Has Instagram Fundamentally Altered the 'Family Snapshot'?

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how parents use the social media platform Instagram to facilitate the capture, curation and sharing of 'family snapshots'. Our work draws upon established cross-disciplinary literature relating to film photography and the composition of family albums in order to establish whether social media has changed the way parents visually present their families. We conducted a qualitative visual analysis of a sample of 4,000 photographs collected from Instagram using hashtags relating to children and parenting. We show that the style and composition of snapshots featuring children remains fundamentally unchanged and continues to be dominated by rather bland and idealised images of the *happy family* and the *cute child*. In addition, we find that the frequent taking and sharing of photographs via Instagram has inevitably resulted in a more mundane visual catalogue of daily life. We note a tension in the desire to use social media as a means to evidence good parenting, while trying to effectively manage the social identity of the child and finally, we note the reluctance of parents to use their own snapshots to portray family tension or disharmony, but their willingness to use externally generated content for this purpose.

Keywords
Social media; Instagram; photo-sharing; families; parenting.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION
The capture and sharing of family photographs is a firmly established activity in many parents' lives. Indeed, family photography has a long and well-recorded history; the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888 and subsequent Box Brownie in 1900, were credited with bringing photography to the general public in an accessible form [61].

This shift from formal studio portraiture led to the common usage of the term 'family snapshot' being associated with amateur photographers capturing their domestic lives in an informal style [24]. Indeed, Kodak's promotional materials from this era set out to persuade parents to record their children playing naturally, marketing this as a superior and more desirable compositional style than formally posed studio photographs [14]. It has been suggested that these changes fundamentally altered the understanding of the term photography from 'for people', in the 19th century, to 'by people' in the 20th century [24].

Moving forward to the current era, the integration of sophisticated image capture capability into smartphones has also had a transformative effect on the user experience related to snapshot photography [29]. One obvious impact of this is the phenomenal rise of the *selfie*, with the number of such self-portraits posted between 2012 and 2014 increasing by 900 times [71]. Smartphones have also had an impact upon *family* photography [66] and the advantages offered to parents through such technology are various and diverse. On a mundane level, the capacity to capture a virtually unlimited number of family snapshots at, effectively, zero cost and share them in a single step via social media has removed the need to expensively print and distribute photographs [9] to share with close family and friends. Perhaps more profound is the capacity for social media to elicit responses from such close family which can confirm that 'good parenting' is taking place [27,43]. The sharing of digital snapshots can also be used to gain support from weaker-tie networks, in addition to immediate friends and family [52]. Research indicates that such online sharing can be a positive source of support [5], as well information gathering [6], for all, but particularly new, parents.

Despite the apparent benefits of sharing family photographs on social media, there are a number of emergent areas of concern regarding such user behaviours and practices. Central to these concerns [1,4] is the creation of digital identities for children. Family snapshots have a long history of remaining private within family albums, and the effects of bringing family photography into the public, performative sphere of social media are still poorly understood [59]. Parents also report dual concerns of not wishing to post too many images and thus alienate their audience [43], but also the dilemma to provide sufficient online evidence as to be perceived as a good, normal, modern parent [27]. It has been

demonstrated that baby pictures, in particular, attract a mixed response from audiences [43] and the emergence of the UnBabyMe Facebook App is perhaps indicative that audiences are not universally appreciative of child-related content that might be encountered on social media feeds. In a timely response to these and other concerns, researchers in the HCI and CSCW communities have begun to examine the behaviours of parents when using technology and social media in relation to family photography e.g. [1,4,43]; our own work, reported here, builds on these foundations.

Our work in this paper focuses on the family snapshot image and explores whether it has been altered by the practices of sharing on social media. In contrast to other related work, e.g. [1,43], that has limited data collection approaches to parental self-reporting, our research seeks to contribute a data-driven perspective that utilizes qualitative visual analysis of snapshots posted to social media. Moreover, we pay close attention to long-standing existing literature from photography, communication and media studies that provides an extant, and thorough, understanding of historical attitudes and behaviours surrounding family snapshots [12,13,33,54,72]. This gives our work a robust foundation, or 'ground truth' against which we are able to evaluate current user behaviours. We focus on the social media platform Instagram, which facilitates the sharing of over 95 million images per day, by 500 million active users [38]. It has been suggested [38] that Instagram now generates more daily user activity than Twitter and that it constitutes the largest, special-purpose, online image-sharing platform to-date. However, to our knowledge, there is little research that has examined Instagram as a platform for family photo sharing.

At the outset of our work we recognised that Instagram not only makes it simple to take and edit photographs but also promotes the instant sharing of these, either publicly or (more commonly) across a defined social network. We were particularly interested to see whether this taking and sharing combination might have changed the composition and nature of the family snapshot. Specifically, our research set out to answer the following questions:

- Has Instagram changed the composition or nature of the family snapshot?
- How do the family images of children shared on Instagram deviate from the strong visual tropes documented in printed family albums?

