WATCHING TELEVISION WITH FRIENDS: TWEEN GIRLS' INCLUSION OF

TELEVISUAL MATERIAL IN FRIENDSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

Watching Television with Friends: Tween Girls' Inclusion of Televisual Material in

Friendship

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This qualitative work examines the role of tween live-action television shows in the

friendships of four tween girls, providing insight into the use of televisual material in

peer interactions. Over the course of one year and with the use of a video camera, I

recorded, observed, hung out and watched television with the girls in the informal setting

of a friend's house. I found that friendship informs and filters understandings and use of

tween television in daily conversations with friends. Using Erving Goffman's theory of

facework as a starting point, I introduce a new theoretical framework called friendship

work to locate, examine, and understand how friendship is enacted on a granular level.

Friendship work considers how an individual positions herself for her own needs before

acknowledging the needs of her friends, and is concerned with both emotive effort and

social impact. Through group television viewings, participation in television themed

games, and the creation of webisodes, the girls strengthen, maintain, and diminish

previously established bonds. I show how characters, narratives, and shows create a

shared televisual lexicon the girls use to challenge and support each other, (re)aligning

with and separating from friends to fulfill individual wants. I found that before television

could be discussed, the girls negotiated their social relationships, and once established,

conversation about televisual material is filtered through their friendships.

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"In 5, 4, 3, 2…" (Freddie, *iCarly*.)

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iIntroduce[1]

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Lao Tzu

You have the right to be *seen*, *heard*, and *respected* as a citizen of the
world… *You* have the right to your *opinions* and *feelings* even if others
don't agree with them.

Nickelodeon's Declaration of Kids' Rights

Understandings about television continue to shift as interest has moved from
audience demographic studies to in-depth examinations of the incorporation of television
into people's lives. "Research needs to move away from thinking about 'effects' and
isolated demographic features of audiences. It needs to locate television in culture as
something that is part of people's usual everyday way of going about the business of
fitting in, having a bit of fun, understanding the way that the world and the people in it
work" (Griffiths and Machin 2003:159). Griffiths and Machin and others (cf. Fiske 2010)
recognize the much-needed movement in television scholarship from examining
(oftentimes, quantitatively) effects of viewing to exploring the incorporation of television
into cultural understanding. From discussions with viewers about individual experiences
of television watching, including engagement with narratives and characters in a recently
shifting medium, a larger picture emerges of the role of television in people's daily lives.
The child audience has been and continues to be of interest to reformers and scholars
alike in this realm. Despite the ubiquity of digital mobile devices in the lives of children
and families, television remains the somewhat surprising favored technological medium

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[1] The use of "i" prior to chapter header is a nod to Nickelodeon's *iCarly*, which heavily
influenced the design of this project.

for children between eight and eleven years old (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts 2010; Common Sense Media 2011).

Children, like adults, do not watch television in disconnected and isolated settings. Instead, children integrate working knowledge from other aspects of their lives into their viewing experience, including especially insights from relationships with peers and family alike. Relationship and friendship formation has been a recent interest in the field of childhood studies and psychology. Much of the literature examines social norms and social standings in clique-like groups at school. Conversely, little research has examined the maintenance of friendships, specifically in non-structured locations, such as at home. There is a large timeframe to consider for how children interact with peers and friends outside of school, as the school day lasts about seven hours.

Combining the need to understand how children interpret television created for them, and the role of television in tweens' everyday relationships, this project explores how a long-standing group of tween girl friends discuss, interpret, and use live-action tween shows in their friendship. I highlight the ways in which the girls interact with each other, specifically addressing the ways that television figures into the mediating, strengthening and diminishing of their friendships, both during viewing and post-viewing while engaging in a variety of television-centered activities. The girls' friendships – both individual and as a group – inform their understanding of tween television shows and aspects of these show and of their viewing of these show informs their friendships. I argue that during television viewing, in the company of friends, and after watching together, the girls enact friendship in various ways informing their understandings of and concerns about shows they watch, concluding that conversations surrounding shows, both

informal interactions during viewing, and semi-formal ones pre- and post-viewing, are influenced by the strong bonds of friendship.

Brief History of Children's Television

Children's television, according to Lynn Spigel (2001), was introduced in the early 1950s. Beloved and successful radio serials were moved to the new visual medium, and "hosted" cartoon shows were introduced. Spigel argues that children's television shows during this era were filled with liminal characters: individuals who were not quite children and not quite adults, which held appeal for children. It was these types of shows, often cartoons, which shaped early children's television. Simultaneously, research during the early years of children's television was concerned primarily on viewing habits and choices children made regarding television shows (Luke 1990). Children's television shows during this time had a limited shelf life, low production value, and were often locally produced (Spigel 1998).

In the 1960s, children's television comprised primarily of animation, which proved to be more cost effective; while shows were more time consuming to produce, they could be used for longer periods of time, extending their value. During this time, research on the child and television focused primarily on the psychological and physical effects of viewing, such as the effects of violent programming on children's behavior. According to Carmen Luke, research in this era was, on different levels, reflective of the "uses and gratifications" models and the "effects" paradigm (1990:164). This research provides the framework for most contemporary understandings of children's viewing habits.

Child specific television continued to evolve with programs mirroring general concerns about children in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. As suburbanization took hold of America, new concerns about children's well-being and education emerged (Spigel 1998; Hendershot 1999). One specific concern was that children in urban areas were less prepared for school than those in suburban areas. In an attempt to lessen the education gap, children's television took it upon itself to provide children with educational programming with shows like *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. As Heather Hendershot (1999) has shown, *Sesame Street*, among other educational shows, were popular with children, particularly when shows adopted a more high end, advertising type format, similar to favored non-educational children's shows. These television programs helped to assuage adult concerns about the widening education gap, though it could not account for children in both urban and suburban areas intently watching. Suburban children continued to expand their educational capital with these shows, maintaining the education gap. Preschool educational television persists today and continues to add to viewers' educational capital.

However, it was the 1980s that saw perhaps the most dramatic of all the changes in children's television. A decade after the successful introduction of *Sesame Street*, an old anxiety for reformers, parents, and experts reemerged: advertising to children. Cartoons became thirty-minute advertisements for children's toys and products. Advocacy groups like Action for Children's Television petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to increase the number of educational hours of children's television programming and restrict the number of minutes of advertising during children's programming on broadcast channels (Hendershot 1999; Engelhardt

1986). Prior to the enactment of increased educational programming and restrictive advertising minutes, the television industry, including children's television, had been semi-self regulatory, anticipating and responding positively to complaints of advocacy groups and the FCC (Luke; Butsch 2000). With new laws in place, broadcast networks came under close examination for what they offered their child audiences.

On the heels of the fallout from increased scrutiny of advertising to children, a new network, originally named Pinwheel, began to air television specifically for children throughout the entire day in 1979 (Hendershot 2004). Borrowing content from Canada and Asia, Pinwheel focused on showing prosocial television for children that moved beyond the educational benefits of *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers*. Pinwheel, later renamed Nickelodeon, became the first network for children and as a cable network, Nickelodeon was free to brand itself as it wanted. Under the leadership of Geraldine Laybourne, Nickelodeon's second president, Nickelodeon became the first network for kids, not just in name, but in ratings as well (Jenkins 2004). Nickelodeon offered children both original and borrowed content between the hours of 6 am and 8 pm that was both prosocial and non-violent. According to Hendershot, Nickelodeon won favor with parents by offering non-violent programming, which included not allowing violent toy advertisements during the commercials and Nickelodeon won over children by focusing on and making fun of the adult/child divide and using basic "gross" humor that kids respond well to.

The creation of Nickelodeon marked the onset of a new era in children's television. Nickelodeon strove to create original programming that featured children as well as gained insight into the child experience and perception through focus groups. The

introduction of the first network for children should not be underestimated; Nickelodeon proved to the industry that children as an audience should not be overlooked. The success of Nickelodeon in the mid-1980s, securing its spot with children in the United States, coincided with the new sociology of childhood and focus on children as active agents in their own world (James and Prout 1997). The 1980s marks the beginning of changing notions about children and childhood, both in practice, as seen by Nickelodeon's success, and in academic arenas.

The relationship children have had with television since its inception in the 1950s has paralleled interests and opinions of children within the larger population. Specified programming for children as well as research on children and television reflect the political and social climate of the time. While never being a fix for children and childhood problems, television has contributed to understanding and recognition of children and childhood as a special audience with particular interests and preferences while also problematizing the figure of "the child" as audience member and as consumer. The brief history presented here focuses on the evolution of children's television as it relates to the present study and is not comprehensive. However, the history of children's television is relevant to contemporary shows and the shifts that children's television – as an industry as well as in practice – has experienced. Many new shows and genres reflect reformers' intents and moral panics.

Scope of Children's Television Studies

In the 1980s, as focus moved from television "effects" and audience demographic studies to more in-depth understandings of the role of television culture in daily life, scholars interested in children and television also began to shift attention from the effects

of television on children to how children engage with television, including narrative, characters, and cultural artifacts derived from television culture. Prominent topics included gaining understanding on what television meant to children (Palmer 1986), the creation and process of television literacy (Buckingham 1993), and later, how televisual culture can empower children (Fisherkeller 2011). This section overviews these topics as they relate to the present study.

Children Understand Television

Children bring personal experience, predispositions, and knowledge into the experience of viewing television. As television audience members, children "react to, think, feel, [and] create meanings" (Lemish 2006:3). They do not watch television in a bubble without opinion or perspective. Patricia Palmer (1986) focuses on how children understand and define television. In her ethnographic approach to children's meaning-making of television, Palmer discovers that television holds multiple positions in children's lives depending on who they watch television with, what other activities they may be engaged in, and what shows are available for viewing. Children use narrative arcs from individual shows, characters, and the ability to use televisual material in play as boundaries for television viewing and the inclusion of television into life. One factor that is particularly important to the children in her study is who is present during viewing. For example, children co-viewing with siblings (or cousins) of a similar age are more likely to engage in conversation and play with the television content. Similarly, children in her study who have less authority in viewing choices when in the presence of parents or other adults are less likely to incorporate televisual material into their play or actively engage in viewing. Palmer concludes that children's talk and behavior about television, both

during viewing and away from it, can offer insight into how children make meaning from television, though she recommends that more research be conducted in the realm of co-viewing, specifically referencing peer viewing.

In an exploration into the child's perspective of (mostly adult) television, David Buckingham (1993) offers insight into how children talk about television. Through a qualitative approach Buckingham explores children's understanding of television narrative, looking specifically to expand the understanding of media literacy. Using a variety of British and American television programs popular at the time, Buckingham looks at how children recreate and understand television narratives. Within the same study, Buckingham also examines the re-creation of narratives from then popular movies. Buckingham learns that children focus on particular aspects of narrative and characters in their re-creations, which are most often things children identify with, suggesting that the material children deem most important, and subsequently make meaning from, are narratives most salient to them. Unfortunately Buckingham does not touch on what meanings the children make of these narratives, as his primary interest is in how children became media literate.

Despite Buckingham's attempts to narrow the viewing experience to emerging media literacy, children do not watch television in isolation or without intention. According to Dafna Lemish, children on a global level interact with television in active ways. Citing concepts such as "making meanings out of its messages" and "analyzing and criticizing" television shows, Lemish brings attention to the idea that children view television with a purpose (37). Other researchers, including Palmer, Buckingham, and Fisherkeller, agree that children do view with intention and use previous experience to

shape viewing. By being discriminative about viewing children place television into a category of activity they can actively be sought out. However, this is not to say that children will not watch television for the sake of watching television, program be damned, as Palmer points out. Instead, as both Lemish and Palmer show, children participate in activities other than actual television viewing when "watching" programs that are not of interest to them such as homework, playing with siblings, or participating in solitary activities like coloring.

Being sometimes selective in viewing choices, children can more actively create interest and meaning in televisual material. Children make and draw meaning from television shows, fitting narratives and characters from programs into their own world and assigning importance based on interest and knowledge. Palmer shows that in play children use televisual material that can easily fit into games. For example, in games of cops and robbers, children will borrow names from popular media heroes and villains to be the cops and robbers, and incorporate popular narratives into the chase game. Similarly, Jackie Marsh and Julia Bishop (2013) find that on contemporary playgrounds in the UK, children utilize narratives and characters to (re-)enact popular scenes. In these instances, children adopt easily accessible media into their play, often changing and re-creating intended meanings when sharing with their friends.

Children make meaning from and with television in various ways and in a variety of settings. Palmer argues that children's talk, both during and away from viewing, offers insight into how children understand, assign importance, and create meaning from television. She uses the example of children watching news programs with family members and how conversations of more realistic news (versus sensationalism) provide

children opportunities to solidify representations of reality (versus fiction) on the screen, and how "realistic" presentations may still be inaccurate. Furthermore, Palmer explains that conversations between peers shape individual tastes in television culture, citing that peers have incredible influence in favored shows. Children use televisual material in conversation to expand their understandings of the world. Amongst peers, television gets used to strengthen relationships and share in common culture.

JoEllen Fisherkeller (1997) argues that adolescents use television to empower themselves. Adolescents identify with, and sometimes embody, television characters who are in more powerful positions than the individuals find themselves in. They will exhibit behaviors from their favored characters into their daily lives in hopes of gaining control and power in powerless situations. Fisherkeller argues that adolescents seek out powerful characters in times of powerlessness, but does not account for identification with powerless or externally perceived bad characters. Despite this, Fisherkeller contributes one concrete way in which adolescents use television in relation to their own behavior; as a model for empowerment. Interestingly, the role of television empowerment has been somewhat neglected for younger children. Content analysis and quantitative studies show increases in "empowering female characters," but has not fully explored how children engage with these characters (Jennings 2014; Duvall 2010; Myers 2013). One notable exception is work from Nancy Jennings, discussed below.

Despite scholarship that has theoretically focused on what children may do and how they may incorporate television into their life, little empirical research has explored the relationship children have with television on a daily basis. Instead, current literature often focuses on the educational needs and uses (Marsh 1999; Dyson 1997), literacy

(Buckingham 1993; Willett 2008), and the way in which television influences aggressive and violent behavior (Kirsh 2011). Literature rarely focuses on children's *use* and *understanding* of television in their daily lives, including the function of live-action television shows that are produced specifically for them. Simultaneously, it can be argued that children's television has undergone an evolution from explicitly moralistic and educational narratives to emotional and friendly ones. Self-identified children's networks like Nickelodeon and Disney reflect this shift specifically in press releases for new live-action television shows (see below). Research on children and television has yet to consider the role of these shows in children's lives, including how they are viewed and discussed with peers.

It is clear from scholarship surrounding children and television that television provides a basis for cultural exchange. What remains unclear is how children view television with peers and same aged siblings or how this can influence meaning making and understanding. Perhaps more importantly, scholarship does not differentiate television genre, ignoring the differences in "children's shows" that exist, nor does it often consider children's views on shows made specifically for them. As self-identified children's networks like Nickelodeon and Disney continue to grow, research needs to account for the new breadth of choices children have, and consider how children view and interact with programming specifically for them. Currently, research that surrounds these self-identified children's networks often focus on pre-school children's educational television (cf. Daniel R. Anderson's 2004 discussion on the creation of Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*) or adult themes present in children's cartoons (e.g., Hendershot 2004). The focus on educational television and cartoons is reflective of anxieties that question the

efficacy of educational television as well as children's access to adult themes via television. However, it disregards one major function of television: to entertain. Scholarship on children's television should consider a child centric approach, one that recognizes the complex relationships between child-viewers and child networks.

Tween Television and Media: Intersection and Engagement

Television shows allow viewers to identify with characters, narrative, and genre. As children's television has shifted, and more emphasis is put on smaller, more marketable demographics, niche audiences within children's television have emerged. Children's television is no longer categorized by generalized age categories, such as pre-school aged children and teenagers, but each audience category has been further broken down to create smaller demographics and increase the ability to target said audiences. One television demographic that has emerged in conjunction with consumer efforts is the category of the tween.

The term "tween" refers to children between the ages of approximately eight and eleven years old. Marketers who introduced the term and wanted to direct their efforts at children in this age group argue "[…] the defining characteristic of tweens is their 'split personality' which toggles between kid behaviors and attitudes, and those of a teenager" (Sigel, Coffey, and Livingston 2001:4). Previously referred to as "pre-teens," tweens are situated as prepubescent but no longer a young child, at an "in between" age, grappling with "'wanting to grow up' teen culture and 'wanting the security of childhood'" (Sigel, Coffey, and Livingston; Buckingham 2007; Mitchell & Reid Walsh 2005:3). As a marketing demographic, tweens reach for teenage objects while clinging to toys from childhood. However, the use of "tween" has become more commonplace, and in recent

years, scholars have also adopted it (Sigel, Coffey, & Livingston; Buckingham 2007).

Literature found in both marketing and childhood studies finds the tween at a stage in her

or his life, but more often her, wanting to fit in. Within academia, both the term tween

and the group have been examined in relation to sexuality and clothing (Cook & Kaiser

2004), girlhood studies (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh), and identity (Willett 2008). In previous

years, the tween demographic has become of interest to children's television networks.

Self-identified children's networks, such as Nickelodeon and Disney,[2] are

immensely interested in the tween demographic. Tweens have pocket money and weigh

in on purchases for themselves thus securing advertisement money for the network

(Banet-Weiser 2007). Simultaneously, and winning the parent vote, networks create

tween friendly shows that include "tween problems," which can offer reconciliation for

common problems that arise for this age group. Press releases for recent television

sensations like *iCarly* (2007-2012), *Victorious* (2010-2013), *Good Luck Charlie* (2010-

2014), and *Jessie* (2011-present) all include language that references the tween. For

example, *iCarly's* press release explains *iCarly* as "[a] show within a show, *iCarly*

follows Carly Shay and her two best friends, Sam and Freddie, as they create a webcast

for and about kids their age while grappling with everyday *tween* problems and

adventures" (*iCarly* Press Release; emphasis added). Networks are actively seeking this

audience and working to include their perspective and view on television. Despite the

intentional marketing and inclusion of this audience, there is surprisingly little research

examining *how* tween viewers understand, mediate, and use these shows in their lives,

specifically in their relationships with peers.

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[2] Though Nickelodeon abides by the 8-11 year old rule that comprises the tween demographic, Disney
extends tweenhood to kids up to the age of 14 (Disney Channel Fact Sheet).

Tween television is almost exclusively aimed at girls between the ages of seven and eleven who want to be viewed as separate from babies, but are not quite ready for teenagedom. Tween television is "aspirational, focusing on characters a bit older than viewers" (Werts, 2006, p. G1 in Jennings 2014:9). Tween viewers can latch onto the characters and narratives and find similarities in their lives, not just relying on the shows for aspirational aspects. Instead, they incorporate their own experience into their viewing. According to Jennings, tween television shows offer "stories that resonated with their audience. The sitcoms were "real" fiction for them-not cartoons, but stories with actors portraying experiences similar to the viewers. [Girls] could identify with the characters and their stories, and since the lead characters were strong females, that made them even more appealing" (9). The shows both Werts and Jennings are referring to are live-action shows made available for tween girls through networks like Nickelodeon and Disney, shows that are at the core of the present study. These shows have been predominately examined through content analysis, ignoring the human experience and integration of televisual material into life.

The tween live-action television genre provides a location to understand how girls make use of television created specifically with them in mind. As a genre, tween live-action shows give viewers the opportunity to seek similarities between themselves and the characters on screen. Though many of these shows include a high belief in a different reality, the research presented here shows that the girls still found enough similarities between the screen and their life that they identified with shows, characters, and narratives. Similarly, in her book, Jennings explores how tween girls bring fictional television characters into their lives. Using a variety of qualitative methods, Jennings

surveys and interviews six eleven year old girls to examine how parasocial relationships created with fictional television characters impacts and reflects understandings of friendships with peers. Using Vandergrift's (1996) "Model of the Female Voices in Youth Literature," Jennings analyzes interviews with the girls focusing on themes of community, agency, and self-expression. Jennings concludes that girls create parasocial relationships with characters on live-action tween shows that are reminiscent of real life peer relationships.

Socio-culturally, and of importance to the present study, tweens – both demographically and as an audience – are of interest because they are just becoming aware of forces outside the family, namely friends. Tween girls are at a unique crossroads in their lives; no longer the girl child, who is viewed as being "babyish," she is also not yet the girl teenager, a stage that exudes "coolness" (Willett 2011; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh). The tween girls[3] who participated in the present study felt the pressures of being both a young child and the desire to move towards adolescence. However, given this ambiguous life stage, the girls often grasped and reached for whichever stage was most advantageous for their situation. For example, in chapter 3, Ashley stretches her experience towards teenagedom by touting the freedom to watch *Degrassi*, a show rated for teenagers. Meanwhile, Brittany loved cartoons, and clings to the imaginary and make belief of young children, while her peers often denigrated them. The girls in the present study actually admonished being called a tween despite an awareness that demographically (and for marketing purposes) they were one. Instead, they referred to themselves as kids, indicating that the weight felt by being called a tween could be alleviated by an even more ambiguous term.

[3] The girls are introduced in the next chapter: "Watching Television and Doing Childhood Studies."

Children's Popular Culture as Shared Culture

Many scholars have looked at the role of popular culture and children, particularly in the realm of school. Allison Pugh, in *Longing and Belonging*, explores children's access and consumption of particular popular culture items elevates or resigns them within their clique or among their peers. However, like Pugh, much of this research focuses on children's behavior within schools. Few researchers have moved to the home or non-school locations to further understand and complicate the role of popular culture as shared culture.

Merris Griffiths and David Machin explore the symbolic culture of children through advertising, looking specifically to determine how children remember and situate television advertisements within their worlds. Griffiths and Machin argue that television shows are a common currency and point of reference for children within their conversations about the advertisements. However, they argue that more research needs to be done on how this shared culture may look within the realm of children's television and what the role of peers may be in relation to this shared, symbolic culture. As previously mentioned, there is a lack of research and scholarship on children's viewing television with siblings and peers. Griffiths and Machin suggest that the symbolic, shared culture found within the advertisements could be expanded and found within children's programming in general.

Rebekah Willett (2011) examines "preteen" girls' use of popular music within performance of two cliques in a UK playground. Through music, these groups of girls create different types dances and performances. In both groups, some of the knowledge about particular songs and dance moves are learned directly from other girls in the group.

It was through music, and the popular culture surrounding it, that these girls performed pseudo-music videos and performances, exemplifying the need for this type of shared culture. The girls who are not permitted to watch certain types of music videos or shows at home are not ridiculed by those in their clique, but are instead brought into the group through explanations of the videos and songs.

The studies examined here provide insight into the ways in which studies about popular culture have explored the idea of shared culture. Children's television has lacked an understanding in shared culture. In the following sections, I propose my dissertation to examine the role of children's programming in tween girls' lives, paying particular attention to the use of television as shared culture in the negotiation of friendship.

Friendships and Peer Culture

Peer friendships are an important topic to consider, particularly within the tween demographic. Around the age of eight, when a child is in third grade, she begins to recognize the importance of friendships with peers. At this age, tweens begin to separate from the family unit to a social world with peers due to a shift in activity engagement from disorganized pretend play to organized sport and just hanging out (Gifford-Smith and Brownwell 2003). Though outside forces, such as family and school, influence peers relationships, individuals begin to seek out their own relationships and independence from the family unit. This shift, which occurs both inside and outside the classroom, has been noted, but not examined in depth. Instead, friendship is more often examined from a quantifiable lens such as looking for predictors to determine best outcomes for children and influences that effect long term well-being (Newcomb and Bagwell 1996). With focus primarily on long-term outcomes and effects, friendship becomes something easily

measured. However, like children, friendship is messy. Correlational studies and predictors only provide one view of friendship, often removing humanistic qualities and individual interpretation. The present study examines friendship from a socio-cultural perspective, parsing out and exploring different factors that contribute to the creation and maintenance of friendship amongst a group of four tween girls.

Children's Friendships

Friendship is multi-dimensional with different facets emphasized at different times in the course of an individual's life. Friendship can be defined as the state of being friends with another, but detailed, nuanced definitions, including what constitutes a friend, becomes contextual for individuals. Friendship status – acquaintances or good – is dependent upon previous experiences between friends, and an individual's own experience with other friends in life. However, one of the strongest characteristics of friendships, particularly for children and new relationships, is spending time together (Hartup 1993; Newcomb and Bagwell 1995). As previously mentioned, tweens begin to spend increasing amounts of time with peers starting in third grade, which can create strong bonds of friendship.

Friends exhibit a range of behaviors and emotions within their relationships that forges a sense of intimacy. Robert Hays (1984) argues there are four important behaviors in friendship: (1) companionship (the sharing of experiences together), (2) consideration/utility (friend as helper, sometimes expressed through concern), (3) communication and self-disclosure (sharing about self and confiding in another), and (4) affection (expression of emotional bonds). These behaviors contribute to senses of intimacy and closeness, but for tweens these dimensions may exhibit in a variety of ways.

Companionship is the basis for tweens' friendships, spending much of their time together in school and increasing time outside of school. Consideration and recognition of utility in others is another important aspect of tween friendships, particularly when a friend is in need, whether the situation is fighting with another friend, bullying, or in need of something else. During the tween years, children begin to seek emotional support outside the family, relying on the support of friends and peers (Gifford-Smith and Brownwell). Finally, tweens are quite adept at expressing emotional bonds with each other, again in the face of "danger." However, self-disclosure can be problematic for tweens for fear of persecution and a need to fit in, but can simultaneously provide the much-needed important emotional security for tweens.

For children, friendship is an important aspect of their life. Adler and Adler (1998) argue that, "Friends provide children with a means of entertainment, a source of feedback, a feeling of belonging, and the foundation of identity" (115). Simultaneously, Gifford-Smith and Brownwell, citing Sullivan (1953), argue that friendships provide a social mirror for what is acceptable and appropriate behavior in interactions. Children rely on each other to mitigate responses and reactions, and as Adler and Adler claim, for feedback on appropriateness. For example, in the present study, conversation about parental enforced television relationships increased anxiety for Sylvia, who experiences the most extreme television rules, and she looks to Ashley for guidance and acceptance in discussing and sharing her rules. Acceptance within a peer group can be a tenuous endeavor and children can rely on peers to understand what is acceptable.

Friendship offers one the ability to socialize, interact, and explore boundaries of relationships. One way children do this is through the construction of norms and valued

identities in groups (Kyratzis 2004). Throughout the study the girls constructed, debated, and negotiated the norms of their group. They relied on previous experience with each other and the incorporation of new knowledge and experiences to expand their relationships with each other. What makes this unique is they did so outside the classroom and away from institutional settings. Furthermore, the group identity and structure can also be refined through conflict, which may ebb into the girls' friendships inside the schoolyard (Maynard 1985). Disputes, fights, and negative interactions amongst children contribute to the stability of friendships. Both Brouwyn Davies (1982) and Marjorie Goodwin (1998) argue that children use disputes to test boundaries of friendship and to construct social order. Participation in minor squabbles allows children to exert control and authority in situations, allowing them agency and freedom to express themselves. Douglas Maynard argues that children may use adult-formulated rules to incorporate power into peer interactions. For example, in chapter four, Ashley insists on making a serious web show episode. Her claim to make something "serious" is reflective of school terminology, wherein students are expected to take something "seriously." Simultaneously, her linguistic choice emphasizes the need to take the play within which they were engaging "seriously" and not make it appear insincere. Instances like these, where friends use accepted "norms" of behavior, create tensions that need to be worked out, and in doing so, strengthen friendships. These moments, when accepted by peers, can also contribute to social hierarchy, using group position to dictate outcomes.

Peer Cultures

Children's peer cultures are one location that has been examined qualitatively by scholars, focusing on meaning making and cultural transmission. William Corsaro (1997)

argues that there are two dominant themes to childhood culture: communal sharing and the need to have control over their environment. These two aspects have been examined in schools and formal settings for children (cf. Adler & Adler; Pugh), but few have moved outside structural aspects of children's lives, namely how childhood culture functions in relationships and in daily life outside school and extracurricular activities, especially for elementary aged children. In this dissertation, I examine the role of television in previously established friendships. To do so, I must first contextualize the role of friendships in tweens lives.

Scholars argue that the creation of peer culture is influenced by five main factors (Adler & Adler; Corsaro; Eckert 2000). Though the girls created their own peer culture within the study, several considerations – gender identity, romantic exploration, and ethnic identification – were irrelevant to this creation of their peer culture. Despite this, all five factors are considered in relation to the girls' peer culture. The first consideration is the construction of a gender identity. In the present study, the inclusion of the peer group was dependent on the girls previously having a close friendship, resulting in an all girls group. This group was reflective of the girls' primary friendship group at school, confirming that gender is an important factor in their friendship group. Boys, as discussed in chapter four, were intentionally excluded from their playtime. The second aspect for the creation of peer culture, the exploration of romantic relationships, was irrelevant to the present study, indicating that for younger tween (eight and nine year olds) peer groups, romantic relationships is not an issue. The girls claimed to be too young to be seriously interested in boys. The third feature, which is also an aspect of peer culture Corsaro argues, is the resistance of adult culture. Research on this factor often argues that

children resist adult culture to create an almost counter culture. Corsaro argues that peer culture is in opposition to adult enforced rules, playing with rules to create a distorted culture from the intended adult culture. The girls who participated in this study sometimes actively resisted adult culture, but more often incorporated pieces of adult culture that were of value to them, like favoring adult shows. Resisting adult rules is more reflective of peer culture in institutional settings, like in school. The fourth contribution, ethnic identification, was not apparent in the present study. Only Tiffany actively identified with her Latina ethnicity, but only during one-on-one sessions or in the presence of family. She did not avoid conversations about ethnicity, but there were few opportunities to discuss it. Amy Kyratzis (2004) argues the fifth consideration for the creation of children's peer culture: inclusion and power in peer groups. Much of the literature on children's peer culture relies on the exploration of inclusion and exclusion in peer groups, as well as the power structure within groups. In the present study, the girls both included and excluded each other in various conversations, making references to the role of power in their friendships. The features of peer culture mentioned here attempt to be representative of a variety of settings for children's peer culture. Unfortunately, when examining peer culture in a single location – such as the school or outside of school – it is hard to hit all of the points that constitute peer culture. Furthermore, few have even attempted to try to examine all of the features in a single setting, or in-depth. Instead, and like the present study, a single feature of peer culture has been studied in depth.

