

EXTERNAL FACTORS

While the girls constantly reviewed their friendship, the complex and fluid nature of the school space determined that there were always factors outside their control that impacted on their ability to maintain a sense of belonging (Hamm and Faircloth 2005). Their allocation to an all-girls class in Year 5 and a co-educational space in Year 6 was determined by the school but it was the girls who had to adapt their friendships to maintain their sense of belonging in this space:

Last year, well you kind of forget what it's like to work with boys and then when you come back to being with boys again, it's like (Mollie 12);

Last year I actually wanted to be in the mixed class because they had such a good class, you know and I regret saying this but I actually missed them [boys] (Lindi).

The allocation of students to the three Year 6 classes also impacted on the girls' friendship negotiations:

Danielle is one of my really good friends, she's in the other grade. We were in Miss Fletcher's class last year and then we got split up which was very bad because we were like very close. Yeah but its fine you know. She doesn't play with us anymore. But Lindi, Kate, Susan and Mollie, they're so cool (Holly 12).

Over the course of their primary school years family circumstances change and this resulted in some of the girls' friends leaving Western Heights Primary School:

My best friend, Emily, was here from Year 2 to Year 4, two years. I always used to hang out with her and yeah, it was really fun. Her parents bought a house on the other side of the city. We haven't had any contact for two years. I'm going to start writing her a letter, 'cause she gave me her address before she moved (Maddie 12).

Despite their considerations of belonging and the girls' constant negotiations of friendships and alternate friendships there were times throughout the year when the girls' sense of belonging was shaken for a variety of reasons. Maddie's connection with Rob, the gardener, as discussed in Chap. 6, was clearly one of those periods. Conflicting sporting trials for athletics and football placed Susan in an unfamiliar space, alone in the playground at lunchtime:

Around 2 pm I find Susan wandering around on her own in the eating area. All of her group has gone to football trials and she has now finished high jump trials. She doesn't think she jumped very well so isn't confident of being in the school athletics team. She looked a little lost and I asked if she would like to walk with me. She did. We walked around to the front playground as I suggested that the girls wouldn't be too far away. As we walked I asked her about her friendships with the girls. She told me that she and Kate had been friends since Grade 3 and had been in a class together ever since. Holly was also a friend from Grade 3 and she got to know Lindi and Mollie

in last year's Grade 5 class. Today I was struck by the vulnerability of Susan. Her friendship group enables her to belong in this space. It doesn't really matter which one of them is here, although Kate is obviously her strongest ally, but the absence of all of them made her a little more vulnerable today and removed her sense of belonging, albeit just for now (Field Notes).

OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE

Throughout the year I developed important insights into the types of actions and behaviours these girls were likely to exhibit. I also gained a good understanding of the types of activities they were likely to engage in. When the school called for the student to audition for the annual school production I was not surprised that it was Sally and Maddie who tried out and not Rachel or her group of friends. I was a little surprised that only Mollie applied for a leadership position at the beginning of the year, although she missed out. I discovered later in the year that the girls didn't see themselves as popular enough:

Yeah, I regretted not going for school captain and junior school council (Holly 12);

I went for both of them, but yeah didn't happen (Alice 12);

But it's about popularity as well. Because if you're not popular you might as well not try (Lindi 12).

I was more surprised to see Sally and Maddie playing football for the school. During the year the girls from Western Heights Primary School competed in the State Primary School Australian Rules Football Competition. Needing 25 girls to compete, seven of the girls from 6C joined up. I was not surprised by Lindi, Susan, Kate, Holly, and Mollie's inclusion in the team but I was surprised at Sally and Maddie's decision to sign up. As they were not regular participants in the physical games that took place in the playgrounds every recess and lunchtime, I was intrigued with how they would fit in with this group of girls:

It is surprising but pleasing to see Sally being a part of this team as she isn't often a part of this group. Maddie is a bigger surprise though as she openly admits she doesn't like sport and is very inactive in the playground at school. So it's great that she has put herself out there and decided to give this a go. I

guess the fact that she and Sally are in this together probably helps and they pair up for a lot of the day. Maddie has a book tucked under her arm when we get on the bus (Field Notes).

It was great to watch all the girls play football for the school but particularly to watch Sally and Maddie in this unfamiliar space:

Sally and Maddie played most of the day in the backline. Sally really stepped up and was happy to attack the ball. She played really well and it was great to see her in this challenging, competitive space. Maddie was less comfortable but she was solid in defence when she was needed and didn't hesitate in tackling (Field Notes).

The girls' different practices were clearly evident though in-between games:

It was intriguing to see Sally and Maddie sitting in the midst of the girls' bags at one stage, rehearsing their school production lines while everyone else was chatting, throwing or kicking a ball to each other. Their interest in the day was evident, but their other interests were not going to be neglected. Spending a whole day just playing, practicing or watching footy wasn't going to detract from their desire to make sure they were word perfect for their parts in the annual school production. I asked Sally why she wanted to play and she said 'I thought my Dad would like it if I did' (Reflections).

