Tweens, Sexualization and Cyborg-Subjectivity:

New Zealand Girls Negotiate Friendship and

Identity on Facebook

by

Erin D. Martin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

University of Canterbury

2014

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Abstract

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In the context of public debates about the 'sexualization' of 'tween' (preteen) girls and their use of social network sites (SNSs), this study explores girls' online practices, experiences and reflections of their engagement with Facebook. This project is part of a growing body of research that prioritizes talk 'with' girls, rather than 'about' girls, as a way of contextualizing issues related to their girlhood. I argue that preteen girls' identities on SNSs can be reimagined as cyborg-subjectivities as girls disrupt binaries through ongoing discursive negotiations of gender and sexuality depending on moment to moment online/offline interactions.

Utilizing examples from an online ethnographic observation of eighteen 12-13 year old girls in Christchurch, New Zealand, I discuss how these girls constituted online subject positions through co-constructive relationships with friends. I explore how girls utilized SNS technology to explore and engage with discourses of gender and sexuality. I discuss how girls' 'played' with both conventional and alternative femininities and sexualities in their online photographs and discuss how these images resist classification as 'sexy/innocent', 'children/teens' and online/offline. This research also reconsiders how identity is understood on SNSs and utilizes a poststructuralist theoretical framework to explore how online identities are embodied and 'citational' of shared online/offline subject positions. In addition to ethnographic observation, this research explores girls' talk and reflections about their Facebook practices through a focus group discussion and a qualitative questionnaire.

Dedication

For my daughter, Indra.

May you always hold your head high.

Acknowledgments

With humility, I offer thanks to all those whose encouraging words kept this project alive through a transition to motherhood, two natural disasters, an international move and several crises of "imposter syndrome". Thank you for believing in my voice.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Tiina Vares and Rosemary Du Plessis, for your patience, persistence and thought-provoking counsel. I could not have succeeded without you both. Thank you to my family, Al and Rosemary Martin, for supporting me and never asking "what are you going to do with that degree?" Thank you to my partner, Paul Simmons. Your confidence in my project never wavered. Thank you for your enduring faith in me, long after I had given up on myself.

Finally, thank you to all the girls who participated in this research and the Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund for supporting the *Girls, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* project that made this research possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> The wide popularity of sites like MySpace.com as well as blog centers has encouraged youth, including girls, to describe themselves on the Internet. Recently, public attention has focused on the sexualized self-presentations by some girls on these Web sites and the dangers inherent in this practice... although there is currently no research that has assessed how girls portray themselves or how dangerous this practice is.
> Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007:10)

Recently there has been a proliferation of international dialogue on the 'sexualization' or 'adultification' of young girls. Concerns about girls' precocious sexual development, premature entry into mass consumerism, problems with body image and self-esteem, early menstruation, and fears of young girls being exploited, manipulated, or sexualized by and for mass media are widespread (Rush and La Nauze, 2006; Seaton, 2005; Cherland, 2005; Hamilton, 2008; Platt Liebau, 2007; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008; Kilbourne, 1999; Schor, 2004; Pipher, 1994; Orenstein, 2000, 2011; Durham, 2008; Brumberg, 1997; Rutledge, 2002). Parents, educators, researchers, religious and child advocacy groups have all expressed alarm over the perceived forces that are 'rushing children into adulthood', in particular, adult sexuality. Governmental agencies and national organizations within the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have commissioned reports and position statements to discuss increasing 'sexualization of children', usually girls, by the media (The Australia Institute, 2006; APA Task Force, 2007; Australian Senate, 2008; Papadopoulos, 2010). Of all the discourses of anxiety about young girls, the most pervasive are the fears around girls' premature sexual development: exposure to and imitations of adult 'sexiness', and the potential for hasty sexual experimentation, or 'self-sexualization'

(APA Task Force, 2007:3). This 'self-sexualization' is thought to be particularly risky in online spaces, such as social network sites (SNSs) and blogs. Yet, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, there is a serious lack of research that explores how girls engage with these types of online sites and how they represent their identities and sexualities within these spaces.

Commissioned reports (APA Task Force, 2007; The Australia Institute, 2008; Papadopoulos, 2010) as well as news stories (Collins and Lenz, 2011; McKay, 2010; Hoder, 2012) often focus on the perceived forces of sexualization, without significant discussion with girls themselves. Experts who discuss the 'sexualization of girls' tend to default to the positions, interpretations and attitudes of adults, such as teachers, parents, 'commentators' and psychologists (Hamilton, 2008; Platt Liebau, 2007; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008; Pipher, 1994). Despite substantial cultural conversations on girls' 'self-sexualizations' or sexual self-presentations online (and offline), there has been little opportunity for girls to contribute their reflections on 'sexualization' and discuss their practices. The exclusion of girls' voices from debates about their identities, interpretations of popular culture and understandings of sexuality is a major oversight. I argue that the prioritization of adult evaluations limits not only the perception of the 'sexualization problem', but also makes the crucial mistake of eliminating girls themselves from the political tasks of defining, formulating, and discerning relevant 'solutions' (Smith, 2010).

I situate this project within a growing body of academic work that prioritizes girls' localized, contextualized practices and self-reported experiences of issues that relate to their young girlhood (Jackson and Vares, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d;

Vares et al.,2011; Ringrose, 2011). These approaches include analyses of girls' experiences and their reflections about their own practices; studies that involve talking 'with' girls, rather than writing 'about' girls. This project seeks to problematize a universalizing discourse about 'tweens' (or all preteen girls in Western culture) and argues that the 'sexualization of culture thesis' (Gill, 2009) is limited if we want to understand how girls come to take up subject positions of gender and sexuality online. In an effort to recognize the central place girls hold in debates about their own lives and sexualities, this project locates girls' practices and experiences online as a starting point of analysis. Rather than contributing to a 'moral panic' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) about girls' online activities – or make claims about the legitimacy of public concern about sexualization – I begin from immersive observation of a group of girls online and then seek to understand the ways – problematic or not – they take up, respond to and interact with discourses of sexuality in SNS spaces.

I utilized an ethnographic study of eighteen girls' Facebook profiles and their interactions with friends over the course of one month, as well as a focus group discussion and qualitative survey to develop a ground-up research strategy. I studied the girls as active users of SNS technology and documented how they made use of Facebook to explore and represent their ongoing engagement with gender and sexuality. Utilizing discourse analysis (Gavey, 1989) and visual ethnography (Pink, 2001) as tools to examine girls' textual and visual signifiers online, I (re)theorize how identity is understood on SNSs.

This project takes a nuanced view of the sexualization debates and considers how adult readings of girls' behavior and activities are informed by assumptions about

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sexual knowledge, childhood 'innocence' and 'girls-as-victims/vixens' online (Edwards, 2005). Acknowledging and stepping away from 'risk' discourse, this study highlights how girls come to constitute online subject positions through exploring gender and sexuality (primarily through female friendship). Ultimately, this study makes the case for how girls' identities on SNSs – occupying the 'tween' period of liminality (Cody, 2012) – could be (re)imagined as cyborg-subjectivities, where girls are 'neither/both' children/teens, online/offline, who negotiate discursive positionings and respond to "multiple pushes and pulls of…sexual innocence versus sexual knowingness" (Renold and Ringrose, 2011:392) depending on moment-to-moment, localized contexts.

I begin with a review of scholarship about young girls and deconstruct the current, often polarized, debates about female preadolescence. I examine how the 'tween' came into being (following other discursive demarcations of youth), the critiques of it as an identity category and how the commodification of young girlhood has been analyzed as both exploitative and 'empowering'. I summarize the 'sexualization of girls discourse' (Renold and Ringrose, 2011) about young girls and explore the media-effects model that often informs these controversies. The academic responses to these debates is examined, including research that suggests children/ girls are highly 'media literate' and capable of negotiating the contradictory messages they encounter.

I explore how the circulation and production of sexualization discourse has served to reinforce cultural ideas about childhood and innocence. Reviewing how concerns about new technologies have historically limited girls' participation and political involvement, I reflect on the 'risk' discourse circulating about girls' use of

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SNSs and examine how girls have, problematically, come to be understood within a binary of victims/vixens online. Finally, I discuss how this project can be understood as a localized 'node' (boyd, 2009:53) of preteen girls' practices online and how their subject positions online might be understood given the cultural discourses surrounding them.

Tweens and the Commodification of Girlhood

The term 'tween' first appeared in marketing publications such as *Brandweek* and *Strategy* in the early 1990's (Guthrie, 2005) as a way of identifying preteens, or youth who were 'between' childhood and impending teen-age. Marketers created, defined and popularized the term. Earlier advertising had targeted audiences of children (2-14), teens (15-20), young adult (20-40) and onward. Growing (and independently spent) disposable income among 8 – 12 year olds helped spur the distinction between tweens and other younger children, and interested marketers in defining and targeting the preteen demographic more specifically. Preceding concerns that 'kids are getting older younger', adolescence – as a discursively constructed developmental period – had become longer, and increasingly (sub)categorised. The 'tweenaged' or 'tween' girl, a recently coined gendered classification of female preadolescence, has become a site for discussion about early sexualization and commodification.

In their book on girlhood studies, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh define the tween as a "younger pre-adolescent…age group [that is] exclusively or almost exclusively female, possessing, or as critics express it, defined by a distinct commodity culture"

(2005:6). The tween can be understood as the most recent age-related consumer

delineation, a consciously constructed identity category, that has emerged following

historical and increasingly capitalist trends to market to (sub)groups of children and

adults (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2005; Harris, 2005; Driscoll, 2002). The tween

follows the post-WWII, Western development of the 'teenager' and the subsequent

personas of the 'subteen' or 'preteen' that pre-empted her arrival.

Contemporary discussions of what constitutes a tween within academic writing

and mainstream media primarily tend to include girls aged 8 – 14 years (with some

variance). Guthrie (2005) discusses one of the first uses of the term 'tween' in non-

marketing, mainstream media – a cover story in *Newsweek* in October 1999. In the

article, entitled *Truth about Tweens*, authors Kantrowitz et al. discussed how tweens,

aged 8-14 in her account, were primarily girls, had significant buying power, and

existed in a kind of anticipatory state, eager for entrance into the teen world, but still

participating in many of the kinds of play and leisure deemed typical of childhood

(Guthrie, 2005).

The proliferation of tween products and the association between tween-

construction and marketers has had a significant impact on public discussion and

academic analysis of girlhood. Magazines (in New Zealand: *Total Girl*, *Disney GiRL*),

clothing brands (Zutopia), television shows (Hannah Montana), 'Bratz' dolls, and

computer games have been developed as distinct from children's or teenage versions

of similar media and products. The consumer aspect, or the commodification, built

into the current understanding of the tween category has lent itself to criticism from

academic writers as well as mainstream media. Critics assert that the increase in

tween-targeted consumer goods exploits the 'vulnerable' preteen age group by playing up insecurities of anticipatory femininity and creating a reliance on the latest disposable goods for entry into the 'tween world' (The Australia Institute, 2006; APA Task Force, 2007; The Australian Senate, 2008).

The gendered aspect of the tween is seen as especially relevant and there has been substantial research on girls' entrance into and expertise in consumption as part of the socialized process of "becoming a woman" (Russell and Tyler, 2002). Since the first serious academic analyses of young female adolescence by McRobbie and Garber (1976), there have been continued efforts to understand how girls' adolescence comes to be delimited or defined by (implicitly passive) consumption – particularly, consumption as it relates to achieving ideal femininity (McRobbie, 1981; McRobbie, 1978; Russell and Tyler, 2002). Although academics have discussed the ways that girl's consumption could be viewed as productive, enjoyable and influential, there continues to be a pervasive tendency to focus on how the consumer-driven aspect of young femininity is problematic. In an influential article, Carter (1984) challenged the prevailing consumerist discourse of female adolescence in marketing industries, but was also critical of the way feminist researchers had taken up and perpetuated these discourses.

In an effort to reconsider girls' ability to discern, critique, and evaluate consumerist discourse while navigating preadolescence and adoption of feminine identity, researchers shifted towards empowerment models that examined girls' consumption as a productive and potentially economically powerful process. Authors such as Harris (2005), Malik (2005), Coulter (2005), Russell and Tyler (2002)

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questioned the assumption that girls' consumption is inevitably a result of predatory

commercialization and highlighted the ways that girls negotiate consumer culture with

both pleasure and cynicism. Using context-specific qualitative research, Harris (2005)

and Russell and Tyler (2002) have been careful to avoid reproducing debates on

whether tween subjectivity is inherently 'good' or 'bad' for young girls, and instead

aimed to "consider the extent to which girls are able to negotiate and positively draw

upon the pervasive and compelling consumer culture within which they live" (Harris,

2005:218).

Another criticism of the tween identity designation is that it is seemingly

universalizing, and depicts young girls as having generally similar tastes, interests and

preferences, despite material differences in age, geography, race, ability and class.

The wide age span that demarks and distinguishes girls as tweens (between the ages

of 8 and 14) collapses the significant differences that exist in girls' lives over this age

range. Harris (2005) critiques the way the designation minimizes cultural difference

and argues that the tween has no "distinctive local identity" (Harris, 2005:210). The

diversity of young girls' experiences is flattened and minimized by privileging white,

middle-to-upper class girls with disposable income and a host of pre-determined

interests (aesthetics, tween celebrities and music, etc.). The global uptake of the

Western tween identity, as suggested by Harris (2005) and Russell and Tyler (2002),

does not differentiate between different cultural aspects of gender, sexuality, and

status. Tween products and marketing are claimed to promote singular versions of

'hyperfemininity' that are privileged over diversity (Russell and Tyler, 2002; Harris,

2005; Orenstein, 2011; Schor, 2004).

The focus on the aesthetic realm of femininity – not only the aesthetics of the self but also of 'girlie' (pink, sparkly, adorned) products and surroundings, or 'hyperaestheticization' (Welsh, 1996) – has been interpreted as both restrictive (Orenstein, 2011; Schor, 2004; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008; Kilbourne, 1999) and also potentially worth celebrating, or at the very least, worth examining as a pleasurable process (Nava, 1992; McRobbie, 1994, Ganetz, 1995). While tween products have been criticized as exclusively hyperfeminine, there are problems with assuming that all young, preadolescent girls passively relate to these goods. Talking with girls about their interest in and responses to these items show a huge range of diverse experiences. For example, young British girls (aged 12 – 16) interviewed by Gleeson and Frith responded to hyperfeminine pink, 'flowery' and 'girlie' clothing as representing an 'immature' femininity – something one outgrows and rejects as part of process of taking up more boyish or sexual clothing styles (2004:105). For these girls, pink "represents a particular kind of femininity – one which is passive, innocent, asexual and immature" (Gleeson and Frith, 2004: 104). Rejecting pink tween identifiers was part of positioning themselves as girls with sexuality. Their interpretation of the marketing of hyperfemininty to tweenage girls could indicate how public discourse prefers to 'girlie-fy' preadolescents as a way of controlling their access to adult forms of dress. Alternatively, authors such as Lazar (2011), Harvey and Gill (2011) and McRobbie (2009) make the case that the postfeminist context is linked to an ironic, fetishization of 'girlie' femininity. Jackson, Vares and Gill discuss how "'Girliness' is a key feature of postfeminism" (2012:3) and enjoying active consumer consumption in this period is considered an act of 'empowered' participation

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in capitalist markets. Within this context, "being 'sexy' and being 'empowered' are conflated" (Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2012:3).

Female Adolescence and the 'Compulsory Disciplinary Technology of Sexy'

In a 2005 article in the *Boston Globe* newspaper, tween girls are described as "too old for toys, too young for boys" (Aucoin, 2005). This sentiment illustrates the oft cited qualities thought to characterize the tween age: 'in between-ness' (Guthrie, 2005) or an 'anticipatory' transition from childhood to being teenagers. Historically there have been other age delineations that served to categorize girls and youth generally. Driscoll (2002) undertakes the project of detailing a genealogy (or historiography) of feminine adolescence beginning with the Renaissance – widely regarded as the period when the conception of 'childhood' was initiated. In a similar vein, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005) discuss medieval definitions of childhood, which included three stages (*infans*, *puertitia*, and *adolescentia*) that were largely determined by the recognizable cognitive abilities of youth and their ascendance into responsibility and religious piety. Discursive distinctions of adolescence have increased since the eighteenth century, beginning with the advent of childhood, and subsequently adolescentia and/or youth (Jenkins, 1998; Driscoll, 2002). Driscoll (2002), Mitchell (1994, 1995), McRobbie (1978) and Kitch (2001) discuss the evolution of cultural texts of femininity from the Victorian era guidance manuals and magazines leading into the girls' advice magazines and domestic (housewife) texts that continued into modernity. The manuals, according to these authors, served as Foucauldian 'technologies of the self' – distributing and reinforcing discourses about how young ladies should act,

control and discipline their bodies, and generally strive to improve themselves (McRobbie, 1978, 1991; Mitchell, 1994, 1995; Kitch, 2001).

In 1978, Angela McRobbie published a thesis, *Jackie: an ideology of adolescent femininity*, which explored how the popular British teen magazine, *Jackie* (modeled after women's magazines and arguably the predecessor to follow up teen and tween magazines), relied heavily on romance discourse. The magazine, McRobbie (1978) argued, presumed that finding and securing a romance-based relationship was the primary goal of working class teen girls. Later, McRobbie (1991) analyzed the changes in teen magazines and explored how more modern versions included feminist rhetoric (not feminist politics) and more information on self-care and confidence building. More recently, McRobbie has theorized that postfeminism – which she clarifies as not the period *after* feminism, but rather, as a *displacement of* or *substitute for* feminist politics – has produced a period where young women have increasing opportunities (and expectations) for equal participation in public life and the marketplace, but are also are increasingly expected to abandon "critique[s] of patriarchy and relinquish […] political identities; and engage[...] in a range of practices which are both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine" (2009: 57). Within this period of postfeminism, hierarchy and power of opportunity are displaced by 'a new sexual contract' (McRobbie, 2009) where girls and women are expected to be visible, engaged, 'empowered' and are largely (self-)evaluated by their participation in increasingly compulsory beauty and fashion standards.

Other authors (Gill, 2006, 2008; Lazar, 2011) have identified this postfeminist period as a time when a rejection of feminist ideals is seen as 'naughty' (Press,

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2011:117) and thereby, sexy or fetishized. Girls are 'empowered' to be sexy and

beautiful through a new 'compulsory disciplinary technology of sexy' (Gill, 2008).

Within this context, feminist politics are abandoned or assumed irrelevant. Ringrose

(2011) discusses how teenaged girls engagement with SNSs operates within the

postfeminist media context by saying that "we need to analyze…[where/how] girls are

under pressure to visually display and perform" this new compulsory sexiness in digital

spaces (Ringrose, 2011:101).

Debates About the 'Sexualization of Girls'

The concern about whether or not young girls buy into, and/or feel empowered

by 'girlie' commodities is echoed in similar academic debates about whether or not,

and how, girls come to consume and/or reproduce media messages of 'empowered'

feminine sexuality. In these cultural conversations, concerns about potential

commodification of girlhood are closely followed by a concern about objectified

girlhood. Fears about adolescent girls' sexuality have circulated since before the

eighteenth century – reinterpreted and reproduced in Western culture (Driscoll, 2002;

Mitchell, 1994, 1995; Jenkins, 1998). Societal fear about girls' precocious sexual

development, premature entry into mass consumerism, problems with body image and

self-esteem, early menstruation, and fears of young girls being extorted, manipulated,

preyed upon, or sexualized by and for mass media are widespread (Rush and La

Nauze, 2006; Seaton, 2005; Cherland, 2005; Hamilton, 2008; Platt Liebau, 2007;

Levin and Kilbourne, 2008; Kilbourne, 1999; Schor, 2004; Pipher, 1994; Orenstein,

2000, 2011; Durham, 2008; Brumberg, 1997; Rutledge, 2002). Parents, educators,

religious and child advocacy groups have all expressed alarm over the perceived

forces that are 'rushing children into adulthood', in particular, adult sexuality.

Governmental agencies and national organizations within the US, the UK, and

Australia have also commissioned reports and developed position statements to

discuss increasing 'sexualization of children' (namely girls) by the media (The Australia

Institute, 2006; APA Task Force, 2007; Australian Senate, 2008; Papadopoulos,

2010).

Of all the discourses of anxiety about young girls, the most pervasive is the fear

around girls' premature sexual development: exposure to and imitations of adult

'sexiness', and the potential for hasty sexual experimentation. The Australia Institute

report entitled *Corporate Paedophilia* criticizes advertising, girls' magazines, and

television programs as the key factors in the worldwide increase of

"children…sexualized at younger and younger ages" (2006:5). The report has

received strong critiques from academics in media studies, sociology of childhood, and

audience reception studies (Bray, 2008; Egan and Hawkes, 2008; Lumby and Albury,

2008). Egan and Hawkes, scholars on nineteenth and twentieth century

understandings of childhood sexuality, note that reports such as *Corporate*

Paedophilia create a "'double edged sword' of reform agendas which can unwittingly

create double standards and inequality in the name of protecting women and children

from social evil" (2008:308).   The authors refuted the claims that children were 'newly'

sexualized by media, and argued that sexualization claims are not 'new' (see

Walkerdine, 1998; Jenkins, 1998).

The Australia Institute and the American Psychological Association Task Force

were the first to publish concern about media sexualization of girls and defined the

process of sexualization as something that occurs when girls determine their value

from their sexual appeal, or are used for other's sexual objectification (APA Task

Force, 2007:2). With a few years, the Home Office of London commissioned

psychologist Papadopoulos (2010) to conduct a review of sexualization of young

people for the British context. Academic debates followed the reports – particularly

Corporate Paedophilia. Lumby and Albury (2008) questioned the use of the term

'sexualization' within the Australian report and argued that 'reasonable adults' would

not read the advertising images included in the document as sexual. Bray (2008)

examined *Corporate Paedophilia*, and the responses to it, as part of a larger question

of the neoliberal value of 'tolerance', where perceptions of 'intolerance' serve to limit

the political possibilities of critiquing corporate capitalism. She highlights how the

question of sexualization of girls and children is intimately tied to the question of

corporate capitalization of social taboos, including childhood sexuality. In other words,

how pedophilic desire, as a cutting edge taboo, is profitable for corporate advertising

(see her examples of 'sexy' preadolescent advertisements by *Calvin Klein, GQ,* etc.).

While not agreeing with all premises of the Australia Institute report, Bray (2008) calls

for a reading of the document as a useful contribution to the question of corporate,

capitalist commodification of children in a neoliberal, postfeminist context.

　　　Bray (2008) compares Lumby and Albury's (2008) critique to the work of Adler

(2001), whose response to anti-child pornography legislation in the US argued that

narrowing definitions of "non-pornographic images of children… sexualiz[es] our

understandings of childhood subjectivity: 'the sexually prohibited becomes the sexually

produced'" (Adler, 2001: 273, quoted by Bray, 2008:332). According to Adler, "the

legal tool that we designed to liberate children from sexual assault threatens us all by constructing a world in which we are enthralled, anguished, enticed, bombarded by the spectacle of the sexual child" (2001:213). Within this understanding, reports, cultural conversations and legislation that perpetuate the 'sexualization of children' thesis end up creating a powerful social taboo that then incites increasing transgressions.

Papadopoulos acknowledges the ongoing uncertainty about the validity and definition of 'sexualization' of girls in her UK report, stating:

> We appreciate that academic debate over the precise theoretical interpretation of sexualisation is ongoing; however, our objective here is to better understand the impact sexualisation is having now and to identify effective strategies for combating its negative effects (Papadopoulos, 2010:25).

However, she largely brushes aside the academic tensions around the 'sexualization of girls' discourse. Within her framework, threats to young children by media are so apparently imminent, that despite a lack of consistent empirical or evidential research on how young people come to be 'sexualized' (or what that term means) and debates about the efficacy and politicization of the concept of sexualization itself, there is no time to pause to consider the question. Instead she advocates swiftly applied strategies to combat the (already determined) 'negative effects' of the yet-to-be-defined process of sexualization. Smith (2010) offers a similar critical evaluation of Papadopoulos' report, saying that the author relinquishes the 'child' at hand to a mere identity category, "whose entitlement is 'innocence' and who must be protected by a range of disciplinary and institutional interventions" (2010:177). Smith goes on to confront the adultist assumptions and ideological biases in the review, alleging that the author, "fails to even consider that young people may have something to say"

(2010:178). Her analysis suggests that young girls might have their own experiential understanding of media, and ideas about how the 'problems' and 'solutions' of sexuality in media could be framed and talked about. This understanding informs the research reported in this thesis.

I acknowledge the value of aspects of the arguments offered in *Corporate Paedophilia* and the Papadopoulos report. I do not deny the claims that concerns about commodified childhood become neutered or silenced by the question of 'tolerance' as Bray (2008) points out. However, I argue that it is important to consider how the 'sexualization of girls' discourse takes for granted an adult/childhood binary, wherein the terms of age and experience are strictly divided by a 'natural' boundary of (sexual) knowledge and (asexual/ presexual) innocence. This public discourse assumes that childhood and young femininity is devoid of any form of sexuality, furthermore, that displays of any kind of sexuality is to be understood within the framework adult, male (hetero)sexuality. I contend that perceptions of self-sexualization by young girls' online are, at times, potentially misappropriations of an adult, male gaze that is applied to acts and performances that may better be understood through the discursive lenses offered by girls themselves. To remove girls' subject positions (such as in online photos) from their original context, strip them of their discursive value, and interpret them without attention to what girls have to say about these images, is to legitimize 'self-sexualization' claims on shaky empirical grounds.

I do not wish to dismiss the real consequences girls may suffer as a result of an increasingly sexual cultural economy, but along with other analysts such as Vares,

Jackson, Ringrose and Gill, I favour the critical examination of the discourse of sexualization. I am critical of sexualization claims while recognizing that in some respects a 'compulsory disciplinary technology of sexy' (Gill, 2008) exists for young girls. I realize that both understandings of girls 'at risk' and 'empowered' by postfeminist virtual environments present limitations and challenges, with real political implications. Like Ringrose, I attempt in this thesis to "contribute to the debate on sexualization with a nuanced, feminist analysis that both takes the risks and power dynamics of 'sexualization' processes in the contemporary media context very seriously, yet tries not to oversimplify the complexity of... girls' responses and productions within specific mediums" (2011:100).

My aim in this research is to ultimately make a space for the voices of girls themselves within these debates and reports. I focus on preteen girls' practices and reflections and emphasize their experiences of gender, sexuality, media and online participation. This work draws on the research of other scholars who have highlighted girls' practices and interpretations of their own actions and reactions to representations of girls and femininity (Jackson and Vares 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d; Vares et al., 2011; Jackson et al.,2012; Ringrose 2011).

Media Effects and Media Literacy

Underlying some of the debates and reports about the sexualization or 'adultification' of tween girls are assumptions about how viewing 'sexualized' media or sexual messaging creates or produces mimicry or reproduction of sexuality by girls. Gauntlett (1998) wrote a succinct essay critiquing the 'effects model' of media

research; wherein media consumption correlates or shows demonstrable effects on individuals' behavior. Within the 'effects model', media consumption is presumed to correlate to, 'cause' or demonstrate reliable (usually problematic) effects on individuals' behavior. Gauntlett (1998) noted that (at that time) there were over sixty years of academic research attempting to show the effects of media on behavior, all of which had failed to conclude any significantly predictable or stable outcomes. Specifically, research on how young people come to consume, evaluate and understand sexual messages in media has debunked any passive theories of 'media effects' and instead indicates that young people are quite media literate, critical and capable of savvy interpretation (Buckingham and Bragg, 2004; Buckingham, 1993, 1996). The 'media effects' discourse does not take into consideration complex, contradictory and nuanced understandings of meanings in various media, and perpetuates a view of children and young adults that frames them as passive consumers rather than active and critical viewers.

In the case of young girls, the 'problem' of media rests on a series of assumptions about how it 'causes' girls to imitate 'sexiness' that is determined by adult gaze and reads girls' bodies as capable of being sexy, but girls as too young to be sexual. Likewise, it ignores how girls themselves might view media differently than adults, and how their interpretations of sexual performativity might be otherwise understood. Buckingham and Bragg (2004) and Buckingham (1993, 1996) have also explored the problems of media effects discourse and developed better understandings of how young people consume and interpret meanings from media. In 2004, they conducted a long-term, in-depth study that showed how youth (aged 9-17)

skeptically and critically evaluate media, and how their take-up of meaning from media sources is a largely contextual process of discursive interpretation and not a simple, passive or unsophisticated process.

Academics have been quick to critique discourse about 'The Media' as monolithic and powerfully persuasive source that easily becomes a type of scapegoat in discussion about cultural forces. Media is diverse, has increasing platforms and relays multiple and competing discourses. Media(s) have been identified as producing the moral panics and cultural controversies they 'report' and there are huge variations in the kinds of media and types of engagement within girls' lives. Reading a blog post, seeing a snippet of the evening news, participating on Facebook and reading a magazine on the way home from school are vastly different practices and may include contradictory discourses about who, what and how girls 'are'. Media is localized, highly contextual, and girls' engagement with different forms of media is equally varied.

Media literacy has, to some degree, been touted as a potential form of inoculation against 'unhealthy' media messages (see Wade et al., 2003; Wilksch, et al., 2006), however, questions remain about the extent to which media literacy can improve girls' experience of the hegemonic sexist discourses that continue to represent women and girls as objects of (narrowly defined) desire. After all, most women are highly media literate – insofar as they can critique the inequitable and unrealistic standards of physical attractiveness and beauty that women are expected to adhere to. This literacy and ability to critically question media depictions does not necessarily prevent women from feeling less ambivalent about representations of their

feminine sexuality. Similarly, girls neither consume gender/sexual discourses in media unthinkingly, nor engage them without a substantial amount of reflexivity and internal grappling. Some girlhood researchers have demonstrated that while preteen girls are discerning and reflexive about the media texts they consume, they are not somehow immune to its influence, for example, Vares et al. indicate that, although preteen girls are able to produce 'an erudite and articulate critique of the use of airbrushing techniques [in magazines] (for example) this did not mean that such images would not *also* make girls feel 'ugly' or 'bad' (2011:151).

I want to both acknowledge the limitations of media effects discourse, and its tendency to ignore the process of media reception and interpretation by literate and critical youth, while also acknowledging research indicates that the media does influence young people, in this case, girls (Vares et al., 2011; Jackson and Vares, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d; Jackson et al., 2012; Ringrose, 2011). Researchers such as Vares and Jackson (2011, 2012) and Ringrose (2011) have shifted the conversation away from an active/passive media reception binary and called for situating girls' understandings and practices at the center of research on girls and media.

Harris argues that young girls' engagement with discourses of hegemonic femininity (and sexuality) could be read as a form of playfulness, saying, "they enjoy it and play with it much as older women do, and in fact, perhaps because of their age, they may be better able to incorporate this as play and take it less seriously than older women" (2005:219). I extend this argument further in later chapters by examining how online subject positions – which draw on both online and offline experiences and

relationships – allow girls to draw on multiple, sometimes contradictory positions of gender and sexuality online/offline. Later in chapter two, I discuss the term 'cyborg-subjectivity' as a way of understanding how identity on SNSs gives girls opportunities for resistance to hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality. Preteen girls' resist classification as children or teens, and their simultaneous online/offline subject positions gives them access to modes of subversion and resistance that may not be as accessible to adult women. The strategies I witnessed girls negotiate is explored further in chapters 4 and 5.