Peer culture includes how individuals discuss and give importance to a variety of topics, which includes televisual material. JoEllen Fisherkeller (2011) argues that adolescents watch the same shows as their friends so as to share the material in a

"symbolic exchange." She argues that when friends use television material in play they identify themselves as a like-minded group of peers which (subtly) includes individual preferences. Many scholars argue that popular culture, particularly television programming and music, but also products and merchandise tie-ins, provide a shared culture among children (cf. Dyson 1997; Tobin 2004; Pugh 2009; Willett 2011). This was also true for the present study.

Chapter Summaries

The next chapter, "Watching Television and Doing Childhood Studies," provides an overview of the methods used in the present study. Using a child-centric approach, relying heavily on the girls' interactions with and about television, this chapter emphasizes the need for child-centric methodologies to understand, contextualize and represent children's opinions and perspectives on television. The theoretical paradigm is also introduced, which argues the importance of centralizing and contextualizing children's lives. Finally this chapter also introduces the girl participants in this study.

Chapter two, "The Role of Friendships in Television Viewing and Hanging Out," provides the framework for the present study. It showcases the girls' friendships and interactions through a lens influenced by Goffman, Pugh and (to an extent) Hochschild. Friendship work has been defined in relation to other important social work that is a part of children's lives. Within friendship work, interactions are granularly examined to understand how girls cultivate and diminish close friendships in *group* settings. In an effort to be succinct, the same day's research has been used throughout this chapter. The chapter closes with a brief examination of the progression of friendship.

"Television is Just Like," chapter three, uses the lens of friendship to examine how the girls determined what is (un)acceptable when discussing television in relation to peers. The focus remains on how the girls navigate their friendships in discussing television, themselves, and peers. This chapter extends Pugh's idea of scrip, which she uses to explore children's concepts of dignity. In the present study, how the girls use of scrip to maintain and diminish relationships is explored.

Chapter four, "Televisual Play," explores two main aspects of play in relation to television content. Boundaries of what the girls considered play is introduced before providing an overview of play studies as a whole. Mimetic play, a theory of how children re-create in play, is used to explore the girls' play episodes. Grounded in examples of the girls' play with television during viewing as well as play with an *iCarly* kit, this chapter examines the influences of players' expectations of the play in conjunction with the play type (goal-oriented play or process as play). The chapter concludes with a re-focus on the need to divide mimetic play and how friendship work is inhibited and encouraged in particular types of play.

Finally, the conclusion reframes and refocuses how the girls' group experiences can be understood within the larger context of tween lives. The question of how friendship work can be used in other settings is addressed. The conclusion reflects on the role of television in peer relationships and what it can tell us about the lived tween experience.

Watching Television and Doing Childhood Studies

Ashley: Do you want to watch *Good Luck Charlie*? (Points to Sylvia.) *Good Luck Charlie*?

Tiffany: Uh, sure.

Sylvia shakes her head.

Ashley: *Jessie*?

Sylvia: Umm. [I'm n]ot allowed to watch it.

Ashley: No. We watched that [unclear if referring to *Jessie* or something on screen] last time.

Sylvia: Oh, but there's -

Ashley: *Dog with a Blog*?

Sylvia (shrugging): I don't really care what we watch, unless I'm [not] allowed to watch it.

Ashley: *A.N.T. Farm*? No. I hate *A.N.T. Farm*.

Tiffany: Can we do *Good Luck Charlie*?

Ashley: No... Because [Sylvia] is here. We have to all agree on something. *Austin & Ally*?

Tiffany: No.

Ashley: *Dog with a Blog*?

Tiffany: No.

Ashley: Disney Junior?

Tiffany: No!

Ashley: *Doc McStuffins*?

Tiffany and Sylvia: No!

Ashley: *Fishhooks*? No. I don't really like cartoon shows.

…

Sylvia: Well there's a new *Jessie* [episode].

…

Ashley: [The episode is] "Why do foils fall in love?" Do you want to do that one or no?

Sylvia: I didn't get to see the whole one.

Ashley: Okay. Okay. One at a time.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Tiffany: Yeah. Can we watch this one?

The above vignette makes reference to several important aspects of the present study, including the use of a childhood studies approach to engage a peer group of tween girl friends in discussions about television. This interaction highlights the emphasis placed on the girls' television choices and their influence on the present study, which begins to contextualize girls' television viewing together, and in doing so, recognizes the importance of allowing the girls to choose television shows that are relevant and of interest to them. The girls were asked to negotiate television viewing as they would if I, the adult researcher, was not there. Their viewing was constructed for the purpose of research, and therefore negotiations for show viewing are slightly contrived, nevertheless they reveal something of how the girls watch television together.   The interest for this dissertation stemmed from a frustration that both the childhood studies and television studies literature failed to examine the role of friendship in children's television viewing. It was clear from my interactions as a caretaker of one of the girls (discussed below) that most often that viewing television shows – and by extension, the meaning making arising around viewing – often happened as a group. Co-viewing, in turn, provided occasion for conversation about not only what they view but also how they viewed together – what one might refer to as their "televisual culture" (Fiske 2002). To begin the inquiry into television as a co-viewing practice among children, I utilized an extant social group of four girls[1] (Ashley, Brittany, Sylvia, and Tiffany), one of whom (Ashley) I had a significantly close relationship with as her babysitter for over three years prior to the

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.

onset of research. Over the course of about a year, I watched television with the girls,

both as a group and individually, interviewed their parents about tween television shows,

and played television themed games with the girls. Through this inquiry, it became

evident that the girls' relationships with each other, and, at times, with me, were more

important than the act of viewing itself.

This chapter reviews the methodological approach and theoretical paradigm used

to frame the girls' interactions and experiences in relation to television viewing as a

group before turning to the intended and actual process of research. The goal of the

present study was to understand how a group of tween girls who shared a strong

friendship prior talked about television after watching shows together and in the process,

re-created and mediated their friendships through the televisual material, managing their

understandings of television through friendship work. This research, including the use of

a childhood studies approach and lens, was influenced by scholars who examined the role

of television in relation to children's experiences, such as Patricia Palmer (1986) who

sought to understand how children made sense of television and David Buckingham

(1993) who wanted to make sense of how children talked about television. Additionally, I

gained insight from research by the Singers (2009) who examined the role of television in

relation to children's imagination, seeking to determine the relationship between

psychological development and the influence of television on children's imagination.

Hodge and Tripp (1986) specifically focused on how children understood and

distinguished "real" from "unreal" events show on television from a linguistic discursive

perspective. JoEllen Fisherkeller (2011) provides valuable insight into how adolescents

use television characters as empowerment devices in their own lives, particularly during

times they feel powerless. However, with the exception of Palmer, these approaches and

studies fail to examine children's experiences *during* viewing, instead relying on recall of

television shows or observation of the incorporation of television into other experience.

Furthermore, none of the scholarship addresses children viewing television *with* friends.

Many of the scholars, including Palmer and Buckingham, advocate for research on

friendship and television viewing. Influenced by this work, and recognizing the value of a

childhood studies qualitative approach, this study seeks to contextualize the girls'

television viewing together.

Qualitatively Researching Children

As a group, children have been studied by a variety of scholars and disciplines. As

a discipline, childhood studies has been most notably recognized since the 1980s.[2]

Allison James and Alan Prout (1997), in their groundbreaking book, *Constructing and*

Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood,

argue for the "new sociology of childhood" wherein a paradigm shift occurs to recognize

that children are worthy subjects of research in their own right including an acceptance

that childhood as a social construct and therefore a variable for social analysis. They

promote a qualitative, if not wholly ethnographic, approach to understand childhood, as

anthropology has shown this method to do well in understanding cultural creation and

meaning (18).

James and Prout outline six tenets to the "new sociology of childhood" including

the (1) recognition of childhood as a social construct with local norms; (2) childhood is a

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[2] There is some debate on the "new childhood studies." Many disciplines, including psychology and anthropology, have included children in research and studies. However, one defining aspect of contemporary childhood studies is the emphasis on the inclusion of children separate from adults. For a review of these debates, please see Chris Jenks' *Childhood* (2008), Psychology Press.

variable for social analysis; and (3) children's social relationships and culture are worthy of studying in their own right, separate from adults. These three tenets in particular informed and guided the present study. First, it must be acknowledged that the data and stories presented here occurred within the particular context of middle class homes in the Delaware Valley when certain tween television shows were popular. Over time, the shows may change, and this study represents an illustration of a particular moment in these girls' lives. Second, I took seriously what I studied. I spent time with these four girls and gave them the courtesy and respect necessary to form strong mutual bonds. Much of our time spent together was silly with a lot of laughter. On occasion one or more girls felt left out, angry, or frustrated. I responded to their behavior and emotions as I would an adult. The subject matter discussed, television, was perhaps more important to me than to them, but it was my interest in this aspect of their world that validated the positions, culture, and our relationship during the research period. Finally, the subject of this dissertation reflects the importance of friendship in the girls' lives, thus respecting the creation and importance placed on those relationships. This seriousness, born out of the tenets James and Prout tout, guides this dissertation first and foremost.

Qualitative Approaches to Children's Experiences

The strong program of childhood studies has focused on qualitative and ethnographic work with the idea of gaining access to children's worlds and their voices. This is in opposition to presuming meaning and importance from an adult view. For example, in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), Margaret Mead ethnographically explores the upbringing of adolescents in Samoa, with a particular focus on dating culture and sexuality norms. Allison Pugh, in *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and*

Consumer Culture (2009), through participant-observation, interviews, and other ethnographic techniques, investigates how children situate themselves when, with peers, they lack a particular commodity. She further examines how children create an economy of dignity, saving face (and dignity) when confronted for lacking. Finally, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Lareau, 2003) considers the intricate relationship between parenting style and class. To varying degrees and for differing reasons, each of these qualitative, ethnographic works seeks to elevate the child's perspective and point of view about a particular issue or topic. Each of these authors, as well as others (cf., Jones 2010; Cheney 2008; Burr 2006; Thorne 1993; Bluebond-Langner 1980), successfully position "the child" or "childhood" in relation to a larger social phenomenon. As James and Prout argue, children are receptive to the ethnographic method and using a qualitative approach provides an opportunity to delve deep into issues related to children and childhood.

Finally, understanding children's television and children's understanding of television has been qualitatively examined. Patricia Palmer (1986) investigates what television means to children through the use of focus groups and in home observations, framing how children understand the meaning of television. In *Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy* (1993), David Buckingham uses small focus groups to examine how children discuss television amongst themselves. His primary interest is in *how* children talk about television and understand it as a medium. In Palmer's study, children are contextualized in their home and through their family including sibling viewing. Conversely, the children in Buckingham's study are similar in age, but had no previous relationship or experience together. Though viewing is an

intentional aspect of Palmer's study, Buckingham relies on children's memory of shows. The majority of shows referenced in both studies were adult shows with the exception of cartoons.

Inspired by previous scholarly qualitative research, and frustrated by the lack of inclusion of friends in television studies, this study seeks to contextualize a group of four "tween" girl friends' who watch television shows together. Through the use of observation, games and activities created to elicit discussion about television shows, and group viewing, this study investigates how a group of four girls watch television together, what sense they make from it, and what role television shows plays in their friendships. It should be mentioned that friendship was not the original focus of this study, but crystallized its importance through the months of hanging out with the girls, both inside the research context and outside it, in informal settings. Discovering the importance of the girls' friendship, and the role television shows played with in it, was happenstance, but no less magical.

The rest of this chapter examines the process by which this study was carried out. It provides general guidelines on how this research was conducted, particularly with respect to the influence the participants had on the execution of activities and questions asked in field. First, there is a discussion on accessing child populations before briefly introducing the girls. The section that follows that reviews the mechanics of watching television with tween girls, using a video camera with them, and the television themed games used. The chapter concludes with a discussion on doing research *with* children and how Ashley emerged as a kid researcher.

Accessing Child Populations

In gaining insight to children's experiences, both in institutions and in the home, scholars sometimes bemoan access. When entering child friendly and/or focused institutions, such as schools and after-school programs, there are a number of gatekeepers researchers must approach and answer to (Thorne 1993; Corsaro 1997; Adler and Adler 1998). Gatekeepers can prevent researchers from entering particular locations or require that researchers share information found in the field (Mayall 2008). Conversely, moving outside child centric locations, such as the home, provides different potential access problems. Relationships with children can be hard to cultivate for adults who are not teachers or do not regularly interact with children. To circumvent institutional gatekeepers, some researchers, such as Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (1998), rely on their own children for access to child populations, though this comes with its own ethical concerns (see Adler and Adler 1998).

For the present study, I relied on a previously established relationship with a family gained through informal employment. Though there were ethical concerns and care had to be taken to ensure that my first informant's voice was not privileged, gaining access to children was fairly straightforward, as I required that participants in the study previously be friends. My relationship with each of the girls in this study, both individually and as a group, is unique, bringing its own challenges to fieldwork. These challenges are discussed where relevant throughout the dissertation with one particular relationship – that between Ashley and myself – presented at the end of this chapter.

Meet the Girls

The participants in my study live in Cooperville, New Jersey, a small town east of the Delaware River and just a short distance to Philadelphia. While Cooperville is a middle class town, all four of the girls come from upper middle class homes with one or both parents having a graduate degree. The four girls attend elementary school together and have been in the same classroom since kindergarten. At the time of research the girls moved from third to fourth grade. My first participant was Ashley Taylor, and the majority of the group sessions took place at her house. On the rare occasion that Ashley was absent during the research sessions, the group moved to another girl's home.

I met Ashley before she started kindergarten and the summer before I began my first year of graduate school. We bonded over tween television shows, and I was hired by her mom, Mrs. Taylor, because of my knowledge of kids' media culture. For approximately three years before research started, I took Ashley, and sometimes her stepbrother, to school, chaperoned play dates with friends, and took her to extracurricular activities one to two times a week. Over the years, Ashley and I spent a lot of time talking about kids' media culture, her experiences and interests validated by my scholarly interests. The decision to include or exclude Ashley in my dissertation project was hard. I felt that Ashley had greatly influenced my thinking and understanding of children's television, often prompting me to rethink what I thought were norms. Over the years, we had discussed, dissected, and enjoyed a lot of children's television, with a huge fascination of *iCarly*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and *Zoey 101*, popular shows during the period of research, 2012. The concerns in including her were valid: how would it affect our relationship? How would it effect the research? How would it effect her friendships?

I discuss these concerns throughout the dissertation, where applicable. However, after a lengthy discussion with my dissertation committee, it was agreed that including her offered more benefits for both Ashley and my project. My relationship with Ashley would offer me credibility amongst her friends. Ashley had already contributed to the project and excluding her could cause a larger rift in our relationship than through inclusion. In retrospect, the inclusion of Ashley offered me the benefit of accessing a close-knit friendship group with quick ease. She offered not just herself to me, but her closest friends to talk about television.

Through Ashley, and over the years, I met Brittany White, Sylvia Clark, and Tiffany Parker. Specifically, Ashley had play dates monthly, if not weekly, with Brittany and Tiffany. The trio were good friends since kindergarten. I asked Ashley to help me with recruiting a peer group of her friends, though I intended to include both Brittany and Tiffany since it was clear their friendship was important. After suggesting both Brittany and Tiffany, Ashley and I discussed the parameters for the final participant. I mentioned that I wanted all of the girls to get along, preferably having a strong friendship, with minimal drama and pettiness. The inclusion of Sylvia was a surprise. Though new to me, as I had only met her at events and parties, it turned out that she was good friends with Ashley, Brittany, and Tiffany, hanging out before school and at recess.

Gaining access to the girls was fairly easy. All four girls were excited to watch television together, talk about it, and hangout after school and quickly assented to the project. The parents had met me over the previous years, and were happy to help any way they could, including giving consent. Finally, Ashley, Brittany, Sylvia, and Tiffany share several extracurricular activities together, including basketball and Girl Scouts. They

spend quite a bit of time together outside school through play dates and sleepovers. All four girls respect each other, and though arguments did occur, the girls were never intentionally mean or exclusive. They worked together to maintain their friendships and decided upon a "don't tell at school" attitude (of their choice, but encouraged by me) to ensure that other friends wouldn't become jealous.

Ashley Taylor

Ashley is a blonde, Caucasian, ten-year old girl whose parents divorced when she was about three. Her father, who she sees on the weekends during the school year, lives in Pennsylvania with her stepmom, stepbrother, and half-brother. During the school week, Ashley lives with her mom, stepdad, and stepbrother. At the conclusion of the research stage, I had looked after Ashley for about five years, taking her to school and hanging out with her after school on occasion.

According to her mom, Ashley is an extremely intelligent and gifted young girl who does well in school. She is both outgoing and sensitive to others, which makes her participation an interesting facet in my research. She engages in multiple extracurricular activities and sports throughout the year but would never define herself as "too busy." In general, Ashley self-identifies as "normal." During research, Ashley took on the role of kid researcher, which was a unique phenomenon discussed below.

Brittany White

Brittany is a nine-year-old brown haired girl who has two younger siblings who are twins. According to her mom, she was quiet before the twins were born, but now that she is the eldest, she's really come out of her shell. Her parents, who have been married

for over 10 years, have lived in the same house since before Brittany was born and are very involved in her life.

Like Ashley, Brittany, in my presence, is extremely outgoing and opinionated. However, she is more self-conscious in some ways than the other girls; she continues to participate in activities the other girls deemed "babyish" such as doll play. Brittany is active in extracurricular activities such as painting, sewing, and basketball, and self-identifies as a fashionista. Of the girls, Brittany enjoys the videography aspect of the study the most. She often performs for the camera and imaginary audience, and tries to outshine the other girls.

Sylvia Clark

Sylvia is an eight-year-old with sandy brown hair who is the middle child of three girls. Her older sister is two grades above her while her younger sister is two grades below her. She claims herself to be incredibly busy with the school Spelling Bee, Girl Scouts (her mom is the leader for multiple levels), Odyssey of the Mind, and sports.

In general, Sylvia is incredibly accommodating and polite to the other girls and me, though when she feels strongly about something, she will voice it. It took Sylvia the longest to become familiar with me, as I knew her the least when the project started, but once she realized that I was not reporting anything back to her parents and had a lax view on what was said or done, she became boisterous and outgoing. Sylvia self-identifies as being "boom" which loosely translates as being hyper. She has an inability to sit still for long periods of time but is still able to pay close attention to things, just needs to have movement to enjoy them.

Tiffany Parker

Tiffany is an eight-year-old Latina who is an only child of divorcing parents. I have known Tiffany since she was five and has always been reserved and quiet. She is incredibly bright and often observes the situation before participating or forming an opinion. Like the other girls, Tiffany participates in her share of extracurricular activities, but her parents encourage her to participate in local meteorology activities as she wants to be a meteorologist when she goes to college.

Tiffany's reserved nature and approach to situations means that she is not as present in the research as the other girls, who often try to take center stage or be the leader. However, Tiffany is a loyal friend and participant. While I was away during the summer, Tiffany was the most active in staying in touch with me and always had something funny to share.

Watching Television and Getting at Understanding

A variety of data collection methods were employed to gain insight into the girls' understanding and use of tween television in their peer relationships. Over the course of approximately twelve months, I met with the girls as a group with two, three, or all four of them present, to watch and discuss television together. During group sessions, a video camera was used to capture the girls' voices and physical movements (discussed below). I also met with the girls individually in their homes, where we played games and watched television together. Finally, I interviewed seven of the parents over the course of five interviews; Ashley's father was not interviewed because of location issues, and Tiffany's parents, who are divorced, were interviewed separately.

This section offers an overview what did (not) work in practice. In planning and proposing this dissertation, I did not anticipate the extent to which the girls' personalities and relationships would alter well planned and thought out activities and discussion points. The gap between what was planned and what occurred, though incredibly wide at times, demonstrates the need for less rigidity in the field when working with children and the ability to be more open to the girls' lived experience.

Television Diaries: Not All Measures Work Equally

During the first few months of research, I asked the girls to keep a log of their viewing at home in a television diary. Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker (1961) argue that one method to gain insight into children's viewing is to have children, including young children, keep a television log. In an attempt to ascertain a baseline for the girls' viewing habits, each participant was asked to keep a television and activity journal, logging the shows and networks watched, when, with whom, and to include what else she did while watching television (see Appendix A). At the first research session the girls were given journals to decorate while instructed what to write down and keep track of. All four girls had experience with reading logs for homework and the television log was modeled from that.

Unfortunately the television diaries did not work out as planned. After trying different approaches to encourage the girls (and the parents) to fill out the diaries, such as texting the parents at night and reminding the girls at the end of research sessions, the television journals were set aside.

Hanging out with the girls provided opportunity for them to reflect on individual viewing. These reflections, though less comprehensive than diaries, led to conversations

about other aspects of their lives as it related to television. This ranged from watching television while doing homework to using television to "unwind and relax." Interwoven in these conversations were glimpses into their lives including feelings about friends, family, school, hobbies, and extracurricular activities. Though the diaries would have provided a baseline to habitual viewing, the insight gained from informal viewing proved invaluable.

Hanging Out, Watching TV

The girls and I hung out as a group approximately once a week during the school year. The research sessions generally lasted about two hours where we watched shows together, talked about television in general, or played games geared towards gaining more insight into the girls' understanding of tween television. After research was over, signified by turning off the video camera, the girls would stay on site, viewing both the research session and post research session as a general hangout. Similar to the group sessions, I met with each girl individually in her home. Originally I had hoped to observe family's daily routines, but scheduling conflicts prevented this. Instead, I spent a few afternoons with each girl. Though the data from the one-on-one sessions is not directly examined in this dissertation, the one-on-one sessions helped the girls create a rapport with me and provided background into their lives. Both the group sessions and the one-on-one sessions had the same format: watch television, talk about it, activity or game, and chat.

During these sessions, the girls and I watched a minimum of one episode of a live-action television show from Nickelodeon, Disney, or one of their sister stations.

With two exceptions,[3] the girls chose all of the shows. The only limitations to their

choices were (1) it had to be live-action and (2) everyone had to be allowed to watch it.

After the first episode, the girls were free to pick out anything they wanted to watch. On

average, we watched approximately two episodes during the first few months of research

and then downgraded to one episode as the girls' discussions and activities took over.

After watching an episode of television, the girls discussed the episode in various

ways. Their favorite discussion setting was the format of a television talk show. During

this time, the girls acted as though they were experts about the show we just watched, and

they talked about the show as though they were on an episode of *Ellen*. By utilizing the

"talk show" approach, I was able to prevent the girls from talking over each other while

giving each an opportunity to recap the most important element(s) from the show for her.

During these discussions, the girls took it upon themselves to move between the roles of

host, expert, and audience member. Berry Mayall (2008) argues that children are adept in

engaging each other in the research topic at hand and are capable of questioning each

other. "It enables one, somewhat, to hand over the agenda to children, so that they can

control the pace and direction of the conversation, raising and exploring topics with

relatively little research input. Through these means, researchers can arrive at good

understanding about what matters to children" (131). Allowing the girls to question each

other about the shows highlighted what was most important to them while simultaneously

interacting with each other in a way that was somewhat reflective of their "normal"

conversations. When the "talk show" approach was not used, the girls would discuss the

show in a round robin style, with each girl reflecting on her favorite part and anything

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[3] During two sessions, I pre-chose episodes for the girls to watch. One episode was *iCarly's* "iFix a Pop Star" to discuss the creation of televisual universes. The second episode was a highly intertextual episode of *Good Luck, Charlie* that included Jim Henson's Muppets.

else that came to mind. On occasion, I would ask about a particular part of the show or character, such as sibling relationships, but for the most part, the girls relied on each other for the conversation.

Using a Video Camera

Group sessions and one-on-one sessions were all video recorded. The decision to use a video camera, as opposed to a combination of field notes and audio recorder, was to minimize the loss of data and to be as minimally distracting as possible. The video camera captured interactions, behavior, and movement faithfully, and allowed me to focus on the girls without determining what was "most valuable" in the field. During video analysis, however, it became clear that a lot of the girls' informal conversations, particularly ones I was not a part of, were equally, if not more, important to the conversations I had with the girls. Video recording removed some of the split focus required when observing and conversing with participants, thus alleviating in field misunderstandings and misrepresentation. Though I did take field notes to supplement the video, they became problematic. The girls wanted to read what was written, or more aptly, decipher my shorthand and draw in the notebook. AT different times each girl would play to or for the camera, interacting with an unseen audience in a way not reflective of typical "hangouts" with friends at the time.[4] Though the girls never fully forgot the video camera was there, eventually it became a part of the process for them, and they grew familiar, if not comfortable, with it.

Ethical concerns were raised by both the institutional review board (IRB) and the girls' parents in relation to the use of the video camera. IRB was concerned about the

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[4] Towards the end of data collection the girls began using iPads or, in Ashley's case, an iPhone, to record themselves in silly ways. Cameras clearly fascinated them.

girls' identities being known if video was shown in any venue. However, their concern

was unwarranted as the girls either did not call each other by name or, when they did,

they often used their chosen pseudonyms. To further alleviate the concern of true

identities being discovered, all of the video data has been securely locked. Parental

concern was trickier. Parents were concerned about video showing up on social media

sites such as YouTube. Several of the parents asked video to not be shown in any venue

outside of to my dissertation committee, including academic conferences.[5] Interestingly,

none of the parents requested to review any of the footage.

During analysis, the recordings proved invaluable. In tandem with field notes, it

became clear that the girls' friendships informed their understanding of television shifting

the focus of the project to their friendship. The footage also allowed for the inclusion of

body movement and physicality to further contextualize the girls' interactions in the

presentation of the data. As Allison James (2007) points out, representation and the

crafting of children's world includes the craftiness of the researcher, who picks and

chooses which instances to use as examples. With the video footage I could review (and

relive) the research sessions, looking for saturation and examples most representative of a

particular theme. The examples presented here aim to reflect typical interactions that

occurred between the girls throughout the research process.

Playing Games

Once a level of familiarity and comfort was established with both the video

camera and me, the research sessions started to take on a new sense of interest. I

introduced the thought game "Television is just like…" and the *iCarly* Web Show Set

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[5] To comply with this and still present visually stimulating presentations, I have used comic strips to present key moments during academic conferences.

Kit. I held off on introducing these activities until the girls found the camera less interesting and could be more themselves around me as both activities required a lack of self-consciousness.

Television is Just Like…

Throughout research, the girls participated in a thought game that I named "Television is just like…" The game consisted of the girls sharing which characters were most like family members, friends and peers, and themselves. Sometimes the girls would ask me to weigh in on their choices, but more often they led the conversations and asked for clarification from each other. Mayall argues that children understand their experiences through comparison of experiences with others. The girls were able to compare their own experiences against each others' as well as against those on screen, whether the experiences on screen held future potential or were already lived. The characters the girls discussed and favored most changed over time and reflected recent viewings, but the primary attributes of the characters chosen were often similar, indicating a form of stereotyping that occurs in tween television. However, the girls rarely reflected on the stereotyping in relation to their choices or how different characters (across shows) were similar.

In general, this game often divided the girls into two groups: those who responded at face value and those who responded in depth. The former often identified with characters superficially, basing their choices on physical appearances and dominating characteristics. The latter group took a deeper look at the characters, went beneath the surface, looking at the intended individual (self, family member, peer) to understand how they may be similar to television characters. They attempted to understand how the

characters would react in situations and how they themselves would react in similar situations.

iCarly **Web Show Set Kit**

The Nickelodeon *iCarly* Web Show Set Kit is a game-like kit for children ages 6+ that allows player(s) to create their own web show. The kit includes cardboard background sets, cardboard characters and prop pieces from *iCarly* that go on spokes, and an instructional DVD. There are several ways to play with the set. The manufacturer's intended use of the kit is for the user to create a web show. To do so, the player uses the cardboard cutouts and stage props to create different scenes within her own web show, perhaps even including herself at different times. The idea behind the set is that you can "direct, shoot, and create" your own web show "just like *iCarly*" indicating that there is a proper way to play with the toy. The underlying, unwritten directive for the kit may be that the player would also plan the show, similar to the characters of *iCarly* who do plan their web show within television episodes.

The girls showed interest in the filming process during research sessions and enjoyed playing with, to, and for the camera. The introduction of the *iCarly* Web Show Set Kit occurred well into the research process to help circumvent feelings of self-consciousness of playing in front of a camera (and me). After the first session with the kit, home-made characters from other shows were included at the request of the girls. The new characters came from *Victorious* (Nickelodeon), *Good Luck Charlie* (Disney), and *Jessie* (Disney). The kit was used in both group and one-on-one sessions.

Doing Research *with* Kids and Sharing Their Experiences

Including the girls in the research process is one unique facet to the present study. Pia Christensen and Alan Prout (2002) argue that there are four main ways of viewing children in relation to research: as an object, as a subject, as a social actor, or as a participant and co-researcher. As a participant and co-researcher, children's agency and competency in research is recognized and utilized. It acknowledges their own understanding of their culture and experiences. Jackie Marsh (2012) advocates for the use of children as knowledge brokers, a "go between" between peers and adult researchers. As knowledge brokers, children are able to improvise and ask questions important to their experience, which reflects the awareness of the participant as co-researcher. Although knowledge brokers were not used in this study, Marsh's advocacy for children as research assistants influenced the understanding of how the girls' ideas, opinions, and questions shaped the study. Finally, child researchers are more common in NGOs and public policy arenas, particularly in rights research (Alderson 2008). Therefore there is a precedent of including children as both participants and co-researchers. In the present study, Ashley was particularly important in shaping my own understandings of tween television and our previous relationship gave her freedom to take on an active role in the research process. This section reflects on Ashley's role within the larger project before examining my ambiguous role and how "authenticity" helped construct the presentation of the girls' experiences.