THE LIMITED APPEAL OF POPULARITY

Within the context of 6C I would describe Lindi, Susan, Kate, and Holly as the popular girls, although the girls did not necessarily align themselves with this label. Popular girls have been described as being at the top of friendship hierarchies and are 'pretty, good at sport, have boyfriends, are into fashion and are confident' (Suckling and Temple 2006, p. 26). The label of course is relational and while these girls didn't consider themselves to be the popular girls of Western Height Primary School, within the boundaries of 6C they definitely were (George 2007). Popularity was not necessarily their goal as they tried to keep their friendship group tight throughout the year:

Like, there were five of us playing tiggly, the tag [game] tiggly or whatever it was called and all of sudden there was some boys I didn't even know were playing (Holly 12);

So then we had to make it a rule that if someone asked you to play that you had to say no so we'd know who was playing cause then it was just too confusing (Kate 12);

But then you just hide and then no one finds you (Lindi 12).

The girls also suggested that being popular required even more work to fit in and made it confusing for others to know the 'real' you. Interestingly Lindi and her group did not consider themselves the popular girls at Western Heights Primary School. Within the classroom though they were the ones who were most visible and desired by the other as friends suggesting they were 'well liked and considered nice and friendly' (George 2007, p. 80).

If you're popular people might not like you for who you are. Because there are some people, there's a girl at this school and she changes personalities to fit in (Lindi 12);

They change because they want to try and find friends, so they change to try and be popular (Lindi 12);

My friend she, well she's kind of my friend, 'cause she changes personalities. So people go and they try to be your friend but they change (Lindi 12);

They change because of that or change all the time? (Kate 12);

I mean they change completely who they are and then the next year they change again to be more popular (Holly 12);

Yeah, it's kind of, if you do that, it's hard to know like for other people, it's hard to know who you really are. Then you get all confused and stuff (Mollie 12);

And it's hard to know if they like you for who you are or who that you're trying to be (Lindi 12);

You're not meant to make people like you for who you are trying to be. They want to like you for who you are (Holly 12).

The girls' understandings of popularity and the work their peers put into remaining part of the popular group are complex and reveal 'deeper

meanings about belonging and striving for power and social prestige' at Western Heights Primary School (Hey 1997, p. 62). Some of the girls they referred to in this discussion were in their Year 5 class and were still considered to be friends. It is unclear how Lindi, Kate, Susan, and Holly would have responded if they had not been allocated to the same Year 6 class but their place in 6C with their tight-knit and supportive friendship group enabled them to avoid these deliberations.

BOYS: I ACTUALLY MISSED THEM

While there have been limited explorations of 'cross-gender friendships' for this age group, the relationships between the girls in 6C and their male classmates ebbed and flowed as much as their friendships with the other girls (Rose 2007, p. 491). Recognising the different experiences of these girls in the Year 5 all-girls class, Mr G. was determined that the female and male students in 6C interacted as much as possible. To facilitate this he allocated seating arrangements, as well as reading, writing, and maths groups throughout the year. As a result the girls often sat with their male classmates and reflected on their interactions:

They can be funny. Yeah when David and Charlie are on the same table they have the funniest conversations. Yeah, they're kind of funny together (Maddie 12);

Sometimes I have to sit next to boys and we kinda get along, like I sat next to Peter, it was funny 'cause we were doing something together (Hayley 11);

Michael doesn't talk, he's not one of those [loud] boys. He's a nice boy 'cause he doesn't talk (Lindi 12).

While they openly referred to the boys as 'loud, stinky, dirty and annoying', the girls revealed the significance of their 'friendships' and interactions with the boys in 6C. The girls' cross-gender friendships were an important part of their everyday life at Western Heights and they were often observed playing and laughing together. Thankfully, for Mr G., their classroom friendships transitioned seamlessly into the playground. The girl and boys from 6C were often observed playing together:

Erin, Rachel and Alex are playing tiggly with Jacob, Tom, Michael and other Grade 6 boys around the school building. Mollie, Lindi, Holly, Kate and Susan are all playing basketball on the back playground court with Sam, Harry and other boys. It looks like girls versus boys' games and they are all very focussed and engaged (Field Notes).

These 11- and 12-year-olds were in the unique position of being able to comment on how single-gendered classes compared with the co-educational experiences. They certainly enjoyed their experience and felt more comfortable in sharing information and exploring topics in greater detail. Yet their overall view was that they missed having the boys in their class, suggesting that they:

I prefer to be in a mixed grade rather than an all girls' grade, it's sort of annoying just girls (Maddie 12);

I didn't enjoy it last year (Alex 11);

They can be nice, so like a friend you know. You can be friend with them, you don't have to feel scared to just be like eergh ... you're a boy (Lindi 12);

Actually it's a bit easier to be friends with girls because I think they listen more and boys kind of want to do their own thing. But they are really fun to play with (Sally 11).

