Beyond Consumption: Belonging and the everyday social worlds of tween girls

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Beyond Consumption: Belonging and the everyday social worlds of tween girls

Abstract

In recent times, the global marketing concept of the Tween has emerged, identifying girls aged between nine and fourteen as a potentially lucrative age group with distinctive needs and interests. At the end of the 20th century advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers (consumer-media) combined to construct and then target the tween girl with products, services and experiences specifically designed to respond to her uniquely tween desires. The targeting of this gendered group of children resulted in widespread outcry and debate in Australia and other western nations, as girls were seen as being pressured to consume and in particular 'adopt sexualized appearance and behaviour' (Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, p. 211). However, these debates made clear the complex interweaving of highly localised social and cultural influences with the global consumer-media in tween girls' lives. The need for research which explored the significance of these other social and cultural influences such as family, friends, school and neighbourhood, alongside the consumer-media, in the life of the tween girl was apparent as Government committees struggled to disentangle the multiple influences in tween girls' lives. My research was designed to address this multiplicity by exploring these important local influences and to introduce tween girls' voices to enhance our understandings of how they negotiate the everyday lived experience of being 'tween'.

This thesis is based on an ethnographic study in a Melbourne Primary School of thirteen 11 and 12 year old girls in Year 6, their final year of primary school. Data for this study

were collected over an entire school year and included observations, field notes, reflections, interviews, focus groups and informal discussions. The aim of my ethnography in the girls' primary school environment was to explore and understand the significance of the tween girls' local, everyday social worlds, including family, friendship groups, school and the neighbourhood, in their negotiation of tweenness. While the concept of Tween has focussed our understandings of tween girls primarily on their consumption activities, their social worlds and the ambiguous position of the tween age group between their childhood and teenage years are also critical aspects of their gendered consumption, and attention to these social worlds suggests that new sociological frameworks are required to develop our understandings of this age group. In this thesis I shift the focus away from consumption and introduce new frameworks to illuminate the influence of family, friends, school and local geographies in the life of the tween girl. I focus on the important understandings to be gained from the girls' ordinary, everyday behaviours in their local environments. Ultimately, the concept of in-betweenness exploited by Tween marketing is explored and reframed in the concluding stages of this thesis with a focus on how tween girls themselves understand their position as Australian Year 6 students located in-between their childhood and teenage years.

My analysis of family, friends, the institution of school and the neighbourhood, and of girls' ordinary, everyday practices in these networks and contexts, has been framed by Alison Pugh's concept of the *economy of dignity*. Pugh's economy of dignity suggests that children assign a value for particular goods, services and norms that enable them to negotiate ways they can belong within their own social worlds. In my thesis, I use this concept to illuminate the tween experience as fundamentally about finding strategies for belonging within their social worlds, and show how Tween goods, services and norms

can be constructed and drawn upon in this process. My findings reveal the extensive and constant work and effort that goes into the tween girls' considerations and negotiations of belonging; which suggests the need to move beyond limited notions of tweens simply as inappropriately sexualised consumers. My findings suggest that the tween girl's desire to belong, and her recognition of her own in-betweenness, forms an essential and complex part of her everyday life that should not be underestimated.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. Neither does it contain, to the best of my knowledge, any material published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. – November 2013

Name: Fiona MacDonald

Date: November 2013

Signature:

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When you take on a project such as a PhD the length of time, commitment and energy expended and the determination required to finish determine that this is a journey travelled with others, and my experience has been shared with many very special people.

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I dedicate this thesis to my Mum, who I miss so much everyday but would have been very proud that I could finally say I did it …..

Introduction

Beyond the tweens' commercial personae

Introduction

In recent times, the global marketing concept of the Tween has emerged, identifying girls aged between nine and fourteen as a potentially lucrative age group with distinctive needs and interests. The term 'Tween', or 'tweenie' in this context identifies girls as being in-between; in this case in between their childhood and teenage years. Advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers (consumer-media) combined to construct and then target the tween girl with products, services and experiences specifically designed to respond to her uniquely tween desires. In targeting this age group the product, service or experiences are carefully considered in terms of the desire that can be stimulated for tween girls;

> Advertising, packaging and commercial product design have become a form of 'commodity aesthetics' and increasingly define their purpose in terms of fantasy, desire and sensation. Advertising's and marketing's role within consumer-media culture then, is to ensure that the desire to consume becomes a primary motivating force (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 32).

Carefully targeted marketing and advertising campaigns offer consumption to tween girls as the best way to fashion young, feminine girlness (Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005; Russell & Tyler, 2002). The success of this targeted marketing and linked product ranges

has resulted in an outcry from parents, communities, social commentators, government and academic circles. Concerns raised in Australia have focussed on arguments such as the sexualisation of childhood, young girls apparently growing up too fast, children's vulnerability and their susceptibility to the influences of advertising (Burns, 2005; Dubecki, 2007; Edgar, 2007; Reist, 2008; Tankard-Reist, 2009). Similar arguments have been raised in contemporary Western societies around the globe (Durham, 2009b; O'Donnell, 2007; Rutherford, 2001; The Midweek Banner, 2005). As Cook and Kaiser suggest, it is the emphasis on sexuality that drives many of the concerns and debates around the Tween market;

> Part of the impetus for producing and distributing what many would concur are sexually marked clothing styles can be found in the tension between trying to meet girls' ever-pressing demands for a sense of autonomy and personhood (i.e. encoded in looking 'older') and yet 'keeping' them in the Tween category and store…
>
> … 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 & Kaiser, 2004, pp. 218-222).

The focus on sexuality and girls growing up too fast in this 'consumer-media culture' has resulted in these issues being discussed and debated by Australian Governments, both State and Federal, since 2006 (Australian Council on Children and the Media, 2010;

Senate, 2008; Victorian Government, 2007). Arguably the two most significant, and controversial, reports emanating from these inquiries were the Australia Institute's 2006 Report, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia* (Rush & La Nauze, 2006a) and The Australian Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts Report from the Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media (Senate, 2008). The Australia Institute's Report, *Corporate Paedophilia* polarised the public, academia and social commentary. The basic premise that children, particularly girls, were being targeted by advertising and the marketing of inappropriate clothing was acknowledged in the overwhelming public reaction to the Report but the linking of the terms 'corporate' and 'paedophilia' with children was hotly debated. Opponents from the retail and marketing fields accused The Australia Institute of 'gross exaggeration', with retailer David Jones threatening legal action. Catherine Lumby, a leading public intellectual in media and gender studies, suggested that '*using terms like corporate paedophilia, ... is very irresponsible*' (Peacock, 2006). The debates continued throughout 2006 and 2007 as the authors defended the report, ultimately releasing a further report, with the less inflammatory title, *Letting Children be Children: Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia* (Rush & La Nauze, 2006b for a summary of publications see, Jackson, Vares & Gill, 2011).

While these reports focussed on the sexualisation of young girls, the Senate Inquiry Report specifically highlighted the tween group. The Report stated that it was difficult to determine the consumer-media's influences over the tween age group as there are 'a multiplicity of influences on children'. The report stated that 'the weight to be given to them and the causal relationships involved' was uncertain. The findings suggest that 'it

is extremely difficult to disentangle the specific roles played by family, school, friends, society at large and the media' for these girls (Senate, 2008, pp. 3-9). It was recommended that 'because the 'tween' market consists of the most vulnerable in our society the regulatory responsibility of government to protect that group is concomitantly greater'(Senate, 2008, p. 9).

As the parent of a tween aged daughter (in 2009) I was uneasy about the debates of sexualisation, targeted marketing and girls growing up too fast. I was concerned that the research being conducted with this age group focussed on the girls' consumption activities rather than exploring the range of social and cultural influences in their lives, those other factors stressed in The Senate Report. The absence of the girls' voices in the debates and scholarship was of concern and I was aware of the call in Australia for well-designed research with this age group (Lumby & Albury, 2008; Mason & Fattore, 2005; Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2006). Recognising the significant social and cultural influences beyond the consumer-media, I was encouraged to conduct a research project that explored, and attempted to untangle, the roles of family, friends, school and the girls' local geographies in the lives of tween aged girls.

Beyond A Tween Identity

The term 'tween' has become widely utilised by the consumer-media, social commentators and policy makers to describe girls aged between nine and fourteen, although there are arguments that suggest it includes girls as young as five or six (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Schor, 2005). The terms 'Tween' and 'tween' and 'consumer-media' culture will be used extensively throughout this thesis and I outline here the

definitions I have adopted. The term 'Tween' or 'Tween market' with a capital 'T' has been drawn from the work of Daniel Cook and Susan Kaiser and refers to the relationships between the advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers who combined forces to create this 'newly constructed persona and market' and perpetuate the perception that the tween girls' commercial persona exists beyond a marketing strategy (2004, p. 205). The term, 'tween' or 'tween aged girl' with a lower case 't' refers to all girls within the target age range of nine to fourteen (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 205). The term 'consumer-media culture' has been drawn from Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen's exploration of children's consumption, *Consuming Children: education-entertainment-advertising* (2001, p. 8). The term recognises the sophisticated, and fundamental, relationship between the consumer market, producers, marketers, retailers and advertisers that culminated in the creation of the Tween market. The term 'culture' is significant in this context as it acknowledges the shared beliefs and practices and 'specific cultural points and origins' of the Tween market that enables only girls of defined age groups to participate (Harris, 2005b, p. 211). While the Tween market is central to this thesis, my aim is to shift the focus to other significant social and cultural influences in the life of the tween girl.

Debates about the influence of the Tween market suggest that the presence of a consumer-media culture is part of a taken for granted cultural landscape for these girls (Gonick, 2005; Harris, 2005; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; Malik, 2005; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). The concept that tween girls are 'born to shop' has been actively promoted by the advertisers, marketers, retailers and producers who collectively make up this consumer-media culture (Burns, 2005).

While 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, 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 (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206 see also, Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Martens, Southerton, & Scott, 2004; Schor, 2005). Childhood consumption is complex and the Tween market challenges us to bring 'together the sociologies of childhood and consumption' to develop new frameworks that assist us to consider how 'cultures of consumption impact' on this age group (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, pp. 155-182 see also, Cook, 2004a; Schor, 2005).

In response to these demands Alison Pugh (2009, p. 6) developed a framework locating the 'key to children's consumer culture, to the explosion of parent buying and the question of what things mean to children' within children's own social experiences. She contends that children 'claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging, or just what it would take to be able to participate among their peers' (Pugh, 2009, p. 6). Pugh calls this concept the *economy of dignity*. She argues that children actively work out the value of belonging in their social worlds and negotiate ways they can feel worthy amongst their peers (2009, p. 6). Pugh uses the term 'dignity' to represent the most basic sense of 'children's participation in their social worlds' (2009, p. 6). I draw on Pugh's term 'dignity' extensively in this thesis as the concept recognises the ways the 11 and 12 year old girls in my ethnographic study constantly negotiate a place they can belong with their friends and peers. The concept also enables me to acknowledge the important role of family in the life of the tween girl. The girls' ability to work out the

ways of belonging in their social worlds is intrinsically linked to their family practices and its own unique economy of dignity. While I was not directly conducting a research project on 11 and 12 year old girls' families, the girls' regular insights and glimpses into their family practices produced important knowledge about the significance of family for these girls. Through the girls' discussions I was able to develop an understanding of how families are responding to the tween girls' increasing consumption desires and more broadly, new consumption practices.

To develop our understandings of the tween girl, sociologist Anita Harris (2005) recommends that we look beyond the aims of the Tween market, arguments and panic of sexualisation and commodification. Beyond these arguments Harris contends that we will discover there has been an 'important shift in young feminine identities that is offered by tweenie' (2005b, p. 222). This shift, Harris argues, 'allows girls to move from a purely passive position to one of active protagonist, from consumer and 'reader' of popular culture to agent and 'writer' (2005b, p. 222). In acknowledging the tween girls' agency, Harris suggests, it is essential to shift our focus and begin 'to take seriously the ways Tween offers girls an agentic, albeit limited, subject position that they are able to negotiate and play with' (2005b, p. 222). These ideas of agency and negotiations were key reasons for conducting an ethnographic study enabling me to observe girls' lives for an extended period;

> Girls exhibit agency as well in their appropriations of available styles and cultural models of girlhood. These afford a rich arena for these girls to experiment not only with age and gender identities, but also with how these overlap and intersect

> in complicated ways with sexuality, race, ethnicity and social class (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, pp. 223-224).

While Pugh does not use the term tween, she explores the intricacies of children's consumer culture and its meaning within their social worlds, drawing on children's own social experiences to understand their consumption activity (2009). She suggests that part of the intensity of children's consumption stems from their overwhelming desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups, in their own social worlds (Pugh, 2009). She claims that children's lives regularly 'traverse several different economies of dignity – at school, at their after-school program, and in the neighbourhood' – and different goods or services assume importance because of the unique peer culture in each place (Pugh, 2009, pp. 6-7). Pugh argues that children's consumption is motivated by their own local, social experiences and their desires to belong. *Childr*en work together to shape their own local, specific *economies of dignity*, transforming the meaning of specific goods, experiences and services, which are 'suddenly fraught with meaning' (Pugh, 2009, pp. 6-7). Pugh suggests that the importance of these localised, social worlds is often missing from 'popular explanations' of why children and in turn their parents consume.

The tween girls' social worlds

The work of belonging with friends and peers is done in the complex interactional spaces the tween occupies, in families, friendship groups, schools, shopping centres, recreational and sporting teams. In many instances the influences of these important social and cultural structures are interlinked and unravelling their individual impact is difficult. While the girls' shopping habits and family leisure activities overlap with the girls'

consumption activities, they do not simply reflect marketing regimes or spending potential. As Pugh suggests, it is the allocation of meaning to specific items, goods, experiences and activities that motivates the child's desire to consume (2009, p. 7). A sense of belonging which is dependent on shared 'consumer goods and experiences' and is vulnerable to 'fads and fashions' can change weekly (Pugh, 2009, p. 225). The realisation of the child's desire is determined by their 'parents' buying practices' which are a combination of the family resources and the parents' interpretation of the value of items and experiences to their child. Understanding their child's feeling of 'being different from others kids' if they don't own the item, experience or goods motivated many parents 'buying practices' (Pugh, 2009, p. 9). Parents who recognised that the value of an experience or item enabled their child to be 'visible to their peers', facilitated their child's participation in their own social worlds (Pugh, 2009, pp. 7-9).

Pugh's concept of the economy of dignity 'reflects children's intense focus on their social world' (2009, p. 214). As Pugh argues, 'children navigate the economy of dignity with what they are given, making cultural meaning through processes of contestation and interpretation that thus create local sources of social honor' (2009, p. 214). Pugh's framework of belonging, encompassing the complexities and the processes involved as girls negotiate their desire to belong with their peers became pivotal to my study. It was significant in my understanding of the girls' relationships with their families and again, as I considered the significance of belonging within their peer groups and to the institution of school. Pugh's concept acknowledges the centrality and overlap of children's local geography's to their negotiations of belonging. The significance of the globalised, consumer-media is acknowledged in Pugh's arguments but she is not alone in contesting

widespread understandings of Tween being situated in a global almost placeless environment (see also, J. Holland, Reynolds, & Weller, 2007; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). While it has been suggested that we are 'witnessing the "death of geography" in the lives of young people, my research explores Nayak's argument that local 'place and geography matter more than ever' (2003, p. 5 see also, Massey & Allen, 1994; Wyn, Lantz, & Harris, 2012). Understanding the local geographies of these tweens was pivotal to my understandings of how they negotiated their desires to belong. As I discovered, the 'places that matter' to these tween girls were 'simultaneously global and local' as they made sense of their experiences and 'rework[ed] global processes' to make meanings in their own social worlds (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 18).

Outside her familial relationships, the school environment is arguably the most significant social world the tween has to negotiate. School is considered to be a key setting 'where young people develop new and different relationships with peers and adults' (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2008). It is argued that developing a sense of belonging in both family and school is a major protective factor in young people's health and well-being (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2008; George, 2007; Mansfield, 2007; Pugh, 2009; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Wyn, 2000, 2007; Zannettino, 2007). Within this significant social world friends are pivotal to the tween 'engendering a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity' (George, 2007, p. 57). Making friends at school is often the first experience children have of negotiating and dealing with friendships 'outside the family'. As she moves through her school years, the tween moves 'away from unconditional love' and navigates 'a complex social setting' for herself 'in which affection, approval, affirmation

have to be negotiated' and constantly reviewed (George, 2007, p. 57 see also, Heilman, 1998; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Pratt & George, 2005). Having considered alternative locations for my study, including retail outlets or shopping complexes, the significance of the primary school environment for this age group, and the girls' negotiations and practices in this important space, made this the best location to conduct my research over an extended period of time.

A Reflexive ethnography in a Melbourne Primary School

The tween age group spans the age range 9 to 14 and Australian school Years 4 to 9. This period spans the two main school systems in Australia; the primary years from Prep to Year 6 and the secondary years, Year 7 to Year 12. Existing sociological, developmental and feminist scholarship exploring identity formation, 'becoming somebody well', connectedness or belonging has focused on the secondary or teenage years (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2008; George, 2007; Mansfield, 2007; McLeod, 2002; Wyn, 2000, 2007; Zannettino, 2007). While the upper end of the tween age group falls in the secondary school years, my interest focused on the final primary school years. I was interested to explore the girls' desire to belong, for acceptance by their friends, in this younger age group.

Increasingly primary schools are being identified as valuable research environments for the younger tween age group (Allan, 2009; George, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Kehily, 2012; Maher, 2008; Rysst, 2010; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). George's (2007, p. xvii) study exploring the nature of girls' friendships in three London primary schools and their transition to secondary school considered 'the complex processes by which urban girls'

friendship are constructed and sustained'. Kehily, Mac An Ghaill, Epstein and Redman (2002a) explored making and breaking friendships in two UK primary schools. The findings of these and subsequent studies provided me with examples of successful and valuable research projects in primary schools. In addition, the depth of knowledge produced in ethnographic studies with this age group influenced my decision to conduct an ethnography in a Melbourne primary school environment (Allan, 2009; Kehily, 2002a; Reay, 2001; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011).

My research was prompted in part by concerns surrounding the marketing of Tween and the debates of whether these girls were agentic in their decision making. The debates included the sexualisation of childhood, body image and girls growing up too fast and scholarship exploring these issues for young girls are extensive. I was however particularly intrigued by the Senate Report's (Senate, 2008) findings that it is difficult to disentangle and understand the role of other social and cultural influences in the tween's life. The aim of my study was to consider all these influences in the life of the tween and to provide a voice for her understandings of her own social worlds. My research was shaped by the understanding that the tween girl desires to belong with her friends and peers in the school environment. My study did not aim to prove, or disprove, a particular hypothesis but takes up The Senate Report (Senate, 2008) call by;

- Exploring the subjective understandings of peer relationships, families, schooling, the consumer-media and other resources that young girls use to fashion a sense of self, and to belong, in the interactive environment of school;

- My study responds to this call by identifying, exploring and analysing the complex and shifting rules of engagement that shape the dynamics of belonging for a group of 11-12 year old girls in one Grade 6 class.

My ethnography was devised to be undertaken with a group of 11 or 12 year old girls from one Year 6 class, rather than drawing participants from different classes, or schools. As George (2007, p. 136) observes, 'I could have studied a larger group of friends and their parents' or considered other influences in the girls lives. I could have compared girls from different primary school or urban and rural girls. But my aim was similar to George's (2007, p. 137), where 'the intention of this research was not to provide a definitive study' of girls of this age group 'but to take a particular group of girls in an urban context' and to 'examine a slice of their complex lives'. By focusing on one group of girls I aimed to develop rich understandings of the influences in their lives as they negotiated their desire to belong within the primary school environment. My fieldwork was undertaken at Western Heights Primary School, a pseudonym, one day a week for the entire school year, with additional visits for the Year 6 camp and excursions, as well as through interviews and focus groups. The ethnography was reflective in nature as this enabled me to consider my place in the research project and to be aware of the effect my presence had on the information being collected (C. Davies, 2008). The year-long ethnography enabled me to reflect on the girls' actions and practices over an extended period, clarifying my observations and developing understandings. I adopted a range of different methods to gather information from the girls throughout the year; observations, field notes, reflections, work sampling, interviews and focus groups. My findings are outlined in Chapters Four to Eight of this thesis. As I will discuss throughout this thesis

the location of my ethnographic study is a significant component of my research, providing me with valuable insights and understandings of the role schools and local geographies play in the life of the tween aged girl.

Thesis Outline

Considerable time was spent deliberating over how to represent the thirteen individual and unique lives of the girls from Year 6C who participated in this study. The deliberations are reflected in the ordering of the chapters in this thesis and motivated the decisions that framed this written representation of the girls' subjective understandings of their desire to belong. My own link to this project was significant as I was 'connected to, or part of,' the life of my young participants for an entire school year (C. Davies, 2008, p. 3). The extended period with the girls required me to constantly review my relationship with them and reflect on the influence I had on the study. My position as an adult researcher exploring each child's social world required constant reflexivity, which 'expresses researchers' awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it' (C. Davies, 2008, p. 7). In this thesis, the girls' insights into their own social worlds and experiences underpin my findings about the importance of school, family and friends in how consumption is practiced and experienced by tween girls. In my analysis and interpretation of the narratives of these thirteen enthusiastic, intriguing and delightfully ordinary girls, I was profoundly aware of my responsibilities to them.

The idea of 'ordinary' and 'everyday' girls is dominant throughout this thesis and I explain my use of these terms here. Rather than accepting the definition of ordinary and

everyday as being uninteresting or unimpressive, I use the terms ordinary and everyday throughout this thesis to capture the girls' commonplace or repetitive actions and practices but I seek to emphasise their significance and importance. I have adopted Walkerdine's (1990, p. 162) argument that 'there, caught in the threads of that ordinary life, is the basis for understanding what my subjectivity might be about'. I recognise that exploring the subjectivity of tween girls through their ordinary and everyday behaviours in a primary school environment confronts and challenges the Tween market's intent to create a global 'consumer cohort out of these girls' (Harris 2005, p. 210). Yet even within the school environment the girls are presented with products and services for play as they negotiate their own subject position in this space. I argue their subject positions are still dependent on the girls engaging with the products and services available to them, even when the Tween products are mediated by a school environment. While arguments against Tween espouse the 'exploitation of minors' discourse there are others that suggest that the Tween market could be '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' (Harris 2005, p. 213). For the purposes of this thesis I have adopted a similar argument, that the girls in this space are actively engaged in negotiating their own subject position, drawing on the 'products and services' of the primary school environment in the process (Harris 2005, p. 222).

Similarly, Brown (1987, p. 3) suggests that ordinary children's behaviours can provide important insights into their 'attempt[s] to maintain command of their own lives'. Throughout my year in the field I discovered that it was often the girls' ordinary, everyday practices which provided me with valuable insights into their negotiations to belong in

this space. Far from being 'trapped by a wall of silence about the very ordinariness' of their lives, these thirteen girls were enthusiastic and open about the ways they go about negotiating a place for themselves to belong within their own social worlds (Walkerdine 1960, p. 161). The openness of the girls provided me with an opportunity to consider and develop a richer understanding of the value of the 'ordinary obviousness' in their practices and actions. In revealing their 'ordinary, everyday' actions and practices the girls enabled me to contextualise my understandings outside the often restricting contemporary panics about inappropriate consumption that surround the Tween market.

The following is an overview of the chapters in this thesis. Chapter One opens with a review of the history of childhood in modern Western societies. From the 17th century to the beginning of the 21st century the chapter reviews the histories and sociologies of childhood. The development of childhood as separate from adulthood is outlined along with the major technological advances and transformations that influenced children and families throughout the 20th century. I outline the diverse, shifting and complex discourses of childhood at the end of the 20th century as producing a social climate that saw the emergence of the Tween market. This exploration continues in Chapter Two where I present a more detailed outline of the Tween phenomenon. I argue this is a distinctly gendered phenomenon and critical responses in the developing field of girlhood studies throughout the late 20th century. The chapter explores the commonly articulated fantasies and desires of the tween girl as well as the debates and discussions surrounding the Tween market. I consider the benefits and shortcomings of having a 'special community marked by age and gender, which is fun loving and global' for these girls (Harris 2005, p. 213). The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the concept of

Tween may restrict our ability to develop broader understandings of important social and cultural influences in the life of the tween girl.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological framework for my ethnographic study. The chapter describes the processes involved in framing my ethnographic study and includes the recruitment processes and the data collection methods utilised. The significance of Alison Pugh's concept, *the economy of dignity,* to the girls' desire to belong within their own social worlds is further discussed. My role as a researcher in a primary school environment is explored and the chapter introduces the thirteen 11 and 12 year old delightfully 'ordinary' girls who participated in this study.

Chapter Four is the first of my analysis chapters. In this chapter I focus on understanding the girls' ordinary, everyday practices and actions. As I discovered over days and weeks in the field many of the girls' ordinary or regular practices provided significant insights into their negotiations of belonging within their friendship and peer groups. I was encouraged in this focus by the argument that it is often the things 'one didn't even suspect existed' that can provide the most important findings in research (Miller, 2010, p. 7). As I discovered throughout the year the girls' ordinary, everyday practices and actions often revealed quite sophisticated and complex meanings. From the wearing of shorts, to 'partners for the year' and one young girl's intuitive understanding of her place on the periphery of her friendship group, this chapter highlights the importance of acknowledging and exploring the meanings behind the girls' everyday practices.

From here I explore the significant role of family in the life of the tween in Chapter Five. While the tween's desire to belong within her friendship and peers is unmistakable, her family continues to provide her with the support she needs as she moves beyond her familial relationships. Despite the significance of their ongoing role there are few studies that directly explore the role of family in the life of the tween. In my study I draw on concepts such as 'family practices' (Morgan, 1996, 2011) and the 'economy of dignity' (Pugh, 2009) in conjunction with consumption (Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, Seigel, Coffey, & Livingston, 2004) to provide a framework for my discussion of family in the life of the tween. Morgan's argument that 'family practices' best illustrate who families are is significant for my understanding of the concepts of belonging and consumption. The chapter considers who these 11 and 12 year old girls identify as their family, including parents, siblings, grandparents and more extended family. The girls' description of familial influences on them, as well as the changing role they see for themselves within their families is explored. Leisure time and family shopping expeditions are discussed as I explore the girls' family activities and how different forms of family consumption work to produce belonging.

The significance of having friends at school is highlighted in Chapter Six. The girls' experiences of negotiating friendships, the attributes of a good friend and the time and effort that go into negotiating friendships in this space are explored. Positive feelings such *as being happy, feeling welcomed* were the attributes girls looked for in their friends. In contrast, strong feelings of *being lonely, sad, depressed* and not belonging were expressed when the girls contemplated the possibility of not having friends at school. In this chapter I have drawn on Pugh's concept the *economy of dignity* to consider how they

girls negotiate their friendships. I consider how the tween interprets the rules and norms of the school environment to appropriate a range of practices and actions including consuming practices that link her with her peers and produce a sense of belonging in this environment. The key friendship groups from the class of 6C are introduced and the complex and hierarchical relationships of each group are considered. The girls reflect on friendships from previous years and contemplate how their current friendships evolved. The chapter includes an insight into the significance of the girls' friendships with the 6C boys. A discussion about the ongoing nature of friendship negotiations and shifting understanding of the norms and rules of friendships in the school environment concludes the chapter.

Chapter Seven recognises the significance of place in the life of the tween girl. While the concept of globalisation is sometimes taken to indicate that the tween is growing up in a global almost placeless environment the significance of her local geography cannot be overlooked (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Nayak, 2003; Valentine, 2004). The importance of local social worlds and the salience of conducting this ethnographic study in a primary school environment are discussed. I consider the significance of the tween belonging to the institution of school, in this case Western Heights Primary School. In this chapter I draw out two key themes introduced in my methodological chapter. The first is how this primary school enables the girls to achieve a sense of belonging through both the formal aspects of the school day as well as the informal structures of interaction and belonging. My second theme explores how the girls inhabit and make use of the outdoor spaces of Western Heights Primary School.

My analysis chapters conclude with Chapter Eight where I focus on the girls' discussions of their own lives in relation to the tween girl 'commercial personae' (Cook, 2004a, p. 151). Drawing on data from the focus groups and interviews I compare the girls' understandings of 'being in between' with the 'in-betweenness' that is constructed and targeted by the advertisers, retailers, marketers and producers of the Tween market. The girls reveal their aspirations for increased independence and freedom outside their familial relationships as part of their sense of transition. The girls' desire for, and use of, consumer goods such as mobile phones, iPods and laptops and their longing for access to social networking sites such as MSN and Facebook reveals complex layers of 'in-betweenness' in the everyday lives of these tween girls.

I conclude my thesis reflecting on the social and cultural influences in the life of the tween girl explored in this thesis; family, friends, her school, local geographies and the consumer-media. Conducting an ethnographic study for an entire school year with these girls gave me time to observe, discuss and reflect on many of the girls' practices. This time revealed the significance of family, friends, school and her local geographies in the life of the tween girl beyond assessments of the market or consumption patterns as dominating or defining girls' lives. My findings, as the Senate Report (Senate, 2008) highlights, suggest it is difficult to unravel the many influences in the life of the tween. But stepping outside the parameters of the Tween market has enabled me to focus on the girls' ordinary, everyday actions and the ways in which tween consumption is practiced and experienced. Rather than reflecting simply the influence of the consumer-media, the girls' actions, and consumption practices form part of their constant, negotiations of belonging in their own social worlds. Understanding the tween girls' desire to belong

within these important social and cultural influences has been central in this thesis. Cook and Kaiser suggest (2004, pp. 223-224);

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

As I have argued, we need to consider tween girls as emerging subjects, seeking independence while simultaneously acknowledging their connectedness to their families, schools and local communities.

Chapter One

Contemporary Australian childhood: all consuming?

Childhood is the art of making the world anew out of the world as we find it (Elliott & Lemert, 2006, p. 27).

Introduction

The realm of childhood at the beginning of the 21st century is incredibly complex as the vulnerability of children, their needs and rights for protection, their psychological, emotional, and intellectual developmental stages and needs, and their dependence on, or independence from, adults is increasingly discussed and debated around the globe. While childhood in many developing nations continues to be under threat from poverty, abuse, child labour and preventable childhood diseases and illnesses, the majority of children in Western developed nations face different challenges. Issues of childhood obesity, abuse, educational outcomes and changing family structures dominate the agenda of governments in developed Western nations. Within this volatile environment childhood is also considered to be under threat from the 'consumer-media culture' (Cunningham, 1995; C. Davies, 2008; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993; Livingstone, 2002; Postman, 1982). An 'end of childhood' discourse abounds in Western nations as 'sweeping changes in conceptions of childhood, in child-rearing

practices, family life and children's culture' transform and threaten childhood as we know it (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 2).

Concerns about the 'end of childhood' and the disappearance of Western childhood are widespread and have been expressed in many contexts, including in parental anxiety, educational forums, social commentary, government inquiries and academic research. Positioned within a particular social and historical context, our changing understandings of Western childhood have been influenced by a variety of different social and cultural processes, with consequent impacts on families and the roles of children within them. While the 'end of childhood' discourse incorporates discussions about the biological, physiological and psychological status of childhood it is the changing social and cultural structures influencing contemporary Australian childhood that I focus on in this thesis. Defining an age range for childhood in a Western English-speaking society is difficult as there are many different academic, official, commercial and community accounts of when childhood ends and adulthood begins. While UNICEF'S Convention on the Rights of the Child covers children aged 18 and under, the years from 13 to 18 are commonly referred to as the teenage or adolescent years. Sociological research with these young people is most often conducted under the auspices of 'Youth' studies. For the purpose of this thesis the zero to 13 age range will be used to define Western childhood (Wyness, 2006).

The Tween market is at the centre of many of these debates and concerns about children growing up too fast and the 'end of childhood' discourse. Emerging towards the end of the 20th century the 'Tween' signals the identification by the consumer market, retailers and advertising media of girls aged between nine and fourteen as a new and potentially lucrative target age group. The consumer-media is consistently blamed for being the most

significant social structure threatening childhood as we know it, despite recognition that 'the "nature" of being young, the relationships of the young to adults to the family and to other social institutions such as school, have changed considerably across time and place' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 2). The outcry from parents, communities and State and Federal Governments' at the apparent sexualisation of tween aged girls has engendered scholarship with this age group which focuses on the penetrating and potentially pernicious influence of the consumer-media. Yet there are other significant social and cultural influences in the girls' lives beyond the consumer-media. The aim of this thesis is to shift the emphasis away from the consumer-media in isolation to consider its influence alongside families, friends, school and local geographies in the everyday lives of tween girls. These significant influences in the life of the tween girl are considered in separate chapters throughout this thesis but the interconnections between them are palpable. In this chapter, I consider how modern ideas of Western childhood emerged as the ground for my later exploration of the complexities of the Tween market in girls' lives.

My exploration will begin in the 17th century when arguably modern ideas of Western childhood emerged and childhood began to develop a status separate from adulthood (Aries, 1962; Cunningham, 1995; Postman, 1982). The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed ongoing changes to the status of childhood as governments in developed English-speaking nations responded to changing social and cultural landscapes and developed laws to protect the rights of children: these are discussed in this chapter. Changes to the roles and structures of families throughout the latter half of the 20th century had a major influence of our understandings of contemporary childhood. It was during the 20th century that shopping became a central part of family life and children were increasingly

identified as potentially lucrative markets by the consumer-media. Gendered marketing was normalized as the advertising industry recognised the potential influence and desires of children within family structures and the Tween market emerged out of this milieu. I conclude this chapter by examining the idea that contemporary Western childhood is 'all consuming' especially as it links to practices of gendered marketing to girls.

A Brief History of Childhood

The Emergence of Modern Ideas of Western Childhood

My analysis of the relationship between children, consumer goods and the media today rests on an understanding that contemporary Western childhood is distinct from adulthood. While Philippe Aries (1962) has been criticised for asserting that childhood did not exist prior to the 17th century, his suggestion that the separation of childhood and adulthood occurred during this period has been heavily influential in sociological and historical studies of childhood and his arguments were useful in grounding this study. Aries argues that modern ideas about childhood in developed English-speaking countries emerged during the 17th century as adults began to remove, censor and guard information they considered inappropriate for children. Knowledge about sex, violence, illness and death were removed from the child's world and became the 'secrets of adulthood' (Aries, 1962, p. 413 see also, Postman, 1982). The on-going salience of ideas of secrecy can be found in the end of childhood discourse with arguments that 'the media discloses too much and exposes young people too early to the unpalatable and the forbidden' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 2). These arguments suggest that adults are concerned that they are

no longer able to ‘control’ the images or information being disseminated to children and I will return to this concern later.

It was during this period of change in the 17th and 18th centuries, Aries suggests, that children’s education was increasingly recognised as an essential part of the transition from childhood to adulthood and schooling became an integral part of children’s lives (Aries, 1962; Cunningham, 1995; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993). Previously children had been valued for their ability to contribute to the household economy; both in household chores and in earning an income from external sources. But from the end of the 19th century children in developed Western nations were prohibited from participating as workers in the production of goods and services. As social perceptions of childhood altered, governments were increasingly pressured to assume new responsibilities for the welfare of all children. Numerous laws were introduced during the late 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century to protect the rights of the child in Western society. Increasingly, childhood developed a social status separate from adulthood with associated rights for protection and education though not without political and economic debate and struggles between different interests and ideas (Cunningham, 1995; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993; Postman, 1982). It was not until 1989 that the basic human rights for all children, regardless of their home nation, were protected by The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2010). The changing status of childhood brought with it new challenges as governments were now faced with the prospect of determining the most appropriate ways to socialise children (Kline, 1993). The need to understand children’s minds and their behaviours was increasingly recognised and the scientific study of childhood expanded from examining their health and welfare needs to understanding their biological and psychological development. For example,

psychologists began to provide advice to educationalists on how to assess the success of their teaching programmes as schools attempted to teach, shape and create social behaviours and moral standards as well as academic learning skills. Play was recognised as the 'work of childhood' and toys and play equipment became a familiar part of children's lives.

Parents became increasingly aware of their changing responsibilities for children; expectations, norms and encouragement to provide a supportive childhood, accompanied by the family image of tenderness, care and empathy emerged and became widespread (Cunningham, 1995; Postman, 1982). This was also the period when many children were shifting from being productive members of the family and becoming consumers in their own right. At the end of the 19th century shops began offering products designed specifically for children; clothes, shoes, toys and books (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993; Seiter, 1993). The individual child's needs were promoted as a reason to purchase a product and the 'advice' of experts on how to raise happy, healthy children blurred with the desire of marketers to sell their products. Mothers were identified as the key purchasers for their households and it was believed that in purchasing decisions 'mother instinctively puts her child's needs above all else' (Cook, 2004b, pp. 42-44).

Changing Social and Cultural Influences of the 20th Century

The scientific, largely psychological, analysis of children's behaviours, minds and learning processes also advanced throughout this period. Developmental theories such as those of Erik Erikson (1963) and Jean Piaget (1962) were influential in shaping understandings of the nature of childhood development, reasoning and cognition. 'The new child psychology was a child-centred model', as educationalists and 'parenting

experts' were mobilized to inform parents of the developmental needs of their child's mind and body (Seiter, 1993, p. 23). Parents were encouraged 'to establish a new quality of self-determination in the relationships with their children, giving them the appropriate objects and opportunities to help them discover themselves' (Kline, 1993, p.64 see also, Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962). Increasingly 'advertising now exhorted parents – mothers – to buy products promising to ensure their child's maximum development. The relationship between good mothering and consumption was established and increasingly mothers asked themselves 'what must I (and what *can* I) do and have and buy in order to properly love, value, educate, nurture, provide for, raise-in a word, *mother* –my child(ren)?' (J. Taylor, 2004, p.12 see also, Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

The impact of wars and depressions in the early 20th century failed to halt the advance of industrialisation and the number of products available for consumption in developed Western nations increased. The end of the Second World War brought with it a sense of hope for the future in Australian and other Commonwealth nations; marriages and the birth rate boomed (Baker, 2001; Poole, 2005; Reiger, 2005). After the limitations of war and depression this period brought with it changing work practices and family structures and an increasing availability of consumer goods. In Australia waves of post-war immigration bought immigrant families in search of the suburban dream, of having their own home and providing their children with a better life (Baker, 2001; Reiger, 2005). The mid to late 20th century, a period of industrialisation, consumerism and increasing affluence, further transformed families and the roles of children within them. It was during this period, Valentine argues, that a view of childhood as a 'coherent universal' experience emerged (2004). This view of childhood suggested that all children enjoyed a 'happy free time, lacking responsibilities' and were 'innocent, incompetent and

vulnerably dependent (on both parent(s) and the State)' (Valentine, 2004, p. 5). This was, however, a 'dominant imagining of childhood' and did not represent the experiences of all children (Valentine, 2004, p. 5).

The baby boom of the post war years did not continue. Family planning was becoming socially acceptable as 'the access to artificial contraception, especially once the Pill became available during the 1960s giving women and young couples more control over the size of the families (Reiger, 2005, p. 58). Family structures underwent significant change again as 'more married women began to take advantage of the expanding educational and employment opportunities' available to them through the 1970s and 80s (Baker, 2001, p. 92). With increased financial capacity families no longer felt the pressure to delay purchases and save for the future. Consumer goods and services became items of clear social value as families looked for new ways to connect with each other and television became an important advertising tool for producers and advertisers. Shopping became a central part of family life and children were being taught the pleasures of consumption and socialised into a culture 'in which people are both encouraged to desire more things and to borrow rather than save' (Reiger, 2005, p. 163). Langer argues that people were being socialised to want more for themselves and their children (Langer, 2005, p. 163).

The first targeted marketing to children or young people emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as producers recognised the independence and potential of the 12-24 year old age group market. Identified as a distinctly lucrative market, with their own disposable incomes and leisure time, advertisers and marketers began to find new ways to directly target this age group. Following their success with the 12-24 year age group it did not

take long for marketers to recognise the potential of the children's markets as toy manufacturers such as Mattel began to explore the impact of mass advertising. The most popular doll of all time, Barbie, was created and marketed to children during the 1960s. Although advertising to children was complicated by their limited exposure to traditional advertising mediums such as radio, magazines, newspaper, advertisers had learnt from their experience with the youth market and they actively sought new ways to communicate directly to children (Kline, 1993). Neil Postman (1982) has argued that the widespread access to television by increasing numbers of the population during this time was the catalyst that changed the avenues of media communication to children. Kline (1993, p. 169) argues that;

> Television advertising proved a successful weapon for changing family dialogue. The evidence was that kids who watched a lot of television, and who zeroed in on commercials, began to make more requests for specific goods in the supermarket. Heavy advertising therefore increased children's influence and consumer "power".

Postman suggests that through television the media removed the boundaries adults had placed around childhood and established direct communication with children. At other levels TV media increasingly tailored its broadcast to different demographics. Children were recognised by advertisers, producers and retailers as a category separate from adults. Television programmes and the marketing of consumer goods aimed directly at children increased (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993).

Changing Families

Television advertising did not stand alone in influencing the status of childhood; changes in family and work structures continued at the end of the 20th and into the 21st century. The apparent demise and changing role of the family is regularly debated in Western developed nations as the complexities and contested view of families and the 'decline of marriage as economic contract and the rise of companionate relationships between spouses' are discussed alongside 'the decline of the nuclear family and the rise of fluid family practices' (Smart, 2007, p. 10). Family structures, in Australia and other Western nations, have become increasingly diverse as marriages rates have decreased, divorce rates increased, and cohabitation and defacto relationships have become more common (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010; Baker, 2001). Women have increasingly pursued post-secondary education before entering the workforce and delayed marriage and having children until later in their 20s, which has substantially narrowed the window of opportunity for women' to have children (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). Assisted reproductive technology such as IVF assists infertile couples to have children as well as assisting single women or lesbian couples realise their desire to become parents. The size of the family has fallen at the beginning of the 21st century and couples are increasingly making the decision not to have children although the traditional nuclear family of two parents and children remains 'the most powerful normative ideal' family type in Australia at the beginning of the 21st century (Saggers & Sims, 2005, p. 68 see also, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010; Statistics., 2009). While the structure and role of families is increasingly being debated and new ways of thinking of families 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 wellbeing of all immediate family members (Hayes, Weston, Qu & Gray, 2010, p. 11 see also, Baker, 2001; Hayes, Weston, Qu, & Gray, 2010; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Reiger, 2005; Smart, 2007).

For children in Western developed nations the family structure remains one of the most important social influences in their young lives. For members of family groups the relationship between individuals is of great importance, as caring, intimacy and economic considerations takes on everyday relevance. As the cost of living in Australia has increased and consumption desires are encouraged by ever-increasing numbers of consumer goods and services presented by compelling marketing campaigns, double income families or families with one parent working full time and the other part time have become more prevalent (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). The numbers of women returning to the work force have increased from the 1970s and child-care often takes place in formal child-care locations or informally with grandparents, friends or extended family members (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010).

Changing childhoods

The latter stages of the 20th century also saw a shift in children's leisure activities, 'the 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, see also Valentine, 2004). Leisure activities shifted away from public spaces to private, home-based spaces. Increasingly children's live became 'more structured and supervised by adults to a growing extent, with the increasing professionalization of children's daycare and education, and even their freetime activities' (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 80). This shift proved significant as children began to spend more time in their private homes looking for activities to entertain themselves. Already 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 (D. Buckingham, 2000; Kline, 1993; Langer, 2005; Livingstone, 2002; Postman, 1982). The 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities survey 'reported that of the 2.7 million [Australian] children aged 5 to 14 years [who participated in the survey], 79% used the internet. Home [use] was reported as the most common site of internet use (73%) followed by school (69%)' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

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 shaping the spending habits of families. This shift in the relations of power observed in families continues at the beginning of the 21st century, with a discourse of 'child centredness' reshaping family roles, relations and structures. The discourse of child centredness suggests that decisions in the family 'are tailored to the specific dispositions of individual children' (Wyness, 2006, p. 159). Seiter (1993, p. 193) suggests that 'a distinctive, peer-oriented consumer

culture now intervenes in the relationship of parents and children'. With consumption recognised as a central socialising influence in children's lives the discourse of 'child centredness' has expanded the opportunity for children to have greater control over the consumer goods and services purchased for them.

Many children in countries such as Australia are being raised in families with increasing levels of disposable incomes. While financial capacity remains a determining factor the 'idea that a child should have her own room, possibly her own bathroom, sound system, television and computer and mobile phone, not to mention a continuing supply of the latest toys, games, leisure equipment and fashionable clothes, has become normalized' (Langer, 2005, p. 164 see also, D. Buckingham, 2000; P. Holland, 1992; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993; Linn, 2004; Wyness, 2006). Langer suggests 'this shift from a culture of making do to a culture of having more, and from saving to spending' has had profound 'effects on both adults and children' and I return to the idea of children as consumers later in this chapter (2005, p. 163). While discourses of 'families in decline or in crisis' are used by some to describe the changing structure of Western families, there is another view that suggests that 'families have become much more egalitarian and less authoritarian, and that family relationships have become less conventional, and more fluid and adaptive to individual needs' (Poole, 2005, p. 16 see also, Smart, 2007). This more optimistic view suggests the family is more resilient and accommodating of change and arguably more responsive to the increasing consumption opportunities being promoted to individual family members.