We conducted a qualitative visual analysis of a sample of 4,000 images collected from Instagram that had been tagged with family-relevant hashtags. Our analyses showed that the style and composition of many family snapshots remains unchanged in one important sense: family photography seems to privilege an 'everything is fine here' social message. We found, however, that this message is also supported by an increased level of everyday narrative, as photography becomes a part of daily life as a parent, enabled by the ubiquity of smartphones and ease of online sharing.

Our work makes a contribution towards the understanding of online image sharing by parents and the ways in which photographic practice contributes to social identity.

In the remainder of this paper we first discuss background and related work. In particular, we pay close attention to relevant literature from media and communication studies that describes early understanding of family photograph behaviour, in order to fully explore which conventions within family photography have been adopted and remain visible in images on Instagram. We then go on to describe our data collection, analysis and findings.

BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Any study of parental photo-sharing behaviours must be grounded within a wider historical context. In this section, the distinctive qualities of printed family albums, the social conventions which governed their curation and the snapshots contained within them are considered. This situates our work within its historical, as well as cross-disciplinary, context and provides a benchmark and criteria on which to later evaluate any changes in practice.

The Traditional Family Album

It is important to note that family photography, while associated with memory and record, is not true documentary [42]; indeed, the pictorial record contained within family albums in particular is unequivocally biased. Rose [64] provides evidence that there is a clear understanding by individuals that, when constructing their family albums, they are consciously aware of providing a distorted, highly selective representation of family life. By omission and selective choice of what to record, and careful selection in composition, family life can be represented as a happy, photogenic and cohesive experience in which the positives of parenting and kinship are readily apparent. On questioning participants on whether albums provided a fair, balanced representation of family life, Boerdam and Martinius report the response [9]: *"Looking through the albums you'd think we were an ideal family. Just forget it! These are just the ups"*. Albums typically represent a romanticized, sanitized and relentlessly upbeat view of family life, where the sun always shines and children are impeccably well-behaved.

These visual tropes emerge from a complex history. Bourdieu [10] noted a shift from adults and family groups as central to photographic practice, to a reversal which placed children as the focal point. Through the ages, any pictorial presentation of children and family groups typically shows things in a positive light, and as wholesome and good. From Renaissance oil paintings displaying the family as devoutly religious [34], to family albums [72] that omit negative images, there is a consistent depiction of the family as a stable, unified and contented unit [30]. Family snapshots therefore will not capture negative events for inclusion in albums [7]. Images which would show, or imply, domestic violence, sexualized content, misery, addiction or family breakdown [7,33] are, of course, absent. These strict social conventions are revealed, with great effect, when they are

instead deliberately broken in artistic photography. The use of children to explore such themes has raised significant controversy for their unsettling boldness in contrast to familiar family photography [49]. There are, of course, the occasional inclusions of a baby crying, or similar non-normative imagery, as an acknowledgement that family life is not in its entirety perfect. However such inclusions are invariably loaded with the message that there is 'no harm done' [12,13].

This adherence to the social conventions of family album construction results in a uniform result: that is to say, all albums are alike. As a consequence they are usually critiqued savagely [64]. Slater [69] for instance describes them as *"a great wasteland of trite and banal self-representation"*. Others [8] concur, describing them as *"cloyingly sentimental in content and repetitively uncreative as pictures"*. This derogatory view extends to the viewing of other people's photographs, highlighted as both exceedingly tedious and time consuming [44]. This is again attributed the central issue of apparent repetition, which is described as *"endemic to the genre"* [44]. This critique of the form may account, ironically, for its phenomenally successful translocation via technology to online platforms and social media. The lack of technical skill, understanding of photographic principles, or commitment to serious artistic endeavour, which define the traditional snapshot genre, perhaps provides the ideal basis to rejuvenate and proliferate the format online.

Smartphones, Online Sharing and Selfies

Smartphones have brought about a democratization of access to photography [57] removing any barriers to the photograph as an everyday means of expression. This alteration in practice is described as *"a kind of archive of personal trajectory or viewpoint on the world, a collection of fragments of everyday life"* [58]. In exploring the consequence of these advances in photographic practice, Murray [53] determines there is a clear transformative impact. Using analysis of Flickr images, they demonstrate a movement away from photography as a tool to capture any defined, special moment and towards a more transient, immediate way to capture the mundane and frame small things. This movement towards the mundane, and an everyday practice has, somewhat paradoxically, been accompanied by an increased desire to share these moments with others, facilitated by the rise of sites such as Instagram [38]. Research has begun to explore the role of such sites in terms of the digital curation of self, including work devoted to the role of the selfie [18] as a means of sharing identity information with others [71]. Selfies are relevant in the context of our work, not because they are representative of the kinds of practice that typify family photography, but because the existing research conducted on selfies can inform us about the way personal images are shared as a means of both self-expression (sometimes more critically described as a form of narcissism, e.g. [70]) and as a means of social engagement [73] and impression management [50].