WANTING TO BE HEARD

When I mentioned to friends that I was planning to spend a year with a class of 11- and 12-year-old girls they suggested that I would be lucky to get any information out of them as they don't like to talk. As evident in this book nothing could have been further from the truth. The girls were so excited about my project and the 'book' I was going to write about them. They were excited that someone wanted to listen to them and understand the importance of their lives. As I reflected on their enthusiasm I was reminded that these girls have grown up being encouraged to 'celebrate their girliness', to 'live large', and 'be somebody' (Hopkins 2002). They have been encouraged to make choices and take charge of their lives, to be the 'future girl' who 'seizes her chances' (Harris 2004, p. 1). Spending a year in an all-girls class with a very enthusiastic young female teacher reinforced those messages. Of all the girls Lindi lived large

in the spaces of the classroom and Western Heights Primary School. The idea of my book was far from threatening; in fact it was quite the opposite: 'well it's [the book] like, part of it is about you, you know, and a lot of people will read it so that's really cool' (Lindi 12).

While Lindi and the girls wanted to live large and include their photographs and full names in my book, this chapter has been about recognising the ordinariness of their behaviours. I have introduced the girls' ordinary, everyday actions and behaviours to demonstrate the ongoing nature of the girls' challenging negotiations. The intricate and complex nature of the negotiations of friendships and considerations have been illuminated by examining the meaning behind the girls' practices. These valuable insights would not have been evident if I had focused solely on the girls' consumption practices yet they reveal much about the competence and agentic subject position of these girls in understanding the importance, and constancy, of the hard work that goes into achieving a sense of belonging in their own social worlds.

Conclusion: Family, Media, and Locality

The socialisation of girls and young women through their consumption activities is not a new phenomenon, yet the prodigious targeting of the younger pre-teen age group by a consumer-media tween culture challenges our ideas and discourses of Western childhood as a state of innocence and vulnerability. The selective targeting of girls who sit on the increasingly blurry boundaries of childhood, no longer identifying themselves as children, has resulted in widespread concerns and emotional debates about the aim of the consumer market. Intent on building commercial personae out of the pre-teen age group the consumer-media tween culture has fashioned a very lucrative market out of this complex juncture where childhood, consumer culture, identity, and young, feminine identities converge. With concerns around the apparent sexualisation of this age group and the ‘adul-teration’ of young girls faced with potentially pernicious messages it is difficult to acknowledge the girls’ agentic subject position in their consumption activities. The mention of tween culture almost instantly engenders concerns and ongoing debates around the premature sexualisation of young girls, inappropriate images and messages, and girls being encouraged to grow up too fast. Yet scholars argue that the girls are not necessarily seeking a self which is sexualised or commodified by consumer products (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Driscoll 2008; Harris 2005). They argue instead that the pre-teen girl is responding to how ‘gender identity is developed and organised’ in contemporary Western society (Driscoll 2008, p. 25). Harris (2005) argues that the girls are actu-

ally responding to a shift in young feminine identities that allows girls to move from a passive role as a consumer of popular culture to exercising agency and taking up active positions.

The globalised nature of consumer-media tween culture has worked to position pre-teen girls in an almost placeless consuming environment, yet their desire for acceptance, friendship, and a sense of belonging in their own local, social worlds is widely recognised (George 2007; Hey 1997; McLeod and Yates 2006; Nayak and Kehily 2013; Pomerantz 2008). Concerns around the pervasive nature of tween culture and its aim to create commercial personae of the girls has seen much of our recent explorations of tween culture focus on the girls' consumption activities (Chan et al. 2011; Cody 2012; Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Jennings 2014; Lundby 2013). Yet the need for understandings of broader social and cultural influences of the tween age group is evident (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005; The Senate 2008; The Children's Society 2009). The aim of this book is to respond to these calls for broader understandings with an exploration of important contemporary influences in the everyday lives of pre-teen girls. By exploring the significance of family, friends, and schools as well as the girls' desire for freedom, independence, technology, and social media I have explored how these influences and desires merge with pre-teen girls' consumption activities. Drawing on my findings from a year-long study with 11- and 12-year-old pre-teens in a Melbourne primary school, the girls' everyday behaviours and actions revealed valuable insights into their nuanced and intricate meaning-making. The links between the girls' desire for freedom, friendship, their consumption activities, family, school, and the desire to belong were unmistakable.