One issue I tried to keep in mind during my analysis of girls' negotiations of online/offline identity is the extent to which 'empowerment' is commodified (and sexualized) in a postfeminist context (Gill, 2012, 2008; Jackson et al., 2012). Gill (2012) cautions feminist researchers in the use of sexual 'empowerment' practices, arguing that we need to recognize that empowerment itself has been complicated by the sexual objectification of 'female sexual confidence'. She advocates examining how sexism contributes to a 'technology of sexiness' (Radner, 1993, 1999; Evans et al., 2010; Attwood 2006, 2009) where girls and women feel compelled to feel 'sexually empowered' as "a compulsory part of normative, heterosexy, young female subjectivity…that has replaced virginity and virtue as a dominant currency of feminine desirability (whilst not altogether displacing the earlier valuations and double standards)" (Gill, 2012, 743).

Media Circulation and the Production of 'Sexualization' Discourse

In her book entitled *Bad Girls: The Media, Sex and Feminism in the 90s,* Lumby discusses how public fears of girls' wellbeing in relation to media and popular culture, are not "simply given", but are produced by "the very people and institutions who investigate them" (1997:xviii). Thus, public outcries about girls' behavior, exposure to and use of the media and popular culture ultimately help produce the same anxieties they purport to warn against. Applying a poststructuralist analysis to the public rhetoric about young girls involves unpacking the assumptions underlying these discourses.

In the governmental reports discussed above, investigations into the 'sexualization of children' become more than position statements, reviews or calls for reform. The reports themselves legitimize, substantiate, and construct the phenomenon of 'sexualization', which in turn generates increasing public concerns that are perpetuated and repeated by the very media argued to be the source of the 'problem'. Gill (2012) discusses how the issue of sexualization – wherein there is a public concern about increasingly sexualized cultural norms – is thought to be a product of media (or at least, the primary site where sexualization occurs). Additionally, media has become the preliminary space by which alarms about sexualization are discussed (Gill, 2012:738). Lumby (1997) has asserted that media commentators frequently perpetuate and legitimize the discourses they report on, and in the case of fears about sexualization, the shock value of reprinting/ replaying sexual transgressions – such as in the case of Miley Cyrus' infamous 'twerking' performance with Robin Thicke during the MTV 2013 Music Awards Show – end up reproducing and hyper-analyzing the sexual material ad nasuem. Gill describes this interplay by

saying, "the media might be said to be a key site of sexualization, a key site of concerns about sexualization, and furthermore, a key site of *concerns about concerns* about 'sexualization' (2012:738, emphasis original).

Interestingly, the presumed threats of sexualization of children/childhood are almost exclusively reserved for girls, with very little mention of young boys being increasingly sexualized or 'rushed into adulthood'. Additionally, there has been no such analogous proliferation of young tween boys' products, identities, commodities, anxieties or niche markets when compared to those of the young girls. Thus, the gendered aspect of the tween should be examined. What does the lack of public discourse about young preadolescent males, bodies, representations, and media 'effects' imply about societal notions of gender and sexuality and how they intersect with notions of childhood and young adolescence? One interpretation of the fixation on young female tweens has been offered by Pomerantz (2006), who argues that much of the public panic over the sexualization (or sexuality) of young girls may be understood as a greater concern "over girls' new found power within the social sphere" (2006:188). The lack of social scrutiny of the lives of boys could be understood as a sign that societal morality, social order and control of sexuality still relies on the notions of feminine purity and modesty. Walkerdine (1998) also postulated that the gendered tween could be understood as an extension of the sexualization of working-class girls that has since spread to include white and middles class.

The recent development of the tween (and teenager or adolescent) as recognizable identity categories highlights its socially constructed aspect; however, the anxious reactions about young girls' 'growing up too fast' awkwardly underscore how

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childhood is understood to be a 'natural' and (sexually) 'innocent' time/space. This tension between the social awareness of tween-as-'created' or 'new' and childhood-as- 'sacred' or 'natural' is evident within public spaces and media sites created for tweens – such as magazines and websites that include both 'childish' and 'teen' content – and reflects the relative instability of the tweenage period. The attempts to clearly demark youth from teenagehood via developmental linearity is threatened when age-appropriate boundaries are trespassed, such as in the case of demonstration of sexuality or knowledge at too young an age.

Threats to the teleological project of 'growing up' are met with strong reactionary attempts to maintain clear social delineations. In his discussion of the historical construction of childhood, Jenks notes that progression through developmental stages is understood through an 'achievement ethic' (1996:24) which further naturalizes adulthood as a stable (end) identity. The challenge for social and cultural researchers is to approach research on childhood with theories and appropriate methodologies that acknowledge childhood as socially constructed and children as capable of agency, but also avoid perpetuating 'childhood' as a unified identity category. Researchers such as Russell and Tyler (2005) have attempted to do this by privileging children's perspectives, but they also situate this knowledge within their particular social context. By focusing on a 'tight intersection' of childhood and other subjective positionalities (such as gender, and consumption within a specific cultural context), Russell and Tyler were able to privilege the subjective experiences of girls.

In a similar vein, Kearney (2006) put girls' productive practices in the center of

her analysis, and acknowledged her own position of power as part and parcel of her academic writing. Situating girls as media producers, Kearney clarifies that her research breaks down the binary adult researcher/ child research participant by attempting to avoid 'speaking for' young girls, but rather, 'speak nearby' them (2006:15). In this thesis, I explore how girls are active producers of their Facebook profiles and discuss in Chapters 4 and 5 how they create meaning and subject positions within their relationships and friendships online by drawing on multiple – sometimes competing – discourses of age, gender and sexuality.

Moral Panic and Girls (as Victims/ Vixens) Online

Moral panics are characterized by increasing social controversy and tension over an issue that appears to threaten social order, and is often times disproportionate to the actual threats at hand (Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jenkins, 1998; Cohen, 1973). Likewise, they perpetuate a source or group that becomes the scapegoat responsible for this threat (Jenkins, 1998). In the case of the 'sexualization of girls', media, as discussed above, is purported to be both the culprit and also the igniter of justice in policing such sexualization (Gill, 2012).

The APA Task Force (2007) argues that increases in sexually explicit material in television programming, music video and lyrical content, movies, magazines, computer/video games and sports media have all contributed to the process of sexualization. Widely publicized news reports of girls 'sexting' – sending sexually provocative photos or text messages to others through 'smart phones' – has stirred alarm over growing cell phone technologies and usage (Marshall, 2009). While all of these forms of media have been identified as 'rushing' girls into premature sexuality,

the Internet and the digitally mediated forms of communication it hosts have been especially indicted as a cause for panic and concern.

Instant messaging, video chatting, chat rooms, blogs, online gaming and web journals have all become significant forms of communication for young people (Watkins, 2009). Since the mid-2000's, social network sites, or SNSs, have seen explosions in user participation and social connection, particularly by young adults and children (boyd, 2007a; Ito et al., 2010; Lenhart et al., 2011). In contrast to other forms of computer mediated communication (CMC), SNSs offer virtual space for users to create digital versions of themselves to showcase, navigate and interact with other users. As a result, growing concerns about how girls use these online spaces and how they represent their identities – particularly how they engage with discourses of sexuality – has become a key point of contention.

Fears about girls and sexuality in online spaces are prevalent and can be characterized in several ways, including fears of girls being exposed to sexual imagery online, fears of girls receiving unwanted sexual solicitations online (which in their highest form, include fears around girls meeting predators offline) and fears of girls reproducing sexuality online – the latter implying that such reproductions of teen or adult sexuality would attract dangerous solicitations by 'online predators' (read: pedophiles).

Anxiety about new technologies and their impact on femininity have been well documented by Cassell and Cramer (2008), who describe how each progressive communication technology – the telegraph, the telephone, the computer, and internet – have been followed by fears that women and girls are incapable of technological

expertise and that their participation with such technologies put their sexual purity at risk. The authors describe how these panics reproduce male domination in communication technologies that are touted as potentially 'utopian' – rather than minimizing identity politics of race, class, gender and ethnicity, these discourses end up reinforcing them. In the case of women and girls, their technological participation comes under increased surveillance and scrutiny, which undermines their ability to be seen as competent media producers or utilize internet technologies as a positive tool. This is reflected in the lower rates of women in rapidly changing IT, web and mobile app development and computer engineering career tracks (Cassell and Cramer, 2008).

With regard to girls being exposed to unwanted sexual imagery or sexual solicitations online, research suggests that the perception of online predators seducing minors is grossly inaccurate (Cassell and Cramer, 2008; Marwick, 2008; Radford, 2006a, 2006b; Rosen, 2006). National research in the United States via the Youth Internet Safety Survey in 2000 and 2005 has shown that youth receiving sexual material online has decreased, and the majority of unsolicited sexual content is sent by peers rather than strangers. Teens and young people report knowing how to avoid or ignore solicitations by strangers in general and show a high degree of knowledge about online privacy, safety and skill in navigating away unwanted sexual material (and bullying) (Cassell and Cramer, 2008; Marwick, 2008; Radford 2006a, 2006b; Rosen, 2006). Furthermore, Cassell and Cramer's work (2008) suggests that young people are most likely to engage with sexual content online in groups, rather than alone. This may be an indication that youth negotiate and explore sexuality among

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their peers, and while "they may be more daring in groups…they may also be more self-regulated" (Cassell and Cramer, 2008). Girls in particular might be using the relative safety of peer groups to explore topics they sense are taboo in the context of societal fear around their engagement with sexual material.

Despite fears about participation on SNSs, and 'self-sexualization' (an ill-defined term from the Papadopoulos, 2010 report) by girls, there is very little evidence to suggest that girls are inherently 'at risk' in SNSs. A number of studies have demonstrated that youth primarily use SNSs to reinforce current relationships and are highly competent at eschewing strangers (Marwick, 2008; Rosen, 2006; Cassell and Cramer, 2008). Unpacking the cultural fear of 'online predators' reveals that discourses of these predators tend to reinforce stranger-danger, and as boyd and Jenkins argue, "distract us from more statistically significant molesters" (2006:58). Online sexual solicitations of young people, just as offline, are more likely to be from a close family member or friend known *offline*. Likewise, despite boys and girls both being subject to sexual solicitation on and offline, it is girls who bear the brunt of moral panic about online sexuality. Walkerdine (1997) argues that this panic about young girls' sexuality is reserved for white, middle-class girls. Cassell and Cramer describe this phenomenon by saying, "adults describe the need to protect girls from their own sexual nature – to convince them to wait until they are older before they flaunt their bodies or describe their sexuality to their friends, for example" (2008:65).

The surveillance of girls' activities online embodies a social fear of girls being victimized by a predatory (usually male, pedophilic) 'other', but also fear of girls' own exploration of sexual identity. There is a conflicting recognition that girls, even young

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girls, are capable of being sexy (if not to 'us', at least in the eyes of some 'other'), yet, girlhood is a 'naturally innocent' time that has to be protected. As Walkerdine has argued, "are the little girls to be saved from this eroticization the very ones who are endlessly fetishized by adult desire when they are barely a few years older?" (1997:167). The sometimes patronizing gaze that adults use to interpret and stall nascent sexual performativity by preadolescent and adolescent girls can be read as a deeper fear of social disorder, or a recognition of a Western sexual fetish of youth in general (Harris, 2005). Within the sexualization discourse about girls online, there is little room to explore how girls themselves feel about sexuality and gender in virtual spaces, because all sexual exploration is deemed risky.

This project is informed in part by the fact that government statements and news reports that assert sexualization of children claims rarely include conversations with children themselves. Instead, adult 'experts' – such as parents, police, teachers, academics, etc. remain the a priori sources of knowledge about 'victims' of sexualization. News reports on cyber-crime and sexual violence against girls via internet activities are particularly likely to have nearby adults appropriate girls' experience with their own assumptions (Edwards, 2005). Presented within a 'girls-as-victims' discourse, girls and teens who face sexual assault or abuse resulting from online activities may then become victimized by their lack of voice or agency in reports. Furthermore, girls are far more likely than their abusers to be analyzed or criticized in media reports – discussion of their clothing, preceding actions ("she regularly trolled sex chat rooms"), character ("she was always a good girl"), etc. become a matter of public scrutiny (Edwards, 2005). Additionally, non-white girls and

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girls from low-income or single-parent households are far more likely to be portrayed in media as 'problematic', 'vixens' or somehow responsible for their own abuse (Edwards, 2005). In other words, reports about actual sexual assault and violence against girls perpetuates binaries between idealized notions of preteen girls (white, middle-class, 'good') and 'other' girls (non-white, lower-class, 'bad' and 'at-risk' or 'risky'). This 'naive' versus 'delinquent' (Casell and Cramer, 2008) discursive binary occludes real examination of how abusers come to perpetrate sexual assault on young girls, and there is typically little discussion of the social and institutional factors that contribute to the issue (Wilczynski and Sinclair, 1999).

Locating Global SNS Engagement in a Local Context

Early analysis of computer mediated communication lauded the possibilities for people to connect and share information globally. SNSs have indeed had an international take-up and perhaps best demonstrate the potential for transnational relationships and dialogue. However, it is important to consider the ways in which US-derived virtual space becomes utilized by non-US-based SNS users. Like physical buildings that come from conscious urban planning, digital spaces have forms of 'architecture' (Papacharissi, 2009) that configure the experiences and possibilities of user engagement. As boyd puts it, the digital architecture of SNSs, "define what types of interactions are possible, and shape how people engage in these spaces" (2011:42). Sites such as Facebook are imbued with the cultural values of American life, for example, the importance of self-promotion. Originally created as an online yearbook (thus 'facebook') for Harvard University in 2004, Facebook required users to

have a "harvard.edu" email account to join (Cassidy, 2006). It later extended its services to other universities, allowing only users who provided their ".edu" (American) email accounts to verify their identity as university students. Eventually Facebook began allowing US high school networks and corporate networks in 2005, before going open to the general (and global) public in 2006. The implications of Facebook's origins are imbedded into the site's design and structure: users fill in profile text scripts that link to their educational institutions and career history. Users are encouraged to identify their favorite popular culture media, often US-based movies, television shows, music and entertainment. The construction of the site reflects American ideals of higher education, early independence and (some would say, excessive) self-definition. The centrality of a 'profile picture' within Facebook users' pages articulates a definitively American paradigm.

Researchers examining SNS participation by non-US populations should always consider the extent to which the US cultural values and practices become negotiated in these spaces. Studies like that of Leage and Chalmers (2010) demonstrate that involvement on US-based SNSs can be a complicated or ambivalent process for users who have to simultaneously negotiate the (sometimes contradictory) cultural standards of US SNSs and a local context. The authors' study, entitled *Degrees of Caution: Arab Girls Unveil on Facebook*, highlights how most key aspects of Facebook membership (posting photos, engaging with friends publicly, etc.) were problematic for teen girls in Qatar. Arab (largely) Islamic culture stipulates a woman's reputation to be of upmost value, and girls' expressed significant concerns about how online actions might risk public perception of their character. Indeed, for the girls that

Leage and Chalmers interviewed, to be in (semi)public is to be 'at risk'. The authors

discussed how most of their participants avoided posting any portrait photos and

discerned ways of engaging in Facebook that counters the presumed typical 'self-

presentation' purpose of SNSs. Likewise, studies such as Punyanunt-Carter and

Smith's (2010) and Bae (2010) discuss the differences of online identity negotiation

between Eastern and Western cultures. With these considerations in mind, I approach

this examination of preteen girls in New Zealand with a critical eye on how girls'

participation on Facebook is potentially complicated or informed by their simultaneous

positions as 'international user' and 'local New Zealand student'.

Situating this Project

This thesis is situated within the highly contentious intersection of young

'tweenaged' girls in Christchurch and participation on Facebook, as well as within

complicated ontological discussions of 'self' and 'identity' online. The research aims to

explore the ways that the girls who participated in this project negotiate online sociality

with skill, while occupying online/offline subjective positions that draw on the complex

and at times, contradictory discourses of age, gender, sexuality and friendship. Like

Jackson and Vares (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d), Jackson et al. (2012), Vares

et al.,(2011), Ringrose (2011) I adopt a context-specific analysis that looks at how girls

navigate the culture they live in. I explore the ways they utilize blended online/offline

subject positions, where they are able to draw from a variety of discursive positions of

age, gender and sexuality. In the next chapter, I explain my adoption of Sundén's

(2003) 'cyborg-subjectivity' as a way of understanding girls' identity on SNSs. I take

special note of Harris' (2005) suggestion that girls may have more room to *play* with these subjectivities than adult women – especially in a SNS context. I explore how girls' gender and sexual performativity online might be understood outside of the frameworks of 'risk', 'media effects', or 'victims/vixens'. I explore how girls in Christchurch utilize their cyborg-subjective positions to both "delve into the past and tip toe into the future" (Cody, 2012:53-54) and how this can be read as (at least potentially) a political practice of embodying 'neither/both' binary positions such as: child/teen, innocent/sexually knowing, etc. Finally, I point out the political possibilities this understanding might offer.

In Chapter 2, I begin by discussing the feminist poststructuralist theoretical frameworks used in this analysis, particularly the emphasis on subjectivity and discourse. I explain how this analysis utilizes Sundén's (2003) 'cyborg-subjectivity' and, like Ladd (2005), argues for a reconsideration of the concept of identity within SNSs. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological strategies I used to conduct this analysis, including my online ethnographic observation of girls. I also discuss the incorporation of their reflections through the use of a qualitative survey and focus group discussion. Next, in Chapter 4, I discuss girls' practices and experiences online, particularly how they co-constructed one another's online and offline identities through female friendship and gendered social affirmations. In Chapter 5, I discuss how girls in this study engaged with sexuality on SNSs – particularly in visual display, such as photos – and how they positioned their photos in ways that could always be read in multiple ways. I explore how they understood these images and how they reacted to

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peers' responses. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the implications of this research and

considerations for future studies of girlhood online.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This study of girls' online social engagement is located within the growing field of 'girls' studies,' and also contributes to an ongoing discussion about how best to understand identity within SNSs. This chapter begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework that informs this thesis. I explore the key terms used and clarify the understandings of subjectivity, discourse and power that are used in the analysis of fieldwork material. Reviewing relevant work by Foucault (1972, 1978, 1980, 1984), Butler (1990), Sundén (2003) and Haraway (1991), I examine how and why I use the concept of 'cyborg-subjectivity' to conceptualize the shared online/offline experiences that girls in this study described. I argue that a poststructuralist understanding of identity and a refocus on Sundén's (2003) ideas of online embodiment offer the most useful frameworks for considering preteen girls online engagement with issues of gender and sexuality.

Current literature on computer mediated communication and SNS often presents the 'online self' as a rational, unified, individual. I question the common application of Goffman's (modernist) dramaturgical 'self' as a way of understanding online identities and discuss the limitations of this approach. I argue that these sites can be re-imagined using Judith Butler's concepts of performativity and iteration – which enable a more complex view of interactions between online/ offline subjectivities (1990). Influenced by authors such as Sundén (2003) and Haraway (1991), I explore the ideas of the 'she-borg' or 'cyborg' (Sundén, 2003 and Haraway, 1991, respectively) as a way of understanding a blended online/offline shared experience of identity. Within this project, I develop and utilize a concept of 'cyborg-subjectivity', to

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situate the poststructuralist focus of my work and avoid linguistic binaries that prioritize the physical person over a SNS 'representation'. I acknowledge the challenges and political implications of using Haraway's 'slippery' (1995) 'cyborg' and how the characteristics the term invokes are well suited to disrupting the binaries that are implicit in understanding the 'tween'.

Subjectivity and Discourse

Cultural understandings of young adulthood are not fixed, and have changed rapidly over the past several hundred years (Jenkins, 1998). Within the past decade, there has been a public uptake of the use of the 'tween' identity category as a way of discussing young, feminine preadolescence, but is important to acknowledge that 'tweens' are not a natural category of youth, but an invented one. Much like the social construction of adolescence and the 'teenager', the tween is a formulated identity category, created and defined within a particular Anglo-American historical context. Though developmental psychology, biology and psychosocial disciplines frame age delineations as relatively uniform 'stages of development' (Piaget, 1952), sociologists and historians have highlighted how these stages have been defined and shaped by socio-cultural contexts and meanings (Hine, 1999; Jenks, 1996; Buckingham, 2000; Driscoll, 2002). Hine (1999) detailed the emergence of the teenager as a response to social and economic pressures, which became validated and legitimized through developmental psychology. The tween designation follows a similar trend – realized through a combination of political and economic motivations - the tween is now

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subjected to a substantial cultural gaze, perhaps reflecting its not-yet-fully stabilized meaning(s).

Drawing attention to historical genealogies and new subjectivities (such as the tween) was a key focus of Foucault's writing. When explaining the aim of his work, he noted that his "objective... has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects" (Foucault and Chomsky, 2006:171). For Foucault, people are 'made into subjects' – or come to occupy *subjectivities* – through a process of subjectification, or "the making of ourselves by becoming subject to the norms that are implicit in the discourses which provide our self-understandings" (cited in Alsop et al., 2002:82, my emphasis). Discourses are forms of knowledge, ideas, concepts, social practices and language that do not "reflect an ordered reality" (Alsop et al., 2002:82) but rather, are constitutive words and practices that do the ordering. In other words, discourses are ways in which normative knowledges are produced, circulated and taken up within specific cultural and social contexts. Discourses construct our understanding of the world, our knowledge and (naturalized) 'truths', our subject positions and the interplay of power in social interactions. An example of this is the creation of the American teenager in the 1950's: a subject position was constituted and later governed and monitored through a host of normative discourses about who a teen is and how teens are expected to behave (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2005; Driscoll, 2002). Thus, hegemonic discourses become regulative, and delimit ways of 'being' a women or a man, a child, a person of a particular race or ethnicity, a teen or tween, etc. In addition to being regulative, discourses also create the possibility for action through the construction of new ways

of being; in other words, discourses can be both regulative and productive (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1987).

Foucault's discourses have "two crucial aspects" (Beasley, 2005:82). The first is that discourses are highly variable over time. Foucault's historiographies are meticulous examples of changing socio-cultural discourses – for example, in *History of Sexuality, An Introduction, Volume One* (1978) he outlines the development of the 'homosexual' as an identity category and notes that it did not emerge as a concept or identity until the seventeenth century. Thus, homosexuality, as both a discursive identifier and as a subject position is shown to be historically contingent and contextual. The teenager and the tween follow similarly traceable roots – they are not inherent age classifications, they are concepts whose creations can be historically pinpointed and have to be continually reinforced through "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988). These 'technologies' refer to the ever-increasing discourses that inform and govern appropriate behavior. Individuals internalize normative discourses and subject themselves to the related modes of behavior (Foucault, 1988). Foucault discusses how "an individual acts upon himself… a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (1988:18). Scientific, social, judicial and medical technologies do not merely theorize about people, they work to regulate and control society. Rabinow explains the political implications of Foucault's ideas and notes, "disciplinary control... is unquestionably linked to the rise of capitalism... disciplinary technologies, in other words, preceded modern capitalism (2010:17-18)." Using Foucault's critiques of regulatory power, the recent formation of the tween has been described as part of a wider process of

constructing subpopulations for the purpose of growing "economic categories" (Guthrie, 2005; Driscoll, 2002).

The second crucial aspect of discourses for Foucault is their inevitable link with power. Foucault's notion of power is complex and nuanced. Rather than viewing power as a singular, monolithic 'thing' one group of oppressors amasses and exerts over another subordinated group, Foucault's conception of power is malleable, pervasive and functions at all levels of social interaction. According to Foucault, power is "productive and multiple…[and] provides the dynamic shaping of the self" (Beasley, 2005:101). Poststructuralists have adopted this understanding of power as necessarily relational, negotiated and managed depending on the social interaction and historical context. Wherever there is discursive power, there is also an opportunity for resistance, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1978:101). In this way, Foucault makes it clear that discourses are multiple, and that there are innumerable competing discourses and discursive subjectivities circulating in a culture at any given time. Discourses change over time, they have sub-layers and are manifest in overlapping sites (Foucault, 1972, 1978, 1980, 1984; Weedon, 1987). Within a poststructuralist framework, there are no essential human qualities and no way of representing a 'natural' or 'intrinsic' world, all ideas, meanings and subjectivities are necessarily constituted through discourses – and discourse *is power*, it is the way power is exercised and enforced. Within this project, this discursive understanding of power is crucial to analysis of how preteen

girls can participate in producing their online subjectivities, while also, at times, reproducing dominant discourses about gender and sexuality.

A feminist poststructuralist analysis looks critically at assertions about singular identities. Rather than postulate a common 'tween girl' or preadolescent feminine experience, a feminist poststructuralist perspective prompts the examination of complex, overlapping identity groupings. In other words, individuals are assumed to occupy multiple, sometimes competing subject positions, without having to prioritize categories: such as 'girl', 'child', 'almost-teen', 'white', 'middle class', 'New Zealander', etc. Poststructuralist approaches to identities explore the way they are "woven from a complex and specific whole" (Alsop et al, 2002:86). Furthermore, feminist poststructuralists argue subjectivity is a disciplinary process; an ongoing interaction with discursive positions and the norms associated with those subject positions (Foucault, 1972, 1978, 1980, 1984; Weedon, 1987; Gavey, 1989). In this study, ethnographic observation of the discursive positions of girls online is used to conceptualize the macro-level hegemonic discourses young girls negotiate their multiple (and sometimes conflicting) understandings of femininity and sexuality, while also navigating social interactions online (power in friendships, social reputation, how to constitute themselves within their social network, etc.).

Butler and Performativity

The work of Butler, following Weedon (1987) and Gavey (1989), continued the application of poststructuralist theories to feminism. *Gender Trouble* (1990) problematized feminism's dependence on identity politics and argued that, "categories

like 'women' delimit rather than advance resistance to gender norms and hence can never form the basis of a feminist political movement" (Beasley, 2005:102). Butler emphasized the socially constructed nature of gender and biological sex. She argued that both sex and gender were produced and reinforced as a way of upholding 'normative' heterosexuality, or 'heteronormativity' (Butler, 1990). Influenced by the philosophical work of Foucault, Derrida, Austin, Levi-Strauss and Lacan as well as feminist theorists such as Kristeva, Wittig and Rubin, Butler asserted that "sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender" precisely because "normative sexuality fortifies normative gender" (Butler, 1990:xi). For Butler, the political task of denaturalizing gender, biological sex, and hegemonic heterosexuality could not be attained by adherence and continued ascription to identity categories, but rather, through subversion of linear 'sex-gender-sexuality' categorization and an introduction of abundant gender/ sex/ sexual positionalities that resist classification (and thereby, hierarchy).

To authors who would contest that bodies *are* sexually different and do provide a biological basis of gender, Butler retorts that these differences need not be more significant than other physical differences – such as eye color or ear shape (Beasley, 2005:101). Building on Foucault's notion of discursive power, Butler argues that "the body is too thoroughly a cultural product" (cited in Beasley, 2005:101) and hegemonic discourses about biological sex, gender and (hetero)sexuality render the anatomical differences between bodies consequential. She argues that "the demarcation of anatomical difference does not precede the cultural interpretation of that difference, but is itself an interpretive act laden with normative assumptions" (Butler, 1990:48).

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Biological difference is socially constituted and *appears intrinsic* (Butler, 1990). To illustrate her thesis, Butler incorporates Foucault's discursive production of subjectivity alongside a reconceptualization of Derrida's theory of "iteration" (Lloyd, 1999; Rohmann, 1999).

Austin (1962), a philosopher of language who opposed his contemporaries' view of statements as either 'true' or 'false' and argued that sentences with 'truth-values' are only a small part of language, and other kinds of statements realize action, neither true nor false, but rather, "successful" or "unsuccessful." Derrida calls these "performative utterances" or "performatives" and suggests that an action achieved by the issuing of a performative utterance constitutes a "speech act" (Austin, 1962). There is not room within this thesis to expand on Austin's theories of language, but what is important to clarify is the how Austin's development of "performatives" eventually informed Butler's development of "gender performativity". Austin's performative utterance, particularly his focus on "illocutionary acts," illustrates how language is not merely reflective of action, but signifies or is *part of action*. Austin (1962) discusses how statements that inhere promise are not just "saying" something, but rather, *performing* a commitment (to do something); the utterance incites and contains action.

Derrida (1988), in his essay *Signature Event Context,* built on Austin's premises and furthered the development of philosophy of language by saying that "communication must be repeatable – iterable – in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability…structures the mark of writing itself…writing that that is not structurally

readable – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing"

(Derrida, 1988:7). For Derrida, "iterability" is not just the idea that words and phrases

continue to be repeated and understood beyond the action or intention of the writer.

Balkin argues that iterability should be recognized as:

> A deconstructive concept… iterability is the capacity of signs (and texts)
> to be repeated in new situations and grafted onto new contexts.
> Derrida's aphorism "iterability alters" (1977) means that the insertion of
> texts into new contexts continually produces new meanings that are both
> partly different from and partly similar to previous understandings
> (1995:4)

As language is repeated, re-written, re-read, and received, it continues to transform

and be modified by new contexts. The 'presence' of the author, the intention and

conscious relationship s/he imbues into the text cannot ever be fully reproduced.

Within the Derridian axiom, texts are not merely 'copied' and are not *representational*;

each iteration takes on its own variations of meaning and evolution depending upon

the context (Derrida, 1988; Balkin, 1995; Derrida, 1995). Put simply, language cannot

convey absolute meaning therefore interpretation can never be definitive and is always

tenuous. Derrida also asserts, '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte'*, or "there is nothing outside

of the text" (1995:89) – meaning that nothing can be comprehended outside of

language; including self-understanding. For Foucault and Derrida, language is never

devoid of political or contextual significance.

Butler indicated that her use of Austin's concept "performative force" was

informed by Derrida's 1988 reading and further interpretation of Austin's work (Butler,

1990; Hood-Williams and Harrison, 1998). Butler expands the concept of

"performative" beyond the limits of text and into Foucault's wider network of

discourse, which, as I have noted before, encompasses language, images, practices and all artifacts of meaning. Butler indicates that just as there is no absolute, definitive meaning or 'truth' behind text, there is also no such intrinsic 'realness' to subjectivity, particularly, gender. She describes a process of "gender performativity", where the anticipation of a "gendered essence" produces the very materialization of the gender it portends (Butler, 1990). Rather than being a part of interiority – an ontological 'core' – gender is produced by stylized bodily acts that are *iterated* or repeated over time (Butler, 1990).

Just as Derrida's conceptualization of iteration argues that text is not representational and is never 'pure,' Butler's application of iteration to gender posits that gendered acts are not reflections of an intrinsic gendered or sexed being, but rather that they create the illusion of a sex-gender coherence. The very fact that these stylized bodily practices must be continually recited to reinforce gender betrays the very notion that gender is inherent. Butler uses descriptive examples of "gender parody" in her work to illustrate her point. Drawing on the cases of butch/femme roles in the context of lesbian sexual practice and the performance of 'drag,' Butler (1990) pulls apart the ordered appearance of sex, gender roles, and heterosexuality. She discusses how the successful use of parody reveals gender to be false, and while she recognizes the limitations of these performances, she calls for other opportunities for subversion: "performances that compel a 'radical rethinking' of gender identity and sexuality" (Beasley, 2005:102).

