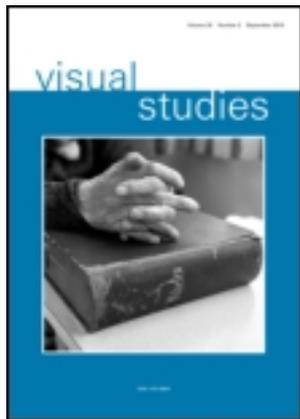


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The secret life of teens: online versus offline photographic displays at home

ABIGAIL DURRANT, DAVID FROHLICH, ABIGAIL SELLEN and DAVID UZZELL

In this article we describe findings from a recent study in which we interviewed four British teenage girls about their photo display practices, online and offline, in family homes. We adopted a phenomenological approach to inquiry, with a particular interest in exploring how photographic representations of self and family signal self-development in emerging adulthood. Findings reveal how teens portrayed themselves differently to friends, online, and family, offline. Self-presentation to peers through photographs was managed separately from the family and largely free from parental control. The separate, online domain was used to explore alternative self-representations with real friends. Our findings appear to signal changing politics of photograph ownership and family representation between the generations.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the tools and practices of film photography have been more accessible to adults than juniors within the family home setting (Chalfen 1987; Rose 2003). This is due to the nature of the tools, along with the cultural conventions and socio-economic factors surrounding their use. The development of digital camera technology and Internet-enabled mobile devices has created new opportunities for juniors and, in particular, older teenagers to participate in photography (Kindberg et al. 2005). Studies of contemporary family photography point to its 'apparent democratisation' (Shove et al. 2007, 86) and its changing role in family representation (Van Dijck 2008). These studies, combined with our own studies to date, show how increased teen participation in photography has, together with its digitisation, led to novel uses and forms of representation; teens are assumed to practice photography differently to their parents, with implications for the social psychological function of photography in family life (Van Dijck 2008).

Researchers in human-computer interaction (HCI) have also explored these two trends of democratisation and digitisation, and associated changes to photography's tools and practices (e.g. Kindberg et al. 2005; Kirk et al. 2006; Miller and Edwards 2007; Van House 2009). We consider these trends as they mediate the *display* of photographs in British homes, and question how the uptake of novel tools and practices by older teens may shape the forms and functions of home displays. Recent innovations in digital display technology also motivate our research (O'Hara et al. 2003), and we deem it timely to explore how these innovations may support or transform domestic photo display mediated by new recruits.

In our ongoing research of family photo displays, we have observed the perpetuation of familial conventions that stem from film photography and its artefacts. We have found that the mother of the nuclear family continues to assume the roles of 'family photographer', 'family chronicler' (Rose 2003) and 'home curator' (Durrant et al. 2009b; Taylor, Swan, and Durrant 2007). We use the term home curation to describe how the display of printed photographs throughout the home is coordinated on behalf of the household-at-large (Durrant et al. 2009b; Taylor, Swan, and Durrant 2007). It is found to be closely interwoven with other roles that reproduce a domestic order, such as parenting, housekeeping and decoration, and, as such, imbued with ethical sensibilities, power relations and moral obligations (Taylor and Swan 2005). The curatorial role affords a dominant voice to the mother for representing household members at home, and as such she is at liberty to impress a singular, maternal narrative upon home displays (Durrant et al. 2009b).

However, as digital photography continues to pervade the home and multiple householders, including older

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teens, engage in practice, we have also found that multiple, intergenerational representations of self and family are being created, with the potential to increase the complexity of curatorial activity. Previous findings on the mutability and multiplicity of these collections, and the new technical skills required to manage them, invite questions on how digitisation, democratisation and the teenage practice of photography may shape intergenerational relationships and the representation of householders (Durrant et al. 2009a). The role that these emerging representational practices may play in teens' self-development also remains an open question. The ubiquity and accessibility of Internet-enabled home computing appears to play a key role in these practices; we previously found teens to be more proficient than their parents in the use of digital technologies. Studies on domestic Internet use have also observed a 'generational divide' between parents and their children (Byron 2008; Frohlich and Kraut 2003; Mesch 2006), with implications for the social psychological functioning of the home.

In previous studies, we unpacked the interactions and negotiations between parents and teens over what photographs to display at home, from multiple collections, and how to achieve consensus on this. These studies also revealed the significance of *online* photo-sharing to teenage expression at home; online displays were fashioned *at home* but in spaces that afforded exclusive teen access and were not viewed or

monitored by parents, with implications for the domestic order. For example, when asked to show us a photograph that was 'liked but would never be displayed at home', one teenage girl retrieved her profile photograph on Facebook (Figure 1).