General Online Sharing of Family Snapshots

Turning to research that specifically addresses the digital capture and online sharing of family images, we find studies that report the use of Flickr [1,53,80] and Facebook [1,5,43], but to-date very little in terms of Instagram [36]. Despite press and media coverage [41,56,75] of initiatives such as the *UnBabyMe* Facebook App, this research indicates that the sharing of family snapshots online seems generally well received. In their study of Flickr [80], Wang et al report that online audiences responded enthusiastically to images of children's birthday celebrations and considered them as evidence of good parenting, with highly positive linguistic expressions such as cute, happy, sweet and beautiful. Any criticism was limited to the technical aspects of composition and care was taken to avoid any implied criticism of the children involved. Even so, parents are aware that the audience may have a limited appetite for photographs of their children and take some steps to avoid 'oversharing', sometimes using the carefully managed privacy settings that Flickr offers [1].

The Facebook studies in this area reveal something of a paradox, as parents declare anxieties about sharing pictures of their children [1] and are also concerned about children's own sharing practices [81], yet parents, particularly mothers, remain very enthusiastic sharers of family photographs [52,68]. Of particular importance here is recent work that suggests the thematic manipulation of audience impression and perception of parenting ability appears synonymous with family snapshots across both print and online mediums. In their study of sharing behaviours of mothers on Facebook Kumar and Schoenebeck [43] suggest that not much has changed in the construction of family albums as *"they share cute, funny, milestone, and family and friend photos, but refrain from sharing crying and naked photos"*.

Zappavigna [82] recently describes work related to ours that used Instagram as a data source; they approach their analysis from a social semiotic perspective, utilising images and their captions to establish how interpersonal meaning is encoded within the composition and framing. In the context of motherhood, they suggest that user's feeds are often dominated by 'portrait' images – often featuring at least one of the user's children. In exploring the relationship between the photographer and the image viewer in 'social photographs' this work utilises motherhood as a case study, concluding images invite audiences to experience the photographer's experiences by sharing it.

New Parenting and Online Sharing

The sharing of child photographs historically begins with the birth of a child; however new patient-centred clinical practices coupled with new media technologies now offer opportunities for some parents to initiate the sharing prior to their child's birth [45,46,48]. The fetal ultrasound, or sonogram, provides parents with the first view of their child; these are often treated as "baby pictures" and may facilitate the formation of an emotional bond with the unborn fetus by

asserting kinship [31]. Scan pictures are frequently referred to as "cute" and shared with friends and relatives [31]. Healthcare professionals also state they have a conscious awareness of such rituals and their role in creating a "Kodak moment" for a family [48]. The New Yorker ran a cartoon as far back as 2011 [55], satirizing the popularity of sharing these images on social media, featuring the common sharing icons directly overlaid on the screen during a pregnancy ultrasound. Such practices could be considered as an extension of the sharing of baby photographs as described by Bourdieu: "*by means of photographs, the new arrival is introduced to the group as a whole*" [10]. The birth of a child brings about a period of "snapshot significance", particularly in the first year when photographic activity is increased [12]. This can take the form of recording milestones [12], introducing the infant to its wider network of relatives [10] and actualising the transition to parenthood [78]. Such images are then shared extensively on social media, with the expectation of some acknowledgement and positive response; 93% of mothers and 71% of fathers who reported sharing a photograph of their baby on Facebook expected the image to be acknowledged by their friends list [5], and indeed the audience responds positively to these baby photos [43]. This expectation of positive reinforcement of picture sharing continues through the toddler years. Studies show that, between the ages of 0-3, posts containing a child's name gain more attention (likes and comments) on social media than those which do not [52].

Bourdieu stated "*the mother who has her children photographed can only meet with approval*" [10]. We should remember that for the parents of very young children, such approval comes at a time of great change and sometimes increased social isolation, so it is not surprising, then, to note that both fathers and mothers might turn to social media in order to seek social support and approbation at this time [17]. As children get older, however, the sharing becomes slightly more complex, particularly for fathers who fear a negative response to postings of older children, particularly daughters, and who screen the snapshots more carefully for suggestive content [1]. Durrant et al [19] explore teenagers' use of digital photography and display, but report that, within the communal spaces of the home, it is mothers that retain the role as the curator of family images. This has previously been noted by Rose, that even in a shift to digital images and storage, the work of organising and curating family photograph collections still typically falls upon mothers [64].

These works highlight the importance of social media sharing to parents in maintaining and strengthening family and social bonds during the transition to parenthood. Additionally, they affirm the significant social importance of family photography in this process, thus suggesting the reason for its enduring role in capturing modern family life.

STUDY OF FAMILY SNAPSHOTS ON INSTAGRAM
Our own study features a large-scale qualitative visual analysis, conducted on a dataset of images acquired through the Instagram API [37]. Posts tagged with hashtags (listed in the following section) related to children and parenting were collected and presented for analysis. The development of methods to make "sense" of the content of large numbers of images acquired from social media, however, is an open research challenge [79]. In a technical attempt to address this challenge, Minkus et al [51] recently utilized pattern recognition and computer vision to identify images of children on Facebook. In contrast, [6] applied semiotic analysis to a small-scale sample of images gathered from Instagram. Whilst qualitative analysis has drawbacks, due to subjectivity and the definition of the precise nature of an image's characteristics, it provides scope for flexibility. In this study, we adopted a qualitative method with a lone coder, selected for her knowledge of themes in family photographic practices and understanding of the role of photography in social media. The use of a lone coder is not unusual in visual analysis (see [77]), but requires that the coding process be both systematic and well-described [3]. We give a more detailed description of our coding methodology in the section below.