Stepping into a Melbourne primary school enabled me to explore the social world of pre-teens and gain rich and valuable insights into the girls' considerations and negotiations of belonging in their own local, social worlds. My decision to explore the everyday lives of pre-teen girls in this familiar space was not innovative, with many scholars sharing valuable and insightful understandings of girls' localised meaning-making (Aapola et al. 2005; Harris 2004; Hey 1997; McRobbie 2008; Pomerantz 2008). However, my study, as theirs before me, reflects a specific time and place in our ongoing explorations and understandings of how girls negotiate their local, social worlds and young feminine identities (McRobbie 2008).

The girls' desire to develop relationships with their friends and peers was pivotal to their ability to achieve a sense of belonging in the school

space. As I discovered, the complexities of the girls' considerations and negotiations of friendship and belonging were often obscured by the outwardly simplistic nature of their actions and behaviours. Beyond friendship though the girls also achieved a sense of belonging through recognising 'their own importance' and knowing that they could rely on others at Western Heights Primary School and their own local, social worlds (Hamm and Faircloth 2005).

THE VITAL ROLE OF FAMILY IN THE LIFE OF THE PRE-TEEN GIRL

They [family] taught me. They like gave me education, they gave me freedom, they give you wealth, they give you health (Sally 11);

Well, if my Mum and Dad weren't here I wouldn't be here, so that's a big influence (Lindi 12).

Asking these pre-teen girls direct questions about their family often resulted in cliché responses like the above or, how annoying their siblings were: 'My sister is very annoying. When I'm on the computer she asks me to hurry up and I just take long cause it annoys her' (Alison 11). It was very difficult though to ignore the significance of family for these pre-teen girls. The vital role that parents and family plays for these girls is clearly evident in their conversations, actions, and behaviours. The constant references to family throughout this book are intentional as these reflect their constant presence in the lives of these pre-teen girls.

While it has been suggested that pre-teen girls shop and make consumption decisions with their friends these pre-teen girls continue to shop with their parents and families (Drake-Bridges and Burgess 2010; Minahan and Huddleston 2010). Family-shopping occasions are a regular and enjoyable activity for many of these girls. For some, like Alex, they were a regular weekend activity and very much a part of her family leisure time. Interestingly though the girls' conversations focused on the shopping centres and places they visited, *Highpoint*, *Altona Gate* rather than on the actual items they purchased. The girls' confidence in visiting these 'theatres of their day' originates from a familiarity and understanding of the local shopping centres and malls from the regular visit with their parents. The girls' ability to identify shopping centres like *Highpoint* or *Altona Gate* as places to negotiate their friendships has

been enabled through the many family-shopping adventures that have taken place throughout their earlier childhood years. These pre-teen girls weren't telling me they wanted to explore large shopping centres in the north, south, or east of Melbourne. The girls didn't mention the Melbourne CBD, only 10 kilometres or less than 10 train stops away. Their shopping worlds will grow in the next few years as they transition to secondary schools, but for now, the shopping worlds of these 11- and 12-year-old girls are very much influenced by the places and spaces they have explored with their family.

It comes as no surprise that the girls' consumer purchases or activities are ultimately determined by their parents. The family's financial capacity and ability to recognise the girls' emotional attachment to a product played a significant role in whether the girls could buy a particular product. Items such as mobile phone, iPod, or laptops are expensive and it is only with their parents' financial support that the girls can even consider owning one. Consumption decisions though were not simply decided by financial capacity. The girls recognised that their parents' decisions, from being given the freedom to visit *Highpoint* with their friends, own a mobile phone, or access social media, were informed by their own social antennae and understandings of accepted social and cultural norms. These were often in conflict with the girls' desires and understandings of what was an appropriate age to be given extra freedom or allowed to own a mobile phone. While these girls were being raised in families situated in a middle-class demographic, their parents' decisions were not consistent across the group. For Susan and Erin particularly, there was an understanding that their parents had a principled aversion to technology and online practices that was not evident for the other parents. While the girls' frustrations were apparent there was no evidence of the girls attempting to access these items against their parents' wishes.

The girls acknowledged the supportive role their parents played when they were stepping into unfamiliar territory. These fledgling social networking users clearly demonstrated their desire for parental support and advice when signing up for social networking on MSN. Despite their overwhelming desire to join social networking sites and the belief that they were old enough the girls understood that their parents were available to turn to if they were unsure of online practices. Similarly they are guided by their parents when considering the unfamiliar transition to secondary school and the many choices they had to negotiate. While they openly

described their parents as annoying at times the girls all admitted, explicitly or implicitly, that they value the role their parents played in their everyday lives.

There was clearly evidence of the girls' parents and family's social location influencing, and in cases, enabling some friendships over others. While we know that parents and families play a significant role in friendship negotiations of younger girls it could be anticipated that these age groups are making their own decisions about friendships (George 2007). Without talking to the girls' parents it is difficult to draw strong conclusions from my findings but there is evidence that the girls of 6C understand that some friendships were encouraged and enabled through parents' actions and behaviours. Incidents such as Kate's mum picking some of the girls up from the football finals, Holly and Susan's after-school netball arrangements, Georgie's mum's friendship with Nigel's dad all convey messages of acceptance around friendship choices for these pre-teens.