Contemporary Childhood – Sold Separately

Consumption – A Working Definition

> How children 'learn' to consume, the lifestyles of their parents, the way that their parents reflexively engage with memories of their own childhood (or biography) and parental readings of material culture all lie at the heart of what can be understood as children's consumption (Martens et al., 2004, p. 175).

In this section I consider the consumer-media's influence over contemporary Western childhood and explore how advertisers, marketers, retailers and producers recognised the economic potential of children as consumers and began to target specific age and gendered children's markets. '[E]ven when boys and girls are playing with the same toys, they are often employing them in very different imaginary contexts and interacting differently with their playmates' (Kline, 1993, p. 340 see also, D. Buckingham, 2000; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; Postman, 1982; Reiger, 2005).

Researchers examining the relationship between the media and children offer two contrasting views of how the media influences children: on the one hand children are understood as being naïve and vulnerable and in need of protection from the influences and evils of the media. On the other hand, children are seen as being increasingly sophisticated, mature and media savvy, empowered by their media experiences to stand up for themselves (D. Buckingham, 2000; Cook, 2004b; Kinder, 1999; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002; Valkenberg, 2004). The first view supports concerns that children are being exploited by the global market because of their inability to recognise 'advertising's persuasive intent' (Edgar, 2007, p. 5). A compelling argument, this position is often based

on specific elements of the media message, such as violence or sexuality, and the groups of children they affect (Kinder, 1999, p. 3). The second position supports the argument that children are generally receptive to media images and messages, but contends that they actively engage with media content and are not simply passive recipients of the information communicated to them. 'Recent research suggests that children are a more reflexive and wary population of consumers' (Wyness, 2006, p. 180 see also, D. Buckingham, 2000; Livingstone, 2002; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002; Valkenberg, 2004). Daniel Cook suggests that there is a third way of viewing children's relationship with the consumer market, 'one that rejects the either/or structure of the problem' (Cook, 2004a, p. 149). Cook (2004a, p. 149) contends that;

> Children's involvement with the materials, media, images and meanings that arise from, refer to and are entangled with the world of commerce figures centrally in the making of persons and of moral positions in contemporary life.

It is this view of consumption that I will adopt for this thesis, the understanding that 'commercially imposed meaning *and* personal identity creation blend together at the level of practice early in the life course' (Cook, 2004a, p. 151 see also, Jackson, Vares & Gill, 2011). Drawing on the voices and understandings of the 11 and 12 year old girls in my ethnographic study I explore the idea that consumption, not just of material goods, but of media images and meanings; family attitudes, values and ideas; friendship group requirements; school rules, both formal and informal; and community values, ideas and ways of life are central to how girls fashion a sense of self and belonging.

The Consumer-Media's Influence

At the end of the 20th century Ellen Seiter, in her much cited text, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consuming Culture,* suggests it 'is a middle-class delusion – though one often propagated by child experts – that children can be shielded from consumption, that proper parenting will nip children's interest in toys and television in the bud' (Seiter, 1993, p. 3). Far from something that can be 'censored' or 'overcome' she argues that 'all members of modern developed societies depend heavily on commodity consumption, not just for survival but for participation – inclusion – in social networks' (Seiter, 1993, p. 3). It is within this context of consuming for identity, acceptance and a sense of belonging that children in developed Western nations are being raised at the beginning of the 21st century. While arguments during the 20th century focused on the influence of the consumer market, at the beginning of this century researchers argue that it is the joint structures of consumption and media that have become a central socialising influence over children's lives. The consumer-media invests a substantial amount of time and money in developing relationships with children (Anderson & Miles, 1999; Hamilton, 2008; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007; Schor, 2005). The 21st century Tween market is an example of the consumer-media's ability to identify the desires and needs of a lucrative age group of children, and create a market accordingly;

> marketing publications are filled with gleeful stories about the spending power of this age group; strategies for capturing the tween doll, shoe, music, accessory, and clothing market; how to get girls' attention in new and more spectacular ways; how to own them and channel their desires (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 5).

The impact of the global consumer market on children is increasingly being questioned by adults in many social and academic forums (Edgar, 2007; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kinder, 1999; Wyness, 2006). Yet children do not necessarily feel threatened by the global consumer market; after all they have grown up with its influences (Livingstone 2002). The role of consumer is not a completely new one for children; but many argue the experience for the contemporary child is different (Langer, 2005, p. 172). They are now identified as consumers whose leisure activities, toys, fashion, games and eating habits are intrinsically linked to the global market (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Langer, 2005). It has been argued that consumption has been a socialising influence in their lives since birth and they recognise shopping as an important part of their family's leisure activities. Indeed it is suggested that children themselves recognise the links between consumer goods and identity (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993). This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Additional tensions have been identified in the global consumer market, where children, like adults, are considered to be consumers; defined by an 'age-segmented market', rather than a boundary between adulthood and childhood (Wyness, 2006, p. 62). With existing indistinct boundaries between childhood and adulthood, ten to thirteen year olds are caught in the middle of these tensions (Wyness, 2006). It has been argued that the years between twelve and fourteen are the 'age range when parents "just don't understand"' young people and they begin to test the boundaries of childhood innocence constructed largely by adults (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 48). Sexualised clothing is often raised as a problem by parents, 'the tween girl's emulation of pop stars, TV personalities, and older siblings' means she wants to wear the same sassy looks as her idols. In this context "sassy" is a euphemism for "sexy" – tight, tight, belly-baring shirts, tiny halter tops, and

“low rider” pants, very short shorts, or tiny little skirts’ (Linn, 2005, p. 132). With its increasing influence and targeted marketing of different age groups of children the consumer-media has become an easy target for adults who lament the problems with ‘young people today’; their negative practices and poor attitudes (Anderson & Miles, 1999; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; J. Seaton, 2005).

It has been suggested that one of the major factors the consumer-media has been successful with children is that it takes their needs and desires seriously (Hamilton, 2008; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; Schor, 2005). As some commentators have suggested, the media’s purpose and message differs from other traditional structures due to the intrinsic link to consumption. For some this means that the media is not simply responding to the needs of children, it is creating them (Anderson & Miles, 1999). This has been particularly evident in spin-offs from a movie or book, for example Star Wars movies and Harry Potter novels where a broad range of toys, clothes, games and puzzles were created to directly target young fans (D. Buckingham, 2011). Children’s consumption is not simply about ‘toys or clothes or food … Ultimately, it is not just about objects or commodities, but also about social meanings and pleasures’ (D. Buckingham, 2011, p. 2). The media has become very successful at using technology to communicate these messages and ‘the many media that kids are using are becoming more and more integrated and interrelated. In order to pitch a product for the children’s entertainment market, you must have thought about the viability of the product, licensable figure, or brand in other media’ (Bryant, 2007, p. 24). Although researchers argue that children interact with media products in different ways, depending on their age, gender and awareness of the products, Wyness argues that images and information are available to children from a wide range of ‘up-to-date technology’ and they have become very

experienced at obtaining the messages they need through its images, text and sound (Wyness, 2006, p. 63 see also, Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Livingstone, 2002; Schor, 2005). The media – in a similar fashion to traditional structures that influence identity formation – has already established a relationship with ten to 13 year olds; through children's television programmes, movies, books and toys (Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

Advertisers and producers are well versed in the knowledge that products which appeal to one group of children do not automatically cross over into others and test products extensively to ensure they meet the desires of specific age groups and genders (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 47 see also, Linn, 2004; Wyness, 2006). The consumer-media is constantly exploring children's play, activities and their interactions with each other. Yet they have simultaneously categorised children's psychological requirements into a 'set of timeless emotional needs' that 'all children are believed to possess' (Schor, 2005, p. 44). Schor argues that it is standard practice for marketing experts and child psychologists to match 'those universal needs to particular products and advertising messages, in which the role of the ad or product is to satisfy the need' (Schor, 2005, p. 44 see also, Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Wyness, 2006). The value of friendship groups, cultural affiliations, of being accepted and belonging with their peer groups are 'important frame[s] of reference for advertisers' and 'promotional toys' are designed to 'strengthen peer-group identification at an early age' (Seiter, 1993, p. 222 see also, Wyness, 2006). Advertisers recognise the value of fantasy to children and realise 'that they were not so much promoting a toy's use-value as marketing a particular imaginative relationships with the toy' (Kline, 1993, p. 170). Marketing strategies are developed to respond to different age groups of children as advertisers develop an understanding that children's fantasies at three years of age are very different from when they are six or seven years old

(Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kline, 1993; Schor, 2005). While we may question the consumer-media targeting specific age groups of children with consumer goods and experiences we are very familiar with segregating children by age and the practice is wide spread in our child-care and educational systems (Kline, 1993).

Sold Separately – Why Girls?

In addition to age segregated marketing, advertisers frequently contend that girls and boys like different products and need gender segregated marketing (Schor, 2005). 'With the exception of food, almost all products, messages, and campaigns are subjected to gender analysis that asks, Is it for boys, or is it for girls?' (Schor, 2004, p. 44 see also, Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Seiter, 1993; Wyness, 2006). These differences are very evident in the ways girls and boys are depicted in advertising commercials. Girls are more likely to be depicted in commercials undertaking a 'style of imaginary play that can be characterized as simple sex-typed role enactment' drawing on their understanding of social roles such as 'nurturance, mothering, grooming, performing'. Boys on the other hand are more likely to take on a make-believe roles, such as Ben 10, and Spiderman and to be more actively engaged as 'they imagine the world from the character's subjective point of view' (Kenway & Bullen, 2002, p. 48 see also, Kline, 1993; Schor, 2005; Seiter, 1993). As marketers recognised the potential in gender specific marketing 'boys' programming focused on action, things and conflict, girls' programming privileged relationships, beauty and harmony', girls and boys began to be 'sold separately' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 49 see also, Seiter, 1993). At the end of the 20th century the founder of Canadian girls' retail clothing chain Chi!kaboom, Nancy Dennis, believed that girls were a better financial proposition than boys, 'preteen girls in particular make [for] a better market

niche than preteen boys' (Phillips, 1999, p. 126). Similarly Karen Bokram, founding editor of American, Girls' Life magazines pointed out that as "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).

Kenway and Bullen (2001) argue that this gender segregation is more noticeable in the consumption desires of children aged between ten and twelve, as boys tend to favour sporting merchandise and girls are more interested in fashion and image. This is an age where acceptance by friendship groups and developing a sense of belonging are becoming increasingly important, particularly for girls. It is this age group of girls that the Tween market targets as it attempts 'to get kids, primarily girls, to continue buying toys' although those toys no longer take the shape of Barbie, Bratz or Little Ponies (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 5). While boys are certainly not exempt from targeted marketing strategies, at the beginning of the 21st century girls have been more heavily targeted by the consumer-media. The strategies and practices of the consumer-media in developing products and marketing campaigns for particular age and gendered groups of children are complex and elaborate and if the aim of this thesis was just to explore its influence over children a far more detailed exploration and discussion of these would be necessary. Terms such as age compression, pester power, dual messaging, kidfluence, just to name a few would be explored in greater detail (D. Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2004a; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Linn, 2004; Schor, 2005). As the aim of this study is to consider more broadly the social and cultural resources that the tweens age group, or 11 and 12 year old girls specifically, draw on as they fashion a sense of self, a targeted understanding of how the relationship between the consumer-media, children and the Tween market emerged is sufficient for

my purpose (Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; Schor, 2005). A term I have chosen to utilise in this thesis is 'fashion' as I mobilise its two meanings; clothes, accessories, make-up and images alongside the alternative; to shape or mould something, provide an apt description for the self the tween girl is attempting to create.

I suggest that there are two key components that underpin the targeting of girls by the consumer-media. The first, lies within discourses of women as 'the ideal subjects of consumption' (McRobbie, 1999, p. 31). Women's roles as nurturers and carers of children with responsibility for the majority of the family's domestic chores situated them as key family consumers. The 'assumptions about the gendered patterns of consumption' that 'resulted in the targeting of women shoppers' in the post-war period were justified by marketing experts who established that women were 'responsible for up to 90 per cent of consumption decisions' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 42). During the post-war period children were socialised into viewing their mothers as the primary home makers and consumers in the family;

> the role of play in gender socialization was explicitly praised in ads for girls' toys. They were set in domestic space and normally portrayed the girl along or with her mother. When girls were not engaged in miniature acts of housework, they were often pictured dressing up in their mothers' clothes, gazing into the mirror (Seiter, 1993, p. 80).

As the post war years shifted into the feminist years of the 1960s and 1970s, women and girls were being encouraged to further their education and employment/career opportunities with governments of Western developed nations changing laws and policies to;

> allow women freedom of choice regarding their bodies, work, family, and relationships – and personal, autonomous responsibility for these choices. These changes have enabled the current generation of young women to see themselves, and to be see, as enjoying new freedoms and opportunities. ... Young women have been encouraged to believe that "girls can do anything" and "girls are powerful" (Harris, 2004, p. 8).

While the idea that 'girls are powerful and active' is recognised by advertisers and marketers, from a marketing perspective 'girls are still thought of in stereotypical ways and remain tethered to traditional ideals of glamour and femininity' (Schor, 2005, p. 45). While advertisers' often portray these ideals in limited, standardised formulas 'girls are reclaiming their very 'girlieness' as a source of power' (Hopkins, 2002, p. 2). Increasingly though the innocence and edge of young, feminine girlieness is being sold as sex. Schor (2004a, p. 57) suggests, that 'children are being exposed to plenty of glamour, fashion, style, irony, and popular music, that is, sex' and it is this trend that has ignited many of the debates around the sexualisation of children, children growing up too fast and the end of childhood discourses. I explore these concerns in greater detail in Chapter Two when I examine the Tween market.

Before I conclude this chapter it is relevant to consider that this age group of girls is going through a significant developmental stage. The ten to 12 year old age group for girls is a period of significant physical, neurobiological, cognitive and emotional development, as their pubertal development generally commences before boys (Gething, Papalia, & Wendkos, 1995; Peterson, 2004; E. Seaton, 2005). A significant height spurt often commences around the age of 10 and is followed by the hormonal changes which

stimulate the growth of the reproductive organs. Girls' bodies begin to develop breasts, hips widen, body hair becomes noticeable and they experience their first menarche (Gething et al., 1995; Peterson, 2004; E. Seaton, 2005). During this period, which is recognised as one of discomfort and uncertainty for many girls, they are increasingly encouraged to look after and enjoy their bodies: 'take care of your body – work out what combination of nutrition and exercise makes you feel great and full of energy. You'll love your inner glow!' suggests Indigo magazine, an Australian magazine designed for the tween market, in an attempt to convey positive body image messages. Yet at the same time as girls are receiving the message that their bodies are great, the consumer-media taps into their confusion and uncertainty about their changing bodies with messages promoting creams, lotions, deodorants, active clothing and underwear for the developing tween (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Smolak, 2004). All these products are designed specifically for the tween aged girl who is conscious that her appearance is a vital part of her acceptance with her peer and friendship groups.

The potential of the tween emerges

In this chapter I have outlined the construction of Western childhood that resulted in tween girls being identified and targeted by the consumer-media at the end of the 20th century. My outline begins in the 17th century when Western childhood, arguably, began to take on a status that was separate from adulthood. Throughout the 18th and 19th century Governments in Western nations increasing introduced laws and welfare to protect the rights of children. The 20th century saw many changes with war, depression and industrialisation affecting families, and the children being raised within them. The second half of the 20th century brought hope, booming birth-rates, consumerism and increasing

affluence alongside changing work options and family leisure activities. Shopping became a central part of family life and children were being socialised into the culture of wanting more. The advent of communication mediums followed television with audio-visual mediums, digital technologies and the World Wide Web emerged becoming quickly entrenched in family homes.

Within this changing social milieu, advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers rapidly identified new and emerging markets to target. The development of new products and services increased and marketers and advertisers came up with new and innovative ways to promote their benefits. At the same time children's needs were being given priority in families the children's market responded to their growing needs and desires. The consumer-media invested heavily in research with children, exploring their needs and wants as they took the potential of the children's market seriously and recognised that children of different ages had different desires. From here advertisers realised that girls and boys played differently with products and identified the potential of gender-specific markets. Aware that the gender differentiation was most obvious around the ages of ten to 12, when girls are particularly interested in fashion and their own image, a potentially lucrative product range, the Tween market emerged.

It could be argued that the consumer-media accurately recognised some important aspects of children's needs and desires. The significance of this recognition has been particularly noticeable with the tween age group who represent discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability which are difficult to contest. While the concept of Tween has focussed our understandings of tween girls primarily on their consumption activities, their social worlds and the ambiguous position of the tween age group between their childhood and

teenage years are also critical aspects of their gendered consumption. In this thesis I shift the focus away from consumption and introduce new frameworks to illuminate the influence of family, friends, school and local geographies in the life of the tween girl. In the following chapter I shift the focus from the tween's commercial personae to the important understandings to be gained from the girls' ordinary, everyday behaviours in their local environments. The aim of my research is to examine the experiences of tween girls by following a group of 11 and 12 year old girls for a year, developing understandings of their everyday lives, their consumption practices and the social worlds they inhabit. I explore how they both engage with and contest the Tween identity in their quest to belong.

Chapter Two

Tweens: Images of Commercial personae and young feminine girlness

Introduction

> The very ambiguity of the age and person, coupled with the moral turpitude that always accompanies female sexuality, make for cultural volatility. In this way, middle girlhood has increasingly become a favored political site for the understanding of femininity, for discourses about vulnerability and 'lost childhoods' and for locating some of the evils of the consumer marketplace (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223).

The 21st century consumer-media Tween market emerged out of the changing social and cultural landscape of the 20th century and the terms tweens or tweenies are widely recognised in developed English-speaking nations. The label tween/tweenies is utilised by social commentators, policy makers, social and health researchers and parents to describe girls aged between nine and 14, although the boundaries are not fixed and girls as young as six have been referred to as tweens or tweenies (Schor, 2005). In categorising the space between childhood and the teenage years the Tween market promotes its products and services to 'create a consumer cohort' of young girls as they make the transition from childhood to their teenage years (Harris, 2005, p. 210 see also, Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005). While 'tween is not a term that youth themselves tend to use',

research suggests that girls of this age like the idea of having a name or label that identifies them as being different from children or teenagers (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p.223 see also, Cook, 2004a; Harris, 2005b; McDonnell, 2006; Russell & Tyler, 2002; Willett, 2005).

The Tween market bridges some 'crucial developmental' stages but the labelling is ambiguous as it places these girls in an indeterminate place between childhood and their teenage years. The Tween market further complicates this transitional space as it represents itself as an identity in its own right (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). Tween offers these girls a place of social acceptance and success and 'young, feminine girlness', through the consumption of products, services, images and ideals which are presented to the girls through 'magazines, shops, music video clips' (Harris, 2005, p. 212 see also, Hopkins, 2002; Russell & Tyler, 2002). I use the concept of 'young, feminine girlness' in this thesis to describe the identity that is promoted to the tween girl by the consumer-media. The concept of 'young, feminine girlness' is an amalgamation of terms utilised by Russell and Tyler (2002) and Harris (2005b) to describe the complex juncture of 'childhood, consumer culture and gender' and 'feminine child-ness, that is, girlness' targeted by the Tween market. Despite the complexities of these intersecting dimensions the advertisers, retailers, producers and marketers of the Tween market consider these girls are not too young to be 'self-conscious about their bodily appearance' and they promote young, feminine girlness within a 'narrow set of social and cultural reference points' (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 628). Girls are encouraged to be aware of their bodies, scrutinising them and identifying 'ways in which they deviate from the ideal' (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 633). Girls are invited to believe that a young, feminine aesthetic is available to them if they buy the right products (Harris, 2005b, p. 212).

The consumer-media develops and promotes products, clothes, accessories, make-up, leisure activities and foods designed to encourage the tween girl to fashion a young, feminine self which is more 'grown-up' than her childhood years, but not mature enough to be confused with the next target group, teenagers (Harris, 2005b, pp. 213-214). The distinction between these marketing categories is significant as the tween is acknowledged by the market to have 'different interests and ideas from older females' (Harris, 2005b, p. 213). By describing the identity options presented to tween girls as 'young, feminine girlness', advertisers and marketers acknowledge her desire to be seen as older than a child but younger than a teenager/adult. Young feminine girlness acknowledges the playfulness of childhood, playing dress-ups and make-believe, while simultaneously offering products that link the tween to a 'young woman concerned with appearance rather than a child engaged in (Russell & Tyler, 2002, pp. 631,see also, AMR, 2001; Harris, 2005). 'Girlness' reflects the gendered nature of the Tween and children's market more generally, which has resulted in the 'category of child' being increasingly replaced by the label 'girl' or 'boy' (McRobbie, 2008, p. 546).

The Tween market addresses girls in this age bracket as part of a globalised 'collective identity', one which 'gains its power through the establishment and recognition of common interests', expressed in consumption (Elliott, 2005, p. 14). Extensive market research and shrewd advertising campaigns promote products, accessories and services that target the tween girls' desires to fashion a sense of self (Brooks, 2008; Carter, 2005; Hamilton, 2008; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Linn, 2004; Livingstone, 2002; McDonnell, 2006; Russell & Tyler, 2002; Tyler & Russell, 2005). Tween classifies these girls as 'born

to shop', consumed by their desire to present an acceptable appearance to their peer group and friends (Carter, 2005; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Fine, 2007). The intricacies of targeted marketing to this age group are a challenge to marketers and producers alike;

> It's a tricky business, this marketing to tweens. Not only are their tastes as fickle and tried trends as ephemeral as teenagers, but pre-teens are 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 see also, Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Schor, 2005).

The influence of the Tween market is the topic of arguments and debates initiated by parents, social commentators, health professionals and in Australia, by the Australian Government, concerned about the sexualisation of children, girls growing up too fast and the targeted marketing of children by the consumer-media (Australian Psychological Society, 2007b; Senate, 2008; Victorian Government, 2007). The concept of Tween and the aims of the advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers who contribute to its success are well known throughout Australia and other Western developed nations. The Tween marketing phenomenon continues to polarise opinion and engender debate, as opponents emphasise the innocence and vulnerability of its target market.

In this chapter I introduce the Tween market highlighting the key aims of the advertisers, producers, retailers and marketers who work together to successfully target this age group

of girls. I offer an overview of the fantasy space of 'young, feminine girlness' created for the tweens in the indeterminate space that the consumer market has identified between childhood and their teenage years. Societal concerns about the impact and influence of the Tween market over this age group of girls are introduced as I consider circulating popular discourses about the tween age group. While these arguments are Australian based in my thesis, they have been replicated around the globe in Western, English speaking nations. The focus on the tweens' appearance and body image is considered here as I explore contentious arguments over whether the tween's body is sexualised by commercial factors outside her control or if she exhibits agency and makes her own decisions about the self she fashions. I argue that an either/or approach to these debates is unhelpful as we attempt to understand the complexities of this relationship (Cook, 2004a). The chapter concludes with an exploration of the connection between the girls' engagement with the consumer-media and their desire to belong within their own social worlds.

The Tween market

> As girls grow older, the messages change in interesting ways. Little girls become "tweens" before you can blink an eye and corporations are delighted with the buying potential of girls as young as seven or eight. Tween – a combination of teen and between – is a marketing concept developed in the eighties to get kids, primarily girls, to continue buying toys (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 5).

While the idea of targeting girls can be traced back to the mid-20th century the Tween market being debated and discussed at the beginning of the 21st century became

‘entrenched in marketing circles’ during the 1980s and 1990s (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 218 see also, McDonnell, 2006; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005; Seigel, Coffey & Livingston, 2004). The Tween market emerged around the time that ‘the loss of childhood’ was being lamented around the globe. Texts such as *The Hurried Child: Growing up too Fast too Soon* (Elkind, 1981), *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman, 1982), *The Erosion of Childhood* (Suransky, 1982) and *Our Endangered Children* (Packard, 1983) were raising concerns about the changing appearance of children and the ‘extent to which children were looking increasingly “like adults”’ (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 215). The emergence of the Tween market further emphasised these concerns and highlighted the ambiguity of Western boundaries around the status of childhood.

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 & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206). The consumer-media works on the premise that the tween 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 tween aged girl is targeted with fashions, accessories and body images that are widely considered, outside the marketing realm, to sexualise young girls or encourage them to grow up too fast (Burns, 2005; Das, 2010; Dubecki, 2007; Durham, 1998; Edgar, 2007). The ‘commercial personae’ of the tween aged girl, the ambiguity of her age, the ‘girlness’ of her consumption choice and her agentic subject position challenges many of our long held discourses and understandings of childhood vulnerability, innocence and

sexuality (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223). Although tween girls find themselves in 'a potentially awkward and anonymous space', no longer a child and not yet a teenager, they find ways to 'transform this space into a site of active feminine identity' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 214). In the midst of these complexities the Tween market offers the tween girl a place where 'divisions disappear, girls are girls, they are the same', and where they can achieve their own young, feminine girlness (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 632 see also, Cook & Kaiser, 2004). This place is promoted to the girls as a 'space rather than a stage', but one which only girls of a certain age can inhabit (C. Driscoll, 2005, p. 224). The concept of Tween being a space rather than a stage acknowledges the 'active social agency' of the tween girl, reflecting her engagement with the Tween market rather than simply a transition through a life phase (Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Russell & Tyler, 2002).

The fantasy world of tweenies

The teenage years have long been imagined as a period of rapid change and rebellion as teenagers develop a sense of who they are outside their familial relationships (Elkind, 1981; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962). Increasingly, the tween years are being recognised as a period of rapid physical, emotional and sexual development as girls actively look to move beyond their familial environments, seeking guidance and confidence from trusted social structures (Carter, 2005; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005b; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Malik, 2005; Tyler & Russell, 2005). The idea of being identified as mature beyond their years appeals to the tween (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Valkenberg, 2004). Advertisers recognise this desire and create a pitch with 'one foot in the kid world and one in the adult world' (Linn, 2004, p. 17). On the other hand many psychologists, social

commentators and parents view these marketing messages as evidence of the consumer-media's role in the early sexualisation of girls.

Harris (2005b) argues though that tweens are not trying to look like their mothers or their older sisters or even to appear overtly sexual. She argues that the tween aged girl wants instead to occupy a space that is separate from children, teenagers and adults, and to create an identity in which they are recognisable to others as a 'young female' (Harris, 2005b, p. 212). Harris suggests that Tween actually signifies an 'important shift in young feminine identities' that are being offered to the tweenie aged girl (2005b, p. 222). While they may not be in control of the 'media representations' presented to them, girls are exercising agency with the products available in the 'representations they create in the daily process of contemplating and dressing their bodies' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206). Evidence of the choices and possibilities, albeit limited, and of agency, are apparent as the tween actively engages in the decision making process of how to present a young, feminine self that is acceptable to herself and to her peers (Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005; Hopkins, 2002; Malik, 2005; Pomerantz, 2008; Russell & Tyler, 2002).

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 see also, Carter, 2005; Hopkins, 2002; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Pattee, 2004; Russell & Tyler, 2002; Tyler & Russell, 2005). 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 entwines 'young, feminine girlness' with consumption (Harris, 2005b, p. 212). In this space

girlness is represented through the 'hearts, glitter, bright lights and make-up, its "pinkness" and "girlie colours"' (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 629). Driscoll argues that "age appropriate" gendered play as seen in the tweens dress-ups and make-believe, draws on long held understandings about girls' activities (2008, p. 25 see also, Harris, 2005). Girls can draw on a range, albeit limited, of products, services, accessories and images that assist them to achieve their 'ideal feminine 'look' (Allan, 2009; Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Harris, 2005b; Hopkins, 2002; McRobbie, 2009). The tween's desire to be in control of her young feminine self places her in conflict with long held discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability (Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Cook, 2004a; Harris, 2005a; Hopkins, 2002). It is very difficult to acknowledge tween girls' agency while considering how their 'age and gender … overlap and intersect in complicated ways with sexuality, race, ethnicity and social class' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223 see also, Durham, 2009a; Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Horton & Kraftl, 2006; Robinson & Davies, 2008). The challenges of seeing these girls outside widely held discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability have exercised Australian social commentators, feminist scholars and Government Departments.

Challenging popular discourse

> 'Because the 'tween' market consists of the most vulnerable in our society the regulatory responsibility of government to protect that group is concomitantly greater' (Senate, 2008, p. 18).

At the beginning of the 21st century texts such as *What's Happening to our Girls?* (Hamilton, 2008), *Consuming Innocence: Popular Culture and our Children* (Brooks,

2008), *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls* (Tankard-Reist, 2009) highlighted Australian concerns about the way girls were being targeted by the consumer-media. These texts and the ensuing social responses invoked discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability appealing to parents and communities to protect children and guard them from adult experiences, particularly sexualisation. Australian governments, both state and federal, responded to community concerns, addressing the ways young girls were being targeted by, and portrayed in the consumer-media. Government Reports such as *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media* (Senate, 2008), *Report of the Media Code of Conduct on Body Image Working Group* (Victorian Government, 2007) and information or discussion papers such as *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia (Australian Council on Children and the Media, 2010)* and *Body Image Information Paper* (Australian Government, 2009) reflected the level of parental and community concerns, expressed here in The Senate Report;

> The Committee considers that the inappropriate sexualisation of children in Australia is of increasing concern. While noting the complexity of defining clear boundaries around this issue, the committee believes that preventing the premature sexualisation of children is a significant cultural challenge. This is a community responsibility which demands action by society. In particular, the onus is on broadcasters, publishers, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to take account of these community concerns (Senate, 2008, p. 3).

Around this time reports and Tip Sheets, *Too sexy, Too soon: The sexualisation of children in the media* (Australian Council on Children and the Media, 2010) and *Protecting girls from sexualisation in the media* (Australian Psychological Society,

2007a, 2007b) provided parents and guardians with information to assist them talk to their girls about the persuasive intent of the consumer-media. Focusing on the negative aspects of the consumer-media's marketing to girls, these texts, reports and fact sheets highlighted terms such as sexualisation, pornification, corporate paedophilia, grrrl power and raunch culture engendering an emotional response to the perceived intent of the consumer-media. Written to give parents/guardians, 'guidance on how to talk with your daughters about these negative images and provide you with tools and advice on how to help your girls make more positive choices', the texts, reports and fact sheets positioned girls as the victims of the consumer-media and emphasised the potentially destructive elements of this relationship (Lamb & Brown, 2006 back cover).

It was argued that girls are pressured to adopt sexualized appearance and behaviour' earlier by the 'marketing intent of the consumer-media' (Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, p. 2). What was missing in these arguments was the recognition that tween girls 'exercise agency in the representations they create in the daily process of contemplating and dressing their bodies' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206). The inspiration for my ethnographic study stemmed from the absence of the tween girls' voices and responses in these debates, not just in explaining their sexualised appearance, but in describing their everyday lives more generally. While the influence of the consumer-media was apparent for the tween girls I knew, it was evident there were other vital influences in their lives. By moving beyond social discourses of innocence and vulnerability and opening up new frameworks of understanding that draw on the voices and ideas of tween girls about their everyday lives, their aspirations and their desires to belong, I sought to generate a broader context to understand the lives of tween girls.

My Body, My Self: Sexualised or Fashioned?

One of the key points of contention in debates about the Tween market lies in arguments of whether it is tweens' 'choice or corporate power that drives kids' consumer culture' (Cook, 2004a, p.149 see also, Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005b; Hopkins, 2002; Malik, 2005; Pomerantz, 2008; Russell & Tyler, 2002). There are widespread claims of direct sexualisation of tween models in advertisements, 'premature expose to explicit material' in music videos and lyrics as well as 'sexualised fashion and underwear', explicit billboards and concerns around eating disorders and poor body image for these girls (Taylor, 2010, p. 50 see also, Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Rush, 2009; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a). While little scholar explores the tween girls' understandings of the effects of sexualised images, Vares, Jackson and Gill present a valuable insight into New Zealand preteen girls' perspectives (2011b). With an intense focus on appearance and the body emerging from the Tween marketing practices, it is not surprising that Australian concerns about the influence of the Tween market have centred on the sexualisation of girls (Australian Council on Children and the Media, 2010; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010; Australian Psychological Society, 2007b; Hamilton, 2008; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a; Senate, 2008; Tankard-Reist, 2009). The major risks of sexualisation of children in these reports were identified as;

- Increased body dissatisfaction;
- Development of eating disorders at younger ages;
- Increased self-objectification;
- Disruption to healthy psychological development; and
- Contribution to increasing child sexual abuse (Rush, 2009, p. 41).

Marketers incorporate a range of processes in the marketing of clothes and accessories, products and services to the tween girl, promising her that they will help her to create her own 'special look' (Lamb & Brown, 2006, pp. 33-34). Girls' bodies are recognised 'as the cultural site of display and sexualization' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 219). Producing items 'designed for adults or teenage female beautification' and linking them with the tween girls favourite playthings or activities, has seen marketers introduce items such as 'thong-style underwear, bikinis, beads, bracelets, body lotion, lipstick' to the girls (McRobbie, 2008, p. 545 see also, Pomerantz, 2008). Parents and child advocates are concerned that these 'special looks' designed for the tween are encouraging young girls to 'see themselves as sexy before they're old enough to understand what this means' (Hamilton, 2008, p. 54).

These beauty negotiations are often complicated and the interlinked issues, and possible outcomes, for young girls of having a poor body image are widely recognised in Australian and other Western nations. In a 2010 national survey of 50,540 young Australians revealed that body image was the top personal concern for young people aged between 11 and 14 years (Mission Australia, 2010). These findings are concerning and scholarship across a range of disciplines is exploring the key components of poor body image; girls' desire to be thin, preferences for specific products and services - clothes, accessories and cosmetics, the activities girls participate in, and the foods that they eat (Bordo, 1993; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Heilman, 1998; Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Smolak, 2004). I acknowledge the significance of these concerns as they inform my aim in this thesis to bring forth the girls' perspectives on their own consumption. I focus on the ways in which girls engage

in the processes of negotiation that align their own body image and appearance with their desire for acceptance by their peers (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Gonick, 2005; Harris, 2005b; Jones et al., 2004; McRobbie, 1991, 1997; Russell & Tyler, 2002; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Smolak, 2004; Tyler & Russell, 2005).

Recent arguments suggest that adopting an either/or approach to whether 'children's choice or corporate power' drives tweens' consumption activity is fruitless; for the girls 'commercially imposed meaning *and* personal identity creation blend together' (Cook, 2004a, pp. 148-151 see also, Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Tween bodies are changing and many scholars contend that the tween is not actively seeking a self which is sexualised or commodified as suggested in concerns and debates about the influence of Tween. They argue it is more accurate to see the tween girl as responding to how 'gender identity is developed and organized; about the developmental role and limits of girlhood; and about the relationship between pleasure, commodities, femininity and ideology' (C. Driscoll, 2008, p. 25Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005b; Pomerantz, 2008). The complexities of this juncture are being explored by feminist scholars everywhere but I consider here Pomerantz's Canadian study which addressed girls' 'identity construction and negotiation' by exploring their 'use of style to insert themselves into a social world – as individuals and as members of groups' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 2). While Pomerantz's study considered the lives of Canadian high school girls, her ideas about the complexity and nuances in how tweens use and understand their clothing have been found by others (Allan, 2009; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Lamb & Brown, 2006). In her ethnographic study Pomerantz argued that girls' bodies

and styles complemented, reinforced and shaped each other (2008, pp. 17-19). She suggested that body and style, while different, worked together to fashion each girl's internal desire expressed in an exterior of clothing and accessories. Pomerantz argued that 'style is the public face of the body', and its messenger, making the body visible, mappable, and readable' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 17). She suggested that girls recognised their identities at school as being fluid as they 'negotiated how they were seen by others' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 16). The girls' negotiations of style and the manner are evident in the ways they dress and present their bodies and address the 'specificities of time, place, and their own continuously shifting subjectivities' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 163). Girls are concerned about their looks, whether a style is appropriate for an event, whether they have the right hairstyle or make up. They consider their body shape and size and worry about how thin they look (see also, Hamilton, 2008; Malik, 2005). As astute, experienced, even critical consumers, each tween girl works hard to choose a style that presents a self that fits with the image she wants to present to her peers. Clothing is after all;

> what enables others to evaluate us as bodies. In our clothes, we are judged, looked at, wondered about, envied, remembered, discriminated against, lusted after, admired, respected and ignored. In style we are recognized and misrecognized, understood and misunderstood, made familiar and rendered exotic and strange' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 17).

For each tween girl, dressing herself creates a style that is, 'at once, a performance of the self and a way to disguise the self from onlookers' (Zaslow, 2009, p. 85). Acknowledging that the tween girl fashions a self that is acceptable to others reveals the agency that the

tween exhibits as she makes decisions about the products and services she adopts from the 'available styles and cultural models of girlhood' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223, see also, Harris, 2005; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007; McRobbie, 2008; Vares et al., 2011b). Many scholars share the conviction that children are competent 'social agents in their own lives' and that they deserve a body of academic scholarship that recognises this (Valentine, 2008, p. 2099). Recent studies have shown that tweens are 'not the naïve or incompetent consumers' they may have been assumed to be, but are active agents in self-fashioning and negotiation (Vares, Jackson & Gill, 2011b, pp. 2-3 see also, Allan, 2009; Cook, 2004a; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Kehily, 2002a; Zaslow, 2009). In exploring tween girls lives, scholars 'open up space for new, meaningful, and ultimately generative understandings of girlhood – just as girls are already doing in their everyday lives' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 163). In this thesis my contribution to the call for new, meaningful understandings is to consider the significance of the girls' desire to belong.

Belonging in my social worlds

> The figure of the Tween girl and her predecessors are inseparable from their inception in, and articulation with, the market exigencies of childhood (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223).

The blending of consumption activity and a desire to belong with their peers is particularly pertinent to the tweens age group. While existing scholarship suggests a range of themes or concepts such as well-being, acceptance and becoming as relevant to tween girls, I adopt the term belonging for the remainder of this thesis. Its meaning,

‘feeling at home, the state of being accepted and comfortable in a place or group’ implies a relationship between individuals (girls, their peers and their families) that is missing from other concepts such as acceptance and connectedness (Collins, 2010). Pugh argues that children navigate their way in their social worlds ‘with what they are given’, making cultural meaning through processes of contestation and interpretation’ (2009, p. 214). Tween girls are very aware ‘which goods and services are “best” for the forging of social bonds and group acceptance’ (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, p. 166). Tween girls, it appears, do gender at this ‘critical time in their lives, when an appreciative audience, one willing to applaud the authenticity of their act, is particularly important to them’ (Russell & Tyler, 2002, pp. 633-634 see also, Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004; Pugh, 2009). Rysst’s (2010, p. 76) study of ten year old Norwegian girls highlights the difficulties a tween faces when an audience of her peers responds unfavourably to her attempts to belong aesthetically;

> Solveig wants to sit close to me [researcher] and she explicitly tells me that she does not like being here. She has dressed up in a long black skirt and a black matching top which is not deemed fashionable by the *kul* [cool] girls. Solveig does not like the loud music which makes it difficult to talk, and her body language signals unease.

Similarly the ‘top-girls’, a ‘popular close-knit friendship group’ from Renold and Ringrose’s (2008, p. 321) study of ten and 11 year olds in the United Kingdom make choices about their aesthetic appearance in an attempt to belong within a particular group at school;

> Adopted a sporty fashion that emphasized fitness, activity and comfort, as one of the ways in which they signalled their flight from the masquerading of sexualized 'girlie' femininities in their reconfiguration of 'girl' within the school context.

Pomerantz argued style is more than 'just fashion', exploring the 'contextual significance of girls' style as mode of self-expression, identification, and agency' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 3). She examined how 'girls use style to insert themselves into a social world', to belong, 'as individuals and as members of groups?' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 3). Girls have a multitude of possibilities available to them, clothing, accessories, body adornments and accoutrements to create their own 'look' that enables them to belong within their friendship and peer groups at school (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 3).

In a similar fashion sociologist Alison Pugh (2009) has devised a concept to describe the way children engage with consumer culture to establish a way of belonging within their own social worlds. Pugh calls this 'system of social meanings' the children's *economy of dignity*. Pugh argues that 'children collect or confer dignity among themselves, according to their (shifting) consensus about what sort of objects or experiences are supposed to count for it' (2009, p. 7) through these processes of engagement with consumption. Pugh assigns a definition of 'worthy of belonging' to *dignity* and she uses the term to 'mean the most basic sense of children's participation in their social world' (Pugh, 2009, p. 7). I have adopted Pugh's concept of belonging for my research as I suggest that her understanding of the links between children's consumer culture and belonging in children's social worlds are valuable for the tween age group. In the same way that Pugh argues that her participants negotiate their sense of belonging across a

range of social worlds, the tween girls in my ethnography constantly assign the value to belonging in the different social worlds they inhabit. The girls are very aware of the nuances of their various social environments and draw readily from their own experiences to determine the value of belonging.

In a practical sense Pugh relies on Goffman's concept of facework to describe the practices and actions the children utilise in 'managing their interactional, personal, and social difference from others. Pugh suggests that children do facework by adopting the norms and practices of their social worlds to establish and maintain their belonging (2009b, p. 53). Through their actions, children were able to construct the importance of goods or services to their sense of belonging (2009b, p. 53). Goffman argues that an individual 'lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to face or mediated contact with other participants' (1967, p. 5). He contends that an individual 'must first become aware of the interpretations that others may have placed upon his acts and the interpretations that he ought perhaps to place upon theirs' (Goffman, 1967, p. 13). Pugh's use of Goffman's term differs from his original definition as she anchors 'it with the person using facework, rather than in the *conversation* whose norms the facework preserves'(Pugh, 2009, p. 53). Pugh argues that children are not particularly interested in norms but focus more on being able to participate in their own social worlds. Pugh suggests that children 'shape their own economies of dignity, which in turn transform particular goods and experiences into a form of scrip, tokens of value suddenly fraught with meaning' (2009b, p. 7). The value of each token varies according to the different social worlds of the tween girl. While the marketers, advertisers, retailers and producers of the consumer-media may suggest that tokens can only be identified as consumer

producers or services, the tween girl is acutely aware of the significance of the norms and practices of her social worlds, alongside tokens, which she must also understand and transact.

Understanding the tween beyond the Tween

The Tween market invites tween aged girls to enter the world of Tween, promoting itself as an identity option of 'young, feminine girlness' which can only be obtained by this age group of girls (Harris, 2005b, p. 212). Alongside the Tween market's financial success widespread community and social concerns have evoked discourses of innocence and vulnerability protesting the apparent exploitation of these girls by the consumer-media. Issues of sexualisation, body images and harmful commercial intent have been raised by parents, community organisations, Government Departments and the Australian Psychological Society. Embedded in these debates are arguments around whether these girls are capable of withstanding the commercial reach of the Tween market or exhibiting agency in their engagement with the consumer goods and services being promoted. I have adopted the argument that tween girls actively engage with the consumer-media and display agency in the ways they fashion their own identities. In taking this approach I have stepped outside arguments of sexualisation and body image to explore how tween girls negotiate and style their own identities from the products and images of the consumer-media. From this standpoint I have been able to consider the tween girls' desire to fashion a self that is acceptable to her peers, enabling her to locate a place she can belong. In the following chapter I outline the ethnographic study I conducted with a group of tween aged girls to consider the significance of the tweens' desire to belong with her peers, her family and in her own local worlds.

Chapter Three

A reflexive ethnography in a Melbourne primary school

Introduction

The influence of the consumer-media Tween market over the tween age group of girls is vital and significant sociological scholarship has focussed on understanding the intent of marketers, advertisers, producers and retailers in targeting these girls (Harris, 2005, p. 210 see also, Livingstone, 2002; Malik, 2005; Russell & Tyler, 2002). The focus on consumption also positions our understandings of the tween girl firmly within the context of globalisation as large companies operate 'across media platforms and markets' around the globe (D. Buckingham, 2011, p. 88). Schor further links the children's market to the global economy suggesting that;

> the growing scope, market power, and political influence wielded by a small number of megacorporations that sell most of what kids buy. Far from being a consumers' mecca ruled by diverse and rich choices, children's consumer culture is marked by bigness and sameness (2005, p. 27).

While the tween girl may be inseparable from 'the market exigencies of childhood', this focus emphasises processes of consumption and diverts, to some extent, our attention

from other important social and cultural influences in her life (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223).