It should also be noted that our work raises particular ethical considerations due to the nature of the image content. In particular, the 're-publication' of images of children, poses methodological difficulties when evidencing the results of our analyses. Though good practice regarding the reproduction of text-based social media posts has been extensively explored and debated [62,63] there is a paucity of similar guidance when dealing with image or video posts from social media. Moreover, Rose's textbook critique [65] of different approaches and viewpoints, from a media communications perspective, around the publication and anonymization of both people and places in visual media reveals that there is little consensus on the subject. In work related to ours, however, [82] publishes non-anonymized images from Instagram containing not only recognizable headshots of family adults but also of children and babies. Here we take a more cautious approach and we refrain from reproducing any images containing identifiable views of either individual children or adults and we only use images where we believe this was essential to understanding the study, and to illustrate particular findings.

Data Collection
The Instagram API was used to collect a sample of images covering a week-long period from July 7th to July 14th 2015. We collected images tagged with one of 13 hashtags: #babies, #kids, #toddlers, #children, #family, #parenting, #motherhood, #fatherhood, #stepmother, #stepfather, #stepparent, #stepmum, and #stepdad. These hashtags were chosen as it was deemed that they had high probability of referencing a significant number of images featuring snapshots of children shared by parents.

The results were sampled in order that the first 500 images tagged with a particular hashtag returned for each API search were subject to analysis. Results from the API which returned less than 500 results in total for the sampling period were excluded from further inclusion in the study. These sampling criteria led to the images relating to step-parenting (from the five hashtags: #stepmother, #stepfather, #stepparent, #stepmum, and #stepdad) being rejected and not used in subsequent analysis. This resulted in a final dataset of 4,000 images covering 8 hashtags.

Qualitative Analysis

A review of the literature on the characteristics of snapshots and other works on social media resulted in an initial codebook, shown in in the first column in Table 1. These codes were used initially to classify a random sample of 150 images taken from the dataset. Given that these codes were derived from the literature on traditional images, a further round of inductive coding was conducted to properly capture the content and characteristics of the Instagram images in our sample, some of which would not be found in traditional family albums. This resulted in a further set of codes, described in the second column of Table 1. The complete sample of 4000 images was then coded using the entire codebook. Each image was coded with a single code; if multiple codes were applicable then the most obvious or significantly applicable code was applied. Particular attention was paid to the classification of images featuring children, labelling, for example, those snapshots that were posed, outside of home, or were cute/funny. As noted earlier, the coding was undertaken by one expert coder with expert knowledge of both analogue photographic literature and social media user behaviour.

RESULTS

The coding process described above allowed us to describe the *composition and content* of images in terms of five broad categories: Daily narrative; Life Events; External Content; Photo Montages and Other. These are captured in Table 1 and described in more detail below, where we note the relationship between the composition of these Instagram images and that of more traditional family snapshots. We also recognised that the snapshots themselves were almost always used to convey either bland or positive messages about either parenting or family members and events; while external images (memes, quotes, advertising) were more likely to be used as a means to express frustration, tension or disharmony, often in a humorous way. We go on to discuss this in more detail, in terms of the idealization of family life and the portrayal of 'perfect parenting' practices.

The Composition and Content of Shared Images

Many posts appeared to capture the ordinary domestic family life in action as it happened: in the car, supermarket, scenes at home of snacks or untidy children's bedrooms, whereas others, more typical of traditional family photography, contained snapshots closely resembling those found in albums recording events such as birthdays, and parties. Within this broader category, we discuss each of the

Initial Codebook	N	Additional Codes (Full Codebook)	N
Daily Narrative			
Everyday life (casual snapshot)	909	Animal / Family pets	112
		Food	95
Posed / look at camera	925	Home interiors / décor	16
Relevant imagery (no people)	136	Nursery / child's room	7
'No harm done'	5		
Negative representation	1		
Life Events			
Holidays / Days Out	337	Scenery / Landscape	61
Special Occasions	55	Age recording of infant (<1 year)	10
Pregnancy	44	Memorial to loved one	2
External Content			
Celebrity	10	Information / Guide	13
		Film / TV screenshot or book cover	19
		Campaign / cause promotion	12
		Non-photographic (irrelevant imagery)	54
		Non-photographic (relevant imagery)	33
		Information / Guide	13
		Relevant Advertising	174
		Other Advertising relevant)	73
		Memes / Humour	72
		Religious content	20
		'Inspirational' quote (relevant)	112
		'Inspirational' quote (irrelevant)	70
		Personal response to tag	10
		Phone / Web screenshot	40
Photo Montages			
Montage / Text added	367		
Other			
Photo irrelevant to tag	143		

Table 1 - Codes included in our initial and final codebooks.

following themes in turn: 'daily narrative, 'life events', 'external content' and 'photo-montages'.