Discovering the Kid Researcher

For three years prior to the start of research Ashley and I discussed television a lot. During research, these conversations played a role in allowing Ashley to emerge as

an unintended kid researcher. Ashley's status as a kid researcher began when she was included in determining the participants for the study, though Ashley did not necessarily recognize this is a significant factor, but did think it gave her clout. Ashley thought she would be the center of research, but throughout the research process, she learned to mediate her feelings, using them to create the kid researcher role for herself. I argue that a kid researcher is a child who asks questions that reflect the aims of the research, prompts participants to further explain their answers, and helps maintain the research atmosphere during research sessions, but is not necessarily formally trained.

Ashley's transition into the kid researcher role progressed slowly throughout the research process, and through managing feelings of jealousy and exclusion that arose out of having to share her friends and me, and not being the center of my attention. She began to actively take an interest in the research process, the negotiation of episodes viewed, and the questions asked. She asked the other girls probing questions about shows, relying on information gleaned from previous conversations with me about what I thought was interesting and important. Towards the middle of the research experience, Ashley was able to expect and guess my next question(s).

The following example signifies Ashley's own recognition of becoming a kid researcher. After watching an episode of *Jessie* in which Jessie (Debby Ryan) sings, I started to ask the girls their thoughts about how every Disney actress has multiple talents, but in particular, it appeared to be a requisite that one be able to sing. Before I could finish my sentence, Ashley interrupted.

> Ashley: I noticed it. What you're going to say, I noted it.
> Me: Okay. You tell me what I'm going to say.

Ashley:	You're going to say [have you noticed] that in almost every
show	the main –
Me:	You do know what I was going to say.
Ashley:	– Person sings.
Me:	So what's my question?
Ashley:	Have you guys noticed that in almost every [show], like, not cartoon show, live show, almost every, the main characters end up singing.

Ashley and I had spent considerable time together over the years discussing television shows and characters. The time spent asking each other questions about television shaped my views of tween television, directly influencing my research interests. After this day in research, I began to notice the many times Ashley "shushed" the group when they started to speak over each other, and would ask follow up questions.

The role of kid researcher developed when Ashley was unable to manage ill feelings in her relationships with her peers and me in the research setting. This setting proved problematic for Ashley; she couldn't be just a participant, she couldn't control her friends, and she couldn't have my full attention. To maintain her relationships with her peers and me, she stepped into the role of kid researcher – a role created specifically by Ashley through previous experiences and interactions with me as she developed an understanding of the research process. Spending time together for years prior to beginning research provided Ashley with the ability to know what to ask in order to learn more about the role of television shows in girls' lives. Ashley was able to pick up on salient themes in shows and ask questions that reflected my research needs. This particular shade of kid researcher is unique to Ashley as it was born out of years of viewing together.

As a kid researcher, Ashley was immensely helpful during the group research sessions. At times, she clarified my questions when my language reflected "adult speak" and the girls did not fully understand me. Simultaneously, she would ask questions and point things out that may have otherwise gone unnoticed by me because of my own research agenda. Priscilla Alderson (2008) argues that children are more open and accepting of ideas changing and evolving, while adults are more likely to feel set in their ways and possibly threatened. Ashley's utilization of the kid researcher fits well with the childhood studies approach, which aims to put children at the center of inquiry.

The Least-Adult Role and Power Imbalances

As an adult researching children's experiences, my role in the research process, for the girls at least, was ambiguous. I was able to validate their experiences and understanding of television shows, but simultaneously, I was an adult with authority. Berry Mayall (2008), referring to a qualitative approach in studying children, claims, "This method involves participant observation with children; it includes watching, listening, and reflecting and also engaging with children in conversation, as appropriate, to naturally occurring events and to the researcher's understanding during the process of fieldwork" (110). As a semi-expert of children's television, I was able to sincerely participate in their conversations, but as an adult, my authority placed me in a different category. Some scholars, such as Nancy Mandell (1991) and Barrie Thorne (1993), advocate for the least-adult role.

The least-adult role allows the adult researcher to be a completely involved member and participate in children's culture while trying to maintain neutrality regarding things like other adults' authority. Mandell used the least-adult role to gain access to

children on playgrounds. Thorne later employs the least-adult role in her study of how children play in school and during recess. The least-adult role encourages children to trust in the adult researcher. This role is also most applicable when there are a lot of other adults present who may potentially interfere in research, specifically in child friendly institutions. Mayall argues the other extreme is the "adult superiority" role, wherein the adult uses their power to study children, often as objects. Mayall recommends for an in between role, one that focuses on the child/adult relationship.

The present study uses the in between role Mayall suggests. There was a recognition of authority between myself as a researcher and the girls as participants. The power imbalance was mitigated by transparency in the goals of the project and inviting the girls' to determine the pace of the research, including the choice of the shows watched. "Through a reflexive critique [… of] methodology, we suggest that due attention to how children respond to and engage with the research is reveling of children's difference social experiences and social competencies" (Christensen and James 161). Children are reflexive within the research process; they examine and readjust when scrutinized, questioned, or become aware of discrepancies and dissonances. This study recognizes that children are social actors, who influence and are influenced by their experiences and world. Furthermore, and unlike many studies, this study emphasizes children's ability to be a part of the research process. Though not ignorant on the subject of children's television, I was unaware of what importance was placed on which shows or what role television has in these girls' daily lives. By starting from this perspective, asking them to choose the shows and ask each other as many questions as I did, the

project grew to incorporate and be influenced by their likes and opinions. This approach led directly to the final analysis and data that emerged: their friendships.

As an adult, there were times in which I was forced to intervene. For example, during the first session Ashley removed herself from the group, later tricking all of us to believe she had left the house. My aim was to present myself to the girls as an adult interested in their likes and interests, who would not tattle to their parents but who they could be honest with. By the end of the research process, I felt like I had been accepted into their "kid clan," but always felt othered as an authority figure who was, to some degree, responsible for their well-being.

Sharing Their Experiences with Television

The presentation of the girls' experiences here has been thoughtfully considered, prompted by scholarly debate about the child's "authentic voice" and "authentic experience." Allison James (2007) cautions against claims of "authentic" voices, arguing that, as with much qualitative and interpretive work, there are issues of translation, interpretation, and mediation in the presentation of experience. James suggests that scholars be mindful, if not transparent, of the presentation of children's experiences. Mayall recommends the use of the word "knowledge" to reflect the temporal features of understanding as opposed to "opinion," which indicates a longer held belief. The words "knowledge" and "perspective" are used interchangeably in the present study, but demonstrate the contextually based understanding of television for the girls. In presenting the examples in this study, there is an intentional recognition that the girls' experiences are not universal. As James points out, it is imperative to not lump children's experiences

together, which can undermine the individual experience influenced by culture, age, geography, and prior experience.

As previously discussed, the present study aimed to do research *with* children as opposed to *on* children. Both Hutchby (2005) and Goodwin (1990) argue quality research about children can occur by recognizing power imbalances, and moving focus to interactions *between children* instead of between the researcher and the participant, providing a picture of experience instead of an overview of feelings. The present study considered the potential difficulties in both soliciting information about children's experiences and how to best represent those experiences in a way that recognizes drawbacks without sidestepping those issues. One research goal of the present study was to understand how a peer group or friend group got along to secure connections of friendship. Giving the girls freedom in choosing the viewing material, as is shown in the opening anecdote, allowed relevant media to be present instead of reflecting an adult's interest. I let them choose because I wanted it to be something that interested them already, not something I thought had themes or concepts relevant to what I viewed as important and underlying tween television. Instead, I wanted them to pick something that they would choose if I weren't present, to create an atmosphere that was as normal to daily life for them, while acknowledging that it was a contrived situation. What emerged from the data were the importance of their interactions as a peer group first and foremost, before the use or understanding of television in relation to their daily lives.

The Role of Friendships in Television Viewing & Hanging Out

> Freddie: All friends have fights.
> Carly: Yeah, but this one was different. It wasn't even like a fight. I mean, we didn't yell or anything. We just said stuff, and it was bad.
> Freddie: Come on, you and Sam have been friends forever.
> Carly: I know, but people change.
>
> Freddie and Carly, "iQuit *iCarly*."

Friendship was at the forefront of all interactions during research sessions. The girls use their relationships with each other as a lens to filter their television talk, participating in what I have termed "friendship work" (discussed below). Friendship work provides a framework to examine how they discuss television by recognizing that social interactions influence and structure what is said in the company of others. The dynamics and structures of the girls' friendships becomes the lens through which they understand, situate, and acknowledge television. Their friendships intertwined with their peer culture influences their knowledge and commentary on television.

This chapter provides a brief overview of friendship groups and peer culture literature before presenting the current friendship group. Friendship work is then introduced to provide the theoretical underpinnings for this chapter. Examples of the girls' conversations are used to show how interactions can be interpreted as being either challenging or supportive and within the interaction type an individual may choose particular pathways to achieve their goals. The roles of "expert" and "leader" show how trying to exhibit power can be a precarious balance. The chapter concludes with a look at how Ashley and Sylvia's friendship changed during the year in which research took place and how friendship work can account for friendship development.

Friendship Groups and Peer Culture

Friendship groups have been mostly examined through psychological measures with limited literature on group interaction(s) for children aged eight to ten. Much of the literature focuses on cliques within school settings (Bagwell et al. 2000; Nash 1973; Adler & Adler 1995; Van Cleemput 2011) and sociometric status or how well a child is liked (Gifford-Smith & Bronwell; Cillessen & Bukowski 2000; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Bagwell 1999; Newcomb & Buckowski 1996; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee 1993; Newcomb & Bagwell 1995) with authors calling for more research to be conducted on children of this age (Gifford-Smith & Bronwell 2003; Adler & Adler 1998). Research on cliques (large groups of 5 or more individuals) or dyadic friendships (between two children) dominates research and literature on children's friendships (Gifford-Smith & Bronwell; Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup 1996; Newcomb & Bagwell). Little research exists on small group relationships or friendships and, as cited above, the remaining literature focuses on the developmental process and the merits of friendship to a child's development. There is insufficient attention focusing on the social implications of friendship groups, particularly individual's roles within these groups. Finally, the literature is dominated by studies done *inside* the educational system or organized activities with little attention paid to group dynamics outside these settings or during "free time" for children. Two important aspects of the present friendship group make it hard to easily map psychological frameworks onto the social structure: group size and location of interactions. The size of the group makes it hard to categorize it. By the literature's standard, this friendship group could be deemed a "cluster" because of it's small size; a clique is often five or more individuals and has connotations of exclusion

and inclusion, particularly within the school setting (Gifford-Smith & Bronwell; Adler & Adler 1995). Similarly, developmental literature in relation to friendship does not consider the structure and nature of smaller groups in non-school settings. These two facets, integral to the research design, elude current psychological literature.

In contrast to psychological approaches to friendship, theories about peer culture found within childhood studies look more closely at the web of culture that children create (Geertz 1973). According to William Corsaro (1992) peer culture and friendship groups play an important role in the development and social world of children. William Corsaro and Donna Eder (1990) define peer culture as "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interactions with peers" (197). Corsaro (1997) further identifies two themes of children's peer cultures: "(a) communal sharing, the strong desire for sharing and social participation, and (b) control, children's persistent attempts to actively gain control over their lives" (219). Both Corsaro's definition of peer cultures and his first premise of peer culture are particularly salient here. As a whole, children's peer culture has been examined in a variety of settings and frames such as online (Willett 2008), on the playground (Marsh and Bishop 2014; Beresin 2010), and in school (Thorne 2008), with little focus on children's peer culture in the home or less structured settings. Peer culture created and shared in the home and in relation to tween television contributes to understandings of children's culture as a whole.

The Girls' Friendship Group and Shared Television Culture

Friendships provide children with the most important relationships in their lives outside family, particularly during the tween years. As was true for the girls, access,

shared interest, and social norms provide the basis for friendship with friends able to validate and emotionally support each other outside the family system (Gifford-Smith & Bronwell; Ladd & Kochenderfer 1996; Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup). The four girls here have been friends for several years, having started kindergarten together. Over the years they've had many play dates, participated in various extracurricular activities such as the Girl Scouts, and competed in sport together. The deepness of their friendship can be found in the four girls receiving recognition at school "for [their] caring heart[s] in reaching out to support the community." As a group, they initiated a school fundraiser for a local family who had a house fire. Working together, they met with their teacher, shared ideas with their principal, and executed an event to support the family who lost much of their material goods. Though they rarely referred to each other as "best friends," the closeness and affinity they shared was palpable.

As friends, the girls in this research interacted with each other in ways that allowed for validation and emotional support as well as permitted disagreements, rejections, and criticisms to arise. These interactions make up their social landscape, which frames how they discuss and understand television. Television is not separate from their friendships but instead works within it. Participation in activities around television programs provides them with a common fund of narratives, characters and scenarios – termed a lexicon – with which they use in the ongoing process of crafting their friendships.

In *The Lively Audience* (1987), Patricia Palmer examines how children define and understand the act of viewing television within the confines of the family unit. She suggests that research on peer co-viewing would offer important insight into children's

understanding of the medium as television continues to be the first choice of media for

children (Rideout, Ulla, & Roberts 2010). Watching television with others is a unique

experience when compared to other at-home screen media formats, which limit co-

viewership to a maximum of three people, as screen size is often small. For example,

research on children playing together on computers is often limited to two people simply

because of space (Willett 2008). Television viewing, however, is only bounded by room

and screen size, allowing multiple people to watch together. The present research attends

to the act of viewing together, considering how group viewing expands and contributes to

peer culture. In watching episodes together, the girls share in moments of laughter,

establish their own likes and dislikes about the episodes, and are able to appreciate or

criticize their friends' (dis)likes (Fiske 2002). Furthermore, co-viewing enables collective

recall of shows and episodes, encouraging the give and take of opinions, perspectives

and, ultimately, of relationships, which is not possible in individual, one-on-one research

sessions. The research act itself contributes to the negotiation of a shared culture, one that

includes the researcher.

Television helps disseminate culture and knowledge. John Fiske argues

Culture is concerned with meanings and pleasures: our culture consists of

the meanings we make of our social experience and of our social relations,

and therefore the sense we have of our 'selves.' It also situates those

meanings within the social system, for a social system can only be held in

place by the meanings that people make of it (2002:20).

According to Fiske, the act of watching television is different from other activities in that

it can shift, create, and reinforce culture. The ways in which the girls make sense of

television, and how they use television in their interactions, add meaning to and help shape their micro-culture of friendship. Televisions shows provide them with a shared lexicon of characters and narratives that serve as reference points to trade their opinions and expertise in a manner that reflects their social structure. The pleasures and meanings made about the televisual material becomes embedded in their peer culture and social system. Their conversations, interactions and play are understood by *what* they directly say and *do* about television as well as *how* they interact with each other in the process of the activity or discussion.

The girls' use of televisual material in friendships is best understood through their challenges, supportive comments, and negotiations with each other. In every session individual friendships are recognized, challenged, and explored both prior to and during viewing, discussion, or activity. Many of the early research sessions are formatted to choose, watch, and discuss an episode together. Choosing the episode gives them opportunities to negotiate roles, display dominance as well as knowledge, express likes and dislikes, and examine their own rules for television viewing in relation to others' rules. Question time about the episodes is often more chaotic as the girls fight over who sits where or who's feet are the smelliest before discovering how much they think each other is like a character in the show, something they came to value. The friendships within the group help each girl navigate individual roles during conversations about television.

Friendship Work

The girls' interactions of friendship can be informed by Erving Goffman's theory of facework (1967) and Allison Pugh's work on how children position themselves and

their knowledge in relation to consumer culture in the presence of peers (2009).

Goffman's theory of facework investigates the structure of and approaches to short,

public interactions that occur between strangers or acquaintances. Facework is the

process in which individuals ensure consistency in the "face" they present to others. The

term "face" describes the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by

the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (5). Individuals'

perception of the situation – "a line" – can be promoted and maintained or challenged by

others in the conversation. When offenses, insults, or challenges occur, an individual may

be perceived as having "lost face," be in wrong face (unable to integrate their personal

experience into the social setting), or out of face. While Goffman focuses primarily on

the conversations as a point of reference, Pugh moves facework *from* the conversation *to*

the person engaging in facework. She argues, "Children are less concerned about

satisfying expectations they already sense […] than about gaining the standing to take

part in their social world" (53). Using Goffman's theory of facework, Pugh examines

how children establish themselves within the economy of dignity while focusing on how

individuals "save face" to maintain their sense of citizenship within a group. Pugh

explores how children find ways to belong to their peer community through the active

and passive uses of consumer culture. The "economy of dignity" refers to the system of

social meanings and the desire to socially belong. She found that when an individual did

not possess the physical entity or experience being discussed by peers, one could still join

the conversation through employing scrip. Scrip, tokens of symbolic knowledge, is

created through peer culture. "Forms of scrip call upon collective understandings of

symbolic value borne out of shared experience […]" (58). According to Pugh, scrip often

falls into two discernible categories of (1) popular culture and (2) travel experience with individuals using scrip to be "cool enough," "old enough," and "wealthy enough" for social visibility.

Through social interactions, the girls position themselves first depending on their needs and wants, and secondly on how they might validate, offer emotional support or disagree with others in a particular moment. These negotiations, sometimes combined with the use of scrip, strengthen and weaken the girls' friendships and together, provide the framework for what I term "friendship work." In friendship work at least one individual wants to align with or separate from one or more individuals. Alignment occurs through support and defense of another, creating a sense of solidarity in the friendship. Separation occurs when an individual feels their perspective (opinion or choice) is more important than another's, creating (momentary) tension, weakening the relationship. Another way to separate oneself is through insults and negatively perceived behavior, such as rudeness. Friendship work may not be recognizable to the individuals present, particularly when the individuals are participating in negative friendship work or abstaining completely.

The girls engage in facework to mediate friendships but, similar to Pugh's work, the girls' interactions are more reflective of facework that occurs *within* their relationships, not just within the conversations. Facework offers explanations for interactions on the conversational level, particularly those that occur between strangers and acquaintances in public, while friendship work examines the interaction *and* the result of the interaction on an established relationship in private settings. The girls approach social interactions and use techniques within an exchange to fulfill their needs

and the needs of others, allowing the girls to be flexible in their positions within the interactions. Like Pugh's economy of dignity, friendship work provides a structure to interpret how the girls work to establish and understand themselves. It should be noted the girls felt free to engage in conflict. This challenges Carol Gilligan (1982) argument that girls are more concerned with personal relationships and therefore work to avoid conflict and negotiations. The girls did not avoid conflict or negotiations but instead, conflict and criticism, along with support, were all aspects of their overall friendship work. This results in communication exchanges falling into two main categories: challenges and supportive interactions. Both interaction types, explored below, contribute to the outcome of friendship work and how the girls position themselves.

Friendship work is similar to other social work children do, such as shame work. Arlie Hochschild (1983) introduced the term "emotional work" to explain "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (7). Emotional work considers rules that govern affect, intention of feeling, and perception of feeling with a focus on the effort of affect as opposed to the outcome (Hochschild 1979). At Hochschild's suggestion, Barrie Thorne (2008) introduced the term "shame work." Thorne, studying the emotions of dignity and shame in children growing up in mixed-income and ethnically diverse areas, refers to shame work as moments when children actively sustain dignity by averting (or repairing) moments in which they would otherwise be positioned as "lesser." Thorne found that children work to obscure signs of poverty and Pugh, extending this, found that children work to make certain perceived negative factors invisible or endeavor to conceal them. Children from different income

backgrounds participate in shame work, but what is concealed differs based on situations. For example, affluent children were found to ask for something of lesser value so as to be the same as other kids in an activity. The example Pugh provides is that of children who did not want the "best" sneakers for soccer, but instead, wanted the same shoes as everyone else. Children from lower income households concealed equally perceived negative elements such as court ordered therapy or not speaking English at home. Pugh argues that shame work alleviates both perceived and real differences children find in their social worlds. Though the girls did not actively participate in shame work during research sessions, Thorne and Pugh's work show how children are adept at engaging in such emotive work.

Unlike other types of social work children participate in to conceal differences that are viewed as negative, friendship work seeks to understand how children interact to preserve, cultivate, and diminish their friendships. By putting the focus on the interaction type, the use of different pathways in the interactions, and the outcome of the interactions on dyadic friendships and group unity, friendship work examines children's ability to fluidly move between stances that align them to or distance them from each other.

Interactions: Types and Pathways

There are two dominant types of interactions in friendship work: challenging and supportive. In challenging interactions individuals choose pathways that may include insults, rude behavior, and threats to perspective, opinion, and choice. In Goffman's facework, a common approach to a conversation is to dispute another's line, opinion, choice, or perspective, while in shame work individuals proactively strive to prevent shame or embarrassment by concealing foreseeable negative attributes (Pugh; Thorne). In

friendship work, challenges are used to distance oneself from another or from the group. Conversely, in supportive interactions an individual actively works to align themselves with one another or the group as a whole through routes of support, encouragement, and defending another's perspective or line. The outcome of challenging and supportive interactions impact friendships momentarily and change quickly.

Supportive interactions require an individual to recognize and respond positively to another's emotional state. If a girl is feeling anxious about something, a friend needs to recognize the anxiety and respond with some form of understanding. In challenges, an individual can blatantly ignore another's emotive state, or use another's emotive state to promote her own agenda. For example, if a girl is constantly interrupted and annoyed, the interrupter could intentionally interrupt to get a rise out of the girl speaking. Where Hochschild was concerned with the emotional effort, friendship work is concerned with the outcome of the emotive effort and its social impact.

The examples in the following sections come from the same research day at Ashley's house where all four girls are present. The activity for the day included creating one's own television show, inspired by the girls' discussions about how to make contemporary shows better. The girls chose to verbalize their shows instead of writing down ideas first. For the most part, they did not require much prompting from me about their shows, instead asking each other to expand on ideas and to consider their input. Brittany and Ashley are both eager to share their ideas while Tiffany is reluctant to participate. Examples 1, 4, and 5 are from pre-activity time when the girls try to convince Tiffany to participate. Examples 2 and 3 are during the girls sharing their show ideas. Finally, Example 6 occurs post-activity when Brittany asks if they can critique each

other. Sharing show ideas provides insights to the salient theme of navigating one's role within the larger group and how the girls typically interacted with each other. The activity expands from a simple glimpse into what the girls think about television to a battleground for how one conducts herself when constantly being interrupted, criticized, and commended for her ideas. Knowledge expertise, confidence in one's own ideas, and defending oneself are important during the discussions and activities surrounding television.

Challenges in Interactions

Challenges function to create, often temporary, fractures and divisions between friends. Direct questioning, discouragement, and interruptions are three common pathways to challenging interactions resulting in weakened and diminished friendships. Challenges may involve all present or just two friends.

Example 1: Questioning

Challenges to a girl's perspective, opinion, or choice sometimes results in a need for a girl to "save face" by defending her choice, comment, or desire (Goffman). An individual must save face when she is confronted or the line she presents is dissonant with previous statements or opinions (Goffman). Saving face requires the individual to reorient or defend herself to be in line with what she has previously said, thought, or anticipated. In friendship work this type of challenge appears as a threat to what the speaker is saying and can result in a defensive response.

> **Example 1**
>
> Brittany: It's kinda a little disturbing because like –
> Sylvia (looks at Brittany like she's crazy)/Tiffany (uncomfortable with the
>   word): Disturbing?

Brittany (throws hands up in frustration): Let me just say stuff. Please.

Ashley (frustrated):   Come on. Let her talk.

Sylvia giggles; Brittany laughs.

Brittany: […] It's kinda like on the disturbing side because, like, you know, we have an audience [...] being like 'uh huh', 'uh huh', 'go on', 'go on.' And you're just like watching there and you're kinda boring.

Tiffany: I don't know what that even means.

Tiffany sinks back into the couch, holding her body away from the other girls.

When the activity of creating a television show is introduced, Brittany is excited to share her concepts with both the group and me. Time spent with Brittany before and after this session show that Brittany enjoys sharing creative ideas, and that storytelling is a skill in which she thrives. During this session, Brittany can not comprehend Tiffany's decision to abstain from the activity. As a means of separation, Brittany challenges Tiffany's choice to not participate. Language choice and intonation emphasize Brittany's inability to understand why Tiffany would want to listen to the others and not participate with her own show.

Brittany initially tries to explain her discomfort with Tiffany's choice through the word "disturbing." Sylvia and Tiffany force Brittany to "save face" when they find the word inadequate and confusing. Brittany's first reaction is frustration in not being able to finish her thought, but eventually manages to explain her choice of word. The "disturbance" for Brittany is in the perceived voyeuristic behavior of Tiffany watching while the others participate and, though her response proves adequate for Sylvia, Tiffany remains unsatisfied. Tiffany ends the interaction without understanding Brittany's point and physically holding herself away from the others.

Brittany separates herself by challenging Tiffany. A divide is created between Brittany and Tiffany as well as any of the girls who may agree with Tiffany's decision to forgo the activity. Through her explanations, Brittany widens the division by clearly disapproving of Tiffany's choice. One indication of a strong friendship is perspective taking wherein an individual can understand a friend's point of view and support that perspective (Rubin et al. 1998). Brittany's inability to do so in this instance creates tension between her and Tiffany, which weakens the friendship. If Brittany perceives one's storytelling ability as a strong attribute in a friend, this tension may permanently damage the duo's friendship. When a challenger feels a response is insufficient the challenged may "lose face" or be pressed for more explanation. Challenges rely on intonation (was it serious or funny), behavior (was the challenger being aggressive or rude), and motivation of the challenger (was the goal for someone to lose face or gain something). Minor challenges rarely result in confrontation or extended friendship work.

Challenges can have larger social implications for groups of friends. Interrogating Tiffany's choice to abstain and the reciprocated dispute of the word "disturbing" affects all of the girls. Sylvia interjects herself into the larger challenge by also questioning the word choice, indicating that she may hold a similar view as Tiffany, perhaps even siding with her decision to not participate. "Taking sides" is a common way to align with or separate oneself from others. In this instance, Sylvia is not taking sides, but is genuinely curious about the word choice. Simultaneously, Ashley's need to insert herself into the conversation has social significance. Ashley wants everyone to give Brittany a chance to explain herself, but her interruption is met with laughter and giggles. Ashley tries to control situations even when she is not already a part of it. Here, Ashley is not supporting

or separating from either party's position, but instead wants to show that she is still present and has some level of control.

Example 2: Discouragement

Another pathway in challenges is to discourage an individual. Discouragement may be an explicit insult to another's position or a dismissal of an idea. Through discouragement, the challenger works to stop another and distance herself. In friendship work this type of challenge can equally threaten the challenger's face if it backfires, as it can be successful in discouraging the intended individual.

Example 2

Sylvia: So, my show would be about two kids. Two girls. They would be orphans.

Ashley: Oh no. You and your orphans.

Brittany laughs.

Sylvia: Hey. You were the one who wrote a story about orphans in writing. So.

Ashley: One! And you wrote a story about a lost child. I wrote a story about a lost orphan.

Sylvia: Whatever.

Given Brittany's laughter throughout the entirety of the exchange, it is clear this may not be the first time Ashley and Sylvia have argued about the use of orphans in storytelling. Ashley tries to force Sylvia to lose face by discouraging her to again use orphans in a creative venue. Unfortunately, Ashley's challenge backfires, and it is Ashley who loses face when Sylvia dismisses her and continues. Sylvia is not directly challenging Ashley's status but is expressing her right to share her ideas. Ashley's attempt to undermine Sylvia's story line is unsuccessful and, as such, the friendship work that occurs further separates the duo, fracturing an already potentially fragile friendship.

By May, when this instance occurs, Sylvia and Ashley's friendship is rocky. Some days Ashley is incredibly supportive of Sylvia and other days Ashley tries to discourage her and reject her ideas. Ashley often uses challenges to promote herself as the leader, discouraging the other girls and forcing them to lose face.

Discouragement is perhaps the most risky pathway to a challenger's own face. Others may come to an individual's aid to help them maintain face, or an individual may offer retorts that negatively impact the challenger. However, if the goal of the challenger is to separate oneself from an individual, discouragement is an infallible way to do so. Directly insulting a person's comment, perspective, or idea will most definitely ensure that the individual will respond with a reactionary retort, and separation will occur. Even if the challenger fails and loses face herself, she is still successful in separating from her friend.

In friendship work, separating oneself from another may be the result of wanting to differentiate herself from others who are similar. In this example, Ashley is aware that she also wrote about an orphan, but her emphasis on the orphan being lost, as opposed to the orphans in Sylvia's television show who are adopted into a wealthy family, allows her to show everyone else that her orphans are different. This emphasis, combined with the discouragement, illustrates the need for Ashley to be viewed as separate from Sylvia. Long-term discouragement can adversely affect a friendship group. Consistently demeaning another may create fractures between individual friendships or resentment from a portion of the group's members. Furthermore, friends may no longer want to hang out with friends who do not value their opinions or perspectives.

Example 3: Interruptions

Interruptions are a natural part of conversation. People ask for clarification, want to dispute a point, and/or share similar experiences. Interruptions can be perceived as a challenge, particularly if articulated rudely, such as Tiffany and Sylvia's interruption to Brittany in Example 1. Sometimes a challenger may interrupt if a speaker takes her time in speaking and pauses for more than the expected couple of seconds. In friendship work an interruption can shift the focus to the one who is trying to be in control or to show how the individual being challenged is lacking in some way.

Example 3

Ashley (looks up at the ceiling): My age range would (elongated) ...
(laughter from Ashley.)

Sylvia (looks at Ashley):   Prolly – (Sylvia elongates the "o".)

Ashley (turns to Sylvia; in Scottish accent): Do you want me to killya?

All the girls laugh. Brittany looks from Ashley to Sylvia.

Sylvia (turns to Ashley):   Yes.

Ashley (looks at the ceiling again): Would probably be eight to –

Sylvia (quickly looks at Ashley then bends down to scratch ankle): –
Eight?

Ashley (frustrated): Stop it guys! (Slaps hand on couch.) Eight and up.