There was little discussion of these kinds of online displays in our previous studies, nor of their relationship to the teens' displays offline. The online content appeared to be a secret part of teen life and visual culture, which we and others had not yet explored. To date, studies of domestic photography have examined the contents of family albums and printed photo displays (e.g. Drazin and Frohlich 2007; Rose 2003, 2010), and practices related to particular digital technologies such as cameras and camera-phones, storage repositories and family websites (e.g. Kindberg et al. 2005; Kirk et al. 2006; Miller and Edwards 2007; Pauwels 2008; Van House 2009). However, there has been no focus on teenage photographic practices, as such, before their introduction in our previous study (Durrant et al. 2009a) and little attention to teens' practice of photography online. This is despite work on the use of social networking sites, which has tended to focus more on the development of networks and communities rather than the sharing of visual content (e.g. Boyd 2008; Subrahmanyam et al. 2008). Better understanding of this area would also contribute to the current debate on digital parenting and online safety stimulated by the



FIGURE 1. Teen profile photograph displayed on Facebook that 'would never be displayed' at home, supplied by research participant Cat.

Byron Review (2008) in the UK. This points to a 'generational digital divide' which has opened up as a result of hidden teen behaviours on the internet, and might be addressed by more informed technology design (Rode 2009).

The current study was devised in response to these insights. We sought to shed more light on teenage photographic practices at home as part of self-expression, and in particular online display, to understand how this may connect to display-making in the home's physical environs and, more generally, to its curated spaces. This line of enquiry formed the basis of our research. The key aims of the study were threefold: first, to explore how teens used online (Internet-enabled) platforms in the family home for self and family representation; second, to identify *features* of teenage photo display practices that intersected with family photo display in the home; and, third, to explore how photographic representations of self and family may signal self-development in emerging adulthood. For the purposes of this article, we report findings from the study to illuminate a broader issue of how emerging visual technologies that mediate both online and domestic domains may be used by teens to express selfhood and in turn reflect identity-formation in a family home setting.

APPROACH

Methodology

In keeping with our previous work, our approach was qualitative, social psychological and phenomenological in orientation (Smith and Eatough 2007). Our analytic mindset was informed by psychological literature on self-processes, including Susan Harter's (1999, 2003) framework of the developing self. Harter conveys a self-concept comprised of multiple identities that form a coherent entity in the transition to adulthood. The way in which multiple selves are conceptualised, evaluated, adapted and subsequently integrated determines self-worth and the ability to function. Based on her own empirical work, Harter posits that the perceived achievement of self-worth is linked to the *significance* that an individual places on being able to perform a particular identity, such as an 'ideal self', in a given domain of life. In Harter's view, a perceived 'discrepancy' between the performance of one's 'real self' and the given 'ideal self' is found to lower self-worth in that domain. This conceptualisation of self-processes has helped us make sense of findings on the function of visual culture, as will become clear in the sections to follow.

Study Design

The study was devised as follows. A semi-structured interview technique was used to generate qualitative accounts on the subject, and a schedule designed to probe the following: how teens use the Internet to *connect out of their family home*, using computers and other networked digital devices; how their photographic presentations of self and family online might contrast with their presentations to the rest of their household *at home*. Building on our previous work, questions also sought to probe further how teens negotiate the domestic order to express themselves.

We recruited four teens that took part in our previous studies, all of whom were female and 18 years of age. Michelle, Julie and Caroline lived with their parents in the South of England, whilst Cat, whose *parental* home was in the South of England, had recently moved away to university in Ireland. The parental households of these girls comprised two or more daughters. Households shared socio-economic status (combined gross income of £40–60k) and each had a shared 'family' computer with Internet access. Each teen had her own digital camera and camera-phone. Cat, Michelle and Caroline also had their own laptops, the latter two with Internet access from their bedrooms. These four girls were recruited because we wanted the study design to afford longitudinal engagement with participant accounts, across this and our previous studies that the same girls had participated in. We previously decided to use a female sample after observing considerable gender differences in the practice of photography by teens (Durrant et al. 2009b). By recruiting these girls, we felt we could concentrate on individual differences within the intergenerational relationships we were investigating. The small sample size was consistent with our approach that sought to engage hermeneutically with each participant's 'life world'. To this end we used a form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as our method (Smith and Eatough 2007).