Daily Narrative

As discussed above, the family snapshot is historically criticized as mundane, thematically ordinary and lacking originality in composition and subject matter [64]. Our analysis showed that image sharing on Instagram, arguably, accentuates this. Traditional family albums would almost universally feature a day out at the beach or the park, with the outing captured as part of the family memory or might feature an "evening in", with the entire family gathered around a board game. With Instagram, these become still more mundane, an image of an ice-cream cone or a snapshot of a monopoly board with the game in progress. In our data, we recognized the capture of everyday trivia, and it becomes harder to understand the longer-term value of these images. Our data shows that the daily narrative might include a tray of pasta, slices of pizza, children eating snacks or standing in a supermarket. These are ordinary, repetitive and highly mundane snapshots of elements of family life. This represents an exaggeration of the visual tropes found in family albums, as opposed to a deviation from them. The images retain the bland, safe and frequently replicated compositions which are so highly critiqued in literature. However, the banality is increased as the images become even more mundane. Other images for instance reflected a trip to the high street, a ride on a bicycle, eating of a meal, care of a pet, a ride in the car or watching TV. Examples of these images are in Figure 1. These images suffer however from the all too familiar online notion of context collapse: Abandoned crayons or completed drawings becomes as valid a photographic subject as a holiday or trip to the swimming pool.

Many of our images of children certainly did not mimic traditional portraiture: we observed many shots taken from behind a child, including multiple instances of children watching TV, loading the dishwasher and walking in-front of the photographer along sidewalks with no scenery or location included. Instead, this visual daily narrative captures the minutiae of life without self-consciousness, or concerns of being boring, inane or not worthy of sharing. These images would likely not have been recorded on a regular basis on film or included in a formal album of photographs, due to the waste of film as a consumable. They also represent low value in an imagined 'display index' of image subjects for framing or showing to others; instead they simply document the everyday practice of parenthood and family life.

So how can we make sense of these images if they are unlikely to be either displayed or meaningfully shared? What is their function? In other domains, we have seen how people tend to be over-inclusive in their documenting of the everyday and then struggle to make meaningful use of the stored data. Indeed, people will typically reject such images as trivia when they show up in automated or semi-automated

biographies such as Facebook's 'Look back' or 'MySocialBook [76]. However, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou [2] have argued that the 'small stories' of everyday living help people create a sense of who they really are, and this identity work is particularly important as part of parenting. The 'instant' nature of photo sharing and capture on Instagram supports the creation of these small stories, but critically, these are likely to provide value for identity work conducted in the moment, rather than for reminiscence in the longer-term [83].

Figure 1: Examples of 'Daily Narrative' images

Life events

Life events typically form a significant part of traditional family albums: births, deaths, birthdays, graduations, weddings, holidays, and other calendar events (e.g. religious festivals) are all commonplace. In our dataset, however, there were a limited number of clear instances of such occasions featuring children; examples of these are in Figure 2. This may be suggestive that these events have specific alternative hashtags associated with them that we did not capture - such as #birthday or #Christmas. Those images that captured life events were similar to what we have come to expect from traditional photography. In other research regarding the *value* of social media, it is recognized that people can fall too easily into established practices – the images they have seen from others become the images they try to create on their own timeline. Thus, for example, one of the participants in the study reported in [83] writes: "*I guess it's the way it's presented, you know? Like when you graduate, it's like a big banner and she's graduated. She's got a new job.*", recognizing the way that certain photographic traditions come to dominate.

In our data, there was also an abundance of what might be termed "group shots" within the data set, affirming and demonstrating the relationships between family members. This serves to affirm the prior observations on the family as presented harmoniously; there is no discord or tensions apparent within the images presented. The digital family curation conforms to the same social rules of presenting a united, cheerful façade as its printed predecessor, although it is possible, given the prevalence of shared images on social media, that we are becoming less tolerant of what Zhao and Lindley [83] would call *'inauthentic history'*.

Figure 2: Examples of 'Life Events' images

External Content

As a social media platform, Instagram subsumes many elements of popular online culture; therefore, many of the images we noticed in our study, though also tagged with our list of family snapshot hashtags, contained content not directly related to our area of interest, but studied elsewhere. However, as demonstrated in Figure 3, these included: visual memes and humour, images of celebrity parents, nostalgia, advertising, religious content, screenshots (of both desktop and mobile devices, including grabs of text message conversations), stills from films, cartoons, digital art and text, motivational quotations, including many quotations related to parenting, and motherhood. These images types, of course, would not be found in family albums. These categories form a typology of content found within parental hashtags on Instagram, and cover a diverse range of content. The image types vary from those created or imported for sharing on Instagram by a user, to those which are user created, such as artworks. Such materials were often used to express tension, frustration, problematic or conflicting emotions, albeit often using humour as a vehicle. When posted online in tandem with personal images, a diverse content range can be observed across parental hashtags. This results in a highly personalized parental feed combining multiple content types. Whilst this has little in common with *recent* family photo albums, it does, in fact, have parallels with the Victorian period when hybrids between scrapbooks and photo albums were common [14].