Sylvia interrupts Ashley twice; the first time is with "Prolly" – slang for probably – and the second is "Eight?" The first interruption is due to Sylvia's annoyance that Ashley is taking a while to answer a question. Ashley's response to the interruption is to verbally challenge Sylvia in a simultaneously humorous and rude manner. Both Brittany and Tiffany take notice of the quick question and response, but neither intervenes. Ashley ignores the affirmative response Sylvia gives her, not following through with the threat or letting Sylvia seriously deter her from her response. Ashley's reaction to Sylvia's

interruption distances her from her peers who may fear retaliation if they intervene. Hypothetically, the interrupter should be stigmatized for interrupting, especially when the interruption is to poke fun at the speaker. However, because Ashley responds harshly to Sylvia, Sylvia is not ostracized.

Sylvia's second interruption – for clarification – can be perceived as intentionally being rude. Both Sylvia's intonation of the word "eight" and her physical movements, to look at Ashley and then turn to her own ankle, indicate that Sylvia is trying to further frustrate Ashley, to which she is successful. Ashley's response, however, implicates the whole group. Ashley says, "Stop it **guys**" not "Stop it, Sylvia." Brittany and Tiffany refrain from supporting Ashley or Sylvia during this interaction but instead observe the interruption and ensuing behavior quietly. Like the previous interruption, this one also works against Ashley in the eyes of her peers. Her reactionary response is to be rude and allow her frustrations to show through, resulting in separation from her friends.

Interruptions may not always be recognized as being challenges; intonation and body movement are indicators of when an interruption is meant to fluster the speaker. As a pathway, interruptions can successfully separate the challenger from the speaker and force the speaker to lose face. Perception of the interrupter by others present is also dependent on intonation and body language. If the interruption is for clarification the interrupter may not be viewed as a challenger, but someone who is simply curious. Conversely, if the interrupter is intentionally challenging the speaker a fracture between friends may emerge. If an individual continuously interrupts with malicious intent, she may be ostracized from the group.

Supportive Interactions

Supportive interactions work to create a sense of solidarity between friends, similar to Goffman's ideas about teamwork (1959). Goffman argues that individuals with similar goals may work together to achieve a desired outcome. During this time individuals may act out of character for the sake of the group, resulting in a sense of teamwork. Likewise, in friendship work supportive interactions are underscored with prosocial behavior that helps the girls strengthen and cultivate their *overall* friendships. Examples of common pathways taken include assurances, coming to another's defense, and encouragement, which show support for a friend. Like facework, Goffman is concerned more about team *interaction(s)*, while friendship work is concerned about *both* the interaction(s) and the effects on social relationships. Possibly occurring more frequently than challenges, supportive interactions are less noticeable. Individual expectation combined with common courtesy can mask the importance of supportive interactions to appear mundane. It is much easier to recall a strong negative experience than a daily kindness.

Example 4: Assurance

Responding to another's discomfort or feelings of anxiety in a reassuring fashion is one pathway to show support. Friendship is based on mutual understanding, shared interests, and spending time together (Corsaro; Rubin et al.; Adler & Adler). Time spent together creates a "normal" emotional state for friends to notice. A shift in "normal" indicates emotional excitement, stress, or discomfort. By recognizing this change to uneasiness and then helping a friend work through or avoid those feelings shows awareness for a friend. This strengthens friendships by assuring another that her feelings

are normal or offering ways to combat the different emotional state, which helps the girls

in the present study to become closer. In friendship work, assurances offer glimpses into

how friendships are maintained through understanding of another friend.

> **Example 4**
>
> Ashley (subdued voice): It's like you're in school. Like, you have to
>   participate. Can't you just participate?
> Tiffany: I don't want to.
> Ashley: Why don't you want to?
> Tiffany: Because I don't think I can think of my own –
> Brittany: Well, think about it right now. Or just make it up as
>   you go. That's what I do.
> Ashley: It's okay, [Tiffany], if you don't think of it –
> Brittany (excited):   Wing it. Wing it.
> Ashley: You don't think of it but you can still try.

Both Brittany and Ashley try to convince Tiffany to participate in the activity.

Frustrated and not understanding her decision to abstain, Ashley uses a compassionate

and soft voice to ask Tiffany *why* she doesn't want to participate. By helping Tiffany

explore her feelings of anxiety, Ashley is able to pinpoint Tiffany's fear and offer

assurance. Tiffany fears she will not be able to participate because of a lack of

imagination, but Ashley explains that her worst-case scenario is an acceptable one.

Ashley wants her to try for the sake of participation. Even Brittany's "Wing it" comments

offer Tiffany support in that trying and failing is better than not trying at all.

As a pathway, assurance shows the ability to perspective take and recognizes

what is important to another. It strengthens friendship by allowing one friend to be

vulnerable while another works to assuage those feelings of vulnerability. Not all

assurances are deeply emotional; some may be a simple agreement to an idea or

suggestion to boost confidence. An assuring pathway reflects recognition of another's disrupted emotional state.

Example 5: Encouragement

The pathway of encouragement allows friends to show their appreciation of mutual participation in an activity, suggestion, or idea. Unlike assurance, encouragement does not require recognition of an individual's disruptive emotional state; sometimes encouraging a friend is just agreeing with an idea or suggestion, allowing them to expand their own ideas at their leisure. Other times, encouragement comes in more concrete forms in which a friend makes specific suggestions in hopes of getting another to participate.

Example 5

Brittany (moves to the ottoman and poses like me; her back is to the camera): Here. I am Cyndi. So, don't even think about laughing. (In a high pitch voice) I am going to ask you a few questions. Who is the main character?

Ashley: That's all. (Moves hand towards Tiffany for a second.) You just have to answer those questions. You don't say, "My world would be blah blah blah." (Emphatically moves arms like a superhero pose.) She's asking you questions.

Brittany (as Cyndi): Would they be mean or nice?

Brittany moves back to the couch.

Ashley and Brittany share the same goal of gaining full participation from Tiffany, though their approach in achieving this differs. In this instance, Brittany tries to encourage Tiffany into participating by lessening feelings of the unknown through a demonstration of the activity. This also gives Tiffany a starting point in thinking about

her show. Once Ashley helps Tiffany explain her fear of not knowing what she'd say, Brittany, who could not previously understand Tiffany's non-participation, is able to repair tension created by insistence to participate through encouragement. By offering suggestions and momentarily taking on the role of researcher, Brittany re-aligns herself with Tiffany. Separation and alignment can change quickly as evidenced by Brittany's turn from challenging Tiffany to supporting her in the course of a few minutes.

Ashley is supportive of Brittany while simultaneously assuring Tiffany by recognizing her fear of inexperience. Ashley's alignment with Brittany stems from the shared goal of getting Tiffany to participate but reinforces her friendships with both girls. This effort in teamwork shows both Tiffany and Sylvia how Ashley and Brittany are invested in full participation and has the secondary effect of assuaging any fear Sylvia may have in participating in the activity.

Moments like these pass quickly in a matter of seconds, but shows of support through encouragement can add up over time. Though friendship work is not a zero sum game, close, strong friendships are built over time and through mutual interest and support. If Tiffany continues to reject this activity as well as others despite the support she receives from her friends, her friendships may diminish. Conversely, if Tiffany realizes that her friends support her regardless and appear to have her best interest in mind, she may recognize the many times and moments they work to support her and align themselves with her.

The pathway of encouragement reinforces social participation, an important aspect of peer culture as Corsaro points out, "communal sharing, the strong desire for sharing and social participation" (219). Encouragement shows interest in friends'

behaviors and actions, strengthening dyadic friendships and group identity. Encouragement can also maintain secure bonds of friendship by pointing out perceived positive behavior and actions in friends. However, it should be mentioned that friends may encourage each other to participate in negative actions or behavior. Encouragement in friendship, not in relation to action or behavior, is what contributes to strengthening and maintaining friendship. If, later, the outcome of an encouraged behavior or action has negative consequences, friends may reconsider how much encouragement should contribute to personal truth and action in the future. Of the supportive interactions, encouragement may have the most potential fallout depending upon outcome and consequence.

Example 6: Defending

The final pathway of support explored here is defending another's choice. In defending another, the defender automatically aligns herself to an individual. Defense of another can take multiple forms, but one thing that is common is stepping in to prevent an individual from becoming further harassed, forced to lose face, and/or being insulted. The girls only participate in verbal defense but it can be imagined that physical defense may contribute to positive friendship work. In friendship work, defense of another may have the most lasting effects. In friendships, knowing another will defend you and support you possibly unconditionally can have strong effects in understanding a friend's motivation and is a very blatant sign of a friendship.

Example 6

(Brittany has explained that she thinks Tiffany's television show sounds boring.)

Brittany:	Why can't you have, like, an adventure or like something happens or like one of the kids gets eaten by like ... Or a kid goes missing or a mystery place. Like *Gravity Falls* or –
Tiffany:	Well, I'm really just telling what it's going to be about for now. I mean, it might increase.
Brittany:	But like, that's – but that's gonna be boring though.
Sylvia (singsong):	Intense. Intense discussion.
...	
Brittany:	[Ashley] what do you think about it?
Ashley:	I think whatever [Tiffany] thinks is good. [Tiffany] likes it, then I like it.
Tiffany:	Thank you.

In this example, Brittany has openly asked if they can critique each other's shows. She makes suggestions to all of the girls, but her constructive criticism to Tiffany appears to be more personal, particularly for Tiffany. Tiffany is defensive and rejects Brittany's suggestions and their tension seeps into the whole group. Sylvia recognizes the tension by pointing out that it's an "intense discussion," though Brittany ignores her assessment. Sylvia participates in a passive form of defense for Tiffany; the quick comment reflects more than the intensity of the interaction. Sylvia tries to cue Brittany that this particular discussion may not be worth the energy as the outcome can not be guaranteed in Brittany's favor. Furthermore, when Brittany tries to reinforce her perspective by asking Ashley her thoughts on the show, she is let down by Ashley's response. Ashley actively supports Tiffany's choice and through taking sides, defends Tiffany to Brittany. Ultimately, Brittany changes the conversation to talk about her own show and suggestions for it.

Active and passive defense of another can force someone to be ostracized or to question her stance. In this example, Brittany distances herself from Tiffany through her critique. A distance emphasized by Brittany trying very hard to gain support from Ashley. However, Ashley distances herself from Brittany when she feels uncomfortable criticizing Tiffany's show. The conversation about Tiffany's fears was only a half hour before and Ashley is probably very aware that one reason for Tiffany's need to abstain came directly from a fear of criticism. Brittany, who actively encouraged Tiffany, questions the show that, conceivable, Tiffany struggled to create. When Ashley comes to Tiffany's defense she signals to Brittany that she is alone in wanting to make this show better at the expense of a friend's feelings while letting Tiffany know she is not alone and need not face Brittany's criticism alone.

Friendship work does not tally every interaction, and it is easy to see how instances like this, over time, can create rifts between friends and potentially force friends to choose sides. The pathway of defending another can lead other friends to recognize high levels of friendship loyalty in an individual. Being loyal, as well as supportive, is a desired quality in friendship (Rubin et al.). Defending a friend automatically aligns the two friends in opposition to another. Over time, defenses may lead to duo's being extremely close, but may fracture group cohesion. Defenses' ability to effect friendships long term may stem from the degree of altercation and who is present. In this example, Tiffany may feel distance from Brittany because of the combined urgency to participate only to be later criticized.

Roles

Within interactions the girls position themselves based first on their needs/wants and then the needs of others, resulting in a girl sometimes taking on a particular role. A role is the mental position an individual adopts with respect to the interaction on hand and how they subsequently position themselves in relation to the outcome. A role may encompass the presentation an individual wants noticed in the moment (Goffman 1959). Roles help manage and mediate expectations of others in interactions. An individual can weigh the needs of the group against their own to determine if taking a specific role will create a fracture within the group or result in a stronger sense of intimacy. An individual may use a role momentarily, lasting a single interaction, or cultivate it over time to become a part of her identity in relation to a group of friends. The word role emphasizes the fluidity of a position as roles could change quickly.

Many types of roles emerge during research. The roles of expert and leader require acceptance from others present, while other roles, such as observer,[1] can be taken on without conscious recognition. An expert strives to show she knows the most about a given topic or activity while a leader aims to control the interaction and possibly those present. Both expert and leader require the active or passive support of others and are more likely to be contested or challenged. Again, this is reminiscent of Goffman's ideas about teams and teamwork. However, Goffman was less concerned about overall effects of roles in interactions, focusing more on the when and how a role changes in interactions. The girls influence their friendship work through role taking and embodiment of a particular role and/or changing roles mid-interaction can shift the type

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[1] Sometimes the girls would simply observe the interactions, such as Sylvia in the previous examples, and may make a comment from time to time. It is unclear if the girls observed because they wanted to avoid interacting or found more interest in observation.

of friendship being engaged, forcing everyone present to (re)consider positions and stances.

The Expert

The role of expert is achieved through an individual situating herself as having more knowledge than those present, whether it is in relation to the activity at hand or a particular topic. Expertise can be contested, accepted, or ignored, and so the expert must actively work to be recognized. As an expert, an individual must be willing to defend her stance if contested, demonstrating the depth of her knowledge. Being an expert can also reflect other familiar roles in children's lives. For instance, gaining expertise in a subject is rewarded in the school space. However, achieving and expressing expertise in school can yield very different results and is less likely to be contested or disputed, particularly when reinforced by teachers. As discussed below, expertise when hanging out with friends can change the atmosphere and dynamic of the situation.

Brittany takes the role of expert during the "Create Your Own Television" activity. Prior to the activity, Brittany suggests that Tiffany "wing it" and to "make it up as you go." Brittany is not just making suggestions; she is demonstrating ways in which she has mastered this activity. She tells us later that her ideas come from dreams and that she writes them down emphasizing this creative side of her. Brittany further cements her expertise in the activity when she poses as the researcher asking questions. Finally, expertise allows for criticism. Brittany is able to critique the others because she is confident in her role of expert in the activity. The ability to criticize further reinforces her role until Tiffany and Ashley force her to re-examine her approach. When expertise is

contested, such as Ashley agreeing with Tiffany, not Brittany, opportunity to work on friendships emerges.

In interactions taking the role of expert can open oneself up to both challenges and assurances. When one's expertise is contested, the expert may find herself being separated from others, similarly if she expresses her expertise in a "know it all" fashion. Conversely, acceptance of expertise can create a stronger sense of self and understanding. In the examples above, Brittany does not try to be a-know-it-all, but instead, comes off as just understanding the activity and wanting to help others.

Over time, taking the role as an expert contributes to friendship work in interesting ways. If an individual continues to vie to be an expert in or about specific activities and topics she may find that her friends rely on her opinion in regards to those she has expressed expertise in. Friendships strengthen when friends defer to a girl who's claimed expertise because it reinforces the expert's sense of self and expertise. Conversely, if a girl is rejected as an expert, friendships may suffer. Fractures may widen between the expert, who views her knowledge in a particular arena as a personal strength and friends who dismiss or ignore the importance placed on that aspect of her identity.

Leader

The role of leader requires support and trust from friends in an individual's ability to lead. As a leader, an individual works to control situations through experience of leadership that include dominance, behavior, control, and action, all of which need active or passive support. Actively, others may accept an individual's leadership through verbal support and by looking to her for affirmation of choice or idea. Conversely, friends may support a leader passively by not contesting their choices, interrupting and/or displaying

negative behavior. A leader may find she is easily accepted because of previous and current experience with friends or she may be constantly challenged. Support is the most important thing for a leader to maintain her role. Unlike the role of expert, a leader only needs passive support or the lack of confrontation to maintain her position. A particular type of facework reinforces the leader role: challenges. An individual needs to demonstrate dominance within the group through challenges to others and/or by answering challenges to one's own position (Hawley 1999). Once the position of leadership is secure, a girl must actively participate in the activity and/or conversation and subsequent facework.

Within this group, Ashley most often perceives herself as the leader, through action and word, and rarely do the other girls contest this. Ashley uses language to express control, such as when she tells the others to "Let [Brittany] speak" or informs the group "it's [Tiffany's] turn now." In Example 2, Ashley demonstrates her dominance by interrupting Sylvia to criticize her decision to use orphans. Through harsh language and rude behavior, Ashley shows Sylvia that her idea is imperfect, and she should reconsider, trying to actively shape Sylvia's behavior. When Sylvia challenges Ashley's assertion, pointing out that it is Ashley who wrote about orphans first, Ashley works to show that she wrote about *lost* orphans. In this interaction, Ashley seeks affirmation that her idea was "better" than Sylvia's television choice. More importantly, she tries to establish to the group that her ideas and opinions are more important than Sylvia's. Finally, Ashley further demonstrates her dominance and desire to control everyone in Example 3. Ashley threatens Sylvia with bodily harm, though the threat holds no weight. By threatening Sylvia, Ashley reminds everyone present that she is in control of the discussion, and can

have the ultimate say in who says what, putting forth the idea that everyone needs to pay attention and listen to her.

In friendship work, the need to demonstrate leadership can lead to diminishing relationships. Ashley's choice to try to one-up Sylvia increases the tension felt between the duo. Over time, Ashley's leadership style might force others to reconsider her as a leader and, subsequently, as a friend. Throughout research, Ashley felt as the de facto leader because the majority of the sessions occur at her house and because of her relationship with me. Despite this, Ashley is careful and cautious to not cause problems with the girls outside research.

When hanging out with friends at home having an expressed leader may be less important that at school in cliques. Different circumstances found in the home may require a leader, particularly when friends are split or unsure about an activity. The role of leader requires a balance between knowing what friends need and trying to control the situation. As a leader, an individual may find friendships easier to understand or friendship work easier to engage in because there is a need for and demonstration of control. Being a leader lets an individual implement her own agenda.

The Progression of Friendship in Research

It is well documented that tween girls' friendships rapidly change and best friends can change at the blink of an eye (Adler & Adler; Rubin et al.) When discussing this research project with Ashley, I made it clear that the girls would need to participate for about a year, unless an individual chooses to stop for her own reasons. I wanted the girls to feel that the research space was safe, with the acceptance that tensions and fights from other parts of their lives could enter it, but hoped that it wouldn't define it. In making

choices of who to include, Ashley was thoughtful to include girls who were less petty and did not fight on a daily or weekly basis. That said, Ashley and Sylvia's friendship progressed throughout the research process in significant ways.

In the beginning, Ashley is very kind to Sylvia and looks out for her, making sure she supports and defends her. Of all the girls, Sylvia had the most constraining television rules that often affected the shows we could view. Rather than exploit what could be deemed a deficit, Ashley encourages viewing shows that are on the allowed list for Sylvia.

> **Example 7**
> Present: Ashley, Sylvia, and Tiffany; Brittany has an extracurricular
> activity.
> Tiffany: Can we do TeenNick [channel]?
> Ashley: No. [Sylvia's] not allowed to watch it.
> Sylvia: Allowed what?
> Ashley: Nothing. Do you want to watch *Good Luck Charlie*?

This example comes from the first week of research. Though Tiffany wants to watch something from TeenNick, Ashley quickly dismisses the idea on Sylvia's behalf, moving forward with a show that she knows Sylvia is allowed to watch. When Sylvia tries to catch up on the conversation, Ashley tells her it is "nothing" and moves on with the suggestion. In this interaction, Ashley saves Sylvia from potentially losing face for not being allowed to watch shows on TeenNick. Ashley protects Sylvia from any negative comments Tiffany might make, and ends the conversation with Tiffany in a way that indicates there is no need to further discuss it. Here Ashley demonstrates her ability to navigate friendships in ways that do not hurt her friends, creating a sense of loyalty that is recognizable to both Tiffany and Sylvia, had Sylvia heard any of the conversation.

However, as research progresses over the months, Ashley often becomes more irritated with Sylvia in general, and with her television restrictions. This example is taken from approximately six months into research.

Example 8

Brittany: Does anyone watch *Degrassi[2]*?

Sylvia: No.

Ashley: I do, sometimes.

Sylvia: No, but it looks stupid.

Brittany: Yeah.

Tiffany: It's TV-14.

Ashley: [Sylvia] don't worry, you wouldn't be able to watch it.

Sylvia: I know, but I've seen the commercials and it still looks stupid.

Brittany: Yeah.

Sylvia: And I was channel surfing and I saw some of it.

What Ashley previously defended she now uses as a slight against Sylvia. Though Brittany brings up the show, Ashley uses *Degrassi* to exploit Sylvia's viewing rules. She points out that Sylvia would not be able to watch in hopes that Sylvia might lose face to the others. At this point in research the girls seek attention from everyone present and want to be viewed as the "best." Pugh argues that kids will use popular culture artifacts to appear cooler and older and will brag and lie to gain power or face. In this example, Ashley situates herself as being better because of her lax television rules and brags that she is able to watch *Degrassi*. However, the other girls are unimpressed by the line Ashley puts out, arguing that the show is stupid and too old for them. To support this

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[2] *Degrassi* is a Canadian drama show aimed at teens. The show features over the top story lines reminiscent of after-school specials, such as drug or alcohol abuse, physical abuse, and sexuality. Though somewhat reflective of individual teen experiences, the show has been somewhat rejected by the tween and teen demographic in the US (CITE).

position, Sylvia claims to have seen *Degrassi* in passing. However, this is unlikely to be true with the strict viewing rules set in her house and Sylvia's general disposition to please her parents and adhere to their rules.

From a friendship work standpoint it is easy to find the tactics Ashley employs in Example 7 to bring herself closer to Sylvia. At the beginning of the research project, it is important to Ashley to create a close bond with Sylvia, someone who had been in her periphery friendship circle. Towards the middle of research, Ashley feels less inclined to create a show of friendship, and it is more important to separate herself from Sylvia as well as the others. Friendship, like all relationships, changes over time as individuals grow and change themselves.

Conclusion

Friendship work is best examined through challenging and supportive interactions, as they're the most common interactions. The pathways presented here are not exhaustive, and many interactions have multiple pathways and interpretations. Friendships are complicated with multiple perspectives and understandings. The examples presented here appear in stasis and without full context of previous experience or patterned behavior, making it easier to see the challenges and supportive pathways. This examination offers one way to untangle children's quick mood shifts in conversations. Friendship work is the active engagement of cultivating or diminishing of friendship with two or more individuals and has implications on group dynamics and how others perceive interactions.

As a framework, friendship work analyzes interactions between friends. Friendship work is not tallied, but continued use of the same tactics overtime may create

close, lasting bonds or force friends to go their separate ways. Pieces of conversations are used to establish that challenging and supportive interactions are the two main ways tweens engage in friendship work. The various pathways demonstrate how tween girls diminish and cultivate their friendships in group settings.

The girls work to create two particular roles that can be recognized by friends: the expert and the leader. These roles, combined with the friendship work the girls engage in, shows ways that their friendships are strengthened and weakened. The final two examples help show how friendships changes and different tactics are used to strengthen and weaken previous established bonds.

Friendship work is a framework that can account for and explain how friendships are established and navigated over time. Peer culture is created through sharing experiences and can create a strong base for friendship. Friendship work can be the lens to understand the acceptance, creation, and evolution of peer culture.

Through the lens of friendship, the girls' comments and discussions begin to take form. They use their friendships as a backdrop to filter what is (un)acceptable to talk about, discussed thoroughly in the next chapter: "Television is Just Like." By using friendship as a the framework to understand how the girls make sense of television created for them, meanings begin to take on multiple tones and allow the girls to use their television knowledge to navigate some of the most important relationships in their lives.

Television Is Just Like…

"Playing, like dreaming, transforms reality into interesting and potentially meaningful bits of information."

Anna Beresin 2010:34.

"GIBBAY!"

Gibby, *iCarly*.

Gibby: I'm all Gibby. And you know what that means?
Carly: Tell her what it means, Gibby!
Gibby: It means I like to dance! WITH MY SHIRT OFF!

Gibby and Carly, "iWin a Date."

This chapter examines the girls' understanding of tween shows in relation to their lived experiences, focusing on similarities found between both. In conversation televisual material can circumvent unspoken social rules and niceties, opening friends to otherwise uncomfortable discussions. Discomfort may stem from the nature of the conversation, such as gossiping, or because of taboo topics. A girl can draw on televisual material to contextualize statements or draw similarities between one's own experience and those presented in television without bringing too much attention to what is actually being implied.

The similarities the girls find between their lived experiences and those on television show how they navigate friendships and use social cues available to them in small group interactions. Tween television shows supply the girls with a shared cultural lexicon of characters and experiences that, when combined with actual experience, provides a framework for understanding what (and who) is acceptable to discuss. The use of television characters and/or narratives provides entrance into otherwise taboo topics. Finding similarities requires a certain level of vulnerability and personal disclosure. Televisual material can mask this vulnerability or mitigate negative responses. As I show, the girls were not always open to or accepting of the connections made by friends.

However, the girls were more receptive to televisual material being used to circumvent social rules or to introduce taboo or unacceptable topics.

To ground the girls' experiences and narratives, this chapter briefly reviews discussions surrounding television "realness" and modality judgments – i.e., the criteria viewers use to understand how television may reflect lived experience. This includes other research that has considered viewers' relationships to television shows and characters. The primary focus is that of JoEllen Fisherkeller (1997, 2002) who examines how adolescents identify with powerful television characters to mollify their own feelings of powerlessness. However, I have found that the girls use the content and subject matter made available through television shows and characters as explanations for unknown experiences and behavior in their lives and do not focus on the identification with the "powerful" aspects of characters.

The girls' responses to the game "Television Is Just Like..."[1] shows how the girls use and apply television and personal knowledge to navigate conversations about themselves, each other, classmates, and siblings. In playing the game the girls are careful to not disclose too much about their likes and opinions of other characters, particularly when the character is perceived as being "mean" or "bad." Likewise, they are conscientious to not draw too much attention to the similarities they find between characters on-screen and themselves. Self proclaiming to be like someone on-screen opens an individual up to questioning and challenges about "how" and "why" as well as disagreement. When discussing each other, the girls are more prepared to explain choices, but still face potential persecution if someone felt the assessment is incorrect or the choice is negative. At times the girls use television as a form of scrip to cultivate,

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[1] For an explanation of the game, please see p. 43.

maintain, or diminish their friendships in conversations about who they are most like. Finally, the unspoken rule to not discuss peers who were not present, particularly other girls, underlay their conversation about who is like the characters on-screen. Sharing too much about a girl from class runs the risk of others refuting claims. Simultaneously, it is expected for an individual to know even less about boys from class. To balance the inability to be an expert about peers, the girls would turn into family experts, using their knowledge about their siblings to make assessments about television.

Television Realness

To contextualize the girls' comments about television, it is important to understand how viewers perceive television in relation to their own experience. Two main factors contribute to this: realness and the ability to identify with characters, narratives, and shows (televisual material). Identification with televisual material can depend on how close a show represents reality for a viewer. In general, television "realness" has been relegated to theories of "perceived reality" and "modality judgments." Both theories propose that the more lifelike a show is, the higher the likelihood that a viewer will "identify" with the show, the characters, and/or the narratives resulting in high television identification. However, many scholars ambiguously define "realness" and "identity," tending to gloss over these borders (see Cohen 2001 for a review). Instead, many studies use psychometric measures to quantitatively determine the degree of identification with televisual material (Cohen). The predetermined parameters of identity and how a viewer identifies with something may obscure and misinterpret televisual identification. Both realness and the ability to

identify with televisual material in regards to children are discussed to provide background for the girls' experience during research.

Children and perceived television "realness" has been of interest to scholars since the inception of the television. A prominent focus has been on aggression and violence, particularly in relation to cartoons where heightened fantasy and effects allow more "unrealistic" events to occur (see Chandler 1997 for a review). However, this has been predominately relegated to "effects" studies; that is, studies that examine children's responses after viewing. Some argue that television "realness" has become more complicated than just exploring the behaviors children incorporate into their life post viewing (Buckingham 1993; Fiske 2002; Fisherkeller). Television "realness" should also consider how children understand television to be real in relation to their own experiences. Distinguishing between real and fiction becomes clear for children eight and up, but, as Buckingham explains, this is more complicated than just asking, "Is that really happening right now in life?" and "Could that really happen in life?" (Buckingham; Chandler; Hodge & Tripp 1986). This shows how ideas of realness can be complicated and nuanced through deeper examination of what viewers know to be real.

Perceived Reality & Modality Judgments

Perceived reality and modality judgments dominate children's understanding of television realness. Robert Hawkins (1977) proposed the "Magic Window" and the "Social Expectations" dimensions to understand how children recognize and incorporate their knowledge of television viewing into life. These dimensions fall under the larger realm of "perceived reality," the understanding of how a viewer perceives representation of life on television as real (Potter 1988). The "Magic Window" dimension accounts for a

child's understanding of television as a constructed physical entity while the "Social Expectations" dimension includes the child's own experiences in relation to those seen on-screen and the conclusions drawn from personal, lived experiences in relation to the on-screen narrative. Both dimensions focus on viewer expectation in relation to psychological growth.

In the seminal text, *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*, Robert Hodge and David Tripp (1986) argue that the "Magic Window" construct is too rigid and does not incorporate the flexibility that occurs in children's recognition of reality and fantasy. Hodge and Tripp, working primarily with children aged 6-12, borrow the term "modality" from linguistics, which Buckingham later defines as "the extent to which the program can be regarded as 'realistic'" (Buckingham, 1993:46). Television shows that have strong or high modality tend to be those that are most similar to the real world or "seems like a 'window on the world,'" while weak or low modality refers to shows where the distance between the program and reality are widest (Buckingham 1993:46; Hodge and Tripp). Modality judgments allow for a more fluid understanding of realness to occur.

Contemporary live-action tween shows aim to present realistic tween experiences. According to Nancy A. Jennings (2014), tween girls recognize aspects of their own lives in these shows indicating highly modal shows. However, as Buckingham argues and literature on televisual identification claim, television "realness" does not necessarily equal acceptance or interest for viewers. A viewer's identification with televisual material may reflect a viewer's perception of "realness."

Televisual Identity

To varying degrees, scholars have examined identification with television. In *The Nationwide Studies* (1978; 1999), David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon qualitatively research viewers from different social classes and ethnic groups who watch the British news show, *Nationwide*. They conclude that people identify most with news shows and stories that first reflect their social class, then their ethnicity and gender. Ten years later Morley continues his research, focusing on how families watch television together (1989). Morley expands understandings of televisual identity by arguing that context is equally important for viewers. Similarly, Purnima Mankekar, in *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* (1999), finds that women in differing social conditions in India look to television to find similarities between themselves and on-screen heroines; ultimately concluding that women use television to understand their own political positions. In both of Morley's studies as well as Mankekar's, identification is partially attributed to similarity between self and on-screen characters as well as with the shows in general. This research provides support that television shows reflective of viewers' lived experience will be more highly identifiable for the viewer.