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'Writing the Self Into Being' Online

Sundén (2003) conducted one of the earliest serious ethnographic explorations of online culture. She argued that 'cybersubjectivity' is best understood through a poststructuralist feminist theoretical framework. This view insists that our understandings of the world are always mediated by discourse. Poststructuralism has been a process of deconstructing the notion that language can be true, reflective, carry universal semiotic representation (Truett-Anderson, 1995) and instead posits that all knowledge and semiotic meanings are not fixed but are unstable, capable of change depending on context and time. With regard to the 'self', poststructuralist theorizing reject, "notions of a coherent unified self, capable of rational reflection and agency, in favor of a model of a self which is fragmented, constantly in a process of formation, constituting itself out of its own self-understandings" (Alsop et al., 2002:81). Thus, poststructuralist analyses tend to critique all forms of identity politics, and instead emphasize discourse, the fluidity of power and subjectivity.

Sundén's groundbreaking work on digital textual embodiment described how users 'type themselves into being' online (2003:3). By this, she meant that the multiple-user domain (MUD) she studied in the early 2000's became a site where users constructed online subjectivities. Sundén argued that new forms of understanding 'the writing subject' needed to be developed to account for the embodied subjectivity MUD users experienced in their construction of an online world. Particularly relevant to my project is her assertion that "the I writing and the I written about can never be seen as *one,* [and] cybersubjects are always at least *double*" (Sundén, 2003:4). Utilizing Queer Theory and the Butlerian (1990) concepts

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of performativity and iteration, the thesis posed by Sundén adopts a particular

understanding of subjectivity as it is constructed through the process of online self

and maintenance. Online performativity considers depictions of identity not as

'representational' of a person/ self/ or reality, but rather, that the successful discursive

iterations of (cyber)subjectivity produce the very subjects they claim to represent. In

this thesis I argue that SNS users do not create profiles that 'represent' or 'express'

their identities, but that the discursive participation and maintenance of on online

presence on SNSs construct (on/offline) subject positions. Furthermore, I assert that

the increasing blending of SNS users' online and offline relationships, social

interactions and opportunities render the current understandings of online/offline

dichotomy less and less relevant. It is well established that SNS profiles are typically

created to sustain 'real' offline identities (Back et al., 2010) and support existing

friendships and social connections (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007, 2011). The

continual cultivation of online presence on SNSs ushers in a new way of considering

identity. In my view, this calls for a view of 'cyborg-subjectivity', where neither ones'

online nor offline interactions is representational of the other ('self'), but that

simultaneous (and often interwoven) physical and digital subjectivities are citational of

a joint 'cyborg' experience. Furthermore, 'cyborg-subjectivity' is performative, or

constructed through a relationship to contextual discourses and (Foucauldian) power.

The Cyborg in Cyborg-Subjectivity

Within the context of SNS research, Sundén drew heavily on the work of

Derrida and Butler to develop the concept of 'textual performativity' (2003:53) in her

pivotal work, *Material Virtualities: Approaching Online Textual Embodiment*. Sundén spent two years studying an online MUD (multiuser dungeon) called WaterMOO, where users 'performed' actions textually. Sundén theorized that users "typed themselves into being" (2003:3) and performed virtual embodiment. She relied heavily on a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity and she closed her analysis with a reconsideration of Donna Haraway's (1991) postgender 'cyborg.' In Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) – which is often mis-cited as the cyborg 'origin story' – the cyborg is described as a cybernetic organism blended by the fusing of organic and technological. Born out of a particular time and place (Reagan-era, post-Second World War America) as a response to national political influences (the Strategic Defense Initiative, or 'Star Wars' program) and feminist political challenges (fractured feminisms and identity politics), Haraway's manifesto sought to prioritize and celebrate a cyborg reality that could eschew boundaries and binaries (Haraway, 1991; Bell, 2007). Arguing that 'tidy dualisms' (Latour, 1993) had become integral to a Western worldview (self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, man/machine, physical/non-physical), Haraway asserted that new technologies of blended organic and non-organic origins present possibilities for transgression and rethinking. The more new technologies create ways of understanding or being, the less naturalized traditional dualisms could become. Cyborgs are irreducible, "instead of either/or, they are neither/both" (Bell, 2007:107). The cyborg disrupts a modernist view of the self as ordered, rational and complete. A "cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway,

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1991:154). Sundén reframed Haraway's cyborg, calling her iteration of the concept a

"she-borg":

> My main point for arguing for a she-borg is to form a feminist perspective
> sensitive to bodies, texts and materialities in various cyberspaces. Instead
> of claiming that online worlds are dislocated utopias where everything is
> possible, or that the use of technologies has little to do with local
> communities of 'real' women, I argue for a cyborgfeminist perspective that
> problematizes every separation of the imaginary from the political, and does
> so in a sense that does not erase the material of the virtual (2003:188)

This thesis continues this thread of thought one step further by imagining how a

gendered, feminine cyborg-subjectivity could be applied to girls who participate in

online SNSs. In this analysis, I argue that 'tweenage' girls in particular are well poised

to maximize the political potential of shared online/offline subjectivity by disrupting

binaries of age, gender and (on/offline) embodiment.

The 'Self' Online – A Poststructuralist Understanding

Sundén's work on textual online environments was quickly appropriated and

applied to other forms in computer mediated communication. Her concepts – 'writing

the self' and 'performing the self' into being – have become common terminology in

SNS/ internet research (Ladd, 2009). Despite the frequency of use of these terms,

authors rarely discuss the feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework that

underpins them. These terms and phrases are collapsed into an otherwise Goffman-

based (1959) understanding of the 'self' where an offline person 'represents'

themselves online.

Kelly Ladd discusses how SNSs in particular are "anchored" (2009:10) in the

material world and thus, these sites challenge the online/offline binary in a

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particularized way. This project is similarly an attempt to retheorize 'performing the self' online through a poststructuralist lens. The goal is to understand identity performances on SNSs more comprehensively and explore the political possibilities of this analysis. I argue that the reframing of the online 'self' through a deliberately poststructuralist view offers more complex understandings of girls' choices online. SNSs are most often utilized to enrich young people's current, existing social relationships (Lenhart, 2009), so it is imperative that theoretical frameworks examining SNS users online activities move beyond SNS profiles as 'representations of' their 'real lives'. Deconstructing the binary language often used in online/offline scholarship, this study argues that SNS participation is part of a shared subjective experience constituted by friendships that span in-person and virtual interactions.

Online communication is widely understood as rapidly progressing and changing the types and forms of social interaction and communication. In the early days of internet connectivity, social interaction was primarily topical – people congregated in chat rooms, virtual bulletin boards or participated on LISTSERV's to discuss shared issues, hobbies, news stories etc. Recent social technologies are network or community based, where "'community' is an egocentric notion where individuals construct their social world through links and attention" (boyd, 2009:27). SNSs begin with one's virtual self, a profile page, and radiate out to communicate with friends, family, followers and supporters. Online communication, especially within SNSs, tends to primarily support pre-existing social relationships (boyd and Ellison, 2008; Lenhart, 2009, 2007). Facebook, the SNS utilized in this study, has been especially associated with supporting offline associations, rather than fostering new

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relationships between users (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). This is largely due to the technological restrictions in the original Facebook design as a university-based 'yearbook' replacement. Requiring early users to validate their identity within pre-existing university networks meant that the Facebook was designed to strengthen and support pre-established relationships. Certainly, girls within this study demonstrated connections almost exclusively with people they know offline.

SNS research has been popularized by danah boyd who has arguably formed the backbone of scholarship on SNSs. Boyd has defined these sites as 'networked publics' (2011) and helped conceptualize their structures and developed ways of exploring self-representation online through her ethnographic observation of teens on Friendster, MySpace, and other early SNSs. She characterizes the distinguishing features of SNSs from non-mediated spaces as: persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences (boyd, 2007a:9). All of these qualities complicate social interactions and have contributed to the considerable debate and concern over youth participation and privacy. Apprehension about the persistence of online content and replicability of online communications are part and parcel of the anxiety about young people's online engagement. How can photos that are uploaded to an online SNS be protected? How can one prevent an online communication or a visual/textual artefact from being copied and reproduced out of context? Yet, for all the concerns about uncontrolled replicability, the internet can be equally understood as a context where identity can be constructed, shifted and reconstructed quickly – or more easily than offline. The same features that make it highly reproducible also allow for malleability in

subject positions as content can be deleted, replaced, or recreated in a new online space.

Joining a SNS, such as Facebook, begins with the construction of an account and selecting a *profile picture* – or key identifying photograph. New users are guided through a process of articulating their subjectivity visually and textually by uploading photos, defining their 'likes' (favorite media), articulating their relationship status (married, single or 'it's complicated'), their religious and political preferences, school attendance and career associations. Research has shown that users tend to scope out their friends' profile pages before fully detailing in their own (boyd, 2007a). By reviewing others' profiles and seeing the kinds of information friends post online, a new user becomes aware of the networked norms and typical discourses appropriate in a self-propagated profile space. Likewise, the user can see how friends re-invent or re-interpret broad profile sections to insert more personalization or creativity. The SNS 'self' is far from being a mere 'copy' of one's corporeal self, it is guided and disciplined into both the structure and boundaries necessitated by the individual SNS and the discourses and restrictions made by one's friendship network (boyd and Heer, 2006). On SNSs, the mediated self must be maintained over time to avoid having a stagnant profile appearance – synonymous with virtual death or social paralysis. The deliberate self-creation of a profile requires active maintenance and continued social participation with other users to generate activity. This is one of the features that separate SNSs from other forms of computer-mediated communication. Users must digitally interact with others within their networked space in order to generate the visual and textual cues that reinforce activity or digital presence.

Boyd and other scholars have compared the formation and preservation of online personal profiles as a new form of 'impression management', an idea originally developed by Erving Goffman in his highly influential work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). Goffman highlighted the ways people consciously and unconsciously use strategies to influence or control others' perceptions of their identities and actions. Social interactions have typically taken place between people within spatially and temporally-restricted spaces. According to Goffman (1956), people order their physical appearance, movements, speech and interpersonal interactions in such a way as to present and reinforce particular identity(/ies) to others. This version of the modernist self is rational and complete - it regulates itself in such a way to control or direct others' perceptions.

Though frequently referenced by subsequent SNS researchers, to date, the majority of SNS scholarship has conflated Sundén's assertion to a 'tagline' and her view of online performativity is frequently collapsed into a sociological reference of performance, associated with the dramaturgical metaphors posed by Goffman (1956) (boyd, 2006, 2007a; boyd and Ellison, 2008; boyd and Heer, 2006). Underlying the majority of SNS scholarship is the presupposition that virtual profiles are 'presented' or 'performed' by users, with active, reflective knowledge about these performances, and these performances are then deemed 'authentic' (Back et al., 2010), 'problematic' (Stokes, 2010), 'empowering' (Regan and Steeves, 2010), 'exploitative' (Quayle and Taylor, 2011), etc. While I do not want to detract from the contributions of this type of inquiry into how young people use SNSs, it is my contention that this framing of SNS research almost always prioritizes an online/offline binary where the offline 'self'

controls or manipulates its 'representation' online. The difficulty with this view is that SNSs are, like many offline spaces, social places where 'real' social interaction occurs. Online friendships, relationships, sexuality are 'as real as' their offline counterparts. Within this framework, young peoples' SNS identities are discussed in a series of binaries: are users' identities authentic/inauthentic? (Marwick, 2005). Is their virtual representation a sign of narcissism? (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2011). Are their social connections 'real' friendships, or latent ties? (Donath and boyd, 2004).

I use a poststructuralist analytic lens to call into question the efficacy of presuming a modern-esque, rational subject who 'represents' his/her identity online. Because online interaction has become as much of a social 'reality' as offline interaction – particularly on SNSs – I contend that researchers can no longer frame online acts as solely 'archival' or 'reflectional'. Choices, presentations and social interactions online readily effect and spill over into corporeal life, and the ontological assumptions about physical social life being somehow more 'true' or 'real' than virtual social life seriously limit sociological understandings of new media. Continued reliance on self-(re)presentational theories of online interaction result in an online/offline binary, where the material body becomes naturalized by the virtual body. In contrast to this position, I adopt a poststructuralist theoretical frame by drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis, Butlerian performativity and iteration and a reworking of Sundén's cybersubjectivity and cyborg considerations. I assert that these analytic lenses give a better understanding of how subjectivity becomes created and valued, and provide researchers with a better way to account for issues of power in social interactions that span online/offline experience. Moreover, poststructuralist analyses offer the

contextually-based specificity that I believe is necessary in teasing through online

sexuality in the midst of sexualization debates.

Within this thesis, I define and make use of the term 'cyborg-subjectivity' to

describe how online/offline shared subjective experience contributes to discursive

positions of gender and sexuality in both contexts. I acknowledge that this term is

clumsy, and it is indeed simpler to default to linguistic references of representation,

but within the theoretical perspectives I have already outlined, it is clear that words

matter, in that they order the reality I seek to describe. My use of cyborg-subjectivity

is intended to build upon Sundén's (2003) expansion of Haraway's (1991) cyborg,

where the fused (online/offline) technoself I refer to is *gendered* and grounded within

specific localities (born out of the experiences of 'real' girls living in Christchurch).

Additionally, there are political implications to my use of the term cyborg-

subjectivities. Sundén describes her use of 'she-borg' towards the end of her book:

> If the cyborg of the Cyborg Manifesto was partly about a possible future
> and partly a commentary on the current situation, utopian myth and social
> reality, the she-borg is more tightly coupled with the here and now. She
> certainly looks for possible futures (every feminist does) as well as for the
> creation and maintenance of cyber-sites of resistance, but her main work in
> this book has been to perform an analysis of the meaning and matter of
> highly contemporary online bodies – who, most concretely, inhabit a world
> in which sexual specificity is still one of the most fundamental aspects that
> structure online practices (2003:189).

I utilize Sundén's analysis in part to make space for discussion of resistant

practices or performances of gender and sexuality in SNS environments. This

approach may become doubly important for preteen girls using SNSs spaces.

Tweenage girls are occupying a "liminal space" (Cody, 2012) between the

categories of childhood and teenager; they literally embody the cyborg mantra of

"neither/ both" (Haraway, 1991). Preteen girls, neither belong to an established "cultural age" (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013) yet, are "embedded" (Cody, 2012) in both childhood and teen-hood. As a result, they call into question the binary divisions meant to organize social development. Additionally, girls' participation on SNSs facilitates their exploration of cyborg-subject positions that resist all kinds of classifications of age, gender and corporeality. Facebook and other SNSs provide spaces for them to experiment with those contradictory positionalities, just as it problematizes the notion that all 'real' social interaction happens offline.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Given the analytical and theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous chapter, it was important that this project consider research methodologies that prioritized girls' understandings and experiences of their online engagement. Academic research has identified and critiqued the 'sexualization of girls discourse' (Renold and Ringrose, 2011), where media forces – such as celebrities, television, music videos, online sites and publications – are perceived to influence girls and impact on their ability to conceptualize or represent themselves in nonsexual ways. Textual analyses of media aimed at girls and the implications of media messages have been researched, while qualitative research into girls' practices, perceptions and experiences with media and popular culture is still sparse. In this chapter I discuss the research strategies I used for this project and how they were informed by my research agendas and the theoretical ideas discussed in Chapter 2. I examine how virtual methodologies are organized, and why I focused on examining girls' everyday engagement within a common SNS in New Zealand. I explain how I observed girls' relationships as they interacted on Facebook, and why I included in the research an offline space for the girls to reflect about their experiences, both on and offline. I address the linguistic and theoretical challenges of delimiting 'online' and 'offline' data collection without reinforcing a binary distinction between them and how I came to discuss and conceptualize both types of data as 'citational' (Ladd, 2009) of a shared cyborg subjective experience.

Long time internet researcher, Lori Kendall (2009a, 2009b), suggests that researchers consider three boundaries and three 'spheres of influence' as they

conduct their inquiry and analysis. These conceptual tools informed the

methodological choices I made in this project and helped me, as the researcher, to

consider a multidimensional reflexivity as I conducted this qualitative project and made

choices about the 'starting' and 'stopping' of the research process. Kendall refers to

three types of boundaries that demark data collection, including spatial boundaries

("the questions of where, who and what to study"), temporal boundaries ("questions of

time spent and issues of beginning and ending research") and relational boundaries

("relationships between researchers and the people they study") (2009a:22).

Additionally, she outlines three 'spheres of influence' that refer to the other ways

decisions are made regarding project boundaries, including analytical/ theoretical

considerations, ethical considerations and personal considerations and biases (the

"sphere of influence that refers to the various aspects of the researcher's background

that might influence project boundaries") (Kendall, 2009a:22). This chapter is loosely

structured around considerations of Kendall's boundaries and spheres as a way of

illustrating a three dimensional approach to my methodological choices.

Analytical and Theoretical Considerations

The previous chapter helped illustrate the borders of my research framework by

exploring the overarching ontological and epistemological frameworks that influence

my construction of the research 'problem' and the processes that I use to research

and respond to it. Feminists and other social scientists have critiqued the notion of

'neutral' or 'objective' methodologies of data collection and analysis in studying the

social (and 'natural') world and have instead asserted that there are fundamental

assumptions built into epistemological, ontological and methodological frameworks

that shape the reading and interpretation of research data/texts. In addition to

politicizing the construction of knowledge claims and legitimizing subjective accounts

as valid (and inescapable) forms of inquiry, feminist and poststructuralist theorists

have critiqued the artfully constructed invisibility of the researcher in traditional

academic writing. This deceptive invisibility relies on a discursive use of power and

exerted 'expertise' which implies that the researcher is capable of both knowing the

'internal' aspects of the world s/he studies and is simultaneously able to step 'outside'

of it; and subsequently, that s/he can 'represent' or objectively quantify an intrinsic

reality based on this specialized inside/outside positioning. These modernist

understandings of knowledge and representation fundamentally rely on binaries –

objective/ subjective knowledge, rationalist mind/corporeal body – where certain terms

are prioritized and legitimated at the expense of others. In contrast, feminist

poststructuralist frameworks seek to acknowledge the limits these discursive

understandings put on research and knowledge production, and emphasize the

importance of recognizing the inherent "personal, interpersonal, emotional, institutional

and pragmatic influences" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003:415) that researchers carry

into their academic pursuits.

The deconstruction of binaries is important within any internet-based inquiry or

virtual methodology that seeks to avoid a reproduction of an offline/online distinction

that has traditionally prioritized 'real life' experiences over computer mediated ones.

John Law (2004) discusses how qualitative researchers can define and analyze their

projects in *After Method*, where he argues that social science methodologies

constitute ways of understanding the world, rather than reflect social realities. Internet

researcher Christine Hine also discusses Law's (2004) position as it relates to virtual

methods and argues that:

> Rather than simply portraying the way that things are in the social world,
> methods thus shape the ways in which it is possible for us to think about
> society… [Law (2004)] argues that the world is an inherently messy and
> complex place and that any attempt to superimpose the methodological
> stances of social science on that situation will inevitably do injustices to some
> features of that situation. Our methodological instincts are to clean up
> complexity and tell straight forward linear stories, we tend to exclude
> descriptions that are faithful to experiences of mess, ambivalence, elusiveness
> and multiplicity. He suggests that we face up to the selective nature of
> methods and try to develop alternative forms...focusing in on the researcher's
> agency as constructor of reality and not hiding behind portrayals of method as
> mere technique. (2009:5)

In other words, within a poststructuralist approach, "method is not a recipe for success,

but a means of argument…the 'steps taken' to 'solve a problem' constitute a method,

but these steps are loaded with assumptions and premises before the process even

begins" (Baym and Markham, 2009:xv). Therefore, examining the assumptions

underlying the research project and stating them explicitly becomes crucial to the

project. In this study, I have sought to explicitly discuss the 'spheres of influence'

(Kendall, 2009a) that impacted on the project borders and my own analysis and

meaning-making of data relevant to girls' use of SNS spaces.

Debating 'Innovative' Online Data Collection

The proliferation of online data collection, as described by Hine, presents

different positions or arguments about both the 'innovative' possibilities of a new

communication medium for social researchers to explore, as well as anxieties about

"how far existing tried and tested research methods are appropriate for technologically

mediated interactions" (2005:1). The issue of 'validity' becomes central, and sits awkwardly against a feminist poststructuralist framework that understands multiple subjective realities as 'valid'. Are online observations 'less valid' than traditional social communications? Is validity important if the purpose is to study online space, context, visibility and actions? For the present study, which explores how preteen girls in New Zealand use online networking sites, and how their use intersects with discourses of femininity and sexuality within a socially charged period of fears about the 'sexualization' of young girls, I had to consider how I could observe 'typical' online interactions without making assumptions about how 'valid' sexualization claims were in this context. In other words, as Solberg (1996) discusses, I sought to concentrate on girls' 'doing' (actions online) rather than 'being' ('how girls are'). By focusing on their experiences and practices, I could avoid reproducing assumptions about who a 'tween' girl is and how she embodies or refutes fears of sexualization of girls. Instead, the focus rests on practices and reflections of girls and how they might be understood within the intersection of age, gender, cultural fears about sexualization and online/offline contexts.

The goal was to render myself an ethnographic observer but also to be highly reflective about the impact of my presence. In addition to 'seeing' girls engage in a SNS, my research agenda also called for a prioritization of girls' reflections about their own experiences. In order for girls to be able to speak directly with me about their feelings in online settings, I sought a blended research strategy that included online observation, as well as offline discussion and reflection.

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Who, What, Why and How – Spatial Boundaries of the Project

In terms of the spatial boundaries, my research sought to answer the question: how do preteen girls in New Zealand engage with an SNS? What are their experiences and practices of online/offline subjectivity and how are those experiences informed by available discourses of gender, sexuality and age? The project was first developed in consultation with my research supervisors and reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Knowing that SNSs are highly social and are primarily used between friends/ peers with established, pre-existing social relationships, I sought to find out what SNSs where popular with young girls in Christchurch, and then find an existing social group that readily participated on a SNS. Informal discussions with my wider social circle introduced me to a principal of intermediate school in Christchurch. After introducing my project in writing (see appendix A), the principal agreed to let me recruit preteen girls in classrooms, with the permission of their teachers. The principal shared the names of Year 7 and 8 teachers and I contacted them by phone to introduce myself and this thesis project. From my initial contact with teachers, I learned that Year 7 teachers did not feel their students were as likely as Year 8 students to have a SNS profile (and Year 7 teachers declined to participate). Two Year 8 teachers asked for more information, and an more detailed information was sent to them (appendix A). Both of these teachers offered to let me talk to students about the project in their classrooms in the following week.

I made contact with prospective participants in early November, 2010 in two Year 8 classrooms. The teachers allowed me to meet with their female students as

one large peer group – away from male students – for approximately 20 minutes. During that time, I introduced myself, my research project and answered questions from girls interested in participating. Girls were sent home with an information packet to review with their parents – which included an informational brochure for students, a parental information form, a parental consent form, and an assent consent form for girls who decided to participate (see appendices B, A, C and D respectively). Girls were aged between 12-13 years old, and only girls who had preexisting profiles on either Facebook or Bebo were eligible to participate in this research. The purpose of this eligibility clause was to maximize observation of girls who already participated in an active, online social context, and to diminish the likelihood that girls would create a profile exclusively to participate in the study. I returned to the two classrooms the following day to collect parental consent forms from girls interested in participating, and then went through the process of answering final questions from the girls before asking those who wanted to participate to sign an assent form (appendix D).

Eighteen girls from the two Year 8 classrooms signed up to participate in the project. All of the girls knew one another as schoolmates and most considered each other friends or social acquaintances. After they agreed to participate and shared information with me about how to find their online SNS profiles, I created a simplified researcher profile to befriend (or 'friend') each of them online. By 'friending' one another, I became privy to the same information they shared with other online friends, and vice versa, such as access to their full profiles, photographs, friends lists, etc. The participating girls all listed Facebook as their preferred and most active SNS, with only

one girl reporting active participation on Bebo, so my only researcher profile was also formed on Facebook.

During the data collection period, I logged onto Facebook between 2 – 4 times per day and, depending on how much social activity had taken place, remained 'active' or 'present' by reading my Newsfeed (a generated Facebook feature that shows social interaction between friends and profile status updates since the last time you logged on), as well as visiting each girl's personal profile pages to note changes or additions they had made. I captured screen shots of their textual and visual social activities, their profile pages, their photographs and albums, as well as of my Newsfeed itself, on a daily basis. I kept ongoing memos and notes about their activities and interactions detailing as much as possible about what they posted and interactions in this social space. Due to the fact I sought out an established social group in the same year at the same intermediate school, the girls in my study were all pre-existing friends with one another on Facebook before my observation.

At the end of the data collection period, I asked girls to participate in one focus group discussion, where I asked about some of the social and personal dynamics I had witnessed on Facebook. Fourteen of the eighteen girls participated in the discussion. Having such a large focus group presented some challenges, however, girls had limited availability before the upcoming school holidays. Finally, each girl was also asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire at the end of the research, which further explored the self-reported experiences girls had participating in Facebook (see appendices E and F for the questionnaire and focus group discussion

guide). All the girls' names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect

confidentiality.

Temporal and Ethical Challenges

The temporal boundaries of my research (Kendall, 2009a) proved to be the

most challenging. The study was developed with the intention of a longer (one to two

month) period of observation of girls' online experiences, however, numerous hurdles

limited the study to a three week data collection period before the focus group

discussion. Ethical considerations of my ethnographic presence, such as how to

inform participating girls' *nonparticipating* online friends that I would be witness to

textual and visual social actions that appeared on young girls profile pages, became

an issue when considering how long I should continue collecting profile data. For

example, if a study participant received a semi-public message on her profile wall from

a friend of hers who was not a participant in my research, how would that person be

informed of my observer presence? This ethical consideration became a key factor in

developing the research project and determining how long it was reasonable to

observe girls interactions. In conjunction with the advice of the Human Ethics

Committee of the University of Canterbury, I determined it best to inform girls' friends

that I would be privy to posts to their profile pages for a set period of time. This was

done with a straightforward, nonthreatening post onto each girl's profile page when we

befriended one another introducing myself as a researcher and indicating that I would

be able to see all posts on that person's profile page or 'tagged' with that person for

the following three weeks (see appendix H). I was anxious about the possibility that

access to their friends' posts so would somehow attract negative attention to the girls themselves or limit or stifle girls' social experiences on Facebook, however that did not seem to be the case.

By having access to each girl's profile page history, I could see that the posts and comments by other (nonparticipating) friends did not appear to decrease or change after my identification of myself as a researcher who had access to their posts for a limited period of time.   My introductory message, in most cases, had 'fallen off' the girls' profile pages (comment wall) within the first few days as more recent posts caused the older ones to shift ever downward, until they were no longer visible without scrolling through a person's wall 'history'. This led to another dilemma about whether or not girls' friends and extended social networks had seen my attempt to introduce the research and were aware of my researcher 'presence'. What if a friend had not visited a girl's page and did not see my announcement before it was buried in their social history? Was it unethical then to proceed to observe? But on the other hand, if I were to continually re-post my presence daily, or in some cases hourly (for girls whose Facebook activity was so frequent my message would have disappeared quickly again), would my presence become so disruptive that it negated my research goal of observing online engagement? Were these ethical issues even more complicated because I was observing so-called minors, under 18? I had to consider my responsibilities as a researcher as they intersected with the possibility that I could unintentionally witness activity on Facebook of adolescents without their parental consent, because research participants were engaging constantly with non-participants whose parents had not been informed about this research.

Traditional (non-virtual) ethnographic observers have developed ways of discerning who to inform about their researcher status, as the groups they study engage with wider social circles and members of the public, but virtual ethnography is still very much in development. Rutter and Smith (2005) highlight this dilemma in their discussion of conducting an ethnographic observation of members of a newsgroup site, given the pseudonym 'RumCom.local.' The authors illustrate how they grappled with informed consent in an online context:

> The negotiation of absence and presence is an important ethical issue, not just in online ethnography but also in its more conventional variety. In the field the ethnographer may make considerable efforts to mask and make redundant the research role. Those around are encouraged to 'forget' that the ethnographer is in the setting as a researcher and begin instead to see him or her as a person. For the online ethnographer the problem is transfigured: how to be seen as a person or a researcher when you cannot be seen at all?... Whereas in a physical environment the ethnographer's physical presence can act as a reminder of the presence of an agent, 'net presence' (Agre 1994) turns out to be a very nebulous thing…. It is very difficult for the online ethnographer to maintain a stable presence in a virtual environment when people cannot see that you are there. This is made worse with the constantly changing composition of many virtual environments as new people arrive and others leave – mostly unannounced. Ethically, how are we supposed to negotiate informed consent? Do we opt for maintaining the letter of the law with regular postings that announce our research identities and our presence as researchers or do we, after a general announcement of our presence, slip into a more naturalistic mode? (Rutter and Smith, 2005: 88-89)

To structure the project, I ultimately thought it best to collect information on girls' profiles indiscriminately, but only commit to analyzing textual and visual interactions that the participating girls responded to in some way. In other words, if a nonparticipating friend left a note on a participating girl's Facebook profile ('wall'), I only used that material if the participating girl responded to it with a comment, photo,

reciprocal gesture, etc. Additionally, photographs were only considered if they featured a participating girl.

Other ethical considerations began to limit the temporal boundaries of the project because the data collection period started towards the end of the school year, approaching the summer school holiday season. All of the participating girls would be leaving their intermediate school at the end of the school year and beginning secondary school at different institutions after the summer. I was concerned about following them through the summer and into their entrance into a new school environment, because I realized this transition was likely to have an impact on their friendships, and by extension, their social media engagement with one another. While it would have been an interesting to witness their social transitions as a researcher, I knew that my ability to bring all the girls back together again for a focus group discussion would be limited once they had completed the school year. Since recording girls' responses and reflections about their own Facebook engagement was important to my research agenda, I did not want to risk losing the opportunity to bring the majority of the group back together because of conflicting family or school schedules. On one hand, conducting the online data collection at the end of a school year allowed me to observe girls' relationships at a time when they were well-formed and social interactions were abundant and imbued with a high degree of familiarity and intimacy. The counter challenge was that the end of the school year provided an encroaching end date that disrupted the potential for a longer period of observation. Ultimately, the data collection period produced more than enough research material,

but I recognize there are limitations to understanding girls' shifting subject positions and relationships by observing them for a relatively short period.

Ethnographic Strategies and my Observer Status

At the time of the study, I already had a well-established Facebook profile, with years' worth of social history and connections to concentric circles of family, friends, acquaintances, old work colleagues, long-past schoolmates, etc. The question became whether or not to utilize my known Facebook identity and profile as an 'egocentric' (boyd, 2009) site to begin my data collection by friending girls, or to develop a new virtual 'self' to present to participants. Analytical and ethical considerations included an assessment of how my established online subjectivity would appear to girls as well as, potentially, to their parents. Facebook is built as a highly connected site and that means I would have little control over the posts of my thousand some online friends that might appear on my own profile during the time girls would be able to see my online postings. How would the texts and visual signals on my profile potentially impact on the information girls shared? Was there a risk that girls' privacy settings could unintentionally give all of my thousand-some online 'friends' access to girls' photos and comments (though settings that allow 'friends of friends' to see posts and pictures)? Ultimately, the ethical concerns about protecting girls' confidentiality led me to justify the construction of a new 'researcher' Facebook profile from which to conduct my observation.