Figure 3: Examples of 'External Content' images

Photo Montages

Of the images containing children in a montage (such as those demonstrated in Figure 4), three divisions in content were apparent. Firstly, these were mundane images typically featuring domestic scenes – children sat on a sofa with a pet dog, brushing their teeth, or eating snacks, for example. Secondly montages were used to showcase a particular holiday or outing, often depicting family or selfies (with or without others included) within scenery. One composition for example featured a couple with a child taking a group selfie from a boat in front of a scenic Mediterranean-looking harbour. Such snapshots were carefully framed to include the background view projecting the family identity: 'we are on holiday together as a unit' at the moment of capture. There appeared to be little middle ground between these montage types, which were either very clearly domestic scenes at home, or starkly representing a holiday or day out. Thirdly, all images contained within the montage feature portraits of the child, frequently with multiple shots taken in succession, as opposed to combining a range of different images from a camera roll or album into the montage. The ability to assemble creative, varied compositions was not seen as an emergent trend in our data. What is notable here is that despite the creative scope for photo treatment, varied images in a montage and experimentation with capturing the images themselves – the same terminology could be used to critique the snapshots on Instagram as in albums: homogenous, lacking in experimentation or artistic endeavour, and the use of repetitive imagery. It could be suggested that this lack of creative expression can be attributed to the strength of the visual tropes found in family albums, which have been inherited in a skeumorphic fashion from film photography and printed albums. Even as an increasingly social activity, family photography remains understood in a normative manner, as a fundamentally non-creative practice.
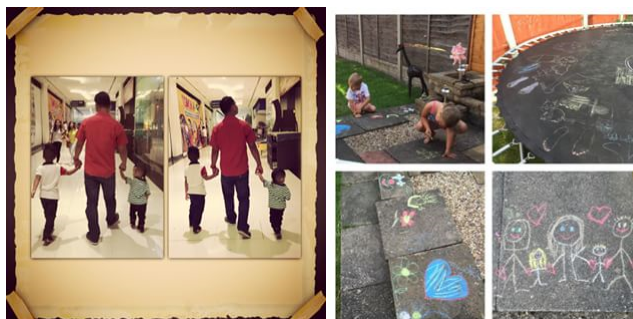

Figure 4: Examples of 'Photo Montages' images

Idealising Family Life on Social Media

In our dataset, we rarely encountered posts that depicted parents dealing with difficulties, nor did we see many posts that mentioned "extended families" e.g. those following a break-up. We should add that where there were posts that recognized family struggles, however these were often accompanied by images or memes found online, rather than family snapshots. Within this broader category of idealising family life, we include and discuss the following themes: 'the

good parenting selfie', 'the cute child', 'no harm done', 'step-parenting', and 'the use of external content to moderate idealization'.

The Good Parenting Selfie

The camera phone has heralded the introduction of the term 'selfie' [12]. Clearly selfies represent a new potential addition to snapshot compositions commonly found in traditional printed photo albums. There was a prevalence in our data of parents taking selfies which depicted themselves *and* a child, often either asleep or engaged in another activity – such as those in Figure 5. This, for instance, took the form of a parent in the driver's seat of a car taking a selfie to include a child or children asleep in the rear of the vehicle. This composition could easily be taken directly without the inclusion of the parent, but the choice is clearly deliberate to include the self within the composition. This alters the composition from a single message ('the children are tired and asleep in the car') to a visual message which conveys something more. We suggest that the image includes both an expression of parental identity: 'these are my children' but simultaneously that good parenting is occurring ('here they are sleeping while I drive them'). Other examples included a child in the background engaged in their own activity such as playing on the floor, sleeping or drawing. Others were a form of baby photography with a sleeping infant sat or laid upon the adults' shoulder or lap with the parent's free arm used to lift the camera phone to capture the image. This differed from a further selfie format which captured tightly formed groups of children around a parent's shoulders, knowingly participating in the photo and looking at the camera phone. Both types of image were evident throughout our dataset.
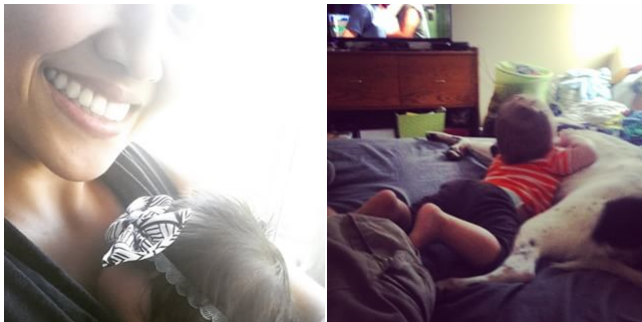

Figure 5: Examples of 'Good Parenting Selfie' images

The Cute Child

Mothers state they share images that they deem to be 'cute' [25] whilst exhibiting an awareness of not wanting to be seen as oversharing photos of their children generally [43]. With this in mind, our initial codebook referenced images which were specifically 'cute'. However, in reality, this raised another point regarding external audience perception. The images (demonstrated in Figure 6) which were identifiable as being intentionally endearing, funny or sweet included those with obvious costumes, dressing up, face paint or with pets present. The images which could be categorized *by an outside observer* as cute all featured clear novelty value.