Despite the influence of large multinational corporations Nayak argues that the 'cultural lives of young people' are still very much situated in their own local geographies (2003, p. 29). He argues that global cultures, 'do not operate independently' but are connecting and interacting 'differently at national, regional or local scales' (Nayak, 2003, p. 5). The localised aspect of children's engagement with the consumer market is evident in Buckingham's descriptions of how children appropriate products designed for global consumption in their 'everyday peer-culture', which he describes as 'glocalization' (2011, p. 94). Far from being disconnected from the important places by engaging with a global market Buckingham suggests that children remain inherently entwined in and influenced by the cultural environments in which they live. As I discovered, the most significant elements of the tween girl's social worlds remains her family. The girls' insights into and understandings of their family practices, and the importance of individual members of their families, became a key conceptual framework for my discussions. In relation to families and friends, the desire to belong – to fit in, to be a part of something – is a strong motivator for young people as they negotiate these important spaces and places in their lives (Brooks, 2008; Carter, 2005; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Russell & Tyler, 2002). In this chapter I introduce my ethnographic study and outline the theoretical frameworks that enable me to shift the focus from understanding the tween's' commercial personae to considering other social and cultural influences in her life.

Explorations of tween girls' engagement with the Tween market provide us with valuable insights into how they use consumer goods, services and experiences as they negotiate a place to belong with their peers and in their own social worlds. Alongside the influence of the Tween culture, 'the emotional meanings of goods and experiences', the significance of the girls' social worlds cannot be underestimated (Pugh, 2009, p. xiii). For the tween girl, the presence of others and the relevance of 'place' in her life are fundamental as she makes sense of her own actions and practices within her local geographies. Exploring the tween girls' desire to belong is the key conceptual framework for this study. Pugh's concept, the *economy of dignity* enables me to analyse my data within a combined framework of consumption practices and the girls' desire to belong within their friendship groups and own social worlds. Within this framework I am able to generate new understandings of how the girls' desire to belong influences their consuming practices and is pivotal to the ways they interact with their friends and peers, families and the consumer-media within their own local geographies.

While research with tween aged girls positions them within their local geographies the significance of place has been underexplored as the influence of the consumer-media takes priority in this scholarship (George, 2007; Kehily, 2012; Rysst, 2010; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011 for a critique see Kehily, 2012; Kehily & Nayak,2008). As outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, there have been calls for well-designed research studies that look beyond the consumer-media with this age group and consider the influence of other cultural and social influences in the life of the tween (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005; Senate, 2008; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2006). The significance of other influences in the life of the tween, and the importance of

recognising her local geographies, has been the inspiration for my work here. My key objectives in this study are to;

- Identify and explore the tween girls' desire to belong with a group of 11-12 year old girls to analyse the ways the girls engage with the consumer-media, the Tween market and ideals of young, feminine girlness to negotiate a place for themselves to belong.

- Explore the subjective understandings of peer relationships, families, schooling, the consumer-media, the Tween market and other resources that young girls use to fashion a sense of self, and to belong, in the interactive environment of school.

An ethnographic study over an extended period enabled me to achieve my objectives. Locating this study within a primary school environment facilitated insights into the significance of the girls' local geographies and to observe how they actively negotiate to find and maintain their place in this space.

A reflexive ethnography in a Year 6 class

Davies (2008, p. 5) argues that as researchers we 'must seek to develop forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience and reflection on it as an intrinsic part of research'. The desire to acknowledge the experiences of tween girls and to hear their voices and gain the greatest insight into their social world defined my approach to this study. After considering the option of one-off interviews or focus groups with the girls I determined that an ethnographic study offered me the greatest

opportunity for immersion in all the elements central to their social worlds. The protracted nature of an ethnographic study enabled me to add context to the girls' actions, practices and responses, developing a richer, more comprehensive account of the influences of their cultural and social environments. The success of previous ethnographic studies in recognising the competence of children in exploring their own social worlds was a key determinant in this decision (Allan, 2009; Gonick, 2003; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Haglund, 2004; Harwood, 2010; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; James, 2001; Johnson, 2004; Kehily, 2012; Rysst, 2010; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Valentine, 2004). A reflexive stance in this ethnography enabled me to acknowledge my position in the research and to consider how my actions and presence influenced the girls' practices and responses and shaped the direction of this study.

In considering places that would be suitable to conduct an exploratory ethnographic study with 11 and 12 year old girls it was difficult to bypass the primary school environment where they spend a significant part of their days. An Australian primary school represented an ideal setting for an ethnographic study with tween girls. For most Australian tweens, school is arguably the most significant environment outside their familial relationships (Mission Australia, 2010; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). Beyond the academic aspects the school space is increasingly recognised as a significant place in the shaping of identities for children and young people; a space where they are compelled to interact with, and respond, to the practices and actions of others (Kehily, 2012; Rysst, 2010; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Wyn, 2000, 2007). With a further desire to explore the local social and cultural influences in the life of the tween a primary school setting enabled me to locate my study within their

local geographies. Research being conducted in school environments at the beginning of the 21st century explores concepts such as belonging, wellbeing, connectedness and self-worth. Researchers consider these concepts in relation to the educational processes and roles of schools beyond Key Learning Areas, academic rigor and critical thinking (Mansfield, 2007; Pugh, 2009; Wyn, 2000, 2007; Zannettino, 2007). Yet the majority of these studies have been undertaken in Secondary School Environments and few studies have been conducted with primary school aged participants (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2008; Pomerantz, 2008; Wyn, 2000, 2007; Zannettino, 2007 for important exceptions see Kehily, 2002a; Jackson & Westrupp 2010). Recognising the significance of schools for this age group, and seeking to explore a range of social and cultural influences outside the consumer-media in the life of an 11 or 12 year old girl in this space, a primary school environment emerged as the most appropriate location to conduct this research study (Allan, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011).

With ethics approval, as outlined below, I contacted several primary schools in the inner-western suburbs of Melbourne. As I aimed to conduct a focused project in one primary school, rather than a comparative study of several schools, my criteria for selection was to conduct the study in a primary school located in the inner-western suburbs of Melbourne. I would conduct the study with a primary school that had several year 5, 6 or composite 5/6 classes. Straight Year 6 classes were preferred as they gave me the greatest number of Year 6 girls to work with, but this was not essential. Western Heights Primary School had three straight Year 6 classes and as they responded first I opted to conduct my study there. The Principal of Western Heights Primary was the official ‘gate-keeper’ for my study, although the Vice-Principal is a friend and she assisted in the process of gaining access. With three Year 6 classes in

2009 a decision needed to be made about which class would be the most appropriate for my project. My main criteria were that the girls were in Year 6, so I was guided by the Principal in class selection. He decided that I would work with the only male teacher in the Year 6 level. Mr G. was the most experienced teacher at this Year level at Western Heights Primary School. While this factor influenced the Principal, I suggest that his decision was also based on his desire to gain an insight into the girls' experiences returning from a Year 5 all-girls class to a co-educational Year 6 class. This uncommon Year 5 experience in a Victorian Government School was significant. The girls' preferences and insights into their combing academic learning and sense of belonging in both their Year 5 and Year 6 classes presented me with unique insights. This information was analysed both for this thesis and communicated to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in a compulsory report required as part of their ethics approval.

Ethics approval

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MURHEC, Number CF08/2201-2008-001056) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Office for Policy, Research and Innovation (Number SOS003986), gave approval to me to conduct the study that I outline in this chapter. I obtained a Working with Children Card to enable me to work with children within a school environment. A number of explanatory statements and consent forms were prepared to address the different layers of consent required to conduct this research project.

Overall approval to conduct this reflexive ethnography was given by the Principal of Western Heights Primary School. The classroom teacher, Mr G., gave permission for me to conduct this research project with the female students in his Year 6 class, 6C. As necessary throughout the year I obtained permission from other teachers who taught 6C students, including their Music, Art and Sports teachers as well as their Year 5 teacher. All students in the identified Year 6 class, both girls and boys, received explanatory statements that outlined the aims and objectives of this project. The female members of the class received consent forms with explanatory statements requesting signed consent forms from both of their parents and as well as the girls themselves. The consent forms enabled me to conduct interviews and focus groups with the girls, make observations and take field notes as well as view samples of their work as deemed necessary throughout the year. An important aspect of this research was to enable the girls to make their own, informed decision about whether they agreed to participate in this study. While I still required their parents' consent the girls' written consent was an important component of this project (Seymour, 2012; Wood, Morris, Davies, & Elwyn, 2011). With a strong desire for the girls' voices to be heard in this project asking the girls to provide their own signed consent was 'a useful way of giving them a sense of control, individuality, autonomy and privacy' over their participation (Valentine, 1999, p. 144 see also, Weithorn & Scherer, 1994). Conducting an ethnographic study in a primary school environment presented me with some complex negotiations to gain the engagement and full participation of the Year 6 girls, their classmates, parents and their school community. Following is an outline of the multiple layers that were addressed for the successful completion of this study.

Introducing Year 6C

The choice of an Australian primary school Year 6 class enabled me to work with a group of girls who would spend the majority of their school days with the same classmates, unlike a secondary school environment where students traditionally move between classes and teachers throughout the school day. Australian primary school class sizes determined that the number of potential female participants for this study was anywhere between five and fifteen, depending on whether the class was a Year 5/6 composite or a straight Year 6. The allocation of a straight Year 6 class, as opposed to a composite Year 5-6 class, gave me the greatest number of potential participants in this study, as I did not need to exclude any Year 5 students. The selected class, 6C at Western Heights Primary, consisted of fourteen Year 6 girls and twelve Year 6 boys.

My ethnographic study had a planned time-frame of one day a week in the school environment for the entire 2009 school year. However there was flexibility in this arrangement as I was available for excursions, camps and other activities that the girls participated in during the school year. The day of the week in the school environment was also flexible and I ended up attending the school on different days throughout the year. This was particularly significant as it enabled me to participate occasionally in the girls' specialist classes and observe different interactions, responses and practices. Throughout 2009 I spent time with Year 6C in PE, Music, and Art and in a Poetry Writing Group which was run with Year 5 and 6 girls by a volunteer writer.

While I conducted this ethnographic study with the female students of 6C it is also important to recognise the interactions, relationships and friendships that existed with

their male classmates as well as their peers from other classes and grades. The girls' movements and practices in and around the school's indoor and outdoor areas enabled me to observe how these influenced their negotiations of friendships and/or interactions with others in this space. The interactions, friendships and relationships with the boys in 6C are regularly noted in my field notes as well as in interviews and focus groups with the girls and they are evident in this thesis. Students from other classes provided the girls with alternative friendship and peer groups in the playground, during sporting activities, on excursions and their annual camp. My data collection methods and written representation of this study are mindful and respectful of other students and teachers at Western Heights Primary School. While I noted the girls' interactions and relationships with other students in my field notes, I only recorded comments from the thirteen girls who consented to participate in this study (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001; Fetterman, 1989; VanMaanen, 1988).

The physical layout of the school influenced my accessibility to the girls in the outdoor spaces of Western Heights Primary School, particularly in the way they utilised the areas. It was easier to talk to the girls who sat in many corners of the playground than engage with those who spent the majority of their recess and lunchtime playing tiggy, netball or basketball, although their actions and practices were all recorded as I built up an understanding of the girls' outdoor activities. The school rules and practices, necessary as they are for the 500 - 600 students, teaching and administrative staff in this limited playground space, provided me with important working parameters. I quickly learnt the areas where the Year 6 students were allowed to play, those they preferred to inhabit, and how they engaged with each other in these spaces. My next hurdle was encouraging the girls from 6C to participate in the study.

Engaging the girls in the study

I began this ethnographic study in the first week of term one in 2009 when I visited the students of Year 6C. Commencing the project at this time gave me the opportunity to experience the entire Grade 6 year with these students and to follow the girls as they adjusted to a new class and progressed throughout the year. I gave a brief presentation of my project, outlining its aims and the involvement required by the female participants. Explanatory statements were handed out to all students, girls and boys, and their parents, along with consent forms for the girls' parents and separate explanatory statements and consent forms for the girls. I prepared explanatory statements for the boys of 6C as my project necessitated my presence in the class during their normal daily activities. It was important to ensure that the boys were aware of the reasons I was there and I wanted them to feel that they were an important part of this project. As noted above, their presence was an important component of my research.

After speaking to the girls in the morning I spent the day at the school orientating myself to the physical layout of the school. I spent time in the playground and the girls approached me to chat about the project and to clarify their concerns or interest. Over the next two weeks I returned to the school on my allocated day and obtained consent forms from thirteen of the fourteen girls in the class, an excellent result for my study. One student chose not to participate in the project, informing me that while her parents felt she should be involved it was not something she wanted to do. While obviously respecting her decision not to be an active participant in my study she was a part of the friendship groups within the class, as were the boys, and as a result is referred to by her pseudonym as necessary in this thesis but I have not recorded any of her comments or

her individual practices. The thirteen consenting female students were actively engaged with the research process from the outset, excited by the prospect of '*the book Mrs Brookes is writing about us'* (Mollie, Field Notes 9th Feb).

Introducing the girls of 6C

Of my thirteen participants, ten have attended Western Heights Primary since Prep, the first year of formal education in the majority of Australian states. Rachel and Hayley transferred here at the beginning of Year 5 year and Georgie started at the beginning of Term 4 in the girls' Year 5. As with any research study the participants make a significant contribution to the direction of the research being conducted. In my study the participation of each of these thirteen girls was significant but equally so was their involvement as part of a larger class group (Dorman & Adams, 2004). The unique composition of Year 6C, the female and male students allocated to the class and their teacher Mr G., made a major contribution to the progress and development of my ethnographic study. The girls were also able to identify that other classes at Western Heights Primary School would have resulted in more diverse findings;

> *I think that you chose a good grade* (Holly, Focus Group 3, 2nd September);
>
> *You got assigned or picked a good grade. Cause if you were in the other grades you'd get a different intention* (Holly, Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

I want to take a moment here to briefly introduce the thirteen girls in my ethnographic study. With a key aim of exploring the girls' understandings of their social worlds I made the decision not to interview parents or teachers who would provide me with a

different perspective from the girls. Having made the decision before I entered the field I refrained from discussing individual girls with their parents or teachers. I adopted this approach for recognised demographic indicators and I did not survey or interview the girls, or their families, about indicators which were external to my study (Yates & McLeod, 2007, p. 23). I wanted to be more open to the girls' understandings and allow them to communicate stories and narratives about their own family practices and relationships (Finch, 2007). My motivation for this decision was also influenced by my desire to ensure Western Heights Primary School was the key local space for this study and not to disperse my understandings of the significance of place for the girls too broadly. In the following section I have drawn on the girls' responses to an introductory questionnaire Mr G. asked them to complete at the beginning of the year. Access to the girls' work was included on the consent forms signed by the girls and their parents at the beginning of the year. In keeping with my aim of allowing the girls' voices to communicate their understandings of the selves they fashion I have included a comment from each of the girls that epitomises a key component of the everyday lives.

Susan The youngest of two girls, a pocket rocket in terms of her size and physical capabilities, she likes to read, sleep, watch old classic movies with her family and muck around. She likes coming to school as her friends are here. *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* (Interview 16th June).

Erin The oldest of two girls, she is a quiet achiever and very clever. She likes running around going crazy and eating ice cream until she's hypo! *Well I'm not yet a teenager and don't yet have that many responsibilities. Except for my sister. That's not really a responsibility that's just a curse* (Focus Group, 5th August).

Lindi Is the oldest sibling, with a younger brother. She plays basketball almost every day of the week and plays in representative teams for her basketball association. She is a self-confessed very funny girl and likes coming to school as she has friends here and enjoys playing with them. She loves being in the paper, *it's cool, I'm in the paper. It's like part about you, you know and a lot people will read it so that's really cool. I think they* [people] see me more as fun, funny like bubbly and stuff (Interview 23rd June).

Holly The oldest of two girls, she likes scrapbooking, reading, dancing and playing sport, particularly netball. She likes school as she has fun with her friends. *Mum takes me to netball and sometimes Dad comes, sometimes Pa comes but like yeah .. every single week? And now because she* [Mum] *has to do work on Saturday it's really bad* (Focus Group, 19th August).

Maddie An only child, she lives with her mother and step-father. She likes reading, playing with her pets, Nintendo and doing homework – when it's fun! She likes school because she enjoys being with her friends and learning. *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.* Is it the things you do as well as the way you look? *Sort of, cause we're both sort of interested in the Chinese New Year stuff and drive ins and stuff. And we both don't like cleaning that much* (Interview 23rd June).

Alex Is an only child. Loves shopping anywhere in Australia and surfing the net. She doesn't like school as she has to wake up early. *I don't know, they were like, I had this confidence issue last year and they were trying to fix it and I didn't really like it. Cause they thought maybe because she's a quiet girl she lacks confidence* (Focus Group 13th October).

Hayley The eldest of four children, she has two younger sisters and a younger brother. Is always being asked to help out at home and talks about how unfair that is. She likes music, owns a horse and likes school as she has friends here. *Well because the parents think they know what's best for the child. But if you just keep them locked up in their room all day they're not going to experience anything* (Focus Group 5th August).

Rachel Is a quiet member of the class. She has two older step-brothers. Does gymnastics and likes learning how to do better splits and backbends. She likes school as the teachers make learning fun and wants to stay here next year. *They* [parents] *don't play with you; they don't play with you as much as when you were young. Too busy doing the things they have to do* Focus Group 1, 19th August).

Mollie The eldest of two girls, she loves playing with her dogs, piano, netball and other activities. She likes school because she catches up with her friends *Yeah well, it depends you know, well Dad he can be tough but you know and then Mum is like, like soft sometimes, not always but you know. Well they force me to make my bed and its, my Mum goes, no I've got better things to do than fold a bed* (Focus Group 19th August).

Alison The youngest of three sisters, the other two are in their 20s so she is almost an only child. She loves going on her computer and using her DS. Hates coming to school as it is hard work but likes having friends here. *Well sometimes they* [friends] *make me laugh cause they say funny stuff. Like in Art today it was really funny when we were on the table they were saying all those weird things. Erin, Pippi, Rachel, Alex and stuff were saying like look at this weird picture and I started laughing. It's really easy to make me laugh; I'm really ticklish* (Interview 16th June).

Kate The youngest of three siblings, she has an older brother and sister. She loves playing with friends, mucking around, being me, and playing basketball. She likes to see friends at school and learn new things. Five things that make her happy; *Comedy and Friends [TV show], basketball, athletics, swimming and making people laugh*. Five things that don't; *my brother, sometimes he's okay but sometimes I hate him, doing housework and chores, eating disgusting food, being in a bad mood and not getting enough sleep* (Interview 23rd June). *One night, it was so fun, everyone was out and*

I just put on my bed socks and I was sliding around the house (Focus Group 5th August).

Sally The youngest of four sisters. She loves singing and playing with friends, and of course, homework. She likes learning at school and seeing friends. *I say I think you guys are being a bit unfair cause I wanted to play as well. 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* (Interview 16th June).

Georgie Is the older of two sisters who lives with their Mum and Step-Dad, staying with their biological father every second weekend. She likes spending time with friends and going on MSN. Likes school because she has friends here. *Well she told me everyone and yeah, she showed me everything and I had a bit more confidence because I knew where more things were. And I didn't need as much of people's help, so sort of made me more confident* (Focus Group 2nd September).

A reflexive approach

The role of the researcher in any research project is important but has particular significance in ethnographic research as the link between the social world being explored and the written representation of this particular cultural group (VanMaanen, 1988). In this reflexive study I sought to fully acknowledge that my decisions and actions, my presence in the school, throughout the year influenced this research study.

The process of reflecting on my practices in the school environment was particularly important as I was an adult aiming to understand and explain the social world of 11 and 12 year old girls. While the girls were very familiar with, and accepting of adults in the classroom and broader school community, for the purposes of this research study I was taking on a different role. An adult in an Australian primary school environment generally takes on the role of educator, student teacher or supporter of the children's learning process, rather than an adult learner gleaning knowledge from the students. My role as a researcher in this space created a new dynamic for the students and their classroom teacher Mr G., a role that I constantly reflected on and negotiated during the year. Mr G.'s openness and support of my project assisted me to negotiate my way through this process. He was very comfortable with me viewing any of the girls' work and regularly volunteered pieces he felt may be beneficial to my study. While maintaining the girls' confidence Mr G. and I held regular brief, discussions before or after my day with 6C enabling us to keep abreast of any issues with the girls. When it came time for the formal interview and focus group phase, Mr G. was very accommodating, allowing the girls to miss class time to ensure they could all be completed in a timely and efficient manner.

From the outset I made a conscious decision to align myself closely with the girls rather than with the more accepted adult place in the staff room with the teachers. I attempted to take on the role of the 'least adult' in this space. This necessitated my presence in the playground before and after school, at recess and lunchtime observing the girls' interactions and engagements. While I clearly remained an adult in the girls' understandings our relationship differed from the traditional teacher-student relationship that they were used to in this space. They recognised that my role here was unique; that

I was here not to be another teacher, educating or disciplining them, nor was I trying to 'be one of them' but rather I was here to learn from, and work with, them. The value of my decision to align myself in this way was reflected in Hayley's comments;

> *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* (Focus Group 2nd September).

Yet the accepted role of the adult in a primary school setting was difficult to overlook and on many occasions in the playground I was asked by other students to assist with injuries, tears and disagreements as the broader school community recognised my presence in the playground space along traditional adult lines.

A researcher in the classroom

As John Law suggests, there is a role for the personal in research, 'subject-positions, the positions that constitute us as knowing subjects, are relevant if we want to understand the performativity of stories, to understand how distributions are being made' (2004, p. 6). So rather than hide the fact that I am a researcher and the mother of a thirteen year old girl and 10 year old boy, at the time of this study, which influenced the direction of this study, I openly shared this knowledge with the girls in the study. My involvement at my children's primary school, as a volunteer parent in classrooms and school committees, as well as a friend and colleague of teachers in a number of Melbourne primary schools also informed my practices and decisions in this space. A solid

background knowledge and understanding of the education processes assisted me in the field and when analysing the data. I am the daughter of a High School Principal/District Superintendent and Physical Education (PE)/Special Education Teacher, I was the President of my daughter's Kindergarten, a member of my children's School Council and the Chairperson of a special Promotions Group created at my children's primary school to actively promote the school within our local community.

The value of existing relationships holds particular significance in ethnographic research (Fetterman, 1989; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; VanMaanen, 1988). While I developed important relationships with the young female participants in my project, I was very dependent on understanding their existing relationships with other students and adults in this environment. Developing an understanding of these relationships assisted me as I observed the girls' practices and actions to determine if they were engaging with existing friends or trying to establish new connections. I was not influential in the formation of these relationships but I was an active observer of their friendships and interactions during their Year 6 experiences. Some of the girls' friendships had developed from Prep, whereas others had evolved in more recent times, or been fluid as the girls moved in and out of different classes throughout their primary school years. The girls' relationship with Mr G. was also new, but one they learnt to negotiate early in the school year, developing a positive, respectful relationship which supported their learning and social interactions in the class and broader school community. My relationship with the girls developed alongside these others, building over time as I actively engaged in conversations and activities with the girls.

I spent my weekly visits to the school in Term 1 building relationships with the girls, chatting and responding to their questions, observing their actions, practices and interactions with other students. In the early stages of the 2009 school year Mr G. was attempting to get to know the students as well and he initiated a number of information gathering activities which provided him, and me, with information about the girls' interests and activities, their likes and dislikes. I attended the students' specialist classes during this term, coming in on the same day each week. I attended their excursions and on several occasions I altered the day of attendance at the school to be a part of specific activities such as the Year 5/6 beach swim programme. I began to develop an idea of the friendship groups both within 6C and also with other students. Attending the three-day Year 5 and 6 school camp at the beginning of Term 2 was a valuable learning experience. The three days provided me with greater insight into the 6C girls' friendships and interactions with other Year 5 and 6 students of Western Heights Primary School. Time spent with the girls on camp or excursions always revealed new insights into their practices, or clarified existing observations. I adopted a range of methods to collect data, these are outlined below.

Methods

As mentioned earlier an ethnographic study enabled me to incorporate a range of different methods in this study. At the outset I commenced my field work focusing on observations and reflections of my time in the field. These observations were recorded separately as Field Notes and reflections throughout the year. I also copied some samples of the girls' work to include in my analysis and I have referred to this method as 'work-sampling' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). From here I progressed to Interviews

and Focus Groups. All data included in this thesis was collected from the girls during 2009; the field work component of this ethnographic study. The use of multiple methods was designed to capture the richest understandings from the girls without making them feel uncomfortable or exploited in any way throughout the process (Ellis, 2007). I suggest that the methods adopted for this study, in addition to the support and advice of my supervisors and my conduct of this study, ensured that this aim was achieved and I will now outline each phase in greater detail.

Observations

In the classroom I sat at my desk at the rear of the room, observing and making notes as the girls went about their activities. The girls would regularly turn around to check what I was doing, whether I was looking at them or others in the class. I created a field notes recording form broken up into hourly blocks, to record the activities the girls were participating in, as well as having space for me to record my initial thoughts and reflections on particular practices, actions and interactions (Fetterman, 1989). These field notes were transcribed by me within a couple of days of attending the school to ensure I kept an accurate record of each day's observations. My field notes assisted me to constantly reflect on and shape the progress of this reflexive ethnography. My initial aim was to develop a rich understanding of the girls' everyday experiences and develop knowledge of the things that were important to them (Bloustien, 2000; Vares, Jackson, & Gill, 2011a). Over time my observations were also used to prompt girls in interviews or focus group discussions as I connected the girls' actions and practices to their responses and discussions (Kawulich, 2005).

In addition to the field notes I also recorded separate notes of my reflections during the day at Western Heights Primary School. Transcribing my written field notes within a day or two of my field work in the school environment enabled me to ensure my written records of the girls' practices and actions were accurate and detailed. Recording my initial thoughts, interpretations and posing questions from these notes assisted me to attend to the changing shape of my ethnography. I was able to acknowledge my presence in the ethnography and do an early analysis of the observations being made (C. Davies, 2008). My field noes and reflections formed the basis of my data collection for Term 1 and Term 2 and were supplemented by interviews and focus group discussions in Term 2, 3 and 4. The following is a table of the key events for Year 6C during the year and the data collection methods I employed in each term.

Table 1: 2009 Time Line

TERM ONE	ACTIVITIES	DATA COLLECTION METHODS
28/1/09 – 3/4/09	Surf Life Saving Excursions x 3 days Footscray City College Excursion Excursion to Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	Observations & Field Notes Reflections
TERM TWO		
20/4/09 – 26/6/09	Grade 5/6 - three day Camp at Ace-High Ranch Excursion to Victorian Arts Centre	Observations & Field Notes Interviews
TERM THREE		
13/7/09 – 18/9/09	Girls State Football (AFL) Primary School Tournament x 2 days	Focus Groups Observations

	Annual School Production Evening	
TERM FOUR		
5/10/09 – 18/12/09	Numerous Transition Days Year 6 Graduation Evening	Focus Groups Observations

While sitting at the rear of the classroom enabled me to record my observations as they occurred I decided over time that I could be more interactive in the classroom. After consulting with Mr G. we agreed that I could be helpful walking around helping out and answering questions for both the girls and boys in the classroom. This activity took on more of the role of a traditional student teacher in the class but did not appear to affect the relationship I had built up with the girls. If anything it gave them another opportunity to discuss their lives or to check answers to questions with me for comment before the girls committed them to paper. My engagement with the girls and boys occurred when Mr G. was caught up with individuals or small groups of students working with them in focused activities leaving the other students to work more independently. My presence in this way added another adult to the room and I was able to offer assistance to the students. I did not distinguish between the girls and boys as I moved around the class, focusing on those students who were struggling with the topic rather than the girls in my study.

Interviews and Focus Groups

While observations, work sampling and informal interviews continued throughout the year, they were the focus of my data collection methods during Term 1 and 2 as I observed the girls both in the classroom and outside in the playground. While I had

planned for interviews and focus group discussions to be conducted in 3rd Term, ensuring I had developed a good, working relationship with the girls, they were keen to have more formal conversations as soon as possible and I decided to interview the girls before the end of Term 2. My first interviews with the girls on a one-on-one basis were conducted over two days on the 15 and 16th June. The interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to 45 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured format with open ended questions enabling the girls to describe their own unique experiences (Haglund, 2004). These interviews were exploratory in nature and I gleaned information from the girls about their family, friends and interests as well as clarifying my observations and thoughts (Myers & Raymond, 2010). The interviews gave me a valuable opportunity to check with the girls that they were comfortable with the progress of the study and were happy to continue.

The interviews were all conducted in a small anteroom off Year 6C's classroom and the intention was to conduct the Focus Groups in this space as well. I consulted with Mr G. the week prior to ensure he was prepared for the interruption to his class and I could access the anteroom. Despite this pre-planning there were many occasions where the anteroom was not available or there had been a change to the daily schedule. Recognising that this was a normal part of primary school life assisted me in being prepared to respond positively and make the most of the circumstances presented on the given day. Delays for the interviews or focus group were not generally appreciated by the girls who looked forward to participating.

I conducted Focus Groups with the girls at the end of Term 3 and into Term 4. I originally allocated the girls to two focus groups for the first topic on the 23rd July. The

decision to allocate the girls to two groups was based on my initial observations of their friendship groups;

- Alex, Erin, Hayley, Rachel, Alison, Maddie, Sally and Georgie
- Kate, Holly, Susan, Lindi and Mollie

The first group of eight girls proved to be too large and they were not all able to actively contribute to our discussion of What's Cool and What's Not. For the remaining four focus group topics I allocated the girls to three groups, two groups of five and one of three participants, which enabled all girls to participate more freely in the discussions. The groups were also more closely aligned to Friendship Groups and I suggest this contributed to more open discussions in this context (Hollander, 2004). The order in which I conducted the focus groups changed for each topic but the groups were made up as follows and stayed the same for the final four topics;

- Kate, Holly, Susan, Lindi and Mollie
- Alex, Erin, Hayley, Rachel, Alison
- Maddie, Sally, Georgie

Focus groups were conducted in a number of locations, depending on space availability at the time. Locations included the anteroom off 6C, the school conference room and a Year 1 classroom, where the focus groups were conducted in the presence of a Year 1 teacher. The list of dates and topics are outlined in the following table;

Table 2: Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUP	TERM	DATE	TOPIC
1	3	23rd July 2009	What's Cool and What's Not
2	3	5th August 2009	Being 11 or 12
3	3	19th August 2009	Families
4	3	2nd September 2009	Friends
5	4	13th October	Boys

The focus group topics were identified from the data collected throughout Term One and Two. The topics were communicated to the girls in advance, via *Mrs Brookes' Blurb* which I will introduce shortly. The focus groups were all conducted by me and followed a semi-structured interview process (Myers & Raymond, 2010). This approach enabled the girls' discussions to determine the direction of the focus group. While the majority of data obtained during the Focus Groups was consistent across the three groups the girls' responses afforded me some unique insights.

With children proving to be successful participants in previous studies, my greatest concern about conducting research with 11 and 12 year old girls in this environment was the possibility of them confiding in me about sensitive or even reportable incidents from their lives (Myers & Raymond, 2010). Conducting an ethnographic study where the development of relationships is vital to the information being collected increased the likelihood of this occurring (Allan, 2009; Haglund, 2004; Kehily, 2012; Rysst, 2010).

While I did not sign any formal agreement, I was aware that entering a primary school environment I was expected to inform the leadership team of any inappropriate actions. This included observations as well as any direct conversations with the girls. Throughout the year the girls shared an extensive range of information about themselves, through discussions and also through my observations. It was obvious in discussions with Mr G. that the girls shared more insights into their own lives than he was privy to as their teacher. I felt an obligation in focus groups to be mindful of the information the girls shared with me in this environment. I was fortunate that the girls did not share any information throughout the year that needed to be reported and only on one occasion did I feel that one of the girls had shared quite sensitive family information in her group. My response to this was to check in with her afterwards to ensure she was comfortable with our discussions. Her response was that was 'pretty sure the others would have forgotten by now' and she was probably right.

All interviews and focus groups were taped onto my iPad and transcribed by me. The girls engaged with the use of the iPad and thought it was 'cool' to use this technology for the study. All interviews were transcribed by me and recorded as per the context of the girls' responses. Utterances such as 'umm', like or disjointed responses have been recorded as uttered and included in my recordings of the discussions as closely as possible to the girls' original comments. As Fingerson (2005, p. 96) suggests these were not intended to be 'extraneous words' by the girls but were used as 'fillers' in their everyday speech. They were also possibly utilised on occasions to deflect the girls 'uncertainty and/or discomfort'. Including the girls' responses in this manner was one key way of ensuring my written representation of their 'voices' more accurately reflected their speech patterns and nuances. The focus group topics were determined

after analysis of the data collected to date and in discussions with my supervisor to ensure they assisted me to achieve the aims of this ethnographic study. The topics of discussion were communicated to the girls in a newsletter, 'Mrs Brookes' Blurb' which I 'published' throughout the year.

Mrs Brookes' Blurb

During discussions with my supervisor early in first term I felt that it was important to keep the girls and their families informed of the progress of this study, and the type of information that I was keen to explore with them. While I could convey this during informal discussions with the girls this process would not ensure all students and their parents received the same information. A written form of communication was considered to be the best approach and as a result a newsletter, *Mrs Brookes' Blurb*, was created. *Mrs Brookes' Blurb* became a one-page newsletter that I wrote at intervals during the 2009 school year and handed out to the female and male students in 6C. The first issue was prepared on the 16th February, giving feedback on the types of observations I had been making. A total of twelve issues of *Mrs Brookes' Blurb* were published throughout the year and a copy of my first newsletter follows;

Image Number 1: Mrs Brookes' Blurb, February Edition

Mrs Brookes' Research Blurb 16 Feb 2009

Hi 6C,

Welcome to my blurb. Just like the back cover of a book gives you an idea into what's inside, I intend to publish a regular roundup to give you an idea about what I am learning when I spend time with you in 6C.

Firstly, I wanted to say thank you for making me feel so welcome in your school. You have all been very friendly and welcoming and I think you should all be very proud of how you welcome new people into your school and classroom. Thank you too to those girls and parents who have agreed to participate in my research.

Some things I have noticed about 6C

- There is a great deal of respect for each other in this classroom.
- Lots of the girls in the classroom have school bags with surf brands on them—this is interesting to me as the surf culture has become particularly important for girls—even those who don't surf. Although watching you all at Port Melbourne beach I suspect that a few of you do.
- You all have very interesting lives and I am starting to hear about them from some of you.
- Western Heights Primary has lots of great play areas.

I have been thinking about how I can get to know you better when I am only here one day a week. I was wondering if you would be interested in writing me a letter sometimes and dropping it in my letterbox. I am interested in lots of things about you, so rather than me telling you what to write, I am happy for you to think about what you might like to tell me. Things that you might write could be: the books you are reading/have read, the TV shows or movies you have seen, what you got up to in the holidays or over the weekend, why you decided to have your hair cut. You could tell me what's good, or what's bad about being 11 or 12, being in Grade 6. Or maybe what it's like to be in a class with boys after being in a class last year with only girls. Or boys, if you want to tell me about what its like to be in a class with girls after being with only boys next year. Yes, I am happy for anyone to write to me.

Thanks again 6C, I am really looking forward to getting to know you all this year,

Mrs Brookes

Interpretation and Analysis

Having conducted a year-long ethnographic study with weekly field notes and reflections, thirteen individual interviews, fourteen focus groups as well as numerous samples of the girls work I was faced with the task of working out how to convey the data collected in this written format. While it was my intention to convey the girls' voices through their narratives it was evident very quickly that it would be impossible to tell and do justice to their thirteen unique stories. As a result I have adopted Sandelowski's (1991, p. 162) approach of 'narrative as a framework' … for 'analyzing and interpreting' my data rather than as a means of telling the participants' stories in their entirety. Drawing on the girls' narratives in this thesis I interpret their stories as a 'temporal ordering of events' and consider how they reveal the girls' 'construction of past and future life events' in their desire to belong within this space.

As a key aim of this study was to explore the girls' subjective understandings of peer relationships, families, schooling and the consumer-media these topics were the starting point for my coding and analysis (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The additional theme of the girls' everyday, ordinary practices emerged strongly throughout my data and became an additional topic in my analysis. These five topics 'guided my evaluation' of the data and have become the analysis chapters in this thesis (Pugh, 2009, p. 44). Major themes that emerged within these topics were coded and incorporated into the appropriate chapter in this thesis. Throughout this process I regularly returned to my field notes, interviews and focus groups to ensure that my analysis represented the girls' voices accurately and allowed their voices to be heard. The stories I tell in this thesis may not be the stories the girls would have told but they address the key aims of this research

project and I have included their comments verbatim in most instances. I have also been conscious that at times the girls chose to be silent, or less visible in discussions, focus groups or their everyday practices. The girls' silences have proven at times to be as valuable as their oral engagement and they have been included throughout this thesis as appropriate. Throughout my field work and in this written representation of my ethnographic study I was conscious of representing all thirteen girls equally although it has been impossible to even out their contributions as some of the girls were more outspoken than others (Pugh, 2009; Sandelowski, 1991). My primary aim in this thesis has been to ensure that the key concept of this thesis, 'the desire to belong' has been explored with integrity and with respect for the participants.

As discussed previously Pugh's concept of belonging provides the key conceptual framework for this thesis. I have adopted her argument that children negotiate the 'terms of their social belonging' in their different social worlds to describe their 'desire to belong' with their peers in the many places and spaces they frequent (Pugh, 2009, p. 6). Drawing on Pugh's concept I have incorporated a number of different theoretical perspectives that are appropriate for the themes of my analysis chapters. The concepts are described in detail in the appropriate data chapters and include theories to describe the girls' everyday, ordinary practices, their interactions and role of their family and friends and the significance of their local geographies, specifically their primary school environment, alongside the influence of the consumer-media in their lives.

Framing a Year-long Ethnography

In this chapter I have introduced the aims of my research project conducted with a group of 11 and 12 year old girls in 2009. The framework for my ethnographic study with the girls of 6C at Western Heights Primary School is outlined along with the ethics approval I obtained from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The recruitment procedures and my justification for conducting this study in a primary school environment are outlined. I introduce the thirteen young female participants in my ethnography, enabling some insight into the girls' lives and interests. My role as a researcher in a school environment created challenges in establishing and maintaining a relationship with 11 and 12 year olds who are used to the adults in this space educating them rather than learning from them as was my aim. The multiple research methods I adopted for this study resulted in the extensive data I had available to me to analyse. A brief overview of the chapters in this thesis provides an insight into the key themes that emerged from my analysis of this data and the following chapter begins my exploration.

Chapter Four

Understanding the tween girls' ordinary, everyday practices

Introduction

> *Like I'm scared, I'm sacred I'm going to muck up, I'm scared I'm going to be boring, I'm scared I'm going to babble on for too long, blah, blah, blah, blah* (Kate, Focus Group, 13th October 2009).

Shy but not boring, Kate's desire to fit in amongst her peers was palpable as I reflect on the data from my year-long ethnographic study of 11 and 12 year-old girls. Having read widely in sociological, cultural and feminist scholarship on the motivations and desires of tweens, I entered the field of ethnographic study expecting to be overwhelmed by the girls' engagement with the consumer-media. While the girls' participation in consumption activities and the influence of the consumer-media was evident and will be discussed in later chapters, it has been their ordinary, everyday practices which have proven to be the most revealing element of this study. A dictionary definition for the term everyday of 'commonplace or usual' and ordinary as 'usual or normal, not special or different in any way' goes some way to mirroring my thoughts but does not reflect the value I place on these practices (Collins, 2010). While the very ordinariness of kids' lives has 'tended not to make them an intrinsically appealing object of sociological enquiry', there is compelling evidence to suggest that in their ordinary practices children can

provide important insights into the ways they 'attempt to maintain command of their own lives' (Brown, 1987, p. 3). All actions and practices have 'the potential to become everyday, everything has the potential to become ordinary' (Highmore, 2011, p. 2). Far from being disillusioned by the regularity and ordinary elements of the girls' practices, I have been reassured that it is often the things that 'one didn't even suspect existed' that can provide the most important findings in research (Miller, 2010, p. 7 see also, Brown, 1987; Walkerdine, 1990). Rather than look to define the individual features of the girls' everyday practices it may be more beneficial to consider that 'everyday life is a thoroughly relational term' and to consider its connections and disconnections with other practices (Highmore, 2011, p.2 see also, de Certeau, 1988; Walkerdine, 1990).

As I reflect on my data with this understanding the multifaceted meanings of the girls' ordinary, everyday practices become clearer. The girls' ordinary, everyday practices become more than just the 'obscure background' to this study as my field notes, reflections and discussions with the girls reveal how they fashion a sense of self and belonging within this space (de Certeau, 1988). Through practices and discussions the girls' ordinary, everyday practices have shown me a 'vast ensemble' of knowledge which is vital to understanding the complexities and nuances of the self they fashion in this primary school space (de Certeau, 1988, p. 43). As I began to analyse the girls' ordinary, everyday practices the significance of recording them for analysis became clearer;

> It is as though those stories which are 'nothing to write home about', in all their ordinary obviousness, were not themselves both constituted by, and constitutive

> of, a history which has to be told. It was the pattern of daily life which gave this adult that I have become her specificity.
>
> There, caught in the threads of that ordinary life, is the basis for understanding what my subjectivity might be about (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 162).

To illustrate the significance of the girls' ordinary, everyday practices in this chapter I draw on my field notes and reflections to introduce the key examples I recorded for consideration and analysis. Subsequent recordings or discussions with the girls, in interviews, general conversations or focus groups, which develop my understandings of these particular practices, such as the wearing of particular items of clothing or accessories, playing tiggy, congregating at the top of the Year 6 steps, partnering up with friends are all included to illustrate their multi-faceted meanings. Pugh's (2009b, p. 52) concept, *economy of dignity*, where children work out the value of belonging within their friendship and peer groups provides a framework for my discussions.

Ordinary, everyday practices

Very early in my year-long ethnography I realised that the spectacular and exciting practices of shopping, technology use, clothing, hair and make-up I had anticipated from these girls was, for the most part, absent and I was observing simple, consistent, everyday practices from the girls; individually or in groups. The girls' practices included their use of the spaces around Western Heights Primary School for recess and lunchtime activities, walking to and from school together and their interactions with others in these spaces. As Pugh suggests, 'children talk. … and through talk they 'mold and shape the relationships that form their environment' (Pugh, 2009, p. 50). While the everydayness of the girls'

talk may diminish its value, it can be argued that their unflustered discussions and interactions are evidence of the girls' competence in dealing with the complex social interactions and relationships required in this space. The process of belonging for these girls is intricate and fluid but the girls appear well versed, undertaking their negotiations in an unremarkable, but effective fashion. Far from the consumer-media Tweens who 'are unsure of themselves' and more 'susceptible to suggestion than most' the girls in my study exhibited an advanced competence in their negotiations to belong with their peers (Hamilton, 2008, p. 31). Encouraged by my supervisors and key scholars I was reading I recognised the value of these ordinary, everyday practices to the aims of my research (Brown, 1987; C. Davies, 2008; de Certeau, 1988; Harris, 2004; Miller, 2010; Walkerdine, 1990). Far from being an 'obscure background' to my ethnography the girls' ordinary, everyday practices became an important component of the study (de Certeau, 1988).

I will take a moment here to define my use of the term, ordinary, everyday in this chapter. I have adopted the dictionary meaning of 'usual and normal' in this thesis but shunned the idea that the girls' practices are 'not special or different' in any way (Collins, 2010). 'Usual and normal' in this context describes practices which would be considered usual for this age group of girls in this space; such as wearing school uniform, playing on or using the playground equipment, interacting with others and working together in classroom activities. Wearing bright, sparkly clothes, obvious lipstick, being out of uniform, playing in the Prep area of the playground are not considered normal for 11 and 12 year old girls in this space and would fall outside this definition. I have rejected the idea that ordinary, everyday practices can't be special or different in any way as their meaning can be quite unique and special to the girls. For example, the girls all agreeing

to wear white t-shirts on a uniform free day could be an outward exhibition of connectedness rather than a simple fashion coincidence. While the t-shirts are quite ordinary, their multi-faceted meaning to the girls and their sense of belonging together can add a layer of complexity that can be identified as special.