Interviews were conducted by the first author in participants' homes throughout 2008, and each lasted approximately 30 minutes. Questions attended to the act of displaying photographs and the material resources available to hand for doing so. Participants were asked about their ownership of digital cameras and camera-phones, and the availability of digital cameras for personal use. They were invited to describe their everyday uses of a digital camera, what they liked to photograph and what they did with their photographs. They were then asked the following questions about display: what kinds of photographs did they want to display to their parents; did they display photographs

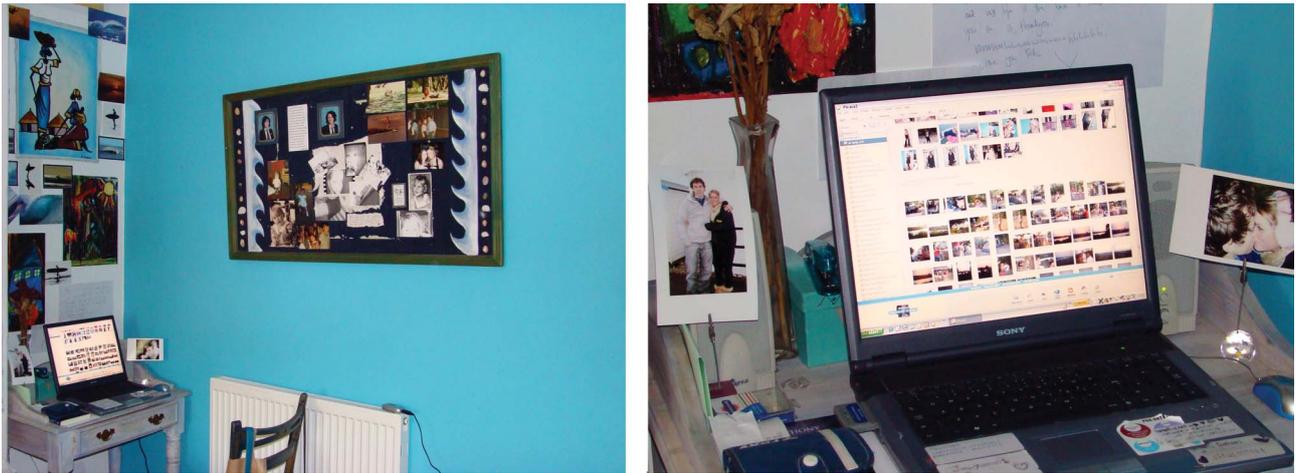


FIGURE 2. Researcher's photographs of Michelle's bedroom, showing: (a) her selection of photographs for ambient display; (b) photographs managed on her laptop and edited for online display.

online and if so how; did they have Internet access at home for such displays; how did the display of photographs online relate to the display of photographs in their home; and, finally, could they imagine a scenario in which they would not want to display their personal photographs in the home? Interviews took place either in teens' bedrooms or in communal spaces such as the family kitchen, and parents were not present for any of the interviews. The researcher was invited to observe various rooms during visits, including teens' bedrooms, and document the arrangement of artefacts that was deemed significant.

Analysis

We used IPA to analyse the interview data, transcribed from audio recordings. This involved hermeneutical engagement with individual accounts of experience: first we read the interview transcripts, eliciting key expressions as participants made sense of the interview questions; transcripts were coded by hand for emerging themes. We then analysed the codes in the context of our research questions, in each case and then across cases. Themes were generated and represented in a descriptive account that follows. The themes incorporated individual differences peculiar to each case.

FINDINGS

Two Domains for the Photographic Representation of Self

The teens presented themselves differently at home to their family than they did to their friends online. This distinction was voiced by all, and epitomised in Figure 2. This figure shows two images of Michelle's bedroom containing a wall display of printed images and a laptop

display of digital images being prepared for Facebook. In the course of our analysis we referred to local photo display for family as the 'offline-familial' domain, and the remote photo display to friends as the 'online-peer' domain. Particularly striking is that the online displays were solely associated with presentations to peers *as opposed to* family; we observed that teens harnessed the Internet as a means to establish and maintain the separateness of self from family. This activity may be understood in the context of psychosocial development, as established by Harter: 'bids for autonomy from parents make it important to define oneself differently with peers in contrast to parents' (Harter 1999, 62); teens demonstrated the process of identity-formation by presenting themselves differently to different audiences. The teens were found to coordinate *who sees what* about them, *when* and *how*.

All four accounts were, perhaps unsurprisingly, characterised by a narrative of transitioning from childhood towards adulthood. Through our particular analytic lens, 'transitioning' meant embracing and negotiating different voices within the self. The teens described striving for autonomy and establishing their own identities beyond the family household; they also described remaining very much connected both to their household and the home environs. Their resources for expression also remained largely under parental control, not least because they were financially dependent on their parents: digital cameras and camera-phones were recent acquisitions, gifted by parents and of lesser 'quality' than parents' cameras; and other photoware located in the home, including printers, was parent-owned and subject to physical monitoring. In the discussion that follows we use Harter's notions of selfhood outlined above to examine the performance and integration of different self-representations in online



FIGURE 3. Digital photograph presented to the researcher, of Cat with friends taken at a friend's party and displayed on Facebook.

and offline domains. We give particular attention to the choice of images displayed in each area, the technologies involved and the reasons for image and technology selection.