Whilst parents may have intended other images within the sample to be perceived as cute or funny these, to our eyes, were not identifiable to a researcher. Without prior knowledge, or a close tie to the individuals featured, or posting the image, it may be less clear to others that an image evokes a sentimental response.

Figure 6: Examples of 'The Cute Child' images

'No Harm Done': Pictorially Sharing Family Mishaps

Chalfen [11] suggested that the infrequent inclusion in photo albums of babies crying, or children with minor injuries, represent a token acknowledgement that family life is not, in its entirety, easy and without mishap. However, such images also imply that no significant, long lasting, or substantial harm has occurred. As previous research has found, mothers refrain from sharing images on Facebook which showed mess, blood, injury or their child as anything but "happy-go-lucky" [43]. Our study confirmed this is also the case on Instagram. Our sample contained no images which were categorized as showing negativity or children in an unflattering light. Images which did contain mess were presented as cute, endearing snapshots of babies or toddlers with food on their faces, for example. Moreover, the code which specifically recorded minor injury and images demonstrating 'no harm done' comprised just 5 images (such as those demonstrated in Figure 7). One image depicts a crying toddler, and another a broken bowl on the floor beneath a high chair, where the infant is positioned safely out of any danger. Only two images suggest harm of any form has occurred. Both feature children – neither appear upset or even slightly distressed – with plasters (band-aids) on their face. The plasters themselves further reinforce the positive message, featuring bright, playful designs commonly found on products marketed specifically for children. The final image in this category featured a child proudly displaying a hand covered in dirt to the camera, accompanied by his smiling mother. These images therefore strongly align with the expected norms of traditional family albums. Competent parenting is implied in managing any injury or taking care of a child with appropriate diligence. This serves to reinforce the message that children are safe, protected and healthy – a further testament to good, attentive parenting which manages potential risks. These types of image provide a benchmark in assessing if there is significant deviation in snapshot subject on Instagram in comparison to family albums.
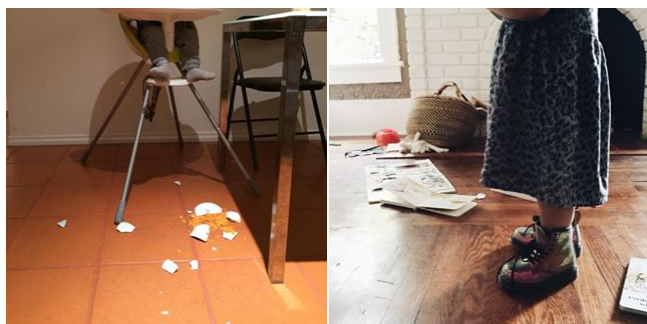
Figure 7: Examples of 'No Harm Done' images

Absence of Family Discord

Aside from no harm, there was no pictorial evidence present in our dataset of any family discord or unhappiness. Again, this concurs with evidence that depictions of family discord or breakdown are notably missing from the traditional family album [9, 16]. However, in collecting data from the hashtags #stepmother, #stepmum, #stepfather, #stepdad and #stepparent the sample size returned was significantly lower than our threshold for sampling. As such the data collected was excluded from analysis. This may stem from the strong tradition of non-documentation of family breakdown photographically and subsequent reforming into a blended family unit. Further research is required into Instagram use by parents from non-nuclear family units, those with disabled children and stepfamilies to establish what patterns of usage they display.

DISCUSSION

Our dataset of 4,000 images acquired from Instagram shows that modern forms of sharing can have an impact upon contemporary photographic practice, although many of the (critically unfavourable) traditions of the family snapshot have been maintained. Here we more broadly interpret and discuss our results under two key themes - the documentation of the everyday and the presentation of the 'perfect family'. We then provide a summary of identifiable limitations to our current study and offer suggestions for future research to address these.

Documenting the Everyday

Our findings suggest that the capabilities and affordances of both smartphones, and social media platforms, such as Instagram, are key facilitators in parental behaviour and practice that adopt photography as an everyday, low key, activity resulting in a process of daily narrative capture. This narrative is thus present *in addition to* the traditional and familiar snapshot compositions, such as the chocolate covered baby, or holiday beach snap. This represents somewhat of a deviation from previous generations of film-based family photography, in that it results in the formation of a record, containing fine granular detail, of the framing of life as an immediate capture of 'the now'. The previous parental concern of evidencing and documenting significant or meaningful occasions is still present –however it is now typically harder to discern amongst postings that focus on the mundane and everyday aspects of simply being a parent.

The outcome therefore remains unexciting for the audience overall. In keeping with tradition, family snapshots tend to be rather visually bland, but perhaps the goal here is not to entertain but to lay down the 'small stories' of everyday life in order to make sense of what it is to be part of a family. Bamberg and Georgaopoulou [2] describe this as a way to deal with the 'identity dilemma' of '*clinging onto the illusion of staying or actually "being" the same through simultaneously changing all the time'.* They argue that the small stories of still unfolding events are seemingly uninteresting titbits that can nevertheless help reconcile this sense of staying the same through changing times. For a family, this might be particularly salient. Additionally, these moments record a narrative of parenting activity. Whilst technology can provide information and reassurance to new parents [51] it also allows them to evidence that "intensive parenting" is being practiced. [20,35,46]. By documenting the daily 'instagrammable' moments a sense of continuity becomes more apparent and communicates parental competence. As a result, our findings reconcile both the record of daily minutiae as a function of Instagram with other findings which suggest that social media can be interpreted as a medium in which primarily the best, most audience pleasing content is shared [35].