It was difficult in the early stages to determine how the girls used these ordinary, everyday practices but it became obvious over time that the girls engaged in them to demarcate their friendships and align themselves with specific peer groups. This awareness grew as I acknowledged that 'meanings and identities are negotiated moment by moment, day by day' and built on over time, through interactions and exchanges between the girls (C. Davies, 2008, p. xi). The desire to belong and to experience the 'sense of belonging and connectedness that friendship brings' was compelling for the girls (Pratt & George, 2005, pp. 23-24). The threat of being excluded, of being 'alone' in this space was real for the girls, as Georgie reflects during a discussion on going to school without friends, *because you wouldn't talk much because you have no friends to talk to. So you'd be like talking to yourself all the time* (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 2nd September). Georgie's thoughts were reflected by the other girls as they expressed feelings of sadness or loneliness, *because I wouldn't have anyone else,* when asked about how they would feel about going to school if their friends were absent (Rachel Interview, 16th June). Despite their strong connections within their own friendship groups the girls in this study all expressed sufficient connection with the other girls in the class and mirrored Rachel's thoughts, *there's always someone here, so I'll play with them, but I still miss them* [friends], *when they are not here* (Rachel Interview, 16th June 2009).

With limited sociological scholarship that makes 'sense of young girls' experiences of friendship outside of 'adolescent secondary school girls' there is a need to consider the 'distinctive friendship cultures' that these young girls construct (George, 2007, pp. 4-5). George calls for 'conceptual frameworks that acknowledge' the complexities of 'these younger girls' friendships' and enable sociological scholarship that considers this younger age group of girls. The conceptual framework for this discussion, and thesis more broadly, considers Pugh's 'system of social meanings', *the economy of dignity* where 'children make themselves audible, and therefore present' amongst their peers, (2009b, p. 51). While Pugh's *economy of dignity* relates to children's engagement with consumer culture, it crucially embeds an acknowledgement of children's strong desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups in their own social worlds. While I refer to the girls in my study as tween girls, they are classified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as children. As such I suggest that Pugh's concept, the economy of dignity, embraces this age group and helps identify the girls' needs to belong within this complex, social environment.

The need to be heard by their friends was compelling for the girls; *it's when they do stuff that I don't want to do. That we should just choose something that we both want to do, we all want to do* (Alison, Interview 16th June). The girls in my study 'collect or confer dignity among themselves, according to their (shifting) consensus about what sort of objects or experiences are supposed to count for' (2009b, p. 7). To effect this process, Pugh argues that children adopt the norms and practices of their social worlds, her modified version of Goffman's impression management, 'in order to gather dignity in public' (Pugh, 2009, p. 52). She suggests that 'children engage in norms and practices not just 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 see also, Goffman, 1967, 1968).

While there is some overlap between the data being introduced in this chapter and that considered in Chapter Six on Friendships, I argue that the ordinary, everyday practices being discussed in this chapter are worthy of consideration in their own right. In separating these discussions I want to highlight the significance of the girls' practices which may be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant as researchers consider the more impressive or obvious practices; such as shopping, fashion or troubled friendships that are sometimes associated with girls. In a similar approach to George (2007; 2000; Pratt & George, 2005), I considered the argument that primary school aged girls' friendships 'have warranted little attention from their teachers or other adults who perceive the '"breaking" and "making" of friendships as an inevitable and almost a "natural" and routine part of their daily classroom experiences and, furthermore, over so quickly that intervention is unnecessary' (George, 2007, p. 4). Looking beyond the traditional developmental and psychological frameworks used to characterise friendship issues for these girls as 'malicious, bitchy, catty and resentful' interactions to frameworks recognising how tween girls engage in less confrontational practices accommodating their overwhelming desire to belong is essential (George, 2007, p. 4).

My early observations suggested there were two main friendship groups operating in this Grade Six class. Moving from an all-girls class the previous year, relationships between the girls of 6C already existed. My initial thoughts were that the fourteen girls in 6C separated into a group of six - Lindi, Holly, Susan, Kate, Mollie and Pippi - and a larger group of eight girls, Maddie, Alex, Georgie, Erin, Sally, Alison, Hayley and Rachel. I

quickly discovered though that the girls found a place to belong within much tighter friendships and peer groups than these initial two groups offered. The smaller group of six girls stood out as being the tightest group but as I discovered they functioned with a core inner circle of four, Lindi, Holly, Susan and Kate, with two peripheral members, Mollie and Pippi. While Mollie and Pippi often paired up, their friendship was not as tight and Mollie tended to move quite fluidly between this group and other class members, particularly Hayley and Rachel. The larger group of eight girls proved to be more accurately two groups, one of three, Maddie, Georgie and Sally, another of four, Rachel, Alison, Erin and Alex and Hayley who tended to float between groups during the year. My understanding of the makeup of these groups became clearer as the year progressed and in particular when I allocated the girls into focus groups during Term 3. The details and significance of the girls' friendships will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Here I focus on how the ordinary, everyday practices were engaged to achieve aims of belonging and ease in the classroom and at school. These practices were central in how the girls negotiated a place to belong within this space.

Partners for the year

Lindi, Susan, Kate and Holly were a very tight friendship group; this was evident from the outset and they remained a close-knit group throughout the year. The four girls formed the 'inner circle' of a wider friendship group of six, but Pippi and Mollie were never given the opportunity to break into this 'inner-circle' (George, 2007; George & Browne, 2000). The term inner-circle refers to two or three girls who were 'close to each other' (George, 2007, p. 77). Confident girls in their own right, there was no apparent leader in this group although the longer standing friendship of Susan and Kate influenced

their group decisions. However they worked comfortably as a group of four, as I noted at a Beach Swimming activity undertaken in Term One;

> Splitting into class groups the first water activity was a rescue on the boards and again the group of Lindi, Holly, Susan and Kate were tight. Despite the instructions to split into groups with one in the water, one on the beach and the other two waiting, the four girls worked together (Field Notes 23rd February);

and slipped easily into pairs when asked to, in class and specialist lessons such as PE;

> The students move into pairs for the triple jump activity, no surprise as to who pairs up; Holly/Lindi, Susan/Kate (Field Notes 25th March).

The girls paired up to work on the computers at the back of the room or in reading groups when possible and embraced the opportunity to partner up in specialist classes where there appeared to be more freedom for them to choose. The movement from a group of four to two pairs was seamless, with little or no discussion or debate about who was going to be paired with whom. It was during a one-on-one interview with Lindi that she revealed the discussion that the four girls had earlier in the year. Lindi and I were talking about her friendship group and my observations of them to date;

> *So was it; Kate, Susan, Holly, Mollie and Pippi? Thinking about these girls as people you had to pair up and work with someone in the class, who would you choose to work with as a pair?* (Researcher);
>
> *Well 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. (Lindi);

Ah, that's a bit trickier. (Researcher);

So how does that work, who decides that? (Researcher);

One of us just puts our hand up, so it doesn't really matter (Lindi);

(Interview 23rd June).

The girls identified the uncertainty or discomfort of working with partners or groups outside their friendship circle. They initiated negotiations at the beginning of the year that enabled them to establish partnerships or group configurations that limited the need to include others from 6C. Restricting access to their friendship group from the beginning of the year limited opportunities for other girls in 6C to interact with them in partners or group work, unless directed by Mr G. or other Western Heights Primary teachers. This decision is notable for the remaining girls in 6C as they recognised from the outset that the opportunities to engage with girls in this friendship group were limited. The decision also cemented the place of Mollie and Pippi on the periphery of the 'inner circle', keeping them close enough to safeguard the possibility of other 6C girls partnering up with 'inner circle' members when girls were absent but distant enough to understand that they were not members of the core friendship group.

Shorts for the year

From very early on in the school term I took notes about the clothes and accessories the girls wore to school. At the same time I was making more general observations about the wider school community's attire;

> Children are dressed in school uniform, with royal blue or white tops with the school emblem on them. Shorts prevail for the boys and the girls wear royal blue netball skirts, shorts or skorts (shorts with a skirt like flap) (Field Notes 4th February).

The school has a compulsory school uniform but there are a range of choices that the girls can make about which pieces they wear to school. I made a note about the changing uniform choices on the 2nd March 2009;

> The weather is a little cooler today and some of the students are arriving at school with long pants or windcheaters on. Still lots of shorts and t-shirts though.

On the 7th May I make a comparison between the 'fit' of the school shorts in comparison to the trousers many of the Western Heights Primary School girls wear;

> I have made a note here for myself to consider the types of trousers the Western Heights girls wear. Most are tight fitting, almost ballet type or lycra pants which cling to their legs. This is in stark contrast to the Western Heights Primary School shorts, which Susan, Lindi, Holly, Mollie and Kate regularly wear, which are baggy and loose fitting (Field Notes 7th May).

On the 19th May, in a brief, almost throw away comment, Susan provides an insight into the significance of the shorts to her group;

> Mollie arrives followed by Lindi and the girls move down the steps into the playground. I comment on their shorts, suggesting that the morning is cold. Susan tells me that they have an agreement not to wear trousers to school.
>
> These girls always wear shorts, blue tops and now their Western Heights Primary School Grade 6 jumpers. They obviously have discussed this and have made a decision for conformity to ensure no-one looks different on any given day.

In this simple comment Susan has revealed the multi-faceted meaning of the shorts to her group of friends. While the wearing of shorts to Western Heights Primary School is not exclusively the realm of Lindi, Kate, Susan, Mollie and Holly this decision has provided the girls with another way to demarcate their friendship group. A small decision that on the surface denotes conformity, this shared choice also shows how the girls have actively negotiated a simple, everyday expectation to wear the school uniform to enable them to create an element of membership for their group. While this simple agreement could be almost overlooked, as Pomerantz (2008, p. 56) suggests, girls' negotiations;

> need not be resistant or even overt in order to be influential in the lives of everyday girls, making "mainstream" style as powerful as "resistant" style in the constant struggle for social intelligibility. Conceived in this way, style is powerful as it is one of the most obvious and accessible ways that a girl can gain some measure of control over how others see her and how she sees herself.

In a primary school environment where uniform is generally the prescribed attire Lindi, Kate, Susan, Holly and Mollie, have found a way for the conformity expected of them at school to provide them with a way to demarcate their friendship group. The girls' choice of shorts though is a specific practice signifying membership of their social group. In this instance Mollie was conferred membership of the 'shorts group' but this level of belonging did not did not extend to a place in the inner-circle with Lindi, Kate, Susan and Holly. This was also an example of the ingenuity of the girls in achieving a sense of belonging from their everyday consumer practices. While school shorts were a compulsory consumer practices for these girls, and not ones we associate with the consumer-media and sexualisation of this age group, they are however a consumer item. In this practice the girls exhibited a creative and counter-cultural use of an everyday consumer item to achieve a place to belong with their preferred friendship group.

Awareness and understanding

From the beginning of the year Mollie was a peripheral member of the 'inner-circle' of Lindi, Susan, Holly and Kate. She spent time in the playground with them; *Susan and Lindi are waiting for Holly and Mollie to join them. A blonde haired girl from another grade comes in to meet them and they all head out to lunch together,* and also in class (Field Notes 23rd February). While she knew that she would be welcomed by the girls at playtime and in class activities, Mollie appeared to have an intuitive understanding that her place with these girls was constrained. In my field notes of 23rd February I recorded the following;

> Mollie's friend Pippi 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 this group but is not an integral part and without Pippi she is looking a little unsure of herself as she functions on the outer edge of the group (Field Notes 23rd February).

On the 17th March we headed off an excursion to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) office in the city. Pippi was absent again today but Mollie paired up with Rachel and they appeared to be having fun. When we arrive at the AEC the students were asked to separate into groups of four to undertake the activities;

> The students were going to be moving into an interactive space, working in small groups of four. The five girls I was sitting next to, Lindi, Kate, Susan, Holly and Mollie, all looked at each other but they very quickly decided that Mollie would be the one who missed out. The girls apologised that she couldn't be in their team and she quickly moved on to join up with Hayley, Rachel and Alex.
>
> Mollie appeared to take this so well but did she have a choice? The instructions were for groups of four and Mollie obviously recognises that in this group she will always be number five. I wonder how that feels for her and whether she is concerned at all about how the group functions (Field Notes 17th March).

At the end of the day I reflected on how Mollie's awareness of her place on the periphery of her preferred friendship group is intuitive. Without missing a beat she recognises the limitations of the friendship group and is able to claim a place to belong with other girls

in the class. As I reflected on the excursion I cannot overlook Mollie's ongoing awareness of her peripheral place in her friendship group;

> The actions of Lindi's group are intriguing. It is easy to think that these alliances and friendships can shift so quickly in a week but perhaps they haven't. I had noticed the tightness of Lindi's group but today's outing really consolidated that. Pippi's absence makes a difference for Mollie on this excursion. Was it difficult for her or was it something she is quite happy about? Without asking her it is extremely difficult to develop a real knowledge of her understandings of these events. She certainly didn't appear fazed but is this just a mask that she puts on, or is it really how she feels (Reflections 17th March).

As time went on her tentative place as a peripheral member of the group was apparent. A very happy, friendly girl Mollie never looked short of friends or appeared concerned when group work was required in the classroom, fitting in wherever she could. She never seemed to be alone in the playground and often played with Lindi, Kate, Susan and Holly. I was struck most by Mollie's intuitive insight into when and how she could fit in with the 'inner circle' and her almost innate understanding of when she needed to look elsewhere. I explored these thoughts and questions during a one-on-one interview with Mollie starting off this conversation talking about the makeup of groups within the class;

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

Like how many? (Mollie);

Like if it had to be a pair (Researcher);

Pippi (Mollie);

Three? (Researcher);

Hayley and Pippi (Mollie);

And four? (Researcher).

Oh four, four. Maybe me, Hayley and Pippi, and maybe, that's a hard one

(Mollie)

It's a bit tricky isn't. (Researcher);

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

Mollie has made no mention of her 'inner-circle' friends, turning instead to other friends in the class as her preferred partners in groups of two, three or four. The next question brings the 'inner-circle' into the picture and enables me to question Mollie about her understandings of her place on the periphery of their friendship group;

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

Oh that would be um, Kate, Susan, Lindi and Holly (Mollie);

And you? Okay so that's a really close friendship but knowing that if there was a group of four that, that would be those four (Researcher);

Yep (Mollie);

Cause they're good friends?

(Researcher).

Mollie's next statement appears almost to defend her understanding of her position in this friendship group; turning to others in the class to provide her with an excuse to pair up with them;

I don't have a problem; it's just that I have Hayley and Pippi as well (Mollie);

Yeah, no it's not a problem. It's just interesting that you go from one to two to three, to four or five and then you get to a bigger group and that's your friendship group of Lindi, Kate, Susan and Holly (Researcher)

In this discussion Mollie is very aware of the complexities of her position with different friends and friendship groups within the class. As she clearly articulates she understands, and appears to accept, that there is only a place for her with Lindi, Susan, Kate and Holly when the group size is larger than four. These boundaries don't deter her from playing with the 'inner circle' girls outside or in class activities or games without size limitations;

Mollie, Susan, Pippi, Lindi, Kate and Holly's group seem to be working cohesively with Susan appears to take the leadership role. Within 10 minutes of the lesson (Music) starting they move outside to practice their routine. The girls performed their Hip Hop routine for me and it was basically three groups, Mollie and Pippi, Lindi and Holly, Susan and Kate doing small portions of the overall performance (Field Notes 12th March).

Mollie is a popular member of the class with the other girls in the class and knows she can turn to several of them if necessary for partner or group work or play. Her ability to respond fluidly and without obvious dissent suggests that she is very aware of her place. Mollie's desire to belong within the friendship groups of 6C appears to be satisfied by her practice of reflecting quickly on whether a position exists for her with her preferred group of Lindi, Kate, Susan and Holly and her partner on the periphery, Pippi. If not she shifts apparently effortlessly to other friendships she has nurtured in the class. While her position on the periphery of the 'inner-circle' continued she increasingly spent time with other girls in the class, seeking out the company of Rachel and Hayley as the year progressed.

Spaces and places

In this section I want to consider the girls' ordinary, everyday practices in the playground although I will discuss the girls' use of the playground in more detail in Chapter 8. While supervised by adults the playground arguably offers the girls the greatest freedom to spend time with their friends. While it can be a great time it can also be one of the most daunting times and spaces for students during the school day. Like most Australian schools Western Heights Primary School has a rule that students spend recess and lunch time outside. While there isn't a large outdoor play area for the number of students, the school has made the most of the spaces surrounding the buildings. A half sized soccer pitch; basketball court and small Australian Rules football oval along with play equipment allocated to the Preps make up the playground at the back of the school with a netball/tennis court as well as play equipment out the front for the students to play on. Some of these areas are dedicated play areas for the younger grades and some, such as

the soccer pitch and small football oval, are generally used by the boys although there are girls playing around the edges of these spaces, making up their own games. For some girls, the appeal of soccer brings them to the edge of the pitch where they will hang around looking for opportunities to join in: *Hayley is playing soccer with some Grade 3 and 4 boys on the football oval* (Field Notes, 12th March).

My field notes highlight where I would find the girls from 6C, revealing who they chose to spend their outdoor time with as well as the activities they enjoyed. For the girls who chose to be active throughout the year tiggy was a popular game, with many of the girls and boys playing at some stage during the year, *Susan, Kate and Holly are playing tiggy around the school, starting from the eating area, moving right around the main building covering the front and back playgrounds* (Field Notes 13th May). Mr G. and I often talked about;

> the cohesiveness of his class and how the games of tiggy in the playground spill over and benefit group work and interactions within the class. He suggests that his last year's group were quite distant from each other and he is really happy to see this year's group having fun with each other (Field Notes 19th May).

For physically active girls such as, Lindi, Kate, Mollie, Susan and Kate, the time outdoors is regularly spent playing tiggy, playing netball or basketball or practicing for their many school sport opportunities. For Maddie, Alison, Georgie and Sally their preference is a quiet, secluded space and they found one in the back playground area. Leading from the Grade 6 area there was a small set of stairs, about five in height, with a little balcony at the top;

> Maddie, Alison and Georgie are in their favourite place, on the steps at the back of the school. Maddie and Alison are doing finger knitting and Georgie is rolling around on the ground with her knees tucked up inside her jumper which is stretched over her knees. Just like a turtle with little legs and arms sticking out (Field Notes 25th March).

For Maddie, Alison, Georgie and Sally the lack of desire to participate in physically demanding activities is palpable and they prefer to engage in quieter games and activities;

> The girls' secluded location at the top of the stairs enables them to have lengthy discussions and limit the opportunity for others to join in. The landing size is appropriate for this group to sit quite secluded from the rest of the playground (Reflections 23rd February).

As I note in my reflections, the girls have taken possession of this space, enabling them to remove themselves from the hustle and bustle of the playground. Their quiet games and interactions with each other enable them to develop their own sense of belonging in this space. While others joined them at different times, the steps leading out from the Grade Six area into the back playground became their own quiet haven. Primary school playgrounds might appear to be a network of games, noise, activity and laughter but for some it is a place of anguish and anxiety as they seek the company of others, or find some solitude and solace in the midst of the mayhem;

> It's warm, 28°C, 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. I engaged in conversation and asked why they liked this spot. They both said they like it here

> because it's outside but shady and away from the noise of the playground. Maddie says no-one else comes up here and they can make their board games without being interrupted (Field Notes 12th March).

I wonder whether the location and elevation of the steps enables the girls to survey the back playground, keeping a distance from the broader playground activities yet aware of what is going on around them;

> Alison, Alex and Rachel were sitting under the tree where 6C line up to go inside. I asked if I could sit with them, they said yes. We talked about Western Heights' playground, what they thought about it and where they liked to hang out. Rachel pointed out the solitary tree with seating around it, that sits between the soccer field and the basketball court, and said they liked to sit there (Field Notes 18th February).

Doing laps of the playground was a very common practice with most of the girls partaking in this activity throughout the year. Sometimes it was Alex, Rachel and Alison *who have become a regular trio and they are walking around the playground together. They stop for a quick chat near the sandpit* (Field Notes 26th August). Throughout the year the 6C girls tended to stick together despite the presence of two other Grade 6 classes with whom they could negotiate friendships. The main exception to this was Pippi who initially spent very little time with 6C girls in the playground. As the year progressed her friendship with Hayley developed and they were often found in the playground with girls from the other Grade 6 classes;

> Hayley is with Pippi's larger group of friends, looking very much a part of their activities; she is touching arms, laughing and joining in their conversations and movement around the playground. A 'mass' of girls moving slowly together, staying connected, but not halting the flow of the groups' forward momentum (Field Notes 29th July).

This particular formation highlights a more aggressive example of connectedness and belonging than I witnessed throughout the year. Arms linked together as they moved forward, the girls' motion is quite intimidating as they paraded their membership to the other girls in the playground. I would suggest that the girls were very aware of the message their formation portrayed and intended for others to witness this practice. The girls' awareness of the potential interpretation of their peers stems from their own understanding of the meaning behind this intimidating practice. While some girls have achieved a place to belong within this group, the message to others is that they are not welcome. Inclusion and exclusion is evident in the girls' ordinary, everyday practices in many forms. Exclusion appears to be particularly significant in the playground where class organised groups and activities are unable to provide support or protection for those girls who might be feeling a little uncertain or vulnerable in their friendship groups.

The value in the ordinary, everyday

In this chapter I have drawn heavily on the data relating to the friendships of the girls in my research. I have focused on examples that illustrate the multi-faceted meanings of their ordinary, everyday practices and actions in this complex, interactive space. Distant from the glittery, sparkling and spectacular activities that may be expected of a consumer-

media tweens' identity, the ordinary, everyday practices of the girls have prompted me to consider the significance of practices such as, wearing shorts everyday and setting up 'partners for the year' to the ways 11 and 12 year old girls negotiate their desire to belong in their friendship and peer groups. While there are consumption practices evident here, such as the use of school shorts, these are mundane and not mired in sexualised or celebrity culture. Far from being 'trapped by a wall of silence about the very ordinariness' of their lives, the girls have provided me with an opportunity to consider the significance of the 'ordinary obviousness' in their practices and actions (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 161). For example, the girls' ability to reflect on the significance of having a 'partner for the year' was acted upon during the girls' daily activities, resolving six girls' ability to belong within the environment of 6C for the entire school year. Observing Mollie's daily interactions with the other girls in 6C and connecting the significance of these has revealed her discerning awareness of her place within these friendship groups. Shifting fluidly between friendship groups her subtle movements reflect her desire to ensure her own dignity in this space.

The girls' insights into the meanings behind their ordinary, everyday practices encouraged me to explore these closely regardless of how routine or commonplace they may have initially appeared. These practices were fluid and ongoing as the girls constantly negotiated and re-negotiated their friendships in pursuit of a desire to belong. As an adult in this space, without the girls' understanding of the rules and norms of this social world, it was necessary for me to consider all practices to develop a richer understanding. These understandings are not knowledge about how girls live a Tween identity but, more significantly, are understandings of how ordinary, everyday tweens, such as the 11 and 12 year old girls in my study, are fashioning a sense of self and

negotiating a place to belong in this important place. My findings suggest that these modest or simple practices are central to girls' everyday social worlds, and may be more central than consumer-media artefacts. The girls' understandings of these practices are learnt from many of the important social and cultural influences in their lives. One of the key influences remains their family and in the following chapter I explore its ongoing significance in the everyday life of the tween girl.

Chapter Five

Families: Their importance to the tween girls' economy of dignity

Introduction

Much has been written about the tweens' increasing desire for independence and a self that is recognised outside her familial relationship (Australian Psychological Society, 2007a; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Harris, 2005b; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Linn, 2004; Seigel et al., 2004). In existing sociological, feminist and cultural studies scholarship the tween's desire for acceptance and to belong within her friendship and peer groups has been explored alongside the influence of the consumer-media. Rather than exploring the girls' everyday negotiations of friendship and belonging this scholarship has tended to consider specific issues such as bullying, exclusion, school transitions and popularity (George, 2007; Kehily, 2002b; Maher, 2008; Pratt & George, 2005; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). While the role of family is acknowledged in this scholarship, the emphasis on friendships and acceptance by her peers minimises the role of the tween's parents and family and suggests that they can no longer understand or respond to her needs and desires. It is difficult though to argue that the tween is an 'autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency' outside of the family she is raised within (Smart, 2007, p. 28). Almost without exception Australian tweens live within families, depending on them for food, shelter, clothing, education and income. Despite her desire to fashion a sense of self and acceptance outside her familial relationships, the

tween recognises the value and support of her family and continues to appreciate 'the protective umbrella provided by their family' (Seigel et al., 2004, p. 45 see also, Mission Australia, 2010).

While the family has been recognised in the field of youth sociological research its influence is assumed rather than investigated and it is often considered as 'a background factor, juxtaposed against the peer group', deemed to be the most significant relationship in the life of young people (Wyn, Lantz, & Harris, 2012, p. 4 see also, Mission Australia, 2010; Pomerantz, 2008). A large scale annual Australian youth survey has found family relationships were the top item valued by 78% of these young people followed closely by their friendships. A total of 82% of respondents aged between 11 and 14 said they would turn to parents or family for advice and support if needed (Mission Australia, 2010). Despite these findings, there has been a tendency to assume, rather than explore, the significance of or changing role of family in the life of the tween girl (George, 2007).

As the Mission Australia report highlights though, young people are not dismissive of their families' influence and they continue to remind us of 'the importance of understanding the significance of family relationship in their lives' (Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2012, p. 18 see also, Mission Australia, 2010; Pugh, 2009). In my ethnographic study the girls' constant references to their familial relationships and insights into their family lives reinforced the importance of families in their lives and for this thesis. This relationship was so significant that I regularly informed those who asked that while I was conducting a research project with 11 and 12 year old girls I was also undertaking a study into the role of families for the girls. With such rich data illuminating the influence of family in these girls' lives I have been afforded a unique opportunity to consider the ways family

practices continue to influence the tween girl as she negotiates a place to belong with her peers.

The discourse of 'families in crisis' underpins many accounts of the changing role of the family in the 21st century and suggests that 'for quite a lot of the middle and older generation, and even more for the younger generation, the landscape of family life has opened up and the ground has become unstable' (Bauman, 2005, pp. 14-15 see also, Bauman, 2007; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Yet at the same time the demise or decline of the family structure is being debated it is recognised that 'family life continues to be of importance to individuals, and families continue to provide love and support for family members (Morgan, 2011, p. 4 see also, Smart, 2007; Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2012). Increasingly theorists are being asked to employ new methodologies to consider 'everything that might matter to people in families, relationships and intimacies' for young people in the 21st century (Smart, 2007, p. 25 see also, Mission Australia, 2010; Wyn, Latnz & Harris, 2012). Gillies invites us to set aside our 'conceptual assumptions on the lives and experiences of young people and their families' and begin our analysis 'from the meanings that are generated by the family members themselves' (Gillies, 2000, p. 222). In the case of 11 to 12 year old girls I suggest there are three key assumptions that require investigation.

Firstly there are assumptions which invoke discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability and suggest that girls need to be protected by the significant adults in their lives. Secondly there are assumptions that the tween is driven by her desire to consume, intrinsically linking our understandings of the significance of her family to their financial capacity and engagement with consumer activities. Thirdly the significance of peers in

the life of the tween directs our limited scholarship to understanding the significance of belonging within friendship or peer groups rather than developing our knowledge of the role of her family. The framework of my ethnographic study has presented me with a unique opportunity to consider the significance of family through the eyes of an 11 or 12 year-old girl. By spending a year with the girls I have gained valuable insights into the girls' families and their significance to the everyday lives of the girls. My data also enables me to consider how families are responding to the influences of the consumer-media and new consumption practices in the lives of these tween aged girls. With this knowledge comes an opportunity to engage new frameworks to analyse and consider the girls' understandings of family. Concepts such as Morgan's 'family practices' (2011) and Pugh's 'economy of dignity' (2009) enabled me to consider how the girls' families and their own unique family practices inform and influence their desire to belong and their engagement with the consumer-media (Cook, 2004b; Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004; Seigel, Coffey & Livingston, 2004).

Understanding the significance of the tweens' 'family practices'

Rather than focus on the role of a mother, father, sibling or grandparent in their families the girls' insights and stories regularly outlined the practices they engaged in with these family members. Be it extra-curricular activities, holidays, outings, special events, extended family functions, ordinary, everyday activities such as mealtimes or watching TV together the girls regularly regaled me with stories of the activities they shared with their families. In order to explore the girls' insights and develop a framework to discuss these activities I have drawn on Morgan's concept, 'family practices' (Morgan, 2011, p. 3). In shifting the focus of exploring family life from 'what families are' to 'what families

do' Morgan enables me to see the girls' unique understandings of their family and to consider how families in the 21st century are supporting the individual members to undertake both individual and collective pursuits and activities. Morgan argues that 'family practices' enable us to consider the active role individuals take in families, and explore how 'individuals can … be seen as *doing* family' rather than being participants in a 'relatively static structure' (Morgan, 2011, p. 6 see also, Cook, 2004a; Finch, 2007; Pugh, 2009; Smart, 2007).

Morgan suggests that 'a whole set of what appears to be trivial or meaningless activities is given meaning through its being grouped together under one single label, that of family' (2011b, p. 6). Having the luxury of spending an entire school year with tween girls enabled me to develop a clearer understanding of what the girls believed was significant about their family. As Morgan suggests, it was often the ordinary, everyday actions which provided the greatest insight into the girls' 'family practices'. For example, a simple comment from Susan about watching old classic movies on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon enabled me to gain an insight into her special 'family practice'. Morgan argues that 'family practices' 'convey a sense of everyday life both in the sense of those life-events which are experienced by a significant proportion of any population (partnering, parenthood, sickness, bereavement) and, equally, in those activities which seem unremarkable, hardly worth talking about' (Morgan, 2011, p. 6). In this chapter, in line with my previous approach I focus on the activities that seemed to be unremarkable rather than the significant life events. While several of the girls experienced family bereavement and sickness throughout the year, it was more consistently the ordinary, everyday stories the girls shared with me that provided valuable insights into their 'family practices'.

My second key concept introduces a familiar framework but with a different focus as I consider the intrinsic connection between consumption, the role of family and the desire to belong for the tween (D. Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2004a, 2004b; Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011; Pugh, 2009). In this chapter I continue to utilise Pugh's conceptual framework, the economy of dignity as discussed in previous chapters. It is important to note that consumption in this context is not restricted to the purchase of goods, but includes how and when they are used, the activities and services that the girls and their families engage in and the places and locations they visit. As Martens, Southerton and Scott (2004a, p. 175) suggest, 'any investigation of the processes through which children consume and of the way that children experience and understanding practices of consumption cannot occur without a consideration of their parents' consumption orientations and of the influence of other adult and child actors with the networks that make up their daily life'. Yet much of the sociological, feminist and cultural studies scholarship with tween assumes the consuming role of family in their lives and does not directly explore the significance of this relationship. The data from my ethnographic study suggests that there are shortcomings in this approach as 'how children "learn" to consume, the life styles of their parents, the way that their parents reflexively engage with memories of their own childhood (or biography) and parental readings of material culture all lie at the heart of what can be understood as children's consumption' (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, p. 175).

The relationships between the tween's consumption activities and her families 'consumption orientations' are 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, Southerton & Scott, 2004, p. 164 see also, Pugh, 2009). 'It is

partly through their consumption practices that children build connections with the people around them' and for the tween her desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups is pivotal (D. Buckingham, 2011, p. 226). The negotiations regarding consumption that take place between parents, families and the tween girls involve complex layers of desire, understanding, memories, difference and cultural meanings that are being invoked by both parties (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004; Morgan, 2011; Pugh, 2009). In this chapter I introduce four key themes around the significance of families that evolved from the girls' discussions, focus groups and interviews during my ethnographic study.

My family

In my three focus groups exploring family the girls were invited to think about the people they consider to be a part of their families and to categorise these people into those they saw everyday, once a week, once a month and those they saw less regularly. This exercise was designed to offer an insight into the relationships the girls recognise as having the character of a "family" relationship' (Finch, 2007, p. 69). The questions about 'family I see every day' asked the girls to consider which were the closest family relationships in their lives and was relatively straightforward for the girls. The inclusion of pets was discussed in each of the three focus groups, *aren't your pets like family?* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August) and the girls all agreed they wanted to include them as family members.

The traditional family structure of Mum, Dad and siblings was common for the majority of the girls although Hayley and Rachel included their Grandmas as family members they

saw every day. Rachel also included her Uncle who lives with her. Two of the girls, Maddie and Georgie live with their Mums and Stepdads. In Maddie's case she has not seen her biological father since she was two and did not include him on her family sheet, while Georgie regularly sees her biological father; *every second weekend I see my Dad* (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 19th August). Lindi, Holly, Mollie, Erin and Georgie all have one younger sibling and Susan an older sister. Maddie and Alex are only children; Rachel has a half-brother who she sees on weekends. He goes to a different school and is rarely discussed during the year. Hayley has a brother and two sisters, all younger. Sally has three older sisters, Alison has two and Kate has an older brother and sister. The girls responded to the question of family members drawing on lines of 'biological connectedness and/or physical place' (Smart, 2007, p. 7).

While the girls were clear about naming their everyday family, defining family members they see once a week or less was more challenging as they struggled with the influence of distant relatives, extended families, divorce, separation and re-partnering on their family relationships; *my mum's mum, they split up so I only see my pop once a month or so* (Maddie, Focus Group 3, 19th August). Hayley and Rachel had the opposite problem as they included extended family members living in close proximity as everyday family members (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011). The ability to choose whether step-members of her family were actually a part of their family was pondered by Georgie in relation to her step-mother in the exercise or not, *would I?.., do I?.., even though I don't like her…* (Focus Group 2, 19th August). As Morgan suggests, 're-partnering may lead to a more weakly bounded set of family relationships' and this was evident in the girls' uncertainty about their connectedness. While Georgie's Step-mum is no doubt considered a member of her Dad's family, Morgan argues that 'family maps drawn by children may differ

considerably from those drawn or imagined by other family members' (Morgan, 2011, p. 84).

The proximity of extended family to the girls was apparent as they recorded family members they see once a week, once a month and less often. Eleven of the girls listed grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins as family they see once a week suggesting they live within close proximity to the girls. Georgie listed her Dad as a family member she sees weekly. His home in Cranbourne, 60 kilometres from Western Heights Primary, necessitates a level of mobility between 'homes' and different sets of family practices for Georgie (Morgan, 2011). Susan and Kate both listed their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins as family members they saw yearly rather than weekly or monthly, suggesting they live some distance away from the girls' homes. During the year I learnt that Susan's parents and Kate's Dad had emigrated from England and New Zealand respectively leaving extended family behind and impacting on the amount of time they were able to spend together.

The important role of grandparents in the lives of some of the girls was also evident. Some of the girls related tales of Grandparents spoiling them, w*hen I was little my Nan used to buy me like everything* (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 19th August). For others, Hayley and Rachel, their grandmothers play a significant role in the everyday practices of their families. Hayley's Grandmother lives next door and plays an important role in assisting the family's daily activities as well as providing a quiet retreat for Hayley away from the busyness of her siblings;

> *Next door, so we're kind of lucky, she's like the supermarket sometimes if we don't have stuff we go next door to her … we just go and get some. Yeah, it's the quietest*

> *place cause if I have really hard homework I go next door to my grandma cause I can sit at the table and do my work* (Hayley, Interview 15th June).

Grandparents were key for some of the girls as their parents juggled the demands of paid work and family life; families called on them to assist with care. The girls related tale of holidays and sick days spent with grandparents; *holidays; sometimes I have to go to my grandparents because both my parents work* (Alex, Focus Group 1, 23rd July).

The girls included their siblings as family members they saw every day. While parents were deemed to provide support and guidance, siblings were tolerated rather than embraced by the girls, regardless of whether they were older or younger. The age of the siblings influenced the type of practices that annoyed these tweens. For Susan, the physical challenges of sharing a bedroom with her older sister created problems;

> *Yeah, very annoying. Cause she 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, Interview, 16th June).

The girls with younger siblings were regularly commenting on how annoying or pesky they are, *mine's 50/50, he can be really cute and then he can be really agghh…..* (Lindi, Focus Group 3, 19th August 2009). While highlighting their siblings' shortcomings the girls were very aware of their position in the family in relation to these siblings. While many of the girls with younger siblings bemoaned their annoying actions and childish activities, Kate, the youngest of three siblings was able to reflect on how her position in her family placed her in a similar position as that being lamented by her friends; *we're*

the annoying little siblings, do you realise that?, she pointed out to Susan (Kate, Focus Group 3, 19th August).

The influence of family

After identifying their family members the girls were asked to think about how their families influenced them. While the girls use the term 'family' in their responses, it is more accurate to suggest they are referring to their parents' actions. The girls' responses tended towards broad statements as the everydayness of the regular family activities appeared to be taken for granted and were not often relayed in detail. The girls didn't appear to consider them as notable family practices. In the following response Sally managed to capture the breadth of everyday family practices that the girls may take for granted;

> *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, Focus Group 2, 19th August).

Sally was quite emotional throughout this statement, a detail picked up by Maddie who suggested, *you sound like you are going to cry* to Sally (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 19th August). Sally responded that she is *happy, cause if they didn't I wouldn't be here,* re-enforcing her appreciation of her family for the things they do.

The girls had their own subjective understandings of how different members of their family influenced them. In this section the girls' responses were taken from the focus

groups as well as an exercise on 'Who Influences Me' conducted by Mr G. The girls felt their families influenced them to be the type of person, who responds and cares for others and recognises the practices that are acceptable in our society;

> *My family influences me to care and be there for each other no matter what. I have fun with my family in England and Australia. Family is very important to me* (Susan, work sample July);

> *Family because they are always helping me make the right decisions* (Erin, work sample July);

When asked how the girls knew that their family was influencing them, Hayley suggested it was difficult to define but suggested;

> *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, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

There were moments of intimate detail about their 'family practices' from the girls in the focus groups. Hayley introduced the idea that her parents were concerned about her physical safety and took steps to ensure she knew how to respond if necessary;

> *Also taught by, you know, if someone's trying to kidnap you, you've just got to* (visual display of punching and kicking) *you've just got to punch them and kick them and stuff. My parents taught me that* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

Not surprising, in football mad Melbourne, the girls in Focus Group 3 talked about how their Dads had influenced them to barrack for a particular Australian Rules Football team;

> *Dad has influenced me to go for Collingwood and to absolutely hate Carlton* (Holly);
>
> *My Dad has influenced me to hate Collingwood and to love Melbourne* (Lindi) Focus Group 3, 19th August).

Throughout the year the girls' insights into their family actions, activities and experiences illuminated the similarities, differences and often inequalities between the girls' families. In line with Yates and McLeod's (2007, p. 23) approach, I 'deliberately did not survey' the girls or their family about information that was external to my study, such as class, education, ethnicity or economic status(Yates & McLeod, 2007). I wanted, like Yates and McLeod, to 'approach these matters in a more open way' and develop an understanding of how 11 and 12 year old girls perceived their family outside these more traditional demographic markers (Yates & McLeod, 2007, p. 23). By leaving the topic open I was able to pursue discussions with the girls about what family meant to them, 'in their own words' (Yates & McLeod, 2007, p. 23). This approach worked well as the girls shared with me, and each other, extensive insights into their 'family practices' through conversations, interviews and focus groups. As a result I have incorporated some demographic indicators throughout this thesis, but only when they have been initiated by the girls, and contribute to the meaning of a particular story or point. For example, Holly's insight into how all members of her family are expected to contribute, *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 provides me with an insight into how domestic chores are shared in her family (Focus Group 3, 19th August). In contrast, Lindi hints at the limited distribution of domestic chores in her family, *I can't believe they wrote a song about him* [her Dad], *called the boy does nothing* (Focus Group 3, 19th August). Within their stories I discovered that there are inherent connections between the ways they fashion their own sense of belonging in this space and the way each family practiced its own economy of dignity. While the girls drew on a variety of resources in their desire to belong, there were regularly overlaps with their parents' capacity to purchase or recognise the significance of specific products or services (Pugh, 2009, p. 24). While seeking to establish their own economy of dignity in this space it was often the families' 'social antennae' that enabled the girls to 'have something to say' and the greatest opportunity to fit in with their peers (Pugh, 2009, pp. 93-94). Parents who recognised the extrinsic meaning of specific consumer goods or services gave the girls the greatest opportunity to fit in with their peers (Pugh, 2009, pp. 93-94). Conversations with Holly revealed that her parents were hesitant in allowing her access to MSN. Aware though of Holly's desire to communicate with her friends through this medium, they allowed her to set up her own MSN account. They set up boundaries around her usages times and stipulated that they would be registered as friends on Holly's MSN page ensuring they could check its content at any stage.

Filtered through the eyes of an 11 or 12 year-old girl I discovered that embedded within their stories of 'family practices' are details of how they negotiate their desire to belong in their own social worlds. I was aware though that the girls were being asked to share information about their 'family practices' which they might not otherwise share with their friends and peers. My approach was to allow the focus groups to flow and respond to any

sensitive topics if necessary. In my ethnographic study the girls' class and ethnic status were not formally marked or defined. I was aware that the girls were all born in Australia, with families representing a limited range of cultural backgrounds. From the information I obtained from the girls they were almost all being raised in middle-class families with the majority of parents employed either full or part time. The focus groups were a chance for many of the girls to tentatively share a little about their 'family practices' and to see if any of the others shared the same experiences in their family. For Alex her recollection of enjoyable Christmas barbecues was a safe way for her to question whether her 'family practices' were replicated by her friends and their families;

> *Do you have barbecues for Christmas? Do all the people have barbecues, I'm guessing?* (Alex, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

The experience resonated for Erin who recalled, *yeah, sometimes Dad makes a lamb on the spit for us* (Focus Group 1, 19th August). For Alison though it was an alien concept, *What?, I don't do that* (Focus Group 1, 19th August). In contrast to the simplicity of Alex's question Hayley regaled us with stories of her 'family practices' of minding siblings, cleaning chores, allocation of household spaces and fitting her own activities around her family's schedule. She produced narratives of everyday family domestic activities which she needed to navigate before she was able to undertake her own activities;

> *Yeah I've been trying to do all the chores around the house cause I get to go to Sunbury, cause I made a friend there* (horse riding), (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

There were many insights from the girls into their own unique 'family practices' throughout the year but it was Hayley who regularly shared experiences such as the one above. Hayley's openness about her family practices revealed that she spent considerable amounts of her time at home undertaking domestic chores, minding siblings and looking after pets. While the majority of girls kept their rooms clean there were very few experiences of them undertaking the same level of chores as Hayley. I would argue that at some instinctive level the girls were aware that Hayley's 'family practices' were different from theirs and limited her ability to participate in other activities creating a level of social difference. I have deliberately chosen to use the term 'social difference' in this context. As discussed previously I made the decision not to ask the girls about their families' demographic indicators such as class, religion, ethnicity, location or financial capacity recording only information offered by them. As a result I don't directly categorise the girls' class or social position but there was evidence of differences between the girls' and their families and the term 'social difference' enables me to acknowledge these here.

An awareness of social difference appeared to be evident in the limited number of invitations Hayley received to participate in weekend, after school activities or birthday parties from the other girls. While Hayley was very open about her family practices in our discussions and Focus Groups she appeared to be less keen to invite others to her home. It is difficult to determine the reasons for these although there are a number of possibilities. Her family home being located outside the Western Heights Primary School area may have been a factor. With a large family it is also possible that her parents were reluctant to have other students to visit. Hayley's decision may have reflected her negotiations of belonging by limiting others knowledge of her family circumstances

which she may have understood as different from other girls. It is possible she felt ashamed about her family's practices and where they lived. She was very open throughout the year about the toughness of her family life with little evidence of sharing fun and laughter together, *my family can be seen* [in the show] *World's Strictest Parents* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August). While the majority of the girls in 6C participated in activities after school and on weekends, Hayley did not.

Yet it was often in exploring the girls' extra-curricular activities that their families' 'sensitivity to a child's need to belong' was most apparent (Pugh, 2009, p. 94). Hayley was desperate to play girls' soccer and regularly told me that her Mum was going to do something about it, yet the year went by and Hayley had to make do with her place on the edge of the school soccer pitch to satisfy her desire. It is difficult to tell whether Hayley's parents were unaware of the level of her desire to play or if their own 'family practices' and commitments made it difficult to allow Hayley to join a soccer team. The rest of the girls participated regularly in extra-curricular activities. Some, like Lindi and Kate, played or trained almost every night of the week, whereas others trained and played once a week. Their stories of games or training inevitably included comments and discussions about the others from Western Heights Primary School they played with. Their excitement at being a part of a team was palpable.

Pugh refers to this understanding as the families' '"social antennae," or the way they recognise or are 'oblivious to their children's yearnings'. Parents' 'experiences, characteristics, or family backgrounds influenced their capacity to be in tune with 'their children's desire to fit in'(Pugh, 2009, p. 93). For some of the girls, their participation in

sporting teams revealed their parents ability to support them as they furthered their friendships and connections at Western Heights Primary School. As Susan suggests,

> *Yep we are having it (netball) tonight and Holly always come to my place before it so we can just walk up* (Susan, Interview, 16th June).

