From Portraits to Selfies: Family Photo-making Rituals

Krystal M. Bresnahan
University of South Florida, kbresnahan@mail.usf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the Communication Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
From Portraits to Selfies: Family Photo-making Rituals

by

Krystal M. Bresnahan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Chaim Noy, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Ambar Basu, Ph.D.
Arthur P. Bochner, Ph.D.
Carolyn Ellis, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
October 28, 2016

Keywords: Family Communication, Photography, Memory, Narrative, Visual Methods, Ethnography

Copyright © 2016, Krystal M. Bresnahan
DEDICATION

For my grandpa, Richard Allen Hawkins

whose eyes sparkled whenever he talked about the National Scout Jamboree.

And for my grandma, Patricia Hawkins

who spends time remembering his stories with me.

He never put these photos on display,

but I’m thankful he kept them for us.

With all my love.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These few paragraphs represent the bigger picture of this dissertation, and the amazing people who shared in my challenges and accomplishments, fears and failures, my best and very worst writing days. I spent many of those days at my home away from home, Felicitous Coffee and Tea House, where an entire team of baristas kept me fed, caffeinated, and feeling loved. Your friendly smiles and sweet treats motivated much of my research.

At USF, I worked with a community of scholars who believe in each other and the work we do. My dear friends Alyse Keller, Alisha Menzies, Amanda Firestone, Max Plumpton, Lindy Davidson, Sheran Dhillon, Mark McCarthy, Joanna Bartell, Lisa Spinazola, and David Purnell remind me writing is a collaborative effort. I want to thank Caitlin Evans, Stephanie Ruhl, Danielle Kaiser, Kathleen Verzwyvelt, Rachel Irwin, and Kristen Johnson for encouraging me to take writing breaks, and Alexander Massa for turning on the light when I found myself writing in the dark.

Kathleen Wong (Lau) first taught me how qualitative research can transform lives. She changed mine. I gifted the time she invested in me to my students: Shelby Swafford, Jordan Rawlinson, Wesley Owen, Sameer Bhatia, Liandra Larsen, Isabella Kosal, Steven Dolan, Hannah Power, Siam TashTash, Chelsea Zemkowski, Brittany DeJesus, Areeb Refae, Christina Lasso, and Kamran McCaskill. Our inspiring conversations nourished my passion for this research. I learned more about the emotional work in teaching and research from Robert Wait, Patric Spence, Larry Ten Harmsel, Aubrey Huber, Lori Roscoe, and Abraham Khan. Thank you all for leading our classrooms by example, and encouraging me to follow both my head and heart.

I am grateful for Carolyn Ellis’s work with relational ethics and autoethnography, which lured me to Tampa to pursue a PhD, and for her constructive feedback and encouragement
throughout this journey. You made it possible for me to push expectations in qualitative research and embrace multiple perspectives. Arthur Bochner taught me how to appreciate the struggle with a blank page. Because of him, I can stand up for what I believe in and sit down to write about it. Thank you, Art, for challenging me to grow – as a writer, a teacher, a scholar, and a person – in caring ways.

I also want to thank Elizabeth Bird for introducing me to digital humanities. Your critical perspective regarding the relationship between words and photographs sparked my interest in studying the visual. Thank you Jane Jorgenson and Michael LeVan for guiding my first steps toward this research, and Ambar Basu for pressuring me to meet deadlines and get this in print. My work with each of you marks this dissertation from beginning to end.

To the families, mothers, siblings, Easter Bunny(s) and his/her helpers who invited me into their lives, their rituals, stories, memories and family photos, thank you for making this research meaningful for me. To my family – Angela, Sara, Jordan, Logan, Chase, Ethan, Livvie, Kaitie, Tina, and Marty – thank you for participating in every part of my life, including this research. You made finishing this dissertation possible. I am so thankful you believe in me, and that I now have free time to help you do your homework.

Special thanks to my adviser, Chaim Noy, for staying up late for Skype meetings and sending emails to remind me to continue writing (and to enjoy it). Your support crossed continents and I am eternally grateful for your commitment to mentorship. Thank you for refusing to accept my perfectionism and instead instilling confidence in me. When I look back through these pages, I will remember how you trusted me to learn my own way of doing things.

I would not be here – with this – without you.

Hugs x 1000.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................ iv  
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................................... v  
Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. vii  

## Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
Easter Bunny Photo Hut ......................................................................................................................... 1  
Mothers’ Homes .................................................................................................................................... 4  
Snapchat Social Media App .................................................................................................................... 5  
Patterns of Choice ................................................................................................................................... 6  

## Chapter Two: Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 9  
The Social Construction of Family ......................................................................................................... 10  
Understanding the Role of Rituals in Family Life ................................................................................ 11  
Developing Ritual in Family Studies ..................................................................................................... 12  
Media in Family Ritual Studies ............................................................................................................. 16  
Constructing Family Through Photo-making Rituals ........................................................................... 17  
Visual Representations of Family: A Brief History .............................................................................. 19  
New(er) Technologies of Family Photo-making .................................................................................... 22  
Constructing a Shared Past, Present, and Future ................................................................................... 25  

## Chapter Three: Family Photo-making Fieldwork: The Practices of Visual Ethnography ............... 28  
Ethnographic Understanding of Visual Culture .................................................................................... 29  
Visual Methods for Studying Photography ........................................................................................... 32  
Visual methods for studying tourist photography ............................................................................... 33  
Visual methods for studying family photography ............................................................................... 34  
Entering the Field(s) of/with Photo-making Families .......................................................................... 37  
Photo elicitation ..................................................................................................................................... 38  
Participant observation ......................................................................................................................... 40  
Ethical dilemmas and patterns of choice in looking at family photo-making ........................................ 41  

## Chapter Four: “Smiles start here”!: Photo-making Rituals at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut .......... 45  
Cultural Myths and the Annual Easter Bunny Photo Ritual .................................................................. 47  
Methods at the Bunny Photo Hut .......................................................................................................... 49  
Entering the Field .................................................................................................................................... 50  
Data Collection ....................................................................................................................................... 52  
Fieldnotes ............................................................................................................................................... 52  
Photographs ........................................................................................................................................... 53
References ................................................................................................................................................. 167
Appendix A: IRB Approvals and Publication Agreement.............................................................................. 182
Appendix B: Photo Release Forms .............................................................................................................. 187
Appendix C: Copyright Permissions ............................................................................................................ 192
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: General overview of selected qualitative methods organized by research site .......................... 38
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Signs at the Bunny Photo Hut entrance remind families “Cell Phone Cameras Are Not Permitted.” .................................................................51

Figure 2: Digital photography equipment presents obstacles for parents trying to use their personal cell phones to take pictures of their children, which are displayed on computer monitors at the Bunny Photo Hut................................................................. 54

Figure 3: Farina Orthodontics sponsors family photo-making at Wesley Chapel Mall and advertises here at the entrance of the Photo Hut ................................................................. 71

Figure 4: Lindsay pictured here smiling between her daughter, Jessa and son, Tommy. .........................96

Figure 5: Ellie shows me her impressive family Christmas photo collection (left) and selects one photo (right) to represent and share how she views her family ...............................................99

Figure 6: A bride and groom appear devastated when they learn their photographer used a snap app to document their wedding day rituals. ................................................................. 116

Figure 7: These images show the “home” screen for Snapchat users creating an image (left) and setting a timer up to 10 seconds for viewing the image (right) ................................. 118

Figure 8: My younger sister encouraged me to download the Snapchat app via text message (left) and I quickly learned how to enhance my selfies using the app’s text and drawing filter tools (right) ................................................................. 123

Figure 9: I posted the brief status update pictured here to my personal Facebook page as a recruitment message for this study ................................................................. 124

Figure 10: Jordan sent a collection of saved snaps from his phone and the most common subject of these images was his sister’s cat (pictured here) ................................................................. 136

Figure 11: Darcie exchanges silly selfies with her brothers on Snapchat and then posts the complete family photo collage to her personal Facebook page ................................................................. 140
ABSTRACT

From family-style portraits to selfies, who is photographer and/or photographed varies as families engage, stage, and interpret the visual. How families participate in photo-making changes how individual family members feel about and relate to not only their photographs, but also each other. In this dissertation, I examine photographs as visual and material objects, and include the communication processes and ritual practices of producing, consuming, curating, viewing, and circulating these photos. By framing family photo-making as ritual, I explore how families do photo-making in everyday life, and identify the patterns of choice embedded in the genre of family photography, which symbolically and socially construct family.

My methodological approach moves from analyzing images to the lives of photos and spaces in which photos are represented and shared, observing visible practices and the traces – photographs and photo displays – they produce. I ask questions about communicative acts of performing rituals and negotiating family memory in the public space of the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, the personal and domestic space of a mother’s home, and the digital space of the social media app Snapchat. Each site provides a unique access point to study family photo-making ethnographically. Combining my ethnographic observations with photo elicitation interviews, I study the symbolic value of photographs negotiated by and between family members.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

The point of discussing ‘family’ through the practice of photography is precisely to underline its contingency, to delineate the openness of its boundaries and the many factors, beyond biology, that underscore its definitional power

– Hirsch (1997, p. 10)

Families engage, stage, and interpret the visual by engaging in patterns of choice. From family-style portraits to selfies, who is photographer and/or photographed varies. In choosing which family photos to display, exchange, and/or preserve, and how to perform these rituals, individual family members curate family memory and communicate who the family once was, who they are, and who they will be. Photo-making rituals become a way to actively participate in everyday family life together, enabling family members to acknowledge each other (Lambrecht, 2012, p. 229). How families participate in these rituals changes how family members feel about and relate to not only their photographs, but also each other. Learning how photographic meanings are created, again and again, requires an understanding of family communication.

