The secret life of teens: Online versus offline photo displays at home

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Abstract

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 was managed separately from the family and largely free from parental control. The separate, online-peer domain was used to explore alternative self-representations with real friends. Our findings appear to signal changing politics of photo ownership and family representation between the generations.

1. 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 (Miller and Edwards 2007); 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 tools and practice (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 photos in British homes, and question how the take-up 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 technologies may support or transform domestic photo display mediated by new recruits and practices. In particular we wonder how teenage photo practices may be characterised and differentiated from the conventional practices of family photography.

In our ongoing research of family photo displays, we have observed the perpetuation of familial conventions that stem from film photography and its artifacts. 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 et al. 2007). Home curation concerns how the display of printed photos throughout the home is coordinated on behalf of the household-at-large (ibid). It is found to be closely interwoven with to other roles that reproduce a domestic order, like 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 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 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 & Kraut 2003; Mesch, 2006), with implications for household power dynamics and the social psychological functioning of the home.

![Teen profile photograph on Facebook that ‘would never be displayed’ at home, supplied by research participant.](image)

Figure 1. Teen profile photograph on Facebook that ‘would never be displayed’ at home, supplied by research participant.

In previous studies, we unpacked the interactions and negotiations between parents and teens over what photos to display at home,
from multiple collections, and how to achieve consensus on this (Durrant et al. 2009a; Durrant et al. 2009b). 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, and 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 & 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 & Edwards 2007; Pauwels 2008; Van House 2009). However, there has been no focus on ‘teen photography’, as such, before its introduction in our previous study (Durrant et al 2009a) and little attention to online photo practices by teens. This is despite work on the use of social network 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 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 teen photo practices at home as part of self-expression, and in particular online display, understanding 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: to explore how teens used online (Internet-enabled) platforms in the family home for self and family representation; 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 paper, we report findings from the study to illuminate a broader issue of how new visual technologies that mediate both online and domestic domains may be changing the visual practices of teens and parents in a family home setting.

3. Approach

3.1 Methodology

In-keeping with our previous work, our approach was qualitative, social psychological and phenomenological in orientation (Smith & 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 helped us make sense of the findings, as will become clear in the sections to follow.

3.2 Procedure

The study was devised as follows. A semi-structured interview technique was deemed appropriate for generating accounts on this subject, and a schedule designed to probe: 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 girls were recruited because we wanted the study design to afford longitudinal engagement with participant accounts, across this and our previous studies these girls had participated in. Further, we previously decided to use a female sample after observing considerable gender differences in the practice of both teen and family photography (Durrant et al. 2009b). By recruiting a female sample, we felt we could concentrate on individual differences within the intergenerational relationships we were investigating. The small sample was consistent with our phenomenological 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 & Eatough 2007).

Interviews were conducted by the first author in participants' homes between February and December 2008, and each lasted approximately 30 minutes. Questions attended to the act of displaying photos and the material resources available to-hand for doing so. The schedule constituted the following questions.

1. Do you own a digital camera? [Please describe the availability of digital cameras for your personal use.]
2. Describe your everyday uses of a digital camera. [What subject do you like to take photos of?]
3. Describe your everyday uses of digital photos. [What do you do with your photos?]
4. What kinds of photos do you not want to display to your parents?
5. Do you display your photos online? [Describe your experience of displaying photos online.]
6. Do you have access to the Internet at home?

7. How does the display of photos online relate to the display of photos in your home?

8. Can you imagine a scenario in which you would not want to display your personal photos in the home?”

Interviews took place between either in teens' bedrooms or communal spaces such as the family kitchen. Parents were not present for any of the interviews. The researcher was also invited to observe rooms, including teenagers’ bedrooms, during visits.

3.3 Data Collection & 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.

4. Findings

4.1 Two domains for the photographic representation of self

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

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 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. We refer 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; the Internet was harnessed as a means to establish and maintain the separateness of self from family. This activity may be understood in the context of psychosocial development: "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. Findings revealed the teens coordinating 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 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 analysis that follows we use Harter’s notions of selfhood outlined in Section 3.1 above to examine the performance and integration of different self-representations in online and offline domains. Particular attention is given to the choice of images displayed in each area, the technologies involved, and the reasons for image and technology selection.

4.2 Teen 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; 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.

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1 http://www.facebook.com
Figure 3. Digital photo presented to the researcher, of Cat with friends taken at a friend’s party and displayed on Facebook.