Photography in the Online-Peer Domain

Internet access created opportunities for forging teen autonomy at home. The teens described using online social network sites and photo-sharing applications to 'create a space for themselves' that was relatively free of parental control. Facebook¹ was the site primarily used by all, as conveyed here by Caroline.

Car: I wouldn't necessarily put pictures of my family on Facebook, it would just be sort-of me and my friends. Yeah, pictures in the house would be more me, my family and my friends and stuff. But Facebook ones would just be a friend thing.

Displays on Facebook portrayed Caroline with friends, not family; and the intended audience was friends, not family.

The teens described *how* online and offline portrayals differed. Online portrayals (e.g. Figure 3) conveyed sociality and social desirability over self-description, characterised in terms of 'being in the world' and expressing connections to others.

Cat: Well, on Facebook it's sort-of how you want to be portrayed *more* – on your profile pictures – I mean there's not much you can do about photos that other people take of you. But on your profile pictures it's generally a way you want to be seen, whereas the ones on your wall at home are a lot more personal, I think? And so you have what you *want to see*. So you see your

family or your friends, or whatever, and they don't have to be pictures with *you* in. Whereas profile pictures on Facebook you want to sort-of look like you're continually in the *midst* of the world, whereas on your wall you're happy to look at photos of your family when you're not there.

Whilst Cat's bedroom displays served more of a reflexive function, her online displays portrayed her as she *wanted to be seen by others*. Examples of such displays are provided in Figures 1 and 3. It was important for Cat to be seen 'in the midst of the world', interpreted to indicate the function of photographic referents to communicate her *social proximity* to her peers. Her own presentations (e.g. Figure 1) were juxtaposed with her peers' portrayals of her (e.g. Figure 3), the latter showing social proximity through capturing Cat with friends at a party. Curiously she considered the former kinds of portrayals to be less 'personal', indicating that the posed self-portrait of Figure 1 was created to serve more of a social rather than reflexive function.

The construction of online portrayals was particularly *effortful* for Caroline.

Car: I s'pose when I sort-of put pictures on Facebook I'm really vain and stuff. I just sorta look at it and think 'If people look at that they're gonna think I'm really ugly, so we won't put that on!' [laughs]. I do think about it more. But I s'pose if it was in my own room I'd just sorta have 'Whatever' photos I had anyway.

Caroline voiced concerns with vanity and body image, and a broader concern with social desirability that Cat expressed. In the online-peer domain, the teens performed 'possible' or 'ideal' selves as expressions of who they aspired to be in the eyes of others. This required work, to resolve discrepancies between, in Cat's words, 'personal' representations and how 'you want to be seen'. Michelle described creating 'posery' online portrayals and editing her photographs for online display: 'I do edit them like black and white and stuff'. Drawing from Harter, this work to achieve social desirability may be viewed as a performance to be evaluated. Accounts also distinguished between online portrayals and domestic portrayals, and those created by peers.

Online presentations were associated with Facebook, which served as a *locus* for particular audiences. This came to light when the researcher asked Caroline to compare different media of communication for exchanging photographs online.

Res: Do you send photos using Instant Messenger programs?

Car: I have done, but only if it's a picture of something like, say, I'd taken a photo on my phone of me and my boyfriend, I'd send it to him – on MSN² him or something – 'cause it's easier. But I wouldn't just send out all my photos to all my friends. But they're on Facebook – most of them, so – yeah. Essentially, people could just, like, take them off Facebook and have them themselves as well.

Different media of online communication seemed to afford different kinds of intimacy, determining an audience of one versus many. For Caroline, Facebook served as an 'online place' for her peer network. She described posting photographs to a defined audience as opposed to individuals.

Further to this, we found the online peer networks to be grounded in *real-world* relationships, groups and locales. Real-world peer networks motivated online subscriptions to Facebook. One's choice of social network site was determined by what one's friends opted for.

Res: So when did you first go on Facebook?

Cat: *Erm*, still at *school* so about two terms before leaving school. 'Cause I resisted it for quite a while 'cause I knew how to work MySpace and I didn't like the Facebook – it was a bit 'stalkery'. *Erm*, so . . . yeah, just before the end of school. So Upper Six Year 13, second term.

Res: And you also mentioned MySpace.³

Cat: *I* – I've deleted now, I think. I really don't use it at all. That was sort-of Lower Sixth, Upper Fifth. 'Cause I think its sort-of in stages. There's the MySpace and then there's the University people who all use Facebook, except in *Ireland* where they all use *Bebo*,⁴ which is what we all used in the Thirds. So now it's all rearranging. I'm gonna have to make myself a Bebo account, 'cause no one in *Ireland* uses Facebook.

Participation in school communities drove Cat's subscriptions to particular social network sites, as different stages at school did; upon her move to university, she'd opted for Bebo.