The decision to create a new profile prompted counter concerns about ensuring that my ethnographic observer presence did not become too 'one sided' in terms of

visibility. After all, I wanted to 'friend' girls online to have access to their profiles and online activities, but the architectures of SNSs require that online friendship be mirrored. My access to girls would also give girls access to me, which meant that there needed to be something (or more accurately, *someone*) on the other side for girls have access to. The construction of my virtual Facebook 'self' led to a highly reflexive process of considering how much to disclose, so that my online presence was not lacking in reciprocity or distractingly vague/ mysterious, but also simple and 'ordinary' – so as to minimize my participation within and/or disrupt the girls 'normal' social context. As an adult in her late 20's (at the time), I felt aware that the girls could view my online presence as that of an adult authority figure, and I sought to both minimize power between us in my profile choices, but also be honest about my age, life stage and my own engagement with Facebook norms. I included a handful of photographs of myself, including a couple that showed my husband and young daughter (aged 13 months at the time). In my profile I described myself as a social researcher who was observing girls on Facebook (with their parental permission) and documenting their interactions and profile choices. I chose to leave several Facebook profile fields blank, avoiding listing specificities of my 'favorites' (movies, shows, music) and leaving my political and religious preferences unknown. My profile picture was professional, but cropped from a more candid shot of me sitting on a bench in my parents-in-law's back garden. In the photo, I was shown from the waist up, smiling and looking directly at the camera, but the photograph was by no means a classic academic 'headshot'. If pressed to identify a tone I sought to achieve in my online profile, it was something between 'casual but distant'. My contact information was

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available for girls (or anyone else) to see, and I made my profile 'public' – which meant that anyone on Facebook could view it and all its contents – a stark contrast to my personal profile that has remained private except to approved online friends. I wanted it to be easy for curious parents or social extensions of the girls to find in case they became aware of the study.

This project utilized the loose structure of 'media ethnography' (Tingstad, 2007). In a traditional use of ethnography a researcher acquires social membership within a group and utilizes 'insider' knowledge to gain understanding of cultural norms. For this project, I utilize Tingstad's definition of ethnography, "not as a method, but rather as a combination of different methods and a theory about the research process" (2007: 132). I define the scope of my ethnographic strategies as first acting as primarily an observer of, though in some cases participating in, an established social group that blended between offline/online settings. Secondly, I conducted an explicit consideration of the relationships between me and the girls I studied, as well as their relationships to one another. Thirdly, I focused on common practices and self-reported experiences of girls, and finally, I attempted to understand wider cultural and structural processes through the lens of a small social group. Due to the online component of the project, visual ethnography was also utilized to understand the visual artifacts embedded into the Facebook context, such as photographs and images. Sarah Pink, in *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representations in Research*, discusses how images cannot be understood as capturing a singular reality:

> There are no fixed criteria that determine which photographs are ethnographic. Any photograph may have ethnographic interest, significance or meanings at a

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particular time or for a specific reason. The meanings of the photographs are arbitrary and subjective; they depend on who is looking (2001:51).

Additionally, photos can have shifting meanings at different stages of analysis. To understand and analyze the photographs and other images girls in this study posted and used, I saved screen shots of each image and reviewed them in context (with girl's comments about photos, etc.). I also viewed girls' photo albums in the narrative order with which they were often posted – viewing them as a curated set by the girl who posted the album. I relied heavily on Schwartz's view that, "in order to use photographs either as data or data generators, we need to have some notion of how viewers treat and understand photographic images" (1989:119). In this case, I relied heavily on developing an understanding of the social practices of girls' photographic production and posting images, and how they used photographs (and other images) within their social group. My analysis then centered on the ways in which girls used photographs to articulate friendship and identity.

In traditional face-to-face ethnography, gaining social trust is paramount to becoming privy to social settings and the researcher spends considerable effort gaining membership and 'passing' (to some degree). As Rutter and Smith point out in their online ethnography of a newsgroup site, "'Passing' or acceptance by those we were studying rarely proved much of an issue. For most of the time to most posters and readers of Rumcom.local, we were invisible. The social acceptability of 'lurking' and the optionality of participation was one factor… [and] was also aided by the accommodative character of the interaction order" (Rutter and Smith, 2005:87). In my study, despite knowing there was a real possibility that girls might chose to engage me

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online and bring me into the social setting by commenting on my photos or profile wall, I chose not to determine in advance how I would handle such overtures. I was hopeful that my grounded approach to the research process would help me evaluate whether or not, and how, to respond to social gestures. I used a 'researcher as lurker' role (Rutter and Smith, 2005:87) that was far more observer than participant, however, there were a few instances of girls engaging with my profile and in those instances, I responded cordially, without inviting more interaction between them and myself. For example, Stephanie commented on one of my photographs of my husband, daughter and myself by saying "cute pic!"). My response was a simple "Thanks!" informed by a 'restrained' concept of participation (Emerson, 1981:368).

When meeting with the girls in person for the focus group discussion following the project, I found myself making choices about how to situate my questions (largely open-ended) and presentation of my offline self in a 'professional yet casual' way that was similar to my online subjectivity. Part of my rationale behind using a focus group discussion rather than individual interviews was an overt attempt to avoid drawing attention to my age and perceived 'adultness'. The social setting of the focus group discussion gave the girls the opportunity to primarily interact with one another, with me loosely guiding the discussion as needed. I utilized prompts from some of the initial observations of the online data, but did not stick to hard and fast questions. This gave girls the opportunity to lead the discussion and direct where and how they wanted to give perspective about my observations.

The Analytic Process

Over the course of the three week data collection period, I amassed thousands of Facebook screenshots (including images and textual interaction) and made extensive notes about the social relationships I observed. I drew on ideas from grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Thornberg, 2012; Strauss and Corbin, 1997), visual ethnography (Pink, 2001) and discourse analysis (Gavey, 1989) to analyze girls' data. Grounded theory (GT) was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as systematic qualitative research methodology that examines the data collected and postulates a theory supported by the data, rather than developing a hypothesis or theoretical framework before collecting data. Grounded theory was developed to consider how participants frame concerns and resolve them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This method of analysis began as a way of understanding participant conceptualizations of problems, however, its use has expanded in other sociological, qualitative frameworks. My analytic process was informed by grounded theory, but did not strictly adhere to GT tenants – such as not reviewing literature prior to data collection, or avoiding all theoretical influences prior to the data. Rather, I approached this project after reading through relevant literature on tween girlhood and sexualization claims, and had recognized the need for more research that included girls' conceptualizations of gender and sexuality – especially within SNSs. My use of GT for this project refers to how I approached the data without a hypothesis or 'theory', but instead, with an intention to understanding 'what is going on here' – in this case, what are girls in Christchurch doing on SNSs? How does their experiences, practices and reflections relate to the overall context of 'sexualization of girls' and girls' online

debates? GT offered an open-ended system to approach the data, where girls'

interactions and engagement with one another acted as sites or 'units' of analysis.

In GT, the qualitative researcher makes use of extensive memos, notes,

interviews, published material, etc. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The data is then

analyzed for codes, concepts and categories, outlined by Glaser and Strauss as the

building blocks for a data-based theory. Glaser and Strauss later diverged GT into two

distinct methodologies (see Glaser, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), largely based on

differences between coding paradigms (Kelle, 2005), however that is not addressed

here. This project sought to utilize GT's emphasis on collecting data and then

examining it from multiple perspectives to identify grounded themes. As is often the

case with GT, this led to an analysis of the data that was simultaneous with developing

a theoretical framework. While I came to the project with a poststructuralist, feminist

perspective more generally available in much of the existing research on girlhood

(such as an understanding of Foucault's use of discourse and power), it was through

analyzing the data that a (re)theorizing of cyborg-subjectivity in SNSs became a

crucial focus. This project then became two-fold – a description of girls' practices and

reflections of their online engagement on SNSs and a theory about identity in SNSs.

What follows below is a description of how I conceptualized GT, discourse analysis

and visual ethnography in analyzing the content I collected.

Using data I had collected on interactions between the girls on Facebook –

which has become the core type of data collected since most SNS activity was

socially-based – I began to take notes on the intensity of friendship relationships

between girls in the group, and the extent they used Facebook to support these

relationships. The social popularity of some girls became evident as their profile

pages were loci of activity and comments for all the other girls in the study (thus,

collectable online data), as well as girls not in the study. I looked for common

practices and norms of the group – how they used photos, what their photos included,

how they described themselves, how they commented on one another's profile pages,

how they changed/edited their profile page, how they used other images, etc.

Patterns emerged, such as 'edits' (or edited photos) discussed in Chapter 4, where

girls gifted one another photos with visual and textual embellishments. I explored how

girls responded to these types of practices in order to develop a contextual

understanding of the meanings of these practices. I used both visual ethnography and

discourse analysis to understand the contextualized nature of these practices and also

how they were understood within the group (based on social reactions and non-

reactions).

During the initial observation period, my aim was primarily to capture and detail

as much as possible. I kept memos of my first impression of girls' interactions and

engagement with Facebook, but tried to leave my conclusions about these as open

ended as possible. Next, I reviewed the material multiple times – paying attention to

chronological order and social context to the highest degree possible. In other words,

I reviewed the screenshots and all their content in the order that they originally took

place, multiple times over. As mentioned earlier, when reviewing the images I

collected, I kept photographs in the albums that they were posted and recorded the

time period they were posted. For example, photos that each girl had in her profile

were categorized as either an album (with subcategories for the album being posted

before or during the study) or as a single picture posted on their own profile or a friend's profile. These were all reviewed with as much attention as possible to their original chronology and order – as well as the social commentary they produced. I asked myself questions about what visual and textual social practices were repetitive? How common were they? Or, were these practices different from the others in the group? What were others' reactions to these social practices? Textual interactions? Visuals, such as photos? What kind of discourses did girls draw on? I identified a common focus on identity and friendship (discussed in Chapter 4), as well as varied readings and responses to girls' use of gendered and sexual discourses online (discussed in Chapter 5).

After identifying these central commonalities and differences between girls' profile pages and their online interactions and comments on the images they posted, I developed a loose guide for questions to use in the focus group discussion. The discussion took place about two weeks after the data collection period was completed so analysis of the online data was still very fluid at that time. The focus group discussion helped clarify, and in some cases, complicate, my understanding of the production of online subjectivities by the girls. There was also space in the discussion for girls to call my attention to ideas or practices I had not identified in my initial review of the data. Finally, girls were asked to answer a qualitative questionnaire about their experience of the research process and which included spaces for open-ended responses. This final piece of data was used as part of the overall research strategy that was directed at an inquiry into how girls engaged with Facebook and the meanings that they attributed to their actions and interactions.

Collecting Data Online and Offline – Notes on a Blended Approach

Orgad (2005, 2009) asks how researchers determine whether or not an empirical study of online media requires offline and online data. How do we develop research methodologies that include both without prioritizing the offline as more 'real' or become subject to hierarchies of authenticity? Orgad believes that internet researchers have a peculiar struggle with deconstructing the offline/online binary that may be unique to the technological medium:

> For instance, researchers did not discuss the use of television data versus offline data, or telephone data versus everyday data… the distinction between online and the offline, and consequently between the online and offline data in the research context, is rooted in an interrelated distinction that has specifically characterized common thinking about the internet (2009:36).

The author explains that the difference may be in the cultural and linguistic perceptions of the internet as a social space. Maria Bakardjieva (2009) responds to Orgad's assertion of the methodological challenges of the internet binary by highlighting that media studies has long made distinctions between 'artifacts' (magazines, films, radio, etc.) and people's responses to them. She goes on to say that she "think[s] about these approaches as user-centered versus medium centered and believe[s] that the same distinction can be applied to internet studies" (Bakardjieva, 2009:57). The focus on a user-centered approach also brings the focus to the social group being studied, which is a key issue for this study that seeks to understand girls' online activities from their own perspective.

Orgad (2005, 2009) also asks that researchers consider if the online and offline data are 'integratable' [sic] and comparable. In the present study, I utilize a blended research strategy to include girls' ideas about their online SNS profiles and their

engagement within them. Offline data was collected to come to grips with their reflections on online practices. I was interested in constructing the opportunity for girls to act as 'informants' about their online activities. In Orgad's words:

> Rather than validating the veracity of data obtained online, the rationale for deciding to gather offline data is based on a perceived need to add context, to enhance information, and to yield insights into aspects that would otherwise remain invisible, but that might be consequential to the research (2005:41).

For example, in my analysis of girls' online profiles, a strand of conversation in the focus group discussion allowed me to understand the choices that informed one participant, Eva, in constituting herself online as a 'fan girl' of a popular musician, an aspect of the use of Facebook that is discussed further in Chapter 5. Without the focus group discussion, I would have not had access to how her understanding of the internet 'risk' and personal image posting shaped her choice to take up a SNS profile that largely centered on celebrity identity. In this case, the integration of online and offline data informed my analysis of her fan girl status.

The question of how to integrate two sets of data (offline and online) "become[s] particularly crucial if the rationale for obtaining both online and offline data was to break down the online/offline distinction conceptually" (Ograd, 2005:45). In my study, both types of data were treated without hierarchy – neither was prioritized over the other but each informed my reflections on interaction in the other social space and between these spaces. This is consistent with my argument that girls' subjectivities are constituted online and offline by shared experience of both contexts. The combination of observed online data (texts, images, interactions on Facebook), focus group discussion and questionnaire responses about online experience gave me

access to the complex practices of relational cyborg-subjectivity (discussed further in Chapter 4) within the subculture of a particular group of Year 8 girls in Christchurch. The intention is not to make generalizations about all Year 8 or New Zealand girls' engagement with SNSs, but to provide an illustrative set of case studies that can inform understandings of how preteen girls constitute their gendered and sexual identities online. This small ethnographic study of a group of 12-13 year old girls in Christchurch answers some questions about the kinds of experiences girls have in socially networked spaces and how they reflect on their own pratices and the reasons for what they do and do not do online. The boundaries of this study, when explicitly framed through the multifaceted 'gem' that Kendall (2009a) suggests, includes the spatial limitations of a particular SNS (Facebook) and the temporal limitations of data collection (only 3 weeks as a result of concerns about continuing the ethnographic observation past the end of the school year).

One issue both Orgad (2009) and Tingstad (2007) raise is the question of whether – and if so, how – researchers ought to distinguish between their online/offline data in their analysis. While making the online or offline data overtly distinct is to potentially prioritize one type over another; however, in part because of practicalities, I have made the 'where' of my data explicit in this thesis. I consider that this makes my analytic lens more transparent to the reader, and potentially opens up the research material to alternative readings and meanings. I do not seek to make claims about the 'truth' of girls' online identity positions, and see little risk in being explicit about whether the research material discussed was generated online or offline. Furthermore, much of my argument is that mediated experience has necessitated a shared online/offline

subjectivity where neither context is inherently 'truer' than the other and both inform

the combined subjective positionings of the person 'doing'. Thus, an overt discussion

about captured 'pieces' of online and offline subjectivity (as, 'from focus group' or 'from

Facebook observation') that contribute to a greater understanding of the 'whole' (in so

much as it relates to this particular set of girls, in this particular school, at this particular

time) reinforces my argument for the use of both sources of information in

understanding people's cyborg subjectivity. This is consistent with the position of

Leander and McKim (2003) who, according to Orgad, "propose replacing the notion of

users' everyday 'sites' by that of 'sitings' (2009:52). In my project, 'sitings' of girls

interactions, talk, text and images from both online and offline contexts become

citational of the cyborg-subectivity (explained further in Chapter 4) of girls who

participate in SNSs.

Radhika Gajjala (2009) rhetorically asks how researchers are to examine the

cyborg experience when we ourselves are subject to the "vocabulary and binaries

generated (such as online and offline, virtual and real, and so on) [that] actually shape

social practices and discursive statements through specific ideological positions and

power dynamics?" (2009:64). Her suggestion is that researchers consider

'cyberethnography' (2009:62) that deeply observes and details the social group being

researched (2009:66). After identifying, locating, informing and gaining consent of the

social group you intend to study, Gajjala advocates "qualitatively" studying the

online/offline intersections that "focus on 'epistemologies of doing', [where] the

researcher has to conduct a multi-layered investigation of self and others while also

collecting statistical and other kinds of data relevant to the particular context" (2009:

67). In this study, I took notes on the school environment where girls attended daily, their classroom space, the electronic access the girls had in their classrooms, home and, in some cases, between home and school. Girls were given opportunities to give details about their online/offline experiences in a focus group discussion. Additionally, I noted media representations of young girls in Christchurch and New Zealand that were reported before, during and after the study period. I sought to understand the types of media girls were purported to be enjoying; this necessitated listening to popular music, reading girls magazines (and, at the time, vampire related fiction novels), popping into 'tween' stores at the mall and reading the variety of narratives produced by parents, teachers and researchers that contextualized who young girls in New Zealand 'are' and the culture(s) they exist in. All of these strategies were meant to help situate my research more deeply within the cultural context that I sought to understand, and help me approach the data from multiple angles to avoid getting too comfortable in any one position.

Research Limitations and Considerations for Future Studies

The limitations of my research are most markedly the temporal constraints. Ideally, I would have preferred to observe girls engagement on Facebook longer than the three week data collection period. If there had been a longer data collection period, it would have been useful to have girls make notes about their online/offline experiences either throughout the process, or at the very least, at more regular intervals during the project. Ethnographers have historically made use of participant journaling and I think this kind of technique could have captured a more 'day to day'

perspective by the girls of online interactions, more so than the singular qualitative questionnaire at the end of the study. The researchers of the 'Tween, Popular Culture and Everyday Life Project,' Vares and Jackson, were able to utilize "individual media video diaries (filmed at home)" to provide rich and timely reactions that 12-13 year old girls had to popular culture (Vares et al., 2011:137). This method of data collection allowed for a focus on girls' words, ideas, and interests as they became the curators and producers of the research data by drawing researcher's attention to the popular culture artifacts they wanted to discuss. The researchers were also able to develop a sense of the spatial boundaries of girls' bedrooms and how/ where/ when they engaged with media. It would have been interesting to utilize this kind of video-diary methodology in my study on girl's online engagement, to see how girls articulated their access to Facebook; what kinds of computers or mobile devices did they use to access Facebook? Where did they access it, and was this 'public' or 'private' within the home sphere? How do girls respond and reflect on their experience with Facebook on a daily basis, rather than at the end of the research study, and are their semi-private video reflections different than those discussed socially in a focus group setting, or textually in a survey? It would be interesting for researchers to consider other methods of putting girls into a 'production' seat of research data collection, especially as they provide information about cyborg experience.

The purpose of this study was to help answer questions about girls' engagement with SNSs and how they constitute their gender and sexuality discursively and visually on these sites, set against the larger cultural backdrop of concerns about 'tween' girls and sexualization. Far from being a definitive or

'stereotypical' representation of what girls do online, my results are meant to illustrate a 'node' (boyd, 2009:27) of relationship between girls, Facebook, New Zealand culture and the numerous other discursive intersections that define the scope of this project. As boyd points out, in contrast to earlier internet culture, which tended to culminate around topical activity (such as chat rooms and newsites with particular discussions framing the purpose of social gathering):

> In more recent technologies, 'community' is an egocentric notion where individuals construct their social world through links and attention… the difficulty with this egocentric network view is that there's no overarching set of norms or practices; instead, each node reveals an entirely different set of assumptions. The issue is quite noticeable when researchers (including myself) have foolishly tried to discuss the blogosphere or MySpace as a continuous cultural environment only to be challenged by other blind researchers looking at the elephant's trunk or ear (2009:27).

While details about girls' online practices and what they had to say about them are the focus of the following chapters, the purpose of this project is not to make claims about what all 12-13 year old girls in New Zealand 'do' on Facebook, but rather, to problematize aspects of a media-effects model of scholarship that makes assumptions about girls' practices without researching what they do and what they have to say about their online interactions. Additionally, the process illustrates the ways in which girls' engagement with online sites can be read as multiple and the importance of girls' intentions and positions as they constitute themselves online.

Chapter 4: Friendship, Affiliation and Cyborg-Subjectivity

Participation in Facebook requires users to set up an account – which can be public or 'semi-public', delimited by user-approved Facebook friends (boyd and Ellison, 2008). A centerpiece of a Facebook profile, the profile picture, is a user-selected identifying photograph, which acts as the virtual signifier of a body. Becoming/being a Facebook user hinges upon explicitly crafting an online self – ideally one that engenders interest and 'friending' from others, particularly from 'latent ties' (Haythornthwaite, 2005), or offline connections, acquaintances and friends – and maintaining this mediated profile well over time. This deliberate self-creation necessitates an active participation– updating activities and events, commenting on friends walls, uploading new pictures, etc. – in order to 'live' or continue 'being' online. Boyd notes that "the very creation of [an online] profile is a social oddity, in the sense that [this] is the first generation to have to publicly articulate itself, write itself into being as a precondition of social participation" (2008:120). Unlike theories of corporeal 'impression management' (Goffman, 1956), where physical appearance, movements and interpersonal interactions are negotiated, online 'selves' add significant complexity to the concept of identity. Furthermore, online subjectivities, particularly on SNSs, are almost always iterations of a corporeal identity.

One of the primary observations that came out of witnessing preteen girls online was seeing how significant their friendships were. Facebook is clearly a tool designed to display connections and relationships – these are features built into the architecture of the SNS – but I was initially surprised by how intensely girl's friendships played a key role in their individual profile pages. My personal experience with

Facebook involves a subtle distinction between how people continually construct their profile pages (describing themselves in their 'About Me' sections, highlighting their schooling, interests, personal history, etc.) and how they connect with friends (via writing on friends walls, 'liking' others' pages or posting pictures depicting friendships). By comparison, girls in this study had little distinction between online 'self' and friends. Areas of Facebook typically defined by autobiographical description or benign connection (that is, virtually acknowledging one's biological family members) were inserted with friendship. Rather than significant displays of individuality, reiteration of friendship became the primary means to enact identity on girls' profile pages.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways Facebook friendships were highlighted by girls in this study, particularly as they were used to co-construct and define one another's virtual subjectivities through an interdependent process of affiliation. I start by examining how girls articulated online friendship – how they distinguished, interacted and engaged in friendship visually and textually. I examine how their friendships come to be the most significant facet of constituting themselves online – which I describe and analyze as a form of virtual performativity. Using the theoretical model of cyborg-subjectivity, discussed in Chapter 2, I explore how girls' subjectivity is constituted through performative friendship that is 'neither/both' online/offline; rather, it blurs the boundaries between online and offline. I explore the process of reciprocity in photo taking, sharing and editing as constitutive acts for co-constructing subjective positions and finally, I analyze how the girls' practice of using friends as primary means of self-construction might be considered within a local New Zealand context.

About Me [read: My friends are…]

Janine and Kenzie (short for Mackenzie) are best friends on/off Facebook. They demonstrate their intimacy and regard for their friendship in a highly public way online. Like other girls in the study, Janine and Kenzie utilize features on Facebook in unconventional ways to highlight the closeness of their friendship. Facebook allows users to nominate other users as 'real life' spouses or family members. Using this ability to identify relatives, Janine and Kenzie publicly identify each other as 'sisters', which in turn hyperlinks their profiles and gives one another special status on their profile pages. Girls in this study often listed their friends as sisters, mothers, fathers, aunts/uncles, children, etc. as a way to emphasize their social circle and link virtually to their closest friendships. A handful of girls listed over twenty friends as family members, fully exhausting Facebooks' family member list in an effort to link all their closest friends to their profile.

Within this study there also appeared to be 'rules of engagement' that girls followed when interacting with one another and calling on friendships as means of self-definition. Firstly, there was a sense of reciprocity: girls expected to be listed or acknowledged in some special capacity in each other's profiles if they listed that person in their own profile page. This reciprocity extended throughout the textual and visual aspects of girls' Facebook interactions. Janine and Kenzie both listed each other as 'sisters' and best friends. They had also both uploaded photo albums posted on their profiles respectively dedicated to times they had spent together: Janine had an album titled 'Kenzie's House' and Kenzie had two albums titled 'Janine and Me'. Likewise, the girls regularly posted on each other's wall – a place for comments from

friends – and included references to inside jokes. Their online/offline friendship says to the world: 'this is one of the closest people in my life' and also reinforces that they are worthy of knowing and spending time with.

Creating a mediated self by building a Facebook profile requires that girls provide basic contact information and then select a profile picture that serves as the online 'body' (Ladd, 2009). Then the user is guided through a series of forms or text boxes where they can choose to fill in pre-determined sections such as *About Me*, *Favorite Movies, TV Shows*, *Music* and *Books*, *Relationship Status* (*Married*, *Single*, or *It's Complicated*), religious and political preferences, work and school associations, publicly displayed contact information, and *Hobbies/ Interests*. These generic profile sections are an optional way for SNS users to construct themselves flexibly through visual and textual signifiers. Research has shown that users tend to scope out their friends' profile pages before fully detailing in their own (boyd, 2007a, 2007b). By reviewing others' profiles and seeing the kinds of information their friends post online, a new user becomes aware of the norms and typical discourses appropriate in a self-propagated profile space. Likewise, the user can see how friends re-invent or re-imagine broad profile sections to insert more personalization or creativity. Representations are far from being a 'copy' of one's corporeal self, the digital body is guided and disciplined into both the structure and boundaries necessitated by the individual SNS and the discourses and restrictions made by one's friendship network.

Like Janine and Kenzie, many 'best friends' in the study listed their counterparts as 'sisters' or family members. Additionally, girls used the more free-formed auto-biographical profile sections in Facebook to emphasize the importance of

their friendships. Three quarters of the girls I followed listed friends in their *About Me* section of their profile pages, which (at the time of data collection) could be written by users in a text box format (the remaining quarter had blank sections or enlisted a simple sentence format to indicate things like, "I am Anna and I love my friends and family"). For most of the girls, friends dominated personal profile information. For example, Kathy used her *About Me* section to first describe her school and a couple of her interests, then to emphasize her favorite friendships:

```
I'm Kathy/ Hills High School/ Year 9/ Love Life (:
Netball and Dance dominate my life… (: x
♥ CAROLINE ♥
BrookeEllaStacyAnnaKenzieAmyErinAliNoraAlyssaHTMeganPraiseTomMikeRyanPatrick
xx
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Kathy devoted as much of her *About Me* space to list her friendships as she did actually articulating her 'self'. She marked her closest friend (Caroline) prominently by using hearts and capital letters. She then chose to list her other 'closest friends' (girls to boys) in a long stream, undivided by character spacing, and followed up her list with a double 'x' – or two 'kisses'. Female friendships seemed to offer a vital contribution to girls' construction of online subjectivities. The extent to which they used their friendships to describe themselves appeared distinctly different from adult friendships and older-teen friendships often described in boyd's research (2006, 2007a, 2008, 2010). The girls I observed found ways of visibly paying homage to their friendships in almost any Facebook feature that would allow or could be manipulated to do so. Stephanie – another girl in the study – devoted her entire *About Me* section to friends:

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KATE♥
WENDY♥
DANIELLE♥
KAYLEE♥
JORDAN♥
BETH♥
You guys rocked my world! ♥
```

Here, the audience infers 'who' Stephanie is by virtue of her most cherished

friendships. If someone outside of her extended social circle were to look at this

section, they would not be able to ascertain any knowledge about Stephanie's

character or personality, other than perhaps she loves her close friends. The friends

she has carefully chosen and creatively listed apparently tells the peer viewer all they

need to know about Stephanie. This is interesting because it limits the globally

networked aspect of Facebook technology; the girls' social network is understood

through and bound by a particular circle of girls, with whom Stephanie interacts in

some capacity offline (at school). The girls have carved out a nook on Facebook to

construct their online selves and manage their online friendships. Rather than writing

themselves into being (Sundén, 2003), these girls described their online/offline selves

via relationships and affiliation with others.

By writing each other into being through associative relationships, girls limited

the information they disclosed about themselves. Using a process of describing their

online selves exclusively by way of naming their closest friends, girls undermined the

potential for outside audiences to really garner much personal information from their

profile page. This could be an indication of young girls' media literacy, protecting

private information about themselves and restricting their audience. Alternatively, it

could reflect their priorities - they consider that anyone of importance to them who viewed their profile will automatically know who these other friends are (and be able to deduce the social significance of these friendship affiliations). Perhaps this is indicative of the psycho-social needs of the age group (12 – 13 year olds) and/or it may be particularly important to pre-adolescent, female friendships. Lenhart et al.'s (2011) research on the differences between the practices of teen girls and teen boys on Facebook demonstrated that girls tended to use the SNS to maintain their existing offline friendships, whereas boys tended to use Facebook as a tool to flirt or meet new people via friends-of-friends.

Girls used strategies to tether themselves to their friendships and strengthen those connections through a process of inclusion and exclusion. As boyd puts it, online, "you are who you know" (2007a:13). Girls in the study navigated their online subjectivity by not only defining their friendships in their profile creation, but also in constantly reinforcing and managing these social connections. Affiliative subjectivities were demonstrated and reinforced by social verifications: textually listing favored friendships, creating visual interest with friend's names (♥☺♫) and hyperlinking friends as 'family' connections – as well as ongoing public displays towards one another. Social validity became reinforced when friends pay homage in return and girls in this study demonstrated a complicated process of giving or withholding reciprocal friendship confirmations.

An example of a social validation in this context would be when girls defined themselves by way showing who their closest friends are within their profile. A photo album entitled, 'Me & My Besties' becomes a collection of visual cues (photos) used to

articulate who a girl identifies as her best friends. Within the study, it was clear that

girls expect a certain level of reciprocity in these displays of social connection – with

one notable exception. A small percentage of girls in the study who appeared to carry

more social cache or popularity could receive more gestures of friendship than they

gave out themselves; however, there appeared to be unspoken norms around this

practice. For example, Stephanie was by far the most popular girl in the group I

studied. She had a large number of friends, photographs with friends and substantial

social activity on her profile wall. Several of the girls in my study listed Stephanie as a

'sister' or family member on their profiles and included her name in their 'About Me'

sections – even girls who Stephanie had not mentioned in her own profile. Meanwhile,

Stephanie was far more discerning about who she recognized or identified as 'best

friends'. Cases like this illustrate that reciprocity is not always the requirement for

friendship association; sometimes an elevated social status was enough to merit girls

listing a particular friend as part of their online identity. A sense of popularity or

likeability by proxy seemed to be at play, and Stephanie could maintain this social

status and receive disproportionately higher number of social overtures and attention

than she doled out by adhering to a few practices that helped her appear gracious.

When receiving this extra attention, she responded by acknowledging social gestures

made toward her and appearing grateful for them, while still being able to withhold

reciprocal acknowledgements of closeness or intimacy. So, when another girl in the

group posted a flattering photo of Stephanie, captioned with the description,

> here's one of the most beautiful girls ever! so glad we're friends!

Stephanie responded to the social overture by commenting on the photo:

ah. thnx sweetie. xx

The comment is an acknowledging nod towards the photo being posted, and a simple expression of gratitude, but it lacks the social verification that a more reciprocal comment would have provided, (such as: "Ah! Thnx. I love u too friend!"). There were several examples of this kind of withholding from the more admired girls in the study.

In contrast, girls in the study who occupied more equal positions in their friendship with one another displayed more rigorously reciprocal displays of friendship and familiarity – at times even overtly chastising one another if gestures went un-validated. Often the gestures needed to have a mutual or explicitly equal quality. When Ashley posted a photo album of a recent swimming date featuring Diana, she then waited a few days for Diana to reciprocate. When Diana had not commented or posted an equally verifying account of their time together, Ashley began publicly demanding that the gesture go noticed by writing on Diana's wall:

hey. when r u gonna post ur pics from last sat?