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 Cat’s 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 Cat considered the former kinds 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 sp’ose 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 photos 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 mediums of communication for exchanging photos 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 mediums 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 photos 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 MySpace³.

**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 Bebo⁴, 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

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² [http://msn.com](http://msn.com)
¹ [http://www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)
⁴ [http://www.bebo.com](http://www.bebo.com)
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 site use 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 explicit 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. As they transitioned into adulthood, the teens coordinated subscriptions to the sites to carefully manage the form and function of their displays and audiences.

4.3 Teen 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 girls 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, describing the kinds of content that she deemed appropriate for 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 photos 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 parent’s space and, as such, her bedroom 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, 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.

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 likes’ 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 "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 couldn't see her photos: she directories in obscure places on the hard drive, with obscure labels.

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.

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.

Photos on Cat's bedroom wall were printed so small that, from the doorway to the bedroom, their content couldn't easily be viewed.

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

Car: It’s not that I’d 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 wanted to carefully coordinate what she showed to who 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 photos, 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 photos. The ad-hoc capture and exchange of digital photos between household members promoted intimacy. For example, Michelle described using photography to keep in touch with her sister, Lottie, who was at University abroad.
Mic: (Y)esterday I bought, like, these skiing boots so then I wanted to quickly like show Lottie 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' photo in a spontaneous fashion; sharing the photo in real time was significant for maintaining a sense of everyday intimacy. After moving away to University, Cat sent camera-phone photos 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 Lottie, 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 photo 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.

5. Discussion

Our aim in this study has been to shed light on the visual practices of four UK teenagers, sharing photos online as a form of visual expression enabled by digital photography and social network 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 photos of joint family activities were depicted in albums, frames and other surfaces in the home (ibid), 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 network accounts inaccessible to both parents (and, in some cases, the general public), displayed only to 'validated friends'. This online-peer network turns out to be a safe place in which teens use 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 provides a new medium through which teens break away from their childhood identities and literally 'leave home' to inhabit another social space online. However, unlike the identities expressed as characters in on-line games, identities in social network sites like Facebook appear 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 is the photo itself, which, as a representation of 'reality', cannot lie, but can and is used creatively with accompanying words 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 network 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 (Zhao et al. 2008, 1820), online selves become just as morally and socially accountable as offline selves. The authors use the term *nonyminity* to describe this real-world and 'institutionally bound' identification (ibid.).

This idea that online selves are 'real' selves is supported by empirical reports in the existing socio-cultural literature on young people's use of social network sites (e.g. Boyd, 2008; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Livingstone 2008; Manago et al. 2008; Steinfield et al 2008; Subrahmanyam et al. 2008; Zhao 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 et al., 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 (e.g. Ellison et al. 2007).

Teens seem to place considerable significance on creating online self-representations that they think will 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 claim 'there is also growing evidence that Internet use in general, and social network 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, produce social capital (ibid.) 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 identity-formation on Facebook, Zhao et al. (2008) show 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 photos 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 photos may be so efficacious in cultivating social desirability (ibid., 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 above, proximity is expressed visually.

The online representation of self and family can be discussed further in terms of how the girls negotiate autonomy with their parents. All described their online-peer activities as being separate from family life, and 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 photos at a small scale for her bedroom so that, when standing at the door, her parents couldn't see them. 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 photos 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. Hence, self-promotion in the online-peer domain was carefully balanced with self-disclosure in the offline-familial domain.

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 parallel online behaviour in their teenage daughters. We assume this is a recent phenomenon enabled by social network sites such as Facebook, and shaped by authentication policies which favour existing over new contacts. Though 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 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.

The female sample is of central significance to understanding the implications and contribution of the study's findings. There is empirical evidence in the wider literature 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). This implies that girls may be more self-aware of phenomena such as social desirability and more susceptible to social pressures, and may explain the extent to which Facebook was significant in our study for both self-representation and self-evaluation, expressed through visual culture. Certainly, 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 network sites (Manago et al 2008). Taken together, this literature and the current study findings
invite speculation that there is a relationship between gender and teenage photographic practices, across online and offline domains, that 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.

6. Conclusions
Discussions of domestic photo practices with four teenage girls have revealed an effortful form of curation, akin to that 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. This freedom was used to explore self-representations with 'real' friends in an online-peer domain, through the careful capture, manipulation and selection of photos. Use of photos in the two domains appeared to signal the girls' 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. The findings also suggest a shifting of boundaries, between the sharing of personal and family photos at home, and changing the politics of photo ownership and control between parents and their children.

7. Acknowledgments
Anonymised.

8. References