The meanings of family photographs “may change over time, for different viewers, in different contexts, in different associations with text and other images” (Van House, 2011, p. 132). Therefore, my study of families’ visual culture(s) examines photographs not only as visual and material objects, but also includes the communication processes and ritual practices of producing, consuming, curating, viewing, and circulating these photos. In this dissertation, I frame family photo-making as ritual in order to explore how families do photo-making in everyday life, and to
identify the patterned choices embedded in the genre of family photography, which symbolically and socially construct family.

Family photo-making rituals are tied to unique family definitions, histories and traditions, storytelling and memory. Through communication, family photographs become iconic representations of relationships, which are made meaningful through the stories families choose to tell. Families tell particular stories about themselves by producing, sorting, storing, and displaying photos. How family members display their photos and what stories they choose to tell about them can create gaps and silences, which preserve specific perceptions of the past. Family members engage in memory work, reflecting on family photos and using the past as a resource in the present (van Dijck, 2007). These photos are “pieces of family history whose meanings need only someone to impose narrative coherence upon [them]” (Hocker, 2010, p. 864). Stories told about family photographs are not only about family life; they are part of family life (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). “Regardless of geography, or even mortality, photographs function to construct an integrated, ever present, and united family” (Carter, 2007, p. 562). Families perform photo-making rituals, producing and using photographs and negotiating their meanings to create a shared social world.

Photo-making rituals are also intimately tied to a history of technological advancement as new tools are introduced and become accessible for reproducing cultural narratives and creating material family memories. Using a camera to visually document the passing of time in family life is important to this process. Key family moments are now considered unimaginable without the presence of cameras and photographers. Indeed, many are staged for the camera. “What we tend to overlook is the active selection process in the making of a family album, which can make the truthfulness of the narrative questionable: the family album may not be false as such, but it is a subjective perspective of what has taken place in a family’s history” (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011, p. 7). What is absent from family photographs: who is not pictured, what facial expressions or gestures are
not allowed in a family photo, and who does not receive a copy indicates specific rules shaping the
genre of family photography and how family members choose to remember. These rule-bound and
ritualized communication practices draw on social conventions (i.e. “say cheese!”). “Conventionality
then is not only associated with what may and may not be photographed, but also with defining the
significance of particular events by the very fact that the photographic record is itself part of it”
(Harrison, 2004, p. 29).

I conceptualize family photo displays as performances in which curating family members
and visiting viewers participate. Those features, which make family photography possible for anyone
to do, are important to how individuals experience it in everyday life (Harrison, 2004). While
outsiders can examine a photograph to discover how a family wants to present itself, the significance
of family photos often depends on an insider perspective (Harrison, 2004). Therefore, I combine my
ethnographic observations with photo elicitation interviews in order to better understand the
symbolic value of photographs negotiated by and between family members. My methodological
approach moves from analyzing images to the lives of photos and spaces in which photos are
represented and shared, observing visible practices and the traces – photographs and photo displays
– they produce. I describe how family members enact photo-making rituals to create meaning in
family life while also reflecting on my own participation.

What I find most interesting about studying family photo-making is the various contexts and
spaces in which these rituals occur, and how specific, patterned practices constitute rituals
performed again and again. Everyday family photo-making exists beyond the domestic spaces of
family home. As photo-making moves from one place to another – beyond a family home to an
outdoor shopping center, for example, or between family homes in blended families – these rituals are
performed differently, and construct different meanings within different spaces. Rather than narrow
my inquiry to one aspect of photo-making – posing, producing, curating, displaying, viewing,
exchanging – I aim to understand how these ritual practices constitute visual, family communication across multiple, overlapping sites. Therefore, when I ask how visual communication happens in families, I note the importance of the setting of these ritual practices by integrating Rose’s (2010) ideas about “practice and place” (p. 22). In this dissertation, I choose to pay attention to the site of doing family photo-making: the material structure of places, the rules specific to places that afford and invite specific performances, and how these practices reproduce spaces as family photo-making spaces (Rose, 2010). My personal experiences compel me to ask questions about communicative acts of performing rituals and negotiating family memory in sites I believe are overlooked both in family life and family photography research. I purposefully selected the public space of the Easter Bunny Photo Hut instead of the more popular setting of Santa’s Photo Workshop. I decided to visit the personal and domestic space of mothers’ homes as they transform following divorce, rather than observing the more traditional photo-making rituals of wedding ceremonies. I analyzed the digital space of the social media app Snapchat without examining more prevalent apps for family photo-sharing like Facebook or websites created to display family photo albums. Each site I selected provides a unique access point to ethnographically study taken-for-granted practices and sites of and for family photo-making.

**Easter Bunny Photo Hut**

For four years, I visited the Easter Bunny photo hut at the Shops at Wiregrass, which is an outdoor mall in the suburban area of Wesley Chapel, located just north of Tampa, Florida. My trips to the mall started as an ethnography project for a graduate seminar, and the photo hut provided a public space for observing the often private practices of family photo-making. Seeing other families perform this holiday ritual reminded me of being guilted by my own mother to pose beside the bunny. As the oldest of six, I was an easily embarrassed middle schooler stuck holding my baby
brother. When we had a ‘good enough’ photograph, I waved goodbye and my aunt winked back from inside the Easter Bunny suit. Later she told me horror stories about a frustrated parent so persistent that her terrified son peed his pants… while sitting on her lap.

As a researcher, I return to the Bunny Photo Hut alone to observe other families. As mothers let go of crying children in order to achieve an ideal pose, I see firsthand how this iconic Easter Bunny photo ritual contributes to a genre of photography, which pressures families to conform to traditional visual representations. By recasting the rehearsal for producing an Easter Bunny photo as part of the photo-making ritual (Pineau, 1995), I pay attention to how families – particularly mothers – perform the emotional work involved in curating family memory.

**Mothers’ Homes**

I visited six divorced mothers’ homes to tour and talk about their existing family photos and displays. In this personal space, the visual, material traces of family transitions portray patterns of choosing how to display changing relationships over time. Mothers curate family photos in creative ways, describing their choices and personal sacrifices “for the kids”. Performing photo-making rituals requires effort, which itself communicates the importance of family and the value of photography.

Walking through my participants’ hallways, I remember the family photographs coming off the walls in my parents’ homes following their divorce, and sitting on my mother’s living room floor sorting through them. At the time, I felt uncertain about what to keep or how to feel about changing these photo displays, and now years later, I explore how other families (re)negotiate these rituals, and who cares for the photographs families produced together after marriage. Divorce makes seemingly mundane photographs meaningful, and combining observations from both public and private aspects of family life helps me understand how conventional rituals can emerge into new practices.
Snapchat Social Media App

Snapchat presents a new technology affording more choices for how to engage in photo-making, and how to construct and maintain family relationships through everyday ritualized visual communication practices. Snapchat users engage in ephemeral photo-sharing, which represents a desire to create images meant to disappear. I was admittedly curious about the hype surrounding intended-to-be-forgotten snaps, but I did not download Snapchat myself until my younger siblings persuaded me to use it for sharing photos together.

Mobile phone applications and adult sibling communication are both neglected areas of research. I am intrigued by this intersection, because unlike traditional family photography, children can now participate and even take control of family photo-making in a digital space made accessible through social media apps. Rather than focus on what visual content siblings create and share in photographs, I study how disappearing snaps are produced and exchanged through the Snapchat app in order to emphasize how sibling relationships are constituted in reciprocal visual communication practices. Exploring how siblings use this mobile application to participate in everyday rituals with one another highlights the nuanced choices families make in photo-making.

Patterns of Choice

How families choose to undertake and participate in photo-making is informed by stories and performances shared, learned, and passed down through generations. By complicating the rigid false dichotomies of memory (then/now), technology (digital/analog), media (new/old), and photography (material/visual), I illuminate more choices, more access, and more possibilities for family photo-making. This is a unifying thread bringing all three sites together. The families I observe and the family members I interview do not limit their photo-making choices to either/or, instead they do it all.
Throughout this dissertation, I write evocatively in order to show how choices are negotiated and meaning is constructed in communication (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). Recognizing myself as part of the context I am trying to understand and represent, I acknowledge how my own choices produced this research not only in regards to the content, or what stories I choose to tell from the field, but also the form, how I tell them. I use select examples from my field notes to draw readers into the rituals performed at each site. For example, I write vivid vignettes about children preparing for photographs with the Easter Bunny to illuminate a perspective of this experience which is typically overshadowed by the talk of adults, and concealed by the selection of an ‘appropriate’ photograph to purchase. People are inundated with images in everyday life and as a result, they may not consider how they use photographs to relate to their family members; therefore, I narrate my experiences in richly detailed dialogue and sensory descriptions in order to illuminate the taken-for-granted practices of family photo-making rituals. In doing so, I urge readers to notice nuances in family photo-making and engage in new ways of thinking and feeling about the familiar experience of creating a family photograph.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the social construction of family to emphasize how everyday communication practices generate visual representations of what it means to be family. The chapter includes a definition of family photo-making and an interdisciplinary literature review of family photography studies. I explain the symbolic nature of family photographs, and how family members produce and interpret photographic meanings. Chapter Three outlines my visual methodology and particular methods employed in this research, highlighting my ethnographic approach to observations and interviews, and ethical dilemmas of studying the visual in family life. Chapters Four, Five, and Six describe unique sites and stories of family photo-making. In Chapter Four, I observe and participate in family photo-making in the public space of the Easter Bunny Photo Hut. In Chapter Five, I visit the homes of divorced mothers to look at their family photo displays and listen
to the stories they choose to tell about them. In Chapter Six, I interview adult siblings to learn how they use Snapchat together and engage in mundane photo-making rituals to maintain their relationships. My goal is to understand how families do photo-making and why it is worth doing. I do this by studying family photographs as ritual practices, not texts, and exploring how choices are made not as individual family members, but negotiated between people in relationship. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I juxtapose insights from these three unique sites in order to examine the nuances of communication in family photo-making rituals. I conclude this dissertation with a discussion framing family photo-making as a tradition characterized by change and choice.
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

New definitions of family continue to emerge and enrich discussions about who counts as family. “Family is an idea constituted in and through the images produced by family researchers, by families themselves, and by canonical narratives of family circulating through culture” (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004, p. 513). As a communication scholar examining family life, I start by questioning cultural and institutional narratives about families, reflecting on how my own consumption and internalization of these stories may be taken-for-granted in my research.