Diana then uploaded her photos from the swim date, with almost exactly the same kind of captions as Ashley's album ("besties"… "us foolin round"…."love hr [sic]"). Social validations became visual and textual ways of proving or verifying things that are normally rendered intangible offline – such as the intensity and hierarchy of girl friendships. Public (or semi-public) actions then become ways of strengthening (or weakening) one's offline relationship status (as 'best friends'), and vice versa, as peer

audiences evaluate representations of online/offline experiences. Using a complex process of social validation, girls in my study relied on one another to create and sustain their Facebook profiles; their individual online subjectivities were socially constructed and reinforced by affiliative relationships and attention afforded to one another.

Performativity: Constitution Online and 'Being Seen'

On SNSs, the mediated self must be maintained over time to avoid having a stagnant profile appearance – synonymous with virtual death or paralysis. The deliberate self-creation of a profile requires active maintenance and continued social participation with other users to generate visible (textual and photographic) activity. This is one of the features that separate SNSs from other forms of computer-mediated communication. Users must digitally interact with others within their networked space in order to generate the visual and textual cues that constitute a digital presence in that social environment.

A myriad of visual and textual symbols are automatically generated by Facebook as users engage in almost any action. Taking the time to click 'like' on musician's Facebook page, list a 'favorite movie', post a link to news article or a consumer good, and 'liking' or commenting on friend's profiles or status'– all produce a distinct symbols that then appears on both a girl's profile and all of her friends' 'News Feeds'. News Feeds have become a common feature in most SNSs and Facebook was the first SNS that introduced it. The effect of a having a News Feed is that Facebook users have an efficient, centralized place (called 'Home') to see real-time activity happening between friends without having to individually visit each friends'

personal profile. News Feeds – by its inception renders individual Facebook actions as social and public – and I found it became a centralized collection of social validations and performativity. Girls visit their News Feeds to see the actions of their friends since their last log-in online and can then (indirectly or directly) evaluate the extent that they are represented in these visual and textual symbols. Girls in this study utilized a series of strategies to ensure their Facebook profiles and actions reinforced their subjective positions.

What I found surprising in my research was how reliant girls were on each other to reinforce, 'vouch for' and contribute to each other's online subjectivities and presence. In this respect, they not only write themselves into being (Sundén, 2003), but write each other into being. This illustrates arguments developed earlier in this thesis about cyborg-subjectivities. These practices are interesting not because they are digital articulations of 'real' friendships, but because the girls I observed enacted online/offline friendship as a process of 'becoming a self'. Furthermore, the extent to which their online subjectivities were validated and verified through affiliations and friendship positions became a form of constitutive currency. For example, three girls in the study who lacked the extensive friendship networks of other girls had profiles that appeared flat, unchanging, and one-dimensional. One of these girls, Lily, was friends with the other girls on Facebook, but did not have a consistent display of friendship validations (photos with others, comments on others' pages, 'wall' messages from others, etc.). Lily's ability to be seen online was severely hampered by her lack of activity (constitutive acts). Facebook 'being' is an interdependent process of social validation and attention. Without continual social gestures, Lily's

profile became active only when she engaged in an individualistic activity – such as 'liking' a page. Because these gestures were one-sided, instigated by Lily herself, the profile stood in awkward contrast to those of the majority of the other girls in the study—whose profiles appeared more dynamic and animate because of constantly reinforced actions between themselves and others.

While grappling with how to understand this interdependent phenomenon and describe the 'aliveness' or 'presence' in girls' online performativity as its related to social affiliation and validation, I encountered the limitations of Goffman (1956) and boyd's (2006, 2007a, 2004) analysis of impression management and construction of the 'self'. My analysis of the cyborg-subjectivities led me to consider an African concept of the self: *ubuntu*. Ubuntu is, "the African concept of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed interdependently through community" (Battle, 2009:3). Trying carefully not to appropriate the deeply spiritual and cultural nuances within ubuntu, I refer to a central tenant within this worldview to demonstrate a socially constitutive selfhood. Within ubuntu, a "unifying vision or world view [exists] in the Zulu maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, i.e. 'a person is a person through other persons'" (Shutte, 1993:46). Within this framework, people 'are' because they interact with others; in other words, there is no individual self from which actions originate. The constitutive actions that serve to create selves are only relevant in so much as others see and acknowledge the selves that are constituted. This is aptly exemplified in the common Zulu system of greeting, where a person acknowledges another by using the phrase "Sawubona" (meaning, "I see you") and

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the other responds by saying, "Naikhona" (meaning, "Because you see me, I am here").

Peter de Jager explains the cultural nuances of these Zulu understanding of selfhood by noting, "inherent in the Zulu greeting and…grateful response, is the sense that until you saw me, I didn't exist. By recognizing me, you brought me into existence" (de Jager, 2005). Similarly, I contend that girls' online subjectivities fail to exist until they are seen and recognized by others. Often online gestures were referential to corporeal acts of friendships, for example, posting photographs online showing friends spending time together in an out-of-school context. A lack of online activity between a girl and others not only indicated a lack of online performativity, it also highlighted a lack of offline social encounters that reinforce friendship (and by extension, social definition). This is a case where online performativity is best understood as a form of cyborg-subjectivity. The ability for the girls to exist as an online/offline 'self' requires the participation of others to reinforce their (cyborg)personhood. Lacking the validation of others in on and offline contexts, a girls' existence as an on/offline 'self' is severely limited. Identities that are valued on and offline are relational rather than individualistic.

Profile Pictures as Virtual Bodies

Girls profile pictures – their central virtual signifier – was in most cases, a photograph of themselves with one other friend. Similarly, albums and photographs posted on their profiles primarily included friends as well – autobiographical pictures, self-taken (aka, 'selfies') were rare in this study. Girls posted photos that were mainly taken outside of school, though some school pictures did exist (such as traveling on a

bus to or from school and a handful of photos taken from inside a classroom). The

overwhelming majority of photos showed girls with one other friend, or sometimes a

handful of other friends. Girls were seen hanging out at playgrounds or empty sports

fields and parks. Their albums often appeared chronological and biographical, as

though they were documenting an afternoon or a weekend outing. The photos were

typically a mix of engaging with the photo taker and a series of candid photos taken by

whoever held the camera. One girl's album featured a Saturday outing with her friend

and family members to a nearby town (50 kilometers away) and included nearly 40

photos of what went on in the backseat as her parents drove them to their destination.

Other albums featured birthday parties – usually posted by the birthday girl and her

friends showing the series of activities.

 Almost all of the girls in the study featured profiles pictures that included at least

one friend. Very rarely did a girl showcase a profile picture that was not a portrait of

herself with a friend or friends. Exceptions included when girls would purposely

upload a profile picture that was clearly not a self-portrait (for example, one girl

uploaded a cartoon character, another used a picture of a famous male celebrity

whom she had a well-known public crush on, etc.). In this way, girls demonstrated

their virtual bodies – a central component to the Facebook profile – as 'being seen'

and vouched for by friends. In an analysis of college students' photographs on

Facebook by Mendelson and Papachasrissi, the authors state:

> Proof of the closeness of one's peer group is confirmed by both the quantity
> and nature of the pictures displayed. The closer the relationships shared
> among friends, the more frequently they appear in photos with a student.
> Likewise, the more they appear, the more their friendship is confirmed (2011:
> 268).

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In the case of profile pictures, the choice of featuring a particular friend within the central signifier of Facebook subjectivity appeared tantamount. Like many of the other social validations I recorded, the decision to feature a best friend in a profile picture was often reciprocal. Dyads or triads of friends often featured each other in one another's central photo.

Within Ladd's research on performativity and archiving of the self in SNSs, she argues the profile picture acts as the iterated 'signature' of the author, which "persists beyond the moment of signing" (2009:27). Ladd uses a poststructuralist framework to consider SNSs, drawing particularly on the work of Derrida and Sundén. She says, "our material selves supplement our virtual selves and vice versa" (2009:32). Her interviews with older Facebook users highlight how central profile pictures are in the constitution of online subjectivity. Moreover, she highlights the blurring of the online/offline by discussing how some corporeal friendships persist only by way of online interaction (or vice versa). For example, she tells of an interview with a Facebook user who said that:

> Although she 'knew' all of her friends in an offline capacity, many of them she had not seen since she was a child. She said that without their profile picture, she would not be able to recognize them. SNS users develop a genuine, affective tie to the profile. A textual version of a user is as real as the actual material body of that person. For many, the copy is the only version of the user they are familiar with (Ladd, 2009:72).

The girls in my study all knew one another in school and online, but portions of their friendship are created in both contexts, which ultimately combine to form an interactive online/offline experience of their friends.

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Ladd (2009) also discussed how the Facebook profile picture (and user name) appears next to any and all online actions the user engages in. When a user changes their profile picture, all the prior textual and visual symbols that exist within Facebook automatically revert to the new 'signature' (Ladd, 2009). In this study, girls' choices of profile pictures were a 'present' construction, one that re-writes all the previous versions of their virtual body (profile picture). When Ashley posted her profile picture as a photo of her and Diana, that photo appears next to all of Ashley's historical actions in Facebook (comments, photos, wall posts). If and when she chooses to change her profile picture to one that does not include Diana, her virtual body is re-iterated and redefined as a body who does not immediately render Diana as core to her public online self. This has implications for relationships offline as well as online. The Facebook profile pictures therefore become a central site of both affiliative identity and co-constructed cyborg-subjectivity.

Tag Your Friends – Co-constituting One Another's Subject Positions

Facebook's ability to upload photographs and 'tag' people (or link them) to the photos they appear in allows girls to post photos online and link everyone in the picture to the photo. Girls often uploaded photos they had taken together with friends and tagged those who appeared in the photo. Other websites have developed to complement Facebook's features and have created digital uploads (typically free) that allow people to upload a jpeg file to Facebook specifically to 'tag' friends. One example is www.tagmypals.com, which offers tagging tables for Facebook users to upload to their profiles. From there, the users then tag their friends on the table using descriptors. An example is shown on the next page (Figure 1).

At times friends seemed disgruntled by the descriptor they were tagged to in a tagging table. Girls in the study never left a space 'untagged', which meant that typically one or two friends on a table were assigned a less glamorous trait. Stephanie used the tagging table in Figure 1 and tagged several of her friends. Ashley was tagged by Stephanie as 'the flirt' and responded by commenting on the photo:

Ashley: The Flirt ?? Lol

Stephanie: Lol. no offence [sic], of course, Ash :)

Ashley: Haha Im Nota Flirt...? Lol

Stephanie: Ok lol I'll change it.. Sorry lol

Ashley: Haha All Gudz, idc...

Ashley clearly did not like being labeled a flirt, but her language was indirect and lightened with the text acronyms "lol" (laugh out loud), "haha" (laughing), and question marks – which conveyed confusion rather than defensiveness. She also responded "All gudz, idc" meaning, "It's all good. I don't care", after Stephanie offered to change it. This seemed to be a way to indicate that even though the description bothered her, she was not going to be too self-focused (which was subtly discouraged and surveyed by friends). In this instance, Stephanie changed Ashley's tag to reflect something less controversial ("the one who's always smiling"). The question of why being labeled a 'flirt' was a disparaging or off-putting description to Ashley is not clear in this encounter.

Friends could also choose not to remove or change something that is at odds with someone else's self-concept. Kenzie posted several photos of her and Janine in an album in September 2010. Featured in the album were a handful of photos of

Tag Your Friends - TagMyPals.com

the good guy • the long-distance friend • the one with the cute baby • the athlete • the one who's always smiling • the one you can depend on • the flirt • the work buddy • THE PRETTY BLONDE ONE • the hopeless romantic • THE sarcastic one • the pinky-swear friend • the good friend • the funny one • the political guru

Rules: Once you have been tagged, you have to get this image from tagmypals.com upload it to your album and tag your friends according to their personality.

Figure 1

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Janine and Kenzie pretending to smoke a cigarette outside. It is unclear whether or

not the cigarette is real or a convincing fake, but the photos (particularly of Janine, who

appeared to be smoking the cigarette, rather than just holding it) generated a lot of

comments. In December, when I followed the girls on Facebook, Janine made several

overtures to Kenzie, asking that the photos of her pretending to smoke be taken down.

At first these requests began simply. Janine commented on the smoking photos,

"Delete please. No questions". Kenzie took no action to delete the photos (despite

engaging in many other activities on Facebook in the following days), so Janine wrote

on Kenzie's wall after about a week to remind her.

Look through the album of photos that u have of us when we have them fake smokes and delete the fotos I commented on,

Kthanksbye,

xoxo

Kenzie continued to take no action, and Janine responded by continuing to complain

in the photo comments underneath the photos of her smoking.

Can you just delete all the fotos of me smoking that shit. Thanks.

No questions, just do it.

Kenzie, delete it.
Delete it.
Right now.

> Delete.
> Now.

A mutual friend, Paige, noticed Janine's frustration with the photos still being posted and wrote:

> Paige: What's the big deal having these photos on facebook? Its fake anyway,
>
> Janine: I know it's fake, and it is and I don't see y people r saying it's real coz it ain't and Kenzie won't delete them >:(even tho I deleted those fotos of hers she didn't like, >:(
>
> Paige: Ohhhh, yeah Kenz delete them.

Here, Paige jumps on board with Janine and supports her as she asks Kenzie to remove the photos.

Kenzie did not remove the photos in the time I followed their friendship on Facebook, but it is clear that if Kenzie wants to maintain her best friendship with Janine, she will have to take some action eventually. The issue illustrates the power friends have over one another in co-constructing cyborg-subjectivities. Girls wanting to maintain primary control over their online/offline subject positions had to navigate times when the very friends who help write and define their 'selves' also highlight negative or inconsistent images or signifiers. At times these strategies are managed subtly, but this example of the growing online tension between Kenzie and Janine demonstrates a time when the challenges become overt.

Boyd (2004, 2007a, 2007c, 2011) discusses in her research how online technologies create awkwardness due to their immediate and easily changeable nature. This is particularly apparent in the case of the smoking pictures. In an offline

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scenario, girls can use strategies such as playing forgetful ('Whoops, I forgot') when failing to adhere to a friend's request. But online, the technology allows changes to profiles and pictures immediately, which means that the photos are simple to remove and easily alterable. Likewise, the photos are always available and public, increasing the visibility of both Kenzie and Janine. It is not difficult to find and delete the photos. Kenzie chooses not to respond to Janine's requests; perhaps pretending to be too busy or unaware of Janine's distress. However, this is undermined by the knowledge that Kenzie has constant access to her Facebook profile from her mobile phone and is active in other areas of her profile. I think it is important to recognize that Janine is not trying to remove the photos of her 'fake' smoking solely to 'manage her impression' (Goffman, 1956) online, or to make sure her online/offline 'selves' are reconcilable. Her blended online/ offline subjectivity prompts her anxiety about having a temporary physical act (pretending to smoke) constitute herself both online and offline in a way she cannot control.

Tagging tables also highlighted another facet of friendship as co-constructed cyborg-subjectivities. Once girls used a table to tag their friends based off descriptors such as 'Shopaholic' or 'Someone with nice hair', their friends typically commented on the tagged photo ("Ha ha… Lol" or "Thanks! xoxo") and would then generally upload a different tagging table and proceed to tag their friends as well (another example of reciprocal acts of performativity). At times girls demurred, particularly if the description was about their attractiveness. For example, Kathy responded to being tagged as 'The prettiest person I know' by Stephanie by saying:

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In this way, girls often responded to compliments by first dismissing the compliment itself or redirecting a compliment back towards the giver. This was almost always the case when compliments related to beauty or aesthetics.

Situating this study within the local, New Zealand context, I considered how readily humility featured within girls' interactions with one another. The 'tall poppy syndrome' (TPS) is a well-known cultural term used primarily in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. The term is used to describe a social phenomenon of 'cutting down' high achievers or people who stand out from their peer group by being conspicuously successful (Peeters, 2004). In its most simple form, "to tall poppy is to cut (an apparently successful person) down to size. The tall poppy syndrome (TPS) refers to the tall poppying of tall poppies" (Mouly and Sankaran, 2000). Louise Tapper (2014), whose PhD dissertation examines how high-achieving gifted- and-talented students were socially rebuked for their accomplishments, validates the persistence of TPS within the New Zealand school system. While some researchers question the prevalence of New Zealanders criticizing or denigrating others for their success, it is widely understood that both Australians and New Zealanders are reluctant to celebrate their own accomplishments (Taylor, 2013; Tapper, 2014). In "*Thou shalt not be a tall poppy": Describing an Australian communicative (and behavioral) norm,* author Bert

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Peeters recounts three 'Australian cultural commandments':

> Thou shalt not whinge.
> Thou shalt not try to be better than others.
> Thou shalt not carry on like an idiot. (2006:71)

These cultural underpinnings are often referenced within New Zealand culture as well. It is not appropriate to stand out too obviously in ones' peer group, and I would argue that humility, a lack of pretension and skepticism towards self-promotion are prevalent discursive practices in New Zealand.

Taking these cultural nuances into consideration, participation on Facebook appeared, at times, complicated for New Zealand girls. Facebook is a decidedly public medium, and it is imbued with American cultural values – particularly of the Millennial Generation (or Generation Y). This demographic cohort, described by Jean Twenge in her book *Generation Me* (2006), is defined as children born between the late 1970's and the early 2000's. Noted for being confident, open-minded, ostentatious and narcissistic, millennials are also commonly referred to as 'digital natives' – children who grew up using digital technology. Facebook's creator, Mark Zuckerburg, an American college student who created the SNS for his Harvard classmates, has been touted as 'America's First Millennial CEO' (Vargas, 2010). Given the origins of Facebook's design, the site is crafted with a millennial American user in mind. Self-promotion, exceptionalism and the 'you can be/do anything' attitudes of the American 'self-esteem generation' (Twenge, 2006) influence the structural design of the site. The centrality of the profile picture, listing one's achievements and accolades (university education and professional advancement), and demonstrating a high degree of social connectivity all become disciplinary

features of the site. There has been a significant amount of research documenting the

so-called displays of narcissism on Facebook by young American users (Mendelson

and Papacharissi, 2011; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010). With this

cultural context in mind, it becomes clear that preteen female Facebook users in New

Zealand are constructing their online subjectivities in the context of two conflicting

discourses: self-promotion (Facebook structure) and the ideal of self-effacement (New

Zealand Tall Poppy Syndrome).

Within this study, girls appeared to navigate these cultural dichotomies

delicately. Compliments bestowed on one another – particularly as they related to

attractiveness and physical beauty – were almost always deflected. But like the

reciprocity of other friendship gestures, there appeared to be a norm around meeting a

complimentary comment with a complimentary comment. Being called 'beautiful' by a

friend generated first an act of gracious denial ("ah. no. not really."), followed by a

reciprocal public proclamation ("u r gorgeous!"). In this way, girls could not only

strengthen friendship ties and provide social verification for one another, but they

could also circumvent the risk of appearing too self-promoting while having others

(co)construct them as beautiful. Posting a highly-valued compliment (after having

enough online/ offline friendship capital to do so) would automatically prompt a similar

comment about oneself. The fact that the comment comes (publically) from a friend

also reinforces that one is well-liked and socially connected. In this way, my research

highlights a key difference from other studies of youth on Facebook: New Zealand girls

went to great lengths to avoid appearing narcissistic – which would have been seen

negatively within their cultural context – but they still found ways to showcase

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themselves on Facebook by utilizing a co-constructive process. Using a 'I build you up, you build me up in return' strategy, girls could avoid boastfulness and simultaneously have a very active role in constructing their online subjectivities. It should be noted that this process was complicated, and at times fraught with tensions in friendship, power and discursive positionings both on and offline. Subject positions that operate in blended online/offline contexts, in other words, cyborg-subjectivies, were at times difficult to manage. Sites of conflict could occur online and offline and ultimately impact the subject positions of the other modality.

'Edits' and Reciprocity: Photos as Constitutive Acts of Friendship

Hierarchies of reciprocal communication and friendship gestures became evident during the time I followed girls' online interaction. Firstly, being acknowledged as an online friend by accepting one another's friendship requests and giving one another access to online profiles was a low level, risk-free form of connection. Nearly all the girls in the study were friends with one another – even in the case of less popular participants. Being friends was essentially synonymous with acknowledging each other's existence. Posting comments on one another's walls and 'liking' each other's comments and photos was the next step of social validation. The three less popular girls in my study rarely, if ever, received this kind of attention from the others. Girls who claimed one another as Facebook 'family members' or listed one another in their autobiographical sections of their profiles were considered very close and most participants received this kind of social validation. Finally, posting photo albums of one another – particularly photos that had been taken together, in out-of-school contexts, such as in each other's bedrooms or backyards – was amongst the highest

forms of social recognition. Similarly, within this top tier of visual affirmation, girls also presented one another with photo 'edits'.

'Edits' was a colloquial term used by the participants to describe photos that had been edited using available software and posted online. These edited photos usually depicted a friend, group of friends, or the user posting the photo. The common thread in these edits were photos that had been written on, decorated, and otherwise altered to communicate friendship, an inside joke, complimentary deference to peers and/or capture an event. The following page includes two examples of these photo edits (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

The edited photos often included acronyms such as 'ILYSFM' (meaning: "I love you so fucking much") or 'LY xoxo' ("love you, hugs and kisses). The girls also used emotocons such as :D, ☺, :p, <3, etc. Occasionally photo edits included friends who were engaged in some form of action together (such as the swimsuit jumping photo below). Additionally, edits sometimes showed two girls together or groups of girls. These types of photos often came from an album the girls had already posted online with a picture being altered to include some aspect of friendship affirmation.

More often than group photos or dyads, 'edits' usually depicted a portrait of a single person. These portrait 'edits' fell into two categories. In the first, a girl would post a photo of a good friend (or a popular friend) and edit it so that descriptive words and symbols communicated a sense of admiration, fondness and familiarity. The edited photo becomes proof that the editor had access to taking a social photo of the friend. The types of words and embellishments added to the photos then carried other nuances. Generic descriptions of "u r great" conveyed less social currency than

Figure 2

Figure 3

references to inside jokes. Likewise, the more popular a girl was, the more likely it

was that 'edits' given to her (featuring her) included synonyms of beautiful or pretty.

For example, see Figure 4. In this edited photo, given to Beth by Ashley, Ashley writes

that Beth is 'beautiful' and a 'stunner' (positive physical affirmations). She also

references experiences and inside jokes that the two share (offline): "sleep overs =P",

"Room 7" and "Truth or Dare :L".

Beth was considered very well liked and popular. The photo gifted to her by

Ashley becomes a public visual and textual affirmation of friendship and the positive

qualities that Beth possesses. Girls in the study who were most admired tended to

have the most photo edits given to them, and tended to have the most descriptive

embellishments and flattering portraits featured. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter,

girls like Beth could receive more attention and public acknowledgement than they

gave out, so long as they appeared affable and grateful for the attention.

For example, in this case (Figure 4), Beth responded to the edited photo by

commenting on it with:

aaawww, that's really nice. Iloveit. Thankyou heaps.

Beth did not chose to reciprocate this act by posting a edited photo of Ashley, but this

did not appear to surprise or affect Ashley the way it did in more congruent friendships.

Like Beth, Stephanie was also considered a highly popular. She received a lot of

edited photos. At times, she would reciprocate to photos given to her by other girls,

but the process of reciprocity could become complicated by differences in social

capital. For example, Stephanie, one of the most popular girls in the group, responded to several photo edits made for her (of her) by Wendy and later posted a single edited photo of Wendy in return. This edit given to Wendy is pictured in Figure 5. It is clearly not the most flattering photo of Wendy. She's scratching or holding her nose, not looking directly at the camera, and the 'edit' lacks the descriptive traits that are so commonly featured. A single generic sentence, "Wendy is Awesome" appears at the top.

Wendy tries to appear grateful for the gesture from a much-admired peer, but also carefully points out that the portrait chosen in not flattering. In the comments below the picture, Wendy writes:

Wendy: aw. thnx. this is kinda the worst pic of me tho.
Stephanie: haha. it was just the first one I found. :p I'll do another one if it be her royal highness' wish x

Stephanie responds to Wendy's complaint by clarifying that the photo was haphazardly selected and should not be taken too seriously. She then asks Wendy if she wants her to do another edit for her, but implies that if Wendy says 'yes', that she is too self-focused. Calling her "her royal highness" essentially removes the possibility for Wendy to criticize the photo, lest she appear too narcissistic. Drawing on the New Zealand cultural value of not appearing too focused one oneself, Stephanie is implying that Wendy is being too critical and this effectively keeps her from demanding a new photo. Instead, Wendy does not respond and appears grateful for the gesture.

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Figure 4

Figure 5

Like the un-attractive photo of Wendy, Stephanie also posts an unflattering photo of another friend, Brittany (Figure 6). She gives Brittany more textual descriptors than in the photo she created for Wendy, but she still withholds any mention of inside jokes or compliments about Brittany's physical attributes. In the edited photo, she has chosen a picture of Brittany wearing a clay face mask and scrunching up her features with her eyes closed – perhaps an indication that this was a candid or unexpected photo. Stephanie decorates the photo with, "funny", "friendly", "cool" and "always smiling" – kind terms but they do not reflect intimacy. In contrast, Stephanie posts edited photos of more popular friends with a greater degree of care, such as this photo made for an equally popular friend, Kelly (Figure 7).

Stephanie's edit for Kelly describes her friendship in much more detail, and makes two references to Kelly's physical attractiveness ("you're way too pretty" and "you're really pretty"). The photo chosen is one where Kelly is looking directly at the camera and smiling. Stephanie perhaps draws on a tongue-in-cheek tall poppy discourse by writing on the photo, "Kelly, you b*tch. you're way too pretty!" Kelly is praised for being attractive, but also teased for it.

Edited photos were highly valued and tended to attract more comments than other photos the girls posted. In some cases, the photos could be highly scrutinized. Wendy, mentioned earlier, was considered less popular than Stephanie and Kelly. She engaged in a lot of Facebook activity and friendship gestures, but her photos and comments appeared to attract more inspection and less outright positive attention than some of the more popular girls. Wendy posted an edited photo of herself on her profile, shown in Figure 8.
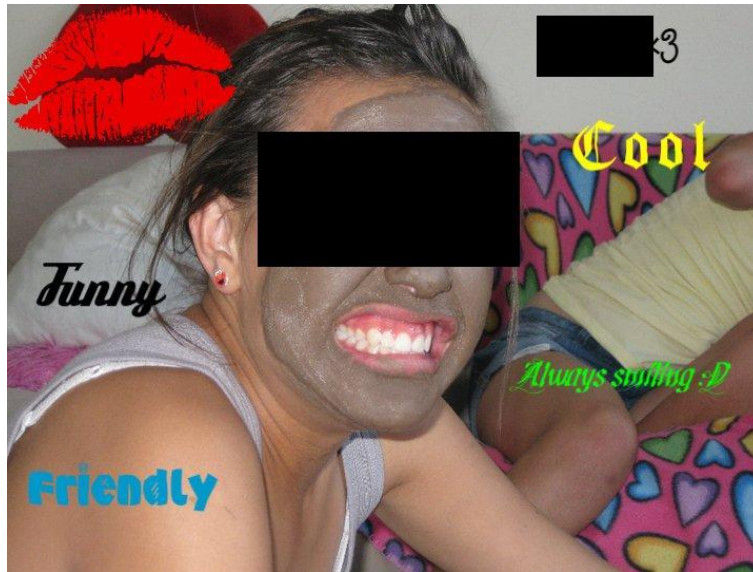
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Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Within a week, two friends commented on the photo:

Haley: Did you make that yourself?

Ian: Nice of ur mum 2 make this for u

Haley and Ian both noticed that the photo edit of Wendy had been posted by Wendy herself – and it lacked a 'signature' by a friend that most other edited photos had (that is, "love Ashley"). They took the opportunity to highlight the fact that Wendy had apparently praised herself. Wendy responded:

Wendy: What the fuck Someone else made this NO my mum so you can just go fuck yourself you good for nothing prick

Haley: What   ?

Wendy: not you haley :) x

Ian: wow settle down

Haley: oh good (: x

Wendy: die in a hole fag

Ian: wow calm down

Ian: u made it 4yaself thats even worse haha

Wendy is chastised by Ian (a male classmate) and questioned by Haley. She attempts to keep her interaction with Haley positive and they display some reciprocal emotocons (: x, :) x (smiley faces and kisses). Wendy curses at Ian for his assumption that her mother made her the edited photo, and she never answers either Haley or Ian's questions about why she has seemingly posted a photo of herself. In this way, peers surveyed each other's photos and called into question constitutive acts that were not peer-initiated. Contrary to the 'self-representation' research about SNSs

in other countries, New Zealand girls had little opportunity to engage in performative acts that were not peer-instigated or peer-screened. Facebook subjectivity was almost always a co-constructive process, which very much overlapped with and became tangled in online/offline experiences.

The second type of photo edit I witnessed was an inversion of the first. Rather than decorate a portrait of a much-admired peer and post it publicly, girls would sometimes post a photo of themselves or a part of themselves with embellishments on the photo that listed close friends (Figure 9). In Figure 9, Tara posts a photo of her own hands making a heart. She decorates the photo with "ily" ("I love you") and xoxo's, as well as "for all those I love the mostest". She tags 22 of her friends in the picture – which means that the picture shows up on the wall of those 22 friends. In these types of photos, posted by girls in the study, the poster tags dozens of her friends. The picture serves as a wide-reaching social verification of friendship. Most of those who get tagged in the photo respond by generating an affirmative comment in the comment section below the photo ("that's awsm thanx" or "ily2"). Less often, a girl would post an edited photo featuring her own portrait and listing the names of all her closest friends, such as in Figure 10.

In Figure 10, posted by Melissa, she features her own face, looking at the camera. She decorates the photo with names of her close friends and tags them in the photo so it shows up on their profiles. This kind of photo was less common than edited photos that were 'gifted' to one another. Posting a photo of oneself was deemed risky and too self-confident. But here, as in other cases, Melissa circumvents the cultural Tall Poppy discourse by posting a photo of herself as a strategy to recognize friendships. In

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Figure 9

Figure 10

this way, she can select a flattering photo of her physical body, but make this virtual signifier a gesture of friendship.

In contrast to some of the research on teenagers use of SNSs (Ringrose, 2011; Grisso and Weiss, 2005; Theil, 2005; Stokes, 2010), the preteen girls in this study were unlikely to explicitly situate themselves as 'empowered' or overly self-confident online. Particularly with regard to photographs, self-promotion was quickly disapproved by friends – as was the case when Wendy appeared to post an 'edited' photo of herself. This example lends credence to Cassell and Cramer's (2008) suggestion that while youth are more likely to encounter sexual imagery online from peers, they are also more likely to be regulated by those same groups. Within this study, there were very few opportunities for girls to explore individual performativity – much less sexual performativity – without heavy peer surveillance. Due to the co-constructive process of subjectivity online, girls potentially had less control over their identities than has been theorized in SNS research that utilizes Goffman-based (1956) 'impression management'. Photo edits that included feminine language and compliments about one another's attractiveness carried high levels of social cache. At times, these compliments included 'bitch' language (for example, "you're too fucking beautiful") that drew on both a 'Tall Poppy' discourse, but also added an edginess or intensity of emphasis to the compliment. Here, girls seemed to embrace a postfeminist 'girly' aesthetic in their language towards one another and in the visual signifiers included on the edited photos such as hearts, lipstick marks, 'feminine' fonts and other signs of hyperfemininity. While the girls did not include 'porno-chic' (McNair, 2002) or 'raunch' (Levy, 2005) signifiers in their textual or visual interactions of

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friendship, they did distance themselves from language such as 'the flirt' – as in the case when Stephanie tagged Ashley with the term. The connation of her reaction implied that being called a 'flirt' was undesirable and Stephanie made clear that she did not 'really' think of Ashley as a flirt, but instead did not know who else to choose for the moniker. As in Jackson and Vares' (2011) work, Ashley may have been trying to discursively distance herself from 'bad' girl femininity/ sexuality.