Not only did Cat's site subscriptions communicate phases of interest, they also expressed stages of growing up, articulated through the patterning of school years. Michelle was explicit on this point.

Mic: I used to use MySpace quite a lot but now I don't – and Facebook – *erm* – sometimes. *Yeah*,

I kind of – I don't know why but I'm not really into that any more. *Erm*, but I have got photos that are downloaded onto Facebook just to, like, share with people that I grew up with who are now all over the world.

In her interview, Michelle described the MySpace contents as representing her 'more, like, younger'. She compared her past and present practices, reflecting on how her use of the site expressed developmental transitions.

The teens' preference for Facebook at the time of interview was reasoned in terms of how it supported photo-sharing within the broader set of applications it offered. The teens were unequivocal about their primary use of Facebook for photo-sharing.

Jul: kind of – I used – I think I do still have a MySpace, but I don't really use it. There's too many of them and I had three at one time and I just *cancelled* them 'cause it's just, I don't know, it's just too much really so, like, I can't be bothered to keep updating *everything* so I've just stuck with one now, Facebook, which I'm kind of – you know the hype at the beginning's kind of dying – *phasing* out now, so it's just mainly – it's mainly just photos I show people. . . . I mean – yeah, I mean – and the odd comment saying 'How are you?' or – that's pretty much it.

In view of online-peer practices, the four teens effortfully leveraged Facebook to cultivate socially desirable identities within their real-world peer networks. It appeared that, as they transitioned into adulthood, the teens coordinated subscriptions to the sites to carefully manage the form and function of their displays and audiences.

Photography in the Offline Familial Domain

When talking about the kinds of photographic content they would happily show to the rest of their family, all the teens expressed concerns for privacy, reiterating the separateness of peer activities from family life. Making one's family privy to aspects of one's social life could cause 'embarrassment'. Julie explained that privacy concerns extended to her bedroom space and described the kinds of content that she deemed appropriate for display in other domestic spaces.

Jul: There are some photos of Sam and I – my boyfriend – that's a bit personal for me – I wouldn't even display that in my room. There's one upstairs actually of me and Sam and I'm so scared about showing – I felt really *weird*

showing parents that picture 'cause I thought it was really *personal* to me. Yeah, I think to family it would be either photos directly of the family or what we – *our* holiday, *our* experiences, not necessarily just *mine*. Like, if I have pictures of my friends at a party, I [laughs] – I wouldn't really show – like, want to display it downstairs. It would be a bit too personal. I don't know.

Res: And you're saying in your room too.

Jul: Yeah, I tend to not want to. . . . Yeah 'cause, you know: parties and things [laughs], you think: there are some funny photos but you don't think they should be displayed in your bedroom where parents can go in and see them, yeah. Maybe that's just me.

Home displays, including teen bedroom displays, 'should' represent shared family experiences capturing household members doing things together. This was echoed by the other teens. It was not just her parents viewing her photographs that concerned Julie. She feared being teased by her sisters: 'I don't display *many* photos in my room because I'm worried what – I dunno – my sisters could tease me: "your friends look so weird!"'. The home's physical environs were found to play a central role in the presentation of self to family.

The degree to which the teenage bedroom was perceived as a private and personal space varied across the accounts, and depended upon the domestic order established in the different households. For Julie, being in her bedroom felt like being in her parents' space and, as such, the room was associated with various constraints imposed via parental rules at home.

Jul: I've never been allowed posters in my room anyway [laughs]. So it's kind of like I've still stayed on those kind of ground levels of not having too many pictures up in my room, which, I don't know – it would be a bit strange – I'd never stick a picture up of like a celebrity that I'd fancy because [laughs] my parents always used to go on about things like that [laughs].

Julie accepted the domestic order that her parents had established, recognising that, until leaving home, this was the status quo.

Jul: I guess when I go to *uni* I'll have *lots* of photos up I think. I think, you know, when you get past that stage of living at home you'd get like a big – what d'ya call it? – a cork board. I'll probably have *loads* of photos there because it's kind-of my own little space. But at the moment it's just my room my parents' house. I don't know: it doesn't feel like I can display that many.

Acceptance of parental constraints in the offline-familial domain formed part of Julie's transition into adulthood. Cat voiced something different, however.

Cat: (Y)our bedroom is generally just you. So that's, sort-of, the inner sanctum of the house and stuff.

She contrasted the privacy of her bedroom to other rooms in the home.

Res: And the rest of the house: would you ever think about wanting to display your own photos?

Cat: Yeah! Yeah! . . . Obviously of a certain *kind* like, things that I would deem appropriate for anyone to see, sort of thing. I mean you've gotta be more careful with that, whereas your bedroom – just whatever you like.