The popular narrative of family life presents an image of “the loving and secure presence of a mother, father, and their biological children. Growing up in Western culture, our experiences as family members are interpreted in relation to this” (Jago, 1996, p. 498). However, defining family relationships based on bloodlines falls short. Using biological criteria excludes legal and emotional connections from establishing family (Sabourin, 2003). For example, family membership can extend beyond blood through marriage and adoption. Furthermore, focusing on legal criteria eliminates relational qualities in family life, which construct co-habitating, divorced, blended, and foster families. Family cannot be defined according to a shared residence, because families often negotiate roles and maintain relationships across generations and between multiple households. Additionally, families are not closed social systems existing in isolation; they are connected to larger cultural systems through ongoing interactions and relationships. “Families develop a unique culture, revealed in the stories that they tell of their experience together, and yet they simultaneously function or find their place in a culture that makes prescriptions about ‘the way that they are supposed to be’” (Yerby, 1995, p. 350). For these reasons deciding on a comprehensive definition of family is difficult.
Families define themselves “to provide cohesiveness and a sense of belonging” (Stone, 1988, p. 35). Desires to represent one's own family definition have turned living rooms into family portrait galleries, and attics and basements into family photo archives (Gillis, 1996). But who gets to define family? Who gets to decide who is pictured in the family photograph?

Tensions regarding changes in family definitions exist in the cultural context of social expectations, which shape family life, as well as the power relations within families. Family members cannot force change, but they can choose who they want to consider family (Weinstein, 1996). Furthermore, individuals can feel empowered to make choices by learning about family communication practices and patterns between people in dynamic, ever-changing relationships.

In this chapter, I describe the social construction view of family in order to emphasize the significance of ongoing communication practices in creating visual representations of what it means to be family. Next, I explain how this theoretical framework informs the study of everyday family rituals. Then, I narrow my focus to family photo-making rituals as practices and processes of social construction, and describe how these rituals have evolved in tandem with changes in visual technologies. Finally, I explain the symbolic nature of visual images in family life, and how family members participate in creating and interpreting photographic meanings. I end this chapter by emphasizing the ritualized memory work families do in the present to co-construct a shared family history.

The Social Construction of Family

Employing a social construction perspective to family studies focuses on the communication practices that enable individuals to create and maintain the meaning of family together. From this perspective, family is “a system of relations that comes about as individuals define those relations in their everyday communications with another” (Jorgenson, 1989, p. 28). What it means to be family is constructed in the dialogue, conversation, and multiple narratives of family members. Therefore,
social construction theorists study family in the process of living, changing, and growing. At any moment, a family may need to reappraise where they have been and where they are going as a family, who they are to one another, and how they will manage. The day-to-day structure of family life takes shape in mundane interactions and imaginings.

Systems approaches to studying family communication look at how the parts are connected, and this is simultaneously a commitment to process as it is to structure. Researchers ask, how does this family work? Studying daily co-constructed patterns, processes, and interactions between people expands the focus of research from an individual to the family and their interactions, which occur in response to a particular social context. Systems theory draws attention to a family’s interdependence, and provides a new way of thinking about social interaction. The unit of analysis is no longer a single person, but rather the whole family system, a special set of people with relationships between them (Bavelas & Segal, 1982, p. 102). Combining both social construction and systems approaches brings family members – and the researcher – into a research process that highlights connectedness to others with more complexity (Yerby, 1995). Therefore, I use this theoretical inspiration to shape the framework for my study of family photo-making rituals.

Understanding the Role of Rituals in Family Life

Similar to debates about how to define family, what constitutes a family ritual is interpreted in a myriad of ways. Reviewing five decades of family rituals studies literature, Fiese et al. (2002) find most theorists agree that “rituals involve a practical component in terms of organizing group behavior and a symbolic component that fosters group identity and meaning-making in group situations” (p. 382). Rothenbuhler (1998) explores ritual as a communicative phenomenon, which he defines as “the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically affect or participate in the serious life” (p. 27). Ritual combines belief and action according to pre-existing ideas, which guide participation and establish criteria for evaluation. Thinking about communication
as ritual directs attention to how communication is enacted, who participates, what symbols and actions mean for these participants, and how participants reflect on and evaluate their performance.

In the context of families, rituals are sets of activities through which family members create and celebrate family identity and meaningfulness, build and maintain relationships, and foster a sense of belonging (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006). Families come to define who they are through rituals. Studying rituals in this context involves multiple family members and a holistic focus on family patterns in order to understand what families do (Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock, & Baker, 2002). Family rituals do not contain meanings intrinsic to particular actions; instead, the meaning emerges in the interpretation of how family members act depending on the contexts in which they are performed.

Previous research has explored how family members engage in different rituals in different contexts, and this historical background informs my multi-site study and interpretive understanding of family photo-making rituals.

**Developing Ritual in Family Studies**

Families create and recreate their identities, realities, and histories through a variety of rituals. Wolin and Bennett (1984) identified family rituals in three categories: family celebrations, family traditions, and patterned family interactions. According to Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), the distinctions between these categories mark *celebrations* as culturally standardized yet uniquely adapted rituals (i.e. Thanksgiving), *traditions* as idiosyncratic ritual events for each family (i.e. family reunion), and *patterned interactions* as mundane and frequently enacted rituals (i.e. bedtime rituals). Families perform rituals both large and small. Whether it is an annual holiday celebration or daily family mealtime, ritualized family interactions become the means for organizing and structuring family experiences into something meaningful.

Performing family rituals constitutes identity, establishes roles and relationships, and displays
values (Gillis, 1996). For example, Christmas celebrations (Altman & Ginat, 1996), Thanksgiving (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), weddings (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002), and adoption (Docan-Morgan, 2014) present opportunities for researchers to examine family rituals. How these rituals are performed can reify cultural conventions of family representation. Families integrate the camera as part of ritual performances and use it to display unity, and immortalize and celebrate family life in particular ways. “The typical image is of ‘loved ones’ taken at cherry occasions such as births, weddings, parties, and holidays; mundane everyday-life and strangers have no place in the photo-album” (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 26). However, rituals can include and/or exclude family members while demonstrating acceptance and/or rejection of social norms (Roberts, 1988).

For example, Oswald (2000) shows how heterosexist power relations are reproduced in family wedding rituals and urges us to move beyond the assumption that families are either straight or gay. In his study of twenty-three gay and lesbian co-habiting couples, Gorman-Murray (2006) explores how identity is constructed through everyday homemaking rituals, examining the ways home is used to establish and unify partnerships. Home is a social(izing) space used to establish, narrate and strengthen these relationships by making a space for both individual and shared identities to be validated despite the norms of the surrounding community outside of this domestic setting. Furthermore, Weinstein (1996) describes feeling hurt when her life partner is repetitively excluded from the annual family photo calendar. Her story conveys that families of blood relations are not always sources of love and support, and she reminds us to celebrate families of choice with co-constructed rituals of our own. These authors highlight that the significant symbolism of participating in rituals as a family is not limited to normative definitions or events. Individuals choose who counts as family and how to perform rituals that create the world in which they live together.

Family rituals present a continuum of construction and deconstruction, generation and degeneration, and meaning and meaninglessness, yet the romantic ideal of family coincides with a
ritually functioning family. Simply ‘being together’ is an ideal for ordinary American families (Haines, 1988), which constitutes symbolic meanings of ritual performances in everyday life. After interviewing thirty-five representative families, Haines (1988) notes that interviewees in emerging families express desires to “start a more formal dinner time,” “establish Christmas traditions,” and “stay home” to develop rituals of their own (p. 84). Based on these responses, family begins and is maintained with specific rituals in mind. The importance of performing particular, prescribed family rituals in order to carry on traditions can be learned through family stories.

Family storytelling is a ritual process that depends on participation to produce meanings for family experiences that are passed on through generations. Family stories are often our first stories. Goodall (2005) refers to these stories as a “narrative inheritance,” which can maintain a hold on us throughout much or even all of our lives. Family members share stories, which tell us where and how they are located in family history, “where [they] have come from, where [they] may be going, and with whom” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 196). Families tell stories in order to organize and give structure to family life and to overcome the challenge of keeping a shared history alive and coherent over time. The messiness of meaning making is revealed through family storytelling, which links past experiences to understanding one’s self as an individual in relation to others (Bohanek, Marin, Fivush, & Duke, 2006; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Specifically, the ways content about self and others are organized into meaningful family stories, and how the narrator frames and reframes lived experience creates answers to questions about “what happened?” and “what ought to happen?” in family life.

Rituals also shape experiences of loss in families, and create expectations for how to communicate during grieving processes. How family members mourn and respond to others’ grief are practices learned and performed through ritual. For example, Ellis (2003) writes about taking on the role of tending to family graves, and the symbolic importance of performing this ritual with her
sister and sister-in-law after her mother dies. Paxton (2014) describes his own re-membering rituals for continuing bonds with deceased family members (i.e. celebrating birthdays, continuing family recipes, supporting a favorite sports team), and invites others to grieve, suffer, and re-member together. Learning how to cope with loss is just one example of adapting to ongoing changes in family life.