Conclusion

Within this chapter, I have discussed some of the ways girls in Christchurch enact their friendships on Facebook, and how online friendship served to constitute – through affiliative identities – their virtual bodies and subjectivities. Girls utilized multiple aspects of Facebook's architecture to inscribe the importance of their friendships, and their affiliations with 'best friends'. In a series of examples of friendship negotiation, I demonstrated how relationships online are not separate from their offline relational counterparts. I argue that the concept of cyborg-subjectivity is useful in exploring how girls and their relationships coexist online/offline, and how both virtual and physical friendship influence the combined/blended subjective experience of girls. Girls are, therefore, understood as embodying 'neither/both' online/offline space and discursive practices in both contexts influence the subjective opportunities in the other. For example, when Kenzie posted photos of herself and Janine pretending to smoke online, both Janine's online/offline status was affected. Similarly, girls in the study who lacked opportunities to document friendship offline (by taking photos together after school) also limited their ability to be seen, 'vouched for' and

referenced online – by themselves or others. Within this cyborg-subjectivity model, we can understand how constitutive acts in both virtual and material worlds come to be complicated by one another, and how acts in either/or, neither/both can become transgressive or resistant to the hegemonic discourses available in both contexts. Janine demands that Kenzie remove the photos of her smoking on several occasions, and this may have prompted tension between the friends and classmates offline as well as on Facebook. Kenzie's resistance to removing the smoking photos may well have had both online/offline consequences for her social relationships and other's understanding of her 'self'. This example also highlights the challenges girls face if they rely heavily on their online relationships for affiliation and subjective positioning.

I have also highlighted how reciprocity functions in the co-construction of cyborg-subjectivities. Girls in the study negotiated strategic acts of flattery, giving compliments and visually representing the strengths (and hierarchies) of their friendships to create their friends' online subject positions, and 'guarantee' similar acts would be reciprocated. Reciprocal acts of friendship – and by extension, identity construction – was rarely a straightforward or linear process. Girls' online/offline social networks and popularity came to influence the level and speed with which they reciprocated. Furthermore, not all friendship gestures were equal; textual references (wall messages) to one another were not as socially significant as visual ones (edited photos), and references to one another's physical attractiveness and inclusion of hyperfeminine signifiers were considered most valuable. Proving a close friendship with a popular girl was also highly desirable, but discursive power was often displayed by the 'cool' girls through not engaging in reciprocal acts.

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Finally, the cultural nuances of 'Tall Poppy' discourse and humility influenced how girls were able to position themselves. By relying on reciprocal acts of co-construction, girls could strategically avoid promoting themselves or looking as if they were posting photos of themselves or comments to 'brag'. Girls were also quick to bring one another 'down to earth' if they appeared to care too much about their own image. Facebook requires users to articulate online subjectivity publicly or semi-publicly, and New Zealand girls found ways to construct themselves that could avoid potential implicit or explicit accusations of pretentiousness.

Chapter 5: Strategic Embodiment of Gender and Sexuality Online

In the previous chapter, I discussed how girls in this study co-construct online identities through relationships with friends and reciprocal acts of friendship validation. In this chapter, I explore how girls negotiate discourses of girlhood femininities and sexualities through analysis of the visual and textual artifacts they post on their Facebook pages. Additionally, I draw on their responses to the qualitative questionnaire and focus group discussion about their experiences on/off Facebook to better understand how these girls conceptualize their positioning as producers and viewers of photos on SNSs. As discussed earlier in the thesis, there is substantial public controversy about girls' access to and imitation of adult sexuality – in the form of wearing 'sexual' clothing, engaging in 'sexy' poses and reproducing 'sexy' acts. Girls' bodies have become sites of public scrutiny. Those articulating the 'sexualization of girls discourse' contend that children are becoming older younger, and that girls are increasingly participating in the disciplinary 'technology of sexiness' (Ringrose, 2011; Bray, 2008).

In this chapter, I look at what girls in New Zealand 'do' as they interact with their friends online and how they constitute girlhood identities. As the previous chapter indicates, much of these girls' exploration of femininity and sexuality was done through (and with the conventions of) female friendships. I explore how girls in this study found ways of 'playing with' (Harris, 2005) both hegemonic and transgressive discourses of gender and sexuality, typically with friends. I discuss girls' talk around these issues in a focus group discussion and how they found ways of distancing themselves from 'other' girls whose online practices connote sexuality. I discuss how they reacted to 'inappropriate' or 'mistaken' readings of their photos as overtly sexual

by peers. As in Buckingham and Bragg's research (2004) and Cassell and Cramer's (2008) work, I found girls were highly educated about online privacy and 'risk' and understood how to avoid unsafe interactions with 'strangers'. Girls found ways to negotiate performative femininities and sexualities online in ways that could be read as multiple – 'neither/both'. As Cody (2012) has suggested, their liminal social location created opportunities for them to be both childish and playful, knowledgeable but naïve, transgressive or resistant but also engaged with 'girly' postfeminist subjectivity. I argue that their participation on a SNS enabled similar 'liminality' in the online context. I explore these issues through examples from my study.

Here's Some Pictures of My Best Friend and I

Ashley's photos act as an example of the way many of the girls' in the study used Facebook photographs. Ashley had just turned thirteen and stated that she had uninterrupted access to Facebook via her cell phone. In a focus group discussion, she indicated that she is on Facebook at school, home, and in between, and that her online activity is not monitored by her parents and she has 'total freedom' (her words) over her account. Ashley posted several photo albums on Facebook, and added more during the time we were online friends. She had posted over 250 photos by the end of the project, most of which featured herself with friends.

In conducting this analysis, I considered each complete photo album as a case study, and reviewed these albums as a group, rather than selecting individual photos to review. The grouping of photos into an album is something that Ashley had done purposefully. It seemed important to look at photo as components of the albums the girls put together because one of my research goals was to examine girls' online

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postings in context as part of the larger project of keeping girls' perspectives at the center of discussions about them. Photo albums posted by Ashley and other girls often had a sense of narrative and a chronology. Viewing pictures in isolation would have stripped much of the content and potentially removed Ashley's intentions from her published work. Pink (2001) discusses how doing visual ethnography also requires the researcher to consider the contextual aspect to any visual text. Ashely's photo albums, including the one I am about to discuss, were typical of most of the girls in this study, suggesting that there are disciplinary norms around how girls come to produce (or take) photos together, then upload them for peers to view online.

One of Ashley's albums was entitled "Good Times with Diana" and depicted the two friends (Ashley and Diana) spending time together in a backyard pool. The album begins with several photos of a snail on a pool floatation device – shots taken from different angles. Over the course of the 56-piece photo album, the Facebook viewer follows Ashley and Diana as they spend an afternoon together. The discovery of a snail prompts them to get a camera and snap some photos. They take turns posing, swimming, then drying off and moving to one of the girl's bedrooms to transition from swimwear to street clothing and 'getting ready' – documenting each stage in afternoon as they go. Some of their photos appear more spontaneous than others and they try different techniques and angles (standing, 'action' shots, sitting together, making faces). The album features themselves, but also objects and animals: pool paraphernalia, pet dogs, etc. Throughout the collection, some common themes can be identified.

The girls take turns being media producers (photographer) and subjects as they rotate between viewer/object, and both simultaneously. Ashley takes a photo of

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Diana. In the next picture, the roles are reversed. Then the girls take a photo

together, using their extended arms to take a photo of themselves at the same time.

They feature their full bodies as the subject of some pictures. Within these photos,

which included posing their bodies in stereotypically feminine positions (looking over

their shoulder, hands positioned on hips, hips cocked to one side), the pictures rarely

include a serious gaze toward the camera lens (viewer). Instead, the girls posed their

bodies and stuck out their tongues, closed their eyes, hid behind their hair or

scrunched their faces – deemphasizing their faces in some way or adding a 'silly'

element to the photo. In analyzing these poses, I reviewed Goffman's (1979) research

that explored how women's bodies and poses were depicted in advertisements

(compared to men's). He discussed how 'gender display' was irreducible to biological

sex and how women were often infantilized or considered submissive in ads – shown

as anxious or shy, having their fingers in their mouths, hiding behind objects, touching

themselves sensually or appearing in canted/ tilted submissive poses (Goffman,

1979).

Sut Jhally, through coordination with the Media Education Foundation,

produced a video called *Codes of Gender* (2010) that explored how poses come to

reinforce a gender/sex difference between men and women. Ashley and Diana, while

not strictly 'reproducing' any specific media depiction of women, engaged in

stereotypically feminine poses – with their hands on hips, bent knees, tilted head

positions. Their facial expressions often look away from the viewer – perhaps an

indication of Goffman's 'licensed withdrawal' (where women are depicted as having

their eyes closed, not alert, unfocused on the audience). Squeezing their eyes closed

in some photos, Ashley and Diana could be understood as performing femininity

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through this kind of shyness, anxiousness or unawareness. Alternatively, their facial

expressions could be read as an attempt to subvert overtly sexual or sexually

provocative readings of their photographs – avoiding a direct gaze with the viewer

could be a way of distancing themselves from stereotyped femininity or adding irony to

the feminine poses their bodies embody. Their facial expressions in some cases

appeared avoidant, in others aloof, or humorous.

In trying to understand the multiple gestures and repeated characteristics of

girls' photographs in New Zealand, I looked at how Bae (2010) analyzed the cultural

use of face-hiding gestures in Korean girls' online photographs. Within the Korean

context, girls in Brae's study hid their faces behind their hands or behind peace signs

to make their faces appear smaller, a signifier of Korean femininity (2010:203). In my

study, I found that girls in this study avoided direct, serious eye contact with the

camera lens and often made an effort to keep their photographs 'playful' by employing

facial expressions that connoted humor, ambivalence or levity. When asked in the

focus group discussion why girls tended to make faces when they were taking photos

of themselves and their friends, the girls commented:

> **Erin (interviewer):** So, I noticed that in a lot of the photos, girls would stick out their
> tongues or scrunch their faces – things like that. Why is that?
> **Kathy:** Oh yea, you mean like [imitates closed eyes and tongue stuck out to side]
> [Other girls laugh. Round of 'oh yeahs' 'yeah, true']
> **Lily:** Or like this [Lily looks up while opening her eyes wide]
> [Laughter continues]
> **Erin (interviewer):** Yeah, things like that. And peace signs and hand gestures too.
> Why do girls like to do those in pictures?
> **Kathy:** I dunno, just fun I guess, ay
> **Susan:** Just like, cause, it's fun to be silly

Eva: You know, girls just like to take pictures… not really like me, but you know, girls take pictures of themselves…

Wendy: Yeah and like, what face should we all make? Like this? [Wendy does a serious face, tilting her chin down, pointing her eyes to me – an exaggerated stare with closed lips, slightly smiling; hand on hip]

[Laughter from all the other girls]

[Inaudible – 'no you should not do that!']

Stephanie: Cause like, girls who do that are so…

Sarah: Stuck up, or like…

Stephanie: Like so into themselves, ay?

[Agreement sounds]

Stephanie: And like, that's so fake…

Eva: Yea, like they are trying to… to be like… posed

Haley: It's not… like… a real photo, its fake

Stephanie: That's why like, all my pictures, my friends and me, we just like hang out and have fun. We're not like trying to… we're just having fun and that's like, more natural.

[Agreements]

The notion of being 'too posed' in a photograph came up repeatedly in the questionnaire responses of girls as well. When asked in the survey what kinds of photos they liked on Facebook, several answered:

Tara: I like pics w/ friends b/c that is a real photo, not posed or fake.

Susan: Taking pictures with friends just shows your close w/ that person. It's not all fake.

Sarah: I like pictures with my friends because you want people to know that you're close. But it's easy for people to fake their personality in pictures. Some girls pose and stuff but my friends and I don't.

Additionally, Tara responded to a survey question about why girls use silly faces in pictures: "because that is real, not posed or fake (having fun with friends is natural)."

Here, the word 'natural' illustrates skepticism toward 'fake' or overtly crafted photos. In the New Zealand cultural context, with its emphasis on avoiding the 'Tall Poppy syndrome', girls appeared suspicious of, or distrustful toward, things that appear overly artificial or narcissistic. Sarah's response to the same question echoed Tara's, "Yes, well, you don't see many girls posing. They might think they'd look stuck-up." It was important to girls that they not been seen as 'trying too hard' or 'being fake' – and playing with gendered performativity in particular was a space where being 'too serious' was synonymous with being 'inauthentic'.

The participants seemed to distance themselves from 'other' girls who 'pose' or 'act fake'. Pictures that featured friends were seen as positive, preferable and more 'natural' than 'selfies' or pictures where girls would make direct eye contact with the viewer or look too directly in conventionally feminine ways at the camera. Girls avoided discussing the particulars of what constitutes a 'posed' photo – when asked to elaborate about 'poses' in our focus group discussion, the girls indicated that posed pictures are, "just like, when a girl is trying too hard" (Sarah) and "trying to be all, you know, like… like perfect or something" (Stephanie). It seemed as if the girls were always on the cusp of separating themselves from 'other' girls – girls who 'try too hard' or girls who were being 'false'. Wendy's example of how 'not' to pose her face in our focus group discussion, where she immediately tilted her chin down, gazed her eyes directly at me and held her lips closed in a slight smile, seemed indicative of a stereotypically 'seductive' or potentially masculine 'alert' and assertive pose (Goffman, 1979). Her ability to immediately snap into this facial expression (along with her hand on her hip), then succumb to laughter as she and her peers agreed that girls who do engage that kind of 'serious' facial pose are 'stuck up' or 'into themselves', serves to

illustrate how girls are capable of picking up and discarding discursive performativities on a moment-to-moment basis. All the girls in the group agreed that 'other' girls do those kinds of faces, juxtaposing their authenticity against those 'fake' girls. Their discomfort with both more assertive, self-confident (traditionally masculine) or seductive, traditionally feminine facial expressions could be understood in the context of their acknowledgement that being 'too sexy' is 'bad' (Jackson and Vares, 2011). Likewise, this could be an indication that girls are well aware of the conflation of self-confidence and 'empowered' assertiveness as part of the commodification and sexualization of female agency – and did not want to appear as though they were 'trying to be sexy' (Gill, 2012; Jackson et al., 2012). Girls reiterated that spontaneity and 'having fun' were inconsistent with having a serious, posed face and making direct eye contact when photographed. The inclusion of a friend in a photo was also a way of making the picture about 'hanging out' with friends and not about projecting a particular image of yourself.

In Ashley and Diana's pool date album, we see the two friends together, each taking a turn to hold the camera. A few photos are taken from above, where the camera has been positioned at an angle above them. The effect is that their bodies are viewed from above, with their eyes looking upward. In Daniel Chandler's *Notes on the Gaze*, he writes that vertical camera angles have significant meanings for the viewer:

> …High angles (looking down on a depicted person from above) are interpreted as making that person look small and insignificant, and low angles (looking up at them from below) are said to make them look powerful and superior (1998).

Goffman (1979) and Jhally (2010) also discuss the power implications of women and girls being photographed from above. They indicate that this body positioning is submissive and feminine. The gendered aspect of the positioning is considered more apparent if the viewer mentally replaces the subject in the photo with a subject of the opposite gender (Goffman, 1979). Men are rarely photographed from above, gazing up at the photographer/viewer.

In Figure 11, Diana and Ashley take a high angle shot of themselves from above. Both hold their arms away from their bodies, bent at the elbow and resting on (or behind) their hips (having a slimming effect as the bicep does not rest against the torso and widen). Ashley sticks out her tongue, curving it to one side and Diana shapes her mouth into an "o" while scrunching her eyes closed. In other photos, they show themselves in swimsuits with hips prominently tilted while also wearing large goggles, sticking out their tongues and making peace signs with their hands. The technique of inserting 'playfulness' or 'silliness' into autobiographical photos while also using aspects of conventional femininity was evident in most of the photo albums these girls posted on Facebook.

Goffman (1979) and Jhally (2010) argue that ideas about gender display are not fixed, but are taken up from our cultural ideas about assertiveness and submissiveness. In this case, Ashley and Diana are the producers of their own photographs and capture themselves from an angle traditionally understood as feminine. Driscoll (2002) discusses that girls in adolescence internalize 'being watched' and identify the ways that a girl "must continually watch herself" (Berger, 1972, quoted in Driscoll, 2002:240). Girls, having identified the 'looked-at-ness' role of women, come to internalize the male gaze. From this perspective, Ashley and

Figure 11

Diana's use of 'submissive' camera angles could be interpreted as evidence of an internalization of hegemonic discourses about femininity and gender display. Alternatively, their aversion to looking directly at the viewer can also be interpreted as deliberate resistance to traditional understandings of a 'male gaze'. Their photos embody a sense of 'having fun' and 'being silly'. Their facial expressions render their engagement with feminine posturing 'fun' and engaged in on their own terms. Likewise, despite the fact that several camera angle shots might suggest that the girls are positioning the viewer as above them, both literally and figuratively, Attwood (2011) suggests that agency in online photographs is much more complex than previously thought. In addition to discourses that make it possible to assume women might enjoy sexuality and sexual performativity as a 'source of strength' (Attwood, 2011:205), she notes that: "Looking and being looked at no longer necessarily signify powerlessness." She continues, the "centrality of the celebrity body in Western cultures has inflected women's bodies in new ways… where visibility is associated with success and admiration" (Attwood 2011:205). Thus, Ashley and Diana's interest in both documenting and posting their afternoon together can be understood as both a process of embodying familiar forms femininity (and sexuality) and also, as a way of literally embodying their cyborg-subjective experience of friendship.

They 'do friendship' both offline, as they spend time together, and online as their afternoon creates the interest in documenting and iterating their offline experience. The photo album of their swim date produces virtual signifiers of the closeness and intimacy of their friendship (read: we spend time together at one another's houses), but also, a form of constituting their femininity and embodying 'having fun' in both environments. They play with gendered and sexual conventions

as they angle the camera and pose their bodies, and draw on neither/both discursive positioning of themselves as preteens: they are girls with 'feminine' bodies but also play with facial expressions that range from aloofness to 'silliness'. They document their experience of friendship, and the interest in documentation of offline activities is not unrelated to constituting their intimacy and subjectivities online – the two contexts inform the experience of producing the photographs. Ashley and Diana are 'knowingly' engaging in sexual performativity and also poking fun at it through their 'goofing off'.

Turn-Taking: You be Silly, I'll be Serious

Girls' photographs in this study also highlighted the ways that their online/offline identities were co-constructed. Just as girls relied on one another's textual signifiers and friendship affiliation to constitute themselves online, girls' photographs became another site for reciprocity and turn-taking. In the previous chapter, edited photos, where girls decorated photos for one another with complimentary words and phrases and symbols, were exchanged to demonstrate fondness, admiration and as means to potentially secure reciprocal expressions of connection. Turn-taking and reciprocity extended further as girls demonstrated intentionality in taking and posting photos of themselves together – for example, when girls both took pictures of a shared experience after school and both girls then shared those photographs on their individual profile pages. This reinforces the argument in the chapter above that girls do not just 'represent' themselves and their friendships online, their offline/online experience is overlapping, with each environment informing actions and choices made in the other social context.

While nearly all the girls agreed that serious or assertive facial posing and or being 'unnatural' in pictures was 'fake' and 'bad', the girls did have strategies for negotiating a more direct gaze with the camera. In the previous chapter, I discussed how girls took turns exchanging compliments with one another – particularly comments on one another's attractiveness – as a way of turn-taking and co-constructing one another's subjectivities. Similarly, girls found ways of negotiating turn-taking and reciprocity in their photograph albums. In the case of Ashley and Diana's album, the girls posted a series of photos featuring them sitting side by side on a bench. In one photo, Ashley stuck out her tongue cocking her head an exaggerated angle, while Diana engaged directly with the camera and gave a serious, closed-mouth smile. In the following photo, the roles were reversed: Diana hid her eyes behind her long bangs and made a funny expression with her mouth, while Ashley gazed directly at the camera (viewer) and angles her face down and smiles slightly. This turn-taking continues in spurts throughout the album, and was heavily featured in other photo albums by other friendship dyads in the study. As each girl takes her turn engaging directly with the camera, she shows a slight smile. The girls appear to be playing with the 'serious' posing that Wendy mimicked (as a way of deriding) in the focus group discussion. In each photo, only one girl appears to be engaging with a form of conventional sexual performativity or seductiveness – in a postfeminist context where confidence is understood to be 'sexy' – while her friend suggests silliness, 'girly' or infantilized (Goffman, 1979) femininity. The result is that any one of these photos contains contradictory discursive positionings (silly/serious, naïve/ sexy). These photographs quite literally embodied Haraway's (1991) cyborg mantra, 'neither/both' – the photos could not be classified as sexual or playful, seductive or childish; they

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contained bits and pieces of all these things. Ashley and Diana, like so many other

girls in this project, played with gendered and sexual performativity within the bounds

of friendship and 'spontaneity', turn taking, or 'having fun'.

If there was any doubt about the consciousness or intentionality of this kind of

turn-taking in gendered performativity among girls, it was dispelled through the

observation of how girls posted the photographs online. In many cases, girls would

tag the friend who was 'silly' in the photo (meaning that it would show up on their

profile page) but, seemingly intentionally, not tag themselves if they were the ones

engaged in 'serious' posing. The photo was in most cases going to be witnessed by

the larger Facebook peer-group, since their shared friendship network was essentially

a networked public (boyd, 2011). However, by avoiding tagging themselves, the girls

could appear apathetic or distanced from photos of themselves that engaged in

performances of sexuality or 'adultish' assertiveness in their gazes towards the

camera. When friends would comment on the photo and say things like, "wow! u look

great D", Diana responded by re-focusing the social attention back towards Ashley's

silliness ("isn't it funny? she cracks me up"). In other words, posting a photo of oneself

engaging in more teen or adult modes of sexual or gendered performativity was

socially permissible as long as the photo's purpose appeared to be to showcase

friendship, a friend's silly expression, or some other object. Compliments from peers

(usually other girls) directed at the friend who engaged in 'serious' posing for a

photograph were often about aesthetics (i.e., "you look awesome Ash!", "hottie

Diana!") and were immediately deflected. Attention was brought back onto the 'less

serious' friend in the same photograph (for example, "love spending time with her",

"she's a riot").

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'Having fun' with Sexuality

      The later photos in Ashley and Diana's album show them indoors; the girls photograph themselves dressed in low-cut tank tops and wet hair (presumably from swimming). Pictures of them blow-drying their hair are punctuated with playing with a plain, white face mask that they take turns wearing. As with other examples, the girls take turns making indirect or silly facial expressions while the person wearing the face mask looks directly at the camera. Ashley sticks her tongue to the side of her mouth – as she often did in other photos and albums – but in the context of the bedroom, it potentially appears more 'flirty' than in previous images. Next, the girls are pictured together, in the reflection of a full-length body mirror, 'kissing' one another as Diana wears the white mask (meaning, there is an object between their lips) (see Figures 12, 13, 14, 15). Neither girl has tagged themselves or each other in Figure 12, or in the four photographs leading up to it in the album; meaning that neither girl is publicly linked to the photo – it is only accessible by going through all of Ashley's album. A few blurry photos show the girls swapping who is wearing the mask, and next they are both pictured with their fore-fingers and middle-fingers making a 'V' for their tongues to stick through – a reference to vaginal oral sex. Ashley, whose face is obscured by the mask, makes direct eye-contact with the viewer, while Diana scrunches her eyes closed as she makes the sexual gesture. Here, the girls demonstrate sexual knowledge – but within a reading that could be understood as 'goofing around'. Additionally, their gestures could be understood as a form of 'play' with alternatives to heteronormativity. By using a mask and including these photos in a linear album of 'having fun', the girls have the space to engage in modes of more teen/adult sexual performativity without transgressing the cultural norm of being 'too posed' or 'all about

oneself' – how can a photo be about oneself if it's behind a mask/ with a friend? These photos can be seen as what we did when 'we were just playing around after swimming'.

On the other hand, their actions can also be read as 'knowing' and by intentionally not tagging themselves in any of the photographs, or the ones directly preceding it, the implication is that they acknowledge that there is some risk in posting the photos online. The pictures can be viewed as an attempt to practice the porno-chic sexual imagery of 'lipstick lesbianism' (Gill, 2009). However, the knowledge and display of alternative sexualities and their interest and ability in taking these photos and posting them online can be understood as transgressive of normative heterosexuality. Preteen girls are understood to exist 'prior to' the development of sexual identities, necessitating protection from sexual material, as discussed in the 'sexualization of girls' discourse. Yet, childhood sexuality "pervades primary schooling, and girls draw on it as a resource for constructing themselves as young heterosexual girls" (Bhana, 2005:171). This is not to suggest that preteen girls' sexuality is the same as adult sexuality, but rather, that they understand (at age 12 and 13) sexual ideas and have a form of girlhood sexuality that is neither 'asexual' child, nor sexually knowing adult. As Walsh points out tweenaged "girls are in serious need of information about safe sexual practices, yet this can only be effectively achieved through an acknowledgement of their existing sexuality. These [pictured] girls are real tweens, and tweens are rugged, strong, defiant, sexual, beautiful, awkward, uncertain, and confident. They are a bundle of contradictions – and changes" (2005:201-202). Within this framework, Ashley and Diana's experimentation with provocative or non- heteronormative sexual performativity can be understood
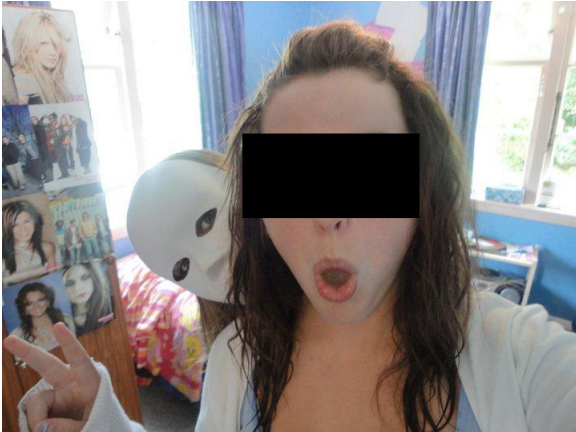
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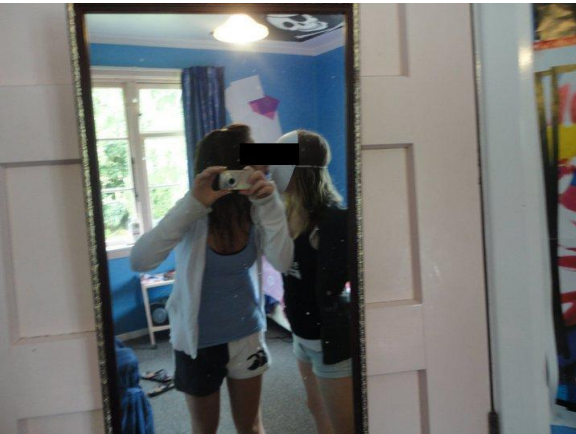
Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

as part and parcel of their existing sexuality – not as a passive reproduction of porno-chic norms. Their ability to transgress dominant heteronormative sexuality is particularly interesting.

The experience of taking the photos, posting them online, abstaining from tagging themselves in them yet making them available to peers is an example of how cyborg-subjectivities can be particularly useful in disrupting hegemonic binaries. Just as Sundén (2003) and Haraway (1991) emphasize that the 'she-borg' or 'cyborg' (respectively) is a slippery contradiction in terms, 'neither/both' – the tween girl, occupying neither the more established discursive positions of childhood or teenage, nor exclusively existing in an online/offline context – is poised to challenge binary ideas about gender and sexuality and playfully embrace the slippery pleasures of liminality.

'Stop being a perv' – Responses to Sexual Readings of Photographs

Within this study, I found a handful of photos like Ashely and Diana's that included performances of non-heterosexuality between friends – mostly, friends 'kissing'. Three photos in the study, featuring different pairs of friends, showed girls kissing one another with their thumbs or another object (such as the mask) between the girl's lips. In all the photographs, girls were not embracing one another's bodies, but appeared only to be touching on the lips (with objects in-between). These constitutive acts can be read in multiple ways, as discussed above, such as knowledge of alternatives to heteronormativity and also experimentation with the sexual subjectivities of 'lipstick lesbians'. Like Stern's (2007) research on adolescent girls' instant messaging online chat boards, it appeared that girls simultaneously felt

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comfortable displaying knowledge of alternative sexual discourses but reacted to sexual interpretations of these performative acts, especially by male peers, as 'perverted'. For example, when Janine and Kenzie posted a photo album that included them pretending to kiss (with thumbs placed between their lips), a male classmate commented on the photo, "Woa", both girls quickly responded:

Kenzie: stop being such a perv

Janine: geez. boys are so disgusting

The girls generated the photograph, but then admonished any attempts by a male classmate to read it sexually. They use terms like 'perv' and 'disgusting' to dismiss their classmate's presumed sexual interpretation of the photograph. What's interesting is that both Janine and Kenzie understood that their classmate's comment ("Woa!") as a sexual reading of their photograph – as if the intersection of his maleness, his enthusiastic shorthand for 'wow' or disbelief and his comment all constitute 'pervertedness' and sexual deviancy. Jackson and Vares have utilized Miller's (2004) theorization of disgust "as inhabiting the border between notions of self as 'good' and notions of self as 'bad'" (Jackson and Vares, 2011:144). In this study girls used discourses of disgust as a strategy for distancing themselves from 'perverted' reading of their photographs. However, their willingness to engage in these acts of sexual performativity and post them online hints at complexity. The girls appeared to want to play with sexual performativity, yet also acknowledge that it could be read as 'bad' or 'sexual'. They used strategies such as avoiding tagging themselves in the pictures (aloofness? or fear of parent surveillance?) and condemned attempts by others to read the photographs sexually.

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How can this be interpreted? Butler (1990) argues that a subject does not 'have' but 'does' gender and sexuality. Sexuality (as an identity marker) is a recent social construction, a set of discourses, outlined by Foucault in his work on the history of sexuality (1978), and its rendering of heteronormative hegemony. In this case, girls drew on a 'lesbian'/ alternative sexuality practice to (semi)publicly play with ideas about femininity and sexuality, constituting themselves as desirable and/or powerful within a postfeminist context, while at the same time, maintaining the right to police sexual readings of the photos by (male) peers. The photos of pretend kissing were sandwiched between photos of girls making peace signs and sticking out their tongues. Rather than being displayed as moments of sexual experience, the performances of kissing were presented with other 'just having fun' poses. In this way, the kisses were citational of discourses about girlhood, sexuality and desirability and yet, disruptive of discourses about 'tweenagehood' as a period of sexual innocence. Simultaneously, girls expected to be able to police the interpretations of their photos – insofar as they positioned themselves as 'disgusted' with 'perverted' readings. In the words of Stephanie, when asked about how girls decide how to document themselves in photographs, "girls, to take Cindy Lauper's line, just wanna have fun, and so that's why we enjoy taking funny photos with each other and sharing them on Facebook."