The arrangements for Susan and Holly appeared to be entered into between their parents who were friends and arguably shared similar approaches to extra activities. The family's role in this arrangement is notable if we consider that the invitation for this after school arrangement was not extended to a third member of the team from 6C, Sally. While it could be argued that Sally was not part of Susan and Holly's friendship group there is evidence in this arrangement that the families are working within their own social milieu. In a similar fashion Kate's Mum took Susan, Holly and Kate home from the girls State Football Finals at Reservoir but didn't offer Mollie a lift despite her friendship with the girls (Reflections 12th August).

While I was able to observe negotiations of friendship supported by their families' social milieu throughout the year it is important to note that these relationships have developed over the girls' primary school years. My observations throughout the year suggest that their families' connections with others at Western Heights Primary School regularly affected the ways the girls negotiated their desire to find a place to belong with their peers in extra-curricular activities. As parents and families organised birthday parties, sleep overs, after school get-together, holidays and extra-curricular activities they influenced the practices and actions of the girls as they developed friendships or joined in groups which reflected their parents' connections. While the parents of these 11 and 12 year-old

girls appeared to work hard to ensure they understood and responded to the girls' desire to belong in their social worlds, this was not always the case.

My final story in this section elaborates on this and relates to Georgie and the annual school production; a very big event on the Year 6 calendar for all students. Georgie had been a part of all the class rehearsals, costume and makeup planning designs leading up to the evening performance. When I arrived 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 getting the students' 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. While Georgie didn't express outright disappointment at these events I found it impossible to overlook as I know how disappointed my own children would be if they missed their annual school production. Georgie was sufficiently close to her friendship group, Maddie and Sally, to ask if she could stay over but this did not appear to have taken place. At some level Georgie's Mum had missed the significance of belonging by taking part in this important event. She may have been 'busy or absent at work' or perhaps her own 'emotional biography' just did not recognise the 'social honor' reflected by the peer group of participating in this event (Pugh, 2009, pp. 93-94). Whatever her reasons it was Georgie who was left with no place to belong with her peers on this special day.

Increasing responsibility or tweens in waiting?

Having considered the ways the girls' families influence them I wanted to explore the differences they were experiencing in their family now that they were 11 or 12 years old. With the consumer-media Tween market identifying these girls as being in-between child and teenager I sought the girls' understandings of this intersection. I wanted to consider how the girls' position on the brink of secondary school and their teenage years influenced their parents' understandings and responses to their needs and desire to belong. I explored this in two focus groups; 'What's Good and What's Not about Being 11 or 12' and 'How your Family has Changed as you've Grown'.

Georgie reported that her family was becoming stricter, *yes my family has changed, as I grow they're getting stricter* (Focus Group 2, 19th August). Others, in contrast, reported their families as being more trusting, enabling them to do more on their own;

> *cause you're getting older now and they sort of have to trust you and when they do they let you do stuff* (Erin, Focus Group 1, 19th October);
>
> *being old enough to do stuff that you weren't old enough to do when you were younger* (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 5th August);
>
> *they've changed a little, they respect me a lot more, they trust me to do more things, like walk the dog, things like that* (Sally, Focus Group 3, 19th August);

Sally reflected on her own position in her parents' decision to allow her more freedom;

Well because when I was younger I sort of had boundaries and I wouldn't have too much freedom cause they might not be able to trust me, so they changed a bit. And I've got older so I've changed as well (Focus Group 2, 19th August).

Being older and more trusted by their parents came with additional expectations and responsibilities of the girls; chores or looking after younger siblings! Neither were a favourite with the girls, *Oh yeah, well they're harder on me with rules and, what's the other thing, oh yeah, yeah they make me do chores now* (Kate, Focus Group 3, 19th August). The girls reported many activities or items that they wanted to do or have but were restricted by their parents;

Two and a Half Men, I'm not allowed to watch them (Holly, Focus Group 3, 5th August);

Can you believe it, I don't have a laptop, a mobile phone, an iPod or anything like that (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

I've never been out before by myself, I'm not allowed to (Alex, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

I want to go to bed later, I always have to go to bed at 8.30 (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 19th August).

The girls were very open about their level of frustrations as their parents continued to keep a rein on their activities. Kate's reflections summed up the girls' arguments;

You know what's weird, like this year we're not old enough to travel to places like Highpoint [a local shopping centre] *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, Focus Group 3, 5th August).

The girls thought their parents' decisions were restrictive, limiting their ability to remain connected with their friends. The girls' understanding of being in-waiting was re-enforced in many instances by their parents as they declined permission for many of the items or activities for the girls, asking them to wait until next year. The girls wanted mobile phones, to access MSN or Facebook and to go out shopping, to the movies and other outings with their friends. While several of the girls had a mobile phone and access to MSN, for others permission was withheld by their parents. The decision for parents is likely to be multifaceted, restricted on a limited needs basis, a family value judgment, interpretation of cultural capital, or due to financial considerations. As Pugh (2009, p. 152) reports;

> Most often, as we have seen, parents refuse to satisfy their children's desires due to resource constraints or as part of practices of symbolic deprivation. Parents do not normally sacrifice their children's social lives for this principle, however, and the occasions on which my informants heard about their children's social suffering and still held out were few indeed.

The girls' parents may have had a 'competing cultural idea, or frame, that enables them to withstand' their constant requests (Pugh, 2009, p. 154). It could also be argued that the girls' parents were reflecting the difficulties faced by many with social commentary fiercely debating the necessity of mobile-phones, access to Facebook and other social media for this age group. Regardless of their parents' reasons the girls of 6C knew that

their transition to Secondary School next year would most likely enable them to access many of the activities or items they were being asked to wait for now;

> *Phones, you'd be able to go out more maybe. You get more trust. Cause you can go to the movies and you don't have to have someone watch over you* (Focus Group 2, 5th August);

> *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 but, until my birthday, and I get a phone* (Hayley, Focus Group 3, 19th August).

In contrast, Mollie is happy that she persevered with her parents, *I just kept asking my Mum and Dad and they gave me one* [a mobile phone]. *It works* (Focus Group 3, 5th August). It was clear from my discussions with the girls that their parents' refusal to allow them access to a mobile phone, MSN, Facebook or shopping and movie expeditions contributed to their understandings of being 'in waiting', or being in-between something, *I'm in-between* (Holly, Focus Group 3, 5th August) and *Yeah in-between* (Mollie, Focus Group 3, 5th August). While Pugh argues that the prospect that the girls may feel, "different from other kids" often animated many parents' buying practices,' there were a range of different motivations which may have 'combined to create parents' relative sensitivity to their child's belonging, leading to which desires parents could ignore and which they could not' (Pugh, 2009, p. 9).

Family leisure activities: intrinsic links to consumption

> *I like shopping because the money's being spent on me you know* (Kate, Focus Group 3, 5th August).

The girls' interest in consumption activities was evident throughout the year as their desire for mobile phones, laptops, iPods and access to social media sites was regularly discussed. Shopping was a very regular leisure activity for the girls particularly with their families and I will discuss this shortly. Shopping wasn't their only family activity though and the girls reported many low-key, but obviously memorable, occasions which were not associated with consumption;

> *We took Max and Bonnie* (dogs) *for a walk yesterday* (Mollie, Interview 15th June)*;*

> *My Dad had his car and he was waxing it, and we went to the carwash cause we wash it our self and we had to wash a water hose and we were spraying it all over the car* (Sally, Interview 15th June).

Not surprisingly, with families 'spending more time in the home, rather than less' many of the girls' leisure activities took place at home with other family members (D. Buckingham, 2011, p. 148). These activities suggested an element of connectedness and belonging between family members and it appeared the intent was to spend time together. Maddie enjoyed hanging out at home or her Step-Dad's workshop, Sally played board games with her sisters and Saturday morning is another school day for Alison and Alex as they attend regular Greek school sessions on a Saturday morning. At some level

though, many of these activities required a level of consumption as the medium being used is a consumer item or activity;

> *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, Interview, 16th June);

> *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 god brother and god sister's house. And we played Singstar* (Alex, Interview 15th June);

> *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, Focus Group 2, 5th August);*

Consumption as experienced in these activities is linked closely to the leisure time the girls spend with their parents and family. Engagement with consumption practices in these instances, I would argue, is not the focus of public debates questioning the tween girls' ability to exhibit agency in her decision making but offers insights into the ways Australian families are sharing time together and the complex role of consuming practices.

In contrast, Hayley's family time often related to chores and minding siblings. As a result she often found it difficult to recognise the benefits of time with her family. Rather she focused on their expectations of her and the assistance around the home that she struggled with,

I actually don't know how I have fun with them. I'm definitely not going to say I have fun with them cleaning, cause I don't (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

As well as shared activities many of the girls spent periods of their home time on the computer. While the girls are not actively engaged with their other family members during this time, they reflected on this as shared family time by virtue of being in the same space at the same time. For others,

Sometimes I play on my Nintendo and that, the computer. But yeah shopping's mostly the thing we do (Alex, Interview 16th June);

I like going on the computer. MSN, I talk to my friends and I also do web cam, I can see them if they've got a web cam. And you can play games with each other but I don't like doing that (Alison, Interview 16th June).

As Lindsay and Maher (2013, p. 31) observed, 'weekends were crucial in family life, especially as children got older'. For these 11 and 12 year old girls, with working parents and their own busy weekly schedules, their family time often occurs on Saturday and Sunday. Activities undertaken on weekends include;

Saturday I went out to the Movies. Night at the Museum 2, it's a good movie but I wanted to watch Land of the Lost and we (siblings) *had to flip a coin* (Hayley, Interview 15th June);

Just had, went out, for dinner with my Mum and Dad and my sister (for my birthday) (Mollie, Interview 15th June);

> *Well on Saturday I usually go to church so I don't really do anything. On Sunday we don't really do much so that's my sleeping in day* (Erin, Interview 16th June).

While the girls' sporting and extra-curricular schedules took up considerable amounts of time they were important leisure experiences for the girls and their families. These activities are not so obviously consumables, but resemble a consumer choice for the girls and their families as they enhance the girls' learning or leisure time and encourage active practices. Many of the girls were engaged in basketball, netball and gymnastics, with games, practices and transport taking up a lot of their family time after school and on weekends. Lindi's schedule was extensive;

> *Well normally I'd play basketball on a Saturday morning, for Western Heights Primary. And then on Sunday morning I usually have training at 8 o'clock for Altona Gaters. And it depends sometimes I go to the footy with my Dad and my brother on Sunday when we play, when Melbourne play. And yeah that's pretty much it. I played basketball on Friday night too. And then on Monday I sometimes train, that's like an extra thing, then on Tuesday I train, Wednesday I train, Thursday my brother trains and then Friday I play* (Lindi, Interview 23rd June).

While the girls were the active participants in these activities they also appeared to be an extension of the family's leisure activities and an important opportunity for direct engagement in the girls' lives. This is yet another example, arguably, of parents recognising the value of the girls 'emotional connection to others' through sport or other extra-curricular activities (Pugh, 2009, p. 93).

While the girls' extra-curricular activities were important, 'holiday times [too] are important family times. Yet, the meaning and purpose of family holidays are variable and complex' (Lindsay & Maher, 2013, p. 32). For these 11 and 12 year-old girls holidays were an important part of their family leisure activity. The destination, length, cost and available activities at their holiday destinations differed greatly and introduced a further layer of social difference between the girls. Many of the girls spent their school holiday periods at home, catching up with friends, sleeping in, taking a break from their busy extra-curricular activities and enjoying different leisure time. Such holidays were not always enjoyable, as Hayley found the expectations of her family during these periods a little underwhelming; *Holidays can be boring, when you've got nothing to do. Especially when you've got three brothers and sisters* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 23rd July).

Several of the girls travelled overseas during the year. Rachel and Lindi's families went to Fiji for a relaxing beach-side holiday during the third term holidays although Lindi missed a week of school as her parents extended her term break to make the most of their holiday together. While Rachel's and Lindi's holidays overlapped for some of their stay they did not spend time together, an activity which may have occurred if some of the other girls and their families who were more socially connected had been travelling at the same time. Kate's and Susan's families had overseas trips planned to visit extended family in New Zealand and England respectively. The girls talked regularly about their holidays, the focus was on their visit to family though rather than on expensive travel and tourist activities. Their other school holidays were spent at home as time and finances were accrued for their holiday;

> I have a quick chat to Susan about her trip to the UK. She says she had a good time. I asked her whether it was the best time or a good time and her response was *a very good time.* Smiling she ran off to join her friends (Field Notes 7th May).

Unfortunately for Susan, her family holiday coincided with the Annual Grade Six camp and she was unable to attend her final primary school camp. Her disappointment was palpable and her friends missed her;

> *I was going to go when we were going to the other place, Rosie's camp. Except for the bush fires and I could have gone but they changed it and I couldn't go. I would have liked to do the giant swing and the horse riding would have been fun* (Susan, Interview 16th June).

Other girls spent their holidays within Victoria, on the Peninsula, up on the Murray River, down on the Surf Coast and in Yarrawonga. Camping was the accommodation of choice for many of the girls' families. Erin's family owns a holiday house at Dromana and she often spent her holidays there with her family. Sharing stories of their family holidays the girls entertained us with the intricacies of sharing tents, hotels and other spaces with their families. For some, Hayley in particular, a holiday was something she longed for and this was expressed openly in focus groups. Hayley's family had camped over the summer holidays so her family did take holidays. I suggest though that Hayley's desire is for a particular type of holiday, a type not taken by her family. The stories the other girls shared about their family holidays, highlights a level of social belonging and resources not afforded to her by her family. She was lucky enough though to be invited for a weekend away during the year. Hayley's excitement was tangible;

> Hayley and Pippi bounce past me. They are excited but not about school, me or the holidays. 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 to Phillip Island this weekend and they are both very excited. Hayley is particularly glowing, as she tells me she's never been to Phillip Island before but I suspect that glow comes more from being asked and given the opportunity rather than the destination (Field Notes/Reflections 26th October).

While I have left shopping to last, it played a significant role in the girls' family leisure activities. The girls often related stories of weekends at shopping centres when asked what they got up to. For Alex, it was a regular family outing and she describes her emotional engagement; *the excitement builds inside me* with the activity. Alex says of her Mum and Dad, *they always buy. But sometimes I have to wait* [for something] *then I don't want it* (Field Notes, 26th May). While Alex went shopping weekly there were special occasions throughout the year that warranted a special family outing;

> *Well on Friday I went to DFO* (Direct Factory Outlet), *I just kind of had a look around and things and yeah, on Saturday we went to Highpoint so that I could spend my birthday money* (Mollie);
>
> *That's right; it was your birthday, Happy Birthday* (Interviewer);
>
> *Thank you and I watched my sister play netball cause I had a bye and yeah, that's pretty much it* (Mollie);
>
> *Yep so DFO, which DFO did you go to?* (Interviewer);

> *We (Family) went to the one 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 because I had birthday money to spend* (Mollie Interview 15th June).

Not surprisingly shopping was considered a much more enjoyable event when items were being purchased for the girls, rather than other family members, *I like it when I get to go and get all the things that I like* (Alison, Focus Group 2, 23rd July). The girls talked openly about their favourite shopping centre, *Highpoint, Docklands, Altona Gate, Werribee Plaza,* all large shopping centres located in Melbourne's Western suburbs. The girls were very familiar with specific brands and outlets, *Supré, DK, Rip Curl and JJ's.* The girls' shopping locations and favourite stores or brands were located in close proximity to their homes. In contrast to the independent, cashed up commercial persona suggested by the consumer-media's Tween the tween girls in my study went shopping with their families or family members, reliant on family income and advice as to which consumer goods or services they purchased. The image of the tween shopping with her parents, or other family, contrasts with the popular culture picture of groups of 'shop till you drop' tweens. While shopping was a favourite leisure activity for the girls and their families it was only Hayley who questioned the capacity of her family to engage in consumer activities or to purchase the items she and other members of her family wanted;

> *Maybe because families are busy now, especially if you have other siblings. Like you have to go, to get more money and yeah* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

The insights into her 'family practices' Hayley has offered throughout the year mark her family's difference and her own awareness of it.

The value of our family practices

In this chapter I have explored how Australian families continue to influence and support the lives of the 11 and 12 year-old girls in my study. With limited scholarship considering the influence of girls' families I have introduced new conceptual approaches to illuminate four key issues that the girls discussed throughout my year-long ethnography. Pugh's concept the *economy of dignity* continues to provide the main conceptual framework for my discussions and I have introduced Morgan's concept of 'family practices' to consider 'what families do' as a way to understand the influence they have over these girls. It was often in the girls' stories of their ordinary, everyday family practices that I gained the greatest insight into the ways their families influenced them. The relationship between the consumer-media and the girls' family leisure activities is also discussed as I consider how consumption practices are integral to these 11 and 12 year-old girls' desire to belong.

Pugh's argument that the family's economy of dignity influences the ways the girls fashion their own place to belong has framed my analysis of the girls' insights. Pugh argues that a family's social milieu, their familiar social environment, contributes to how the girls achieve their desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups. She suggests that the families' social antennae equips the girls with the understanding of particular practices as well as the value of different products, services or commodified experiences giving them 'something to say, or not' in their own social worlds. Pugh argues that it is through their 'social antennae' that parents are able to comprehend the meaning of the girls' desires. The significance of consumer products and services to this process is evident in the girls' desires and in their frustrations. The girls' frustrations at their families' inability to recognise the cultural value of their wants and desires was

palpable. While many of their desires were related to consumer products, such as mobile phone and access to MSN and Facebook, the girls were equally keen to establish new levels of responsibilities and freedom. The girls' shopping activities were generally undertaken with family members, and this formed an important part of their leisure activities, they were keen to begin shopping alone with their friends. The differences between the girls' desires and their parents understanding of the value of certain products and freedoms to the girls' negotiations of belonging made a significant contribution to their understandings that they were located in an ambiguous space in-between their childhood and teenage years. Yet, despite their disappointment, the girls were very aware of how supportive their families are and recognise that the lives they lead, the activities they undertake and the opportunities offered to them would not be possible without their family. As Sally suggests, *the best place to be is with your friends or family* (Focus Group 2 5th August 2009). It is the influence of friends I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Friends: Because I don't like being alone

Introduction

> *Cause I've been here since Prep, I've made a lot of friends, when they stay* (at Western Heights Primary). *I've got time to play with them. I was playing with my friend from last year* (today) *and 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, Interview 15th June).

In this short passage Sally shows us the centrality of friendship to the school life of an 11 or 12 year old Australian girl. Her final statement offers a glimpse of the anxiety ridden negotiations and considerations of friendships and the girls' efforts to achieve a place to belong in this primary school space. The value of friends to young girls such as Sally is widely recognised in academic scholarship (Carter, 2005; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Durham, 1998; Hamilton, 2008; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Pratt & George, 2005; Reay, 2001; Robinson & Davies, 2010). Many studies with 11 and 12 year olds, still in their primary school years, have been undertaken within psychological, educational and development frameworks. Hey reflects that such studies are often limited to exploring the concept of popularity within a developmental framework in the girls' social environment (1997, p. 10). In addition, there is a tendency 'to oversimplify how young children' negotiate their friendships within their own social worlds (George, 2007,

p. 5). George argues that 'adult views and understandings' are often presumed to represent children's friendship desires and negotiations and there has been limited sociological scholarship considering girls' friendships (2007, p. 5 see also, Hey, 1997; Pratt & George, 2005; Reay, 2001). My aim in this chapter is to consider the significance of friendships, both female and male, to the girls as they pursue and negotiate their desire to belong within this important social world.

Research exploring the nuances and complexities of friendships with this age group is slowly being developed. Recent studies in primary schools around the globe focus on popular discourses of friendship and identity issues such as bullying, cyber-bullying, inclusion and exclusion in the school environment and external contexts (Devine & Kelly, 2006; George, 2007; George & Browne, 2000; Hey, 1997; Maher, 2008; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). Evidence of the girls' understandings of popular discourse and accepted norms are exhibited in their negotiations and active engagement with issues of gender and practices of femininity (Kehily, 2012, p. 176 see also, Allan, 2009; McLeod, 2002; Paechter, 2012; Reay, 2001; Renold & Ringrose, 2008). Popular discourses of early sexualisation and consumption activities of the tween are also being considered in primary schools across the globe (Cody, 2012; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Kehily, 2012; Russell & Tyler, 2005; Rysst, 2010; Vares et al., 2011a). With important exceptions few of these studies consider the ordinariness and everydayness of negotiating friendships or the girls' desire to belong within their friendship and peer groups. Existing studies do however present findings that reveal the amount of time and 'emotional energy' the girls invest in their friendship negotiations. These studies reveal valuable insights into the considerable 'pain and anguish' girls' experience in friendship negotiations, and the

length of time they carry their distress ‘when things go wrong’ (George, 2007, p. 12 see also, Hey, 1997).

George’s research exploring friendship groups of pre-adolescent girls’ offers a useful framework for my exploration of friendships with Australian 11 and 12 year old girls (George, 2007, p. 4). Like George (2007), I explore how girls understand and negotiate their friendships within the context of a primary school environment. In my exploration I ‘consider the meanings that the girls attach to the intimate behaviour and social experiences that are important in their lives’ (George, 2007, p. 4). I examine the often contemplated question, ‘will you be my friend?’ (Hey, 1997, p. 2). My research differs from previous studies by placing the girls’ desire to belong as the focal point of my analysis and the key component of their negotiations of friendship. The girls’ desire to belong within their peer and friendship groups is illuminated throughout this thesis as I consider how they work out the value of belonging to specific groups or with other students. Expanding my initial analysis of friendship negotiations in the girls’ ordinary, everyday practices in Chapter Four, I draw on the girls’ voices to illuminate the energy and effort the girls expend to achieve a sense of belonging within this complex, interactive space. The relevance of their school, Western Heights Primary School, and their local community is considered as the girls reveal the significance of these places in their endeavour to negotiate a place to belong.

I begin my exploration with a discussion of the importance these girls place on friendships in the school environment and introduce the attributes they look for in a friend. The functionality of the three girls’ friendship groups in 6C is discussed as I consider how the practices of each group impacts on the cohesiveness of the others. This section will be

followed by a discussion of the difficulties presented to them, and the different options available to the girls when friendships break down in this space. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion about the presence of boys in the girls' friendship circles. They are included here because the boys in 6C were identified by the girls as possible, and sometimes sought after, friendship options (Rose, 2007). So while boys weren't the subjects of this project, and there has been limited research into cross-gender friendships in primary schools, it would be difficult to represent the primary school environment for the girls in this study without acknowledging the presence of the boys (Reay, 2001, p. 156 see also, Kehily, 2002b; McLeod, 2002; Rose, 2007; Swain, 2005).

The Importance of Friends

As discussed previously, I have adopted Pugh's concept, *the economy of dignity,* to provide a framework in this thesis to understand how tweens contest the terms of their belonging their own social worlds and negotiate a way to participate in their own social worlds. While Pugh's concept is based on consumption and material items or services she recognises that 'children navigate their economy of dignity with what they are given' and the tweens in my study allocate important meaning to others' practices and actions, as well as to material items. The girls use questions, interpretation, reflections and analysis to work out the terms of their belonging (2009, p. 214). Pugh's concept allows acknowledgement of the girls' intense focus on their unique social worlds but recognises as do others that their meaning making is 'simultaneously global and local' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 18). While the term *economy* is intrinsically linked to 'the realm of material life' Pugh argues that her concept, *economy of dignity,* extends beyond consumer goods and services, thus enabling me to apply it beyond the girls' consumption activities;

> Children's social worlds are the shared ground for symbolic life, where cultural meaning is made, and the tenets of dignity established. Each such social world features its own economy of dignity, most closely resembling a black-market economy, one children conduct on the margins of an order established by adults, its features often reflecting the negative space where adult rules are not felt. These economies have their own scrip, or meaningful tokens, their own norms about managing children's conversations, and their own processes of negotiating value (Pugh, 2009, p. 52).

Understanding the value of the tokens or norms and rules in their social worlds is akin to recognising that objects, experiences or practices hold specific meaning in different contexts. Armed with an understanding of the value of tokens, norms and rules the girls are able to create a scrip which enables them to participate in their different social worlds (Pugh, 2009). Goffman contends that it is the individual's responsibility to understand the rules or norms of their 'social encounters' and the desire to abide by them (Goffman, 1967, p. 13 see also, Finch, 2007; Pugh, 2009). The girls in my ethnography understand that there are 'rules which govern' the process of making friends or gaining membership to particular groups in the primary school environment' (George, 2007, p. xvii). They recognise that there may be contrasting practices for different groups and are aware of the need to assess these before participating.

Existing sociological research on friendship with children and teenagers 'suggests that friends are pivotal in engendering a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity' (George, 2007, p. 57). McLeod's and Yates' study (2002, p. 216) with 12 to 18 year old Australians reports 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 findings of my study would suggest that primary school aged girls are equally pre-occupied by their friendships. For many children, making friends at school is often the first experience they have of negotiating and dealing with friendships 'outside the family' as they move 'away from unconditional love to a complex social setting in which affection, approval, affirmation have to be negotiated' (George, 2007, p. 1 see also, Pratt & George, 2005). For many girls, as discussed in Chapter Five, their 'family practices' remain significant as they continue to provide them with a reference for their actions. Their family practices support them as they negotiate a place for themselves with their peers in the primary school environment.

The links between friendship and family are tangible for the 11 and 12 year old girls in my ethnography as they reflect on the importance of their friends both during and outside school. While only 11 or 12 years old, they have been negotiating friendships in a school environment for seven years and they recognise that 'friendship is a central part of their experience of being at school' (Sargeant, 2010, p. 216). It is important to note that friendships and peer relationships in Australian primary schools differ from the secondary years as they tend to centre on an individual class, as children of this age spend the majority of their school time with their immediate classmates. The 'intensity of the peer relationship' is fashioned around the relatively 'contained setting of the classroom base' and the class moves as a unit to other specialist classes (George, 2007; Pratt & George, 2005). The differences between primary and secondary schools in Australia, and other developed Western nations, and the age of tween girls makes it difficult to directly transpose findings from secondary to primary school.

The ‘making’ and ‘breaking’ ‘of friendships for primary school aged girls may be considered by educators to be ‘an inevitable and almost a ‘natural’ routine part of their daily classroom experiences’ (George, 2007, p. 4). Yet the girls engage in ‘complex processes’ and expend considerable time and effort in ensuring the presence of friends at all times. While young girls feel that the friendship group offers them something positive, they find the experience of exclusion distressing and debilitating. George found this ‘duality was lived out even more painfully by the girls who found themselves on the periphery of the friendship group’ (George, 2007, p. 1 see also, Hey, 1997; Pratt & George, 2005). Status and power was directly related to the social positioning of the individual members within each friendship group. George (2007) distinguishes the members of her friendship groups as Leader, Inner Circle and Periphery members. Similarly Renold and Ringrose (2008, pp. 323-324) define different friendship groups, adopting the term ‘top-girls’ to describe a popular, close-knit friendship group in contrast to their ‘spice-girls’, in their study ‘an ethnically diverse, ‘working-class’ group of girls. In both studies individuals who were most closely aligned to the leaders were more popular and the girls had a strong sense of what constituted a good leader and friend.

Svahn and Evaldsson argue that social exclusion for girls is often situated within the ‘flow of intricate, subtle and seemingly innocent everyday peer group interactions’ (2011, p. 505). Much like the ordinary, everyday practices discussed in Chapter Four these subtle interactions – verbal, wordplay, demeanour, appeals to join in - take place in the girls’ daily activities and actions and can include discussions and actions in ‘sensitive areas such as bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment, boyfriends and girlfriends, as well as emotive talk about schoolwork, play friendships, music, popular culture, fashion and appearance’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 321 see also, George, 2007; Hey, 1997;

Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). So strong was the desire to belong with their peers that George reports some of the girls in her study 'avoided being alone at all costs, including remaining in damaged relationships' (2007, p. 75). After they entered the school environment they cannot participate in this social world 'until they make friends' (B. Davies, 1982, p. 60). George even suggests that 'children may enter into a complex set of strategies in order to secure friendship, not because of the love of a particular individual, but for the purpose of engaging in the functions of friendship' (George, 2007, p. 60). While children's friendships arguably stem from liking each other, Davies suggests that children view 'being with someone, as the first and basic element of friendships' (B. Davies, 1982, p. 68). She suggests that children associate with each other first and grow to like the people they 'associate with because [they] associate with them, rather than because they are intrinsically likeable' (B. Davies, 1982, p. 68).

Hey argues that 'what appears to be at stake in these detailed (and apparently trivial) social dramas of intimacy are deeper meanings about belonging and striving for power and social prestige involving inevitable tensions over those girls deemed most popular' or desirable as friends (1997, p. 62). It is this desire for power, and the perceived actions of girls seeking to achieve this status, that has resulted in terms such as 'bitchy', 'catty', 'mean girls', 'slutty' and 'tarty' being assigned to young girls who actively pursue friendships in a manner deemed to be inappropriate and often confrontational (Allan, 2009; Reay, 2001). These labels, or assumptions about the malicious intent of the girls, focus our considerations and discussions about the ways friendships are desired and negotiated within more traditional psychological frameworks (Cooke, 2007; George, 2007; Waters, 2004; Wiseman, 2009a). While I acknowledge the importance of these

frameworks in my study, the girls' conversations, practices and actions illuminate different and more localised social and cultural nuances as they negotiate a place for themselves to belong in this space. The benefits of, and anxiety caused by, friends was a regular topic of conversation during my year-long study, in focus groups and interviews as well as in informal conversations and observations.

Importantly though, I was not observing the bitchy, catty or malicious practices of girls often reported in psychological findings for secondary school aged girls and adapted for this younger age group (Brooks, 2008; George, 2007; Lamb & Brown, 2006). Understandings of friendship for this age group tend to explore issues of friendship that are not working, such as bullying, bitchyness or exclusion (George, 2007); such psychological or developmental understandings that tend to position tween girls as 'malleable beings, susceptible to influence, who must therefore be protected' (Cook, 2004a, p. 149) were not a key focus in my study. Being witness to the everyday time, energy and emotion the girls expended as they worked to negotiate a place they could belong in this intense, interactive space I was encouraged to explore the complex and shifting rules of engagement that shape the dynamics of belonging for this group of girls. In this focus on desires and negotiations, it is my intention in this chapter to make a contribution to growing understandings of the significance of friends and belonging for 11 and 12 year girls. After all, friendship, regardless of the energy and time expended, remains a significant motivator to come to school for many of these girls;

> *like you wouldn't really feel like going to school cause you've got nothing* [friends] *to look forward to* (Mollie, Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

‘Yeah, it’s just she’s nice and friendly and, … yeah’

The importance of friends was evident for all the girls and they were able to articulate the attributes they desired in a friend. The girls felt that *they sort of just make you feel like you want to be hung around with,* others suggested that friendship *makes you feel sort of special* and *confident,* or *happy* and included as, *they make me feel more welcomed and not as shy.* For some it was the sharing of activities that made a friend, *we all liked the same things* or the ability to laugh together as, *we like to be fun and funny and entertaining.* As Mollie suggests*;*

> *I don’t know, they’re just really nice and friendly and easy to get along with. She’s (Hayley) just funny and yeah it’s just she’s nice and friendly and yeah* (Mollie, Interview, 15th June).

Susan described her need for friends as essential to her well-being, almost as much as her family, but not quite. She acknowledged there were differences;

> *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, cause they’re like you and families are more like love and yeah that’s the difference* (Susan, Interview, 16th June).

The girls’ descriptions support the argument that ‘friendships were emotionally important’ for them as ‘positive aspects of friendships were frequently described in relation’ to their feelings rather than identified through the games or activities they shared

together (George & Browne, 2000, p. 296). They talked about how their friends made them feel and used emotional concepts as they described what a friend meant to them;

> *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, Interview, 16th June);

> *I just enjoy hanging around with them cause they, cause we all include each other and because we also have lots of fun. Just talking and playing games and stuff like that* (Erin Interview, 16th June).

The girls stressed that being funny and making each other laugh, being 'nice and friendly', talking a lot and keeping secrets from others, was what they liked about their friends or what they think is special about them. The girls recognised that there were two sides to each friendship, identifying their own agency in the negotiations. They expressed a desire for their friends to be honest and trustworthy;

> *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, Interview, 15th June);

> *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 Interview, 23rd June).

The girls clearly identified key practices that they found most important in their desired friendship or peer groups. Although the immediate issue of belonging within the classroom dictated that friendships within 6C were prioritised, the girls had long-standing friendship histories, with other Year 6 students as well as the wider school community.

The girls recalled many of their previous friendship negotiations, including current friendships that had not been workable in earlier year levels;

> *I've known Alex and Sally since, oh Alex since Prep and Sally since Kindergarten, but in Prep and stuff me and Sally didn't really play with each other* (Alison, Interview 16th June);

> *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, Interview, 22nd June),

Of the thirteen girls in the study, ten had been at Western Heights Primary School since Prep, giving them seven years of understanding and knowledge to draw on as they negotiated their friendships in Year 6. The three girls who arrived at Western Heights Primary School in Year 5 had to interpret the social norms and nuances of a group of girls who may not have always been friends but had known each other since Prep. With many established friendships in 6C it was difficult for the new arrivals to find a space for themselves. They were at a further disadvantage because many of the 6C girls shared extra-curricular activities out of school hours, increasing their contact with their friends and peers. With the majority of these activities clustered around the school and girls' local neighbourhoods it was not uncommon for them to play in the same competitions, learn to swim together or undertake their Catholic Holy Communion classes together. In some instances it was the girls' shared extra-curricular activities which resulted in the formation of friendships which then transferred to school. The close-knit community surrounding Western Heights Primary School and the girls' proximity to the school

contributed to these additional interactions. These will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

‘You don’t need a best friend to be happy …yeah but you need friends’

While the girls’ positive reflections revealed the importance of their friends it is perhaps their responses to the question of how they would feel if they didn’t have friends at school that revealed the true significance of belonging with friends and in friendship groups. The girls said it would be unpleasant to attend school without friends and used terms such as loneliness or sadness to describe the extent of their feelings;

> *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, Focus Group 22, 2nd September);
>
> *Well mostly I would feel really sad if I didn’t have anyone to play with* (Holly, Interview 22nd June);
>
> *Cause then you don’t get really, really lonely* (Maddie, Interview, 23rd June).

While the girls again found it easier to articulate their responses through feelings, several of the girls reported that the absence of friends at school would make them change their practices;

> *Yes it’s important cause you might lost your self-confidence if there’s no-one to play with* (Susan, Interview, 16th June);

Yes I suppose you'd get a bit depressed and not concentrate and stuff (Sally, Interview, 16th June).

Several of the girls articulated the difficulties they would face achieving their desire to belong or feel connected to Western Heights Primary School without the presence of friends;

I would feel like I didn't belong at the school (Holly, Focus Group 3, 2nd September);

I'd probably move [schools] (Kate, Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

The desire to belong was overwhelming and some of the girls suggested they would beg their parents to change schools and if their parents didn't respond they would;

feel depressed every day and then she'd (Mum) say to me, 'okay you can move' (Holly, Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

While friendships are vital to the girls' sense of belonging at Western Heights Primary school, as Mollie suggests, *you don't need a best friend to be happy* (Focus Group 2, 2nd September). Mollie highlights here the differing values that are placed on particular friends or groups by the girls. The value of the relationship is a reflection of the girls' desire to belong with this group, assigning their own unique social value to particular friendships;

Well I don't mean to be rude or anything, I know of like people who are more popular with people because then you can tell if they're nice with them and things like that. So that's how they're like more popular. Like say if I walked into the

classroom to see if or who can be my friend I'd probably look at Lindi, Holly, Pippi and Hayley cause you can tell that they're more the outgoing type of people (Sally, Focus Group 2, 2nd September 9).

While Sally suggests being outgoing, or popular, was something that girls would aspire to as it meant they had more friends or friendship options this assessment was not echoed by the other girls. In contrast the girls in Group One linked the idea of popularity with being fake or superficial, or suggested that these 'type' of people changed themselves to impress others;

If they weren't good people then they would go play with the plastic people (Holly);

Because they try to be something that they're not (Lindi);

And all they care about is their looks (Kate);

Because 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);

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

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

I mean that, I mean they change completely who they are and then the next year they change again to be more popular (Holly), (Focus Group 3, 2nd September);

You're not meant to make people like you for who you are trying to be (Holly, Focus Group 1, 13th October).

Holly's reference to the 'plastic people' highlights her group's dislike of girls, or boys, they believe are attempting to be something they aren't to impress and gain status with the other students at Western Heights Primary School. *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, Focus Group 1, 13th October). This is also an example of the girls' understanding of how different norms and practices enable individuals to participate in particular groups. Holly and her friends clearly identified a difference between those students who wanted to be part of the 'popular group' at school as opposed to others, like themselves, who simply wanted to belong, to fit in, with their Year 6 peers at Western Heights Primary School;

It's also about popularity as well because if you aren't popular you might as well not bother (Lindi);

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);

So, popular, popular or fitting in? Which is more important? (Researcher);

Fitting in; collectively and without hesitation. (Focus Group 3, 13th October).

So far in this chapter I have introduced the importance of friends and friendship groups to the girls. The girls have described how essential friendships and fitting in with their peer group is to their overall desire to belong in this space. By introducing the girls'

feelings about the importance of friends alongside the unthinkable alternative of not having them, I have considered how fundamental friends and friendship groups are to the girls. In highlighting the norms and practices of specific groups I have highlighted the girls' understandings of how they go about negotiating a place for themselves to belong. From here I want to consider the work the girls' engage in to ensure their friendships enable them to achieve the sense of belonging they desire.

Explicit or implied: the functionality of groups in Class 6C

As noted earlier, in the very early stages of my ethnographic study I made the mistake of thinking there were two friendship groups functioning within 6C, a tight group of six and a larger, less cohesive group of eight. It did not take me long to realise that there were three groups functioning within the class, with a broader range of friendship partnerships and groups operating in the playground during recess and lunchtime. For the purposes of this chapter I will focus my discussion on the three groups functioning within the class and report on the nuances of the playground friendships as necessary where they illustrate the arguments being presented. The three friendship groups in 6C were defined as follows;

Group One: Lindi, Susan, Kate, Mollie, Holly, Pippi;

Group Two: Hayley, Rachel, Alison, Alex, Erin;

Group Three: Sally, Maddie, Georgie.

George (2007) reported that there were different levels of membership in each of the groups in her study on primary school aged girls' friendships; Leader, Inner Circle and

Periphery members. Similarly Reay (2001) and Renold and Ringrose (2008), in their discussions allocated different names to each of their groups. The analysis of the groups in my ethnographic study revealed similarities to the groupings found in these studies but also identified some important differences. The girls in my study did not use labels to define their position within their friendship groups. The makeup of each group was complex, and with the exception of the inner-circle of Group One, the groups ebbed and flowed, and interacted with each other constantly. Unlike George's (2007) findings none of the groups in 6C functioned with a dedicated Leader with all three groups functioning more with an inner circle and periphery members. The tightest and most influential group in the class was the four core members of Group One; Lindi, Holly, Susan and Kate. While the girls did not particularly like the label of popular, within the confines of 6C they were the most desired as friends by the other girls. The value of belonging within this group was high. The other two members of this group, Mollie and Pippi (who chose not to participate in this study), were peripheral members of their group and sometimes, by choice and sometimes through necessity, chose to play with or partner up with members of Group Two. Group Three was the least cohesive, with some complicated dynamics and interesting friendship shifts throughout the year making the functionality of this group more challenging.

The girls spent a lot of time negotiating how their friendship groups would function. For Group One that meant establishing pairs and small groups that would be mobilised whenever group or partner work was required in class or specialist classes such as music, art or PE. As outlined in Chapter Four the girls conferred amongst themselves to ensure that they were covered for partner and group work throughout the year. While the strategy included the peripheral members, Mollie and Pippi the negotiations were entered into

primarily to ensure the presence of partners and group options for the four key members of Group One. While the girls had envisaged the majority of group or partner work likely to be asked of them during the year, there were occasions where even their carefully made plans were insufficient;

> *I'd choose Holly (*as a pair) *cause at the start of the year we're like, partners for the year? I'm like yeah and then that's what Kate and Susan did and that's what Mollie and Pippi did so it worked out really good. But if we need a four we do me, Holly Susan and Kate, but if it's a three we don't know, one of us has to go with Mollie and Pippi. One of us just puts up our hand up, it doesn't really matter* (Lindi, Interview, 23rd June).

> *I'd work with Kate but sometimes Lindi if she's away. When she's away I'd feel, sort of not, well I don't really know cause Lindi and Holly are best friends too, it's better when all of us are here* (Susan, Interview, 16th June).

The negotiations of Groups Two and Three appeared to be less concrete. When asked, the girls had considered the options available to them within their own groups and if their immediate group members were absent or otherwise occupied. Though they did not appear to have negotiated specific partners or groups as had Group One, they were aware that they had several options available to them for partnership or group work;

> *It feels okay because I know there's other friends like Hayley, Susan and Erin* (Sally, Interview 15th June);

> *I sort of played with Alex, Rachel and Alison, so probably them* (Maddie, Interview 23rd June);

Rachel, Alison, Erin yeah that's basically it, but when they're not here I go with some other people (Alex, Interview, 15th June).

The students pair up and the friendship shifts that have been noticeable over recent weeks are a little more apparent. Although admittedly they pretty much pair up with those sitting near them. The usual foursome, Lindi and Holly, Kate and Susan, Mollie pairs with Erin, Alex with Alison, Sally is with Rachel and Pippi pairs up with Hayley. Georgie is in a strange mood and when Maddie stands in front of her to pair up Georgie hesitates but Maddie stands her ground (Field Notes, 19th August).

The relationship between Maddie and Georgie and the other Group Three member, Sally, could, on occasions, be described as detached. Of the three groups in 6C this was the least cohesive, with several incidents during the year highlighting the girls' fragile links of friendship. While the friendships worked for Maddie, Georgie and Sally most of the time, I would suggest that this group resembles George's finding that girls can engage in complex strategies to secure friendships, not because they are particularly fond of an individual but with the intent of 'engaging in the functions of friendship' (George, 2007, p. 57 see also, B. Davies, 1982). Aware of the tenuous links between them I suggest these girls to place this value on their friendship as achieving their desire to belong, rather than hanging out for a strong bond of friendship (George, 2007, p. 57). The provisional nature of friendships was evident as they splintered when faced with the pressure of new friendships or partners.

Behind the 'intense preoccupation with being a good friend' and achieving a sense of belonging in the primary school environment there is an awful lot of forgiveness that

takes place as the girls accept the functionality of friendships do not always sit comfortably with the 'emotional aspects of friendship' (George, 2007, p. 59). I suggest that this was particularly evident in an outburst between Sally and Georgie, Maddie and Alison;

> Sally walks up to the girls and accuses them of *sidelining her;*
>
> Maddie suggests that *it's okay as stuff like this always happens* but;
>
> Sally responds with *you sidelined me, just like you sidelined me on my birthday 2 years ago;*
>
> Maddie suggests that she doesn't remember that time. Perhaps it wasn't as important to Maddie as it was to Sally;
>
> Sally sticks around with the girls now. There are no words of sorry, forgiveness or reconciliation spoken but it seems to be okay now (Field Notes, 1st June).

Sally's emotions were real and obviously long held but the others had no idea of the depth of her feelings and hurt. Regardless of these outbursts Sally maintained a friendship with these girls, managing to undertake practices which enabled her to belong with this social group while she suppressed feelings of hurt and anger. She was definitely not alone in this predicament as all the girls reported instances of fractured friendships and unpleasant actions and practices during their primary school years;

> *It's when they do stuff that I don't want to do. I wish that we should just choose something that we both, that we all agree* (Alison, Interview, 16th June);

Sometimes what I really get annoyed about friends is when they don't want to play with you sometimes or you've started not to like them and everything (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 2nd September).

While they expressed some reluctance to participate the girls often went along with the activities to save face and retain their place within their particular friendship groups. For others, friendships that continually ebbed and flowed made it difficult for the girls as they attempted to determine the practices and actions required in challenging circumstances;

I say I think you guys are being a bit unfair cause I wanted to play as well. 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. Cause like even if it's at snack, probably at lunch she'll be talking to me again but I'm still remember what she's done and still be a bit upset with her but I can't really explain that (Sally, Interview, 16th June).

The odd number of members in Group Two and Three dictated that the members of these groups had to negotiate with each other to ensure all the girls were accommodated in partner or group work during the year. While this occurred fluidly throughout the year there were members of both groups who were more open to these negotiations than others. It was in these negotiations that the influence and decision making power of Group One was most evident;

I'm not sure (who I would sit next to)*, I'd probably sit next to Pippi and Mollie cause they're both like exciting, I'm not saying Rachel isn't but it's good to have*

other friends as well. … They let me talk, they're very silly in ways sometimes … in PE if Miss C. (the teacher) doesn't choose then we'd be a three'r (Hayley, Interview, 15th June).