In addition to death, marriage, divorce, and remarriage also present unique challenges for (re)negotiating relationships and identity. Although social ideals emphasize family solidarity and exclusivity, the post-modern blended and transitioning families of today require permeable boundaries. Family rituals can be a tool for rebuilding a sense of family identity in the face of transitions, and creating meaningful relationships for family members who actively participate in rituals together (Hutchinson Afifi, & Krouse, 2007). For example, Braithwaite, Baxter, and Harper (1998) describe how family rituals can be enacted to embrace both the “old” and the “new” in blended families. Studying family rituals stresses the messiness of maintaining family relationships. Odom et al. (2011) investigate how families adapt to change following a divorce or bereavement with particular attention to the ways family members use interactive technology to do this. “From divorced parents relying on online shared systems to mediate parenting practices, to virtual environments providing the bereaved with new, but at times complicated, outlets for personal and collective tribute, it is clear complex social processes related to doing family are expanding to virtual places” (p. 264). Family rituals passed on and blended between generations represent continuity and change, and the seeming success of keeping connections with family over time requires a reflective process of renegotiating roles and relationships. “Not only do the participating generations change in families, the practice of ritual itself changes in many ways, often due to historical change” (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988, p. 682). Rituals, like families, change, and learning how to adapt rituals helps family members to feel a sense of solidarity and connection over time.
Media in Family Ritual Studies

Media has the potential to become integrated within family rituals, and change how these rituals are performed. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) theorize two possibilities for social media use in family life. How family members choose to use social media may displace or strengthen meaningful interactions within the family. For example, family members can maintain close relationships by using texting, calling, and social networking sites together (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Fraser, 2012). Furthermore, using media as a family may become part of shared activities, traditions, stories, and collective memory by supplementing existing family rituals or creating entirely new ones.

Coyne et al. (2014) examine the patterned ways families describe using media together. In this study, parents and adolescents report five positive and meaningful ways to use media: for entertainment, for information, for emotional communication/connection, for a catalyst for discussion, and for documentation. Two findings are of particular interest to my study of family photo-making rituals. The largest specific medium highlighted for maintaining an emotional communication/connections was sharing photos with family members (49% of responses) to stay connected with family. In addition, the largest specific medium of media highlighted for remembering events from the past and documenting events for the future was electronic photographs (66% of responses). “Some participants referred specifically to the importance of photographs, such as a 42-year-old mother who said her family likes to ‘take pictures, make albums, take cell phone pictures and text to family and friends’” (p. 677). As a result, the authors identify photographs as an important type of content that is likely shared across different media, which requires further study. Coyne et al. (2014) call for future research to focus on expanding the view of how families use media as a positive force in family life to capture experiences, create shared realities, communicate and connect.

In many ways my study of family photo-making rituals is a response to their call.
Families can choose to engage in photo-making by integrating photography as part of family life in ritualized ways. Family photographs are produced through ritual practices performed in the context of family relationships. The meanings of family photographs, which not only document but also shape family rituals, are actively constructed in dynamic interactions between the photographer, the viewer(s), and the photo (Schwartz, 1989). Therefore, family photo-making can be a means of communicating “this is who we are” and “this is how our family will continue to be.” In this dissertation, I frame family photo-making as ritual in order to explore how families do photo-making practices, and to identify the patterned choices embedded in the genre of family photography, which symbolically and socially construct family.

**Constructing Family Through Photo-making Rituals**

Family photography is characterized by dominant iconic visions of happy families at leisure, which circulate through culture, and shape how family members are represented together (Rose, 2010). Families themselves participate in reproducing conventional imagery, using the camera as a tool to create and display connection, togetherness, success, and love (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003). In this dissertation, I argue that family is an idea produced and performed through the constitutive communication processes and practices of photo-making. For example, family photographs can be a starting point for family stories, providing visual reference for family history as it continues to be told (Carter, 2007, p. 564). In addition, organizing family photographs into albums emphasizes relationships, networks of kin and friends, rather than individuals (Zussman, 2006). Constructions of “what a family is” emerge not only in photographs themselves, but also in the ways people make and use these images (Harrison, 2004).

Similarly, Morgan (1996) defines family as a fluid and diverse facet of social life, not a social institution; “a quality rather than a thing” subject to change over time (p. 186). Finch (1997) also recognizes the fluid nature of relationships and the necessity of demonstrating connectedness and
commitment to the people we identify as ‘family’. She establishes the concept of ‘display’ as “the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute ‘doing family things’ and thereby confirm that these relationships are ‘family’ relationships” (p. 67). Stories are a valuable tool for display because they can be made and remade over time, and told and re-told to different audiences in order to refresh and reinforce shared understandings. This focus on the social nature of family practices creates an opportunity for understanding ‘who constitutes my family?’ beyond biological ties or household boundaries. Instead, defining ‘who is my family?’ is a question about relationships – “which of my relationships has the character of a ‘family’ relationship?” (p. 69). Family relationships can no longer be taken for granted; rather being family must be re-defined through active participation and interaction.

Finch goes on to argue that physical objects such as photographs or family artifacts can be tools for display. She concludes that displaying family is a process conveying that “these are my family relationships and they work” (p. 78), which can be supported and reinforced by photographs and stories. According to Finch, the concept of ‘display’ is applicable to any relationship in any family; however, she distinguishes degrees of intensity in the need for display, describing a more intense need when circumstances change and relationships are redefined and renegotiated. In this dissertation, I apply Finch’s concept of ‘display’ to ask questions about family photo-making: How do individuals visually and/or verbally communicate their evolving relationships as “family-like” through photo-making? How do the photographs family members display (or choose not to display) demonstrate their focus on the quality of current and future family relationships?

Photography is an integral component in producing identity, relationships and “familyness” (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 26), and changing technologies and related photography practices are intertwined with visual representations and performances of modern families. Before explaining my
praxis approach to the study of family photo-making, I investigate the history of visual family representation, and then outline how the uses of technology continue to shape conventions for everyday photo-making practices.

**Visual Representations of Family: A Brief History**

Beginning in 1839, inventions of photography were situated in a climate of scientific inquiry aimed toward Naturalism (Rosenblum, 1997; Winston, 1998). Discoveries of chemistry, physics and applied mechanics contributed to significant improvements in the accurate depiction of detail and realistic quality of photographs produced in the hands of upper class professional men. Few people had access to this new technology due to the skills and training required to operate equipment and the expenses incurred through practice. Photography began as a scientific field of study for men, and family life remained a separate realm and responsibility for women (Rosenblum, 1994).

In a world before film or smartphones, early photographers used a wet (glass) plate collodion process, which restricted when and where photographs could be made (Coe, 1976). Heavy cameras, glass plates, lenses, and an assemblage of chemicals necessary for producing images presented obstacles for making photographs anywhere but a studio.

Traveling photography offered unique challenges. Although transportable dark rooms were an option, this small space could overheat and cause chemicals to boil over, resulting in unusable collodion and ruined photographs. At a time when sunlight was a necessary component for creating an image, traveling photographers were also subject to unpredictable weather. Even in good weather conditions, the process of developing an image required pure water, which was not easy to obtain. Photographers could spend days waiting for suitable circumstances to achieve desired lighting and tonal qualities. The convenience of present day pocketsize camera devices and built-in editing filters were not available. Instead, the limitations of early technologies shaped photo-making into an extraordinarily laborious process.
Changing gender expectations and advances in technology made photo-making more accessible to women. Photographic societies opened to men and women, and wives gained skills while helping their husbands in studios. Conversations about photography started to reframe this practice as an art, rather than a science, which allowed women to participate. Photography originated as a field of study for men; however, in the 1890s advertisements of the Kodak Girl invited young, fashionable women to purchase cameras and make photographs of their own (Munir & Phillips, 2005). By selling photo-making as a popular practice, which included women, Kodak expanded the market of available products as well as ideologies for creating photographs.

Producing photographs became a socially acceptable (not to mention desirable and later normative), domestic activity replacing painting or needlework. Yet, women were restricted to specific subjects portraying family values: home, garden, motherhood, and marital ties. “Following World War I, Kodak began associating its cameras with housewives and family life… capitalizing on a strengthening discourse surrounding the family, that had emerged when soldiers, who had been away from their homes for years, reunited with their families. Women were back in the house, raising children, and men went back to civilian life. Eastman recognized this social dynamic, building upon the emphasis on the woman as ‘efficient’ housewife, and encouraged women to create family histories through photographs” (Munir & Phillips, 2005, p. 1677). Elaborate marketing campaigns not only encouraged women to participate, but also created the moral imperative connecting women and their cameras to family responsibilities. These family-centric values remain present in photographs produced and used in the home nowadays (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011), and the photographic ‘family gaze’ is recognized as a feminized gaze stressing interactions and relationships (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003).

Social class also contributed to conventions of family representation, because only the affluent could afford to produce or purchase photographs (Hudgins, 2010). New technologies
created lower costs and greater opportunities for photo-making, which expanded beyond the wealthy elite. In the early 1900s, George Eastman made “Kodak moments” possible for the middle class. Kodak combined a reasonably priced roll-film camera design with discursive strategies for managing the meaning of photography, and transformed photo-making into a popular social practice (Munir & Phillips, 2005). Thus, the camera became a tool, and photography a hobby, for families.