One way children's televisual identity has been examined is through parasocial relationships created between child viewers and television content indicating that children may be less inclined to identify with characters along lines of class, race, or gender. Parasocial relationships are the relationships created between the child viewer and the characters on-screen. Cynthia Hoffner (1996) infers that identification with various "good" and "bad" characters are based directly on forged parasocial relationships. If a bad character is still lovable, a viewer may look to them as a friend. Hoffner and

Buchanan (2005) later find adolescents connect to characters in similar ways. The creation of a parasocial bond is important in identifying with television characters and shows. Though focusing on college undergraduates and using surveys, Rebecca M. Chory (2013) argues that identification with television is based on characters who are most favored, similar to the conclusion Qing Tian and Cynthia Hoffner (2010) draw about *Lost* fans. Parasocial bonds and relationships with on-screen characters also contribute to the likelihood of finding similarities between a viewer and on-screen action. Parasocial bonds and relationships do not stringently adhere to liking the good characters and hating the bad. Instead, parasocial bonds and relationships appear to have a symbiotic relationship with how much a viewer can identify with the character.

Young children's televisual identification has also been examined. Spring-Serenity Duvall (2010), through in-depth interviews with young girls, contends that positive female characters found in shows like *The Powerpuff Girls* allow girls to identify more easily with characters on-screen and can contribute to feelings of empowerment. However, not all identification with characters, narratives, and messages are desirable. Kristen Myers (2013) argues in a theoretical piece that "anti-feminist messaging" found in children's programs might lead girls to identify with less than desirable ideals. However, Buckingham, who also invokes the lived experience of the child, suggests that identification is based on modality. It is clear that televisual identity is complicated and requires contextualization and nuanced understandings.

Finally, JoEllen Fisherkeller's work (1997, 2002) helps frame the girls' televisual identifications and analysis. Fisherkeller examines three adolescents' evolving identities as informed by television, arguing that adolescents create and understand their different

identities as members of multiple cultures in the contexts of home and peers. Taking a cultural studies approach and concentrating on the idea that created meaning is connected to one's sociocultural experiences, Fisherkeller argues for more integration and contextualization of children's lives in relation to their responses and understanding of television's role in their life. Building on John Hartley's (1983) argument that what adolescents take away from television matters in relation to their environments and that individuals interpret media from a structure of identifications that are based on gender, age, family, class, race or ethnicity, and nation, Fisherkeller uses identity projects to understand and contextualize adolescents' incorporation of television into their own life. Through "identity projects," the lifelong experience of recognizing one's social position, particularly in relation to power, and Hartley's conclusion that environment and identity relate, Fisherkeller determines that television compliments the identity work done elsewhere for adolescents. Fisherkeller concludes adolescents identify with television personae that reflect their own aspirations in life. Her analysis focuses on the power structures between the adolescent and the location of a problem. Power structures, as well as problems in their own lives, force adolescents to identify with personae that are more powerful than they currently feel. Though I feel Fisherkeller stretches her theoretical framework and forces her data into an unnatural place – focusing on structures of power while her participants never outwardly spoke of such relationships – her work does have implications for my own. The girls ignore, or at the least, do not remark upon, the power struggles Fisherkeller's participants faced, particularly gender and age. Instead, the girls' focus on finding similarities between and identifying with characters and shows is largely

dependent upon and couched in their social interactions, particularly paying attention to who is present and what is expected of them.

Television realness and ability to identify with television appears to be a symbiotic relationship for viewers. The more realistic a show, the higher the likelihood a viewer will identify with the show. Children appear to additionally create parasocial bonds with characters on shows that increase investment in televisual material. The intended high modality of the live-action tween shows used here means the girls easily identify with the shows, are able to comment on the shows in relation to their own experience, and use the shows in the friendships.

Television is Just Like You (and Me)

Television offers the girls solutions – often amusing ones – to more local problems they face such as fights with friends or understanding a sibling relationship. In the examples that follow the girls participate in "Television Is Just Like…" by imagining hypothetical and possible outcomes and extending their knowledge about television and people they know. Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) and Geoffrey Bateson (1972) discuss this idea of the "as if" as one way to imagine hypothetical outcomes and Fein (1984) argues that engaging in "as if" play allows children to create a safe space to experience a fantasy of emotional events. The girls use this game to examine themselves, each other, and their peers in relation to television using the similarities and difference to understand how television can be a mirror to their own experience. Their ability to identify with characters as being (dis)similar also gives them an opportunity to negotiate friendship by finding out which of their "lines" are picked up by friends and which are rejected. This also helps them to define the boundaries of what is acceptable knowledge to share.

Discussions of similarities and differences between television content and real life is dependent upon who was present, what shows we watched that day, and the girls' moods. The girls are more inclined to share similarities and differences between television and themselves during one-on-one sessions with me, making the game more personal. Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979) argues that social rules govern affect. Group settings may have increased the vulnerability in over sharing or disclosing too much only to have it shot down by friends. Sharing with just me let each girl's opinion and perspective to be valued uncontested. Unspoken rules direct whom and what can be discussed in group settings; knowledge is valuable and exhibiting knowledge can be a tricky endeavor. The sections that follow explore the tensions, how the girls navigate these conversations, and how they use their knowledge to engage in friendship work.

Through research sessions and observations, it became clear that the girls use television to make connections between their lived experiences and fictional situations found on-screen using both characters and narratives to find similarities and differences. Unlike Fisherkeller's participants, who identify most with powerful characters that help them to understand their own powerlessness, the girls use television to contextualize behavior and experience. Similar to Morley's findings, the girls look for situations on-screen that reflect their current life. They use television to explain behavior they might not otherwise understand and, though not explicit, television provides the girls with a model for how to deal with new experiences and behaviors. That is, television shows them what life *could* be like, exposing them to things they might be unfamiliar with, but might be of interest to them.

During their interactions, the girls are aware of who is present and what is expected of them. In the first example, Brittany's opinion and the similarities she finds changes when Ashley is introduced into the conversation. The ways in which Brittany balances her opinions in relation to the social interaction with Ashley shows the need for understanding and managing expectations in friendship.

Liking the Bad Character

After watching episodes of *Victorious* and *iCarly* with Brittany during a one-on-one session, the topic of tween television characters in general came up. Brittany actively rejects the majority of the characters on television as being similar to herself even when she really likes them, focusing on the differences in interests and physical characteristics. However, Sam from *iCarly* provides one site of likeness.

> **Example 1: Sam as Favorite**
>
> Brittany: Sam's my favorite.
>
> Me: Okay. Do you think you and Sam are alike?
>
> Brittany: Umm, kind of. We're both kinda lazy.
>
> Me: Okay.
>
> Brittany: Umm...
>
> Me: How are you lazy and how is she lazy?
>
> Brittany: I just don't like to do homework. (Grabs homework and shakes it at the camera.)
>
> Me: Okay.
>
> Brittany: (Counting off on her fingers) Or go to school. Or do stuff.
>
> …
>
> Me: Do you like chicken?[2]

---

[2] Sam loves chicken and is often shown eating a chicken leg.

Brittany:	Yes. I love chicken.
Me:	Just making sure you had the meat aspect there. ... Okay. So you're both lazy. Are you a really good friend? Because Sam is a really good friend to Carly.
Brittany:	Yes.
Me:	Although she's kind of not a good friend to anybody else.
Brittany:	Yeah. I know. Well besides that.
Me:	Are you a really good friend?
Brittany:	Yes.
Me:	Good. What else about Sam are you guys alike?
Brittany:	We have good taste in clothes.
Me:	Good.
Brittany:	Like her cupcake thing that she like –
Me:	Was wearing today?
Brittany:	Like, yeah. Her cupcake thing.
Me:	You would totally wear that?
Brittany:	Yeah. If it was a donut.
Me:	Okay. So you guys both like pastries.
Brittany:	Yes, miss, we do. Um. I like FatCakes. Or. Like they're not real things, I don't think so.
Me:	Fatcakes are not real, but like Tasty Kake or Hostess or Little Debbie.
Brittany:	Yeah. Yeah. Processed food.

Though Brittany accepts Sam's main negative attribute – that she is mean and can be viewed as a bully to some – she uses their similar likes to find commonality. This conversation comes on the heel of discussing all the ways she differs from most characters, so Brittany is adept at identifying similarities and differences. Interestingly, Brittany's opinion of Sam differs a week later when Ashley is present.

Example 2: Sam as Different

Me:	Who do you guys think you're more like? Sam or Carly?
Ashley:	Sam. Wait. I guess Carly. I'm not, I don't beat people up.
Brittany:	Yeah. Me either.
Me:	And who do you think the other one's more like?
Brittany:	I think she's more like... You kinda dress like Sam.
Ashley:	I dress like Sam, but I don't act like Sam.
Brittany:	Like you have blonde, wavy hair.
Me:	Like Sam.
Ashley:	I look like Sam but I don't act like Sam.
Brittany:	Yeah.
Me:	And then what about her (pointing to Brittany)? Who do you think she's like?
Ashley:	She acts like Carly.

In the first instance, Brittany actively shares the similarities between herself and Sam from *iCarly*. However, when a peer is added to the equation, Brittany ignores the similarities and agrees with Ashley's assessment to focus on Sam being a "bad" character. Goffman (1974) argues that in conversation, people outwardly conform, for ease of conversation and to avoid conflict. Brittany's desire to agree with what Ashley says reflects the need to conform in particular social situations, even if one's own interest must be ignored. Outwardly, Brittany accepts Ashley's opinion, and may inwardly accept it as well, changing her opinion in future conversations. In her study of ritualized sharing of treats among Israeli children, Tamar Katriel (1987) argues that a child's self-interest and desire is symbolically sacrificed and "subordinated to an idea of sociality shaped by particular cultural values" (318). Though Katriel is discussing sharing treats among a group of peers, the idea of symbolic sacrifice is still salient here. Brittany recognizes that from a social aspect, it is better to agree with Ashley instead of admitting her previous

feelings, thus sacrificing her own opinion for the benefit of the friendship. If Brittany counters Ashley's focus on Sam's negative behavior, Ashley may challenge or insult Brittany for her opinions, thus diminishing their friendship.

The dexterity needed to identify who is (un)acceptable to favor is necessary when discussing similarities and differences between characters and friends for the sake of the friendship and the ease of the relationship. From a friendship work perspective, Ashley's overt disgust of Sam forces Brittany to decide if a "challenge and defend" tactic is worth it. Brittany avoids any direct challenges from Ashley by clarifying her choice to include only the physical characteristic. In this instance, acceptance of another's view is preferable to the challenge. Ashley is often perceived as the leader of the group, reinforced by the relationship she and I shared, therefore her opinions tend to hold more weight with the girls. The girls sometimes actively avoided unnecessary arguments and challenges, particularly when only two are present. Instead, the fluidity necessary in friendship allows the girls to protect themselves and their friendship from the negative effects of a fight. In this instance, Brittany accepts that it is important to support Ashley's assertions instead of arguing her own opinion.

The Use of Scrip

How the girls perceive themselves in relation to how they are perceived by others provides insight into their use of televisual material as scrip and its implications for social interaction. Allison Pugh (2009) argues that children use scrip – symbolic tokens – as currency within the economy of dignity, such as to enter conversations and to feel a sense of belonging. It helps individuals appear to be "in the know" about cultural phenomena like knowing what Pokémon is even when one might not own the cultural artifact or have

first hand experience with it. Television shows provide the girls with a lexicon of cultural categories and shared knowledge. The girls can employ their expertise within interactions and use it in their friendships. The girls use televisual scrip in cultivating, managing, and diminishing their friendships; or, scrip offers one way to understand friendship work in action. The girls transform television characters into scrip during discussions where they name who each is most like a character from television. The employment of scrip can maintain, strengthen, or diminish friendships much the same as being supportive or challenging can be.

In the following example the girls use Zuri Ross (Skai Jackson) from *Jessie* as scrip. Zuri is the youngest sibling on *Jessie* at age seven. Like her on-screen siblings, Zuri has been adopted into the Ross clan and is originally from Africa. Zuri is often branded as being sassy and mature for her seven years. This session was towards the end of the school year and occurs at Ashley's house with Sylvia, Ashley, and Brittany present. A week prior, the group, including Tiffany, played the game "Television is Just Like..." The game came up again during play with the *iCarly* Kit as the girls tried to remember who they had picked the previous week.

Example 3: The Bane of Zuri
Brittany: You [Ashley] were Zuri.
Ashley, horrified: No I wasn't, [Brittany].

...

Ashley: I was Allie and somebody else.
Brittany: Zuri.
Ashley: No. I was not Zuri.

Sylvia: She is not Zuri. You [Brittany] said she was Zoey from
Zoey 101.

Everyone: Yeah!

...

Me: Well, who would you guys say today?

Brittany: Zuri.

Ashley: *Zoey 101* is who?

Me: Okay.

Brittany: Zuri!

Ashley: Who?

Brittany: You [Ashley is Zuri].

Sylvia: [Ashley is] Tess.

Me: Why?

Ashley: How am I like Zuri?

Brittany (a bit more dejected): I don't know.

…

Brittany: [Ashley] I think you're Zuri.

Ashley: How? Why?

Sylvia: She's nothing like that.

Brittany: Because you're fun and Zuri's fun.

Sylvia: Yeah, but Zuri's like –

Ashley: Zuri's not fun.

Sylvia: – little kiddish and Emma's [from *Jessie*] not.

Ashley: Yeah. [Zuri's] kinda mean.

Sylvia: [Ashley's] not mean.

Brittany: Well I'm not saying about the mean part.

Sylvia: [Zuri's] funny.

Brittany:	She's funny!
Me:	And [Ash's] funny?
Brittany:	Yes!

In a previous session about two months prior, Ashley identified Zuri as being someone she was most similar to saying that "she's funny and cool." At the time, Brittany took issue with this similarity because Ashley, who is Caucasian, did not look like Zuri, who is African American. When Brittany makes the assessment, Ashley is horrified. What should have been an easy, acceptable, if not complimentary evaluation, Ashley rejects, as she no longer perceives herself as being similar to Zuri and takes offense. Brittany incorporates previous knowledge to offer a suggestion that should be viewed as a positive assessment in hopes of maintaining, if not strengthening the friendship and perhaps to make up for the previous disagreement. However, both Sylvia and Ashley reject the assessment, focusing on Zuri being "kiddish" and "mean," not on the intended characteristic of funny.

Brittany is at a loss for how to handle the situation. She thinks the commonality of being funny (and possibly witty) should be a sufficient assessment and show interest in Ashley. She tries to use Zuri as scrip to maintain, and hopefully strengthen her friendship with Ashley. Instead, the assessment is challenged and the explanation rejected. For Ashley, Zuri is too mean to be similar to her. Sylvia sides with Ashley, arguing that the two are nothing alike, even when she concedes to the idea of Zuri and Ashley both being funny. Sigurd Berentzen (1984) argues that girls use praise to create alliance and criticism to exclude. In this instance, Brittany is excluded from Ashley and Sylvia through her comparison of Ashley to Zuri. If Brittany is continually rejected by Ashley and Sylvia long term, she may seek new friends and stop hanging out with them. Ashley

and Sylvia's friendship benefits from Brittany's misstep, bringing the girls closer together when Sylvia defends Ashley as not being mean. Conversely, a fracture is created by the exclusion and dismissal of Brittany's assessment.

It is easy to notice Ashley's focus on meanness in characters when this example is compared to the previous one about Sam from *iCarly*. Character identification is tricky, and can reflect personal shortcomings. It is unclear if Ashley is directly being perceived as mean or a bully during the research sessions or if she was just worried about it. Ashley most actively identifies with Teddy from *Good Luck Charlie* who is loyal to her friends and family as well as conscientious of others. Her need for others to recognize her positive attributes is reflected in her own responses to Sylvia and Brittany discussed in the next example. In this example it is obvious that Ashley's tactic for sharing similarities differs from Brittany. Where Brittany chooses a character based off a single characteristic, Ashley borrows from the previous week's conversation focusing on idolization the girls have expressed. She is aware of aspects each girl views as positive in herself and looks to characters who share those attributes.

Example 4: Highlighting the Best

Ashley:	No! How about we tell each other what we think and why? And why? And why? ... Okay. [Sylvia] I think you are most like Jessie [from *Jessie*].
Sylvia:	Everyone is saying that.
Me:	Yeah! You guys keep saying that but why do you think it's Jessie? We didn't say the why last time.
Sylvia:	Nobody said why I was like Jessie.
Me:	And I want to know the why now.
Ashley:	I'm kidding. I don't think she's like Jessie.

...

Ashley:	[Sylvia] is Nicole [from *Zoey 101*]! Yes! I agree.
Me:	[Sylvia], are you boy crazy?
Sylvia:	No.

Brittany laughs.

Sylvia:	I don't even know who she is.
Me/Brittany:	That's okay.
Ashley:	I think you're like Nicole [from *Zoey 101*] because Nicole's all like "Ahh!" (Screeches and jazz hands.) And is so excited. Just like –
Brittany:	Ahh! And you butt into everyone's business.
Ashley:	And she's like Sam [from *iCarly*], I mean, not Sam. Cat [from *Victorious* and *Sam & Cat*]. But not dumb.

...

Brittany:	Who thinks me?
Ashley:	[Brittany] I think you're almost like Emma [from *Jessie*] because Emma loves fashion and you do too.

During the previous week, it was unequivocally accepted that Sylvia was like Jessie but no one took the initiative to define the parameters of their similarities. Sylvia was content with the assessment and did not ask for clarification. However, with Ashley's insistence that everyone explain her choice, both Sylvia's and my curiosity is piqued. When Ashley is challenged to explain the likeness, she retracts her assessment. This hesitation is in opposition to Brittany's ability to accept the challenge and defend her choice in Example 3.

After thinking for a few minutes, Ashley's assessments of the girls become more reflective of their own choices from the previous week. Ashley's goal of this interaction shifts to flatter the girls with these choices without having to explain her choices. Comparing Sylvia to Nicole from *Zoey 101* is a risky choice for Ashley; Sylvia didn't watch *Zoey 101* with any regularity when it aired and is not allowed to watch it with her sisters now. Ashley focuses on the traits Sylvia is best known for: being excited, outgoing, and physically active. In many sessions Sylvia comes off as acting "crazy" and "wild" and enjoys the positive attention she receives from this behavior. Ashley has clearly paid attention to this and uses it to her advantage. By assessing Sylvia's needs and desires accurately, Ashley is able to use Nicole as scrip to strengthen the girls' friendships. Nicole represents Ashley's ability to see value in Sylvia's confidence.

Similarly, Ashley uses the idea of Brittany's desire to be viewed as a fashionista to her advantage. All of Brittany's favorite characters are fashion conscious. Her absolute favorite character is Emma (*Jessie*), eldest of the Ross siblings, who writes a fashion blog and works on her own fashion designs. Brittany also likes and identifies most with True from *True Jackson, VP*. *True Jackson, VP* is about a teenage girl, True (Keke Palmer), who becomes the Vice President of a fashion company at the age of fifteen, and then takes over presidency at seventeen, when the president retires. True designs her own clothes and fashions for the company. Brittany's alignment to both characters reflects her interest in fashion, which is consistent with her other character choices, such as Sam in Example 1. In friendships it is important that both individuals take an interest in the other's likes and dislikes (Hays 1984). By choosing Emma, Ashley demonstrates that she

pays attention to what Brittany appreciates and enjoys, offering Emma as scrip to cultivate the friendship.

Example 4 shows how characters can successfully become scrip used in friendship works. Ashley turns the girls' own perceived positive attributes into television characters she thinks they are most like. She strengthens her friendship with both girls through intentional attention paid through previous research sessions. In friendship it is important to actively maintain the relationships and use opportunities to show how well one knows a friend.

Understanding Scrip

In social settings, it is important to be savvy about how and when to defend an opinion or use previous knowledge to support a friend. The girls use their shared televisual lexicon as scrip to strengthen their friendships and understanding of each other. Pugh argues that scrip helps individuals enter conversations and feel a sense of belonging. However, the girls use scrip in a different way: to maintain, cultivate, and diminish their friendships.

A shared televisual lexicon can be used as scrip to strengthen friendships. In Example 4 Ashley uses characters to positively understand and bond with Sylvia and Brittany. In using television as scrip the girls are able to emphasize important aspects of their friends while maintaining and strengthening friendships. Scrip may also be rejected resulting in negative friendship work. Brittany uses a similar tactic as Ashley to try to gain favor with Ashley but Ashley rejects Brittany's assertion, widening the gap between the two girls.

These conversations and playing "Television is Just Like…" adds value to the girls' televisual lexicon. Amy Kyratzis (2004) argues that children socialize one another, construct norms, and create value within groups through language and the employment of particular linguistic tactics. Using the televisual material as scrip helps the girls expand their understanding of each other and how others perceive them.

Television is Just Like Classmates

The focus in this section is on the girls' inclusion of classmates and how the girls navigate these discussions. Particular attention is paid to an individual's ability to share "common knowledge" information without disclosing too much about her own personal experiences. The girls discuss boys in a context that is deemed safe as they are not expected to have in-depth knowledge of boys from school and the stories shared tended to be from group settings.

The girls make connections between classmates and television characters but are more selective about who they discuss. They use discretion when discussing boys from school and mutual girl friends. Games like "Television Is Just Like…" can create a protected space to discuss boys, which is also found in girls' jump rope games (Evaldsson 1993; Evaldsson & Corsaro 1998), but peers can still misinterpret open discussion of boys. If a girl knows a lot about a boy it may indicate that she has a crush on him. The girls found crushes and interest in boys as unacceptable. Conversely, discussion of mutual girl friends opens individuals to challenges of "who knows her best." In general, the girls avoid bringing up classmates, unless recalling a specific shared experience. The girls participate in "Television Is Just Like Classmates" by superficially connecting boys from school to television characters. These connections open up their

ability to criticize some boy's behaviors and actions without letting on if they like the boy or view him as a friend.

Acceptable topics of discussion and the ability to discern what is safe to discuss is an important aspect of friendship. During research the girls must rely on previous experience to mediate anything that may appear as gossip. The examples presented below reflect two separate research days in which the girls are cautious about who to discuss. In Examples 5-8 Brittany and Ashley tactfully avoid speaking about female classmates when discussing similarities between the *iCarly* cast and classmates. Instead, their conversation focuses primarily on male classmates and the use of television as a reference to understand behavior and experiences they otherwise had little knowledge of. Conversely, in Example 9 and 10, Brittany, Sylvia, and Tiffany openly discuss how the television show *Austin & Ally* is similar to a fight that occurred with all the girls in their class. Both discussions use television as a framework to understand experiences in their own life, but social dynamics dictate how these discussions differ as well as what is deemed "acceptable" knowledge in relation to friendships.

iCarly *Boys and Understanding Behavior*

Examples 5-8 are from a single research day where Ashley, Brittany, and I watch *iCarly* at Ashley's house after school. In the episode watched, "iMake Same Girlier," Sam asks Carly for help to impress a boy. In this episode, as in many *iCarly* episodes, Gibby, a main male character, constantly takes off his shirt. I jokingly point this out to the girls, opening up discussion about the males in their class.

> **Example 5: *iCarly's* Gibby Never Wears a Shirt**
> Me (jokingly):   Why does Gibby never wear a shirt?
> Brittany (seriously):   Because he likes to.

Me:	To not wear clothing? Is that acceptable?

Both girls just stare at me.

Me (jokingly):	Do kids at your school never wear shirts?
Brittany:	Well, [Mike]. He always takes off his pants

sometimes.

Me:	Wait. What?
Brittany (stands up):	No, he, like everyday he's like (imitates pulling
	pants down and up real quick, but doesn't do it)
	goes like this –
Me:	He just pulls his pants down?
Brittany:	Yes! (Sits back down.) Luckily he's wearing

underwear.

Me:	Is that normal?
Brittany:	Umm... For [Mike] it is.
Me:	Okay. Has he been doing that since kindergarten?
Ashley:	Yes!

(Brittany nods emphatically.)

Me:	Oh. Okay... Interesting. Any girls do that ever?

Ashley shakes her head.

Brittany:	No. No.

The conversation begins with me asking why Gibby never wears a shirt, but the girls make a quick connection between Mike and Gibby. In the first few seasons of *iCarly*, Gibby is best known for taking off his shirt and by season 4, Gibby has become a main character of the show with more screen time. Gibby is the "weird" friend who doesn't take Sam's joking too seriously and walks to the beat of his own drum. Known for removing his shirt for little to no reason in the first few seasons, Gibby later embodies the friendship loyalty and kindness the show is based on.

The girls do not go into detail about Mike, but I am aware that he is a fairly outgoing boy in their grade who does not seem to care what others think of him. Most days, when the research session has ended, the girls ask to go to Mike's house as he has a jungle gym and two younger brothers who idolize the girls. Like Gibby, Mike's status in the girls' lives is that of an outlier. He makes an appearance from time to time – sometimes to play or at a birthday party, but currently holds a "weird friend" title.

There are several years' age difference between Brittany and Ashley and the cast of *iCarly*. In its first season, the *iCarly* cast was in sixth grade, and friendships with boys were socially acceptable on the television show evidenced by the inclusion of Freddie and Gibby. In third and fourth grade the girls had moved away from play dates and "hanging out" with the boys in their class with the only acceptable times to be with boys being during recess, after school care, and other co-ed extracurricular activities. Gibby's t-shirt stripping offers Ashley and Brittany an acceptable frame of knowledge pertaining to Mike, and his self pantsing occurs in a public space, continuing for approximately four years. Ashley does not challenge Brittany when she remarks on his pants stripping but does agree and support the assertion. The ability to refrain from offering too much in social situations is key to maintaining balance in friendship. Challenging Brittany by coming to Mike's defense or offering explanation may indicate an unacceptable notice of Mike's behavior. The unspoken rule to not showing interest in or to know about boys tempers any challenge or defense Ashley may consider taking. In this example it is better to plead ignorance or indifference and agree that Mike is similar to Gibby than to appear

too interested in boys. Over interest in boys could identify you as being "boy crazy," opening an individual up for teasing considered inappropriate during research.[3]

The girls continue to skirt discussing other girls in their class in Example 6. The conversation opens with me asking if either Carly or Sam were like any of their classmates. The intention was for the girls to draw connections between Carly or Sam to the girls in their class, but the girls shift the similarities back to the boys.

Example 6: *iCarly's* Males and Peers

Me:	Okay. So you guys both think you're more like Carly, even though you [Ashley] look a little bit like Sam. And you both think the other one acts like Carly. And what about your friends at school? Do you think anyone acts like Sam? Or Carly?
Brittany:	Does it have to be a girl?
Me:	No. It can be boys or do you think anybody at school –
Brittany:	[Jax] could be Sam.
Me:	Do you think anybody at school acts like anybody from *iCarly*? And there, there – Maybe nobody does.
Ashley:	[Mike] acts like Gibby. (Laughter.)
Brittany:	Yes!
Me:	Because he likes to take his pants off.
Brittany:	(Laughter) Yes! [Nathan] acts like Spencer.
Me:	How does he act like Spencer?
Brittany:	No. No. [Danny, Danny.]
Me:	[Danny] acts like Spencer?
Brittany:	Yes.
Me:	Okay. How?
Brittany:	Because he makes these crazy ideas.

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[3] It is unclear if the girls had crushes on any boys, as it never came up during research. All parents pled ignorance about crushes for their daughters, but everyone, parent and girls alike, were able to identify crushes for non-participating girls.

Me: Okay.

The conversation began with me asking if any of their friends are like Carly or Sam, and Brittany continues to move the conversation to the boys in their class, asking outright if the similarities could be between a female character and a male peer. It becomes clear that the girls are able to make judgments between the characters on-screen and people they know. There are three interesting aspects to this segment: (1) the decision to continue to discuss boys, (2) the use of television to understand how to talk about boys in their class, and (3) Ashley's support of Brittany's earlier connection.

Using *iCarly* characters to discuss boys is safer for the girls than the alternative of discussing mutual girl friends. Individuals in friendships need to exhibit knowledge about other people (not present) in conspicuous ways that are acceptable, particularly for tween girls (Jennings). The initial question is intended to open discussion about girls in their class in relation to the *iCarly* characters, but it is shifted to safer terrain to allow Brittany and Ashley to maintain on equal footing. Had either girl mentioned a female classmate, she would have opened herself to challenges as well as jealousy. Claims about those not present indicate a sense of expertise about the individual in question. Focusing on boys lets the girls use shared experience, as opposed to individual ones, to support assessments.

The girls are expected to be ignorant about boys in their class, so instead of discussing deeply the similarities between Danny and Spencer, Brittany simply says that he has crazy ideas. Ashley does not refute or support this, staying silent about Brittany's assessment. Danny is the bane of the girls' existence second only to Jax, another boy in their class. Ashley, her mom (Mrs. Taylor), and the other girls have mentioned at

different times that Danny is smart and creative. According to Mrs. Taylor, Danny is the middle of seven or eight children, and during Ashley's tenth birthday party, a trip to the local pumpkin patch, I saw first hand how chaotic Danny could be, trying to jump out of a moving wagon and throwing hay everywhere. In *iCarly*, Spencer, Carly's older brother, is an artist who creates sculptures and has bizarre ideas and solutions to problems. Brittany projects Spencer's core character trait onto a classmate, this time focusing primarily on creativity. Television shows offer the girls a way to categorize their classmates, especially when they are not expected to know the individual being discussed very well and can therefore just dismissively say, "Danny is like Spencer because he has crazy ideas." Televisual expertise helps them to be able to generalize about their classmates.

Ashley further supports Brittany's earlier assessment of Mike being like Gibby. Bringing up this assessment again reinforces Brittany's accurate evaluation and shows Brittany that not only was she correct, it is worth repeating. Ashley shows Brittany they share the same ideas about boys in their class. Small acts of support like this can strengthen the girls' friendship over time.