Caroline and Michelle shared Cat's sense of liberty about displaying 'whatever she liked' in her bedroom. The researcher asked the girls to consider what they might display on a digital photo frame, if it was situated in their respective bedrooms. It transpired that they felt they could display the same kinds of content *regardless* of display format (e.g. whether printed or displayed digitally).

The teens described various strategies for establishing and maintaining personal privacy at home. Cat felt obliged by her parents to solely access the Internet via the family computer. Her own laptop was not connected to the Internet and was to be used 'strictly for school work'. So, the '*family* computer' acted as an intermediary store for personal content that she wanted to post online. Cat found a way to partition off private space so that other family members could not see her photographs: she created directories in 'obscure' places on the hard drive, with labels intended to 'hide' content.

Cat: It does say 'Cat's stuff' and it's hidden in quite an obscure place. It's hidden under 'Hadrian's Wall Photos' so [laughs] I don't really see many people going in there.

Despite viewing her bedroom as her 'inner sanctum', Cat remained concerned about her parents monitoring her bedroom displays, and described other means to maintain personal privacy there. Specifically, she described printing photographs for her bedroom wall at a size so small that, from the doorway to the bedroom, their content couldn't easily be viewed.

Cat: if you come in they're all *tiny*, . . . and you can't really see them from that far off. You have to be sort-of [gestures] back here to see them properly.

Herein was another strategy for coordinating parental access, at home, to aspects of Cat's life as represented photographically.

The *temporal framing* of photo displays was significant for displaying photographs to family. Caroline articulated this when talking about the difference between an ambient or 'permanent' home display and the act of temporarily showing photographs to the rest of her household.

Car: It's not that I wouldn't want them to see, and it's not that I would go 'No, that's my photo, you can't see that!'. I probably would *show them* and say 'Look, this is what we did last night and this is me and this is so and so'. But I wouldn't want it to be *on display* for everyone to see. Like, I wouldn't mind showing people, that's fine, but I wouldn't want *everyone* to see, and especially if other people are coming in the house and stuff. If they're my photos then they're my photos and I want to be able to have the *control* to show someone if I want to show them.

Caroline said she wanted to carefully coordinate what she showed to whom and when. For this reason, displaying personal collections ambiently and permanently in the home was not appealing. Julie expressed something similar, valuing the opportunity to display *some* of her personal photographs, but only on the condition that displays were ephemeral and expressed casualness and contingency. Significantly, she was concerned for her displays to fit into the broader expressions of the family.

As much as they sought privacy, the teens also wished to represent themselves as *part* of their family. They had a clear sense of what to include.

Car: I probably wouldn't have so many pictures of myself on my own [laughs] or else it would be a bit vain. . . . I think if it was gonna be a permanent display I'd only have one or two of me and all the rest would be of me with people, mostly me with my sister, probably [laughs].

Home displays were about shared family experiences, and content should display members captured together. Michelle echoed Julie (above) about her choice of 'familial' content.

Mic: (T)he ones that I would display in my home will be of family and the things we've shared *together*, not just my own memories. 'Cause if I displayed a photo of *me* at a party they wouldn't share the same funny memories that went on, you know, whereas if I displayed something that they – we could all like, you know, talk about.

Appropriateness was established using clear content criteria.

Familial proximity was expressed through means other than the *content* of photographs. The ad-hoc capture and exchange of digital photographs between household members promoted intimacy. For example, Michelle described using photography to keep in touch with her sister, Christine, who was at university abroad.

Mic: (Y)esterday I bought, like, these skiing boots so then I wanted to quickly like show Christine them so then I quickly took a shot and then put them on to my computer and then sent a file to her through, er, Googletalk. So – and then she like got it within like, you know, under a minute and she was just like 'oh yeah they're so cool'.

Michelle described missing her sister and the instance of capturing a 'here and there' photograph in a spontaneous fashion; sharing the photograph in real time was significant for maintaining a sense of everyday intimacy. After moving away to university, Cat sent camera-phone photographs to her mother (Maman), to serve a similar communicative function. In this case Cat was the one located remotely.

Cat: There's a photo that I took to send to Maman, of my first ever pork chop that I cooked all by myself. Literally burnt it the whole way *through*. So that was a *black blob*. And Christmas lights on Grafton Street. Just things I want to show Maman sort-of *immediately*, when the Christmas spirit overtook me, probably.

The immediacy of the exchange was central to the sense of intimacy fostered. As with Michelle and Christine, Cat and her mother were located in separate countries. In this instance, Cat used her 'poor quality' camera-phone that captured referents as 'blobs', indicating that the photograph was not sent to serve an aesthetic function, but as a means of making contact and sharing experiences. In this case, contact involved sharing a rite of passage.