The reactions to photographs on Facebook of girls kissing should be situated within the context of intense public scrutiny of girls' online behaviors and risk. When asked in surveys what girls liked least about Facebook, many of them indicated that participation on SNSs entails risk. Eva responded to the question by saying, "I don't like how you have to be careful because of all the bad people on Facebook." Likewise, Susan wrote: "Just that there are heaps of people on Facebook and you can

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never trust people you don't know." Other girls shared similar sentiments, commenting that they disliked having to watch out for "random bad people", "offensive people" and "sleezy guys". The girls understood the notion that they needed to 'be careful' on Facebook and this came out in the focus group discussion as well:

> **Erin (interviewer):** So, when I was reading what you girls liked least about Facebook, it sounded like most of you mentioned being careful. What do you mean by that?
>
> **Tara:** Just like, only friending people that you like, really know, you know?
>
> **Stephanie:** Yea. You know cos there's a lot of… like, bad people on Facebook.
>
> **Melissa:** Especially… like… guys you don't know.
>
> [Agreement sounds]
>
> **Sarah:** Sometimes, like, random people will try to be your friend and stuff.
>
> [Ew. Yeah.]
>
> **Wendy:** I know that like, you have to be careful because… like, perverted weirdoes and stuff…
>
> **Diana:** Like, they would try to like, post offensive things on your wall.
>
> **Wendy (talking over Diana):** And I like, knew this girl right… who like, friended some guy she didn't know…
>
> **Ashley:** Oh yeah, I know who you're talking about, ay
>
> **Wendy:** Yeah… and like, she sent him like a picture and like, he turned out to be like, a pervert… and like, her parents got involved… and like, she wasn't allowed to be on Facebook, like, at all anymore.
>
> [Ew. Ugh.]
>
> **Ashley:** But she doesn't got to [this school]
>
> **Eva:** that's totally why like, my parents… well, like why I don't really put many pictures of myself online.
>
> **Ashley:** Yeah, Eva, you just like put up pictures of Adam Lambert instead, ay"
>
> [laughter]
>
> **Eva:** Yeah. Plus he's hot.
>
> [All laugh, agree, relief, agreement – change of subject]

The 'pervert' and 'sleezy guys' were by implication the 'bad people you don't know' on Facebook. Girls were keenly aware that engaging with unknown males on

Facebook was problematic and risky. They drew on public discourses that construct "girls as victims of the Internet" (Edwards, 2005:14), at risk of exploitation by adult (male) perpetrators. They shared an example of how a known acquaintance suffered as a consequence of friending 'a guy' on Facebook who turned out to be 'a pervert'. This narrative functioned as a 'beware' story for all the girls in a room and they acknowledged that parents got involved and that monitoring of future Facebook activity was likely if they were not careful. There was no explicit conversation about what exactly the other girl shared with the unknown male online – the details of the case and the photograph shared are unclear – however, Ashley makes a point of noting that the 'other' girl "doesn't go to [this school]," and in this way distances the girls in the room from a girl who took the risk of befriending a stranger online. The 'unknown pervert' on Facebook was only potentially a male – indicating a heteronormative risk bias. Their shared disgust and distrust of male others on Facebook could have, on one hand, put their own assumed heteronormativity at risk; however, when Ashley points out how Eva's profile primarily consists of photos of a male celebrity, who Eva notes as "hot", everyone in the room laughs, appears relieved and quickly the talk shifts to a discussion of Eva's status as 'mega fan'. The social agreement about a celebrity's attractiveness functions as a moment of levity and a quick segue into another topic.

Adolescent and teen girls are situated within a complex net of competing discursive positionings. Janice Irvine, in *Sexual Cultures and the Construction of Adolescent Identities*, argues that "in our society, adolescent sexuality is a social problem" (1994:5). As Walsh explains, "at play here is the tension between the way that the community often wishes to see young people – innocent as in non-sexual and

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in need of protection (from sex itself) – as opposed to the way young people actually are" (2005:201). The girls within this study demonstrated that they were aware of popular discourses about sexuality and what constitutes women's bodies as desirable and attractive – yet they were critical of perceived peer attempts to seek attention through desirability, lest it be judged as 'unnatural' or 'fake'. They took up modes of practising being both producers and objects of a presumed peer gaze as they took photographs together, documenting friendships but also forms of femininity and sexuality.

The girls employed highly complex strategies of maintaining control over how '(semi)public' acts of sexual performativity should be interpreted by limiting how they tagged and commented on photographs. They dismissed peer attempts to read their photographs as sexual, even when embodying forms sexual performativity. Most of the girls in the study made reference to the 'stranger danger' discourse when asked about what they liked least about Facebook, and displayed a high degree of self-protection by ensuring that they knew everyone they Facebook friended. But their negotiation of gender and sexuality was, at times, precarious and challenging. They defined serious facial expressions are 'fake', yet, found ways to carefully tip-toe (Cody, 2012) into those kinds of expressions with friends. Their shared online/offline subjectivity informed both online and offline actions and the fact that they had to employ such nuanced strategies to achieve both physical and virtual embodiment speaks to the challenges young girls face. As Shannon Mazzarella states in her introduction to *Girl Wide Web*:

> Scholars of adolescent girl's identity development have pointed out the
> need for girls to have outlets for self-expression to aid in this
> development… Mary Bentley (1999) argued for the need for girls to have

safe spaces in their lives. Specifically, she asserted that girls 'need spaces where they can know what they know and try new identities without self-censoring' (2005:5).

Within this study, girls were simultaneously playful but also explored taking up feminine body positionings for an imagined photographic viewer. They were 'having fun', but also sexually knowledgeable. They were 'hanging out' and 'doing friendship' while reproducing both dominant and alternative discourses of what girls' and women's bodies 'do'. But their actions were also constrained by New Zealand 'Tall Poppy' discourses of humility and anti-narcissism, as well as the need to distance themselves from 'perverts' and maintain safety in a highly loaded girls-as-victims-of-the-internet context.

Preteen girls inhabit both 'child' and 'adult' spaces and navigate the discourses associated with this in-between period on a moment-to-moment basis. Facebook and SNSs in particular offer girls a self-designated space for exploring aspects of femininity and sexuality in particular ways. As our cultural norms around youth have changed in the last 30 years, young people have less unsupervised time as they participate in school and family life. Stephanie, one of the girls in the study indicated that her Facebook profile is the only space that she has "utter free reign over". In a highly scrutinized time for young girls, a SNS profile may be one of the few spaces for exploring and practicing femininity and sexuality without adult surveillance.
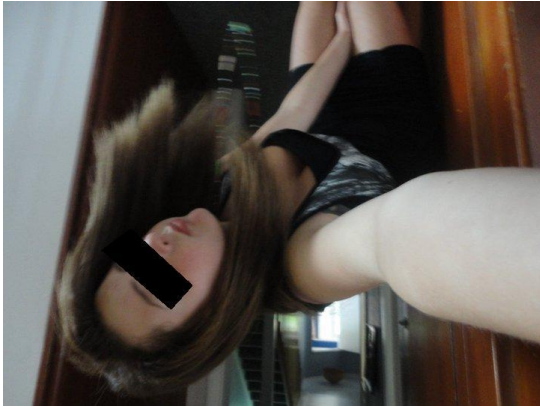
Just Goofing Off with My Dog…In My Miniskirt

As discussed earlier in this chapter, girls engaged in complex strategies to capture and share photographs with friends that were both feminine yet 'spontaneous' or 'fun'. In the focus group discussion and in the qualitative questionnaire they
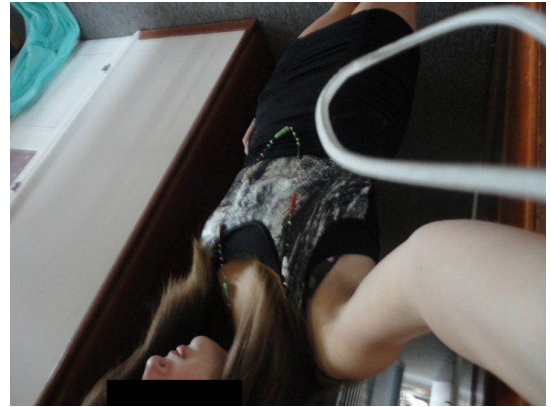
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completed, girls drew on ideas about the authenticity of 'good' photos and negatively

distanced themselves from pictures that were 'posed', 'fake', or 'stuck up'. Just as

girls used strategies to co-construct one another's subjectivities and avoided

appearing self-promoting, at times girls found individual ways of practicing femininity

with other objects that could deflect the 'seriousness' of the photo. In one of Ashley's

albums, she appears in a short skirt or dress at home in a series of pictures in front of

a full-length mirror. She posted this album without tagging herself, and posted photos

of herself upside down (Figure 16 and 17) – maybe to appear aloof or uninterested (in

herself). Next in the album, Ashley appears in a series of photos through the reflection

of the full length mirror as she snaps pictures of her dog. The pet becomes the

subject of and the reason for the photograph, and allows Ashley to pose more

conspicuously than if she were seemingly taking pictures of just herself. These

pictures are oriented right-side up (rather than the upside down pictures of herself

alone in the short skirt that precede them), and she orients her body in different

positions as she takes them (Figure 18, 19, 20 and 21). When a friend comments on

one of Ashley's photos by saying, "I like this one! pretty." Ashley responds, "I love

taking pictures of daisy. She like poses, its real funny". Ashley redirects a compliment

(and the photo) back to her dog Daisy, lest it appear that the purpose of the photos is

to showcase herself. It is clear from the context clues in this series of photos that

Ashley has gone to some effort to take photos of herself and post them online, but

does not want to seem self-promoting. Identifying the context of girl's photos – and

how they expect them to be interpreted – is especially important for researchers trying

to understand girls' online activity. If these pictures are stripped of their textual

components, there is a risk that Ashley's perception of her physical body and what she

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defines as the 'purpose' of these pictures gets stripped away. Girls in this study put a lot of effort into articulating how they expected pictures to be read by way of what they tagged, commented on and how their oriented the picture. The message becomes: "don't take this too seriously, because it was just a picture of my dog" or "we're just goofing off, having fun".
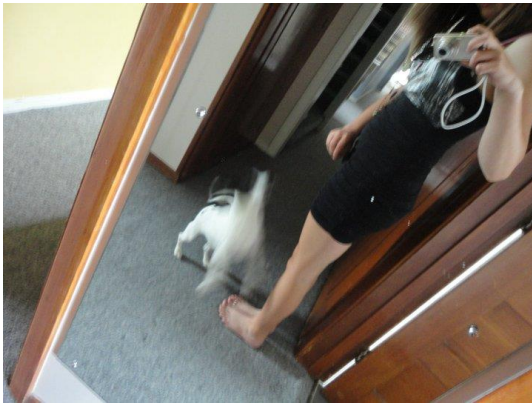
In part, this could be an indication that girls anticipate and attempt to subvert judgments about depictions of their own bodies. The observations of online stranger-danger and 'risk' by girls suggest that, as Buckingham and Bragg (2004) assert, young girls are very capable of critically evaluating media and mediated tools, such as SNSs. Girls are aware of the political discussion of 'sexualizing' media and their presumed effects on their own behavior. Maybe one of the reasons why girls in this study are quick to situate sexual performativity within photographs that can be read in diverse ways ("we were just being silly", "it was just a picture of my dog") is to avoid the moral charge that they are emulating adult sexiness or falling prey to sexualizing influences. Having a clear understanding of the 'risk' discourses that surround them, girls found creative ways to try to explore femininity and sexuality that could be read as 'safe'. This allowed them to redirect peer (and potentially adult) criticism of their photographs as 'too sexual' or 'too posed'. If their photos were indicative of sexuality, it was the fault of the viewer, not the photographs. If there was any question about the intentions of the photographs, context clues were provided to help define the photos as 'about my silly friend' or 'my dog' (such as not tagging oneself in a 'sexy' photo). In this way, girls could respond to critiques with naiveté or distancing, if necessary ('stop being such a perv'), and still safely be seen in engaged in gendered and sexual performativity by peers. This could be an indication that the girls want to explore their
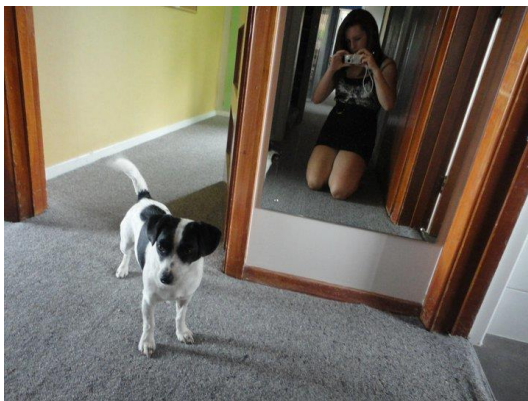
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Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

own sexual performativity, without the risk of being criticized for taking themselves too seriously or deliberately presenting themselves as sexual.

Fan Girl – My Crush on a Gay Celebrity

Not all girls in the study posted photographs of themselves. In the group I studied, there were a few girls who only had a handful of personal photos. Discussion with these girls (in the focus group) indicated that their parents limited their posting of photographs on Facebook and/or that they lacked regular internet access or the tools to post photos quickly and efficiently. Interestingly, of the four girls who had less than 10 personal photographs on Facebook, three of them suffered from static appearing profiles as a result. Without a virtual body, their online action was severely hampered; they could not (or did not) post photos of themselves hanging out with friends, did not appear to have enough photographs of themselves or others to construct the highly socially valuable 'photo edits' for friends and, in general, their accounts had less activity to comment on or engage with. This further reinforces the notion of online/offline interactive cyborg-subjectivity developed in this thesis. Girls' offline limitations had implications for online embodiment and engagement with friends. These three girls also reported in their questionnaire responses that they did not feel like they had many friends on Facebook. Observing them in the focus group discussion also revealed them to be less assertive and less engaged with the other girls in the room. It is unclear whether limitations to 'being seen' online was a reflection of their offline social status, or vice versa.

There was one notable exception to this rule. Eva, identified earlier in the focus group discussion, did not post many photographs of herself or her friends online. She

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had 5 photos of herself on her profile, a few of which had been posted by others from a social setting (school bus photo). Eva hinted in the focus group discussion that her parents may be the reason her personal photographs are limited (above). In the discussion, she begins to say that her parents limit her Facebook photos because of online risk, but she corrects herself and restates the sentence to convey more agency in relation to this decision ("that's totally why like, my parents… well, like why I don't really put many pictures of myself online). Ashley then jokes, "Yeah, Eva, you just like to put up pictures of Adam Lambert instead, ay". Eva agrees, everyone laughs and Eva indicates that Adam Lambert is "hot".

Despite Eva's low number of personal photographs, her Facebook profile was very active and included regularly uploaded photos, albums, comments from friends and wall posts. Her online experience was almost completely through a process of constructing herself as 'fan girl'. Eva purported to be a mega fan of a (presumed gay) young male singer from a popular reality talent show, and her profile page was full of celebrity photos of the singer (Adam Lambert). She regularly posted new photos of Adam and noted his 'hotness' and 'talent' – which stimulated online agreements from her friends. Ashley publicly recognized Eva's status as a fan girl in the focus group discussion and Eva was happy to agree. In addition to adding photos of her celebrity crush, Eva also created elaborate drawings of Adam, which she also posted and received comments and feedback on. The result was that her profile, essentially, her online being, felt 'present', embodied and actively engaged with through a process of fandom. This became a safe way for her to participate on Facebook, given her parents' concerns about internet safety. She was also able to construct her own heterosexuality through a constant stream of admiration and asserting her crush's

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'hotness'. In the questionnaire at the end of the study, I added a question to ask her to

elaborate on her fan status. She shared:

> I just love uploading photos of Adam Lambert. And I don't really put
> many pictures of myself online. I like uploading drawings of Adam
> because it's fun… seeing what other people think and having them know
> who I like and how much I love them. When I first heard of Adam
> Lambert, I didn't like him that much, but then he has grown on me. I like
> him and Tommy so much b/c he has a great voice, like even when he's
> not singing and Tommy is incredible on guitar. And they are both hot
> guys. (Eva)

Here, Eva mentions how much she likes having other people know how much she

loves her celebrity crush and his bandmate, Tommy. Interestingly, during the course

of the study, Adam Lambert was rumored to be homosexual and increasingly began

appearing in public with make-up, heavy eyeliner and was regularly noted as having

an androgynous performance style. Towards the end of the study, rumors began

circulating that Adam was in a relationship with his bandmate, Tommy, the guitar

player that Eva makes reference to in her follow up survey. The two made headlines

by kissing during the end of performances on tour during the time the girls participated

in my study, and the guitarist was also heavily featured in a gay rights advocacy

campaign, though he maintained that he was heterosexual. Her main crush, Adam,

did not make comments about his sexuality one way or the other during the study

(though he has since come out as gay).

Eva navigated increasing media rumors about her celebrity crush's sexuality in

complex ways. Over the course of my observation of her profile, she appeared to

expand her crush to include Tommy, the guitar player – despite the fact he was

purported to be kissing and/or in a relationship with her crush. She employed both

textual and visual homages to both men in her Facebook profile as the study went on

– saying they were both 'hot' and that she was 'so happy for them' (though she never explained *what* she was happy for). Eva's online subjectivity became possible almost exclusively through her identification of fandom and girl crush – she demonstrated regular expertise on her celebrity crush and also enacted her heterosexuality through (semi)public admiration of his attractiveness and detailed drawings of Adam's face and body. Upon the slow discovery that her celebrity crush may be gay and potentially engaging in a sexual relationship – or at the very least, sexual performativity – with his bandmate, Eva reacted not with distancing and disgust, but with attention to her crush's presumed crush. She did not view her celebrity idol's potential alternative sexuality as threatening to her own heterosexuality, and in some ways, could be seen as expanding her own subject position as a girl who found two men, and potentially two gay men in a relationship, attractive and talented.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how girls in this study embodied nuanced online gendered and sexual subjectivities. Posing, particularly as it related to direct engagement with the camera lens, or seductive eye contact, was seen negatively by the girls and as something 'other' girls did. Assertive/ non-humorous eye contact in online photographs was associated with 'trying too hard', 'being fake' and 'stuck up'. Girls avoided direct engagement with the camera in photographs where they were featured alone, however, they developed strategies for playing with direct eye contact and more provocative posing in photos with friends – such as turn-taking with 'posed' faces in dyad photographs. The girls also used other contextual cues to de-emphasize the appearance of narcissism and posing, such as avoiding tagging

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themselves in photographs that could be read as more directly engaged with teen or adult poses while simultaneously tagging their friends in the same photo (where their friends were engaged in 'silly' mannerisms such as scrunching their face or pulling their tongue). Posted photos that received the compliments of friends ("u look so great!") were re-directed towards the non-threatening friend by the recipient ("thanx. Isn't she hilarious?"). This further reinforced that the photo should only be read as 'having fun' and 'hanging out', not 'trying to hard'.

At times, girls inserted displays of sexual knowledge into photos, or played with the idea of homosexual affection between friends through simulations of kissing (with objects between lips). These photographs were always sandwiched between other less potentially charged photos, such as the friends laughing, playing in a playground or otherwise 'doing' some activity. Yet, girls never tagged themselves in these photos, suggesting that, while they were posted semi-publicly for peer review, they were not associated with photographs directly (through a link to their profiles). Male comments on the photos were disparaged and girls employed discourses of disgust to distance themselves from any potential sexual readings of these kinds of photos. Whether these photos were referential to the kind of postfeminist 'lipstick lesbian' hyper(hetero)sexual discourse, or potentially displays of sexual knowledge and potential transgression, girls were quick to police them and reinforce that they should not be interpreted in these ways.

In the case of Ashley's photos featuring her dog while she seemingly posed in front of a full length mirror, she negotiated a creative set of strategies to take pictures and be seen as feminine and potentially sexual, while asserting that the pictures were really 'about' her dog, Daisy. Even when friends made positive comments about her

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appearance – seemingly acknowledging Ashley as the subject of the photographs – Ashley redirected the attention towards her dog. In this way, there was less risk of being evaluated by peers as having 'posed' for the pictures.

There was a strong connection between participation in photo taking and photo sharing with social capital and influence, and this applied in both online and offline contexts, as girls who participated less in the focus group discussion were also less likely to post photos online or be tagged in others' photo albums. One notable exception was Eva, who managed her parent's restrictions on her personal photo sharing online through the strategy of embodying a 'fan girl' discourse online. This online identity carried over into the offline environment as well, where she became known for being a fan girl off Facebook, further reinforcing how SNS profiles are not always a reflection of an offline identity, but a citation of both online/offline subjective experience.

Chapter 6: Tweens, Gender, Sexualities and SNSs – A Conclusion

This project is situated within complicated cultural conversations about 'tweenage' girls, sexualization, media and girls use of a popular SNSs. Inspired by the work of Jackson and Vares (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d) Ringrose (2011) and others, this study focuses on girls' practices, experiences and reflections that are relevant to the debates about tweens, sexualization and representations of girls' bodies. I have outlined the contentious discussions and panic surrounding preteen girls' – particularly as they relate to claims of commodification and sexualization of girlhood femininity. The purpose of this study was not to make claims about whether or not (or how) preadolescent girls are 'sexualized' (or 'self-sexualizing'), but rather, to undertake a context-specific analysis that explores how girls navigate the culture and media they live in, including their participation on SNSs. Taking the position outlined by boyd (2009), this study represents a 'node' – a localized insight into the practices of larger cross sections of girls, discourses of sexualization and online subjectivity. This 'node' is located at the intersection of the global SNS, Facebook, and a group of preteen girls from Christchurch who use the site to explore friendship, girlhood, femininity and sexuality online/offline.

Utilizing a process of mediated ethnographic observation online, via a 'researcher as lurker' (Rutter and Smith, 2005:87) role, I observed eighteen girls (aged 12-13), who were online Facebook friends and classmates at a Christchurch intermediate school, for a period of three weeks. Loosely following a grounded theory approach to the research process, I observed girls' interactions online, captured screenshots, took extensive memos and immersed myself in 'tween' media. In

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addition to online observation, girls also filled out qualitative questionnaires about their experiences on Facebook and most of them participated in a focus group discussion at the end of the observation period. These methods were intended to access girls' reflections on issues relating to tweens, the 'sexualization of girls' and online communication via SNSs.

These different sets of research material were examined using the insights of visual ethnography and poststructuralist feminist discourse analysis. The focus was on the online practices and subject positions girls explored as they interacted online or spoke or wrote about these practices. Utilizing these theoretical frames, I was able to contextualize girls 'play' with discourses of sexuality and gender online and understand how they come to occupy complex and sometimes contradictory subject positions, depending on moment-to-moment negotiations. Additionally, as I observed how girls 'co-construct' one another's online subjectivities, I found the existing conceptualization of 'identity' within SNS research to be inadequate. I found that many authors cited Sundén's poststructuralist-informed terminology about online embodiment (and how users of computer mediated communications 'write themselves into being'), yet, tended to conflate Sundén's analysis of the online self with Goffman's (1959) much earlier discussion of 'impression management'. Researchers have discussed how users 'represent themselves' online, however, this unintentionally prioritizes the 'self' that constructs the representation and serves to reinforce modernist binaries of online/offline, physical/virtual, man/machine. Ladd (2009) has discussed how the implicit or explicit use of these binaries in SNS research can be challenged by applying a poststructuralist framework to the simultaneously enacted online/offline self. Rather than understanding identity online as a copy of or

'representation' ('the real'), it is important to consider how subject positions online and offline are citational of shared subjective experiences, and how these positions are co-produced and negotiated through discursive performances in online and offline social contexts. Like Ladd (2009), I argue for a re-imaging of the SNS 'self' within a poststructuralist framework as a way of examining how shared and interactive online/offline performances of identity come to be embodied and informed by both contexts. Within a poststructuralist understanding, the 'self' is not formed, but always 'becoming' and shifting through ongoing discursive negotiations.

My analysis resulted in a revised theory of cyborg-subjectivity – an extension of Haraway's (1991) 'cyborg' and Sundén's (2003) 'she-borg'. I use this term to refer to how girls' online and offline subject positions are both referential, mutually shaped by their simultaneous and interactive online/offline embodiment. I also argue that the 'tween' as a liminal (Cody, 2012) identity category offers potential political space for girls who are at an intersection of multiple cultural binaries (such as child/teen, innocent/sexual, naïve/knowing). Within the 'neither/both' framework associated with earlier articulations of 'the cyborg', new forms of embodiment become possible, and these positions offer the potential to disrupt hegemonic discourses. It is my assertion that preteen girls – whose identity, or 'in-betweenness' is *already* disruptive to modernist ideas of age and gender – are particularly poised to utilize their positions of simultaneous online/offline embodiment to explore, transgress, reproduce, embrace, retreat from and otherwise resist classification in binary positions – and that is precisely what girls in this study accomplished.

Girls in this study, in response to a New Zealand cultural context that prioritizes self-effacement over excessive self-promotion, found ways of 'writing each other into

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being' through the process of reciprocal social validations of friendship that were nevertheless related to hierarchies within this group. Friends used gendered discourses of familiarity and admiration in online gestures towards one another, which in turn generated approximately equal validations back towards the person who had initiated the posting of comments or images. Girls used friends to position themselves online – going so far as to reinterpret the architecture of Facebook to define themselves through their friendship network as effectively as possible. In doing so, they were also able to limit the amount of perceived self-promotion and self-disclosure online, since their identities were highly interwoven and referential within a particular social group. In the context of public concerns about online privacy and risk, and especially the vulnerability of tweens, girls' use of personal information in their profile pages was minimized through this strategy of friendship-based crafting and re-crafting of subject positions.

As girls engaged with one another on Facebook, textual and visual signifiers were generated by the SNS to produce activity and 'presence'. These signifiers were hierarchal both in terms of their social cache, and in terms of the level of embodiment that they produced. Textual engagement produced less embodied signifiers than visual ones. Photographs of girls and their friends were the most crucial ways in which social (friendship) was signaled and individual embodiment produced. In other words, photographs were most frequently used to produce active, engaged, embodied and 'alive' Facebook profiles. Personal photographs also engendered the most response from online friends and peers – they stimulated further textual and visual signifiers of friendship and subjective positioning by inviting comments, 'likes' and reciprocal acts of visual signification.

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It is also important to note that photographs were not just uploaded and shared as a way of 'representing' offline interaction and friendship; rather, girls' online engagement influenced and informed their offline production of visual signifiers of friendship and subjectivity. When spending time with one another offline, girls made efforts to document their activities in a way that allowed for virtual embodiment later. Thus, acts of friendship and subjective positioning online and offline both became referential of the shared experience(s).

Ladd (2009) has argued, in her study of older teenagers on a Danish SNS, that youth co-construct identities online, where she conceptualizes shared online/offline experience as 'identity across timescales'. I discuss the online/offline as a form of cyborg-subjectivity instead, as a way to situate the 'neither/both' frame over 'selves'. The implication is that subject positions must always be worked at, re-positioned, performed – it is grounded in neither/both contexts (online/offline, physical/virtual), and is only ever 'seen' as the performative acts that iterate from the cyborg-self are constructed, disrupted, sustained and repeated. This is illustrated in my study where girls' mediated 'selves' necessitated both online and offline interactions in order to 'be seen'. I related this to the African Zulu concept of ubuntu, where "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, 1993:46). I argue that the New Zealand girls in this study become 'persons' through the acknowledgement, interpretations and affiliations of their networked community (online/offline). Girls were seen through a peer group of 'others' who referenced, documented, produced, situated and gave (and withheld) validation for their embodiment. Peers surveyed one another's performances in a constant process of evaluating one another's subjective positions, and re-constituting their own (and others) positions. The three girls in my study who lacked offline

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documentation of friendship (such as photos of themselves with others) also suffered from the appearance of stagnation online. Likewise, these same girls contributed less to the focus group discussion – though it is unclear if the lack of engagement in one context preceded the other.

Girls in the study demonstrated significant understanding of their own 'risk' (and 'riskiness') online – indicating that they should not friend strangers (especially unknown 'guys') on Facebook. In the focus group discussion they circulated a cautionary tale about a girl who befriended an unknown male online who turned out to be 'a pervert'. The consequence of these actions were that the 'other' girl no longer had the freedom to participate in social interactions online (without surveillance by her parents). Interestingly, the narrative they circulated included the 'other' girl sending a photograph to the unknown male – the content of which was not disclosed – but which hinted at an acknowledgement of their own potential 'riskiness' as sexual becomings/beings. Girls were no only circulating a story about a 'perverted' male other, who tries to befriend 'good' girls on Facebook, but also, about what it means for their documented bodies to incite/excite danger. They understood that their bodies could be read in sexual ways – at least by 'perverted others' – and understood that displaying a certain kind of sexual performativity (or sharing any kind of embodied signifier to an unknown audience) entailed a certain degree of risk, as well as potentially critical parental and peer scrutiny.

Knowing all these complications, including the 'risk' discourses associated with being victims/vixens online, girls' had to find ways of positioning themselves carefully online while exploring different forms of representing their bodies. Under heavy peer (and potentially adult) surveillance to avoid appearing self-promoting, 'stuck up', 'too

posed' and or/engaged in 'riskiness', girls had to find ways of engaging with femininity and sexuality that could always be read as (at least) double: potentially, but not really sexy; hyperfeminine, but with tongue-and-cheek irony; about oneself, but *really* about friendship, a pet or an object. Their bodies, and by extension, their production and documentation of bodies, needed to flexible and resistant to classification. Girls in this study managed this complicated terrain through several strategic methods of self-positioning, including negotiating modes of femininity and sexuality through turn taking with friends, utilizing discourses of disgust in the face of sexual readings of their photos, as well as distancing themselves from how 'other' girls 'pose' for photographs in contrived, 'unnatural' ways.

In a period of what has been defined as 'postfeminism', Ringrose has suggested that we need to examine how girls are under pressure to "to visually display and perform a new compulsory 'disciplinary technology of sexy' (Gill, 2008) in digital environments" (2011:100-101). She asserts that girls are 'experimenting' with sexual subjectivities as much as they historically have, however, in a period of 'visual cyber culture' (Thomas, 2004), this experimentation may imply "incitement to specific, normative forms of gendered and sexualized visual self-representation, common to the postfeminist media context" (Ringrose, 2011:102). Within this context, femininity and sexual 'empowerment' has been identified as problematically fetishized and commodified (Jackson et al., 2012; Harvey and Gill, 2011). Interestingly, girls in this study struggled to find ways to position themselves directly online. Their Facebook subject positions were largely influenced and determined by the extent to which their friends 'wrote them' – a process that involved significant online/offline investment, social capital and reciprocity in moment-to-moment performative acts. In this context,

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girls in this study were surprisingly indirect with their production and documentation of 'bodies'. Perhaps because assertiveness, self-confidence and empowered self-display are now considered part and parcel to 'being sexy', girls shied away from direct eye contact in photographic documentation of themselves in portraits. Their understanding of photos of girls/women where the subject makes direct eye contact and engages in overtly feminine poses was considered 'too posed', 'fake' and 'unnatural'. It is hard to say if their resistance to a "performance of confident sexual agency" (Gill, 2008:53) is a potentially political resistance, or an indication that these girls, still 'between' childhood and teen-hood, do not yet feel comfortable engaging this kind of sexual performativity. Instead, they found ways of exploring more hegemonic modes of femininity and sexuality with strategies of diversion – a silly facial expression coupled with a more 'posed' body, a 'sexy' position next to a friend who was clearly 'taking the piss out of' the photo, a selfie (self-portrait) in front of a mirror that was 'actually' a photo of a family pet.