The next example shows how personal experience outweighs the need for television shows to be an anchor to understand behavior and expectations. Ashley uses her own experience to contextualize a classmate's behavior, but Brittany misses an opportunity to strengthen their friendship.

Example 7: Classmates and Brothers
(Ashley notices the camera and waves.)
Brittany: The Groovy Smoothie guy – What's his name?
Me: T-Bo.

Brittany: T-Bo. I think he's more… Hmm… [Henry].

Ashley: YES!

Ashley & Brittany: [Henry!!!]

Brittany: [Henry]. Definitely.

Me: How?

Brittany: He thinks he's like so cool (uses hands to emphasize) and
                he's like, "Oh yeah. I'm a rapper." He, like, raps at
                everyone and I'm like, "[Henry] you're not really that
                cool." (Shakes head while she says it.)

Me: And you guys have all known each other since you
                were super young? Since kindergarten?

Brittany: Pretty much.

Ashley: But [Henry] has family problems. His dad died. [Jason's]
                dad died and his grandpa died two days ago. That was the
                only thing left he had of his dad.

Both girls agree that Henry is like T-Bo, the owner of the Groovy Smoothie in

iCarly. T-Bo is an African American twenty something male. In general, his character is

outrageous and embodies a child-like adult. He continuously tries to sell customers food

in bizarre formats, like tacos on a stick. It is unclear how Henry is like T-Bo as T-Bo

never outwardly shares his musical taste and that is the criteria Brittany uses. However,

T-Bo does come off as being "cool" and aloof. Connecting Henry to T-Bo lets Brittany

criticize Henry without coming off as mean. Although Ashley does not interpret

Brittany's criticism as being mean, she offers a different perspective on Henry, one that is

salient to her own experience.

Ashley finds similarity between Henry and her stepbrother Jason through their

shared loss. It is unknown if Henry has lost one or both his parents, but it is clear that

Ashley is aware that his home life is less than stellar. Ashley, who's own home life

reflects a typical middle class upbringing, has experienced loss and turmoil through her relationships with her stepbrother and cousins. Where Brittany critiques Henry's bravado and the front he uses with others, Ashley tries to put into perspective that his loss may have some effect on his behavior. Like Brittany's assessment, television can provide viewers with models for unknown, unlived experiences and behaviors. However, the girls' use lived experiences when possible to explain behaviors of classmates, like the understanding Ashley shows.

Ashley opens up to Brittany and me when she shares that her stepbrother has lost the last tangible entity of his dad through his grandpa. Robert Hays (1984) argues that sharing personal experiences and information can create a sense of intimacy that is necessary in close friendship. Unfortunately, Brittany does not intervene or use this moment as an opportunity to deepen her friendship with Ashley. A moment goes by, in which I tell Ashley "I'm sorry. That sucks" and Ashley agrees, during which Brittany looks uncomfortable, then the conversation moves back to the characters of *iCarly*. This missed opportunity to strengthen their friendship indicates that Brittany didn't see it as an opportunity (meaning that perhaps she does not understand the social cues of compassion and empathy) or (more likely) did not feel the need to offer emotional support to Ashley. Ashley does not expand on what is wrong with Henry's home life, but in this context it is allowable to know more about Henry than Brittany does.

The final example from this day of research shows how the girls can critique and air grievances about boy classmates. This example, like the previous, shows how the girls can enact friendship through agreement about classmates and expanding each other's ideas.

Example 8: *iCarly's* Freddie

Me: So, [Henry's] like T-Bo?

Ashley & Brittany: Yes.

Me: And [Nathan's] like Spencer.

Brittany: Wait. Wait. Who was like Freddie?

Me: Maybe they aren't.

Ashley: [Danny] –

Brittany: No! [Colin]!

Ashley: Yeah. [Colin] because he thinks he can do anything… He
                thinks he's so technical.

Brittany: He thinks he's sooo perfect. He's like. He's like. What does
                he always say? Anti…

Ashley: Antiestablishment?

Brittany: Yeah. No. It's something else. And everyone's like, "We
                don't even know what that means."

Ashley: Yeah. Antiestablishmentarism

Me: Antiestablishmentarism.

Brittany: His project for Mrs. [Turtle] What is it called again? ...
                Like a plant thing.

Ashley: I don't know. I'm not in his group anymore.

Brittany: Oh yeah. Like he's doing this plant thing for his, for a
                project at school and it's like, he's like doing this plant
                thing and I'm like, "We don't even know what that is." …
                We're, like, so not into it.

Me: Interesting.

Brittany: He's like science and stuff. And like math. He's such… He
                always sucks up to the teacher.

Ashley: And all the teachers, like, think he's like so smart.

Me: But you guys don't think he's smart?

Ashley: Not really.

Brittany: Well –

Ashley: Well, sorta.

Ashley's decision to change her connection to Freddie from Danny to Colin underscores the respect she has for Brittany's recommendation. Like the previous support she shows in agreeing with Brittany's judgments, Ashley shows Brittany that she's interested in her assessments and thinks she's good at the game. Over time, agreeing without constantly challenging opinions will create a strong foundation for the duo. This will become particularly important when the girls do not see eye to eye in the future. Remembering the times they agreed or could ceded to the other may help them avoid future fights. Friendship work here takes shape as supportive responses meant to maintain strong bonds.

Under the guise of research, discussing negative attributes of classmates is socially acceptable. Both girls have strong feelings about Colin, none of which appear to stem solely from annoyance. Knowing him since kindergarten means they've seen him "suck up" to teachers on many occasions, a trait that irritates them. Freddie in *iCarly* is not often a show off but scenes that take place at school reflect his intellect and sometimes his "kissing up" tendencies. Also, being the tech guy for the web show clearly requires a bit of knowledge. It is clear from their mention of Colin's school project and use of word "antiestablishmentarism" that he perceives his intellect as something important, and the girls use that to superficially connect him to Freddie.

iCarly's *Males and Classmates: Shared Assessments*

Televisual material gives the girls a common text to refer back to in understanding the boys in their class. The superficial connections they make between the boys in their class and the *iCarly* males are based on key characteristics, sometimes

shoving classmates into the characters with little thought. The shallow reflection of the boys in their class offers them a safe space because they're not expected to know any boys intimately; over disclosing personal knowledge about boys may have the other girl questioning any deep connections made between either the boys and on-screen characters. Their friendship remains safe because they agree on the superficial assessments. The agreement of the boys on-screen similarity is telling of their friendship and what is acceptable to disclose. They work on their friendship at the expense of having a substantive conversation. Meanwhile, discussing girls from class opens them up to the danger of critique and challenge.

In these conversations, the girls use *iCarly* to contextualize unusual behavior of male classmates. When an actual experience can provide background for a classmate's behavior, such as Ashley's connection of Henry to her stepbrother Jason, the focus shifts from trying to categorize the classmate into a predetermined character to an emotional connection of understanding. When a personal experience is expressed, others can choose to ignore knowing too much about those involved (such as boys) and may use it as an opportunity to strengthen their friendship. It can be concluded that when a tween viewer does not have a lived experience to explain another's behavior (in general or specifically), they may turn to television to understand the experience.

A second theme emerges from these examples: the choice to discuss male classmates over female classmates. The unspoken rule of not over sharing about boys has the girls making sweeping commentary about their male classmates without question and this behavior continues in other settings. The girls rarely discussed non-present female peers when talking about television characters or narratives, not wanting to open

themselves up to challenges. The girls preserve their friendship together by avoiding conversations about non-present mutual friends. In this game identifying only boys keeps everyone in safe territory that allows them to engage in positive friendship work. Furthermore, the girls can speculate about boy behavior through these conversations and share in the humor they provide, such as with Mike, or criticize their behavior, such as with Colin. Television Is Just Like (Male) Classmates gives the girls a chance to connect television to their own experience in a real, explicit way.

"The Fight"

Live-action tween shows on Nickelodeon and Disney dramatize tween experiences emphasizing friendships and family relationships making shows highly modal for viewers (Jennings). Jennings argues that tween shows are "stories that resonated with their audience. The sitcoms were 'real' fiction for them – not cartoons, but stories with actors portraying experiences similar to the viewers" (9). The girls agree that part of the appeal of tween shows is the similarities that could be found between the shows and their lives. Disney Channel's *Austin & Ally* is an example that held such appeal. *Austin & Ally* is a comedy series that follows semi-famous teen musician Austin, songwriter Ally, and their two best friends, Trish and Dez. The series centers on the quad's friendships and Austin and Ally's struggle to balance their competing stardoms (Disney Channel Media).

After watching an episode of *Austin & Ally*, the girls discuss the different types of relationships in the show. The conversation took its own course, offering insights into the larger friendships within their class. There is an average of nine to twelve girls in their class that also participated in the same extracurricular activities as the girls. Part of going

to such a small school, where there is only one class for each grade, means there is an unspoken rule that everyone will be invited to parties, including the boys when appropriate. If girls are selective about sleepovers or over-night trips, the group present usually did their best to keep it secretive. Having such an intimate class also means that small fights or disagreements can grow to become unmanageable or require adult intervention.

Example 9: Establishing Friendship Group Similarities

Present: Brittany, Sylvia, Tiffany; Ashley is sick.

Me: What about friendships [in *Austin & Ally*]?

Brittany: They're all friends together.

Me: So... Are they friends the same way you guys are all friends?

Tiffany: Yes.

Brittany: Umm... (Nods.) In some ways.

Tiffany: In some ways.

Me: How?

Brittany: Like... We all hang out, we all, like, eat lunch, we all help each other. Umm. Yeah.

Me: So you guys all get along the same ways they do?

Tiffany: Yeah.

Brittany: Pretty much. I mean we have some fights eventually but ... That's [fights] in there [*Austin & Ally*] - same thing too.

Me: So do they get in fights?

Tiffany: Sometimes.

(Brittany nods agreement.)

Brittany: From time to time.

The girls most often recognize personal life experience on-screen when friendship is emphasized in a show. When asked about seeing life experiences in shows all the girls

thought it was normal and part of tween television shows. In this example and the one

that follows, the girls use their lived experiences to connect themselves to the problems

and resolutions with the *Austin & Ally* group. The girls combine their knowledge of the

show with an episode we had previously viewed as a group to find similarities and ways

to apply resolutions to their own lives. Discussing *Austin & Ally* in relation to their own

squabbles gives them the opportunity to discuss a larger fight that occurs with all of the

girls in the class. The girls refer to the course of events as a fight, though nobody

physically fought and other markers of fights may be missing.

> **Example 10: "The Fight"**
>
> Sylvia: There was a new kid. Her name was [Sarah]. And she –
>
> Brittany: She's not at our school anymore.
>
> Sylvia: Yeah. She, she was very mean, you see.
>
> Brittany: Yeah. Kinda like, I don't want to be mean or anything but we kinda –
>
> Me: Again, this is just going to stay between us. No one is going to see it or hear it. And [if] you don't want to talk about it, we don't have to.
>
> Brittany: Yeah. She's kinda like. I don't know. It was a little bit –
>
> Sylvia: It's hard to explain. But –
>
> Brittany: She wasn't very, like, she was like, really mean and, you know, we were kind of. But the fighting stopped... We were kinda happy because like the fighting was stopping... We had had to have three talks with Mrs. [Turtle] about this.
>
> Sylvia: Can I please talk?
>
> Me: Let her tell the story because she wanted to tell the story.
>
> Sylvia: Well. There was a new kid at school. Her name was [Sarah]. Well, we did not get along very well. No. None of the girls did. This was when the boys didn't have any

problems because they didn't care. And, she, and um, she said, she said to [Shannon], "I'm thinking the B word about you." And –

Brittany: Not butt or bee. It's a really bad word.

Me: That's okay.

Sylvia: And, we had one talk –

Brittany: And she always had this attitude.

Me: Let her tell the story, please.

Sylvia: One talk we had with Mrs. [Turtle] was the first talk, when - almost all the girls were there.

(Brittany and Tiffany are hugging to the side of Sylvia.)

Sylvia: And we had to come up with Mrs. [Turtle]… And, we had to talk with Mrs. [Turtle] – AKA our teacher – And then we had another one and we had to write down the story of what happened. Then... We had one thing where we literally got taken from lunch, we took our lunch to the art room, and we had all these cards with people's names on them and you had to write something nice about them. And of course, because this was happening, of course we had to write something nice about [Sarah].

Me: I also think I have some of those cards in my car.

Brittany: It was kind of a hard thing.

Me: Let's let her finish the story. And then everyone else can tell their bit.

Sylvia: And then... [Sarah] moved and went to a new school.

Brittany: That was kind of a good thing.

Sylvia: And then lived happily ever after.

For the girls, discussing classmates seldom occurs, which may have been a side effect of their knowing the focus of the project was television. This is the only example in

which the girls discuss other girls in their class in a group setting[4] and this example is in reference to a fight that included all of the girls in the class. The entrance to the discussion of "the fight" was through finding similarities between television and lived experiences. In this instance, the girls use a television narrative to find a safe space to discuss girl classmates, specifically one whose behavior has proved problematic. The girls try hard to not criticize or insult Sarah, but they admit that her leaving is a good thing for the class.

Sylvia is the first to want to share the story of "the fight" and I encourage her to share her perspective with minimal interruptions, reminding Brittany to allow her to talk. Neither Brittany nor Tiffany challenges Sylvia, supporting their friend's narrative. Here, the girls engage in maintenance friendship work, supporting what another says with minimal interruption. It should be noted that Brittany's interruptions are to clarify or add to the story, but not to challenge Sylvia. Sylvia's response to Brittany's interruptions – to either remind her that she is telling the story or to ignore her – demonstrate an understanding that Brittany is excited to share the extra "bits" and does not disrupt their friendship.

When discussing "The Fight," the girls navigate conversations about their female peers in very particular ways so as to not ruffle any feathers and avoid negative friendship work. Brittany interrupts Sylvia on multiple occasions to clarify or add to the narrative, but she does not actively challenge Sylvia's presentation of the story. Sylvia does her best to be objective about the fight and provide me with as many "facts" about the events to make a clear picture. Conversely, Brittany tries to engage in gossip talk by

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[4] On occasion the girls would refer to other girls in the class during one-on-one sessions, but it is often in response to a question about classmates.

referencing Sarah's attitude and name-calling. Neither Sylvia nor Tiffany joins Brittany in her gossip talk, reinforcing the unspoken rule about avoiding discussions of others.

Gossip about classmates is near nonexistent during group settings. The girls actively focus on each other in games like "Television Is Just Like…," though the game could open itself up to discussions of classmates. Penelope Eckert (1993) argues that gossip talk can consolidate group views and the use of gossip can help establish group positions. However, the absence of gossip signifies something larger. Marjorie Harness Goodwin (1990) argues that African-American tween girls are more likely to engage in he-said-she-said confrontations than Caucasian tween girls, who will mitigate responses in confrontations. Though it is unclear why Caucasian girls are more likely to avoid gossip, the girls appear to need to be perceived as a loyal friend who does not speak ill about her friends or acquaintances. The "good, loyal friend" appears to drive the girls conversations about others. However, avoidance of gossip about girl classmates means individuals are not open for challenges of opinion and perspective about those not present. It may be easier to adhere to the loyal friend presentation of self than to engage in challenges of who knows who best.

Conclusion

Live-action tween shows, with the intention of being reflective of everyday life, provide a good framework to understand how the girls made sense of the reality of television. The girls are able to make judgments about how television is both similar to and different from their own lives. The examples presented here focus on how making these judgments reflect their own social structure. Specifically, characters from tween shows become a source of televisual scrip to strengthen and diminish friendships. Hodge

and Tripp argue that viewers connect multiple parts of their life to understand and make sense of social experiences. The girls use their lived experiences to contextualize television characters and substitute television narrative when, where, and how they deem appropriate. In the discussion of boys in their classes, Brittany and Ashley use television to critique annoying classmates. Through discussions of television, the girls make sense of their own experiences and contribute to their peer culture.

Identifying similarities and differences between television narratives and lived experiences relies on the use of a shared televisual lexicon of characters and shows. The girls use their shared knowledge to understand these similarities and differences in relation to multiple people in their lives, including themselves. Patricia Palmer argues that the act of discussing television is an important shared experience for children, particularly in schoolyard play where cultural categories and value systems are established. By openly discussing people in their lives, the girls participate in important conversations that establish their own culture, including social rules of what are (un)acceptable topics of discussion and behavior.

Television provides the girls with a shared lexicon of characters and narratives to pull from when discussing similarities and differences between their lives and those shown on television. Varied interactions, with different people present indicate that there are unspoken rules and expectations about when and how certain people will be discussed. For example, the lack of conversation about other girls throughout the entirety of the project is one boundary the girls adhere to. The inclusion and exclusion of certain people in their lives during their discussions reflects unspoken social rules. By including boys in their conversations, the girls remain on safe conversational grounds and are able

to maintain their friendships. The girls categorize male classmates and through this they make meaning out of the characters from *iCarly* that is reflective of their own lives. By relying on group participated anecdotes, the girls are able to discuss both the boys and the girls in their class. The inclusion of boys and the exclusion of girls help the girls avoid skirmishes and challenges to knowledge. Relying on shared experiences is the only acceptable way to discuss girls from class. Though it is expected that the girls would gossip (Kyratzis), they actively avoid participating in it. By avoiding gossip, the girls preserved their friendship.

Identification with television helps the girls understand social behavior and highlights their social structure, particularly social rules. Friendship underscores how the girls talk about similarities and differences between television and lived experiences. Unlike Fisherkeller's participants, who use television to explain their own powerlessness, the girls use television in conversation to reflect where they stood with each other.

This chapter, as well as the next, rejects ideas that television is simply a model for life or simply entertainment. In this chapter, it has been shown that in some instances television is used as a model to understand unknown behavior, but it does not teach the viewer how to behave or respond. Instead, it offers the viewer the opportunity to examine a single possible outcome, much like "as if" play. Similarly, there are instances in which television remains as entertainment for viewers, such as when Brittany rejects finding similarities between herself and tween television shows. Finally, as explored in the next chapter, tween television shows offer viewers a lexicon to play *with*, not necessarily to *learn from*. The girls use their televisual lexicon in interesting and different ways that are dependent upon what is asked of them and who is present.

Televisual Play

> "…No matter what the cultural stimuli might be (toys or television
> shows), they have to be mediated by children's fantasy in order to be
> accepted, and adjusted to their play norms and social competence in order
> to be assimilated into the active theatric play forms of childhood."
> Brian Sutton-Smith 2007:154.

> "And this is *iCarly*!"
> Carly and Sam, *iCarly*.

This chapter examines how the girls use television content in play (televisual play) to engage in friendship work. Observation combined with the girls' actions and words inform friendship, which in turn informs understanding of television. The purpose is to demonstrate how the girls' lexicon of tween shows emerges in various play spaces, both during and away from television viewing, for friendship. To contextualize the girls' play, this chapter first provides a brief overview of the very large topic of play focusing on imaginary play, play frames, and mimetic play (Sutton-Smith 1997; Bateson 1955; Bishop and Curtis 2006; Caillois 1961). Examples here are derived primarily from the playground, where children's incorporation of media has been most extensively studied. Additionally, this chapter uses categories presented by Patricia Palmer (1986) and later extended by Julia Bishop and Mavis Curtis (2006) as a way to differentiate the when and how play occurs in relation to television.

This chapter addresses how imaginary play in informal settings can look different depending on how much television content is included. Play episodes are presented as both goal-oriented and process-oriented play, arguing that player expectation and perception are particularly important for the weight of television content used. For example, for players who want to use television to learn a skill or faithfully recreate a scene, play looks different than those who rely on structure and format to guide play.

Those in the former group are more focused on the end result while those in the latter enjoy the process. By examining the "weight" of television content, the play episodes also speak to the need to parse out the concept of mimesis. Highly mimetic instances include more television content and look more like faithful re-constructions of television.

Friendships and social dynamics are explored through televisual play both during and away from viewing. I argue that friendship work is influenced by when and how play (goal-oriented or process-oriented) occurs. Framed as "performance" and "re-make," the examples presented here work to extend ideas of mimesis while providing insight into the role television plays in friendship. "Performance" play provides a goal-oriented perspective of play wherein friendship work is unconsciously embedded in the play frame. Conversely, "re-make" play, with its variation of mimetic qualities, highlights the idea of "play as process" and friendship work occurs more explicitly.

Overview of Play

Play is found across ages and species, fulfilling a need, even when not enjoyed by the player. Despite this, agreed upon definitions of "play" are often elusive. Brian Sutton-Smith argues that descriptions and definitions of play often reflect disciplinary and professional needs. For Sutton-Smith, and many others, play is ambiguous because definitions are reliant on multiple factors, including perspective and scholar needs. Despite this ambiguity, many theorists and disciplines study children's play with scholarship historically falling into the categories of games (examined by folklorists), informal play (the focus of psychologists and anthropologists), and psychotherapy (by psychoanalysts) (Evaldsson and Corsaro 1998). To that end, much of play theory that includes children focuses on children's transmission of culture (cf. Opie and Opie 1959,

1969) or its role in cognitive development (cf. Piaget 2013; Singer and Singer 1992). In contemporary play studies, scholars focus on spaces frequented by children. These include the schoolyard (Beresin 2010; Marsh and Bishop 2013; Willett et al. 2013), the classroom (Marsh 2000; Dyson 1997), or, as the case with more recent literature, online play (Willett 2008; Marsh 2010). The range of this research emphasizes the ambiguities and complexities of play.

Within play theory, literature often considers play from an adult perspective, with pre-conceived notions of play or categorical ideas of what it should (not) look like, relying on terms like "sociodramatic play" to convey complicated meanings. As Sutton-Smith warns, such interpretations may be very different for others who view the same scene or interaction in a different way, especially with a regard to a child's interpretation of an event. In conjunction with an adult perspective, play theory generally works to examine the results of play, its productivity, and what a child gains from it (Glenn et al. 2012). Glenn et al. argue that for children, the enjoyment of play can also be found in the process of play. The recognition that a single play episode may elicit multiple interpretations – as well as the belief that the process and the end result of play are both important to research – guides the interpretation of the girls' play in this chapter.

Play Rhetorics and Play Frames

In the seminal text *Ambiguity of Play*, Brian Sutton-Smith outlines seven rhetorics of play that shapes historical and contemporary play theory. Arguing that no single rhetoric of play can fully define play, he encourages the use of multiple rhetorics to be combined to understand and frame play experiences. Of the seven rhetorics, two are

particularly appropriate to use here: the rhetoric of play as imaginary and the rhetoric of play as progress.

The rhetoric of the imaginary includes creative play that is fanciful, not real, lighter, and playful (Sutton-Smith). In imaginary play, players perform their own or others' works, rely on metaphor, and use metacommunication to convey meaning. According to Marsh and Bishop, the use and transformation of source material, such as media, in play is an example of imaginative play (cf. Marsh and Bishop; Opie and Opie; Reid and Frazer 1980; Palmer; Gotz, Lemish, Aidman, & Moon 2005). Another aspect of imaginary play is the interaction with and use of play frames as well as the boundary of being "in play" or "out of play" (Sutton-Smith; Bateson 1972). Permeation between frames (and play) allows individuals to participate in multiple "conversations" and "interactions" (Sutton-Smith; Bateson 1972). It is apt to refer to the play presented in this chapter as imaginative play as it includes the "act of making what is present absent or what is absent present" (Sutton-Smith 1997:131).

Manipulating the play boundaries and frames along with the use of metaphor provides players with the ability to offer double meaning and use metacommunication to play with meaning. The play frame can allow players to communicate in ways typically deemed inappropriate and/or unacceptable. Moving outwards from the play frame, the play space is the imaginative space that children use to "embody" that which is "not real." In the play space, children rely on verbal and non-verbal communication to signify that they are "just playing" and things should not be taken seriously. In the play frame, children can be whatever they want, and act how they want with a mutual understanding that feelings should not be hurt because things said and done in the play frame are not

intended to be about the person. However, in the larger play space, players may work through issues with others present, try out new identities, or critique social experiences and behavior (Bateson 1972). To clarify, the play frame is the use of the imaginative space to mediate communication while the imaginative space and players together constitute the play space.

As Sutton-Smith recommends, it is important to consider the various rhetorics of play. The rhetoric of play as progress emerges from notions that play is used for the development in becoming an adult of a species (Sutton-Smith). Much of the play theory here comes from biology of both humans and other species and psychology. Of importance to the present study is the concept that play is an opportunity to develop complex social skills. According to Sutton-Smith, "… play skills become the basis of enduring friendships and social relationships and also offer a way of becoming involved with other children when shifting to new communities" (43). In play, relationships can be discovered and strengthened as will be shown in the examples below.

Televisual Play

The *when* and *how* children use television content in play outside the playground has received limited attention. In *The Lively Audience*, Patricia Palmer investigates what television means to children, how they interact with television in the home, and how television content may be incorporated into play during or away from television viewing. Palmer defines eleven ways in which children interact with television that relates to how close (during viewing) or far (not during viewing) the child is to the television during play. Of the eleven categories, two are relevant to the present study: "performance" and "re-make." "'Performance' is the acting out, saying or singing of television content"

during viewing (72). An example is a child singing along to the theme song of their favorite show. "Re-make" is a bit more ambiguous and occurs *away* from viewing.

> 'Re-make' can be a small reference or event within an otherwise conventional game or play sequence. At the other extreme, it could describe a long episode in which children attempt deliberately to reconstruct what they remember seeing on TV. The 'making' can be in the form of words, gestures or acting out. It may even be material, the creation or use of objects based on TV shows" (Palmer 1986:77-78).

However, episodes that fall under "re-make" do not accurately assess the extent to which television content is a part of play. Both "performance" and "re-make" mark the action of viewing as being an important factor in understanding television interaction, behavior, and subsequent play.

Extending Palmer's categories of interactive behavior with television, Bishop and Curtis (2006 as cited in Marsh and Bishop 2013; personal correspondence) identify three ways children use television in play: syncretism or hybridisation, allusion, and mimesis (Caillois). Syncretism or hybridisation blends characters from television with traditional play tropes, such as incorporating characters from *Batman* into familiar chase games. Allusion play makes references to television characters (onomastic allusion), copies gestures from shows (gestural allusion), or references topics from shows (topical allusion). Finally, and of interest here, mimesis includes children's play that faithfully uses characters or storylines, creative adaptations of original plots and characters, and parody. Like "re-make," mimesis runs the spectrum of faithful re-creation to creative adaptations. To clarify, "re-make" is a category of interactive play behavior while

mimesis is the way a child plays with media content. When combined, "re-make" and mimesis can reference a range of play episodes that incorporates media to differing degrees and does not acutely consider the location of television viewing (during or previously).

Play On Schoolyards

Play on school playgrounds has historically been one location to understand the incorporation of media into children's games, and by extension, examine the rhetoric of the imaginary. Marsh and Bishop (2013), continuing the Opies' study of rhymes and song transmission with elementary school aged children, examine the influence contemporary, popular television and media have on songs, rhymes, and playground games finding that children continue to incorporate popular media into their playground culture. They determined that since the Opies' studies, forms, framings, and functions of play, as well as the incorporation of media and the commercial market have remained the same while contexts, texts, practices, and processes have changed. It is less surprising that contexts, texts, practices, and processes have changed as it reflects changes in technology. Together, the continuities and discontinuities indicate the continued saturation of media in children's playground culture. Though the present study takes place outside the schoolyard, both the Opies' and Marsh and Bishop studies offer insights into the use of media in play, particularly in relation to the "play frame." Marsh and Bishop argue that children continue to create play frames and communicate "metamessages" on the playground that "enable children to manage modalities in play" (149). Framing offers individuals the opportunity to rely on double meanings and metaphor. The play frame in particular helps players work through problems and criticisms of others.

The inclusion of television content on the playground is useful in understanding ways children play with televisual material away from the screen and outside their homes. Marsh and Bishop (2012, 2013) document the inclusion of television structures and storylines in children's pretend play on contemporary schoolyards in the UK. They argue that through the imitative and parodic play of the adult reality talk show *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, children are able to explore issues of social class as well as work towards an ethical self. Through faithful reenactments of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* children act out transgressive identities that are otherwise deemed dangerous and defiant. Marsh and Bishop also posit that this play allows children to explore issues and problems they may face in adolescence. This play is most successful when all players know what to expect by recognizing the format of the "reality show" game and are able to accurately portray their parts, resulting in "a shared play practice… which also served to strengthen friendship groups" (Marsh and Bishop 2014:24). One important factor in the incorporation of media content is the shared lexicon of televisual material. Without it, children are unable to participate cohesively.

The combination of the rhetoric of the imaginary and the rhetoric of play as progress can be found in tween girls' incorporation of music into playground play. Rebekah Willett (2012) examines how popular music is used in playground dance routines during recess. The tween girls in her study taught each other lyrics and dance moves from popular music and adapted them for appropriate recess performances. The two groups of tween girls had different approaches to their dance performances and expectations of how the others should perform, similar to the girls in the present study and their expectation and incorporation of televisual material into their play. In Willett's

study, the girls were able to share and teach each other without being condescending or disparaging to those that didn't already know the lyrics or dance moves. The adaptive performances reflect girls' access and exposure to contemporary music; those whose lives are more saturated with contemporary media are often the teachers, while those with less exposure learn more from their peers. Willett's study shows one way in which tween girls incorporate contemporary media into their recess performances and transmit their knowledge in a cooperative, even caring, fashion.

Playing for the Girls

Before presenting examples it is important to address the girls' ideas about play as they often outwardly rejected the idea of "playing." Several times they told me they no longer had "play dates," just "hang outs." However, fluidity in play did persist. They would ask if they could go to Mike's house "to play" at the end of research sessions. One explanation for this fluidity may be their ideology of what constitutes play. A narrow definition of "doll play" or "playing house" may appear childish to them, and thus they work to differentiate their own get togethers. Simultaneously, they consider games and the *iCarly* Web Show Kit used during research as play, further cementing ideas that play, for tweens, is a complicated experience.