DISCUSSION

Our aim in this study has been to shed light on the visual practices of four UK teenagers, sharing photographs online as a form of visual self-expression enabled by digital photography and social networking sites. This practice extends an existing involvement in domestic photography for these and other teens, mediated for the most part by their mothers (Durrant et al. 2009b). In contrast to our previous findings, in which

photographs of joint family activities were depicted in albums, frames and other surfaces in the home (Durrant et al. 2009b), these interviews reveal a practice almost entirely hidden from parents, in which teens share pictures of themselves and their friends through the screens of their Internet-enabled computers. Such representations resided in the online-peer domain, on social networking accounts inaccessible to both parents (and, in some cases, the general public), and displayed only to 'validated friends'. We interpret this online-peer network to be a safe place in which the teens used photo-mediated communication to consolidate existing friendships and 'try on' multiple, alternative selves in a critical phase of their self-development. The photo-sharing technology used in this context provided a medium through which teens broke away from their childhood identities and literally 'left home' to inhabit another social space online. However, unlike the identities expressed as characters in online games, identities in social networking sites like Facebook appeared more true to life, reflecting mixtures of characteristics of real and idealised selves enacted in the context of important relationships. A key factor and agent appeared to be the photograph itself, which, as a representation of 'reality', could not lie, but could be used creatively to 'stretch the truth'.

To elaborate on these points, it appears significant to us that, at the time of the study, all four girls used Facebook as their social networking site of choice. An important signifier of real-world connectivity drawn upon in much of the literature, is the Facebook policy by which membership to online networks is authenticated. Networks, in Facebook terminology, are group memberships and are typically tied to institutions. This is largely because Facebook was founded within an institutional community. An application to join a given Facebook 'network' requires the use of the affiliate email address belonging to that network. For the teens participating in the current study, this included their school email addresses. Zhao and colleagues point out that, because online self-representations are 'anchored to offline communities' of accountability, online selves become just as morally and socially accountable as offline selves (Zhao et al. 2008, 1820). The authors use the term *nonyminity* to describe this real-world and 'institutionally bound' identification (Zhao et al. 2008).

This idea, that online selves are 'real' selves, is supported by other empirical reports in the extant Anglo-American literature on young people's use of social networking sites (e.g. Boyd 2008; Boyd and Ellison 2007; Livingstone 2008; Steinfield, Ellison, and Lampe 2008; Subrahmanyam et al. 2008). These accounts feature the 'emerging adult population', not least because

adolescents are recognised as heavy users of these sites, and more 'addicted' than 'older' adult users (Lenhart and Madden 2007; Rosen, Cheever, and Carrier 2008). Many authors report their participants' tendencies to use these sites for cultivating offline friendships (Lenhart and Madden 2007) rather than for initiating new ones (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007).

The four teens seemed to place considerable significance on creating online self-representations that they thought would please others. In keeping with the above, we suggest that such performances shape self-evaluations as a function of selfhood; the quest for social desirability may shape teen aspirations to perform 'ideal selves' that differ from 'actual selves' (Harter 2003; 1999). Ellison and colleagues that claim that 'there is also growing evidence that Internet use in general, and social networking sites like Facebook in particular, may be associated with a person's sense of self-worth and other measures of psychosocial development' (Ellison et al. 2007, 435). Further, such self-evaluations are found to have positive and negative effects. Social relationships, cultivated online, are found to produce social capital (Ellison et al. 2007) especially in cases of teens with low global self-worth that find it hard to network offline (Steinfield et al. 2008); the same sites have also been found to produce social expectations of desirability (Manago et al. 2008). Studying self-construction on Facebook, Zhao et al. (2008) show that attempts to resolve discrepancies between 'ideal' and 'actual' selves may introduce social pressures. Such pressures, the authors suggest, feed ideas for self-enhancement.

Desktop editing provides a good example of digital manipulation in the service of self-enhancement, as voiced in the findings by Michelle and Caroline. Photo-sharing was found to be the primary form of online communication for the four girls, and central to online expression. Profile pictures were of particular significance, communicating specific emotions and 'looks'. Zhao et al. (2008) use their own empirical findings to reflect on photo-mediated communication on Facebook and its role in self-construction. The authors show that many more photographs are posted online than textual expressions, and introduce the concept of the 'visual self' to describe what they find to be a salient Facebook phenomenon: a self-representation that is projected predominantly through photography. They speculate why photographs may be so efficacious in cultivating social desirability (Zhao et al. 2008, 1826).

A better way to present oneself to strangers as well as friends is therefore to 'show' rather than 'tell' or to display rather than describe oneself. Moreover a picture is more than a thousand

words and positive remarks from others are more effective than self-praise.