While it was Hayley's preference to work or partner up with Mollie and Pippi she had to wait until Group One, as per their Term One arrangements, had determined their needs. For Mollie and Pippi, more than happy to work with Hayley, this meant that their negotiations with other classmates had to wait until they checked their Group One commitments. The flow-on effect of Group One's arrangements, alongside the odd numbers of girls in these groups, determined that Groups Two and Three were required to regularly re-negotiate their partnership and group pairings. Some of the girls gave the impression that they needed to ask whether they could play with certain groups, or be a part of a specific game or activity with members of their group. In these instances the girls handed over their desire to belong to others leaving themselves open to rejection;

Well sometimes because like, you know you just, if you talk to them or you see what they do and then you'll know if they're going to be your friend (Alison, Focus Group 1, 2nd September);

Well I was happy that at least one friend was there cause then I'd have, if all my friends weren't there I'd have to find someone else to play with and if I get a bit lonely … (Alison, Interview, 16th June).

The girls regularly checked in on their friends. As suggested earlier it is through talk that children are able to influence the 'relationships in their social worlds' (Pugh, 2009, p. 50).

The girls' talk is constant and takes place at school, at home, face to face, over the phone and increasingly for these girls on social media;

> *I'm going to be calling her and Maddie tonight just in case they're like sick or anything* (Sally, Interview, 16th June).

The girls' negotiations were endless and are representative of the girls' on-going need to navigate their sense of belonging. The appeal of the members of Group One to the other girls in 6C, alongside their explicit negotiations to partner up with each other, enabled them to experience a level of belonging that was not afforded to the other girls in the class. The members of Group One also had to negotiate their position within this friendship group, undertaking complex processes to belong that were not evident until I began to consider more fully their everyday practices and actions.

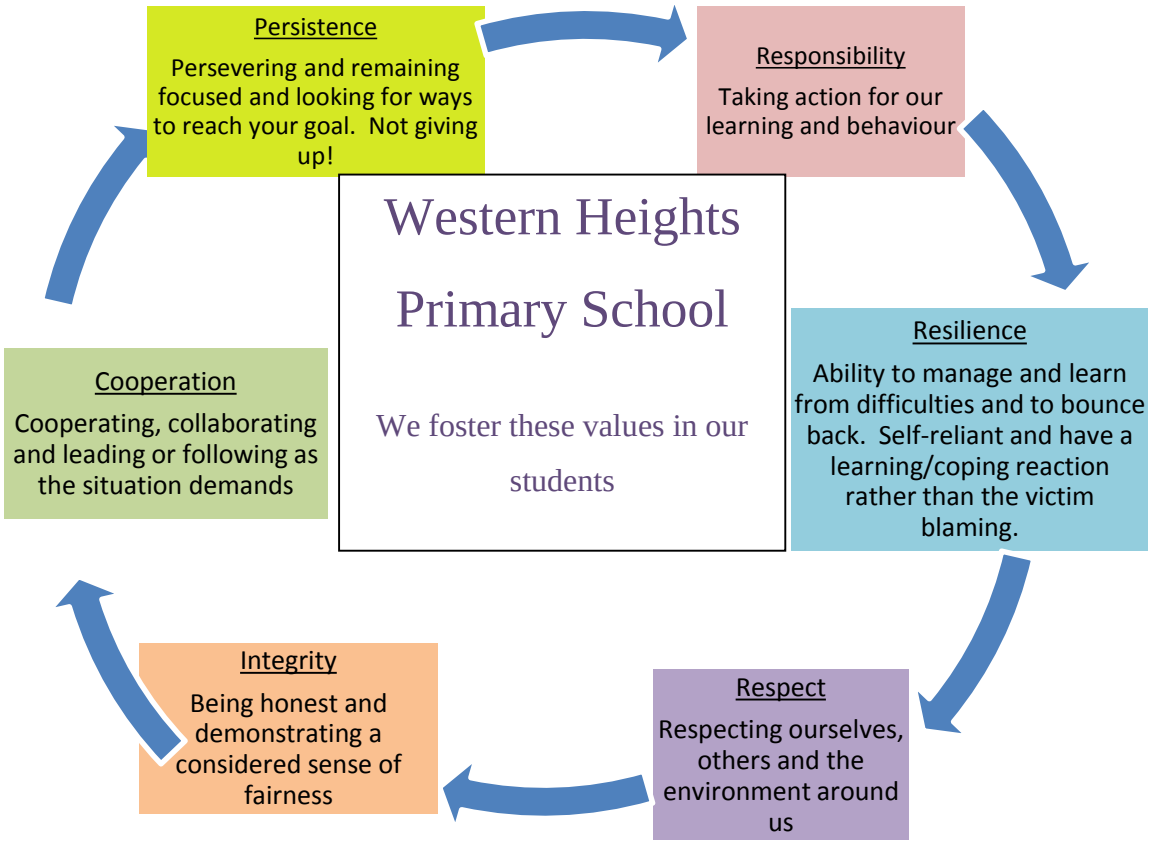
Adapting 'family' or 'school-based' practices to negotiate friendships

Negotiating friendships within a primary school environment is often the first time children are required to regularly negotiate with others outside their family. In their desire to establish a sense of belonging with their peers, the 11 and 12 year old girls in my study are required to work out the norms that enable them to participate in their friendship groups. Their knowledge of the social norms and practices come from a variety of influences, increasingly widespread as the girls grow, but I want to focus here on the girls' 'family practices' in relation to social networking as they shaped school-based practices of friendships in Western Heights Primary School. The girls' requests for access to social networking sites stemmed from their desire to communicate with and maintain their

friendships at Western Heights Primary School. Their engagement with the consumer-media through social networking sites was incidental to their key desires.

At Western Heights Primary School, like many others, there are school rules that govern how the girls treat others within the school environment. 'We are courteous and considerate of others', respecting ourselves, others and the environment around us (Western Heights Primary School, 2013).

Image 2: Western Heights Primary School Values Statement



The girls were very familiar with the expectations of their teachers and the school and understand the policies on exclusionary play or bullying practices. The girls in 6C worked hard to ensure they were not reprimanded;

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, with some of the girls around a table and that wasn't great* (Lindi, Interview, 23rd June).

Conflict, disagreements and exclusion were all part of the girls' recollections of their time at Western Heights Primary School. They had clear memories of friendships that didn't work as well as those that evolved over time as interests changed. They talked of time spent together in the same class that revealed friendship possibilities not apparent in the younger year levels. Even the close-knit, inner-circle members of Group One could recognise how their friendships had changed over time;

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

I know (Susan);

Cause she was dragging Kate away from us (Lindi);

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

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

And I tried to introduce them together but they're just like, no (Kate);

and how we're like friends (Susan). (Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

The three groups had their own ways of dealing with disagreements, arguments or differences of opinions. Not surprisingly Group One claimed they were very democratic and didn't face any unresolvable disagreements during the year, *we just make a group decision, we're very co-operative* (Lindi, Interview, 23rd June). The girls acknowledged that conflicts occur when girls want different things. They appeared to approach disagreements, if they occurred, with the same level of negotiation they exhibited in their year-long agreements;

> *Because maybe some other people are having an argument and there's arguments where one person wants one thing and another wants another think and then they have a fight about it. But that never happens* (Susan, Interview, 16th June).

Group Two was less cohesive and had several disagreements throughout the year. I was not privy to the reasons behind these arguments but I was a witness to how they played out for the girls in the classroom, particularly in the playground during recess and lunchtime. For this group, their use of MSN (a social media site, which enabled the girls to communicate with each other as well as access information over the internet), intensified their disagreements. Access to MSN crossed the family/school divide and the girls turned to their families, as well as their school and peer-based practices to resolve their issues;

> *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, Interview, 15th June).

While they resolved their issues without the need for teacher or adult intervention this early use of social media provided an insight into the ways girls begin to rely on these mediums to communicate, organise social activities and glean information.

The members of Group Three had regular disagreements and fell out on several occasions during the year. At different times throughout the year all three girls, Maddie, Georgie and Sally had to look beyond this friendship group to achieve their desire to belong at Western Heights Primary School. The norms of any group require a 'delicate balance' (Goffman, 1967, p. 40) and in this case the group's stability was shaken on several occasions throughout the year, but most noticeably when Georgie paired up with a boyfriend. The balance of this small group of three was disturbed, but rather than Maddie and Sally pairing up, they looked elsewhere during this time for a place to belong. For Maddie this involved seeking out the company of the school handyman, Rob, to assist him to plant shrubs and trees around the playground during recess and lunch. While this appeared to be an extreme attempt to negotiate a place to belong, it is important to note that Maddie is an only child, spending the majority of her time outside of school with her Mum and Step-Dad. In addition she was one of the few members of 6C who did not engage in after-school or weekend sport or activities. I suggest that her 'family practices' led her to believe that a friendly adult was a more reliable 'friend' during this time of friendship uncertainty. In time though she was able to re-negotiate a place for herself with Sally and to a certain extent, Georgie, although the presence of her boyfriend shifted Georgie's allegiances to her friends;

> Georgie is playing with her boyfriend Nigel; they spend a lot of time together. He obviously gives her a sense of belonging in the school environment which I suggest she finds incredibly challenging. She is struggling academically and it would appear socially with her peers (Field Notes, 6th October).

Georgie was an interesting member of 6C. A new arrival to Western Heights Primary School, she joined the girls at the beginning of Term 4 in their Year 5 class and had been placed, along with the other girls, in 6C. Georgie made friends with a number of girls in the Year 5 class before she buddied up with Maddie and Sally for their Year 6 year. Georgie was also the only member of 6C who partnered up with a boyfriend during the year. There were other Year 6 classes at Western Heights Primary School in which girlfriends and boyfriends were more prominent, as the girls in Group One shared with me, *there's always a class that is boyfriend and girlfriends' class. They're always the popular ones* (Maddie, Focus Group 1, 13th October). Georgie's boyfriend, Nigel was a member of another Year 6 class so they couldn't spend class time together but they made up for it at recess and playtime creating their own special playground practices for their relationship.

While I will discuss the boys of 6C shortly I have introduced Georgie's relationship here as I think the relationship functioned for her on a number of levels, not just about being boyfriend and girlfriend. As discussed in Chapter Four, Georgie lived with her Mum, Step-Dad and younger sister, spending every second weekend with her biological Father in Cranbourne. This suburb is located an hour away from Western Heights Primary School. The communities are markedly different. Western Heights is located within 10 kilometres of Melbourne' central business district, while Cranbourne is 70 kilometres

away. Western Heights residents are predominantly middle-class, in contrast Cranbourne represents a lower socio-economic demographic (qpzm Local Stats Australia, 2013). While Georgie's connection to Western Heights Primary School was tenuous at best, her mother's connection was even less, consequently Georgie found it difficult to make connections with the girls. Her boyfriend, Nigel lived with his Dad and they were family friends of Georgie's Mum and Step-Dad;

> *Well my Mum and that are good friends with Nigel, we know his Dad and we're good friends* (Georgie, Interview, 22nd June).

I want to suggest that Georgie's relationship with Nigel worked for her on three levels. He provided her with a friend in the playground at recess and lunchtime who did not engage in the disagreements or disputes of the members of Group Three. He had a strong connection to Georgie's family enabling him to be a part of her after school and weekend activities, either in person, over the phone or on the internet. And lastly, I suggest that Georgie gained kudos with the other members of 6C, particularly Maddie and Sally, as no-one else paired up with a boy during the year. I suggest that in the intersection of her 'family practices' and the practices of starting a relationship in the school environment enabled Georgie to achieve a sense of belonging across her social worlds that was not entirely satisfied by her small friendship group.

As discussed, the work the girls undertake to ensure the presence of friends and a friendship group is relentless. The girls are constantly evaluating and responding to shifts and change in their friendship groups. For some, such as the four members of the inner circle of Group One, the major negotiations took place at the beginning of the school year and worked for them with only minor adjustments, when members were absent sick or on

holidays. For others though the negotiations were ongoing, uncertain and required a considerable amount of energy as the girls work out the practices, actions and norms required to enable them to negotiate their own sense of belonging both in the classroom and playground spaces of Western Heights Primary School. These negotiations were undertaken with other female students of Western Heights Primary School, as well as the male students in 6C and the other Year 6 classes.

Boys – 'I actually missed them'

The relationships between the girls in 6C and their male classmates added a layer of complexity to their friendship negotiations which is important to acknowledge as part of this analysis. As Rose (2007, p. 491) observes 'relatively little is known about cross-gender friendships' for this age group but my findings suggest that these relationships are significant and important for further academic study. There is evidence to suggest that 'cross-gender friends may be more common than typically thought' (Rose, 2007, p. 503) and they were evident throughout my research project. While there were no girlfriend/boyfriend relationships between the female and male students in 6C negotiations of friendship between the genders were evident throughout the year. An additional layer of complexity between the female and male students in this class was present as the girls had been members of a trial all-girl Year 5 class and were returning to a mixed-gender class for their final year at primary school. It is unusual for an Australian government schools to run all-girls classes although all-boy classes have become increasingly necessary to achieve a gender-balance in some classes (Baron, Bell, Corson, Kostina-ritchey, & Frederick, 2012; Bigler, 2011; Patterson, 2011; Price, 2011;

Rose, 2007). The girls valued their experiences of an all-girls class to their sense of belonging at Western Heights Primary School, I discuss this further in Chapter Seven.

From the beginning of the year Mr G. was determined that the female and male students interacted as much as possible to ensure that his class was able to work as a cohesive unit.

> Erin, Rachel and Alex are playing tiggy 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 focused and engaged.
>
> The interactions with each other transition seamlessly from the classroom into the playground. They all interact comfortably with each other and as Mr G. has suggested, this can only help his teaching in the classroom (Field Notes, 1st June).

To facilitate this process he allocated the seating arrangements for the students of 6C for the majority of the school year. On a small number of occasions the students were able to select their table-mates but for the most part Mr G. managed the students' seating arrangements, changing them regularly. Mr G.'s decision resulted in the 14 girls in 6C working regularly with their male counterparts in the class as well as with their female friends and peers. The students generally worked well together and Mr G.'s decision to facilitate the interaction of female and male students in this manner contributed to the cohesiveness of the class. My observations suggest that the girls, and boys, responded well to this arrangement;

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, Interview 15th June);

I get along with them better I imagine (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 13th October);

Yeah when David and Charlie are on the same table they have the funniest conversations (Kate, Focus Group 1, 13th October).

There were times though when the girls found it difficult to be apart from their friends;

Last week you were at a table with all boys. How did that feel? (Researcher);

Ugg it's bad. I don't like it, I hate it. Cause you feel like you're kind of a loner (Kate, Focus Group 1, 13th October).

With the exception of Georgie's relationship with Nigel the relationships I witnessed between the female and male students from the year 6 classes at Western Heights Primary School are best described as friendships. For the girls from Group One there was the friendship that enabled the boys from their class to join in their regular games of tiggy in the playground, *we used to play tiggy with the boys* (Kate), *that was fun, that was really good fun* (Mollie, Focus Group, 13th October). For Maddie, Sally and Georgie it was a friendship with Simon which enabled them to ask him to join them on a weekend outing to the movies and chat regularly with him on MSN, *I think it was a few weeks ago me Maddie, Georgie and Simon went to the movies, they went to my house first* (Sally, Interview, 15th June). For Hayley it's the boys who play on the school soccer field every day who acknowledge her presence but don't extend the invitation to join in, *ever since I*

came to Western Heights my favourite sport is soccer … yes, I'm often next to the soccer field, probably my favourite place to play (Hayley, Interview, 15th June). The girls of 6C valued their friendships with boys and each group worked out ways they could understand the norms and practices that were required to engage boys in their activities;

> *they can be nice, so like a friend you know. You can be friend with them, you don't feel scared to just be like eergh … you're a boy* (Lindi, Focus Group 1, 13th October).

Others reflect on the changed relationships they have experienced with boys over their primary school years;

> *Cause at Prep you used to have a best friend that's a guy. Now you're just like …*(Erin);

> *You used to hold hands with the boys in Year Prep. When I was in Prep a boy tried to kiss me and I fell off the chair …* (Hayley, Focus Group 3, 13th October).

In contrast Sally contemplates what those relationships might mean in the future;

> *I play with them like, if they are a friend. I don't really notice how I feel like as me and the future. I kind of like them just as a friend that I'm doing stuff with. But it does make me wonder about the future. Yeah and it kind of makes me think at what's happened and like life after,…* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 13th October).

For these 11 and 12 year old girls their male classmates were an important part of their Year 6 experience. As classmates, group members or friends the relationships the girls shared with the boys were different from those they pursued with their female friends and

peers. Yet the boys played a significant role in the girls achieving a sense of belonging in this space. A significant component of this study was the progression of these thirteen girls from their all-girls' Year 5 class to Mr G's mixed-gender Year 6. As a result the girls shared their unique and valuable insights into the presence of boys in their class. Their experience in Year 5 gave the girls an understanding of the different practices of boys in a primary school class and presented them with an opportunity to consider which they preferred and how their learning experiences were influenced. The girls' insights in this study are particularly valuable when we consider that the measurement of success in a school environment is often the academic outcomes of the students rather than the students' sense of belonging.

When I asked the girls about the differences between the classes or whether they preferred one class or the other they were divided in their opinions;

> *I kinda liked being in an all girls' class but it was a bit too quiet for me* (Hayley, Interview, 15th June);
>
> *It was just all girls and it was fun. Having a fun teacher as well, she used to teach us always properly and stuff. Oh he's* (Mr G., Year 6 teacher) *funny, he's funny and stuff I like being in this grade and I've got a lot of friends in this grade as well* (Rachel, Interview, 16th June).

From my observations and discussions with the girls one of the major reasons for enjoying their all-girl year 5 class was the enthusiasm and effort of their young, female teacher. To provide a holistic, value-added experience for the girls in Year 5 their teacher contacted a local Government High School who ran a girls-only stream to link up with

these girls, creating buddy relationships. She organised special excursions for the girls which the other Year 5 classes did not attend. While the girls and their teacher felt that the year was a successful one on a number of levels, the academic outcomes of the overall group did not support these findings and the all-girls class was a one-off experiment at Western Heights Primary School. With a similarly young, enthusiastic male teacher in 6C the students found it difficult to make a definitive decision about which they preferred;

> *I reckon it was the teacher because Miss F., she, I like her teaching method, but she does everything fun and that's really, really good* (Lindi Focus Group 1, 13th October).

Price (2011, p. 72) also discovered that 'a committed teacher delivering a classroom programme and environment' influenced the outcomes of learning in a single-gendered class. The girls from 6C described their Year 5 class as being quieter, with less interruptions and distractions to their learning than in previous years;

> *It was always quieter* (Sally);
>
> *There was no screaming and yelling going on* (Georgie);
>
> *Well there weren't as many interruptions and it was much quieter* (Erin);
>
> *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), (Focus Groups 1, 2 & 3, 13th October);

> *Yeah it's pretty good, weird being a boys.., a mixed class again. But then again it doesn't feel different cause there's boys in the yard and like you know* (Mollie, Interview, 15th June).

Yet despite the interruptions, noise and the positive influence of Miss F., the majority of girls felt that this year's mixed-gender Year 6 class with Mr G., offered them a better learning environment;

> *I prefer to be in a mixed grade rather than an all girls' grade, it's sort of annoying just girls* (Maddie, Interview, 23rd June);

> *I didn't enjoy it last year* (Alex, Focus Group 1, 13th October);

> *I thought that I learn a lot better when I was with the girls' class. I don't know if it was Miss F. 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, Focus Group 1, 13th October).

The 11 and 12 year old girls in this study recognised the male students of 6C as an important component of their Year 6 at Western Heights Primary School. Their interactions, experiences and negotiations provided the girls with alternative friendship options than those available to them with their female friends and peers. The value of the boys' friendship, in an ordinary, everyday, platonic capacity is significant as the girls negotiate their ability to achieve a sense of belonging within the primary school environment. Without a detailed analysis of the boy/girl relationships, which were not the purpose of this study, it is difficult to determine how significant these cross-gender

relationships are to the girls in my study but my findings support the call to explore these friendships in greater detail (Rose, 2007).

Negotiating friendships, a never-ending practice

Friends are pivotal to the tween achieving a sense of belonging. In this chapter I have considered the significance of friends for one class of 11 and 12 year old girls. Pugh's (2009) concept, the economy of dignity, her key to understanding 'children's consumer culture,' provided me with a framework to consider the tweens' desire to belong amongst her peers. While Pugh's concept focuses on children's consumption it underscores children's desire to be worthy of participating in their different social worlds. The significance of having friends, including boys, at school is highlighted as the girls' outline the work that goes into achieving a sense of belonging at all times. The emotional significance of friends to the girls has been discussed as they reveal the traits they found appealing in their friends. The girls identified a range of feelings, *being happy, funny, feeling welcomed, laughing, being crazy* and sharing a similar interest in games and activities as desirable attributes in their friends. In contrast the girls described feelings of *being lonely, sad,* los[ing] *self-confidence, depressed* and feelings of not belonging when asked to contemplate the possibility of not having friends at school. The girls felt that staying home from school or even changing schools was a viable alternative to the absence of friends.

The nature of friendship groups in 6C and the challenges confronting the members of each group have been discussed in this chapter. The energy and time expended by the girls negotiating these relationships is evident in the constant and ongoing reflections and

discussions they shared with me about friendships and friendship issues throughout the year. The girls' work is unrelenting and is often undertaken at home as the girls reflect on the value of different objects, experiences, norms, practices and rules that would enable them to participate amongst specific groups or with their peers (Pugh, 2009, p. 6). The girls negotiate their friendships in this space abiding by the school's expectations as well as their own and they related stories of disagreements and differences from their earlier primary school years which required intervention from teachers. While the girls' friendships existed in the school space they were nonetheless influenced by the family and their own unique family practices. Friendships which were supported by family such as Lindi, Holly, Susan and Kate's assisted their relationships outside of school hours. Similarly girls with access to MSN had an additional platform for negotiating friendships in 6C. Again, the focus on local friendships and relationships is difficult to ignore, with the girls using their time in their local social worlds rather than the broader communities available to them on MSN. In contrast, Georgie's friendships with Maddie and Sally was strained at times as her family practices of visiting her Dad fortnightly, and her Mum's lack of connection to the families of her friends, influenced her ability to negotiate in this space. 'Having nothing to say' or not being able to participate amongst your peers 'is akin to not belonging', and according to the girls in my study one of the worst experiences of school; *you wouldn't really feel like going to school cause you've got nothing to look forward to* (Mollie, Focus Group 3, 2nd September). The girls' desire to belong motivates their negotiations; these are constant and often unrelenting but, according to these girls, are essential to enjoying school and were often described as 'the reason I come to school'. In the following chapter I explore in more detail the significance of the primary school environment as the space for the girls' everyday negotiations of belonging.

Chapter Seven

Understanding the tween girls' local geographies

Introduction

In this thesis I have explored the argument that the desire to belong is one of the greatest concerns of the tween girl. The work that goes into belonging is extensive as the girls recognise that different practices are required in their many and varied social worlds. They exhibit a series of evident and sophisticated competencies in the quest to belong that extend our understandings of tweens beyond that of passive consumer. The influence of family, friends and peers in the girls' ordinary, everyday practices of belonging are significant. While I have considered these influences independently in this thesis they are nevertheless closely entwined. Fundamental to my discussions, but not yet fully explored in this thesis, is the understanding that the tween girls' desire to belong does not take place in a vacuum. The speed and reach of the consumer-media sometimes suggest that the tween lives in a globalised, almost placeless environment yet these explorations fail to recognise the ongoing significance of place in young people's lives (J. Holland, Reynolds & Weller, 2007; Nayak, 2003; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). Nayak argue that even in a globalised economy that 'global cultures, then, do not operate independently but connect and interact differently at national, regional or local scales' (Nayak, 2003, p. 5). Introducing the concept of local spaces to my research findings embeds the significance of these interactions and 'add[s] texture and detail' to my exploration of the tween girls' social worlds (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 9).

In the case of the tween girl her desire to belong unfolds in the many spaces she occupies; home, school, local neighbourhoods, sporting activities and increasingly, her online communities. 'Places that matter' in the life of the tween girl are 'simultaneously global and local' as the girls 'both experience and rework global processes' creating meaning in their own social worlds (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 18 see also, Pugh, 2009). The presence of online communities is significant to these girls and I will discuss their importance, referenced in Chapter 6, more fully in Chapter Eight. Similarly the significance of the girls' local neighbourhoods will be discussed in Chapter Eight as I consider the relevance of sporting endeavours, shopping trips, outings to the movies, churches or special events. This chapter however will focus on the 'powerful presence' of school as the key site where the tween girl moves from her 'family out into the world' (Lareau, 2003, p. 163). Locating an ethnographic study within a school environment recognises the significance of school in young people's lives and incorporates the geographies of place into my analysis and interpretation (Allan, 2009; Kehily, 2002a; Pomerantz, 2008; Rysst, 2010; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). In this chapter I continue to explore the girls' desire to belong amongst her peers and friends, but for the first time I consider the concept of 'belonging to the institution'. The 'personal stake' the girls have in the activities and practices of Western Heights Primary School are discussed as I consider the girls' practices and interactions in this space (Gill & Howard, 2009, p. 164).

The 'powerful presence' of school in the tween girls' life

In the life of individuals space is not 'merely a backdrop for social relations, a pre-existing terrain which exists outside of, or frames everyday life. Rather, space is understood to play an active role in the constitution and reproduction of social identities' (Valentine

2004, p. 8). Space creates the context for the tween girls' understandings of the value of particular experiences, goods, services and activities. Context, in this setting, is being used to define the spaces and places and the social and cultural rules and norms that govern the spaces the tween girl inhabits. As Pugh (2009, p. 180) suggests;

> contexts do more than mold 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.

The tween's spaces and places automatically provide a context for her practices and actions as she pursues her belonging with her peers. A primary school space is common to the majority of Australian tweens, yet every school is different, influenced by the school's facilities, its feel or culture, the Principal and teaching staff, curriculum, policies and engagement with families (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013 see also, Butler & Hamnett, 2011; English, 2009). Space and place have similar meanings but I use them in different contexts. I will now briefly outline those differences. The term space is used to define an area that is available for use but has not yet adopted its functionality. In contrast I use the term place to describe a room or area with a defined purpose, such as a school classroom or bathroom. While there is a range of academic scholarship available to consider the influence and significance of spaces and places in tween life I have adopted Holloway and Valentine's argument that 'in a very general sense, geographical studies can add texture and detail to the currently rather broad brush analysis of the social construction of childhood' (2000, p. 9). For this thesis

I am adopting geographical studies to describe the significance and influence of the girls' physical location as well as the local social and cultural influences in their lives. It should be noted that the influence of place is a reciprocal process as children's identities 'shape and influence the character of places' at the same time they are being shaped. As I reflect on the significance of Western Heights Primary School and the girls' social worlds I am reminded that is in these local geographies, her 'everyday spaces', that the girls' 'identities and lives are made and remade' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 11).

Outside their familial homes, the girls' neighbourhood or community and their school are the most significant places in each tween's life. For the tween, her school is arguably the most significant place as she has not yet reached the age of engaging in broader community activities or events outside her familial relationship. The education process encompasses a broad range of agendas for these girls, teachings of 'literacies and numeracy' and other academic outcomes remain significant, but increasingly schools take on a role of assisting young people to live well, assisting their 'social cohesion' and 'wellbeing' (Wyn, 2007, p. 5). The education process 'involves not only shaping children's minds but also their bodies' (Valentine, 2001, p. 144 see also, Kehily, 2002a; Pomerantz, 2008). Australian children are required by law to attend school from the age of six or enter into a recognised home schooling agreement (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013). By the time they reach the age of 11 or 12 Australian girls have spent around seven years in the school/education system. At one level the education system is measured by the success of individual school's NAPLAN - Australia's national assessment program for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 - and VET/VCE, year 11 and 12 results. When conducting research in a primary school

environment it is important to acknowledge that the social experiences in this environment will differ 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).

In my study I focus on the more informal world of 'social networks and peer group cultures' of 11 and 12 year old girls rather than the educational processes or outcomes that are the focus of most adults in this environment. (Valentine, 2001, p. 142). But it would be inaccurate to suggest that I am not exploring the formal worlds of Western Heights Primary School. Beyond their academic outcomes schools 'make choices about how they operate and the values they transmit', creating their own unique context for children who attend (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 220). In my thesis I am interested in the operational structure of Western Heights Primary School. Understanding the structure of the grades and classes assists me to comprehend the allocation of this particular group of girls to Year 6C. The buildings, classes, corridors and outdoor play spaces that make up the geography of Western Heights Primary School are relevant to my understandings of the girls' actions and practices in these spaces. Acknowledging the existence of leadership positions, sporting teams and the buddy programme enables me to distinguish between the experiences of this group of Year 6 students and the many other students at Western Heights Primary School. While I am considering the influence of this place in the everyday lives of these 11 and 12 year old girls my lens is nevertheless attentive to

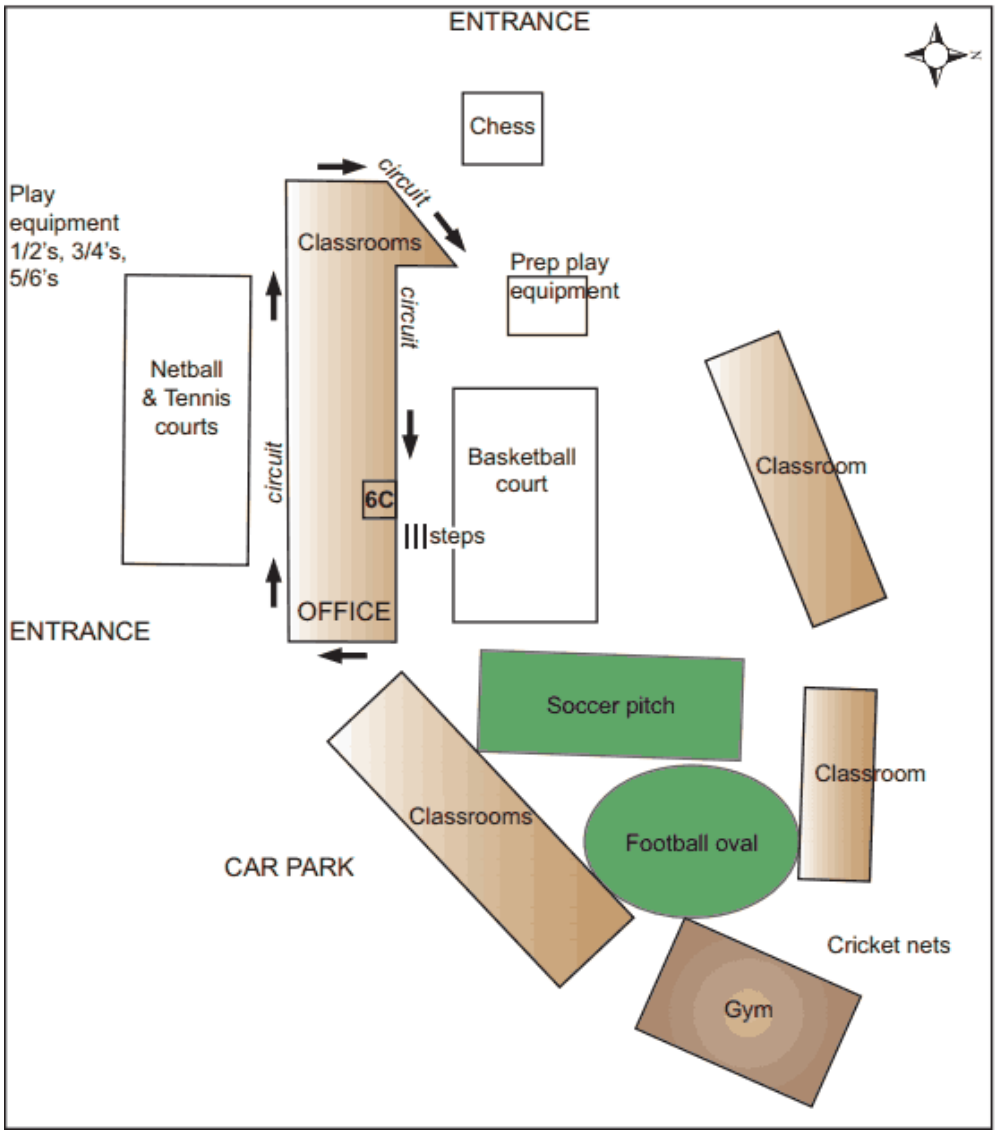
the significance of the formal operations and structures of Western Heights Primary School and how the places of school influence the girls' practices of belonging. As a result my field notes are more significant in this chapter as I consider the ways the girls use the spaces and places of Western Heights Primary School in their daily activities. I have included some demographic details and information from the school's website to provide the texture and detail of the physical and social geography of Western Heights Primary School (George, 2007; Pomerantz, 2008; Pugh, 2009).

The formal world of Western Heights Primary School

While the public education system in Australia was designed for children to attend a school in close proximity to their home that offered the same educational programme as any other, increasingly parents are 'shopping around' for the perceived best education for their children (Tsolidis, 2009). Parents' desire to get their children's education 'right', by sending them to a 'desirable and successful state school' in the Victorian education system (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 60) has become a key determinant when deciding where to live. While parents' decisions may have previously focused on the independent, private school systems, the select-entry, high performing schools of the public system have become increasingly desirable (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Healey, 2009; Tsolidis, 2009). If parents are unable to live within the zoned area surrounding a desired school, their arguments for enrolment often invoke curriculum based selection criteria. Located approximately 8 kilometres from Melbourne's Central Business District, Western Heights Primary School is considered to be a desirable and sought after government school and claims, on its website, to be the 'leading education provider in Western Heights and the surrounding suburbs' (Western Heights Primary School, 2013). The popularity of the

school has seen its enrolments increase from 348 in 1995 to 619, 17 years later in 2012, with 70% of their students living outside the local neighbourhood. 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. The teaching staff at Western Heights Primary School presents as a unified group to parents and there is a strong focus on professional development throughout the school. The Principal is a very prominent figure around the school and is actively involved in any behavioural issues or school achievements. A diagram of the physical layout of Western Heights Primary School is included here;

Image 3: Map of Western Heights Primary School



Western Heights Primary School is located in the inner-Western suburbs of Melbourne. The suburb is a traditional working-class area of Melbourne with small suburban house blocks. During the 20th century the area housed many blue collar workers. Towards the end of the 20th century the area became increasingly redeveloped and gentrified. The area has become 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 speak English as their first language with other nationalities represented at less than 4% of the suburb's population. 90% of the residents are employed with a range of occupations represented (qpzm Local Stats Australia, 2013). There are few public housing commission residences and no high-rise apartment blocks as evident in other inner-Melbourne suburbs. The school is reflective of this relatively middle-class, homogenous community.

Belonging to the institution: Western Heights Primary School

> A school is made by the bricks and walls that give it physical shape, by the rules and regulations that give it social structure, by the bodies that give it purpose, and by the internal and external discourses that institutionalize it as that thing we call "school" (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 69).

The success of Western Heights Primary School is measured in a number of different ways. School enrolment and retention of pupils is a measure of success as are the academic outcomes measured by NAPLAN, discussed earlier in this chapter, and other key learning areas. Retention of teachers and the leadership team is considered a variable of success, as are requests from other schools to share knowledge and expertise. 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. There is an aura of success and advantage about the school which is difficult to quantify but tangible amongst the students. Success is reflected in the school values, its history, students'

code of conduct, the presentation of its website, including a proud Principal's address, 'the school has been noted for their work on using data and evidence to differentiate the learning for all children' (Western Heights Primary School, 2013). The school regularly reminded the students of Western Heights' expectations, particularly when representing the school at sport or out in the community on excursions. The school's expectations of the students are reflected in the lyrics of the school song;

Image 4: Western Heights Primary School Song

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

Three, Two, One Eight is our number

Come by and you'll really see

That Western Heights is a school that cares for us

And that makes it a good place to be

We live in the shadow of the Westgate Bridge

A feature of our great land

It reminds us to link all the nations in our school

And hold out the friendship hand

Four, Seven, Double Eight is our number

Come by and you'll really see

That Western Heights is a school that cares for us

And that makes it a good place to be

The students' connection to the school song was evident in the way they sang these lyrics in contrast to their rendition of the National Anthem;

> Following the National Anthem the students turn back to face Mr G. and start singing the Western Heights Primary School song. This is sung with more passion [than the National Anthem] and the words are audible. It appears to be about

> making the most of the opportunities at Western Heights Primary School and striving to do your best for the school (Field Notes, 27th April).

The school's reputation throughout the community and within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development enabled the girls to belong to a successful, solid, dependable institution, designed to provide them with a safe and stimulating learning environment. The girls' sense of belonging to this institution appeared to be enhanced by their parents' strong attachment to the school. While I deliberately did not speak to their girls parents, as previously discussed, their engagement with the school was evident in their attendance at sporting events, excursions, volunteering on camp and helping out with the school production. My informal discussions with several of the girls' mothers and fathers support the argument that they consider Western Heights Primary School to be a good place for their daughters' primary school education. It is important to note though that the girls' sense of belonging is not necessarily invoked by their parents, teachers or Principal's feeling towards the school and its geography (Gill & Howard, 2009, p. 162).

The school's success in the sporting arena, in addition to its academic achievements, is renowned across the region. Throughout the year the girls regularly attended trials for a range of different sporting teams, and when successful attended region, zone and state games and finals. Western Heights Primary School often hosted education professionals and teachers from surrounding schools to share insights into their continued success in all facets of school life. While the majority of these activities were not directed at the students themselves the aura of success and achievement filtered through the school. The girls were aware of its presence and the importance of being at a school with high

expectations of its students; *Yeah representing the school and you did something bad or something and people saw that and they'd think oh, that's not a good school* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 2nd September).

Hayley's, Rachel's and Georgie's stories of transferring here during Year 5 offer valuable insights into the processes and activities that go into belonging to this institution and I will unpack them here. Hayley and Rachel had both attended the same primary school together since Prep. Their school was a much smaller school than Western Heights Primary School and the schools are less than 10 kilometres apart. The girls both left their previous primary school at the beginning of Year 5 and started at Western Heights Primary School together. They both related having no friends at their previous school and Hayley recalls, *I used to hate going to school. The teachers were strict and the people were mean* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 2nd September). Rachel related similar experiences;

> *I was happy* [to move] *because I didn't feel comfortable going to that school. They didn't teach you properly. It was just really important to me cause I hadn't had a lot of friends before, only Hayley. People used to bully us as well. I just 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 could leave"* (Rachel, Interview 16th June).

In this statement Rachel refers to the absence of friends, a level of bullying that she found difficult, a lack of teaching ability and her Mum who initially found it difficult to comprehend the level of Rachel's distress. It took Rachel's Mum some time to support her move to an alternative school. Georgie's experience was slightly different; she had attended two previous primary schools that were a considerable distance from Western

Heights Primary School. Her first move was in response to her unhappiness but her move to Western Heights was a combination of distress at the treatment of others and because her Mum moved into the local area. There is evidence in Georgie's account of teasing and bullying, a lack of friends, inflexible responses from the teachers and the absence of support when Georgie needed some;

> *Well sometimes I felt embarrassed and like I wasn't going to make much friends cause when I was at Sunny Hills Primary for Prep the teachers there were really strict, they yelled and it was a really bad start for me. So I ended up moving in Year 1 because I would have had the same teacher again, she was really strict. I used to get bullied there and I had no friends really. ...And I used to get teased a lot, cause people used to tease me because of my last name* (Georgie, Interview 22nd June).

While the girls pinpoint lack of friends, bullying and non-supportive teachers as the reasons for transferring to Western Heights Primary School, they suggest that their previous schools did not enable them to achieve a sense of belonging. It is difficult, with limited knowledge, to determine exactly what occurred but it could be argued that some of the formal and informal structures that enable girls of this age to develop a sense of belonging to the institution of school were absent. The reasons could have been as varied as unclear procedures for the girls to follow if they experienced bullying or exclusion in the playground or teachers who failed to follow the correct procedures in this instance. Hayley and Rachel identified their school as small and it may have been difficult to establish friendships with others who shared similar interests and values. With a focus on promoting the 'feel' or 'culture' of a school the girls may have been enrolled in a

school which didn't accommodate their culture (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; English, 2009). The girls' comments about teachers may be accurate but this it is difficult to establish, particularly as it is not uncommon for students to speak 'heatedly about particular poor teachers' (Yates & McLeod, 2007, p. 1). In contrast, the girls felt encouraged since transferring to Western Heights Primary School. Western Heights Primary School appears to have been a good cultural fit and the girls reflected on their sense of belonging in this space that was absent in their previous school;

> *Yeah because last year I was new and in the 2nd term I almost knew the whole school. It was very helpful* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 2nd September);
>
> *Last year I met Alison, my first friend was Mollie, then I met Alison and then Sally and Maddie* (Georgie, Interview, 22nd June).

Year 6: 'the big kids'

Year 6 is the senior year of primary school in most Australian states, although Western Australia and South Australian primary schools continue to Year 7. Students in Year 6 are generally aged 11 or 12 and enjoy being the senior kids, *being in year 6 is great, yep all round* (Kate, Focus Group 3, 5th August). The increasing pressure of their forthcoming transition to secondary school places many Victorian Year 6 students in the unenviable position of uncertainty as their parents attempt to enrol them in the 'right' secondary school (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; English, 2009). At the same time the students have reached the pinnacle of their primary school years and are looking for new experiences to maintain their motivation for school and

their sense of belonging to this institution. In many primary schools special programmes or activities are implemented to engage the students and respond to their senior status within the school environment. At Western Heights Primary School these programmes include the buddy system, with Prep students, and the student leadership roles.

The benefits of the buddy system are twofold. The Year 6 students take on responsibility for assimilating the young Prep children into school, specifically in the playground areas. The Prep students know they can turn to their older buddies at any time for support or assistance (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; English, 2009). The girls in 6C loved being responsible for their Prep buddies and often spent time with them in the playground;

> *being in grade 6 is good, having a prep buddy* (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 5th August);
>
> *I have my prep buddy, her name's Corey she's really cute. I sometimes play with her like snack and lunch. She has a lot of friends* (Maddie, Interview 23rd June);
>
> Kate walks past holding hands with her Prep buddy, Elizabeth, who she introduces to me (Field Notes, 2nd March).

At times the Prep buddies created a way for the Year 6C girls to achieve their sense of belonging, particularly in the playground areas. They also provided the girls with an opportunity to spend time with other Year 6 girls with whom they would not normally play.

There were a number of leadership positions available for the students in Year 6 at Western Heights Primary School. These included School Captains and Vice-Captains as well as sports specific captains. The selected students wear badges to acknowledge their position of responsibility. The process of appointment for the School and Vice-Captains included a written application to the Principal, Mr T., and then selected students were identified for panel interviews with the Management team. None of the 6C girls were identified for interviews although Mr G. spoke to Mollie and indicated that her application was extremely well written and he felt disappointed that she has not been granted an interview. It was not compulsory to apply and later in the year Lindi and some of the others indicated they wished they had. It appears that it may have been a group decision not to apply and they were feeling a little regretful. The sports captains were allocated throughout the year as each specific sporting carnival or event took place. Lindi was selected as the captain for the Western Heights girls' basketball team and wore her badge with pride.

The Year 6 students also wore school jumpers that were especially printed with all Year 6 students' and their teachers' names listed on it. They were organised early in the year to ensure the students had the most benefit from wearing them. The girls looked forward to them, *the jumpers will be great, with your name on it*, although they were disappointed that this year's design had been created by a parent, with no input from the students (Lindi, Focus Group 3, 5th August). The senior students had their own outdoor play area, although it was shared with Year 5s, so they had been using this space last year. Western Heights Primary School had play equipment for all year levels and it was one way of identifying students in different year levels in the playground. The girls' Year 6

graduation ceremony was a significant event on the Year 6 calendar; *Grade 6 you've got the graduation and you can get this shirt signed* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 5th August).

The spaces and places of Western Heights Primary School

As I have already argued, the presence of friends at Western Heights Primary School is vital to the girls. While they spend the majority of their time with their peers and friends in their classroom or specialist rooms it is the playground spaces that the girls found the most challenging to negotiate. This is evident when the girls' talk about being without friends in the playground: *It's important cause you might lose your self-confidence if there's no one to play with. It's good to have a lot of friends* (Susan, Interview 16th June). While the classroom space offers the girls a limited place to express friendships the girls use the variety of spaces in the playgrounds to more actively negotiate their games and friendships.