My final key finding in relation to parents and families is the fun and memorable family activities and occasions the girls shared throughout the year. From Maddie's story of her family's early morning games of Wii through to Mollie's birthday shopping adventure and the basketball parents' commitment to driving the girls to multiple trainings and games the families' engagement in the girls' everyday activities was evident.

While the role of family in these pre-teen girls' lives is assumed, there is a tendency to under-investigate the role of family in the lives of young people. Yet, as I discovered, through the narratives of these pre-teen girls there is much we can learn about how families in a contemporary Western society make decisions and support pre-teens as they negotiate a way to achieve their own sense of belonging in their local, social worlds. Australian scholars Wyn et al. (2012, p. 4) assert that families in youth research are often acknowledged only as a 'background factor, juxtaposed against the peer group' in identity development with 'the dynamics of relationships between young people and their families ... often assumed rather than explored'. Yet, as I have discovered with this group of pre-teens, family continues to play a significant role in pre-teen girls' lives. Importantly, while the girls' direct responses to queries about family may have been a little formulaic, their insights throughout this book demonstrate that these pre-teens do not discount the significant role family continues to play in their everyday lives (Government of Canada 2015; Mission Australia 2010).

PRE-TEEN GIRLS' TECHNOLOGY USE AND ONLINE PRACTICES

Statistics reveal that many pre-teen girls, and boys, own mobile phones, iPads, and other technology. We also know that many under 13s' online practices extend to membership of social networking sites like Facebook and other sites designed for an older youth and adult audience. Surveys around the world confirm the technological and online usage of these pre-teens (ACMA 2013a, b; Ofcom 2013, 2015). The numbers of pre-teens owning their own phones and/or accessing social networking sites has increased dramatically. Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Like, post, share* report (2013a) reveals:

- One in ten 8–9 year olds and a third of 10–11 year olds have their own mobile phone;
- 8–11 year olds are active social network users with 78 per cent of 8–9 year olds and 92 per cent of 10–11 year olds accessing a social network site;
- The most popular site for younger age groups is YouTube;
- 95 per cent of the 8–11 year olds surveyed report that they have access the internet in the last four weeks.

The *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report* for Ofcom (2015) reveals similar usage:

- While there has been a decreased in mobile phone ownership from 2005 35 per cent of 8–11 years olds own a mobile phone with 24 per cent owning a smartphone;
- Since 2015 the amount of time 8–11 year olds spend online has more than doubled with children spending up to a week online;
- 91 per cent of 8–11 year olds have internet access in their home;
- 21 per cent of 8–11 year olds have a social networking profile.

The rapidly increasing numbers of pre-teens owning mobile phone and accessing social networking sites online have engendered emotional debates around the risks and dangers confronting this young age group. While excessive phones bills are concerning for parents, arguably their greatest concern around mobile phone ownership for their pre-teens is the issue of 'sexting' (Campbell and Park 2014; Dobson et al.

2012; Ringrose et al. 2012). Parents' concerns of the potential risks for pre-teens accessing social networking sites also include issues around cyberbullying, privacy and security, online strangers, identity fraud, and exposure to inappropriate content. Valuable explorations of these issues and understandings of the pre-teens' phone and online practices are emerging (Bond 2010a, b; Boyd 2008; Mathiesen 2013; Robards 2012). Yet there is still a lot to be learnt about the mobile phone and online usage for this age group, and the insights into the everyday practices of these pre-teens girls makes a valuable contribution to our growing understandings.

These pre-teens consider the owning of a mobile phone to be part of their cultural landscape, almost a status symbol for their age group (Inyang et al. 2010). If not granted permission this year the girls clearly identified a link between their upcoming transition to secondary school and ownership of a mobile phone. For some though, like Erin and Susan, their expectation placed them in conflict with their parents' understandings of the cultural norms surrounding the age that mobile phone ownership and social networking is appropriate. For these pre-teens their parents' decision was vital as the girls' capacity to generate the financial commitment of the purchase and ongoing management of a phone was entirely dependent on their parents' support. While financial capacity is clearly a determining factor, their parents' principled subject position and their own social antenna clearly influenced their response to the girls' desire. The frustration for these pre-teen girls of not understanding their parents' interpretation of cultural norms and practices and apparent oversight of the girls' emotional connection around mobile phone ownerships was palpable. Parental responses of 'not yet' or 'next year' further frustrated the girls and contributed to their overall sense of in-betweenness which I will return to shortly.