Photo displays are key agents, then, in online bids for popularity. Not only do they afford physiological transformations of the self via the creation of ideal selves, they also create presence and show social proximity, or, in Cat's words, 'being in the midst of the world'. They do this whilst obfuscating the need to articulate self-descriptions in a literal sense. As illustrated in Figure 2b, proximity is expressed *visually*.

The online representation of self and family can be discussed further in terms of how the girls negotiated autonomy with their parents. All described their online-peer activities as being separate from family life and they expressed concerns for keeping other aspects of their life, notably 'offline-peer' activities, private in this domain. Content-wise, any referent with sexual connotations was mostly kept private, including that capturing 'boys', 'boyfriends' and friends socialising at 'parties' (Figure 3). Cat, Michelle and Caroline felt that they could display some of these referents in their bedrooms, but remained sensitive to issues of self-disclosure in that space. The girls carefully managed bedroom displays for privacy; recall Cat printing photographs at a small scale for her bedroom wall. Disclosure was thus coordinated across online and offline domains, to negotiate different 'risks' (Livingstone 2008) or 'access to the self' (Tufekci 2008) in the different domains. Julie, who felt that she couldn't display personal photographs in her bedroom, was compensated by confidence that her parents wouldn't see her online displays; the nature of her display-making was determined by her different perceptions of self-disclosure to parents across the two domains. We may discern that self-promotion in the online-peer domain was carefully balanced with self-disclosure in the offline-familial domain.

Given our broad interest in how the relationship between self and family is expressed through photographs, we may connect our insights on teenage practices to the practice of home curation. Given the ongoing role of mothers in curating family representations for *offline* display (at least in the families we studied), it has been fascinating to observe a somewhat parallel online behaviour in their daughters. We suggest that these girls' online-peer practice may be referred to as a form of online curation and is a recent phenomenon enabled by the emergence of social networking sites, and shaped by authentication policies which favour existing contacts over new ones. Although mothers might be surprised to see their daughters share photographic content in this way, they should recognise the curatorial motivation to portray

idealised images of self and family to others. This, we suggest, is the very same drive that underlies mothers' own behaviour in assembling traditional family albums, and reveals again how everyday practices are often transposed to new media, albeit in a modified form.

Leading from this, the female sample is deemed of central significance to understanding the implications and contribution of the study's findings. Harter presents empirical evidence to suggest that teenage girls in mid to late adolescence are more capable of recognising and articulating multiple self-identities than teenage boys are; in turn, girls may be more strategic in presenting themselves *differently* to different social groups or domains as a function of the performing self (Harter 1999). Harter's findings imply that girls may be more self-aware of phenomena such as social desirability and more susceptible to social pressures. In turn, her insights may be used to make sense of the phenomena we report in this article: the girls' concerns to be seen to respect their parents' domestic order; and the extent to which the display of photographs on Facebook was significant for both self-representation and self-evaluation. We recognise that gender is core to understanding the role of culture in socio-psychological functioning (Grint and Gill 1995), which may incorporate the visual self (Tinkler 2006) and the use of social networking sites (Manago et al. 2008). Taken together, the extant literature and the current study findings invite speculation that there is a relationship between gender and teenage photographic practices, across online and offline domains, which warrants further research.

Findings on the lives of teens in the online-peer domain point to ethical concerns surrounding 'digital parenting' (Rode 2009; Rosen et al. 2008) and the 'generational divide' (Byron 2008). By acknowledging the developmental imperative for teens to explore multiple identities, perhaps parents could, in turn, acknowledge (i) the presence of the online-peer domain and (ii) the need for it to be mainly separate from family life. By establishing an understanding with their teens of the boundaries between parental protection and teen autonomy, parents may facilitate the responsible co-management of this 'other domain'. In a broad sense, the concept of home curation may be extended to include online portrayals; and the representation of self and family may be reconceptualised as a creative process that engages multiple voices and images in the household as a product of photography's digitisation.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussions of domestic photographic practices with four teenage girls have revealed an effortful form of

curation in online and offline domains, akin to curation used by their mothers offline. Photo display was managed as a private activity divorced from photo circulation in the family, giving it a secret character from a parental perspective and a consequent freedom from parental control. Teens used this freedom to explore self-representations with 'real' friends in an online-peer domain, through the careful capture, manipulation and selection of photographs. Use of photographs in offline and online domains appeared to signal the teens' recognition of multiple identities as a feature of emerging adulthood. In turn, their curatorial practices are interpreted in terms of efforts to nurture social relationships, online with friends and offline with parents. Findings from this study also suggest a shifting of boundaries between the sharing of personal and family photographs at home and changing politics of photograph ownership and control between parents and their older children.

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NOTES

- [1] See <http://www.facebook.com>
- [2] See <http://msn.com>
- [3] See <http://www.myspace.com>
- [4] See <http://www.bebo.com>

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