Before Kodak perfected the image quality and marketing of a roll-film camera, family photography was a formal affair, which required a scheduled sitting at a studio. Families planned in advance what to wear, what accessories and props to bring, and how to pay for this expensive service. As a posed, purposeful practice, family photographs were produced for future generations. Photography was confined to stationary objects, because actions and movements were too hard to capture without blurring the image. The limits of available technology demanded lengthy sitting times, and inspired other equipment such as neck braces and hand straps to hold subjects in position as long as needed. It is no surprise why family members did not show big smiles in the photographs resulting from this process. Adding to a family’s solemn demeanor, patrons could be given a chalky, ghostly look due to a dusting of white powder, which was used to create a contrast between them and the background if the studio’s lighting was inadequate.

The genre of family photography inherits and perpetuates ideals derived from painting traditions. Conventional notions regarding appropriate portrayals of family life influence choices of representation: what and how to photograph. Hirsch (1997) suggests family photographs are located in a “space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life…[showing] us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not” (p. 8). However, there is a sense in which the camera ‘captures reality’, not just interprets it (Sontag, 1977). Historically, photographs have been understood as representations of a fixed reality or
objective truth; but, over time, this perception has given way to alternative understandings (Ketelle, 2010). Winston (1998) argues that confidence in the ‘photograph as evidence’ should be questioned, because a photograph is subject to interpretation. Pointing first to the photographer’s role in creating a photograph (i.e. choosing an angle, lens, filter), and second to the viewer’s reading of this image, he believes the “illusion of evidence is ending” (p. 60). Freund and Thomson (2011) agree, describing photographs “as artifacts produced by people with interests and agendas at a certain time and place, artifacts that are shaped as much by aesthetic conventions as by social norms” (p. 10).

The tradition and culture of photography is interwoven with a history of family representation to shape how photographers create partial views of family life (Chalfen, 2002; Geffroy, 1990). Cameras are not simply “machines that record the world as it is (or even as we see it) but machines designed to represent the world in the manner we have learned to show it” (italics in original, Scott, 1994, p. 261). In the following section I examine the ways new technologies are used in photo-making practices to construct what it means to be family.

**New(er) Technologies of Family Photo-making**

Today the convenience of instantaneous photo-making dramatically overshadows past practices. Handheld cameras have evolved from using glass plates to film to digital file storage (Livingston & Dyer, 2010). Viewing, deleting and remaking photographs is an expected part of the process. Camera phones and photography apps further eliminate equipment restraints and offer new possibilities – time lapse settings, lighting filters, layering and cropping tools. Everyday practices of family photography become taken-for-granted every-minute practices.

While family photo-making has certainly changed in relation to technological changes, historical patterns of conversation regarding these changes have focused on creating rigid, binary categories. Print and digital photographs are often placed in opposition with each other and conceptualized as products of technology. In this section, I address how family members choose to
produce photographs involving both print and digital technologies. By observing technology use, I aim to explore what these choices and changes in technology mean to families. I begin by describing how the combined use of print and digital photo-making in families shapes perceptions, interpretations and uses of photographs. Next, I argue for a process-oriented approach in order to better understand the role of technology in modern family photo-making.

Visual technologies scholar Nancy Van House reveals how participants’ perceptions of photos change through/with technology use. Van House (2011) describes how “several participants expected their digital images to die with them,” because no one would search their computers for these “large but fragile archives” (p. 129). As a result, printed pictures were described as more durable, “more solid, more ‘real’” and perceived to be easier to retrieve. It is important to consider families may not be choosing between printed or digital photographs, but instead using available technologies for photo-making to produce and consume more of everything. Photo-making practices might include posing for digital images and then ordering a photo book, purchasing a print and also providing an email address in order to receive a digital image, creating, uploading and publically sharing a slideshow of images for a digital photo frame, or sending a digital reproduction of a framed photograph. By studying both printed and digital photo-making processes, I seek to explore how current families create, circulate and come to terms with visual representations and displays of family life.

Edwards (2002) argues that photographs “are not just stage settings for human actions and meanings but are integral to them” (p. 69). Choices made for presenting a photograph influence the embodied experience of viewing and responding to it. Physical marks of handling (i.e. tears, annotations, fingerprints) testify to a photograph’s active and material role in social experience and the familial gaze – bringing it out, touching, pointing out familiar faces, tugging on corners to get a closer look, putting it away. Boxes of photographs may be considered more private or personal than
a family album, because they require handling in a different way than pictures displayed in protective plastic. According to Edwards (2002), the meanings of photographs are inseparably enmeshed with their presentational form (i.e. albums, frames); therefore, it is necessary to consider the materiality of family photos in order to understand their importance in everyday family rituals.

Materiality also matters for digital photographs.

Material objects like camera-phones or computer screens mediate visual images, which shapes how family members engage with and think about their representations (Tinkler, 2013). For example, after interviewing a group of middle-class women about their family photography, Rose (2010) learns decisions about whether or not to dispose of family photographs may be related to what camera is being used. Some of her participants couldn’t bear to throw away printed family photos, others appreciated using a digital camera because of how easily they could delete images. In addition to new practices of digital photo production, families are also embracing opportunities for sharing photographs. While traditional displays limited photo-sharing to a single image “frozen in time,” today’s displays can put photographic moments in motion through image *sequences* in slideshows, photostreams, image feeds (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008). Choices involving print and digital technologies are evident in modern families, and the role of technology use in family photo-making requires further research.

Today, photo practices are integral to embodied performances of family photography and understanding what it means to be family. Thanks to increasingly more affordable and accessible digital equipment, photo-making is part of the everyday fabric of family life; however, changing functions of photography are “part of a complex technological, social and cultural transformation,” not an exclusive result of digital technologies (Van Dijck, 2008, p. 59). This dissertation explores photo-making by attending to the “sorting, storing, displaying, redisplaying, dusting and looking” (Rose, 2004, p. 552) that contribute to everyday interactions with both print and digital family
photographs. By focusing on how family members use technology, I reveal how photo-making shapes family identity and relationships through shared communication processes of storytelling, remembering and forgetting.

**Constructing a Shared Past, Present and Future**

Family members do the work of choosing moments to photograph, display and archive in order to preserve a specific version of the past and create a visual portrayal of a family’s narrative inheritance (Goodall, 2005). Through this selection process, material traces may be eliminated, generating gaps and silences in family history surrounding stories (un)told about photographs. In this section, I briefly describe how ethnographic sensibilities contribute to understanding photo-making practices, which cut across different perspectives of family life. Family photographs are often meaningful to more than one person suggesting these images operate within multiple intersecting narratives. Therefore, a family photograph can be “a *site of struggle for meaning*” (italics in original, Cross, 2015, p. 43), and evoke conflicting memories for family members (Kuhn, 2007). Here, I will explain how meanings are attributed to photographs in the viewing process through family storytelling, and then summarize my methods and goals for this dissertation.

My research draws attention to the ways stories and photographs, words and images, are inseparably linked in family life. Families construct stories, meanings and memories through the use of family photographs preserved for future generations (Kuhn, 1995). Freund and Thomson (2011) explain that photographs “need stories to create meaning - or rather, in order to imbue images with meaning, we tell stories about them, whether silently to ourselves as we view a picture and speculate on what happened before the depiction of a scene or out loud to others” (p. 5). Still, it is important to remember that processes of memory, history making, and narration are “ongoing features of personal and social relations with photographs” (Harrison, 2004, p. 25) and the relationships family members have to photographs change with time.
A family photograph becomes part of a performance of memory that continues after it is taken (Freund & Thomson, 2011). Kuhn (1995) argues a method of “memory work can create new understandings of both past and present, while yet refusing a nostalgia that embalms the past in a perfect, irretrievable moment” (p. 10). According to Kuhn (2007), memory becomes a form of storytelling, which requires family members to construct accounts in response and relationship to one another. Kuhn proposes this memory work method for exploring how the struggle over the past continues in the present, and questioning whose memory prevails in the family archive. Rather than thinking of family photos as fixed in time, I aim to apply her ideas and appreciate the life of an image over time (Tinkler, 2013).

Similarly, Schwartz (1989) argues meanings are not constrained to photographs themselves. Using photographs during group interviews, she points to the active role of spectators in making photographs meaningful. She defines photographs as inherently ambiguous symbolic events that are given emergent meanings in the viewing process. In my own research, I show how meanings are negotiated by and between family members, and highlight the complexities of these everyday, lived experiences.

Unfortunately, the sensory experiences of meaning making are made invisible by a photograph (Hammond, 2004); therefore, I aim to understand how families relate to photographs with more than their eyes, but also with their bodies. Rather than focusing primarily on the visual content of images, I attend to photo-making practices and the constructed nature of family photographs with a different set of questions: “How are photographs actually used as objects in social space? How are they acquired and accumulated? By whom? How are they displayed? Where? To whom? Which remain in small private worlds intentionally hidden” (Edwards, 2002, p. 70)? Edwards (2009) further suggests that photographs are made meaningful “through the material engagements of embodied users” (p. 147), who literally shape and perform the meanings of
photographs in their hands (p. 143). In this way, photographs become material for interpretation to be interrogated in the present for possible meanings of the past (Kuhn, 1995).

Doing family photo-making highlights visual communication processes through which families are defined and constructed. Therefore, in this dissertation, I explore how family members participate in photo-making and use photographs to shape family life in the present for future generations. The following methodology chapter outlines how I achieved these aims.
CHAPTER THREE:

FAMILY PHOTO-MAKING FIELDWORK:

THE PRACTICES OF VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Studying visual culture ethnographically means reflecting on how the visual is part of social life (Rose, 2007). Different understandings of the visual inform “different practices of looking, each following divergent contexts and purposes for looking” (Martens, 2012, p. 46). The visual is interwoven in ethnographic research along with other senses and discourses (Pink, 2007). Images and words, photographs and stories exist in relationship, and ethnographers must make decisions regarding how to account for this tension.