The front of the school is made up of play equipment/monkey and climbing bars for the Year 1s to 6s. The Year 1s and 2s share one piece of play equipment, the 3s and 4s another and the Year 5s and 6s have their own. This play equipment sits on tan bark underneath the widely spreading branches of a beautiful old tree. There is a synthetic netball court, with 2 mini-tennis courts incorporated and a mini running track around the outside. There are rows of bamboo trees alongside the school building, outside the prep rooms, used regularly for games of tiggy and hide and seek. The main entrance is alongside this space and it flows to the right into the canteen/eating area and to the left to the chess board situated in the V shape space at the end of the school building. The back playground has a synthetic basketball, several handball courts, sand pit, soccer pitch,

volley ball nets, canteen and eating area, cricket/mini football ground. There are several small alternate spaces which the students utilise. The area between the Year 4s and 5s classrooms, music room and gymnasium offers the students a narrow space to play games with limited numbers of participants and it is here that I witness Hayley and her friends practice their dance for Red Faces, performed at School Camp. The other prominent area for the girls is the stair access to the Year 6 area in the back playground. It is situated above the handball and basketball courts and when the girls are seated there they can see the majority of the back playground. The back playground is also where the students line up to go into class and for their weekly assembly. I quickly learn where I might find the girls and their friendship groups as they are, after all, creatures of habit;

> The students 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 the activities they want to undertake. The girls are generally not confronted by other students attempting to take over the space for different games and there appears to be a level of understanding/respect from others (Term One Review, 18th April.

Within the classroom the girls' friendship negotiations are affected by Mr G.'s allocation of seating arrangements and reading or math groups. While the girls retain their preferred friendships and groups within the classroom they are often seated at tables with girls they do not normally play with, or indeed, with the boys. Mr G's intervention appears to assist the girls in the classroom when their preferred friendship group is absent;

so what happens in the classroom when Maddie and Georgie are away? (Researcher);

Well it feels okay cause I know there's still of my friends like Hayley and Susan and Erin and all that, so yeah (Sally, Interview 15th June 2009).

By Year 6 there are few adult interventions in the playground and the girls are required to negotiate their own place to belong in this large, complex space. While the presence of others is significant, and I will discuss this shortly, I focus first on the physical geography of the playground. The playground has been laid out so that many of the areas can be used for more formal games and activities. These include the football ground, soccer pitch, netball and basketball courts and these are generally used for a version of the games these areas were designed for. For example, there are few soccer games on the soccer pitch but there are numerous students, mainly boys, playing kick to kick, shooting on goals or playing mini-games. The result is a chaotic mix of all grades running, kicking and, by necessity, avoiding.

The playground equipment is constantly used as they students swing and climb all over it. The students generally respect the grade allocations for each piece of equipment and enjoy sharing this space with their direct peers. The Year 6 play equipment is often incorporated into the games of tiggy that are constantly played throughout the year, with both girls and boys from Year 6C participants. The chess board with its large chess pieces is generally used for its intended purposes but I did witness a special event on this equipment after the Year 6s had been taught Hip Hop dancing in PE;

> Walking around the corner from the Prep playground I am confronted by a mass of boys around the chess board, sitting on the seats, tree stumps, ground and anywhere there is a space. There would have to be 40 to 50 boys ranging from Preps through to Year 6. In the midst of these boys is the chess board, the dance floor as I discover. As I watch there are 2 or 3 of the students at any time in the middle of the circle dancing – hip hop, grunge, krumping and no doubt lots of other styles I don't have the vocabulary for. The boys around the outside are smiling, clapping and cheering at the moves being presented to them (Field Notes 29th July).

This was a creative and clever use of the space but more importantly it showcased how the spaces created by adults in schools can be utilised by the students in a variety of ways. Throughout the playgrounds of Western Heights Primary School there were many planned spaces that the girls adapted for their games and activities, assisting them to embed their own ingenuity into the school's geography. Their inventiveness included, but was not limited to, park benches, the eating area, the sandpit, the edges around the raised garden beds, the soccer pitch, the bamboo trees and the steps outside the Year 6 area. One of the most utilised spaces was the circuit around the main building. The building was long, five classrooms plus the office and administration area in length and it was positioned in a manner that allowed students to do circuits of the building. The circuit was a valuable part of the playground. It was used constantly for a variety of purposes; including tiggy (chasing) and hide and seek. It was also a walking track and girls regularly walked the circuit, chatting and laughing along the way. The circuit was almost a metaphor for the ways the girls monitored and negotiated their friendships, moving around the friendship circle, watching from a distance but engaging more with

their identified peer groups as the distance grew shorter and shorter. The circuit enabled the girls to be attentive to their peers and monitor any shifts or changes in peer groups that may open up opportunities to negotiate new friendships and ways to belong. It was clearly a method of being seen by their peers. The constant circling of the school brought the girls into regular contact with their peer groups in the playground;

> Georgie, Maddie and Alison are walking around the school. They ask me if I have seen Sally. I have, she is also doing circuits of the school and I tell them that's where she is. They continue on their way.
>
> I spoke to Sally who is purposefully striding around the school. When I asked about the others she said they were looking for her but she was not interested in finding them. She continued on her walk (Field Notes, 1st June).

The circuit gave Sally a place to inhabit when her friendships got tough, close enough to step back into the group if she chose to but with enough distance to be on her own. These friendship upheavals were constant throughout the year but I want to suggest that Maddie's experience of fractured friendships highlights how the girls use the geography of Western Heights Primary School to assist them to maintain a sense of belonging;

> Maddie is walking around on her own, looking for Rob, the handyman/gardener. He's probably in his 60s, a nice, caring man to have around the school. The kids are all very familiar and accepting of him and he is often in conversation with them about what they are up to in the playground. 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.

> I feel for Maddie as she walks off. Her friendship group has almost disintegrated and she is left looking for things to keep her occupied at lunch time. Georgie is so besotted with her boyfriend that she spends no time with her 'girl' friends. Sally is often with the boys, playing tiggy and obviously Maddie is not involved in the same games (Field Notes 13th October).

A position in the garden beds alongside the handyman/gardener is not necessarily a place many 11 and 12 year olds would consider to negotiate their sense of belonging in the geography of a primary school. For Maddie though, this option enabled her to maintain her sense of belonging at school during a period of upheaval in her small friendship group. Most significantly she did not have to succumb to the fear of spending her recess and lunchtimes alone, a prospect the girls dreaded;

> [without friends] *I would feel like I wouldn't belong* (Mollie);
>
> *Like this isn't the school for me and I don't feel like I would belong you know* (Lindi);
>
> *It makes you feel like you only want to stay home* (Alison, Focus Group 1, 2nd September).

The girls highlight their concern about finding themselves without friends or peers to play with or hang out in the playground during recess or lunchtime. Their insights highlight the girls' distinction between class time and their outdoor activities. While they are fearful of being unable to partner up or find a group during class time they are far more apprehensive about the outdoor spaces. The girls reveal the challenges we face as

researchers of considering the physical geography of schools in isolation from the children and adults who inhabit these spaces.

The presence of others: Negotiating a place to belong

The length of time spent in the classroom throughout the year dictates that the girls negotiate ways to belong in this space that can be sustained for an extended period of time. As described in Chapter Six, the girls have negotiated agreements with each other, both verbal and implied, to ensure they have partners or groups to work with throughout the school year. The school playground presents the girls with a different proposition, particularly when you consider the number of 'others' who inhabit this space. Most commonly in the playground spaces the girls negotiate their sense of belonging with their peers, although, as outlined in Maddie's story above, adults are not excluded from this process. While the girls' negotiations take place without adult input the girls are aware that the teachers on duty, as well as those inside the buildings, observe their activities, *Yeah, 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, Focus Group 2, 2nd September*).*

The playground spaces offer a wider range of friendship options than the girls' Year 6C class. There are two other Year 6 classes as well as three Year 5s at Western Heights Primary School. For some, such as Hayley, her best friend was from another Year 6 class and they regularly linked up in the playground, *I've spent more time with Emily than with everybody else I know* (Hayley, Interview 15th June). When asked, the girls all thought that being alone and having no one to play with was an undesirable situation;

It's good to have other people, yeah it's good to have other people around but, I don't like being alone, by myself, but I used to now I'm fine with it yeah (Alex, Interview 15th June);

So you don't get really lonely. Yeah wouldn't want to go to school. (Maddie Interview 23rd June);

Today I was struck by the smallness of Susan when she was not with her friends. She looked truly lost when I saw her in the eating area and I suggest in a sense she was (My Reflections, 26th May);

Well mostly like, I would feel really if I didn't have anyone to play with. I don't know they're [friends] *just really cool and stuff, yeah* (Hollie, Interview 16th June).

The girls recalled many instances when their friends were absent from school, or their friendships had fragmented. The girls revealed the intensity of the negotiations they undertook to achieve a place to belong, in the short and long term;

On Friday I didn't really play with anyone. I sort of played with Alex, Rachel and Alison (Maddie Interview 23rd June);

Maddie and Georgie aren't here today and that's who I usually play with. I felt a bit lonely cause there was nothing really to do. Then I realised I wasn't playing with them there were other people I was hoping they would let me play with them as well (Sally, Interview 15th June).

The idea that you have to ask permission to join in with other girls or groups was common for the girls. This is a difficult position to be in, as often the question is being asked at a

time when feelings of loneliness or sadness are prevalent. The thought of rejection must be challenging but the fear of having no place to belong necessitates the question;

> *Would feel lonely and you'd be probably a bit scared just in case you ask someone and they say no or something* (Sally, Interview 15th June);

> *Well um, I don't know, you kind of like say, "can I hang out with you?" Then if they say no that's probably she's part mean or if they say oh sure* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 2nd September);

> *Cause I'm crying* [in Year 1], *I tried to hold it in and I started crying and then Miss M. went "what's wrong?" I'm like, "Amanda and her friends wouldn't let me play with them"* (Lindi, Focus Group 3, 2nd September).

The girls' 'power to permit or withdraw friendship – to include or to exclude' – is arguably most evident in the playground (Valentine, 2001, p. 145 see also, James, 1993; Thorne, 1994). Amidst the uncertainty of rejection the girls were able to identify the possibilities that new friendships may bring. Alex reflects on how the hurt of existing friendships can be softened by negotiating new ways to belong;

> *Friendships change a lot. Makes me feel alright, yeah makes me feel good cause most of the time something bad happens can't figure it out so a change from it* (Alex, Interview 15th June).

A, B or C? Does it really make a difference?

I conclude this chapter with an overview of how the texture and detail of a specific space or location can be affected by the individuals and their interactions. As Nayak suggests, 'places and identities are mutually constitutive in that not only does 'place' shape youth identities, but also youth identities shape and influence the character of places' (Nayak, 2003, p. 28). The make-up of Year 6C, the female participants in my study, as well as the boys and teacher, Mr G., influenced the conduct of my ethnography and my understandings of the girls' everyday lives. As I have discussed previously the Principal's decision to allocate me to a class led by a male teacher with a group of girls who had spent their Year 5 in an all-girls class, proved significant in my study. The allocation of individual students to each Year 6 class in 2009 also proved to be significant. While I was aware of these variations the girls of Year 6C were very cognisant of the differences between their class and the other two Year 6 classes;

> *Like Miss A.'s grade, they some of them ....* (Holly);
>
> *But sometimes, only sometimes* (Lindi);
>
> *Probably about three people* (Holly);
>
> *There's always a class that is boyfriend and girlfriends class. They're always the popular* (Kate);
>
> *Yeah, popular. There's popular boys, there's 2 popular boys in Miss A.'s class and then the rest of them are in Miss L.'s class* (Lindi);

cause all the girls in there [Miss L's] *are sensible* (Holly);

There's just certain people when they are in a class they influence the other people (Kate), (Focus Group 1, 13th October).

The girls identified the influence that different groups of students and teachers had on each class. The girls were insightful and particularly intuitive when discussing the differences between their all-girls Year 5 class and this year's co-educational class. The girls had very definite views on the success of each class, as earlier identified. They 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. The girls identified some of the practices and actions that were absent from the all-girls Year 5 class;

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

No people yelling, no people like David going crazy (Georgie);

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

There were no stinky boys in the grade (Georgie);

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);

Last year I actually felt that I could do more and say more and I could just be myself (Lindi) (Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3, 13th October).

They also identified that the different teaching styles of their female Year 5 and male Year 6 teachers impacted in the classroom;

I don't know if it was the boys or it was the teacher, I don't know (Kate);

I reckon it was the teacher. Miss F., I like her teaching method, but she does everything fun. But Mr G. teaches more (Lindi);

In Mr G.'s class it's like we learn more than we're meant to (Holly) (Focus Groups 1, 2, 3 13th October).

Lindi offered an interesting revelation when she suggested she had compensated for the absence of boys in Year 5, *I was sort of like the boy of the class last year*. Obviously missing the presence of boys she went on to express her preference for a co-educational class rather than a single gender, *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* (Lindi, Focus Group 1, 13th October). Interestingly Lindi may have a struggle ahead of her at secondary school as she has been enrolled in a Catholic all-girls secondary college.

The girls' understanding of the allocation of their peers to classes in their earlier years was insightful as they reflected on their own practices. Kate recalled, *in Prep I was, in Prep I was popular, popular*, even though she did not want to be, *yeah but I don't actually want to be popular, popular. They always wanted to play with me, it was so weird* (Kate,

Focus Group 1, 13th October). She suggested that at times it could be a drag, especially when *everyone asked me to go to the toilet with them* (Kate, Focus Group 1, 13th October). In contrast, Sally's recollection of friendship negotiations in Year 3 or 4 was not enjoyable;

> *When I was like in Grade 3 or 4 I think. Because Maddie had a different friend and I remember one day we were playing and I thought just because she was my friends she'd want to hang out with me at lunch. She didn't show up so I looked for her and she was playing with her friends. And she was only playing with me 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, Group 2, 2nd September).

Local geographies: Understanding the places and spaces of Western Heights Primary School

In this chapter I have considered the significance of local geographies in the life of the tween girl. While the Tween market is more commonly referred to as a global experience the everyday lives of tween girls are lived in their own local geographies. I have considered the significance of these spaces and places and introduced the significance of belonging to the institution of school. School is a powerful presence in the life of the tween and the spaces and places of Western Heights Primary School have been introduced as the location for this research project. I consider how the buildings, outdoor playgrounds and spaces, teachers, students of the broader school and Year 6C combine to create the unique 'social geography' of this space (Valentine, 2001, 2004).

The opportunities and challenges confronting the girls in the playground spaces of Western Heights Primary School are discussed as the girls reveal the ongoing and constant negotiations of friendship. The value of friends is without question as the girls relate their apprehension of being left without friends, particularly in the playground spaces. The girls have developed playground strategies over their time at Western Heights Primary. While playground spaces could be lonely if their friends were absent or friends were strained, the girls negotiated back up plans to ensure they were not on their own. Examples of the girls' negotiations when friends were absent, or in a state of flux, reveal the expended energy and effort that goes into maintaining alternative friends to cover all circumstances. Maddie's example of spending time with the gardener/handyman provided an insight into how creative the girls can be when times are difficult.

The girls' competent and considered use of the spaces and places of Western Heights Primary School was notable. Creatures of habit, I discovered early on that the groups of girls would be located in their favourite places around the playground. While the playground is a 'highly public space', the spaces and places are 'shaped and regulated by children themselves' (Kehily, 2002a, p. 170). From the active groups of tiggy to the quieter games on the back stairs the girls identified and actively inhabited spaces which enabled them to engage in common activities with their friends. The girls had a well-developed understanding of which areas would be available for particular games or quiet contemplation and clear awareness of other students and their right to share the same spaces. Local geographies, such as Western Heights Primary School play an important role in the life of the tween, but local geographies also interact with global spaces and the

globalised nature of the Tween market. In the next chapter I will consider how these spaces work in tandem in the life of the tween girl.

Chapter Eight

Challenging Tween with the in-betweenness of the tween girls' everyday practices

Introduction

> Children's consumer culture occupies an ambiguous place in contemporary thought. It stands, on the one hand, as a ubiquitous presence in the everyday public culture of wealthy nations and, on the other, as a relatively neglected area of social research and thinking (Cook, 2004a, p. 147).

It is no coincidence that scholarly interest in the culture and practices of children burgeoned at the end of the 20th century 'in tandem with the growth of the children's market' (Cook, 2004a, p. 151). It is now argued that 'the place and status of children, and the meaning of childhood itself', are 'inseparable from branding' and their 'commercial personae' (Cook, 2004a, p. 151). Highly regarded scholars and theorists have explored the 'production' and commercial rewards of children's consumption, and considered the consumer preferences and practices of children (see Cook, 2008 for a detailed list of scholars). Yet despite this scholarship, they contend that 'relatively little is known about how children engage in practices of consumption or what the significance of this is to their everyday lives and broader issues of social organization' (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, p. 161 see also, Cook, 2004a; Cook, 2008; Cook & Kaiser, 2004). By focusing on the 'relationship between the market and children', it has been

argued that scholars have largely neglected the significance of 'social relationships' to children's consumption activities (Martens, Southerton & Scott, 2004, p. 158 see also, Adler & Adler, 1998; Cook, 2004a, 2008; Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Pugh, 2009).

Within this complex milieu, the Tween market compels theorists to address gendered consumption in children's consumer culture. Advertisers contend that the desires of boys and girls differ, that they 'like different products and need segregated marketing' (Schor, 2005). Targeting girls in the ambiguous space between their childhood and teenage years, advertisers, producers and retailers do not present the Tween market as a category or a stage that must be achieved but rather 'an identity in itself' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 218). Producers, advertisers, marketers and retailers have identified this period of rapid social, physiological and emotional development, in the girls' life course, as a 'newly constructed persona and market' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 205). The tween girl's desires, both as a biographical person and as a commercial persona', resides in this 'ambiguous cultural space of sexuality and autonomy whereby the ability to construct personal identity cannot be divorced from market availability' (Cook, 2004a, p. 151). Retailers, producers and marketers work together to create a 'consuming tween' by responding to 'her desires for clothing, accessories, goods and services (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206 see also, Brookes & Kelly, 2009). While societal debates about the sexual innocence and agency of the tween girl continue, cultural studies and feminist scholars do argue that she exhibits agency in her 'appropriations of available styles and cultural models of girlhood' (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 223 see also, Harris, 2005b; Pomerantz, 2008; Russell & Tyler, 2002). As Robinson and Davies contend, while 'the market can work hard to insert particular meanings and desires' to the girls, it remains within their 'power to take them up, resist them and sometimes abandon them' (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. xv).

For tween girls, the intersection of 'three dimensions', 'to be a child, a consumer, and to be feminine' pinpoint just what it means 'to be a young girl in contemporary consumer society' (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 621). Personal identity, 'styles of dress' and presentation are essential to the tween girl (Pomerantz, 2008, p. xiii). Aesthetically they enable her to fashion her own young, feminine girlness that is presented to her friends and peers for acceptance and a place to belong. 'The power of the market', its products, services, images and messages affect the tween girl and provide her with a range of 'tools' she can use to be noticed by her peers (Pomerantz, 2008, p. xiv). The tween girls' 'capacity to function as effective consumers seems to be honed largely through the pursuit of an ideal femininity' (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 621). For the tween girls in Russell and Tyler's U.K. study, presenting young femininity was 'defined according to two aesthetic dimensions… that to be feminine means to conform to an aesthetic ideal of femininity and that femininity itself is an aesthetic phenomenon' (2002, p. 629). While the Tween market responds to the girls needs and desires for 'lots of 'lovely', 'girlie' things, providing her with 'concrete, aesthetic objectifications of femininity', she is not easily led. As tween girls actively engage with the products and services, images and ideals of the consumer-media, they want to maintain 'responsibility for controlling their own gender, and for managing' the meanings and the desires that motivate and fashion their own young, feminine girlness (Russell & Tyler, 2002, p. 630; see also Harris, 2005; Pomerantz, 2008). Though the marketers, retailers and advertisers of Tween may claim to understand the tween girls' needs and desires, there are many aspects of the experiences of this age group that are unrecognised as I have explored in my earlier chapters.

In this chapter, I examine their subjective understandings of the ambiguous space in which they find themselves. I shift the focus from their in-between 'commercial personae'

to the in-betweenness they experience in their own social worlds. I explore the goods and services they use and desire as integral to their increased longing for responsibility and independence. Parental decisions in relation to secondary school selection, independent outings and access to social networking sites intersect with are the girls' frustration at the limitations and restrictions being placed upon them. The aesthetics of fashioning their own young, feminine girlness is considered as the restrictions of school uniform are freed up by the permission to wear their own casual clothes to camp. I discuss the girls' engagement with traditional channels of the consumer-media and their early involvement with social networking sites. Parental attentiveness to the girls' consumption activity and social networking sites is revealed as the girls grapple with parental decisions and restrictions.

Tweens: Pursuing her own young, feminine girlness

Relating the in-betweenness

The girls were aware that the inspiration for my study of 11 and 12 year old girls stemmed from the consumer-media concept, the Tween market. The topic came up regularly in conversations throughout the year and the girls pondered how closely they associated themselves with being a tween. While they didn't directly align themselves with the consumer-media definition of a Tween – *Born to Buy* - (Schor, 2005) they identified some of its key aspects;

> *I don't know, not bothered (about being a tween) I don't like that about tweens, the pink and purple stuff* (Susan, Focus Group 3, 5th August).

The rapidly changing needs and desires of the tween girl are acknowledged by marketers, retailers and advertisers who have become very adept at responding to their shifting requests. Understanding the volatility of the Tween market is important in the marketing world. Tween are considered to be trend setters, changing their needs and desires more rapidly than the well-established teen market (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 222);

> *As you get older you change your personality, I used to like the colour pink but now I like the colour blue. But everybody still buys me the colour pink so they don't quite get that we've changed but you are changing. You don't know it but you are going older and yeah …* (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 5th August).

The girls and I discussed the concept of being in-between their childhood and teenage years and how their understanding of in-betweenness may differ from the consumer-media's definitions. The girls identified tween as a stage in their lives, one that was situated between childhood and their teenage years. Their comments reflected the ambiguous nature of the Tween market and its indistinct age boundaries as the girls weren't sure how they fitted in;

> *What do you think about the term tweenie? Well it kind of just explains your age* (Hayley);
>
> *you're in-between* (Rachel, Focus Group 1, 5th August);
>
> *9 and below is sort of like a kid then 10, 11, 12 is like the tweenie thing and then 13, teenager* (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 5th August);
>
> *I think of myself as nearly a teenager* (Lindi)*;*

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

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

Higher than a child but not completely a tween (Kate);

No, tweens lower than a teenager (Kate), (Focus Group 3, 5th August);

yes, no, a little bit, kind of, I'm not a teenager yet, unfortunately, just stuck in-between (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August).

The girls clearly identified that this was as a period of in-betweenness and there was a sense that they were almost in waiting for something. It is important to note that the girls were not particularly focused on turning 13 and the appeal of their teenage years, but were motivated more by the significant transition to Year 7 in their new secondary schools and the freedoms and consumer goods that seemingly awaited them in these spaces.

The disparity between tweens' desires and parental decisions

The girls experienced the appeal of being more mature though, of increased freedom and responsibility. Accessing or purchasing different products and services was commonplace and in many case their parents accommodated the girls shifting desires;

You can go out more, you get more freedom (Sally, Focus Group 2, 5th August);

Hanging out with friends and having sleep overs (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 5th August);

Getting spoilt more, you get lots of attention (Alex, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

Being older than my sister (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August).

But equally often the girls' parents did not agree with their changing desires and the girls expressed their frustrations;

I hate going to bed at 7 or 8. I hate going to bed at that time (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

I'm not allowed to watch M stuff (movies) *until I'm 16* (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

I cannot stay home by myself at night (Maddie, Focus Group 3, 5th August);

The girls believed they were ready for these activities and struggled with their parents' decisions. There were different values and parenting styles evident even in this small group of girls;

you don't have that many responsibilities (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August); or

well actually in my house there are a lot of responsibilities (Hayley, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

I like being responsible but not being responsible doing jobs (Holly, Focus Group 3, 5th August);

I started watching M [rated] *movies when I was in Grade 2* (Kate, Focus Group 3, 5th August); or

I watched an M movie and then I had to ring my Mum to see if it was okay (Lindi, Focus Group 3, 5th August);

I always have to go to bed at 8.30 then read for ½ an hour before I go to sleep. I want to stay up till late (Maddie, Focus Group 2, 5th August);

I'm allowed to stay up as long as I like on weekends (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 5th August).

The girls had very definite ideas of the activities and opportunities that should open up to them during Year 6. The decisions about these however rested with their parents who were not always as forthcoming with goods, services and activities as the girls would like. Hayley's comment *I'm 12 now I can handle this* (Focus Group 1, 5th August) reflects many of the girls' belief that their age and position in primary school automatically prepared them for new activities and ownership of desired consumer goods and services. I asked the girls to separately list three activities they wanted to be allowed to participate in and three consumer items they wanted to own but their parents wouldn't let them.

Table 4. Things I want to do

Things I want to do that I'm not allowed to	Number of responses from girls
Go out by myself, without family members	7
Access MSN/Email/Facebook/My Space	7
Stay up late	5

Table 5. Things I want

Things I want but am not allowed to have	Number of responses from girls
Mobile Phone	7
Lap top computer	7
iPod	4

There was a consistent theme in discussions of desiring freedom or independence from the family unit, both physically as well as on-line and to communicate and keep in touch with their friends/peers. A mobile phone was arguably the most desired item for the girls, *phones, you'd be able to go out more maybe. You get more trust. Cause you can go to the movies and you don't have to have someone watch over you* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 5th August). The argument that a mobile phone would enable parents to keep in touch with them wherever they went was a strong case proposed by the girls. The owning of a mobile phone, the type of phone they would choose and who they would keep in touch with was a constant topic of conversation throughout the year.

For many parents the decision to purchase a mobile phone or grant access to MSN or Facebook appeared to be closely linked to the girls' transition from primary to secondary school. It was difficult however to confirm this hypothesis or determine whether these items were being withheld to be gifted as a rite of passage or if the parents felt that the girls were not yet ready to take on these responsibilities without talking to the girls' parents. The decision to give an 11 or 12 year old a mobile phone or access to MSN or Facebook is complex though and likely to be deeply embedded in the girls' own 'family relationships' (Lindsay & Maher, 2013, p. 42). For the girls though ownership of a phone

was a significant token of value in achieving their desire to maintain communication with their friends and peers outside the school environment. It is possible that parents were not aware of how important the ownership of a phone was to the girls' desire to communicate with and 'fit in' with their peers (Pugh, 2009, p. 93).

Similarly it was difficult to determine how aware the girls' parents were of their regular conversations about the attributes of the different secondary schools being considered for them. While their parents pondered and explored the options available to the girls, conversations between the girls, and boys, were taking place in the classroom and playground. There was a significant level of angst and uncertainty in the girls' discussions as they discussed the merits of different schools. As discussed in Chapter 7, the significance of developing a sense of belonging to the institution of school cannot be underestimated. Alex's reflections provide us with an insight into the types of thoughts and discussions that took place between the girls;

> *I don't really get my say unless it's affecting me. With High Schools I really wanted to go to Western Heights High but they* [parents] *took me to Mount St Agnes. I did like it but I sort of still wanted to go to Western Heights High but I did like it and I'm going to Mount St Agnes now. And I feel good about that because I'm going with Lindi and Georgie and a few of the other girls* (Alex, Focus Group 1, 19th August).

The appeal of a successful school, as determined by their peers, is evident here but it is less clear how young people, in this instance the girls in my ethnography, feel about attending a school viewed unfavourably by peers. What happens to these girls if they are unsuccessful in being accepted at a Secondary School, which enables them the

opportunity to join in the conversation about their next year options with their peers? (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009; Tsolidis, 2006, 2009). What would have happened to Holly if she and Kate had not been accepted to her parents', and her, preferred secondary school; *Melbourne Girls is cool* (Holly, Focus Group 1, 23rd July). Many Victorian parents spend years determining where their children will go to school, both primary and secondary. Some, like Erin's, move house, *well we're probably moving so I can get into Southern Heights High School and they* [parents] *talked to me and my sister about it. So they told us if we were okay with that and stuff. Cause Anna* [her sister] *will probably have to change primary schools* (Focus Group 1, 19th August). With limited research exploring the conversations and understandings of Year 6 students facing their transition to Secondary School it is difficult to draw any specific conclusions from these findings, but I suggest that this is an area that warrants consideration. For these girls transitioning to Year 7 was a major focus for the year and influenced the girls' feelings towards being 11 or 12 and the senior students of Western Heights Primary School. During our focus groups I asked the girls whether *Being 11 or 12, is it the best of times or the worst of times?* Their responses were generally noncommittal;

> *Both, yeah both, both, absolutely both* (Hayley, Alison and Erin, Focus Group 2, 5th August);
>
> *It's pretty good. It's not the best time and it's not the worst time, it's in the middle. It's up there* (Holly, Focus Group 3, 5th August);
>
> *A bit of both, but it's also, because it is fun but it's also really exciting nearly being a teenager and getting more privileges* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 5th August).

In many ways the girls' responses reflected the ambiguity they felt about their age and position of looking forward, with apprehension and expectation, to their secondary years. The girls' desires for freedom, responsibility and communication products such as mobile phones, reveal a departure from their parents' understandings which emphasises the uncertainty of this period of in-betweenness for tween girls. The girls know their parents' decisions regarding freedom, mobile phones and consumer products consider a range of issues beyond the straightforward cost of the product. Despite these differences, and the obvious frustrations of the girls, they acknowledged their parents' desire to make appropriate decisions for this stage of the girls' lives. One of the areas the girls' parents and families continued to control was their consumer purchases. For these girls, in contrast to the Tween market's suggestion, shopping was an activity still undertaken with their parents and family.

'Not a "girlie girl" but I Liiiike Shopping'

One of the girls' favourite activities was shopping, arguably their most noticeable engagement with the consumer-media. The girls' identified the Tween market with the fantasy world of 'pink, fluffy, glittery, sparkly and shimmery objects and fashions' created by retailers and advertisers (Harris, 2005b, p. 212). The girls regularly discussed their shopping expeditions and shared stories of the products they purchased. As discussed in Chapter Five, their shopping outings were most commonly undertaken with their parents and other family members;

> *I go shopping most weekends, with my Mum and Dad, but mostly my Mum* (Rachel, Interview 16th June);

> Alex is writing a poem titled *Shopping.* 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, everything. She says they *always buy. But sometimes I have to wait then I don't want it* (Field Notes, 26th May).

While most of the girls' shopping outings were undertaken with their parents as discussed in Chapter 5, going shopping with their friends was a popular expression for the freedom and responsibility the girls desired, *I want more freedom, to go out shopping more, but my sister still has to come* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 5th August). Parents weren't completely dismissed as the girls recognised how their purchases were funded, because *that's what parents are for* (Lindi, Focus Group 2, 23rd July 2009). The girls were very aware that shopping without funds was not an enjoyable activity, *if you have no money then it's boring* (Kate). It was unclear if the girls felt they would have purchased different items with their friends, but they were very keen to shift their shopping activities from family outings to adventures with their friends.

The girls were well-versed in the intent of advertising and the effect that well known and popular brands had on the price of different products. Favourite outlets for the girls included;

> *Supré, JJ's, Smiggle, Boost Juice, DK, ICE, I like all the surf brands* (Rachel);
>
> *Rip Curl, Smiggle is pretty cool* (Holly);
>
> *I like the surf brands as well but they're really expensive* (Kate);

if they were cheap I would love them so much (Holly, Focus Groups 1 & 2, 23rd July).

The girls' preferred shopping locations were predictably shopping centres and strip shopping in their local neighbourhoods. The girls were aware that *advertisements make things look cool when they're not* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 23rd July). Kate's awareness about the shrewd sizing of Just Jeans influenced her decision to avoid the outlet, *I used to like that shop but I don't like it now. They say that I'm a size 6 and I'm not (*Kate, Focus Group 2, 23rd July). Cost was another determining factor in the girls' decisions about the brands they chose to wear, *I like the surf brands as well but they're really expensive* (Lindi). In 2013 the Commonwealth Bank estimated that children between the ages of ten and 12 were paid an average of $11.37 per week in pocket money (Bank., 2013). Despite the girls' regular shopping outings they did not divulge the amount of pocket money they received from their parents. The only time that 'their' money was discussed was when they went on shopping outings around their birthdays, and they did not disclose the amount of money they had to spend.

When asked in these focus groups about their understandings of the Tween the girls expressed the opinion that you needed to be '*girlie, girl'* or a *shopping person* to make the most of your shopping expeditions as a Tween (Focus Group 3, 5th August). Some, like Kate, were not convinced that they wanted to be associated with Tween, *I'm not a shopping person*, while in contrast Lindi claimed this identity; *I am, I am*, (Focus Group 3, 5th August). While the girls all enjoyed shopping, Alex was the most inclined to shop and this was a regular leisure activity for her family. Alex's shopping activities with her parents and her regular discussions with Rachel about what and where to buy demonstrate

an in-betweenness in her consumption activities. Unlike the group consumption activities depicted by the Tween, this is another illustration of the in-betweenness of 11 and 12 year old girls as they turn to friends for advice but are still heavily influenced by the decisions of their parents;

> *We 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 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, Interview, 15th June).

Aesthetically appealing: fashioning young, feminine girlness

The regularity of the girls' shopping expeditions prompts the question, what are the girls buying? For the most part the girls' shopping outings were to window shop for, or purchase, clothes and accessories;

> *I love skinnies* [jeans]. *I don't like wearing dresses, they don't suit me* (Hayley);
>
> *I hate jeans* (Alison);
>
> *comfortable stuff* (Erin);
>
> *tops with logo's/pictures, I like black jeans, I like black clothes* (Maddie);
>
> *I don't mind wearing dresses, but I'm more just a tracksuit or leggings[girl]* (Alison); or,

I like things that are different, I wear things that don't match. I like bright yellow (Sally); or,

Tops and jumpers (Holly);

I like Haviannas as well (Lindi), (Focus Groups 1, 2 & 3, 23rd July).

With school uniform compulsory at Western Heights Primary School I didn't get to see the girls wear their outfits or purchases very often. One of the few occasions I observed the girls in their own attire was on their three day school camp;

> The girls were dressed comfortably and casually for the three days of camp. They wore tracksuits, leggings and jeans most of the time, although Lindi has denim shorts on for day two. The most popular creative and colourful items appear to be their slippers, pyjamas (pjs) and beanies. Maddie wore a pj top which said *I'm a pussy cat by day* and when she turned around said *a tiger by night.* Maddie was very aware of the connotations of the phrase on her pjs and was very excited to show them off to (Field Notes Camp, 20th – 22nd April).

Conformity in simple, casual gear was evident in the girls' choices of jeans, leggings and tracksuits. These items did not appear to have a 'look at me' appeal about them but enabled the girls to fit in with their peers. Maddie's pyjamas were evidence of imprinting tween girls' clothing with sexually explicit connotations often raised in the arguments and debates about the early sexualisation of tween girls.

> Beanies were another fashion item, Lindi and Mollie had similar beanies but with different colours. A number of the girls from other grades were wearing similar

> beanies, soft crocket style with bobbles hanging down below the girls' ears. Mollie's slippers were also very obvious, large fluffy items which looked almost like two tom cats hanging onto your feet (Field Notes Camp, 20th- 22nd April).

The different colours and styles of the beanies and slippers are ideal accessories for the girls to introduce their own young, feminine girlness. It appears that the girls may be more comfortable in experimenting with their accessories or less obvious items of clothing like their shorts, as discussed in Chapter 4, than their entire outfit or style. There were some exceptions, such as the camp disco;

> Clothing for the disco was also quite casual. Most of Mr G.'s class had on jeans or trousers with a nice top although Sally has on a pink dropped waist dress with a pink cardigan. They had all spent considerable time preparing themselves though (Field Notes Camp, 20th – 22nd April).

The simplicity of the outfit, jeans or trousers with a smart t-shirt or shirt almost failed to convey the level of discussions and consideration that had taken place over several weeks leading up to camp. The conformity was striking with few girls brave enough to attempt a 'different look'. Sally was one of the exceptions, in her dropped waist dress but I would suggest that it wasn't her intention to stand out, or not belong on the night but rather to wear an item of clothing she felt comfortable wearing. Jeans and t-shirts/tops were definitely the attire of those who wanted to belong to the larger group. There were a few who took, arguably, the next step in their appearance;

> A couple of girls from other classes had make-up on at the disco. Hair, shows, getting dressed all took time and when I popped into Hayley's 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 (Field Notes Camp 20th – 22nd April).

The wearing of make-up, perfume and other feminine toiletries is a stark reminder of the unlimited ranges of shoes, tights, bags, glasses, make-up and toiletries that are available to purchase and increasingly marketed to tweens. This is another example of the consumer-media targeting this age group with products which blur the boundaries of their in-betweenness. Rather than wait for the girls to reach their teenage years, these products are actively produced and marketed to the girls. Rachel's products highlight her progress to another stage of Tween products and Hayley was a very willing confidant in this development. The other girls appear to be just starting out on their adventures with makeup, skin products and perfumes. The girls' desire to explore the products that are available to them appears to be driven by two key aspects. Firstly their changing bodies necessitate new products;

> *it's like nervously cause then you've got to start waxing, I'm not doing it yet!* (Lindi);
>
> *You're going to have to start shaving your legs* (Maddie)

and secondly, as Hayley's comments suggest, they want to be classy, or mature, just like their peers (Focus Group 3 5th August). Awareness of the products and services available to them is one aspect of marketing and advertising, but ensuring the girls know how to use a product, its purpose and benefits, adds an additional layer to the promotion of

individual products. In the next section I will consider how the girls use available products and services to fashion their own young, feminine girlness.

Magazines, Celebrities and MSN

Celebrities: what do they mean in the everyday life of the tween?

Despite the multi-media avenues for communicating products and services, women's and girls' magazines continue to provide tween girls with gossip, celebrities, images, ideals and a significant place to learn about aesthetics and young, feminine girlness (Jones, Vigfusdottir & Lee, 2004; Brookes & Kelly, 2009; Carter, 2005; McRobbie, 2008). While the majority of girls in my study did not actively buy or read magazines, Alex and Rachel admitted that they were keen readers. Rachel's favourites were *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, both Australian magazines aimed at a young, female demographic. Lindi's Mum is a hairdresser and she has ready access to women's and girls' magazines, although she declared that *I don't read magazines but I just look at the pictures* (Focus Group 2, 23rd July 2009). Susan also had access to a specific magazine but didn't read them at all, *my Dad collects Vanity Fair, I think there's a whole book shelf at home* (Focus Group 1, 23rd July 2009). Several of the girls, who have irregular access to magazines, described their favourite segments;

> *I love going to the pages where they've got embarrassing stories* (Hayley, Focus Group 2, 23rd July);
>
> *fashion, music, gossip, celebrity stuff yeah,* (Alex, Interview, 15th June).

The girls raise the issue of celebrities and the role they play in communicating messages about products and services and ideals of young, feminine girlness. The girls were hesitant to declare anyone a celebrity without first debating just who they thought qualified and what it takes to be a celebrity;

> *Is Tyra Banks a celebrity?* (Alex);
>
> *yeah she's like a model* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 23rd July).

There was no consensus of which celebrities the girls liked though although Erin's group attempted to define a celebrity;

> *They can be rich people … they can be people like Paris Hilton* (Erin);
>
> *they can be Pink* (Alex);
>
> *Paris Hilton, I hate Paris Hilton* (Sally);
>
> *I think celebrities are overrated* (Alex);
>
> *Celebrities don't actually have to act or anything, it can be like your family or something. Paris Hilton, she's got a pretty rich father, so it's not actually her. She's not really done anything, she's stuck up, I hate her* (Sally, Focus Group 2, 23rd July).

The most prominent celebrities tended to be those that were prevalent in the girls' own social worlds at this time. The American singer *Pink* was touring Australia at the time with record breaking numbers of shows in Melbourne alone. Other popular singers included *Taylah Swift*, *Miley Cyrus* and *Lady Ga Ga*, although Holly suggested that while

her music's good, some of her lyrics are a bit … [daring] (Focus Group 1, 23rd July). Most of the girls had iPods to listen to their favourite artists and songs but also enjoyed listening to the radio and watching Video Hits. Stars or celebrities from television shows or movies the girls watched were popular, although only some girls were allowed to watch M rated movies or TV shows, *I think I've watched maybe one movie that's rated M, I think I watched it with my Dad* (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August). Daniel Ratcliffe of Harry Potter fame was deemed a celebrity by the girls, linked to the release of the latest movie, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*: the books alone were enough for Susan. Comedians, talk shows hosts, sporting stars were also classed as celebrities by some of the girls, but others were unsure.

Alex's and Rachel's regular and explicit interest in celebrities was self-proclaimed and formed an important part of their friendship. They declared that their access to celebrity gossip and information had moved beyond the more common mediums discussed above and now included MSN, Microsoft's portal, which offers 'news, sport, money, games, videos, entertainment & celebrity gossip, weather, shopping and more' (Microsoft, 2013). For the majority of the girls though they had an awareness of celebrities but were able to question their influence in their lives and even question the validity of the celebrity status accorded to some individuals. The girls also identified that their knowledge of celebrities had shifted from magazines and was predominantly gained from their on-line activities.

Stepping stones to Facebook

With formal access to Facebook illegal for this age group - the legal age is 13 - there has been little research exploring how 11 and 12 year olds use social media. An Australian Bureau of Statistics report indicates that 22% of children aged between 5 and 14 access

social networking sites. The Bureau reported that only 11% of children between 9 and 11 accessed social networking sites (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). Further statistics reveal that social networking was more popular with girls than boys with girls' accessing Facebook and Twitter more regularly than boys. Statistics show that social networking is replacing emails as the most popular way for girls', and boys', to communicate with their friends and peers online (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b).

While MySpace and Facebook are arguably the most recognised social networking sites and desired by the girls in my study, *Facebook's awesom*e (Hayley, Focus Group 2, 23rd July), MSN offers its members the ability to sign up at any age and create their own Hotmail (email) address as well as use an instant messenger service (Microsoft, 2013). MSN enables members to upload, store and transmit photos, video, music, emails and instant messages, the most common activity of the girls in Year 6C. With Facebook's age restrictions and widespread parental and community concerns about cyber-bulling and on-line strangers it is arguable that MSN offers tween girls a more secure and less confronting social networking medium. It is not my intention here to contribute to discussions about cyber-bulling, on-line risk or even to monitor the girls' usage (S. Bauman & Tatum, 2009; Maher, 2008; G. Valentine & Holloway, 2002; Willett, 2005). My intent is to include the girls' understandings of their engagement with social networking sites, particularly MSN, as part of my exploration of their belonging and in-betweenness. In this way I aim to contribute to developing broader understandings of how girls use social networking sites (Boyd, 2008).

For the girls in my study access to any form of social media was a significant achievement, enabling them to communicate with and be 'visible to their peers' at any

time (Pugh, 2009, p. 7). While the girls appeared to have ready access to the internet they all identified parental restrictions around their social networking access;

> *I don't go on MySpace or Facebook or anything like that* (Erin);
>
> *That Facebook and stuff it can be dangerous and so I'm not allowed. I think she* [Mum] *said until I'm 31 or something* (Georgie, Focus Group 2, 23rd July 2009);
>
> *I don't go on MySpace or Facebook, I just go on* (Alison, Focus Group 3, 23rd July 20);
>
> MSN *you can stay in touch* (Lindi, Focus Group 1 & 2, 23rd July).

For parents, who may hold grave concerns about the girls' access to social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, MSN may dispel some of their concerns. Boyd's findings may also be reassuring, teens 'primary audience consists of peers that they know primarily offline' and this was certainly true for the girls in my study (2008, p. 129). MSN, and similar sites, seemed to provide girls with a stepping stone where they can be seen to be cool to their peers and acceptable in the eyes of their parents (Boyd, 2008);

> *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. And sometimes I go on web sites but mainly talk to people on MSN. It's just cool how you don't really have to ring anybody and if they're on line you can just talk to them* (Holly, Interview 16th June);

> *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, Interview, 22nd June).

As discussed in Chapter 6 the girls' negotiations of friendship are ongoing, uncertain and time consuming and access to MSN at home introduces a new layer of complexity for them to navigate. The first step in this process is having access to MSN, which was not available to all the girls;

> *Can you believe it? I don't have a laptop, a mobile phone an iPod or anything like that, I don't even go on MSN or Facebook or anything like that* (Erin, Focus Group 1, 5th August);

> *Well they 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 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, Interview 16th June).

The girls' frustrations at not being able to communicate through this medium were palpable but being able to apportion the blame to their parents appeared to help the girls maintain their dignity with their friends. Friendship groups maintained communication with the non-users of MSN in more traditional ways, *I still stay in touch with Susan and she doesn't go on MSN* (Kate, Focus Group 1, 23rd July). The non-users missed out though, on the communication taking place with girls and boys outside their friendship group at Western Heights Primary School and I will return to this shortly. The third step

is to have access to a computer and MSN after school and on weekends. For some girls their access appeared unlimited;

> *I just go on the computer and talk to friends and talk to my Mum* (Rachel, Interview 16th June);

And others have more restrictions;

> *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, Interview 22nd June).