The girls' understandings of their parents' concerns around the risks and dangers of accessing social networking sites are more discernible. There is less evidence too of the girls' parents asking them to wait until 'next year' or 'not yet'. While the tension between their desire and their parents' objections was evident, the girls demonstrated a greater understanding of parents' concerns. Broader concerns around privacy and strangers online were evident in the girls' conversations although adult concerns around sexting and inappropriate messaging were not. Interestingly, despite the girls' underage status, most of the girls have been given permission to access social networking, albeit it is MSN and not Facebook.

An explanation for this may lie in their declared intention to use social networking sites to maintain contact with their friends and known peers. While social networking sites are obviously designed to enable individuals to connect with their friends, engaging with online networking instantly enables the girls to become members of a multitude of online communities. Boyd's (2014) highly regarded work with teenagers describes these online communities as *networked publics*. While the girls argued that their desire to access social networking is to communicate and network with their known friends, or publics, their reasoning demonstrates their naivety of the reach and potential of online networking.

The girls shared valuable insights into their fledgling online practices in this book. The scrutiny of their online practices is evident as they describe where their computers are set up in the home. Their limited online usage suggests close monitoring of their online time and the 'friending' of parents is another common condition of access. The girls' desire to increase their online friendship network was evident in their 'friending' of anyone from Western Heights Primary School including boys and other girls who are not evident in their friendship negotiations in the school space. Issues with playground disputes and arguments amplified and prolonged during their online communication were highlighted by Alex. Even their excitement at describing the simple and most basic practices of 'you can talk to your friends' revealed their inexperience but also their enthusiasm.

The girls' understandings of the perceived risks and dangers of online practices were shared through their everyday practices. Key concerns around online strangers and identity fraud were demonstrated through narratives of Rachel's 'different online identity' and Sally's sister's online deception. Blurring boundaries between school and home and the intrusion into their private lives were evident as the girls shared stories of webcam conversations from their bedrooms. Parents' support and advice was actively sought by the girls as they developed their online practices and ability to respond to concerns. Their parents' concern with Facebook was also evident and the girls expressed their uncertainty about signing up, although the desire was evident. With Facebook recognised as the most popular social networking site for 12–17-year-old Australians the stepping stones to Facebook for these pre-teens was evident (ACMA 2013b). At this stage, at least, these pre-teens appeared to be satisfied with their parents' permission to engage with the local networked publics of the MSN site, enabling them to communicate with their existing friends and known peers.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCALISED NATURE OF PRE-TEENS' EVERYDAY LIVES

It has been argued that we are witnessing the decline of young people's geographies in the face of the globalised nature of our consumer-media culture. Yet many scholars argue that place and geography now matter more than ever in young people's lives (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Nayak 2003; Nayak and Kehily 2013). Nayak (2003) argues that global cultures connect and interact with existing local and national cultures in complex and nuanced ways. The complexity of this interaction is evident in the ways these pre-teen girls made sense of global messages. The context of their own local spaces, in Western Heights Primary School, shopping malls, and their increasing online practices added a rich texture to my understandings of the social and cultural influences in their lives and, importantly, enabled me to experience 'how it feels to be where they are' (Pugh 2009, p. 180).

Far from being a backdrop to their actions and practices the significance of the girls' local and very familiar spaces was clearly evident. These pre-teens understood the cultural rules and norms that govern their local spaces and recognised that these were fluid, determined by who else occupied the space and the purpose of their engagement (Thorne 1993). The exploration of everyday lives of pre-teen girls in schools is not new, and notable works have been undertaken by key feminist scholars including Hey (1997), McRobbie (1994), Thorne (1993), and Walkerdine (1990). Yet time is as significant as place in understanding the local, social worlds of individuals and my exploration of these pre-teen girls was undertaken in the midst of emotional debates around the globe about the influence of tween girl culture (Hamilton 2008; Hopkins 2002; Lamb and Brown 2006; Linn 2005).

The significance of the informal spaces of 'social networks and peer groups cultures' for these girls was obvious (Valentine 2001, p. 142). The challenge for me was to develop an understanding of the ways the girls negotiated the school spaces to achieve a sense of belonging. Friendships, as others have explored before me, were vital to the girls in this space (George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2008). Having friends enabled the girls to have someone to play with but also to achieve a sense of belonging and connectedness that 'comes from feeling valued by the community' (Hamm and Faircloth 2005, p. 62). As I discovered, achieving a sense of

belonging, was a complex process of considerations and negotiations in this space, and increasingly in their online spaces.

As Mollie discovered, a solid friendship group did not protect you from negotiations of 'partners for the year'. While Lindi, Holly, Susan, and Kate's negotiated practices worked well for them throughout the year it was Mollie who was left to constantly consider her position and negotiate new friendships and relationships to maintain her own sense of belonging. Her claim that 'I don't have a problem; it's just that I have Hayley and Pippi as well' is arguably true, but her complex and ongoing considerations of where she belongs were notable.