Bringing “visual” and “ethnography” together, my methodology situates visual images and technologies in relation to a reflexive approach to ethnography (Pink, 2007). “From an ethnographic perspective, the interpretation of images and visual practices are concerned with the production of context, the object of the photograph, the context of consumption, and the materiality of the images themselves” (Ardévol, 2012, p. 82). Therefore, I embrace ethnography as a way of learning about family photo-making, because it allows me to focus on a process-oriented, embodied understanding of visual culture.

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of visual, ethnographic studies. I emphasize looking as an embodied practice for participants and researchers, and explain how interdisciplinary work inspired my research. Next, I summarize my methods for conducting fieldwork within three different sites of family photo-making: at an Easter Bunny Photo Hut, in mothers’ homes following divorce, and using the Snapchat app. By grounding my ethnographic approach in photo-making rituals performed at multiple sites, I challenge ideas of family photographs as static ‘records’ of
culture and identity, and instead, question how they are produced, drawing attention to “performances of participation” (Noy, 2008b, p. 191). Next, I discuss my approach to looking at family photography specifically through methods of photo elicitation and participant observation. To conclude, I describe my own ethical dilemmas in choosing how to integrate visual culture in ethnographic research and the possibilities for improving how future researchers choose to do this.

**Ethnographic Understanding of Visual Culture**

Ethnographers, like myself, are mindful that life is layered, complex, and complicated; therefore, established norms and expectations are taken as problems to be questioned rather than facts to be reported (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). Taking an ethnographic approach to study the visual attends to the ways visual technologies, practices, and methods become part of social relations through processes of research, analysis, and representation (Pink, 2008). “The relationship between the technology and the embodied and gendered self of the researcher” comes to the forefront in visual ethnography, “as a means of reflexively understanding the processes through which ethnographic knowledge is produced” (Pink, 2012b, p. 115). Producing an ethnographic understanding of visual culture rests on the complex nature of the visual, of visualization practices, and of visual technologies (Pauwels, 2015). In this dissertation, I investigate the production, consumption, and uses of family photographs. I do not focus on technologies as tools; instead I study the context-bound embodied technology use embedded in and shaped by family photo-making rituals.

As a visual ethnographer, I aim to understand photographs and photo-making practices that are “often not seen as important but belong to the implicit structures of people’s life” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 3). Family photos are commonly used in domestic spaces as decorative displays (i.e. canvas portraits, framed photos, photo books), and collectible merchandise (i.e. coffee mugs, coasters, mouse pads, clothing items). As family photographs saturate American culture, these
images seem increasingly unremarkable, and people may not consider how they relate to their family photographs. Therefore, in this dissertation, I observe and reflect on the taken-for-granted nature of family photo-making.

Drawing from academic traditions of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, ethnographers explore photography and challenge the conventions of representation using various, sometimes competing, methodological approaches (Chalfen, 1987; Halle, 1993; Kuhn, 1995; Pink, 2007, 2012; Rose, 2007). In previous research, photographs have been used for a variety of purposes serving as visual notes for documentation purposes, as a method for categorizing artifacts, people, and behaviors ‘in the field,’ and as illustrations reinforcing written analyses (see Tinkler, 2013 for a historical overview). Oftentimes the possibilities for understanding “what is happening here?” appear to be limited by the tools available in the field (i.e. note pad, audio recorder, camera, video camera); however, little attention is focused on the various choices made in producing research and the ways these tools are used.

Tinkler (2013) identifies a continuum of approaches, which shapes not only how researchers conceptualize photographs in visual research, but also informs how they select and employ visual methods. “While the construction of photos is widely acknowledged, scholars differ in their views about the relationship of the image to what was in front of the camera lens” (p. 5). Historically, cameras provided researchers with a new tool for investigating the intersection of cultures and recording everyday life as it happens. While ethnographic approaches such as participant observation and thick description work to document the people, rituals, events, and material artifacts of far-away places, positioning the camera as a device for capturing a fixed reality enabled early researchers to produce illustrations as evidence of/for their work. This focus on capturing an image in order to better understand culture contributed to an understanding of photographs as representations of an objective truth (Ketelle, 2010). Similar to the standpoint of positivist scientific method, this
approach attempted to situate viewers as witnesses of events by removing the researcher from the experience, and separating “them” pictured from “us” looking at the photo. In many ways, this approach enacts the exoticism of past ethnographers, failing to acknowledge the presence of the researcher in the field and the relationship between observers and observed.

At the opposite end of the continuum, Tagg (1988) argues that social beings make sense of photographs, emphasizing that everyday discourses and situated knowledge surrounding photos determine what viewers think they see in a photograph. Similarly, Schwartz (1989) emphasizes the social construction of photographic meaning and argues against conceptions of photography, which limit the meaning of images to the photos themselves. She employs ethnography and photography in combination with field notes to elicit meanings and encourage conversation during group interviews. Harrison (2004) recognizes that “the processes of memory, history making, narration and self-actualization, are ongoing features of personal and social relations with photographs” (p. 25). She identifies family photographs as “carefully selected and socially patterned representations” (Harrison, 2004, p. 33), and the depiction of family in photographs as a human, rather than mechanical process. Examining both family photos and videos in his ethnographic study of pictorial communication, Chalfen (1987) describes ‘home mode’ as a pattern of interpersonal and group communication centered around the home, and with a specific audience in mind (i.e. the photo/videographer and viewers often share a personal relationship, which helps make sense of photos and videos). He understands visual material as “evidence of the structure of observation-with-cameras, and of how people have structured a particular view of the world” (p. 6).

The question of the ‘ethnographicness’ of the visual “does not depend entirely on its content or on the intentionality of the [researcher]…its ethnographicness is contextual” (Pink, 2007, p. 98). This means the visual – photographs, film, videos, and otherwise – ethnographic representations are inevitably constructed through fieldwork experiences generating knowledge through observations,
conversations, and negotiations between researchers and participants (Pink, 2007). Furthermore, understanding visual methodology involves questioning how we know and the environment in which this knowing is produced (Pink, 2012a); therefore, how I conceptualize photographs and ritual practices of photo-making in this dissertation informs my choices for how to research and analyze visual culture in families. Moving beyond the evidentiary features of photographs and their visual contents, my dissertation turns toward “a critically informed appreciation of the materialities, practices and performances involved in their staging” (Noy, 2014, p. 50). Thus, my ethnographic approach seeks to create a holistic understanding of the “visual field as an integrated whole” (Pauwels, 2015, p. 25).

As I have shown here, an impressive diversity exists in ethnographic and visual approaches. The ways other researchers conceptualize ‘the visual’ influences how I deal with the form and content of data. In the next section, I describe various conceptual and methodological approaches to studying family photography and then explain the visual methods I chose to employ in this dissertation.

**Visual Methods for Studying Photography**

Visual methods offer new ways of seeing and studying photo-making practices in everyday family life. It is important to note, “visual research methods’ are not purely visual. Rather they pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture” (Pink, 2007, p. 21). In this section, I highlight the various choices researchers make in how to employ methods and study visual culture. It is important to note, once again, that family photography and visual studies are interdisciplinary areas of interest, and different disciplines ask similar questions in unique family contexts. I begin by outlining studies in tourism, because the following researchers apply ethnographic and performance-based approaches, which greatly influenced my study of family photo-making rituals.
Visual methods for studying tourist photography. Neumann (1992) uses photography as an ethnographic research practice that creates a space of interpretation, reflection, and critique. Rather than reproducing dominant views of the Canyon, he turns his camera toward people visiting there and spends six weeks collecting fieldnotes and conducting interviews. Neumann watches through the viewfinder of a stranger’s camera as tourists assemble a vision of themselves at the Grand Canyon, imagining that “they were looking to a moment in the future…where this picture would be passed hand to hand and perhaps a story would be told” (p. 25). He describes photographs as a means of expression, and identifies the ways people move across a landscape and ponder the sights as part of the production of meaning and significance of that space and their place in it.

Haldrup and Larsen (2003) focus specifically on family photography at tourist sites and the reflexive and embodied performances, which produce social relations. Using 937 family photos collected from 21 families, Haldrup and Larsen employ multiple visual methods and analytic strategies to interpret this data. Through quantitative analysis, they note the stages used for producing the photos (i.e. rural landscapes, beach) and the bodily ‘doings’ of portrayed people (i.e. posing, eating) in order to identify structured patterns in how families create their ‘photographic world.’ Using content analysis, Haldrup and Larsen also describe some of the implicit collective rules governing families’ photographic performances and choose five representative images to demonstrate what this looks like. Additionally, they conduct 20 semi-structured interviews with families to learn about their desires and investments in making personal photographs. They argue “tourist photography is one of the uniquely modern ways through which families produce life-narratives that are constructing them as families in a mobile world . . . Rather than being an alienating add-on, photographing is an integral component in producing identity, social relations and ‘familyness’” (p. 26). Haldrup and Larsen put this argument into practice by choosing to study family
photographs as if they are integral to family identity, and asking the families who produced them to reflect on their practices and contribute to analysis.

Taken together, these visual methods produced rich ethnographic data for studying photography. The fieldwork conducted by these researchers emphasizes photography practices, and the embodied experience of producing, looking at and responding to photographs. My methodological choice to study family photo-making rituals ethnographically using more than one method and in more than one context is informed by these studies.

Visual methods for studying family photography. Chalfen (1987) employs multiple visual methods to examine what he calls everyday “pictorial communication events” including a questionnaire to create an inventory of family photo practices and open-ended interviews to study home movie viewing and interpretation. He discourages the use of an uncritically accepted metaphor claiming that a picture speaks: “Pictures don’t ‘say’ anything – people do the work” (Chalfen, 2002, p. 397). Examining approximately 200 personal photo collections over a 10-year span, he questions what people aim to do when they make their own personal photograph collections. His analysis results in a framework for future researchers observing and describing processes of pictorial communication.