While access to MSN did not determine friendship groups it shifted some of the friendship opportunities and created a new social world on-line, which was linked to but separate from the social world of school. When asked who they communicated with on-line the girls included classmates who were not generally in their friendship group as well as students from the other Year 6 classes. As discussed in Chapter 6 the friendship groups of 6C were pretty tight but the 'MSN' social world created a new layer of friendship and belonging which was not directly aligned to the class group although their engagement with the other girls from 6C was obvious when they described their MSN 'friends', *I talk to Rachel, Alex, Sally and Georgie and …* (Alison, Interview, 16th June).

The links and similarities between the girls' 'offline and online identities' were tangible in the girls' descriptions of their on-line use. While Boyd argues that young people are motivated to 'to present the side of themselves that they believe will be well received by these peers' (Boyd, 2008, p. 129) this was not always evident in my study. This may be due to the girls' inexperience with on-line communities or a reflection of practices and

activities that have taken place during the day and are carried forward to MSN after school and into the evening. These impacts were clear in the girls' discussions about how they dealt with incidents that occurred on MSN overnight. Sally identified that Rachel presents herself as something different from her everyday self on MSN. She knew that it was Rachel as they used webcam during their conversations but Sally was uncertain about the person Rachel presented on MSN. Similarly Alex is concerned about how fights that occur on MSN appear to be resolved on-line but flare up again at school. Alex reflects that the problem is that these fights start on-line rather than face to face, suggesting that the on-line conversations are not as transparent, or add complexity to the disputes;

> *MSN I talk to my friends and I also do webcam. And you can play games with each other but I don't like that. At first I was just agreeing but then I decided to say no cause it got boring. I get to chat to my friends when I don't see them. I talk to Rachel and Alex and my cousins. 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 16th June);

> *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. Has a few of the girls and boys email addresses from the class. She has favourites and then got friends. That way if you're at home you can still talk to them* (Sally Interview 15th, 16th June);

> *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 cause fights start about little things on MSN. You resolve it on it but*

> *then you make it on MSN. Then all this and stuff, hating, happens and it's just because you talked on the computer and not in real life* (Alex, Interview 15th June).

The girls' use of social networking sites was in its infancy but their motivation and enthusiasm for gaining access to these sites was palpable. MSN, and Facebook for those who had access, was an important component of the girls' communication with each other. The girls without access were eagerly waiting for permission to sign up, for Maddie this was only a case of purchasing a computer, for Susan it was transitioning to Year 7 or possibly even Year 8, and for Georgie, tongue in cheek, till she turns 31. Although I did not focus on whether the girls were ready to take on the complexities of social networking sites, these 11 and 12 year old girls believed they were. They argued that they were going to be given access in Year 7, their first year of secondary school, and were frustrated by parents who decided they must wait. Parental decisions about social networking sites in Year 6 or 7, or even earlier in Year 5 or later in their secondary years, added an additional layer of complexity to the girls' feelings of in-betweenness.

Reclaiming the in-be-*tween*

In this chapter I have shifted the focus from understanding the consuming Tween to considering how 'ordinary' tween girls negotiate their own social worlds to locate a place they can belong. The ambiguity of their location between childhood and their teenage years was evident in the girls' inability to clearly define or identify with the consumer-media's definition of tween. Yet the concept of being in-between was re-enforced by the

girls and to some extent mirrored the consumer-media Tween's market definition that these girls are placed, between their childhood and teenage years. There were many parallels between the girls' understanding of their in-betweenness and the Tween market's response to this status. The girls' longing for mobile phones, iPads and laptops and the Tween market's promotion of these goods revealed their desire to move forward. Similarly Rachel's desire for make-up, perfumes and feminine toiletries, clearly recognised in the Tween market, reveals her ambitions for a level of maturity beyond her years.

While the girls did not directly align themselves with the Tween market's definition that they were 'born to shop', shopping was a favourite activity. The girls' awareness of brands and preference for specific outlets and their favourite styles was measured and well-informed. Far from being the victims of the consumer-media, the girls conveyed agency in their consumption decisions and had a well-developed and complex understanding of their own young, feminine girlness rooted in their local, familial everyday social worlds. While the consumer-media portrays the Tween as shopping with friends, entering the fantasy world of Tween together, the girls in my study predominantly undertook their shopping outings with parents and family members. Decisions as to which clothes, accessories, products or services to buy were not made in isolation but were considered in conjunction with parents and/or siblings. Peer belonging influenced choice of outfit as on the school camp. As I discovered throughout my year at Western Heights Primary School, parents maintained a significant level of influence in the girls' lives.

The parents' views of the girls' wants and desires contributed significantly to their ongoing understanding of in-betweenness. From parental decisions over consumer goods, the purchase of a mobile phone or iPods and laptops, there was an understanding amongst the girls that these were items that reflected their growing maturity. Whether they already owned a mobile phone or were waiting for their transition to Year 7 the girls felt they had reached an age, or stage, where they should be allowed to own one. Similarly the girls' desire for access to social networking sites was frustrated by those parents who had determined they must wait until their transition to secondary school. There was a large inconsistency in their parents' decisions but girls who received permission quickly become accustomed to the benefits of this major communication medium. The girls whose parents had made them wait felt they were being uncaring, particularly where no explanation was forthcoming.

Similarly the girls felt their parents were being too restrictive with their freedom and independence. The girls expressed a strong desire to shift their shopping outings from family events to shopping experiences shared with friends. Again, the girls were being told that they could do this next year, when they transitioned to Year 7. Pop concerts, M rated movies and staying up late were all desires of these 11 and 12 year old girls. Parents, again, were the main respondents to these requests and again, the girls' transition to Year 7 was the point of change parents offered. In-betweenness surrounds these girls and they actively identify with this aspect of Tween. The girls' transition to secondary school has become a significant period in their lives and shifts the focus from enjoying their final year of primary school to looking ahead to Year 7. The Tween market has clearly identified the needs and desires of the tween girls in this ambiguous stage in their lives. While the consumer-media presents these girls with specific products and services that

are promoted under the marketing umbrella of the Tween market their consumer activities are not simply motivated by their desire to purchase items. My findings support the argument that the girls' consumption decisions are profoundly entwined with their desire to belong. Goods and services which enable them to belong in their own social worlds are highly sought after. While the girls' engagement with the Tween market may appear to be about owning particular items, in my study their strongly held desire to belong with friends and peers motivated their desire to consume.

Conclusion

Understanding the tween girls' desire to belong

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century the Tween market emerged as advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers recognised that girls aged between nine and fourteen were a potentially lucrative market. Advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers work independently and collectively to target girls within this age bracket, producing and promoting consumer goods and services designed to respond to their needs and desires. Promoted as a fantasy world of dress-ups, make believe and role playing the Tween space is reminiscent of girls' childhood but also inaugurating a new teenaged possibility. The Tween market bridges some 'crucial developmental' stages and is designed to appeal to the tween girl's desire to be seen as older than a child, yet not quite a teenager, wanting instead to fashion her own young, feminine girlness. Tween girls are encouraged to believe that young, feminine girlness can be fashioned by purchasing the right products, accessories, services and images from the consumer-media. While the producers, marketers, advertisers and retailers of the Tween market claim to respond to the developmental needs and desires of the tween girl they work hard to create a commercial persona and consumer cohort of these girls.

The targeting of this age group of girls challenges some long held views and discourses of Western childhood. The Tween emerged at the same time 'the loss of childhood' as we know it was being lamented around the globe. The Tween market emerged towards

the end of the 20th century following significant changes to work structures, industrialisation, consumerism and increasing affluence. Families were transforming as women took advantage of educational and employment opportunities, family planning became increasingly acceptable, financial capacity was more assured and the diversity of families increased as divorce rates and defacto relationships became more common. Children's needs were being given a higher priority in families and they increasingly influenced family decisions. Advertising began to target children as advances in communication mediums, which began with television and magazines and moved quickly to the World Wide Web, enabled goods and services to be promoted directly to children. The question of how targeted advertising impacts on tween girls have become central in academic scholarship too. While there are generally two views of how children respond to the messages they receive from the consumer-media; firstly that they are exploited as they are unable to comprehend the advertisers' intent; and secondly that they actively engage and exhibit agency with the messages and images from the consumer-media, there is a third option, promoted by Daniel Cook and adopted for this thesis. Cook rejects the either/or of these options and argues instead, that children's consumption should be viewed as a blending of 'commercially imposed meaning *and* personal identity creation' (2004a, p. 151). It is this view of the tween girl that is often absent in debates and scholarship considering tween girls' consumption activities.

Beyond the Tween's commercial persona

The Senate Report highlighted concerns I had with our understandings of the tween aged girl, as distinct from the commercial persona being created by the Tween market. I appreciate parental and community alarm about the perceived intent of the advertisers,

marketers, producers and retailers of the Tween Market but as the mother of a tween (in 2009), I was aware that there were a lot of influences in her life not necessarily acknowledged in these arguments. I was concerned that the emergence of the Tween market had resulted in an assumed cultural landscape for these girls which focused our research on the girls' consumption activities overlooking the significance of other social and cultural influences. Widespread understandings that tween girls need to be protected from the Tween market's persuasive intent limited the opportunity for their voices to be heard in community debates and thus inform our understandings. Motivated by these insights and the appeal of The Senate Report for further research with tweens I was encouraged to undertake research which shifted the focus from the girls' consumption activities in isolation and investigated the role of family, friends, school and their local geographies in conjunction with the influence of the Tween market.

Far from consuming practices disconnected from their own social worlds, tween girls appropriate products and services from the global market, making sense and use of them within their own social worlds (D. Buckingham, 2011). The intersection of the global and local nature of tweens' consumption shifts our understandings from the commercial persona of the global Tween to a closer focus on the localised nature of her everyday life. Alison Pugh's concept, an economy of dignity, enabled me to see how children's consumption is motivated by their own, local, social experiences and their desire to negotiate a place to belong with their peers (Pugh, 2009). Pugh argues that children actively work out the value of belonging in their own social worlds and negotiate ways they can feel worthy amongst their peers. She argues that the intensity of children's consumption stems from their overwhelming desire to belong in their own social worlds

(2009). Each girl's desire to belong within her friendship and peer groups and her own social worlds became the key conceptual framework for my research. Within this framework school is the most significant social world, outside her family, that the tween negotiates.

Exploring the tweens' desire to belong

The significance of ordinary, everyday practices

I entered the field of Western Heights Primary School for my ethnographic study expecting to be overwhelmed by the girls' connection to the consumer-media. While there was evidence of its influence, the girls' ordinary, everyday practices, including their consuming practices, were concerned with belonging within their own social worlds, within families, with peers and at school. In their everyday practices, discussions and interactions, they acted with purpose to achieve their desire to belong in this space. Lindi, Susan, Kate and Holly's arrangement of partners for the year was one such practice. Through a discussion held early in the year, and the ongoing reinforcement of their agreement the girls established a safety net for their partner and group work in 6C. Having identified the uncertainty of working with partners or groups outside their friendship circle as something they preferred to avoid, the girls implemented a process that would limit this occurrence. In a similar fashion the girls revealed the multi-faceted meanings behind their wearing of shorts every day. Through contemplation and discussion the girls set up the practice of wearing shorts to demarcate their friendship group and to reflexively embody membership through the display of commitment to the pact. Yet it was Mollie's awareness and understanding of her place in different friendship

groups which provided the greatest insight into the complexities and nuances that engender the girls' ordinary, everyday practices. Her understanding of her place on the periphery of Lindi, Kate, Susan and Holly's friendship group was considered and discerning. Her ability to constantly negotiate her position in the different groups of 6C was evident as she described the social practices she adopted depending on the context at any given time. My year-long ethnography with these girls gave me time to draw out the agency and purpose in their everyday actions. The girls' capacity to open up and reflect on the meanings and significance of their ordinary, everyday practices further illuminated their awareness of the complexity of achieving and maintaining belonging in their own social worlds.

Family practices

While the aims of my ethnographic study included an exploration of the influence of family I was unprepared for the girls' constant references and insights into their family lives. The relationships they shared with their family members and their own unique family practices made a significant contribution to the ways the girls pursued their desire to belong in this space and in their own social worlds. The girls' insights into the actions and practices of their families encouraged me to incorporate David Morgan's (2011) concept, 'family practices' in this study to shift the focus from the more widely explored perspective of 'what families are' to considering 'what families do'. From stories about being transported to numerous basketball commitments (Lindi), Saturday afternoons curled up at home together watching movies (Susan), early mornings on the Wii with her Mum and Stepdad (Maddie) and regular family walks with their dogs (Mollie), the girls emphasised the centrality of family in their lives.

The girls' stories conveyed many meanings of family practices which are not always evident in more traditional frameworks and I found inherent connections between the ways each girl fashioned her sense of belonging within her peer and friendship groups and the way her family practiced its own economy of dignity. In the space of this research project, they thoughtfully reflected on how their family practices differ from those of their friends and peers. Yet it was the similarities between their families and the specific socio-cultural location of Western Heights Primary School that was most striking. Their family practices and social milieu shaped how they negotiated a place to belong in this local, social world and the girls were trying to find a place for themselves but also with each other. The similarities of family practices was evident in the girls' choice of friendship groups both at school and in their out of school hours activities. Families who fail to understand a particular social environment presented challenges for the girls when negotiating a place to belong and this was particularly evident in Georgie's experience before the annual school production. Having parents who recognised the girls' own aspirations and facilitated them enabled the girls' negotiations in search of belonging.

The girls' consumer desires did speak to the tween market but clearly reflected a more local and connected sense of how they experience their own in-betweenness. While their desire for consumer goods such as mobile phones, laptop and iPods was palpable, equally so was their desire for increased freedom from family to go out shopping, to the movies or walking with friends. The girls' understandings of in-betweenness were re-enforced, arguably unintentionally, by parents who asked the girls to wait for certain products or freedoms until they had completed Year 6. Despite the girls' frustrations, and I will return

to these shortly, they revealed strong, supportive relationships with their parents and families. Many of their consuming activities, particularly shopping, were done with their family members, far from the common image of the independently consuming tween. While friends were important it was family who most influenced their social milieu as the girls' negotiated a place to belong in this space.

Understanding the norms and practices of belonging

While issues such as bullying and exclusion have been explored in sociological scholarship the ordinary, everyday negotiations of friendship for tween aged girls have been underexplored (Devine & Kelly, 2006; George, 2007; George & Browne, 2000; Maher, 2008; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). The complexities and effort that go into achieving a place to belong within their friendship and peer groups are an ongoing concern for the tween girl. My research differs from previous studies as it focuses on ordinary, everyday negotiations of friendship rather than exploring issues of friendships that have gone wrong. George's (2007) findings from her ethnographic study with inner-London primary school girls alongside Pugh's economy of dignity, underpinned my focus on the active practices they adopt to negotiate friendships.

For the girls in my study, negotiations of belonging were an everyday part of school life and having friends to belong with in the school space was identified as a key motivating factor for their attendance at school. The presence or absence of friends at school invoked strong emotional responses. Feelings of being *happy, funny, welcomed* and of *being crazy* defined the girls' experiences of friendship. The absence of friends at school, either short or long term, invoked feelings of *being lonely, sad, losing self-confidence, being*

depressed and *not belonging*. Several girls expressed a desire to stay home, or change schools, if they were friendless in this space. The girls had all negotiated places to belong with their friends but they also had substitutes in the case of absences or disagreements. The girls' everyday conversations revealed the constancy and complexity of these negotiations within their 'everyday peer group interactions' (Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011, p. 505).

Making friends at school is often the first experience girls have of negotiating and dealing with friendships outside their familial relationships. The girls recognised there are different norms and practices which govern the process of making friends or gaining entry to particular groups. An understanding of these ensured the girls were able to participate and engage with their peers. For the tween girl, 'having nothing to say' or not being able to participate amongst your peers is 'akin to not belonging' (Pugh, 2009). Understanding the significance of group norms and practices was essential for the girls as they entered into negotiations of friendship but, as I discovered, the functionality of the class contributed to the girls' opportunities to belong, and to the lack of them. The girls' negotiations of friendship in this space required attention to the boys and Mr G. The boys played a significant role in the girls' negotiations of friendship, both in the classroom and outside in the playground. Girls and boys from 6C were often seen playing alongside each other in games of tiggy around the playground. Mr G.'s allocation of seating throughout the year created the opportunity for girls and boys to work alongside each other and the girls were surprised at times at how well they got along together. The presence of their male classmates took on an added significance as the girls related stories of their all-girls class in Year 5 to their current co-educational Year 6 class. The girls'

daily interactions and engagements with their friends and peers at Western Heights Primary School; and increasingly at home and in their after-school activities, was far more central to these tween girls' everyday lives than any connection they felt with the consumer-media. While the latest celebrity gossip and new iPhone rated a mention, understanding the expected local norms and practices of Western Heights Primary School was uppermost in the girls' minds.

The texture and detail of school

In addition to teachers, friends and classmates at Western Heights Primary School the significance of belonging to the institution of school and the specific texture and detail of the girls' social worlds within the physical space of the school cannot be overlooked. The significance of the school environment is evident throughout my ethnography but it must be noted that locating my study in this space determined that school was a dominant influence in the lives of these tween girls. The local, social environment of Western Heights Primary School played a significant role in the lives of the tween girls in my study. This contrasts with the Tween market which is promoted as a global entity suggesting that tweens live in a globalised almost placeless environment. Far from being the backdrop for the girls' social relations the spaces and places of Western Heights Primary School and the local communities they live in played a crucial role in how they fashioned their own sense of self. For these girls, as for most Australian tweens, school is arguably the most significant place outside their family home.

The two distinct elements of Wembley Primary School were evident throughout my ethnographic study. The formal world of teaching and learning existed and was the focus

for the teaching and leadership teams in the school, but for the girls in my study it was the informal world of the students which had the greatest impact on their everyday lives (Valentine, 2001). With classroom interactions primarily overseen by the Mr G. and the specialist teaching staff it was arguably the playgrounds, sports pitches and outdoor areas of schools which presented the greatest challenges to the girls' negotiations of belonging.

The girls had a well-developed understanding of the potential opportunities or challenges of the spaces of Western Heights Primary School. The girls of 6C entered the playground spaces with six years of understanding their potential. They have learnt from older students, who have already moved on from Western Heights Primary School, the norms and practices of specific areas in the playground. Negotiations in the playground necessitated an understanding of the spaces in conjunction with an understanding of the norms and practices of the potential friendship groups who occupied this space. While friendships were established a back-up plan was necessary for the occasions when established friends were absent and alternatives needed to be negotiated for the duration of their absence. Having friends to belong in this space was essential at all times and the girls' expended considerable effort in their negotiations.

Comparing the in-betweenness

I now return to the Tween market's understandings of 11 and 12 year old girls and the implications of my findings. My focus though is not on re-examining the girls' actions and practices from the perspective of their consumer personae, as this has been widely explored, but to shift focus and consider how the girls' consumption activities and their understandings of in-betweenness can be understood as engendered by their desire to

belong. While the girls were not bothered about being a Tween and they were not entirely sold on the concept, there were aspects of this persona they identified with. The concept of being 'nearly a teenager' or 'higher than a child' suggested that they were not entirely clear about where they fitted in, a perception recognised by the consumer-media. The girls' understandings of in-between were intensified by parents' responses to their desires for increased freedom outside their familial relationships and to own specific consumer products such as mobile phones. Reflections of increased responsibility around the home and with siblings were interspersed with frustrations at not being allowed to go on outings with friends, later bedtimes and watch M rated content in movies. The consuming practices in these discussions are clearly embedded in familial relationships rather than consumer practices. The gap between the girls' desire for freedom or to purchase specific consumer goods and their parents' understanding of the girls' negotiations of belonging is complex.

Shopping is an activity central to the Tween market and the girls in my ethnography enjoyed this activity. But the practices of shopping for the 11 and 12 year olds in my study are clearly different from that proposed by the advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers of the Tween market. While the Tween market would suggest that the tween girl shops with her friends, making her decisions based on the group consensus, the girls in my study shared the majority of their shopping activities with their families. For the girls, being a shopping person, or a 'girlie' girl was an indicator of your connection to the Tween market. They were familiar with shops, brands and styles they desired, '*I like jeans', 'I like black clothes'* and knew which stores and outlets would stock these. They also recognised the shrewd marketing intent of advertisers, marketers, producers and retailers, and were alert to promotions or messages they felt were attempting to lure them

into purchases. While the wearing of school uniform limited my opportunity to observe the girls' particular styles the school camp revealed some of the girls' preferences. Although the girls' attire arguably reflected a conformity the girls adopted to ensure they would fit in.

The girls' knowledge of appropriate young, feminine, girlness is constantly communicated to them through the many media forums. Family plays a part in the girls understanding of girlness, as do friends, but girls also obtain their information from magazines, celebrities and on-line networking sites such as MSN. The image of tween girls unable to discern marketers' intent was not borne out in my findings. The girls identified with celebrities and enjoyed reading about them in magazines or on MSN but they questioned the concept of celebrity and wondered who could be classified as one. They expressed doubt at the validity of celebrities' 'fame' and were critical of celebrities such as *Paris Hilton,* who they believed did not deserve her status. While some of the girls used magazines and television to obtain information about celebrities, images and messages for their young, feminine girlness, they were increasingly turning to on-line social media and networking. For the girls in my study, MSN was the popular communication medium, although there was a divide between those who were allowed access by the parents and those who were not. It was evident though that the girls identified the importance of MSN as assisting their negotiations of belonging in the school space, rather than wanting to belong in a broader, global online space.

The tween beyond the Tween

The desire to belong is a strong motivator for the tween girl as she negotiates the ambiguous space between her childhood and teenage years. The Tween market targets this space with the aim of creating a consumer cohort while the tween girl is focussed on creating a place that she can belong with her friends and peer groups. The juncture of the aims of the Tween market and the desires of the tween girl have created a lucrative commercial personae but I argue in this thesis that this is an inadequate view of the tween and reflects a limited understanding of how and why she consumes. I argue that her desire to belong is compelling and she actively works out the terms of her 'social belonging, or just what it would take to participate amongst her peers' (Pugh, 2009, p. 6). The tween makes sense of her desire to belong in her own everyday social worlds and adapts global processes and consumer products to this purpose.

The aim of this research was to shift the focus from the influences of the consumer-media in the life of the tween girl to considering the significance of important social and cultural influences such as family, friends, school and local geographies. By positioning these as the focal point of my research the aim was to consider the girls' perspectives on how they influence the sense of self they fashion and the negotiations of belonging in the interactive environment of school. My research was influenced by my own position as a white, middle class female and the mother of a tween aged daughter, and slightly younger son. I was particularly motivated by the desire to give a voice to the everyday experiences of tween aged girls and to shift the focus from their widely publicised consumption activities to consider the significance of their ordinary, everyday practices. Motivated by calls for research with this age group by The Senate report, *The sexualisation of children in the*

contemporary media, I explored the 'multiplicity of influences' in the tweens' life and attempted to 'disentangle the specific roles played by family, school, friends, society at large and the media' (Senate, 2008, pp. 3-9). These influences are intrinsically linked but they are able to be disentangled and analysed, as I have shown in this thesis. I argue that we need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of these social and cultural influences to the tween girl's consuming practices. The Tween market promotes goods and products, and seeks to create the desire to buy in the tween, but her unique decision making and consumer practices reflect her local worlds and are shaped by her family's spending capacity.

My research demonstrates the value of extended and embedded research methodologies for exploring the lives of children in this age group. Conducting an ethnographic study in a primary school environment created challenges but produced rich data otherwise unavailable. Conversations that took place in interviews and focus group reflected the significance of building the relationship during first and second term. Splitting the focus groups into friendship groups enabled the girls to open up with each other, enhancing the data and information that was collected throughout the year. The girls' enthusiasm for and engagement with the project and their openness to share insights into their lives, built throughout the long term relationship, expanded the scope of this research. Taking on the position of 'least adult' in this space and introducing *Mrs Brookes' Blurb* to inform the participants of the direction of the study enhanced the research methodology of this project. While I was obviously an adult in this space my decision to align myself with the girls in the playground rather than the teachers enable the girls to see me as a confidant an adult friend. They were also aware that I had children of a similar age, this appeared to give me credibility in terms of knowledge and understanding of tween girls wants and

desires. The salience and significance of the girls' ordinary, everyday practices were only revealed in this context.

Most importantly I gathered valuable insights into the complexities and constant negotiations the tween girl engages in as she pursues her desire to belong within her own social worlds. Far from appearing as 'malleable beings, susceptible to influence' the girls in my study revealed their active agency in the practices they adopted and their negotiations of belonging in this space (Cook, 2004a, p. 149). The girls' engaged the messages and images of the marketers, advertisers, producers and retailers who make up the Tween market, with an open and often critical understanding. The girls' agency was an important finding of this study, and was reflected in how they reshaped the direction of my research to produce more valuable insights into the life of the tween girl.

In these tween girls' lives the desire to belong is central. Belonging within families, at school, in peer and friendship groups in their local social worlds is essential to their everyday negotiations and practices. Consumer goods and services are important to these practices and are used to achieve belonging in the girls' social worlds, but their consuming practices form part of their negotiations of local and intimate relationships rather than simply reflect the market's reach. The work of belonging for these girls is relentless and often complex. The girls' negotiations take place everyday, carried out in ordinary conversations, or silences, and in the norms and practices of their varied social worlds. Pivotal to the girls' negotiations of belonging, are their families and the unique family practices which influence their everyday practices. At the age of 11 or 12 these tween girls are skilled negotiators, and are, most importantly, active agents in the process.

Shifting the focus of research with tween girls from their consumption activities to their everyday practices in this study revealed valuable insights into the life of tween girls. The girls' everyday practices revealed the extent their desire to belong within friendship and peer groups in their varied social worlds determine their everyday practices. The girls in my ethnography have provided valuable insights into the complexity of their friendship considerations and negotiations. The girls' ability to recognise and respond to the norms and practices required of them in their varied social worlds revealed the extent of their insights and understandings. The intrinsic links between their everyday practices, consumption activities and their desire to belong provides us with a valuable perspective of the purpose of tween girls' engagement with the consumer-media. The importance of the girls' social, social worlds was clearly, evident in my findings. In contrast to the Tween market's global perspective, these tween girls lived and made sense of their lives within their own, albeit varied, social worlds. My study has highlighted the significance of understanding the ordinary, obviousness in the girls' everyday practices and how they contribute to negotiations of belonging. The regular, everyday practices revealed valuable insights into the complex negotiations and arrangements of friendships these tween girls engage in. The girls provided valuable insights into the ongoing role and importance of family, and their own unique family practices, in the tween girls' life. At a time when we consider the structure and role of families to be arguably under threat, the thirteen girls in this study reminded me how very important their families are in their lives. In conclusion, while an ethnographic study is not always possible the significance of my findings suggest that taking time to listen to tween girls and to observe their everyday practices is beneficial in developing understandings of the in-betweenness experienced by these girls. So many of my discussions in this thesis would never have

gained traction had I stepped into the school environment for an interview or a focus group. Building reciprocal trust and respect, with these thirteen girls has, I believe, contributed significantly to an important, and timely, contribution to our understanding of the significance of the local, social worlds of tween aged girls. While I recognise that the findings of this study are unique to this particular group of tween girls in a Melbourne Primary School and cannot be transferrable to tween girls around the globe, I suggest that the value of recognising the significance of the tween girls' local, social worlds is universal.

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APPENDICES

Attachment A Explanatory Statement for Principal and Teacher

June 30th, 2008

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

I, Fiona Brookes, am conducting a research project that is supervised by Dr Peter Kelly, Head of Behavioural Studies (BHS) at Monash University towards a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Monash University. In accordance with the requirements of this award I am required to write a thesis, the equivalent of a 300 page book, supported largely by a research study that has been designed and conducted by myself. The purpose of this statement is to outline the aims and purpose of the research study and to seek your permission to conduct this project in your school/class.

The research is concerned with the ways in which 10-12 year- old girls (tweenies) actively work out the rules of belonging in their peer groups and in the school environment, both classrooms and playgrounds. The key aims of this project are to:

. Identify, explore and analyse the complex and shifting rules of engagement that shape the dynamics of belonging for a group of 10-12 year old girls in one Grade 6 (or 5/6) classroom.

. Explore the subjective understandings of peer relationships, families, schooling, the consumer-media and other resources that young girls use to fashion a sense of self, and to belong, in the interactive environment of school.

The research is being shaped by the understanding that belonging – developing a sense of self and of others – is a fundamental task for this age group and one which has fluid, shifting rules. Developing a sense of self and others is considered to be an active, ongoing process that is vitally important in shaping young girls' engagement with education, with their peers and with their families. Developing a sense of belonging in the school environment is considered to enhance academic outcomes and be a major protective

factor for young people's health and wellbeing (Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne).

The project does not aim to prove, or disprove, a particular hypothesis but it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to academic, community, educational and policy debates about the influences of technology, consumption and media with this age group. By providing an insight into the ways a group of 10-12 year-old girls fashion their own sense of self in the school environment the project will contribute to educational, health and wellbeing policies and projects that recognise the significance of belonging to important social structures, such as schools, in developing a healthy sense of self for young people.

To develop a detailed analysis of the concepts outlined I propose to undertake an ethnographic case study in the interactive environment of one Grade 6 (or 5/6) classroom. The aim of the ethnographic study is to create an opportunity for observation and develop a rich understanding of the ongoing dynamics of belonging for this group of 10-12 year-old girls. To undertake the ethnographic study I will be seeking your permission to observe students in one of your Grade 6 (or 5/6) classes. The study has a planned time-frame of one day a week in the school for most weeks of 2009 to develop a relationship of trust and openness with the students. Whilst the school and the teacher become a part of this research project, due to their placement and relationship with the participants, the focus of this study is on the 10-12 year old female participants and individual teacher's pedagogy or the whole school philosophy, engagement with students and educational outcomes will not be analysed in this project.

A number of data collection methods will be utilised during the study and these are outlined as follows:

Observations

Observations will be the primary data collection method for this research study. All other data collection activities will stem from the information obtained by the researcher during this process. Observations of participant behaviours and actions and their interactions with peers, classmates, other students, teachers and adults will be undertaken. These

observations will provide me with an understanding of how 10-12 year old girls negotiate the school environment, whether they spend time alone, their interactions with others, participation in class activities and a range of data about the resources they draw on. Detailed field notes will be hand recorded by me.

Curriculum Based Activities

Classroom discussions and work created as part of the Grade 6 curriculum will be observed, recorded and collected for analysis. Discussions within the classroom environment that provide an insight into participant's thoughts and feelings about belonging and their sense of self will be hand recorded by me. Written work, photography or art work which reflects feelings of belonging, or engagement with this process, will also be collected for analysis.

Interview and Focus Groups

Female students will be invited to participate in focus groups or one-to-one-interviews in Term 3. Questions will be asked that encourage the female students to explain the ideas/thoughts behind a particular piece of work or response to a curriculum task. The resources girls use to fashion a sense of self will also be explored in these discussions. It is anticipated that focus groups or one-to-one interviews will take approximately 30-40 minutes and will be conducted during negotiated school times. Female students may be involved in a maximum of 3 interviews and a maximum of 3 focus groups. Participation in the one-to-one-interview and focus groups will be voluntary and consent to participate will be sought from the girl's parents/guardians as well as from the girls. All interviews and focus group discussion will be digitally recorded and transcribed by me.

The research project has been designed to create as little inconvenience or discomfort for your students. The significance of belonging is recognised though as being particularly important for this age group and it is possible that the purpose of my research may cause some level of anxiety or distress. I will be working within the school policies and procedures for reporting issues of concern and will determine my duty of care to the students with you prior to my first observation in the classroom.

In keeping with the Privacy Act 2000, no personal details will be recorded and all participants, school and teacher will be given a pseudonym, or false name, so that their privacy and real identity is protected. Real names and pseudonyms will be stored separately to ensure privacy is maintained. Pseudonyms will be used in any transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and the primary school in the thesis, reports or any subsequent publication resulting from this research project. It is unlikely that any participant will be identifiable in the data collected or reporting of this research although it is possible that some students may be able to identify each other in the data collected from the focus groups by the views and comments they have made. I will undertake to deidentify your school in any written reports or publications that result from this project although it is possible that your school will be identified at a DEECD level in discussions that may occur as a result of the findings of this project.

Information/data generated from this research project will be stored for a period of five years. After this time the information will be destroyed. Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise for the school's involvement in this exercise. If you agree that your school will participate you are free to withdraw the school at any time during the study. If this happens, a consultation with the researcher – and if required, the researcher's supervisor and a representation of the Department – will take place to determine the manner in which the researcher will cease conducting research, and what information already obtained from the students/school community may be used for analysis. Individual participants and their parents may withdraw their consent to participate in one-to-one interviews or focus groups at any time. Additionally, there will be no adverse consequences if you choose not to be involved after reading this Explanatory Statement.

If you choose to be involved in this project please complete the attached consent form. The consent form can be returned directly to me in the reply paid envelope enclosed.

I will provide a written report of the project findings at the conclusion of the study and advise you of any public reporting of the project. I can be contacted on 0409 745 453 if you would like further details. The findings are accessible for an indefinite period of time.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	*If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research <insert your project number here, i.e. 2006/011> is being conducted, please contact:*
Dr Peter Kelly [redacted] Monash University P O Box 197 Caulfield East Vic 3145 Australia	Executive Officer Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 [redacted]

Thank you

Fiona Brookes

Attachment B Consent Form – Principal and Teacher

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records

I agree for ..... Primary School/..... class to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

. I agree to allow Fiona Brookes (the researcher) to spend one day a week in the school/class environment observing, collecting work samples and keeping detailed field notes of the observations she makes.

. I agree that the school community and the teacher become a part of this research project, due to their placement and relationship with the female students.

I understand that the teacher's pedagogy and the school's teaching philosophy, engagement with students and educational outcomes will not be analysed in this project.

I understand Fiona Brookes will be working within the school policies and procedures for reporting issues of concern and will determine her duty of care to the students with me prior to her first observation in the classroom.

. I agree to allow Fiona Brookes to seek consent from parents or guardians of female students in the identified classroom for their daughters to participate in one-to-one interviews or focus groups during Term 3.

I understand that each student will participate in a maximum of 3 one-to-one interviews and 3 focus groups.

I understand that the girls will also give their consent to participate in one-to-one interviews and focus groups however if the parents or guardians do not give their consent the female student will not be allowed to participate.

I understand that the school's/my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time during the research study. If this happens I will consult with the researcher – and if required, the researcher's supervisor and a representative of the Department – to determine the manner in which the researcher will cease conducting research, and what information already obtained from the students/school community may be used for analysis.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the observations, work samples, interviews or focus groups for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I understand that data from the observations/interview/focus group/transcripts and audio-tapes will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name
Signature

Attachment C Explanatory Statement – Parents and School Council

June 30th, 2008

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

Hi, my name is Fiona Brookes and I am enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Caulfield Campus of Monash University. Dr Peter Kelly, Head of Behavioural Studies (BHS) at Monash University is supervising my research.

My research is concerned with the ways in which 10-12 year old girls (tweenies) actively work out the rules of belonging in their peer groups and the school environment. Belonging, developing a sense of self and of others (an identity), is recognised as being a fundamental task for this age group and one which has constantly shifting and changing rules. My research project has been shaped by the understanding that developing a sense of belonging in a school environment is a complex and constantly changing process, influenced by many factors.

The key aims of this project are to:

. Identify, explore and analyse the complex and shifting rules of engagement that shape the dynamics of belonging for a group of 10-12 year old girls in one Grade 6 (or 5/6) classroom.

. Explore the subjective understandings of peer relationships, families, schooling, the consumer-media and other resources that young girls use to fashion a sense of self, and to belong, in the interactive environment of school.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to academic, community, health, educational and policy debates about the influences of technology, consumption and media with this age group.

The Monash University Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria have approved this research. You are receiving this

Explanatory Statement to inform you about the project as your child is a student in (teacher's name).....class. I have not been provided with any other details about child or your family. All correspondence regarding this research project will be sent home with your child from school.

To develop a detailed analysis of how 10-12 year old girls develop a sense of belonging in a school environment I propose to spend a day a week in your child's Grade 6 (or 5/6) classroom and school environment for the 2009 school year. I will use several data collection methods to develop a deep understanding of the rules of engagement and the resources participants use to fashion a sense of belonging in the school environment. The data collection methods are outlined below:

Observations

Observations of participant behaviours and actions and their interactions with peers, classmates, other students, teachers and adults will be undertaken. Observations will be my primary method of collecting data; the remaining data collection methods will be used to discuss the information I observe. Observations will provide me with an understanding of how 10-12 year old girls negotiate the school environment, whether they spend time alone, their interactions with others, participation in class activities and a range of data about the resources they draw on. All observations will be hand recorded by me.

Curriculum Based Activities

Classroom discussions and work created as part of the Grade 6 curriculum will be observed, recorded and collected for analysis. Discussions within the classroom environment that provide an insight into participant's thoughts and feelings about their sense of self and belonging will be hand recorded by me. Written work, poetry, photography or art work that reflects participant's feelings of belonging or their engagement with this process will also be collected for analysis. All work will be returned to your child.

Interview and Focus Groups

At some point in Term 3 I will want to interview the girls in this class through one-to-one interviews or in focus groups. All female students will be invited to participate in these interviews and their parents or guardians will be sent a consent form seeking permission before these occur. Questions will be asked that encourage the female students to explain the ideas/thoughts behind a particular piece of work or response to a curriculum task. The resources female students use to fashion a sense of self will also be explored through questions. It is anticipated that focus groups or one-to-one interviews will take approximately 30-40 minutes and will be conducted during negotiated school times. Female students may be involved in a maximum of 3 interviews and 3 focus groups. Participation in the one-to-one-interview and focus groups will be voluntary and there will be no payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise for the student's involvement in this exercise. I will send a consent form to parents or guardians of all female students seeking their permission before Term 3. All interviews and focus group discussion will be digitally recorded and transcribed by me.

The research project has been designed to create as little inconvenience or discomfort for the students. The significance of belonging is recognised though as being particularly important for this age group and it is possible that the purpose of my research may cause some level of anxiety or distress. I will be working within the school policies and procedures for reporting issues of concern and will speak to the Principal if I am concerned about any of the participants.

In keeping with the Privacy Act 2000, no personal details will be recorded and all participants, school and teacher will be given a pseudonym, or false name, so that their privacy and real identity is protected. Real names and pseudonyms will be stored separately to ensure privacy is maintained. Pseudonyms will be used in any transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and the primary school in the thesis, reports or any subsequent publication of this research project. It is unlikely that any participant will be identifiable in the data collected or reporting of this research although it is possible that some students may be able to identify each other in the data collected from the focus groups by the views and comments they

have made. Information/data generated from this research project will be stored for a period of five years. After this time the information will be destroyed. Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years.

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Fiona Brookes on 0409 745 453. The findings are accessible for an indefinite period of time.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	*If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research <insert your project number here, i.e. 2006/011> is being conducted, please contact:*
Dr Peter Kelly [redacted] Monash University P O Box 197 Caulfield East Vic 3145 Australia	Executive Officer Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 [redacted]

Thank you.

Fiona Brookes

Attachment D **Consent Form – Parents/Guardians of Female Students**

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

NOTE: Signed written consent will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

Earlier this year I (Fiona Brookes) sent you an Explanatory Statement that outlined a research project being conducted in your daughter's class. In this statement I mentioned that one-to-one interviews and focus groups discussions would take place with girls in this class during Term 3. I am writing to you now seeking your permission for your daughter to participate in these one-to-one interviews and focus groups. All female students in this classroom are being approached to participate.

If you agree that your daughter may participate in this data collection method please complete this consent form. The signed consent forms can be placed in the enclosed reply paid envelope and returned directly to me.

I agree that .....(full name of participant) may take part in this data collection method for the above Monash University research project. The project has been explained to ...(name of participant) ... and to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to allow (full name of participant) to:

- Be interviewed up to 3 times by the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Have the interviews audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Be involved in up to 3 focus groups ☐ Yes ☐ No
- To allow the focus groups to be audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that (full name of participant) participation is voluntary, that she or I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that she can withdraw at any

stage of the interviews or focus group discussions without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interviews and focus groups for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that data from the interview, focus group, transcripts and audio-tapes will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name

Participant's Age

Parent's / Guardian's Name

Parent's / Guardian's relationship to participant?

Parent's / Guardian's Signature

Date

Attachment E Explanatory Statement – Female Students

June 30th, 2008

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

Hi, my name is Fiona Brookes and I am enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Caulfield Campus of Monash University. I am conducting a research project in your class and Dr Peter Kelly, Head of Behavioural Studies (BHS) at Monash University is supervising my research.

I think that developing a sense of belonging, of feeling valued and accepted at school and with your friends is very important to children of your age. But developing a sense of who you are and feeling that you belong is not something that just happens, you have to work at it and there are influences and information that you use to help you. I am conducting research that explores how 10-12 year old girls work through this process. Not that I think that boys don't go through the same process, or aren't important, there is so much to learn that I have decided to concentrate on girls for this research project.

There have been lots of discussions in the newspapers, on television and the internet about social influences over young people like you. These discussions have been talking about the influence of television shows, video clips, the World Wide Web and consumer goods as well as talking about the health and wellbeing of young people. Many of these discussions suggest that there is not a lot of information available that helps adults understand what young people think about these issues. The research I am conducting in your school will provide information about how some 10-12 year old girls think about these influences.

At the end of this year I will be writing a thesis, similar to a 300 page book, and some reports for your school, the Department of Education and journal articles that will talk about what I learn. You will find information about some of your classmates and your school in these but their names will be changed and you should not be able to identify who I am talking about. This is a research process that protects you, your classmates and the school's identity. Your Principal and teacher ...(teacher's name)..... have

agreed that I can conduct my research in your classroom and so have the Monash University Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria. You are receiving this Explanatory Statement because you are in .....(teacher's name).

During 2009 I will be in your classroom, playground and the school making observations of your behaviours and how you interact with your friends, classmates, other students, teachers and adults. When I am doing these observations I will be sitting or standing quietly watching and writing notes. I might also make some notes about discussions you have in the classroom. You might feel a little uncomfortable about this at first, but hopefully this won't last for very long.

In Term 3 I will be doing some interviews or focus group discussions. I will ask you later in the year if you would like to participate in these. Interviews would be between you and me; a focus group would be with 3 or 4 other girls and me. The interviews and focus groups will always have a focus which I will tell you about before you agree to participate. We might talk about things such as your own work, or things that I notice are important to you and other participants. This might be a television show, a new website, hairstyle or book you have been reading. I will ask your parents or guardians if they give their permission for you to participate and I will also ask you. It is okay for you to say no.

Sometimes talking about things that are important to you might make you feel a little uncomfortable. I will try to make sure that this doesn't happen but it might and you are free to withdraw from the research study at any time. If you let me know you don't want to participate anymore you can immediately stop and I will not include any of the information I have already collected. If I think that you have become uncomfortable with the research and you haven't spoken to me about how you feel I might talk to .....(Principal's name).... about my concerns.

I promise to treat you and your classmates with respect when I am conducting my research. Please ask me questions if you are not sure about why I am here and what I will be doing. Your parents or guardians have also received an Explanatory Statement about the project and they may also be able to answer any questions or concerns you have.

If you are interested in finding out about what I find in this research project you can ring me on 0409 745 453. The information I collect will be stored in a secure University room for 5 years but the thesis and reports will be available for a long time.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	*If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research <insert your project number here, i.e. 2006/011> is being conducted, please contact:*
Dr Peter Kelly [redacted] Monash University P O Box 197 Caulfield East Vic 3145 Australia	Executive Officer Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 [redacted]

Thank you.

Fiona Brookes

Attachment F **Consent Form – Female Students**

Title: Fantasies of Belonging

NOTE: Signed written consent will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

Earlier this year I (Fiona Brookes) sent you an Explanatory Statement that told you about the research project I am conducting with your class. In this statement I mentioned that one-to-one interviews and focus groups discussions would take place during Term 3. I am writing to you now asking if you would like to participate in these one-to-one interviews and focus groups. All the female students in your class are being asked.

If you would like to participate in these interviews and focus groups please complete this consent form. The signed consent forms can be placed in the enclosed reply paid envelope and returned directly to me.

I agree that I will take part in this data collection method for the above Monash University research project. The project has been explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed up to 3 times by the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Have the interviews audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Be involved in up to 3 focus groups ☐ Yes ☐ No
- To allow the focus groups to be audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can choose to withdraw at any stage of the interviews or focus groups without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any information that the researcher extracts from the interviews or focus groups for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain my name or identify me.

I understand that information from the observations and work samples will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team.

I understand that information from the interview, focus group, transcripts and audio-tapes will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period.

Participant's name

Participants Signature

Date