The question of how girls positioned 'posed' portraits as 'inauthentic' or 'fake' was an interesting one. Other researchers have discussed how users of SNS sites deride 'fake' profiles and distance themselves from 'fakesters' (boyd, 2006; Larsen, 2008). These authors describe how users define their own profiles as 'real' or 'authentic' in contrast to blatantly 'fake' profiles – where the profile pictures, name, descriptions and other identifiers are hyperbolic or fantastical (for example, where a SNS profile goes by "Minnie Mouse", or appears to be the same as a celebrity, porn star, or imagined character). It is argued that these fake profiles serve to legitimize users who consider their participation in SNSs as 'real'. In this study, girls were not commenting on the inauthenticity of other profiles, but of 'real' girls who were 'acting

fake' by posing themselves in more assertive, potentially seductive ways – particularly in regard to eye contact. The insinuation was that girls were capable of pretending to be assertive/sexy/direct/hyperfeminine, but that performances of this kind of gendered or sexual performativity was *a performance* (or at least, would be viewed as such by peers). This could be an indication that girls are suspicious of the new forms of 'empowered' femininity and sexuality, or that they are, to some degree, aware of both the impetus to perform sexual 'self-confidence' and the potential moral judgment that comes from doing so.

While girls did experiment with, or to take up what Harris' (2005) has characterized as 'play with' hegemonic ideas of femininity and sexuality, I agree with Ringrose's assessment that their "'experimentation' should not be viewed as sexually subjectifiying them only in a negative sense, since their performances can also work to disrupt conventional meanings of sexualized discourses and images in surprising ways" (2011:102). By positioning themselves and their online embodiment within a discourse of 'having fun', these girls had more space to manage how their subject positions were read – at least by peers. They policed sexual readings of their online photographs by male peers, while simultaneously finding ways to receive compliments and positive comments about the aesthetics of their appearance from female peers – all the while exercising the right to correct or redirect attention away from any perceived narcissism or 'seriousness'. Girls were able to experiment with displays of sexual knowledge, including alternative sexualities, without making claims about their own sexualities or their intended audience. For example, girls' displays of 'kissing' one another through fingers and other objects resist classification as either a form of porno-chic 'lipstick lesbianism' or homoerotic experimentation. Girls were able to

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simultaneously demonstrate awareness of these alternative sexualities and construct 'naiveté' about sexual readings of them by utilizing a form of disgust in response to male classmates' comments. Additionally, one participant was able to construct her subject position online through a 'fan girl' heterosexual admiration toward a rumored gay, male celebrity – eventually extending her crush to include his (presumed) gay partner as well. This form of gendered/sexual interest in two, alleged gay and involved celebrities disrupts a traditional understanding of a passive heteronormative crush. By admiring both men's 'hotness' and talent as a literal form of online embodiment, she crafted an online (and offline) identity that focused around her attraction to a gay couple that defined her as unique among her friendship group.

While I carefully and critically consider how 'empowered' sexuality and media literate 'agency' have both been called into question, I assert that girls in this study had some opportunities to disrupt binaries of gender and sex. Their resistance to 'posing', and acknowledgement that doing so was optional, hints at critical opportunities for resistance. However, there are other questions that should be addressed in further research. The 'sexualization of girls' discourse, in its many forms, perpetuates unparalleled focus on girls' bodies, practices and actions in contrast to boys' bodies and practices which also should be the focus of research. In the online context in particular, concerns about girls on SNSs and other websites serves to limit their participation in mediated environments, or potentially subjects them to substantial self and other surveillance. Girls understood that parents, authority figures and peers had the ability to call their online actions into question and they internalized this scrutiny. Highly aware of their perceived vulnerability as victims/vixens online, they framed their discussion of male 'strangers' online as an ever-present risk. They understood that

their photographs could be read in certain ways by 'perverts' and the moral of their 'beware' story in the focus group was that it was the girl (not the 'pervert') who suffered from relinquished freedom as a consequence to sharing herself 'too much' with others.

Despite this social scrutiny, girls did find ways of circumventing social judgments and 'playing' with femininity and sexuality, but the presumed energy that must be involved in managing their subject positions is problematic. Several times during this project I asked myself what it would mean to consider the extent that boys manage their online subjectivity? How much attention must boys give to 'becoming' online? Does it require a co-construction through delicate friendship validations, signification and gestures? Are they able to play with gender and sexuality under less scrutiny? Quite possibly. While I do not want to imply that preteen boys are not under enormous pressure to embody hegemonic forms of masculinity, it was hard for me to imagine a 12-13 year old boy in Christchurch carefully documenting his offline experience as means to become embodied online. I had a difficult time envisioning him considering the extent to which his photos should be tagged/ not tagged, flipped right-side-up or upside down, 'edited' with particularized words and symbols for a friend, or otherwise fraught over. I consider the efforts girls expended on these activities were gender specific.

I argue that the political potential of the cyborg experience – as a localized, gendered resistance to classification – is demonstrated through the research material presented and analyzed in this thesis. The 'tweenage' has already been analyzed as a site of disruption of ideas about what childhood is and how children's agency and political involvement should be considered. It would seem then, by extension that the 'tween' online – especially in SNSs – is well poised to disrupt (as well as reproduce)

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ideas about online/offline binaries. Through a process of cyborg-subjectivity, where girls are 'neither/both' children/teens, online/offline, knowledgeable/naïve, sexual/asexual, new ideas about old discourses may become available. In as much as the landscape is unpredictable, scary, freeing and/or provokes our concerns and moral reactions, there are also substantial opportunities for girls to use these social spaces to re-conceptualize girldhood and sexuality. In the meantime, a concerted effort to continue to research girls' positions and voices in discussions about them can avoid the discursive protectionism that limits their political involvement. As we better understand the "pushes and pulls" (Renold and Ringrose, 2011) of girls' practices and their understandings of expectations of them, we will be more prepared to mobilize cultural conversations in useful ways.

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Appendix A: Principal/Teacher Information Sheet

Erin Martin
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140

Dear [Teacher or Principal],

I am currently a M.A. candidate in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Canterbury. Working under the supervision of Dr. Tiina Vares and Associate Professor Rosemary Du Plessis, I am undertaking a thesis research project on the use of social networking websites. I would like to visit [your or such-in-such's] Year 8 classrooms to request the participation of girls aged 12 – 13 in this study. Girls' involvement would, of course, be subject to permission from their parents. Please see below for more detail about this research.

Project Title: *The Use of Social Networking Websites by Preteen New Zealand Girls*
Project Aim:
Social networking websites have rapidly become very popular among young people in New Zealand and internationally. This project seeks to explore how 12 – 13 year old girls use these websites (such as Bebo and Facebook). As a researcher, would like to have access to girl's online web-profiles to see how they use these websites: the photos they post, how they describe themselves, how they engage with friends and interact with others. I hope to contribute to a current gap in research about how young New Zealanders set up and use profiles on social networking websites.

This research is being conducted as part of a wider Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund project that seeks to investigate firsthand how girls use and interact with a variety of media. The completed research results will be written up and made widely available and ultimately make a significant contribution to national and international information about young people's engagement with media.

Your involvement:
I am looking for 5 – 15 girls to participate in this research project. I would like the opportunity to give a brief 15 minute presentation to the girls in [your or such-n-such's] Year 8 classroom. This presentation would outline the project I am conducting and would ask girls to consider participating in the research by allowing me temporary access to their social networking profile. The girls from [your or this] classroom will be given an Information and Consent Packet to take home and discuss with their parents. Girls and parents/ guardians will be provided with full information about the purpose of the research. Those who are interested in participating will have to have signed consent from their parent/guardian. Girls who do not already have an online profile with a social networking website will not be eligible to participate.

Girls and Parents/ Guardians who consent to participate in the project will be asked to return their consent forms [to you/ the teacher] within a few days. Once the forms have been returned, I would like to meet briefly with girls who have agreed to participate (approximately 10 minutes). During this meeting, I will re-explain the project, answer any questions, and

Appendix A: Principal/Teacher Information Sheet

ask participating girls to sign an assent form, which is their agreement to participate. The assent form includes the same information as the parent consent form, written in an age-appropriate manner. The assent form will also ask girls for the following information:

- The social networking website they use
- Their name on the social networking website (which occasionally differs from their legal name)
- The email address to which their profile is linked
- General contact information (for follow up)

This information will **only** be used to "search" for the girls at the listed social networking website they have identified. As the researcher, I will have a simplified "researcher online profile" and will ask for the participating girls to accept an online "friendship request". Once the girls accept this "friendship request", they will be able to see my researcher profile and I will be able to see their online profile, much like their other friends on these websites.

I will be viewing girls' online profiles as a "friend" for a temporary three week period. During this time, I will view their online profile daily, in a similar way to how friends view their page. During these viewings, I will take note of what girls post on their profiles, their photos, their comments and interactions with friends online. I will keep this information securely as research data. At the end of the three week period, I will terminate the online "friendship" and remove my researcher profile from the website, which will restore girls' online privacy. Likewise, the girls and parents/ guardians will be told that they can terminate the online "friendship" at any time during the project, which will remove my access to their online profile.

All information (photos, comments, descriptions, etc) gathered during the research will be considered strictly confidential and will be rigorously protected and securely stored at the University of Canterbury. Names and identifying information will be accessible only to me and my research supervisors.

Following the three week period, the girls will be asked to participate in a one hour focus group discussion about how girls use social websites – but it would **not** discuss the particulars of girls' personal profiles. Girls do not have to participate in the discussion. The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded (voices only) and later transcribed (this information will be made clear to both parents and students). To ensure security, audio-recordings and files that have identifying information would be kept in a securely locked location at the University of Canterbury and raw data will be destroyed after 5 years.

The results of this project will be analysed alongside the results of other media research conducted for this Marsden funded project. The information gathered will be considered confidential. Any publication as a result of this research will not include any identifying information about girls, parents, teachers or schools. The final thesis produced from this research will be accessible as a public document in the University of Canterbury library database. Once the research is complete, suitable (and age-appropriate) summaries of the results will be offered to any interested parents, students and teachers.

In total, your involvement would include allowing me access to [such-in-such's / your classroom] to give a short presentation and helping me facilitate receipt of any parent consent forms and contact information of participating girls. Lastly, involvement would include helping foster a follow-up 1 hour focus group discussion by providing an in-school

location at a day/ time convenient to you, the girls participating in this research and their parents. Ultimately, your contribution would be instrumental in furthering the research about young people in New Zealand.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact me, or my M.A. supervisors, Dr. Tiina Vares (Tel. 03 364 7969 or tiina.vares@canterbury.ac.nz) and Associate Professor Rosemary Du Plessis (Tel. 03 364 6878 or rosemary.duplessis@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please note that this project has been *reviewed and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Many Thanks,

Erin Martin
M.A. Candidate, School of Social and Political Sciences
edm28@student.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

Erin Martin
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140

Dear [Parent/ Guardian],

I am currently a M.A. candidate in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Canterbury. Working under the supervision of Dr. Tiina Vares and Associate Professor Rosemary Du Plessis, I am undertaking a thesis research project on the use of social networking websites. With the permission of [School Principal Name] and [Teacher Name], I gave a brief presentation in your daughter's Year 8 classroom. I am looking for girls aged 12-13 who might be interested in participating in a research study. Please see below for more detail about this research.

Project Title: *The Use of Social Networking Websites by Preteen New Zealand Girls*
Project Aim:
Social networking websites have rapidly become very popular among young people in New Zealand and internationally. This project seeks to explore how 12 – 13 year old girls use these websites (such as Bebo and Facebook). As a researcher, would like to have access to girl's online web-profiles to see how they use these websites: the photos they post, how they describe themselves, how they engage with friends and interact with others. I hope to contribute to a current gap in research about how young New Zealanders set up and use profiles on social networking websites.

This research is being conducted as part of a wider Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund project that seeks to investigate firsthand how girls use and interact with a variety of media. The completed research results will be written up and made widely available and ultimately make a significant contribution to national and international information about young people's engagement with media.

I am looking for girls aged 12 – 13 who are interested in letting me view their online profile on a social networking website, like Bebo or Facebook. Girls who do not already have an online profile on a social site will not be eligible to participate.

Your daughter's involvement:
I would like to invite your daughter to participate in this research project. Girls who want to participate must have their parent's or guardian's consent. If they want to participate and you agree to their involvement in this study, please sign the **Consent Form** provided with this letter.

During my presentation in [Teachers Name]'s classroom, I explained the project to girls in class and answered questions. I have also sent home a short brochure with your daughter, with information about the research.   Before agreeing to allow your daughter to participate, please feel welcome to ask any questions. Participation in this project is voluntary.

Girls and Parents/ Guardians who consent to participate in the project will be asked to return their consent forms to [Teachers Name] by [date]. After [teacher's name] has received all

Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

the parent consent forms, I will meet with all the girls who plan to participate. During this brief meeting, I will re-explain the project, answer questions and ask the girls to sign an assent form, which is their agreement to be involved. The assent form has the same information as the consent form included with this letter (written in an age-appropriate manner). In the meeting, I will also ask girls for the following information:

- The social networking website she uses (such as Facebook, Bebo, or similar website)
- The name or username your daughter uses on the social networking website (which occasionally differs from a legal name)
- The email address your daughter used to set up her online profile
- General contact information (for follow up)

This information would **only** be used to "search" for your daughter's profile at the listed social networking website she uses. As the researcher, I will have a simplified "researcher online profile" and will ask your daughter to accept an online "friendship request". Once she accepts this "friendship request", she will be able to see my researcher profile and I will be able to see her online profile, the same way her other friends do on these websites.

If you and your daughter agree to her participation in this research, I will be viewing your daughter's online profile as a "friend" for a temporary three week period. During this time, I will view her profile page daily, in a similar way to how friends view her page. During these viewings, I will take note of what she posts on her profile, her photos, her comments and how she interacts with friends online. I will keep this information securely as research data. At the end of the three week period, I will terminate the online "friendship" and remove my researcher profile from the website, which will restore your daughter's online privacy.

In the event that your daughter changes her mind about participating in the project, she can choose to terminate the online "friendship" at any time during the project. This will remove my access to her profile. You or your daughter can contact me at any time with questions or concerns.

All information (photos, comments, descriptions, etc) gathered during the research will be considered strictly confidential and will be rigorously protected and securely stored at the University of Canterbury. Names and identifying information will be accessible only to me and my research supervisors.

After the three week period, I will ask your daughter and other girls who have allowed me to view their profiles to participate in a one hour discussion about their use of online websites. The discussion will take place at school, during a time deemed convenient by [Teacher's name]. The discussion will focus on how girls use online websites – but it will **not** discuss the particulars of any girls' personal profiles. Girls do not have to participate in the discussion. This discussion will be audio-recorded (voices only) and later transcribed. To ensure security, audio-recordings and files that have identifying information would be kept in a securely locked location at the University of Canterbury and raw data will be destroyed after 5 years.

The results of this project will be analysed alongside the results of other media research conducted for this Marsden funded project. The information gathered will be strictly confidential. Any publication as a result of this research will not include any identifying information about girls, parents, teachers or schools. The final thesis produced from this research will be accessible as a public document in the University of Canterbury library

Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

database. Once the research is complete, suitable (and age-appropriate) summaries of the results will be offered to you and your daughter. Ultimately, your contribution would be instrumental in furthering the research about young people in New Zealand.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact me, or my M.A. supervisors, Dr. Tiina Vares (Tel. 03 364 7969 or tiina.vares@canterbury.ac.nz) and Associate Professor Rosemary Du Plessis (Tel. 03 364 6878 or rosemary.duplessis@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please note that this project has been *reviewed and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Many Thanks,

Erin Martin
M.A. Candidate
School of Social and Political Sciences
edm28@student.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix C: Girls' Information Brochure

what if I add you as my friend but then change my mind?

No problem! If you change your mind about letting me see your profile any time during the 3 weeks, all you have to do is delete me as an online friend. You can also email me and say you don't want to participate any more.

what if I don't have a profile on a social website?

Unfortunately, you will not be able to participate. I need to find girls who *already* have a profile on Facebook, Bebo, etc. This project is only looking at websites that are used to create personal profiles. I am not looking at game websites like Club Penguin. You cannot create a profile just to participate in this project.

how do I contact you?

If you have any further questions regarding this research, please contact:

Erin Martin (Researcher)
Email: edm28@student.canterbury.ac.nz
Phone: 021 036 8210

Tiina Vares (Supervisor)
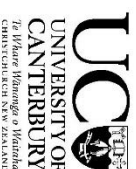Email: tiina.vares@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone: (03) 364 7969

Rosemary Du Plessis (Supervisor)
rosemary.duplessis@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone: (03) 364 6878

what happens to the info you see online or hear during our discussion?

First of all, it gets written down so I have a copy of it. That way I can find out the things girls like about social websites and how they use them. I'll use the information to write a thesis (or report) for my university. When I write about girls' profiles or the group discussion, I will **not** be using real names or other identifying information. No one will know that you wrote or said certain things. No photos will be used in my thesis or any publication based on this research.

I might use the research to talk at conferences or write articles for academic journals. There may also be small write-ups in the news media. Don't worry, no individual girl or school will ever be identified! The final thesis produced from this research will be accessible as a public document in the UC library database.

I will keep in touch with you and your family throughout the project. This means you can easily ask me for information at any time and it also means I can give you summary updates about the main themes we find in the research.

The use of social networking websites by nz girls

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Appendix C: Girls' Information Brochure

hello!

This brochure is to tell you about a research project so you can decide whether you would like to take part. Please read it & think about whether or not you would like to be involved!

the research

Social networking websites (like Bebo and Facebook) have become very popular among young people in New Zealand. Even though we know that social websites have a lot of users, we are still learning about what young people like to do online. I am doing a research project to find out how girls aged 12-13 use websites like Bebo & Facebook to create profiles, post photos, talk about their likes & interests & keep in touch with friends.

I am looking for girls who are interested in sharing their online profiles from Bebo & Facebook with me. I would also like to have a group discussion with girls who use social websites to find out what they like about them, what they dislike and their experiences of participating in this project.

who is doing the research?

This is a small research project done by myself, Erin Martin, for an MA degree at the University of Canterbury. This project will also add to a larger study about girls & media conducted by researchers in Wellington and Christchurch.

My university supervisors (or people who oversee my work and this project) are Tiina Vares & Rosemary Du Plessis.

what is involved if I decide to participate?

This project has 2 steps. You can choose to be involved in both steps, **or** just step 1.

Step 1: If you would like to share your online profile with me, the first thing you need to do is chat with your parents about it. If they agree to let you participate, then they will need to fill out the **Parent Consent Form.** This form needs to be returned to teacher's name] by [date]. After that, I will meet with all the girls who are going to participate. In this meeting, I'll ask you to sign an assent form, which is your agreement to participate. I'll also ask you for some basic info so that I can find your profile online (at Bebo, Facebook, etc). I will use this info to find your profile & send a "friendship request".

Once you have accepted my friendship request, I will look at your profile the same way all your other online friends do. I will see your photos, comments & friends. I will then be able to explore how girls design their profiles & like to use social websites. I will be looking at your online friend for 3 weeks. During that time I will look at your profile about once a day, the same way most friends do.

After 3 weeks, I will "de-friend" you & delete my researcher account. (So I'll only be looking at your profile for 3 weeks).

It's important that your other online friends know that I'll be looking at your profile – since I'll be able to see what they post. I'll post comments on your page to make sure your friends know that I'm looking at your profile.

Step 2: After the 3 week period is over, I will arrange a time where all the participating girls can get together for a 1 hour group discussion. The discussion will take part at school.

The discussion will be a way for me to meet with everyone in person & talk about how everyone felt about the project. We will be talking about how girls like to use social websites generally. We will **not** be talking about anything specific I had seen on anyone's profile.

It is important to know that the discussion would be audio-recorded (voices only) so that I can have a copy of what was said for my project. I will be the only person who will be able to hear the recording & it will be kept safe & private.

who are you going to share my profile stuff with?

No one! Only I will be able to see your profile. The info, comments, & photos I see on your profile will be kept completely confidential. That means I will **not** be showing things from your profile to teachers, parents or friends.

School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
New Zealand
www.canterbury.ac.nz

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

The Use of Social Networking Websites by Preteen New Zealand Girls

➢ I have read and understood the description of the above-named project.

➢ I understand that by signing this form, I consent to allow my child, _____, to participate in this project.

➢ I understand that her participation in this project is voluntary.

➢ I understand that the researcher, Erin Martin, will "befriend" my daughter on the social website my daughter uses and will be able to view my daughter's online profile for a temporary 3-week period.

➢ I understand that my daughter may participate in the optional focus group discussion following the 3-week period, and that the discussion will be audio-recorded (voices only) for the sole purpose of academic analysis.

➢ I understand that my daughter may change her mind about participating in the project at any point. My daughter has the right to terminate the online friendship, refuse to participate in the group discussion and/or may contact the researcher to say she does not want to be involved any further.

➢ I understand that there may be academic publications based on the results of this project, and also understand that the identity of my daughter will be strictly confidential and preserved by the use the pseudonyms and disguising of any personal information. I also understand that the final thesis produced from this research will be accessible as a public document in the University of Canterbury library database.

➢ I understand that all identifying information about my daughter will be kept in a securely locked location – accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisors– at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years' time.

➢ I understand that I can contact the researcher with questions at any time, and ask for a summary of the results of this project as it becomes available.

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

> ➤ I note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Name - please print: _____

Name of daughter (participant):_____

Signature:

Date:

find my profile form

My name is:_____

The social networking website I use is (circle): Bebo   Facebook
Other:_____

The name or username I use on that site is:

_____

The email address I used to create my profile
is:_____

I am _____ years old.

My street address is:

_____

The email I check regularly is:

_____

My phone number is: _____

Please read these points and sign at the end of the form. Once you have done
this, your teacher will give this form to me, Erin Martin, the researcher doing
this project. I will find your online profile within the next week and ask for you
to accept a friendship request. My profile name will be "Erin Martin" – I will not
go by anything else, so only add me as a friend if you see that name.

- o   I got and read the description of this project (*The Use of Social Networking Websites
  by NZ Girls*) in a brochure given to me.

- o   I had a chance to talk to my parent/s (or guardian) about this project.

- o   I understand that by signing this form, I am agreeing to be online friends with the
  researcher, Erin Martin, for a 3 week period of time.   During that time, the researcher
  will be able to see my online profile the same way my other friends do.

Appendix E: Participant Assent Form

- o I understand that I am also agreeing to take part in a group discussion scheduled after the 3 week period. The group discussion will be audio-recorded (voices only) so that the researcher can use the tape for her project.

- o I understand that I don't have to be a part of this research project if I don't want to be. If I change my mind about participating, I can end the online friendship with the researcher at any time, or change my mind about taking part in the group discussion. I know that I can also email the researcher and tell her I don't want to be involved.

- o I understand that the researcher will occasionally post a comment on my profile to ensure my other online friends know that a researcher is looking at my page during the 3-week period. (*"Hello, friends of [participants' name]! Please be aware that I have been given permission to view [participants' name] profile for a research project at the University of Canterbury until [end date]. If you have any questions about this research, please view my profile page at [link to researcher profile]. Thanks!"*)

- o I understand that there may be some academic journals or papers that get written about the results of this project. I also understand that anything from my profile (photos, comments, etc) and things I say in the discussion will be protected by the researcher, and no one will know who I am in the publications.

- o I understand that all the information that identifies me (like the tape recording of my voice, or stuff from my online profile) will be kept in a secure and locked location – accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisors – at the University of Canterbury and it will be destroyed after five years' time for my safety.

- o I understand that I can contact the researcher with questions at any time, and that I will be offered a summary of the results of this project when it is available. I also understand that the final thesis (or report) produced from this research will be accessible as a public document in the University of Canterbury library database.

- o I have been told that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (the group at the university that makes sure all projects are done safely and securely).

Name - please print: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank you

Thank you so much for letting me see your profile! I had so much fun seeing different profile pages and checking out photos. I have just a few questions I'm asking all the girls who participated to answer. Remember that answering these questions is optional – you only have to answer what you want to. I would love to get your feedback on the questions below.

PROFILE
1. Do you feel like your Facebook profile does a good job of representing your personality and interests?

2. When you look at someone else's profile what can you tell about them?

3. What's the first thing you look at on someone's profile when you become their Facebook friend, and why?

4. What do you think about the new Facebook profile layout?

5. What do you like best about your own Facebook profile?

FRIENDS
1. Are your closest friends on Facebook?

2. What do you like best about interacting with friends on Facebook? Least?

3. What do you like best about seeing friends/ classmates profiles? Least?

4. I noticed that a lot of girls make their best friends known on their profile (by listing them as family members or by including them in their profile picture). Is this something you like to do? Why or why not?

5. Several girls in my study have boyfriends or their relationship is listed on Facebook. Why do you think about people who have a relationship known on Facebook?

PHOTOS
1. What do you like about seeing other people's photos? Are their types of photos you look for or like most? Least?

2. It seems like editing photos for friends is pretty common. Do you do edits for other people? Has someone ever edited a photo for you?

3. What do you like or dislike about edited photos?

4. How do you decide what to make your profile picture?

5. A lot of girls in my study post photos of themselves goofing off with friends – taking lots of pictures in funny poses or with funny faces. What do you think about these kinds of photos?

6. I noticed when I was looking at photos that sometimes a girl will ask a friend to delete a photo that's posted of them. Why? Does the friend usually delete it?

7. How do you decide what photos to post in your albums? How do you decide which photos of yourself to put up?

8. Some girls like to put up photos of celebrities. Why do you think that's a common thing to do?

GENERAL FACEBOOK STUFF
1. Do you play any games or anything on Facebook? If so, which ones do you play and why?

2. It seems like a lot of girls do things like take quizzes. Have you done those before? What do you like or dislike about them?

3. It seemed like some girls spend a lot of time "liking" things (pages or interests) on Facebook. What do you think about that? What makes you decide to want to 'like' special pages?

4. What do you like best about Facebook?

5. What do you like least about Facebook?

Anything else you would like to share about your Facebook experiences or friendships online?

Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Consent/Assent Process
Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am very interested to hear about your ideas, feelings and reflections about your Facebook profiles and activity. I'm going to review a few things that were included on your Assent forms before we begin. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask at any time.

- *The purpose of this study is to learn how 12-13 year old girls in New Zealand use websites like Facebook to create profiles, post photos, talk about their lives and engage with friends online.*

- *The information you give me is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in the focus group.*

- *I would like to voice-record the focus group so that I can make sure to capture all the thoughts, opinions, and ideas I hear in the discussion. No names will be attached to the focus groups and the tapes will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.*

- *You may refuse to answer any question or leave from the discussion at any time.*

- *I understand how important it is that information shared in our discussion is kept private and confidential. I ask that all of you girls respect each other's confidentiality as well.*

- *If you have any questions now or after our discussion, you can always contact me. You should all have my email address and phone number. If you do not have, I have extra copies here.*

Introduction:
1. Welcome
2. Explanation of the process

About focus groups
- I am trying to learn from you
- There is no 'right answer' – just be honest about your thoughts
- Not trying to achieve consensus or agreement; just gathering ideas, reflections
- In this project, I am using online observation ('friending you all'), as well as the follow up questionnaire and this focus group discussion to find out more about how you use Facebook. The reason for using all of these tools is that I can get more in-depth information.

Logistics
- Focus group will last about one hour
- Feel free to move around

- Where is the bathroom? Exit?
- Help yourself to refreshments
- If you would like to leave, there is an area in the next room with magazines available

3. Ground Rules
Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.
- Try not to interrupt one another.
- Information provided in the focus group should be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations
- Turn off cell phones if possible
- Have fun

4. Turn on Voice Recorder
5. Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started, and address those questions.
6. Introductions

Questions:
1. Let's start the discussion by talking about why you all are on Facebook (or have Facebook profiles)?
2. What are some things that you like about Facebook? What about are some things you dislike or like least?
3. How do you make choices about what to put online or on your profile?
4. What kind of things do you do most on Facebook (games? comments? pictures? celebrities?)?
5. What kind of things do you like to look at on other people's profiles?
6. How do you make choices about who to be friends with on Facebook?
7. How often do you check Facebook? Where from?
8. Do your parents or other adults check your Facebook or online activities?
9. Do you think your Facebook profile is a good representation or view of your interests, activities and friendships? Why or why not?
10. What are some of the best parts of being able to interact with friends/classmates online? What are the worst parts?
11. Is there a difference between how boys act on Facebook and girls?
12. What are your thoughts about listing your relationships on Facebook (like best friends, boyfriends, etc.)?
13. Let's talk a little bit about photos on Facebook. What kinds of photos do girls like to post?
14. When/how do girls take pictures to post? How often do you post?
15. What about photos taken with friends?
16. What happens when friends disagree about what should be on Facebook?
17. Is there anything else you want to share? Do you girls have any other questions for each other about Facebook?

Appendix H: Components of Researcher Profile

Please note that a screenshot of my researcher Facebook profile was not included to protect the confidentiality of participants (who appear on the 'friends list'). The components of the researcher profile, are list below.

<u>Profile picture (Figure 22):</u>

Figure 22

<u>'About Me' Section (public):</u>
I'm Erin and I'm doing a research project as an M.A. candidate at the University of Canterbury. My project is called: The Use of Social Networking Websites by NZ Girls. In this project, I'm "be-friending" 12-13 year old girls in Christchurch who have a profile on Facebook. With their parents' permission, I'm checking out what young girls like to do online -- how they create and change their profiles, post pics, talk about their likes/ interests and keep in touch with their friends.

I'll be online friends with each girl for 3 weeks. During that time, I'll be able to view their profile just like their other friends would. This allows me to be able to see how girls like to design their profiles and use social websites.

Other online friends of girls "friending" me on Facebook can rest assured that all the information I see online is considered strictly confidential. That means I won't be sharing any of the pictures, comments or posts I see online with anyone (teachers,

Appendix H: Components of Researcher Profile

parents, etc). When I write my final thesis (or report) for my University, I won't be using any identifying information. All photos, comments, posts, etc. gathered during this research will be rigorously protected.

Anyone can contact me with questions about this project at any time. My email is edm28@canterbury.ac.nz. This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and the College of Arts.

Other pictures included in a single photo album (Figures 23, 24, 25, 26):

Figure 23

Figure 24

Figure 25

Figure 26

Appendix I: Wall Post Disclaimer to Girls' Nonparticipating Friends

The following message was posted on each participants' Facebook wall as part of an

effort to inform her nonparticipating Facebook friends that I would be able to see posts

and comments on her profile during the period of ethnographic observation.

"Hello, friends of [participants' name]! Please be aware that I have been given
permission to view [participants' name] profile for a research project at the University
of Canterbury until [end date]. I will be able to see comments/ photos on this page
until then. If you have any questions about this research, please view my profile
page at [link to researcher profile] or contact me. Thanks!"