Citing Chalfen’s (1974) earlier work, Musello (1980) takes an “ethnographic approach to examining photography as social activity and photographs as the symbolic artifacts of that activity” (p. 23). Using a sample of 12 middle-class Euro-American families, Musello relies on two sources of data: interviews and observations. During interviews, families shared a selection of photographs from both storage and displays, and describe and discuss these particular photos. Observations attended to how families interacted with their photos during this time. Musello explains that home mode photographs are not documents of fixed value in family life, but rather the power and value of
these images evolves and changes (or can even be lost) over time. As such, interviews with family members can provide researchers with space and opportunity to observe this interpretive process.

Extending Musello’s ethnographic discussion, Halle (1987) systematically studies the location, content, and meaning of family photographs displayed in a family’s home. Visiting a random sample of sixty homes in three diverse neighborhoods of New York City, he interviewed homeowners and asked questions about their family photo displays. Some participants volunteered a tour of their homes, others showed a specific part of their house, and others preferred to answer questions outside. In addition, at the end of each interview, Halle asked for permission to take photos in order to help with recall and interpretation for his research, and most participants agreed. Halle noticed four prominent themes in American family photo displays: a shift from formal to informal scenes, the narrow focus of subjects (family members only), the lack of depth in presenting a family history (ancestors are rarely displayed), and the clustering of photos emphasizing closeness rather than individualism among family members. He theorizes that free-standing arrangements for photos are preferred to permanent wall hangings due to their mobility and the convenience of removing photos and rearranging displays as needed (i.e. following divorce). I appreciate Halle’s approach to studying family photographs in the context in which they are displayed, and I adopted this methodology in my own research (especially in chapter five).

Van House (2011) identifies “a relative lack of ethnographically informed research on people’s actual, daily practices of photography” (p. 125). She describes photographs as having both content and form as images and material objects. Rather than study a particular family album or display, she analyzes the ordinary, everyday practices of personal photography and the implications of shifting from film to digital technologies. Van House employs qualitative methods: participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and photo elicitation to study personal photo collections and illuminate the differences in form and practice between printed and digital photographs. Similar
to Halle, she asks participants to give a tour of their family photographs; however, her focus extends beyond photo displays to albums, photos tossed in boxes, and digital images on cameras, computers, and online. Her ethnographic research reveals how participants’ perceptions of and engagements with photos change through/with technology.

Photographs exist in time and space, they are objects, not just representations, “made used, kept, and stored for specific reasons which do not necessarily coincide… they can be transported, relocated, dispersed or damaged, torn and cropped” and viewing them implies one or several physical interactions (Porto, 2001, p. 38). Therefore, researching photographs as material objects not only in production, but also stored in a family archive can provide a new perspective and advance theoretical understanding. Edwards (2002) explains that “materiality mediates other aspects of a visual economy which allows us to think not only of ethnographic photographs as defined by content but, also, the social and material mechanisms through which they become ethnographic” (p. 70). She looks at the physical attributes of a photograph, acknowledging the physical presence of a photo, rather than focusing solely on its use as a depictive device, turning attention toward an ethnography of photographic practice. Attending to the materiality of family photographs provides unique insights for understanding communication, because, “the material form of photographs dictates the embodied relations of viewing” (p. 74).

In sum, these researchers encourage me to keep families ‘in the picture’ and ask what they do with and say about their photographs, rather than relying on photographs to speak for themselves. Therefore, my study of families’ visual communication practices emphasizes that printed and digital photographs require an ethnographic approach, resulting in many possible meanings, which are constantly being negotiated. By questioning how photo-making rituals are performed, what photographs are created, who is involved, and why and for whom photos are taken, I aim to understand and further appreciate the complexities of families’ visual communication practices. In
my research, I learn how families relate to photographs with more than their eyes, but also with their bodies, using photographs as objects, which are curated and circulated to communicate we are family.

**Entering the Field(s) of/with Photo-making Families**

Grounding my methodology in ethnographic sensibilities and sensitivities generated a complex, comprehensive (i.e. photo practices, representations, narratives), and critical perspective (i.e. who controls the camera, what is not shown in photographs). My ethnographic approach combined an assemblage of layered observations and interviews emphasizing my process-oriented, embodied understanding of visual culture. In an effort to analyze and appreciate family photographs and photo-making rituals in new ways, I employed the visual methods of photo elicitation and participant observation. I approached interviews as opportunities to join family members in talking about their photographs, remembering and performing photo-making, and listening to their stories. By observing family photo-making, I examined relationships and communication processes within which family photos are made meaningful.

For the sake of convenience, I outlined my three sites and the associated methods I adapted to these different contexts and materialities of family photo-making in the table on the following page. I selected these methods according to the sites I studied. In the next section, I provide a more detailed description, and then I elaborate on my methodological choices for each site in the subsequent chapters.
Table 1. General overview of selected qualitative methods organized by research site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Site</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The annual family photo-making ritual at the Bunny Photo Hut (Chapter 4)</td>
<td><strong>Participant Observation</strong>: At Wesley Chapel mall’s Easter Bunny Photo Hut, I conducted observations, interacted with parents and employees, snapped and posed for photographs, and collected brochures and marketing materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Family photo displays and archives in mothers’ homes (Chapter 5)              | **Participant Observation**: Participants acted as tour guides in their homes as I observed their family photographs on display and/or in storage following divorce, and listened to their stories.  
**Photo elicitation**: Participants used existing family photographs and displays as a starting point for interviews conducted in their homes. |
| Everyday visual communication rituals between adult siblings on Snapchat (Chapter 6) | **Written Reflection**: Participants wrote personal reflections about their own use of the Snapchat app in everyday sibling communication prior to interviews.  
**Interviews**: Together sibling pairs discussed how they use Snapchat in their relationship during Skype interviews.  
**Observation**: Participants added the researcher as a “friend” on Snapchat providing access to visual data shared on his/her “Story” for 24 hours. |

**Photo elicitation.** Photo elicitation is a method “based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview” (Harper, 2002, p. 13), but this method can be employed in different ways depending on how researchers conceptualize photographs and memory work. For example, Collier (1957) first employed photo elicitation in a more positivist way for the perceived benefits of sharpening participants’ memory, obtaining precise and direct responses, and reducing the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews. Harper (2002) argues that introducing photographs within interviews will enhance research, and evoke a different kind of information. He believes photographs can be described as tools for breaking the frame of typical views and also provide a bridge between worlds. From Harper’s perspective, “when two or more people discuss the
meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together” (p. 23). Similarly, Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) use photos in interviews as a starting place for listening to others and creating rapport between a researcher and participant(s).

Asking participants to select photographs to present during interviews allows them to focus conversations around events, relationships, or stories they feel comfortable sharing. “Interviewing people about their photographs leads them to explain why they take particular pictures, to remember things that related to objects or places pictured, as well as to anticipate the possible outcomes of events or the progression of their lives” (italics in original, Radley, 2010, p. 274-275). Harper’s argument in support of collaborative approaches to photo elicitation encourages ethnographers to employ this approach. In my own work, I am less interested in the visual content or the view photographs provide, and more intrigued by the ways families produce and use them, as well as how they talk about them. Understanding photos “as process rather than text” (Robertson, 2003, p. 86), I recognize participants “as curators, with a share in the representation of their own lives” (Wilder, 2009, p. 35).

Drawing on Fiske (1994), Rose (2007) describes the term audiencing as “the process by which a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances” (p. 22). During my interviews, I attend to the technology used in audiencing family photos and the social practices of interpretation and meaning making (Bresnahan & Keller, 2016). By centering on photographs, these interviews offer participants and researchers an opportunity to reflect on things they might typically be taken for granted and overlooked (Rose, 2007). I am reflexive about my own viewing practices during the research process, because audiencing particular photographs in particular places and in the presence of family members invites different ritualized ways of seeing, engaging, communicating, and relating to these photos.
Participant observation. While the private domain of family life is becoming increasingly visible in public spheres through photographs posted on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or photo-sharing sites such as Flickr and Snapfish, production processes of family photo-making remain difficult to observe. Staging family photographs is an important part of visual culture, which is not revealed in the final photograph selected for purchase and/or display. Being there, as an ethnographer, requires observation based on describing the setting and small details, listening to and participating in conversations, interacting with family members, and noting what is perceived to be ‘typical’ in this time and space.

Van House (2011) employs semi-structured photo elicitation interviews and participant observation to collect data in order to analyze on-going, emergent interpretations of photographs. When visiting participants’ homes, she asks for a “tour of images” including “prints on walls, in albums, and tossed into boxes and drawers, as well as digital images on their cameras, computers and online” (p. 127). Although her focus is ‘technologies-in-the-making’ such as camera phones, image-sharing websites, and social media tools, her methods for studying everyday photography practices inform my approach at three different sites.

In the fourth chapter, I entered the Easter Bunny Photo at Wesley Chapel Mall to observe family interactions in and surrounding an annual photo ritual. Engaging in ethnography encouraged me to consider context, not only limited to the physical location of a photograph, but also including the social relationships and processes within which family photographs are embedded. My observations extended beyond the family in front of the camera interacting with the Easter Bunny and his photographer. I also paid attention to the line wrapped around the Bunny Photo Hut, workers’ conversations, and parents passing by just to point him out to their kids. Sitting in the nearby play area at the mall, I realized parents and workers were not the only people talking about family photo-making rituals at the mall, children were having their own conversations.
In the fifth chapter, I entered the private space of mothers’ homes, and asked them to guide me through domestic photo tours. However, by making a choice to focus on photo displays, I was overlooking processes and practices for constructing these displays, which included mothers’ choices for how to use their family photos. Despite my focus on photo displays, several mothers also showed me family photos they stored in boxes or organized in albums as well as pointing out where photos used to be displayed.