The Perfect Family

Taken together, the snapshots that represent the 'good parent selfie', 'no harm done', 'and 'step-parenting' themes show us how much positive images of parenting dominate sharing practices. This firmly supports the accordance present in literature that family photography has never been documentarian, but a selective and biased representation. Whilst family photographic practice itself appears fundamentally unchanged by online sharing, placing it within a public sphere may serve to intensify the perceived social pressure to conduct "intensive mothering" and thus "good mothering"

We are reminded, naturally, of Goffman [28] in this respect: seeing parenting as a performance on Instagram. In our data, we can see parents conducting identity work on behalf of both themselves and their child all of which is in keeping with the work on both impression management in social media [39, 40, 82]. However, we should be mindful of the need to keep separate the different elements of self in a 'faceted' social media world [22]. It is interesting, for example, to contrast the happy, positive images shared on Instagram with the kinds of despair sometimes shown by parents on information sharing sites such as Mumsnet [26]. People feel they can be honest about parenting difficulties on such sites, and yet they can also be very harshly judged – i.e. both the initial postings and the responses can be highly negative [60]. Honesty here becomes a social norm, but is supported by the communication being primarily text-based and an interesting issue for future research concerns the extent to which photographic sharing might reduce social authenticity. It is worth considering the psychological cost of a social media system in which contributors behave

inauthentically, i.e. are prone to present an idealized self. When this happens on Facebook, it can lead to negative affect [21,47] and has even been linked to depression [23].

In Instagram sharing, our findings suggest that the opportunities for making 'upward comparisons' that might adversely affect the wellbeing of the viewer are many, again we might speculate about where the support for struggling families might come from in such a pictorial exchange. However, as a visual platform Instagram includes the ability to include externally sourced content (visible within our data) confirming that whilst family photographic practice is a medium with strongly inherited tropes and norms, it can be adapted and messages subverted by this additional material. In becoming a social exchange and means of self-expression, the ability to convey frustration or negativity can be projected and displaced with internet culture via memes, visual humour or satire in both pictorial and written form. Thus Instagram expands the social functionality of photography as a means of identity and role expression, allowing for exploration of problematic and contradictory emotions surrounding parenthood and family life.

Limitations and Future Work

We acknowledge that there are potential limitations inherent in the study we report. Firstly, data collection was conducted over a one-week period during the UK summer months – a time of year often used for summer breaks for European schools and a popular time for family holidays. As such, the images analysed here may not be representative of images shared, perhaps, during other times of the year. Secondly, due to the typical demographic of Instagram users [74], the analysed images, and therefore the findings, are likely to reflect predominantly Western cultural backgrounds. In order to overcome these potential limitations, we suggest that future work could focus on various points in time throughout the calendar year, as well as using multiple, or alternative, social media platforms and data drawn from a more global demographic. Further insight could be drawn from this study data by textual analysis of the accompanying comments and image captions. Such further work could build on the findings presented here, increasing the breadth and generalisability of work in this field. The low presence of content which represented non-nuclear or blended families is an area which requires further study to establish if alternative hashtags are utilised, or content is simply not highlighted with this particular identifying information. We stress the need for further study required to both assess if Instagram meets the needs of all parental user groups equally, or if there are design opportunities which may improve the accessibility or usability for differing parental demographics. However, the prolific activity of parents in documenting 'the now' suggests that both the platform design of Instagram are well suited to usage in this everyday manner and are well adopted by the parental user demographic.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we have seen ways in which the established cultural norms are preserved in modern forms of family photography. Family snapshots are illustrative of a desire to evidence good parenting and to appear a respectable, cohesive family unit pictorially. Parents consciously exclude negative imagery of children and family life, sending a clear photographic message to their audience that all is well and, critically, also lay down a record that offers some reassurance that things are just as they should be. This retains the visual tropes apparent within traditional albums of images functioning as an artificially positive representation of family life. This inheritance of photographic norms results in the form and social function of snapshots of children retaining their visual characteristics overall. That is, the critiques in literature of the repetitive and inoffensive compositions remains applicable. This retention of the visual cliché provides an explanation for the lack of creative expression found within the family hashtags surveyed.

The public sharing of images may bring about an awareness of audience perception and increase the pressure to be seen to be practicing "intensive mothering" [32] This may account for the record of the mundane which is recorded and displayed as a demonstration of maternal competence. This positioning of the family snapshot as a means of identity reassurance is, as yet, relatively unexplored. We identify that this area requires further exploration, both in expanding our own findings to include broader data collection periods and thus extend our findings but additionally in exploring how parents categorise the value of capturing the everyday and motivators of these sharing behaviours. The role of step-families and non-traditional family structures as expressed photographically online, and through Instagram is also identified as requiring further study.

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