The intersection of the global messages from the consumer-media tween culture with the girls' local, social worlds was clearly evident in the ways the girls' consumption activities were linked with their families' regular visits to their *Highpoint* and other local shopping centres and malls. The global nature of the girls' desire to buy 'cool' stuff was evident when asked about the clothing they like, *Supre*, *DK*, *Billabong*, *ICE Design*, *H & M*, *Zara*, and all the surf brands. The powerful reach of global surf brands was evident in the girls' schoolbag choices. Hanging up on pegs in the classroom the numbers of well-known surf brands were impossible to overlook. A quick count of those present included: Roxy 3, Billabong 1, Maui Girl 2, Hot Chilli Girl 3, and Piping Hot 2. Yet when these girls talked about shopping it was about their experiences of shopping with family, and increasingly with friends, in their local shopping centres and malls. They described, '*Highpoint* is cool' rather than their actual clothing purchases (Mollie 11). While designed to encourage the art of consumption, as Miles suggests, these 'theatres of their day' have become very important social 'places that matter' to these pre-teen girls (2010).

The significance of global celebrities was also considered within the girls' local, social worlds. A great example of this was the girls' response to the global tour of Pink, the American singer and songwriter. Several of the girls went to her concerts. Pink's presence in Melbourne had a direct influence over a focus group I ran around the same time. On asking the girls 'who is cool' in the world of celebrities I got the following response, Pink (Holly 11), Pink (Lindi 11), Pink, (Kate 12), Pink (Susan), yeah Pink (Mollie 11). She certainly wasn't the only celebrity the girls identified as cool but her presence in Melbourne at the time was significant. For several of the girls Pink would have been their first international music concert, further cementing the significance of her presence in Melbourne in their lives.

Increasingly the girls' engagement with social networking, particularly MSN, opened up new 'local spaces' for them to negotiate friendships and a sense of belonging. While this is clearly a global communication medium, the girls' desire was to use MSN to extend their local friendship negotiations online. Stepping into this online space immediately exposed the girls to possibilities of endless global messages and advertising. Although at this stage Alex and Rachel were the only girls in this group who engaged with the content—'when you look into MSN this thing pops up about all this gossip that's happening. That's where I get mine' (Alex 11)—the potential for all the girls was on the screen every time they logged on.

THE IN-BETWEEN NATURE OF PRE-TEENS: NO LONGER CHILDREN BUT NOT YET TEENAGERS

Arguably one of the biggest concerns around the influence of the consumer-media tween culture is the age group and developmental stage of the girls targeted by this phenomenon. Much has been written about the 'very ambiguity of the age and person', of discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability, early sexualisation, and the pressure to grow up too fast (Cook and Kaiser 2004, p. 223 see also, Driscoll 2008; McRobbie 2008; Russell and Tyler 2005). Less evident are understandings of the complex juncture of the girls' emergent puberty, new social and cultural norms and practices, and educational transitions alongside their consumption activities. While the desire for and significance of friendships for this age group has been explored by the notable work of George (2007), Hey (1997), and Pomerantz (2008), the implications of other significant cultural influences for these girls are assumed but have been largely under-investigated (The Senate 2008). Yet the girls' desire for freedom and independence, consumption activities, longing to engage with new technology, social media, and their transition to secondary schools and colleges are heavily influenced by family, friends, school, and their local, social worlds which complicate the space of in-betweenness these girls inhabit.

These girls lived the complexity of this juncture between childhood and their teenage years in their everyday lives, no longer children but not yet, nor wanting to be, teenagers (Harris 2005). The frustrations of the in-between nature of the everyday lives were constantly expressed throughout the girls' final year of primary school. The tension between the girls and their parents' different understandings of cultural norms and practices

around their desires re-enforced the girls' sense of in-betweenness. These girls clearly identified themselves as ready to take on the responsibility of mobile phone ownership or outings with their friends. Their conversations suggest that they worked hard to convince their parents of their increasing maturity and need for more freedom to spend time with their friends. The recognition of the girls' emotional connection to their desire for freedom and independence and new ways to communicate with their friends was not always apparent. Although it could also be argued that their parents were very aware of the girls' emotional connection and made principled decisions in response to the girls' requests. Without speaking to their parents it is difficult to make an informed analysis of their motivations. I can however convey the frustration and exclusion that the girls experienced.

Responses of 'not yet' or 'next year' or 'you are too young' frustrated the girls who could not understand why they couldn't be given the freedom and independence they desired.

As Kate suggests, the girls found it 'weird' that they were not able to travel to local places like *Highpoint* this year when within six months some of them would be travelling to the other side of the city. Hayley questioned her parents' argument that she was too young to get a phone because she will still be the same age when they buy her one when she heads to secondary school. While their parents' decisions were not consistent there was an understanding amongst the girls that their frustrations at their state of in-betweenness were shared. As a result they were very supportive of each other. Susan's friendship group went out of their way to ensure she was included, yet she still felt a level of exclusion that made some of her negotiations of friendship more challenging.

