

Like mother, like daughter? Unboxing an Etsy childhood

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This paper is based on an in-depth, ethnographic case study of a six person household with four children, the two youngest of whom are under the age of nine. The study particularly includes interview data from the mother and the youngest child, five year old Alice. It concentrates on exploring the ways in which Alice has internalised her mother's Etsy 'pre-loved' business as a major focus of her own play world, and enriched it with additional features from her unboxing fandom and vlogging consumption. Although the family is not well-off, it cultivates creativity and enables positive attitudes towards the repurposing of technologies and the support of passionate engagement. The parents have made available to the two younger children an outdated mobile phone without a sim card, but with video recording capacity. Using this technology, the children have developed vlogging personas, allowing them a level of voice and agency unusual in this age group, but especially striking in Alice. Alice has developed sophisticated play practices which have seen her translating her mother's online 'pre-loved' Etsy market-place into a tangible play shop which echoes girls' structured play of fifty years ago, but which is brought up to date by the integration of vlogging and unboxing literacies within Alice's play behaviours. On the brink of joining primary school, Alice is already a seasoned op-shop visitor, and critically assesses her own pre-loved physical toys for their relative market value before offering them for virtual sale to imaginary customers. Supporting her mother's business also means helping to box the unboxed goods prior to posting them around Australia and the world, allowing Alice the opportunity to live in physical space her imaginative online world of shopping, vlogging and (un)boxing.