The boundaries of play during research sessions have been externally decided for the girls by me and therefore acceptance of an activity and subsequent play is contingent upon my choices. Under the guise of helping me, the girls can express interest in an activity and any enjoyment derived from it. From their perspective, the choices are mine and I hold the power in what takes place. However, the reality is the activities have been influenced and shaped by their enjoyment and openness to share thoughts about

television, indicating that the power of choice is split between them as participants and me as the researcher. Giving them the illusion that play is part of the project allows them the peace that everyone is expected to participate and any amusement found in an activity is for the sake of the project. Within the research setting particular types of play are acceptable that under different circumstances would be rejected, such as playing with the *iCarly* web show kit.

Performing Mimesis: Faithful Re-creation During Viewing

Rather than passive, television can be an interactive experience with viewers finding ways to angle themselves in relation to the characters and storylines. Viewers use television to understand their own experiences, and as a reference point (Palmer; Buckingham 1993; Fiske 2002; Griffiths and Machin 2002). Interactivity may take multiple forms: participation in conversations online about shows (Tian & Hoffner 2010), through creative writing (Dyson; Marsh 1999), both structured and unstructured games (Willett 2004; Marsh and Bishop 2013; Opie and Opie), and, of interest here, imitation (Palmer; Bishop and Curtis; Sutton-Smith; Caillois). Though much research regards television imitation as negative (Bandura, Ross, and Ross 1963; Kirsh 2011), positive imitation, categorized as learning or play, can be found, particularly with younger children.

One example of positive imitation can be found in pre-school television, which is often categorized as educational. Daniel R. Anderson (2004) argues that one primary aspect of successful preschool educational shows is imitation, particularly in a call/response manner, which can be seen in Nickelodeon's *Blues Clues*. Other educational preschool shows, like *Sesame Street* and *Dora the Explorer*, also rely on

viewer interaction and imitation (Hendershot 1999). Surprisingly, within the realm of tween television, positive imitation and implicit learning have been largely ignored. This is most likely due to a shift in scholarship towards other tween media use, such as social media. Furthermore, the focus on interacting with television has been primarily reflective of a significantly (pre-school) younger or older (adolescent) demographic. There are opportunities for imitation in television shows aimed at tweens, such as embodying language, style, attitude, and movements. Imitation of physical movement, such as the performances Willett found on the playground, is categorized as gestural mimesis (Bishop and Curtis). Mimetic gestures are faithful physical imitations of media content. Performance of gestural mimesis during television viewing provides a particular type of play in which children collaboratively work towards a common goal, learning a skill seen on screen. Players accept their common goal and focus is put on achieving expertise in the physical imitation.

In gestural imitation, friendship work may be obscured by the activity. As players work to learn something new, dialogue may be minimal, indicating that perhaps social dynamics are not being addressed. However, friendship work simply looks different here. As individuals speak less, physical movements and terse words mediate friendship. For the more enthusiastic player, attaining leadership and convincing others of her agenda is a matter of confidence and direct command. Others may be absorbed in the activity and prefer to participate under the guidance of another, allowing the friendship to be maintained.

The example below, learning to salsa dance through a television show, becomes a faithful gestural re-creation of television content in which the girls, with Sylvia as leader,

learn to salsa dance. Glenn et al. found that children aged seven to nine would find any opportunity to play and concluded that, for children, television viewing and the repurposing of viewing material were different activities. However, in this study, Sylvia and Brittany show that television viewing can simultaneously enhance play. As Reid and Frazer suggest, the girls use the television content to augment their knowledge and ability to play during viewing, subsequently repurposing the material for their own use.

Learning to Salsa

The example, Learning to Salsa, comes from the first research session, which includes Ashley, Brittany, and Sylvia. The girls watched an episode of *Jessie* ("Toy Con," season 2, episode 13), which had two main storylines. In the first storyline, Zuri, the youngest Ross child, sells Jessie's (the nanny) favorite doll to a toy collector in exchange for a less impressive toy bunny that poops candy. Jessie is hurt that Zuri would be so quick to exchange a cherished doll and working together, they get it back. Meanwhile, Luke, the eldest Ross boy, and Emma, the eldest Ross, help the family's butler, Bertram, win over his crush, Salma, by teaching him to salsa dance for a competition. Many of the scenes include the Ross children teaching Bertram to salsa, which Brittany and Sylvia replicate throughout viewing.

> **Example 1: Learning to Salsa**
> On screen: *Emma and Ross show Bertram the basic steps to Salsa, cueing him with, "One, two, three."*
> Sylvia stands up and tries the same steps, moving her hips back and forth and her arms in a vaguely salsa-like fashion.
> Brittany stands on the couch and moves towards Sylvia.
> Brittany: Here. Here. Let's have it. Let's tango –
> Brittany reaches out to Sylvia, but Sylvia pushes her away.

Sylvia: No. No. I'm trying to do the moves they're doing. I'm
                 trying to do the moves.

Sylvia puts her hands out in front, like resetting herself. Brittany, still on
the couch, moves closer to Sylvia. Sylvia pushes Brittany away.

Sylvia: All right –

Brittany: Let's –

Sylvia: No. Wait. Move. Please. Please.

Sylvia moves away from Brittany. Sylvia begins the moves shown on
screen. Brittany steps down from the couch and imitates the dance moves
as well. The girls' salsa moves are in sync with the moves on screen. Both
girls twirl together, but their steps, though in time with the music, are
uncoordinated. Sylvia is more coordinated, controlling her stance and feet.
Brittany flails herself about, laughing. They jump up and down, and
eventually return to a ballet pose with one arm arced above them, the other
at their waist. The dance scene on screen ends and the girls end theirs in a
fit of giggles.

...

On screen: *The Salsa Competition begins. Bertram is dancing with his
love interest, Salma. As the scene progresses, Bertram loses confidence in
his dancing skills and messes up. The judges tell him he shouldn't be
dancing. Emma and Luke watch from the sidelines, ready to step in if
Bertram messes up.*

Brittany begins the solo dance moves, while Sylvia remains on the couch.
Eventually, Sylvia stands up.

Sylvia: Now we're trying to dance. I'm Salma [Bertram's love
interest].

Sylvia reaches towards Brittany to dance as a couple.

Sylvia: No, Bertram does [this dance movement].

Sylvia shows Bertram's role to Brittany. Girls return to dancing separately.

Sylvia: I'm Salma... I don't want to, to be her. I'll be Emma once she comes in. I'll tell you right now, she does [come in].

Girls continue to dance separately.

Brittany: I'm Salma.

Sylvia: You're not doing what Salma's doing.

Sylvia mimics Salma's moves, and Brittany continues the more basic step. Both girls start to twirl. Girls hold final pose of the salsa dance.

Sylvia: Here, I'll be Emma when she comes back in and you can be Salma. Wanna be Salma? I'll be Emma!

Brittany: Yes!

Girls continue to hold salsa poses.

Sylvia: You can be Salma now.

Brittany begins to copy Salma's dancing.

On screen: *Salma begins to dance with Luke.*

Sylvia: I'll just do her [Salma's part] until Emma comes in.

...

On screen: *Jessie and Zuri attend a toy conference to get the doll back. To enter the conference, they dress up as "Snuggle Bugs," a children's performance group similar to* Teletubbies *or* Yo Gabba Gabba! *The "Snuggle Bugs" perform.*

Ashley walks towards the television. Sylvia and Brittany sit on the couch and ottoman.

Ashley: Okay. I'm gonna be Jessie.

Sylvia: What? I'll be, I'll be Zuri, which is the ladybug.

Sylvia and Brittany both stand up.

On screen: *scene returns to the salsa competition.*

Brittany: I'll be her [pointing to the television screen]. I'll be her.

Sylvia: Salma. I'm, I'm Emma. I'm Emma so. I'm Emma. And
               once they [Emma and Bertram] turn, I'll be with you,
               [Ashley].

Brittany and Ashley dance together. Sylvia dances alone.

On screen: *Salma and Luke dance together. Bertram and Emma dance together.*

Ashley: Okay.

Ashley moves from Brittany to dance with Sylvia.

Sylvia: They didn't turn yet.

Ashley moves between Sylvia and Brittany.

Sylvia: I'm Bertram. I'm with Salma.

Sylvia begins dancing with Brittany. Ashley dances alone.

Sylvia: You're [Ashley] Luke. You're Luke.

Sylvia switches partners to dance with Ashley. Brittany dances alone.

Ashley doesn't do the correct steps or take it seriously.

Sylvia: Stop it!

The girls sway separately, and then begin following the steps again,

separately.

Understanding Salsa Play

        According to Palmer's scale, this type of interaction is categorized as a

performance: there is a demonstration of knowledge without a reciprocal response from

the television. The atmosphere during this instance is jovial with the girls' laughter

accompanying their movements and the girls gesturally imitate what they are seeing on

screen, with this performance becoming a faithful reproduction in mimetic play. This

example shows how gestural mimetic play can become goal-oriented. Sylvia is intent on

learning the correct steps to salsa dance, and Brittany willingly joins her. The girls

perform their salsa dancing during the viewing of *Jessie*, relying on cues for how the movements should look and change.

In this example, Sylvia uses language and physical movement to set the play space and show her intent to learn to salsa dance and what she expects from Brittany and Ashley. In gestural mimetic play expectations are mediated through a shared goal, in this case, learning to salsa. Dialogue is minimal with Sylvia explaining her intentions and rejecting Brittany's attempt to tango and Ashley's silly dance. Brittany and Ashley are forced to join Sylvia, abstain all together, or risk Sylvia's anger through talking. Sylvia and Brittany achieve their collaborative goal in learning the dance routine by pretending to participate in the episode's dance competition.

During gestural mimetic play, players are focused on learning a skill and dialogue is minimal, reflecting the need to pay attention to television content. Negotiations and enactment of friendship develop through more physical means and language that helps direct others. Sylvia steps into the leadership role, as learning to salsa is primarily her interest. Together, Brittany and Sylvia work on the steps, correcting and encouraging each other, which, in turn, maintains their friendship. Shared interest and support contribute to friends feeling closer. However, this stasis is interrupted by Ashley's choice to make the dance silly. Sylvia corrects her behavior with the verbal warning, "Stop it!" indicating that more seriousness and sincerity should be exhibited. Sylvia expects Ashley and Brittany to participate in learning to salsa appropriately and is not trying to control either girl. When either girl responds in ways Sylvia disagrees with, Sylvia comments on it and/or physically moves herself away from the perpetrator.

Sylvia rarely vies for the leadership position, more often letting Ashley and Brittany step into the role. In this interaction, Sylvia actively creates the leadership role for herself by providing the boundaries for the place space and reinforcing it through terse language. Additionally, she assigns the other girls roles in the dance sequences after choosing her own. Laurence Goldman (1998) argues that in play, children will assign and choose identities and roles to shape the play experience. Neither Ashley nor Brittany contest Sylvia's leadership, instead positioning themselves within the space to best suit their own needs.

Friendship work is embedded in the girls' play here. Through terse language, gentle re-positioning, and displaces of self-interest, Sylvia maintains her relationships. Both other girls support Sylvia's insistence for this type of play and in working to learn to salsa, the girls create a new experience. When the girls disagree with Sylvia's play, they still respect her choice and eventually follow her lead. Friendship work here is more subtle and found through shared achievement. Finally, because Sylvia rarely takes the leadership role, the girls seem to be more likely to appreciate her when she does.

As explored below, this type of play differs greatly from play that occurs away from television viewing in both the extent to which television content is used and how friendship is enacted. This re-creation occurs simultaneously with viewing, and leaves little room for dialogue or exploration of the television content outside of the direct instruction of learning to salsa.

The *iCarly* Web Show Set Kit

This section shifts to look at how the girls play with Nickelodeon's *iCarly* Web Show Kit. The *iCarly* Kit is a game-like kit for children ages six and up that allows

player(s) to create their own web show. The kit includes cardboard background sets, cardboard characters and prop pieces from *iCarly* that go on spokes, and an instructional DVD. Together, the player uses the cardboard cutouts and stage props to create different scenes within her own web show, perhaps even including herself at different times. According to the box you can "direct, shoot, and create" your own web show "just like *iCarly*" indicating that there is a proper way to play with the toy. The underlying, unwritten directive for the kit may be that the player would also *plan* the show, similar to the characters of *iCarly* who do plan their web show within the television episodes.

Like the "Television Is Just Like…" thought game discussed in the previous chapter, use of the *iCarly* kit occurs well into the collection of data to circumvent feelings of self-consciousness of playing in front of the camera and me. The girls' interest in the video camera prior to introducing the kit included them playing with, to, and for the camera indicating an interest in the filming process. Engagement with the kit helped grow this interest.

In some ways the girls play with the kit as intended by the manufacturer. They are aware of the imaginary audience and make sure their characters face the camera. They borrow tropes from the *iCarly* web show itself, and at times, play the characters accurate to their onscreen personas. Much of their play with the kit *looks* similar to a puppet theater. However, the addition of characters from other television shows and a desire to *not* plan the webisodes, but instead, improvise their parts disrupts the intended way to play. At my suggestion and their request, more characters were added to expand the *iCarly* cast to include characters from *Victorious* (Nickelodeon), *Good Luck Charlie* (Disney), and *Jessie* (Disney). With the additional cast members the girls expand their

storylines, creating crossover episodes. While the look of the play is similar to puppet play, the interactions and engagement with the characters and each other reflects doll play more than puppet play. In puppet play players act out predictable storylines with an underlying feel that it has been practiced previously. Conversely, doll play tends to be more improvisational.

In the *iCarly* television show, the group plans skits, topics, and viewer participation scenes for their web show. The girls prefer to improvise their webisodes, creating multiple storylines with players sometimes at a loss for how to participate within the frame. The web kit was similar to creative writing for them, and in creative writing they are required to plan characters and storylines. Therefore, by their logic, planning was akin to schoolwork and was dismissed. Research, as a separate space from school and home routine, differed from other "work" in their lives in that "fun" was an important aspect for them. The research sessions were intended to mimic their normal hanging out, so their decree that they be fun was important to the project. This contributes to the similarities found between puppet play and doll play previously discussed.

The webisodes are not presented in chronological order; instead they are presented to reflect the faithfulness of re-creation to their television material. Television re-creations fall onto a spectrum of being an accurate reproduction of the source material, faithful re-creation, to loosely referencing the television content, a fantastical creation. A faithful re-creation relies on players' knowledge of the show's structure, narrative, character relationships, and language. Faithful re-creations may appear parodic or an honest attempt to capture the show's likeness. Fantastical creations, at the other end of

the spectrum, may borrow pieces from the source material, such as names and character traits, but use the player's imagination to create new storylines and character interactions.

The examples included in this section come from two separate research days. Webisodes 1 and 2 include Ashley, Brittany, and Sylvia, while Webisode 3 is only Brittany and Sylvia. One note on the presentation of data in this section: the girls took turns recording and being in front of the camera. As the girls do not have formal training video recording, much of their footage is shaky and nauseating with lots of zooms in and out. For that reason, a lot of the physical movement has been lost.

Webisode 1 (Chronologically in the middle)

Webisode 1 occurs halfway through the research session and the girls' play with the kit for the first time. Sylvia is video recording while Ashley and Brittany are playing with the set. Brittany is primarily Gummy Bear, an inanimate prop piece from the *iCarly* universe while Ashley uses the Carly and Sam cutouts. Brittany insists on using Gummy Bear as her character despite Ashley and Sylvia's verbal and physical frustration and annoyance (see Webisode 2). Ashley and Brittany are particularly familiar with the structure, language, and readily available tropes of *iCarly* and use their knowledge to create a webisode reminiscent of *iCarly*. In this webisode, their televisual expertise is emphasized and attention moves to the creation of a webisode.

Webisode 1

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So. How do you identify love? Tell me now? Let's go.
Brittany as Robot:	I... I... I don't know –
Ashley as Carly and Sam:	That was a funny scene. Now, I'm Carly. And I'm Sam. And this is –
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	And I'm Gummy!

Ashley as Carly and Sam:	And this is *iCarly* –
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	*iGummy*.
Ashley as Carly and Sam:	*iCarly*!
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Plus Gummy Bear. Hello. How are you? Okay. Just fine.
Ashley as Carly and Sam:	I'm Carly and I'm Sam.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	And I'm Gummy. Gummy.
Ashley as Carly and Sam:	Uh, actually you're not part of this.

…

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Okay. So today, Sam, if you got to pick between getting a Mohawk or hitting yourself in the face by a giant bowling ball, which would you pick?
Ashley as Sam:	Totally hitting... Totally getting the Mohawk. Actually, both.

…

Ashley as Sam:	Now. It's my turn! Because I'm the star.
Brittany:	Who said anything about you being the star?
Ashley as Sam:	Um, doh! I'm the main, one of the main characters.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	One of the main characters. Hello, I'm here too. I'm Gummy Bear.
Ashley as Sam:	Um, I mean, the other person is Carly.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Carly has diarrhea.

...

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So, Sam. If you got to shave your head or shave your head?
Ashley as Sam:	Um, I would probably, um, shave my head.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So. You would shave your head? With scissors or with... Hmm. Pulling it out?

In Webisode 1, Brittany and Ashley borrow format and language from the *iCarly* web show for their own creation. Palmer categorizes *any* episode of play that incorporates specific television content as a "re-make," while Bishop and Curtis argue that creative use of television content in play falls on the spectrum of mimesis. The first example of this is the use of "i" (for internet) in the naming of their show. In the first episode of *iCarly* Freddie suggests using "i" for internet, while Sam recommends Carly's name so Sam won't be held responsible for content or have much responsibility.[1] The second example is the girls following *iCarly's* introduction of characters. In the web show, Carly and Sam introduce themselves and then say, in unison, "And this is *iCarly*." Finally, the random questions Brittany/Gummy Bear ask Ashley/Sam are evocative of the web show. Many of the *iCarly* sketches include Carly and Sam asking each other bewildering questions. The incorporation of specific television content categorizes this webisode as a re-make (Palmer), and according to Bishop and Curtis, the creative use of television in play signifies mimetic qualities indicating that Webisode 1 is a mimetic re-make. Finally, this is an example of goal-oriented play in that the girls work together to create a webisode. Ashley wants to create an authentic webisode, starting with a proper introduction while Brittany prefers to use *iCarly* as a template for a new show.

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[1] In his blog Danwarp, creator and producer Dan Schneider laments that iSam.com was already registered, as he wanted to call the show *iSam*. Fans speculate how the show may have been different with a different name (Huffington Post; Danwarp Blog)

Dismissing Brittany allows Ashley to develop the play scene to fit her expectation while simultaneously expressing annoyance.

In play, the play frame can be used to facilitate friendship work. The play frame allows players to be critical of others and express themselves in ways otherwise deemed unacceptable (Bateson; Goldman). Use of the play frame to mediate friendship work is particularly useful in goal-oriented, highly accurate re-creations, like Webisode 1. Players can blame negative comments on "just playing." Friendship work becomes more inconspicuous when meditated through the play frame.

Ashley actively uses the play frame to work through irritation with Brittany's use of Gummy Bear instead of a human character. In play, players are able to be critical or express themselves in ways that may otherwise be deemed unacceptable (Bateson; Goldman). Through the character of Sam, Ashley expressed her annoyance of Brittany as Gummy Bear. The structure and language, familiar in an *iCarly* skit, is useful to interrupt Brittany with, "That was a funny scene." In *iCarly* Sam can be rude and abrupt, and during web show scenes she will interrupt Gibby or Freddie or a guest (but never Carly) when she is bored or has decided the scene is over. Sam allows Ashley to dismiss the Brittany/Gummy Bear scene in a way reflective of the web show and can express disinterest in Gummy Bear's participation in the scene. After all, Ashley is just playing Sam. The play frame lets Ashley express frustration without causing a fight with Brittany, which is later repeated with the phrase, "Uh, actually, you're not part of this."

The play frame allows language to take on multiple meanings. In Webisode 1, Ashley's language can be interpreted in multiple ways. The statement "Now. It's my turn! Because I'm the star" holds two possible meanings. In the play space, this

statement, spoken by Sam, is interpreted as Sam being a star of *iCarly*. The emphasis placed on Sam being a main character invalidates Brittany's choice of Gummy Bear. Ashley is determined to have a true to form creation at the cost of Brittany. The second meaning can be found within the larger realm of the research project itself. Throughout the process, Ashley often referred to herself as "the star" of the project, as she had a hard time adjusting her relationships with the other girls and me to accommodate the research project (explored in Chapter 2). The use of double meaning language in friendship further lets Ashley convey her annoyance under the guise of play. Brittany/Gummy Bear's response – the use of scatological humor – minimizes any offense taken. Brittany and Sylvia, who is recording the scene, may choose to ignore Ashley's insistence on being at the center of the project.

Expertise and authority are contested in this webisode. Ashley uses her expertise about the *iCarly* universe to exclude Brittany by pointing out that Gummy Bear is not a character in *iCarly* and therefore can not be a host in the girls' re-creation. Like showing her frustration by interrupting Brittany/Gummy Bear, Ashley continues to use Sam to emphasize that the girls' rendition should be as accurate and true as possible. In expressing her expertise, Ashley is able to gain some authority. However, Brittany's dexterity in play, to point out that Carly is not present and therefore it makes logical sense for Gummy Bear to be a host, demonstrates Brittany's ignorance or choice to ignore Ashley's underlying need for Brittany to play her way. Like Ashley's intentional use of the play space to express displeasure and frustration, Brittany chooses to use the play space to support her play choices. Brittany does not challenge Ashley's authority in the play space or expertise about *iCarly* but continues to play her way while trying to

adhere to Ashley's unspoken rules in ways that are consistent with her own play expectations. Brittany may interpret Ashley as being frustrated and annoyed, but she can ignore it as they are "playing." Brittany does not have to actively address the problem. At the same time, Ashley can remain ignorant if Brittany's feelings are hurt. The play space offers a unique area to critique without meaning for it to be taken personally.

In mimetic re-creations that are faithful to their referent television content, play appears as being goal-oriented (to create a webisode) with the freedom to incorporate other knowledge (such as humor). Friendship work here looks similar to that found in the salsa example; it's embedded within the play, but it also relies heavily on the play frame. Players can use the play frame to share criticism and work through frustrations. In turn, the play frame mitigates the harshness otherwise felt by brutal honesty. At the same time, players may use the form and structure of play to assuage tensions or to ignore them all together, like Brittany does. The use of the play frame to mitigate negative feelings combined with the use of elements from the show referent offers a safe(r) space for friendship work to occur in play.

Webisode 2 (Chronologically first)

During the first attempt with the kit the girls competed for physical space as the kit's background scene cutouts were not intended for three children to play at once. Ashley decided that it would be easier if one girl is a director/video recorder. Webisode 2 is the first webisode with one of the girls, Ashley, recording the scene.

This webisode highlights how the girls' individual expectations in play can create tension that can emphasize friendship work. Webisode 2 opens with discussion on how to make a true to form webisode. Once the play begins Brittany uses the Gummy Bear

character while Sylvia is Carly and Sam. This webisode moves along the mimetic scale towards fantastical creations, sitting about halfway between the two extremes. It uses elements from *iCarly*, such as form and language, but it becomes clear that there is no shared goal. Instead process as play is emphasized.

Webisode 2

Ashley:	How about we actually use iCarl- the Carly [cutout character] and make it the real show?
Brittany:	Why? Why?
Ashley:	And then we can just put like, Freddie. Freddie, where would we put Freddie?
Sylvia:	Freddie would be over here! I'll put Freddie [on my spoke]. I'll get Freddie.
Ashley:	Yeah. Put the Freddie with the, um, camera on his head.
Sylvia:	I need Freddie and big Carly.

...

Brittany:	Can I still use my Gummy Bear?
Ashley:	Umm...
Cyndi:	Why don't you put Freddie on with the Gummy Bear?
Brittany:	Okay.

...

Brittany:	I can't have Freddie. He'll join us in a minute, k?
Ashley:	Nooo. Gummy bears can't talk.

Brittany:	So? It's TV! Nothing's real! It's TV, nothing's real.
Ashley:	Actually, most things are real on TV. More real than fake things.
Brittany:	Well kids' shows. Like *iCarly* and *iCarly*.
Sylvia:	Yeah. Like *iCarly* and *iCarly*.
Brittany:	See.
Ashley:	Okay, fine.

Ashley signals the start of the segment with the countdown.

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	I'm Gummy! [Pauses for Sylvia.] I'm Gummy!
Sylvia:	You can't tell me when to do my cue!

(Laughter.)

Ashley (video recording):	I'm Carly and I'm Sam –

Sylvia (who has the spoke with Sam and Carly on it): No. I'm Sam and I'm Carly.

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So today –
Sylvia as Carly or Sam:	We're here with Gummy and this person –
Ashley:	Guys let's try not to be silly, okay?
Brittany:	What?
Ashley:	Cuz let's make a for real one and then a silly one.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So today we'll be talking about dogs being shaved. Now. Do you think dogs should be shaved, Carly?
Sylvia as Carly:	Why should I care?
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Because you should. Well, no you shouldn't, but you know what I'm talking about. It's a talk show.
Sylvia as Carly or Sam:	They need a haircut in the summer.

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	That's true. In the wint- That's true. In the summer they need a haircut because –
Ashley:	One question. Where is this taking place?

In Webisode 2 the girls use the format of *iCarly* to direct how they play with the kit, attempting to figure out how to create a web show. Before they can begin playing, Ashley decrees that it should be a "real" webisode. The girls each have competing ideas about play and what constitutes a "real" webisode. Therefore, social dynamics and competing expectations in the play space emerge and must be addressed before the girls can create a webisode and/or engage in play.

Ashley assumes the position of director and video recorder insisting the girls take the activity "seriously." Ashley wants a viable webisode, but does not explain what a "real show" would encompass. The girls create what appears to be a semi-realistically formatted webisode, but Ashley is still unhappy and interrupts the scene to gain pertinent information. Brittany's own expectations about playing with the *iCarly* kit are in opposition to Ashley's. She wants to create a webisode in the spirit of *iCarly* but adapt and develop Gummy Bear as a character. She uses elements of *iCarly*, as was seen in Webisode 1, but is insistent that Gummy Bear be used. Lastly, Sylvia, who is the least familiar with *iCarly*, wants to incorporate the cast of *iCarly* but finds herself frustrated when Brittany tries to cue her. Sylvia's ignorance, combined with the use of Gummy Bear, frustrates Ashley who interrupts to ask where the scene is taking place, but in doing so, emphasizes her assertion that their play is not to her standard.

In the play space social dynamics have to be addressed when players have different modes of playing and expectations. Ashley tries to be the leader through the director role. As director she tries to influence the girls to play how she wants them to.

Sylvia is up to Ashley's challenge and accepts playing by being Carly and Sam. Brittany rebuffs Ashley's comments that Gummy Bear is not real by pointing out that not *all* television is real and uses this argument to defend her use of Gummy Bear. Ashley concedes the point and the girls continue to play. In the play space, individuals must consider their fellow players, and determine when and how to deal with disputes. When the players are friends, such as the girls, minor disputes are opportunities for individuals to exert their control and participate in friendship work. By conceding Brittany's point, Ashley maintains their friendship and may give her a cache to disagree at a later point.

Expectations of others can influence how friends engage in friendship work. Ashley is forced to re-think her expectations in relation to Sylvia and Brittany recognizing that wanting her way could cause a fight or disagreement large enough to discourage full participation. Brittany appears to be oblivious to Sylvia and Ashley's frustration and simply wants to play. Conversely, Brittany may use ignoring her friends' expectations as an adaptive tactic to play how she wants. Sylvia's knowledge about *iCarly* is challenged when she does not take Ashley's cue for entering, but neither Brittany nor Ashley view Sylvia's ignorance as a deficit in this webisode.

In play as process, expectations must be managed for all players to enjoy the sequence. Friendship work is not embedded in the play itself but comes through during the conversations that occur during set up, throughout play, and at the conclusion of play. Television content becomes secondary as the play focuses on social dynamics. Process play must consider and mediate players' expectations. The girls could not play without addressing friendships. Competing expectations can derail play and highlight disagreements

Webisode 3

Webisode 3 occurs during the summer. The session takes place at Brittany's home with Brittany, Sylvia and me present. For this session the kit has been expanded to include characters from *Victorious*, *Good Luck Charlie*, and *Jessie*. This webisode highlights the girls' choice to improvise and expand character's storylines to create a large, multi-show narrative. On the mimetic scale Webisode 3 is the most fantastical creation and friendship work here is enacted in a similar fashion as Webisode 2. However, the play frame is broken to contest expertise, and competing ideas about acceptable play are challenged.

Webisode 3

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	So. What's up Zuri?
Sylvia as Zuri:	Gummy, I'm pretty sure this is my show.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	I'm pretty sure this is my show. (Gummy jumps on top of Zuri's head.) Did you know I'm starring in a new movie?
Sylvia as Zuri:	Well I am starring in EVERY *Jessie* show and every *Jessie* movie.
Brittany (breaking character):	There is no *Jessie* movie.
Sylvia as Zuri (with attitude befitting Zuri):	Uh. What about "Jessie's Big Break"? Um. Yeah. Think about it.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Well, at least I'm more popular. Ha ha. I'm food. (In a Valley Girl voice:) Isn't that greater than a person?
Sylvia as Zuri:	Um, I'm Zuri Zenobia Ross. I don't know if you know who I am but –
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	I know who you are. You're my co-host.
Sylvia as Zuri:	Co-host? What do you mean? You're MY co-host.

Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Like I'm the superhero and you are the sidekick.
Sylvia as Zuri:	Gummy, get it right. You do whatever gummy bear song you have. Well I'm a gummy bear (sung) or whatever that is.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Hey I have one million. Over one million hits.
Sylvia as Zuri:	I like your song but I don't like you.
Brittany as Gummy Bear:	Let's just go to school.

iCarly is almost completely removed from Webisode 3. The only nod to *iCarly* is Brittany's use of Gummy Bear and the idea of creating a web show. Brittany has created Gummy Bear into a new character while Sylvia uses Zuri from *Jessie* to round out the scene.

The girls attempt to use a similar format as the previous two webisodes, but their improvisation and need to be the star interfere with their ability to create a cohesive introduction. Caillois argues that one benefit of mimetic play is the creation of a world without rules that allows for more improvisation. The lack of rules means the girls are able to include more television content without fear of "getting it right," emphasizing the importance of process as play; fun is found in playing, not just in creating a viable end result.