There is, of course, no right or wrong in either the girls' interpretation of cultural norms and practices, or for that matter, their parents' views but what appears evident here is a limited understanding of how important technology and online practices have become, even for this age group of girls, to negotiations of friendship and belonging (Boyd 2014; Inyang et al. 2010; Pea et al. 2012). Discourses of innocence and vulnerability and arguments that pre-teen girls need to be protected may complicate parents' understandings of the increasing maturity and agentic subject position of pre-teens (Harris 2005). The messages for parents about the girls' desires can also be complicated. Take, for example, the request to access social networking sites. On the one hand parents receive advice such as allowing their pre-teen to 'get the most out of social networking and avoid its downsides by supporting their navigation of social networking' (RCN

2016c). On the same web site the risks that social networking ‘might include your child connecting with people who humiliate, bully or stalk him or even someone who wants to harm him’ remind parents of incidents of severe online bullying. The girls’ desire to hang out with their friends at *Highpoint*, to own a mobile phone, and access social media all come with complex mixed messages for parents: support your pre-teens increasing maturity, but be careful of all the dangers and risks that exist online or in public spaces. It is not surprising that parents’ decisions do not always align themselves with the girls’ understandings of cultural norms and practices. Yet it is this space of in-betweenness which I argue we need to explore further if we are to better understand the ambiguous position of pre-teen girls on the blurry boundaries of childhood, no longer children but not yet, nor wanting to be, teenagers.

BELONGING AND THE PRE-TEEN GIRLS’ ECONOMY OF DIGNITY

The desire for acceptance and to belong for young people in their local, social worlds has long been recognised (Goodenow 1993; Hamm and Faircloth 2005; Osterman 2000). The socialisation of young people, girls, and young women through their consumption activities has its own long history of exploration and understandings (Harris 2004; Kehily and Nayak 2008; McRobbie 2008). What has shifted for girls in contemporary Western society is the increasingly pervasive and intrinsic link between the girls’ desire to belong and their consumption activity. The success of the consumer-media tween culture lies in its ability to recognise pre-teens’ desires and to almost instantaneously produce and market products, services, and experiences that respond to the girls’ every desire. Understanding how the products respond to the girls’ desires, intertwine, and are dependent upon each other is often challenging and difficult to discern. Yet, as the rapid increase in mobile phone ownership and social networking usage for the pre-teen age group demonstrates it doesn’t take long for products, services, and experiences to quickly become cultural norms and practices for younger age groups. In this way, as Pugh (2009) suggests, children work together to assign their own meanings to goods, experiences, and services in their own local, social worlds.

Yet, as these pre-teen girls have demonstrated, their consumption desires and purchases are not necessarily ‘compelled by gadgetry’. For

many, their desire is ‘compelled by friendship’ or the desire for friendships. As Boyd (2014, p. 18) suggests, social networking for teens is about connecting with friends and pursuing a desire to belong, and these pre-teens experience the same longing. The girls demonstrate how Pugh’s ‘system of social meanings’, a child’s ‘economy of dignity’ establishes the links between the pre-teens’ consumption activity and their desire to achieve a sense of belonging in their own social worlds (Pugh 2009, p. 7). The desire to maintain dignity in this space was ever present for these girls and the nuanced understandings they displayed in their considerations and negotiations of belonging belied their years. Adult concerns around the aim of consumer-media tween culture make the links the girls can make between their consumption desires and the desire to belong difficult to identify. Concerns around the premature sexualisation and encouragement to grow up too fast for these younger age groups of girls engender our understandings and discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability making the links even more difficult to discern. My aim in this book has been to highlight the significant role that family, friends, school, and local communities continue to play in the lives of pre-teen girls. I recognise that this small study with 13 white middle-class Australian girls is not representative of all pre-teens. I have however endeavoured to demonstrate how a group of pre-teen girls’ consumption activities intertwine with their everyday negotiations of acceptance and belonging. While the meanings would differ depending on cultural norms, race, class, and the specific context, I argue though that the links between pre-teens’ consumption activities and their desire to belong would be replicated. I have shared here the insights of 13 pre-teen girls’ desire for technology, particularly mobile phones, and their emotional connection to social networking sites as new spaces for communication and negotiations of friendship and belonging to demonstrate the complex considerations the girls undertake in their everyday lives. While I am not suggesting that pre-teens need to have all that they desire, I am arguing that developing our understandings of how the girls’ consumption activity intertwine with their desire to belong within their own local, social worlds is significant. Recognising that pre-teens do not all align themselves with the sparkly, glittery fantasy world of tween girl culture and are capable of exhibiting agency and complex consideration in their consumption decisions is a good place to start.

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The ‘Acknowledgement’ section in the front matter, which was missing in the original version has been included.

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