The boundaries of the girls' play are fluid in this instance. They stay "in character" for the majority of the webisode and the incorporation of different characters allow them to cross stories, and, more importantly, show off their own knowledge about tween television. Sylvia shows her expertise about *Jessie* by naming the episode that was a television movie in which Zuri was a "star." She factually explains that Zuri stars in all

the episodes of the television show *Jessie* as well as the hour long "movie" of *Jessie* she

emphasizes her knowledge about the television show and perhaps hopes to legitimatize

her play as Zuri. Brittany challenges Sylvia's knowledge about the show by stopping play

and saying there is no *Jessie* movie. Though Brittany is correct that the hour-long show is

more a long episode and not an actual movie, she is content with Sylvia's response and

no longer feels the need to question her authority on *Jessie*. By accepting Sylvia's

response, Brittany legitimates Sylvia as a friend and her character choice for play.

Friendship work occurs in this webisode as the girls struggle to dominate the play

space. The first demonstration of control is in determining who is the primary host.

Brittany does not leverage her home as Ashley does, so she does not automatically

maintain leadership. Instead, the girls develop the characters they are playing in hopes of

gaining the primary host position. Sylvia bases her character on the reality of Zuri's

character from *Jessie* while Brittany improvises Gummy Bear's background, using her

imagination for these characteristics. Through this interaction we find the girls work for

equal footing in their friendship. Though Sylvia outright rejects Gummy Bear, it is hard

to find any seriousness in this rejection extending to Brittany as a person. Her intonation

and body language express that she simply dislikes him, perhaps because she does not

know what to expect from him as a character. The layer beneath may be a frustration

from Brittany's insistence to continue to be Gummy Bear instead of a "person, person,"

but this provides Sylvia with the ability and opportunity to critique the character, and

through that extension, Brittany's imagination. Ultimately, she comes up short in relation

to finding things to critique about Gummy Bear aside from him not being real and just

simply disliking him. Sylvia's criticism of him, and by extension, Brittany, differs from

Ashley's criticism. Ashley uses the form and structure of the *iCarly* web show to exhibit and work through frustrations with Brittany. Sylvia's annoyance stems more from the character of Gummy Bear than from Brittany; Brittany is simply the mouth of Gummy Bear.

In Webisode 3 friendship work moves within the play space and the play frame is used to cushion insults. In this webisode, the girls rely on explicitly shared knowledge as momentum for their play experience. They question each other at various times, accepting and recognizing each other's strengths to support each other. Use of non-*iCarly* characters allows the girls to use their favorite characters, further highlighting their strengths.

In fantastical creations friends can use expertise and self-perceived strengths to move storylines along. Friendship work becomes embedded and blatant. Fellow players' questions and challenges to choices provide opportunity to work on friendship. The extent to which television content is included extends opportunity to work on friendship as players become open to supporting fellow players' expertise and/or continue to challenge them.

Conclusion

The use of the rhetoric of the imaginary falls in line with other play literature surrounding children's use of media in play and televisual play is just one option for examining friendship work in play. The examples in this chapter are grounded in play, observation, and interaction and examined from the rhetorics of the imaginary and progress. Unlike the examples in the "Television is Just Like…" chapter, these examples rely on observation and the use of the play space to convey feelings about friendship,

each other, and acceptable ways to play. The play space becomes the mediator of friendship and friendship work. Within it, the girls use the play frame as a tactic to communicate negative feelings and work through frustrations.

Mimesis as a way of play for children encompasses a variety of experiences. "Whilst mimesis can refer to instances in which children copy [media] characters or storylines faithfully, it can also refer to more creative adaptations in which children develop the original plots and characters in new and innovative ways" (Marsh and Bishop 2012:281). The examples presented here show how the degree and use of television content that is included in play varies. The inclusion of *all* examples of play that include references to television content as mimetic play does not take into consideration the extent of television content used in play. Instead, the mimesis spectrum should reflect players' expectation, experience, and knowledge about the source material. It can define play and inform how players play with media content in the play space.

Mimesis is "part reproduction and part re-creation, part fidelity and part fantasy" (Goldman 1998, p. 11). The breadth of mimetic play and the examples presented here suggest a need to parse out the different types of mimetic play that can occur. At one end of the spectrum, media infused play may reflect the imitative, faithful re-creations of the referential media content termed "faithful re-creations." The other end of the spectrum should reference "repurposed interpretations" of media content in play scenarios. The salsa dance example above would be considered a faithful re-creation, while Webisode 3, in which the girls borrow television content but repurpose it for their own needs, would be a repurposed interpretation. The spectrum should recognize the extent to which media content is being used in children's play, differentiating the degrees between the extremes.

One challenge for researchers is gaining knowledge about children's media culture to be able to recognize if, when, and how it becomes incorporated into play. In the present study I was aware of and invested in the tween television shows, making it easier to find the source material in play.

Televisual play offers multiple avenues to understand friendship work as the girls use television content to fulfill their own needs and desires in the play space. In goal oriented play, such as "Learning to Salsa" and Webisode 1, friendship work is obscured by the need to learn a skill or achieve a goal. Furthermore, goal oriented play tends to incorporate more television content, though relation to viewing does not seem to be a factor. This allows players to exhibit expertise and knowledge about shared shows. Conversely, in process oriented play, friendships often need to be outwardly negotiated, either overtly by calling someone out, or covertly, through the use of play frames. The use of play frames is particularly interesting as it enables players to participate in friendship and work through annoyances and issues without confronting another.

Movement in the play space from conversation *about* play, such as taking it seriously, to actual play highlights the players' ability to recognize different roles. This webisode emphasizes this transition as being an important factor in differentiating goal oriented play from the enjoyment of play in the process. In the salsa example, and Webisode 1, the girls' expectations were obvious and they worked collaboratively towards the end result of learning or creating something. In this example, wherein each girl's expectation was different, as was the execution, social dynamics were managed before the girls attempted to create a webisode. Though *iCarly* is a referent to how they

play, expectations, friendship, and perception of the experience alter the end result so that

conversation *about* play becomes more memorable then the webisode itself.

iConclude

Carly:　　　　　But what about *iCarly*?

Sam:　　　　　The internet will still be here when you get back.

…

Carly & Sam:　And this has been *iCarly*.

"iGoodbye," *iCarly*

This dissertation sought to examine the role of live-action tween television shows in tweens lives and peer relationships, and in doing so, contributes to understandings of television viewing as an active, not passive, activity. As other research has shown, viewers, including children, filter importance and interest of shows through experiences, including those with peers (Fisherkeller 2011; Fiske 2002; Buckingham 1993; Palmer 1986). For tween girls, peer interactions shape particular interests in shows and conversation surrounding television shows, narratives, and characters. When viewing television together, girls position conversation around their own needs from their friends and what they want to (unconsciously) gain from the discussions. Viewing shows together is a source of pleasure and enjoyment for tween viewers, but also provides them with opportunities to explore and maintain friendships. Tween girls participate in friendship work when watching television together, talking about it before, during and after viewing, and while engaging in a variety of activities.

Friendship Work

Friendship work is a theoretical framework to explore relationships with friends that examines interactions on a granular level and in relation to media culture. It locates friendship through context, conversation, and physical movements to examine the use of friendship in interactions. Friendship work translates conversations into a framework to

understand how and in what settings children employ their cultural lexicon to their own advantage and it becomes a lens to understand children's culture. At the center of this inquiry stand the problem of how these tween girls understand and use a television lexicon of live-action tween shows to forge and negotiate their friendships.

In seeking to understand the social impact of interactions between friends, friendship work uses facework as a foundation. Erving Goffman's facework (1967) is concerned about how individuals understand and fulfill social expectations, especially with strangers and acquaintances. Facework offers a system for understanding challenges and maintenance of face that occurs when friends hang out. Allison Pugh later argues that children are less concerned with expectation and more concerned about social standing amongst friends. Friendship work extends these two theoretical approaches to consider the social impact of talking about television with close friends. Friendship work recognizes that conversations and chats with others impact social understandings and interpretations of relationships.

In the present study, friendship work has examined tween girl friendships in the less structured, less routinized location of a friend's home. By locating how friendship is enacted in a casual location it moves beyond sociometric approaches to understanding how peers interact, offering a more in-depth, nuanced illustration of friendship. The friendship work the girls engaged in suggests that the cultural force driving conversation, intimacy, and, at times, animosity, includes television, but is not confined to it; at times they discussed and used music and movies in a similar fashion indicating that children can use any media material in friendship work.

Engaging in friendship work, and subsequently, maintaining face, becomes more important than the act of viewing when watching television with friends. When hanging out with friends, I found the girls' conversations could be categorized as either challenging or supportive interactions. Challenging interactions included interruptions, questioning, or discouraging a friend, resulting in a friend losing face. Challenging interactions serve to separate the challenger from one or more friends, creating or widening fractures in friendship. Challenges can be issued both intentionally and unintentionally. The goal of challenging interactions is to separate from one or more friends and televisual material can help achieve this by focusing on weaknesses, gaps in knowledge, and/or misinterpretations of content. For example, the girls would challenge each other's assertions about similarities found between friends and characters on screen. Making inappropriate or incorrect connections between friends and on screen characters were opportunities to separate from a friend and their perspective. Well-intended, but poorly received assessments emphasize deficits in friendships. Occurring more often, but less likely to be recognized, friends help each other maintain face by assuring, defending, or encouraging one another. In defending a friend's perspective, statement, or position, another girl can help her friend save face or possible lose face all together. I found that supportive interactions (re)aligned two or more friends, and in doing so, deepened the friendship.

An individual's need to hold a particular role affects friendship work as well. The two roles described, leader and expert, help frame how individual's needs emerge in interactions with friends. Roles help individuals position themselves in hopes that friends will value and support self-perceived importance. Friends' reactions to self-perceived

strengths can favorably or adversely affect one's understanding of that strength and increase or decrease the closeness two or more friends feel. In friendship work roles can illustrate how social positions are achieved and how positioning can negatively or positively affect friendships. Though friendship work is not a zero sum game, an individual may unconsciously pay attention to how often a friend is supportive or challenging, which can result in a maintained, strengthened, or diminished friendships.

Friendship work endeavors to understand how media material (here, televisual culture) contributes to peer interactions and how individual children position themselves in relation to one another based on previous experience. Experience with peers is particularly helpful in imagining how comments will be perceived. Cultural knowledge combined with personal knowledge of those present help friends position themselves in interactions to fit their own needs. Knowing each other well, the girls often relied on other experiences to inform how their own statements will be taken up, ignored, or rejected. For example, Brittany was particularly adamant about positioning herself as an expert in storytelling and willing faced any challenges the girls had for her, but was shy about admitting to Ashley that she thought she was a bit like Sam. Friendship work recognizes children's concern to maintain and strengthen well-established relationships, and through this precarious balancing act, friendships are maintained, diminished, or strengthened.

How an individual may choose to diminish, maintain, or strengthen friendship is dependent on the situation and who is present. Tweens, like adults, filter televisual content through experience and in doing so, they become cautious about sharing opinions or making comments about televisual material. Sharing opposing views, favoring a

disliked character, or identifying with negative content or characters may create

dissonance in friendships. By monitoring what is said and how it is said in the presence

of friends, tweens can maintain their relationships by avoiding challenging or debates.

Engaging in and discussing tween television becomes one location to explore how tweens

participate in friendship by looking at what is shared and what is dismissed when hanging

out with friends.

The Tween Television Lexicon

As an industry, tween television shows operate under the assumption that they are

reflective of tweens' lived experience. As a multi-sensory medium, television can present

information both visually and audibly in an attempt to better capture and produce an

experience. Shows are better equipped to present "real-life situations" that reflect a lived

experience. They can become reference points for viewers who are otherwise unfamiliar

with something going on, bringing experience and knowledge for inexperienced viewers.

Television content represents a large portion of children's shared culture.

Children incorporate television into their daily routines and life, using it as a time marker

(cf. Fiske 2002; Morley 1989), to (re-)create narratives during story/writing time at

school (cf. Dyson 1997; Marsh 1999), and to "play out" television scenes during recess

(cf. Marsh and Bishop 2014). Television is an easily accessible commodity and when

children do not have first hand knowledge of the show or character in question, they can

make up for the gap in knowledge through cues from others present (Buckingham;

Griffiths and Machin). The televisual lexicon used in this study has been created from the

live-action tween television shows, characters, and narratives. The girls used the lexicon

in friendship work, as a reference point in their lives, and as source material to create their own webisodes in play.

Television viewing is informed by previous experiences (Palmer 1986; Buckingham 1993; Morley 1980, 2003, 2005; Fiske 2002). The girls in the present study were no different in using previous knowledge to inform their viewing habits and interests. However, to date, few scholars have examined how children's experiences impact television viewing choices and discussions, particularly when viewing with friends. The act of viewing television together introduced the girls to a known experience, but one that provided them with a different skill set, particularly in how they discussed shows and interacted with each other. As a shared cultural experience, group viewing, especially in a research setting, the girls were forced to acknowledge new dynamics for the group, while maintaining confidence in their prior experiences and knowledge base. The tween television lexicon informs how tween girls use, compare, and contextualize personal experience in relation to television shows created for them. In conversations with friends tween girls can borrow from this lexicon to explain new behavior, experiences, and problems. The characters, narratives, and shows become sites to discuss similarities, discover friend's preferences, and negotiate interests.

The girls in the present study used tween television shows as reference points when unknown experience or behavior emerges, indicating that tween television shows are successful in reflecting tween experience. The girls used televisual material to explain behavior of boys in their class and to contextualize a fight that occurred with all the girls in their grade. However, the girls sometimes did rely on personal experience for explanation if the personal experience was more remarkable. Tween television shows can

explain different points of view and provide background for tween experiences. When tween live-action shows reflect tween viewers' lives, shows can act as a normalizing agent for the viewers, whose experiences are shown in a contained 22-minute episode.

The televisual lexicon provides tween viewers with material to discuss their lives in veiled ways to talk with friends about taboo topics such as boys. Reframing boys in relation to television shows becomes an acceptable arena to discuss male peers, suggesting that television becomes a portal for uncomfortable or forbidden conversations. In less formal settings, television can provide a catalyst for friends to discuss new subjects or as an avenue into more uncomfortable conversations. Interestingly, in the present study, this conversation does not extend to other the girls from class, indicating that not all topics can be accessed via televisual material. Additionally, though not included here, all of the parents interviewed indicated that they had used television shows to broach difficult topics with their daughters including conversations about bullying and sex. As a medium, television provides a variety of depictions of life experiences that can open up conversation for tween viewers.

Televisual Play

The girls in this study did not identify with television character or narratives in ways that would be expected from previous research. They rejected embodiment, instead using shows to frame their own experiences and to benefit themselves in friendships. The girls could identify characters they were similar to and even characters they aspired to be similar to, but when asked if they are like them in explicit ways the girls were hesitant to make those connections between themselves and the characters on screen. They were capable of finding such similarities in others. In chapter three we saw how the girls made

judgments about each other and were able to justify their claims. However, such assertions could be rejected or accepted, which contributed to girls' friendships. For example, Brittany likens Ashley to Zuri from *Jessie*, but both Ashley and Sylvia reject this. Televisual material can be used to bring friends closer together in such thought games or push them apart. Televisual identification for tweens is more complicated than simply liking a character and trying to be like them. Instead, characters become an example of what life could be like given a set of particular circumstances, like how the girls draw connections between their own friendship group and the one found on *Austin and Ally*. Tweens use television shows as an example of life, but not necessarily a how-to-guide. As a demographic, tweens tend towards cynicism, recognizing the efforts of marketing and selling and perhaps some of this newfound cynicism extends to viewing (Griffiths and Machin 2003; Siegel, Coffey, and Livingstone 2001).

Friendship work recognizes the dark side of friendship, which can be found within play. Expression of displeasure and/or a need to show off can influence friends' interactions. The play frame is particularly useful in working through frustrations and annoyances, and is important in understanding television's role in friendship work during play. The play frame allows players to make comments about others and express dissenting or unpopular views. Commentary about others and admonishment of how one played could be passed off as "part of playing." The girls were adept at using the play frame to express and conceal frustration and displeasure, especially in playing with the *iCarly* web kit. While in character, players can criticize friends without "real world" consequences, even if the commentary is pointed. Tween girls may use play frames to be

critical of others without coming off as rude or critical. If they are challenged for criticism, they can simply fall back on "I was just playing around."

From the lens of friendship, the play frame offers insight into how tween girls interpret and express friendship, particularly when a girl is frustrated with a friend. Instead of creating a "fight" or forcing a friend to lose face through disagreement, the play frame masks players' discontentment without addressing the issue head on. Using negatively perceived and/or rude characters further supports the use of characters to express frustration and annoyance. Simultaneously, players can respond to rude behavior in like by also claiming to be "in character" or they can ignore the behaviors. The play frame allows players to distance themselves from others present without actively participating in friendship work.

Tween girls find pleasure in both goal-oriented and process play. Goal-oriented play, like the salsa example in chapter four and the first webisode in the same chapter, appears more rigid. Friendship work in goal-oriented play is embedded within the play itself. With attention put on learning or creating something explicitly, friends have little room to negotiate status and friendship. Friends are forced to adhere to the rules in the play space or to abstain from the activity. In this study the girls participated in more process play wherein friendship work was overt. In the freedom of playing that is open-ended and highlighted by the make belief aspect, friends can participate in friendship work to align or separate from others.

Expanding categories found within the mimetic play framework brings attention to the importance tweens (or children) place on different media content. Patricia Palmer (1986) shows how the children in her study used media content that could be easily

incorporated into traditional chase games (such as cops and robbers), while Marsh and Bishop (2014) show that mimetic play allows children to confront and "discuss" societal issues, such as teen pregnancy. The girls in the present study engaged in mimetic play that to some degree reflected their own lived experience or desired experience. Play with televisual material allows to tween girls to be experts, (re)-create narratives, and focus on aspects of shows that are important to them. In the games played with the girls, I found they were excited to have their knowledge and experiences validated by both their friends and by me as an adult. The *iCarly* web show kit became a battleground for competing ideas, expertise, and play approaches. Focusing on how and to what extent televisual material is incorporated into tweens play reflects the importance placed on the characters and narratives, as well as what they feel is most important.

Reimagining Tween Play

Scholarship surrounding children's play tends to focus on young children's play or conceptual underpinnings to understanding play. Play looks different for tween aged children. Historically, scholarship has focused on tweens play on the schoolyard (cf. Willett 2011; Marsh and Bishop 2013). More recently there has been a shift to look at how tweens play with new media (cf. Ito et al. 2009). Tweens can be found playing in other locations of their lives, like at home when hanging out with friends. Play with friends at home can include a range of play activities. In the present study the girls played with the televisual material in several ways that included making connections between friends and television characters, using televisual material to learn a dance, and to create their own webisodes. Tweens play here is informed by television. Locating play outside

school grounds for children requires an understanding of what play is for tweens, and how the engage in play.

The girls in the present study were quite adamant that what went on during and throughout the research process was very much *not* play; play included dolls and/or toys. For them, it was providing me with tangible data about their understanding of and thoughts about tween television, and television was a separate activity not defined as play for them. However, I argue that much of their interactions should be categorized as play. The girls used television to "mess around" with learning new dance steps and (re)imagined and (re)enacted borrowed content to create new iterations of shows. A shift in understanding of what is play for tweens is necessary as tweens' lives continue to be examined and understood. Gaining a common language and understanding for what is play for teens may help identify how they play.

iImagine Future Research

As adult researchers and scholars endeavoring to gain mastery in a new subject, we seek those who are most knowledgeable about the topic. In thinking about children's experiences, it is just as important to confer with children themselves about research methods and ethical concerns. In future research I hope to continue the dialogue *with* children on their lived experiences, letting their voices guide research, much like Ashley's role in the present study.

As childhood studies expands to further understand the role of children's culture in children's lives it must continue to include media culture. This study provides one lens into the role of television in tween girls' relationships with peers. It is my hope that future research considers the role of tween television in all aspects of tweens lives, including

peer relationships in different settings such as school or during organized activities. Equally important is to gain understanding in how families discuss and use televisual material in familial relationships, especially those with different power dynamics. Future research should consider how and in what ways tween television is used as a means of communication.

There are two aspects of tween television that should be considered in future studies that fell outside the scope of the present study: access and show depictions in relation to viewers. As Netflix and on-demand applications gain popularity it is easy to assume that children have more access to tween television shows. The girls in this study were predominately middle-class, Caucasian and cable was a given in their homes. Research needs to consider if the same shows are used in a various economic status households; do children in lower income areas have the same televisual lexicon as the girls here, and if not, does this present a different set of problems with friends. Pugh assures us that children make up for gaps through other knowledge, but it is important to consider how these slippages affect friendship work. Additionally, ethnicity did not play an overt role in this study, but should be factored in to future studies. Many of the shows on Nickelodeon depict ethnically ambiguous, middle class children in varying scenes and tweens on Disney tend to be upper-middle class and equally ethnically ambiguous. While the girls could identify with shows through shared problems and values, it remains unclear if this is true for an ethnically diverse audience.

I imagine friendship work to be applied to friendships in a variety of settings. Research needs to examine how other media material is used in friendships. I anticipate that friendship work becomes increasingly complicated as individuals age and friendships

grow stronger. If friendship work is to be a viable framework for understanding friend's interactions it should be malleable and adaptable to the cultural materials important to different populations. I hope that my future work can further contribute to and broaden understandings of friendship.

Final Thoughts

In conducting and completing this research I have been consistently asked, "Is television bad for my child?" The answer to this question, and all media, is that it's complicated; it is hard to categorically claim that television is bad for children. My response often begins with asking the parent about their own viewing habits before directly discussing the shows their child is watching. Most people follow up that my project must have been "fun and easy, just watching television." Watching tween shows with Ashley, Brittany, Sylvia, and Tiffany was enjoyable, but it was also complex, filled with negotiations amongst themselves that I could only view as an outsider. Television, as a medium, opens the viewer to new experiences, but also shows depictions that can be both humorous and emotional.

Approximately four months before I began my study, Carly and Sam said good-bye to *iCarly*. During the final episode, which I watched with Ashley, I recalled all of the shows that were important to me growing up and the impacts they had on my understanding of the world. In working with Ashley, Brittany, Sylvia, and Tiffany I was reminded that it wasn't the shows that mattered most. It was the conversations I had with my friends, the viewing parties we scheduled for new episodes, and tying up the phone lines to talk about the shows while viewing together, but apart. Those memories drove this research, but I can not underestimate how these four girls have shaped my

understandings of what it means to be a tween in the 21st century, and the role of television in their lives. To say good-bye to my own work I would like to share a short conversation I had with Tiffany's mom at the end of a research session. She told me, "You have no idea the impact you're having on these girls at such a young age. Showing them that education can be fun and to set their goals high."

Appendix A

Sample Television Diary

Day: Monday					
Time	Television Show	Network	Watched With	Activities	Notes
7:00 AM	*iCarly*	NICK	Self	Homework	
7:30 AM					
8:30 AM					
3:00 PM					
3:30 PM					
4:00 PM					
4:30 PM					
5:00 PM					
5:30 PM					
6:00 PM					
6:30 PM					
7:00 PM					
7:30 PM					
8:00 PM					
8:30 PM					
9:00 PM					
9:30 PM					
10:00 PM					

Appendix B

Television Show Directory[1]

Austin & Ally (2011-Present), Disney.

Follows the exploits of teens Austin and Ally, opposites, who combine their musical

talents. Ally is a songwriter and Austin is a musician/singer who becomes an overnight

singing sensation singing one of Ally's songs. Best friends Trish and Dez help the duo

get into and out of trouble. Storylines focus on the teen's friendships.

Degrassi (2001-Present), TeenNick.

A fictional, Canadian teenage drama television series that tackles tough issues in a

realistic way. The most authentic teen drama on television, *Degrassi* explores an

interesting group of adolescents and young adults going through the trials and tribulations

at Degrassi Community School and beyond.

Good Luck Charlie (2010-2014), Disney.

GLC focuses on siblings PJ (a teen), Teddy (a teen), Gabe (a tween), and Charlie (a

toddler). Teddy, as the older sister, makes a video diary of Charlie's best moments,

ending each episode with, "Good luck, Charlie!" Storylines focus on family and friends.

iCarly (2007-2012), Nickelodeon.

A show within a show, *iCarly* follows Carly Shay and her two best friends, Sam and

Freddie, as they create a webcast for and about kids their age while grappling with

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[1] For Nickelodeon shows, blurbs are taken from www.nickpress.com. Disney show blurbs are created through my knowledge and show websites.

everyday tween problems and adventures. Carly lives with her older brother and guardian

Spencer and produces her web show from a makeshift studio in the loft upstairs. Due to

Carly and Sam's hilarious banter and great chemistry, *iCarly* becomes an internet

sensation and a pop phenomenon blooms with the weekly webcasts featuring everything

from comedy sketches and talent contests to interviews, recipes and problem-

solving. (Nickelodeon press site.)

Jessie (2011-Present), Disney.

Jessie is a teen who moves to NYC to sing, but becomes the nanny for the Ross family.

The show revolves around the four Ross kids: Emma, a teenager and the only biological

children of the absent parents; Luke, an adopted American pre-teen; Ravi, an adopted

Indian pre-teen; and Zuri, an adopted African 9 year old. Storylines focus on sibling help

and the fun that can be had in NYC.

Sam & Cat (2013-2014), Nickelodeon.

Nickelodeons funny gals Sam Pickett (from *iCarly*) and Cat Valentine (from *Victorious*)

come together in a spin-off series about the duo. *Sam & Cat* follows feisty Sam and

flighty Cat as they become best friends and unlikely roommates who start a babysitting

service.

True Jackson, VP (2008-2011), Nickelodeon.

Impressed by her no-nonsense style as she sells sandwiches outside his offices, fashion

executive Max impulsively offers teenager True Jackson a dream job as vice president in

charge of his youth apparel line. At first startled by the harsh office politics she encounters, particularly with bitter and resentful older colleague Amanda, True gets a handle on things once she realizes corporate life is no worse than swimming with the sharks in high school.

Victorious (2010-2013), Nickelodeon.

Show follows Tori Vega, a teen who unexpectedly finds herself navigating life at an elite performing arts high school. From her first day at the school, Tori feels out of place among the amazingly talented students, especially mean diva Jade. With the help of Tori's sister Trina, and her new friends musically talented André, brooding bad boy Beck, eccentric Cat and lovable but psychologically scrambled ventriloquist Robbie, Tori realizes that she was born to perform and that entertaining people not only makes her happy but may change her life.

Zoey 101 (2005-2008), Nickelodeon.

Thirteen-year-old Zoey Brooks is a winsome leader whose independent nature is put to the test at the newly co-ed Pacific Coast Academy. The Pacific Coast Academy used to be a boys-only school, and since the girls have arrived so has the romance. Zoey and roommates find their way together facing teen topics from a light-hearted perspective.

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION:

2009-present. Doctoral Candidate in Childhood Studies. Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey.

Areas: Childhood and Youth, Children's Media Culture, Childhood Studies, Media Studies, Girlhood Studies

> Dissertation Title: *Watching Television With Friends: Tween Girls' Inclusion of Televisual Material in Friendship*
> Committee: Dr. Daniel Thomas Cook (chair), Dr. Anna Beresin, and Dr. Todd Wolfson.

2010: North Carolina State University: Ethnographic School in Lake Atitlán, Guatemala.

2006: Bachelor of Science in Anthropology, *cum laude*. Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. *cum laude*, University of California, Riverside.

EMPLOYMENT:

2015-present. Left Coast Press, Inc. Independent Contractor. Solicit reviewers for new publications; work with authors on book covers; research potential audiences.

2014-present: Strottman Consultant. Contribute to new approaches for companies and branding to better appeal to children.

2012-2014: Adjunct professor for the Department of Childhood Studies and the Department of English, Rutgers University. Designed and taught multiple courses.

2014: Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant for Dr. Robin Stevens, in the Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University. Taught/Supervised: *Child Well-Being*. Spring 2014. Supervised undergraduate students working with low-income junior high students in the pursuit of understanding happiness.

2011-2012: Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant for Dr. Daniel T. Cook, Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University. Supervised *Kids Media Culture*. Research, collected, maintained, and coded articles on children, marketing, food, and mothers. Edited papers that developed through this research and data collection.

2010-2011: Conference Assistant for Dr. Daniel T. Cook, Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University. Assisted graduate student director with international conference: *Multiple Childhoods/Multidisciplinary Perspectives: Interrogating*

Normativity in Childhood Studies. Circulated calls for papers; managed email correspondence with guest speakers and attendees; managed attendees; created and disseminated acceptance and rejection letters; worked with multiple on-campus offices to secure locations, reservations, food, and transportation.

2009-2010: Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant for Dr. Myra Blubbond-Langner, Department of Childhood Studies and Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, Rutgers University. Supervised *Death, Dying, and Illness* (Spring 2010), *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Spring 2010), and *Children and Childhood: Cross Cultural Perspective* (Fall 2009). Developed a data management system to maintain, code, and analyze interviews, observations, and transcripts between parents of terminally ill children and medical personnel. Created a coding system to analyze the transcripts that focused on particular types of questions parents asked medical personnel. Assisted in preliminary analysis and presentation of data.

2007-2009: Operations Manager for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Planned volunteer events in detail for Team In Training including informational meetings, start of season events, and training events. Sought new relationships with local businesses to support Team In Training events and fundraisers.

2006-2007: Traffic and Sales Coordinator for Cabletime. Created and implemented a system of weekly reports to keep sales executives and third party vendors aware of television commercial advertisement orders and verifications of actual runs of advertisements. Maintained a client database that included television advertisements, runs of commercials, and previous orders.

2001-2006: Research Assistant for Dr. Tia Kim, Department of Psychology, Rutgers University.

PUBLICATIONS:

"Character Licensing" (encyclopedia entry). (2015). In *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of consumption and consumer studies*.

"Rebranding Nickelodeon: How Did the First Network for Kids Make it Work? (2014). *In Media Res: A Media Commons Project.* Available: http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/

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