In the sixth chapter, I entered a virtual space of multiple software applications and explored how to incorporate observations of Snapchat during Skype interviews with adult siblings. I asked participants questions about how they used this photo-making technology and made time to learn about the features – filters, videos, screenshots – they enjoyed most. Through listening to tech-savvy explanations in interviews and actually starting to explore and use the app myself, my Snapchat skills improved, enhancing my visual literacy and ability to analyze data. I also emailed siblings months after our interviews and encouraged them to reply with recently saved snaps and tell stories about them. Evoking the visual as a process, not a text, I reconsidered my position as a researcher looking at family photographs and photo-making rituals.

Ethical dilemmas and patterns of choice in looking at family photo-making. At all three sites, I used my cell phone as a tool to visually document my work in the field including what kinds of interactions occurred at the Bunny Photo Hut, what kinds of displays hung on mothers’ walls, and what kinds of images were produced and shared via Snapchat. Taking pictures of each site allowed me to focus on observing interactions and listening to family members speak to each other, which were important aspects of my study I could not capture in a photo. I referenced these visual aids during various stages of data analysis in conjunction with handwritten field notes, interview transcripts, and memos.
“While everything may be photographed, both theoretically and in terms of the technology available, only certain things are. This suggests that it is a socially regulated and highly conventional activity” (Harris, 2004, p. 28). This is true not only for families, but also for me, and it carries ethical consequences. When I started collecting data, I looked at photographs as illustrations for participants’ family stories, and my own photo-making as a kind of visual recordkeeping necessary for my ethnography. Being there to see families create shared meaning through photo-making reminded me to reflect on my role as a researcher behind the camera, and how my choices reified conventions of representation, implying aesthetic criteria for what makes “good” research-worthy photography.

As a participant observer in the field, I could have tried to photograph families while they were posing with the Easter Bunny; however, I did not do this for several reasons. The Photo Hut décor included large posters with explicit, bold-faced instructions not to take cell phone pictures of the Easter Bunny. Wooden fences and half walls actually kept the Easter Bunny protected from the camera flashes from passers by attempting to photograph the event. I did not want to set a poor example by breaking the rules about cell phone use. I respected the workers’ wishes, and I put my relationships with them first, tucking my phone away when inside the Photo Hut. Lastly, I feared my photo-making would be intrusive, because a stranger with a camera is oftentimes interpreted as a threat, especially when snapping photos of children. In the process of conducting this research, I learned the importance of adaptability in the field(s), and how to make choices about integrating the visual in my ethnographic work.

How researchers encounter and experience the visual in everyday life shapes how we learn about and understand it. “The visual aspect of our world does not manifest itself uniquely in the visual media, but it actually pervades our daily lives in most of its facets: in looking, being looked at, visualizing, depicting (reproducing), etc.” (Pauwels, 2015, p. 254). For example, photo elicitation can
sometimes shift the balance of power in interviews, giving research participants more authority (Thomson, 2011); however, integrating photographs will not automatically create an empowered participant and/or useful interview (Harper, 2002). Furthermore, “a photo-interview [can] not imitate the intimate sharing of memories among friends and family. This [is] a new context, and interviewees [learn] only during the interview which meanings the interviewers [are] interested in, and which meanings [are] safe and useful to inscribe in the photos in this particular context” (Freund & Thomson, 2011, p. 30). Looking at everyday photo-making rituals in mother’s homes reminds me that no matter how well-intentioned my research efforts may be, these interviews create unequal power relations. Embedding my own audio recorder and camera phone in this process, I mediated their performances of family photography, and produced my own version of their lived experiences. Interrogating my methods teaches me to maintain sensitive to participants’ experiences, and to remain aware of my role in creating knowledge (Martens, 2012).

Studying Snapchat created an opportunity to follow up with my participants, and inquire about their ongoing communication practices, rather than a single interview and photo submission. During Skype calls, siblings described the snaps they shared with one another, but these images were already sent and had since disappeared. Although siblings had specific snaps in mind, the ephemeral nature of this photo-making technology made it difficult to point to a particular image. It is clear that deciding whether or not to engage in photo elicitation is only one of many choices I must make as a researcher.

Reflecting on how I employed photo elicitation in mothers’ homes and through Skype interviews, I practiced looking at the visual in new ways, questioning not only how photographs were visually presented, but also how photos were represented to me in the processes of interviewing, and collecting and analyzing data. Visual research risks ‘exposing’ participants in ways I could not anticipate before I entered the field. In doing family photo-making research, I learned the
importance of reflecting on “how recognizable subjects are in images, the acceptability of possible negative consequences, the conditions for access to the data, and the extent of participation on the part of those involved” throughout the research process (Pauwels, 2015, p. 35). The juxtaposition of multiple sites and methods in my study helped me rethink some of my methodological assumptions. My reluctance to use a camera to snap photos in specific family contexts indicates an ethical dilemma future researchers may face. How I introduced photographs within interviews, how I looked at them (i.e. along with participants, via email before or after interviews), how many photographs I asked participants to share, and how I documented and reproduced them (i.e. making photos of photos, writing descriptions, excluding/including them in the dissertation) are all reflexive questions, which highlight the complexity of using visual methods in ethnographic research.

The following three chapters offer rich ethnographic descriptions and in-depth discussions and analyses of my ethnographic fieldwork, and what I learned through employing visual methods at three unique sites of family photo-making.
CHAPTER FOUR:

“SMILES START HERE!”:

PHOTO-MAKING RITUALS AT THE EASTER BUNNY PHOTO HUT

Founded in 1961, Cherry Hill Photo Enterprises Inc. provides holiday photography services for shopping malls throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada, and England (“About Us”). Men and women are hired to bring life to iconic portrayals of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, and transform family photo opportunities into profit centers. The corporate context for these family photo-making rituals at shopping malls, or what Belk (2001) identifies as the “current cathedral[s] of consumption” (p. 334), enables businesses to exploit the holiday emphasis on children in order to increase profits. Festive decorations illuminate Santa’s workshop and the Easter Bunny Photo Hut as exciting attractions to see and spend money on holiday themed purchases, and vivid advertisements prompt families to make a special trip to pose for photos at the mall.

Similar to Christmas, families participate in Easter rituals, which contribute to a consumer culture, proffering fashionable clothes, plants, flowers, candy, cards, and colored eggs as gifts to be given in celebration (Pleck, 2000). Spending time with family during the holidays often involves spending money to purchase gifts. In addition to religious ceremonies, “Christians celebrate Easter by buying $2 billion in candy, including 1 billion Peeps marshmallow chicks and bunnies, 16 billion jelly beans, and 90 billion chocolate rabbits (most of which will have their ears eaten first)” (Feller, 2008, p. 167). Family photography is a common part of Easter gift giving.

Beginning with a Santa Photo program, Cherry Hill Photo has since expanded to coordinate Bunny Photos during the Easter season, which starts in early March and ends the day before Easter Sunday. Posing with Santa is the more popular option thanks in part to the commercialization of
Christmas (Belk, 2001). Easter remains a religious holiday tradition less marketable to American families; therefore, the Easter Bunny’s annual visit at the mall receives much less attention. Expectations for how many families will participate in these photo-making rituals are reflected in the varying lengths of each holiday photo season. In comparison to Santa’s strenuous 5+ week schedule and long 10-hour work days, time with the Easter Bunny is limited to 3-4 short weeks. Although unique rituals are performed to celebrate Christmas and Easter, similarities can be drawn between how families do photo-making with Santa or the Easter Bunny at the shopping mall.

Cherry Hill Photo defines their primary focus to provide “customers with memorable experiences that become annual traditions” (“About Us”). To achieve this goal, the photo company employs marketing strategies to rebrand the awkward experience of being photographed with a stranger as family fun (Kotchemidova, 2005). Photo package advertisements show children laughing, smiling, and saying “cheese!” which constructs an ideal image to live up to, and a model for how families and family memories should look.

Photo-making at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut perpetuates portrait style traditions. Moving through the line, every family poses the same way. Family photography as a genre almost always shows only happy family members at leisure (Rose, 2004), and year after year, families reproduce particular images of happiness when selecting and purchasing souvenir photographs good enough to share with others. Although adults are absent from both the ads and the resulting photographs they purchase, their active participation behind the camera is a necessary part of this ritual. Parents use Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny as stationary props, which enable them to arrange children for a desirable iconic photograph, and then pay for it (see Thompson & Hickey, 1989). Portraits produced here illustrate idealized qualities of shared values and beliefs, and family and cultural identity in romanticized visions of family life.
In addition to specific posing practices, the iconic image of these holiday characters must be authentic. Mediated depictions shape expectations for how they should look (Belk, 2001; Okleshen, Menzel Baker, & Mittelstaedt, 2000). While Cherry Hill Photo highlights a selection standard for “naturally bearded” and age-appropriate Santas (Jones, 1993), the criteria for being the Easter Bunny can range by age, sex, height, weight, etc., because of his full body costume. The Easter Bunny plays his part each spring by visiting shopping malls to hold children on his lap and handout lollipops while parents purchase family photo packages. “The mall Easter Bunny is that funny looking, adorable, fantasy creature with the long ears, oversized incisors and prominent cottontail” who poses for pictures that later decorate fireplace mantels, refrigerator doors, photo albums and scrapbooks in family homes (Hickey, Thompson, & Foster, 1988, p. 67).

Entering ‘the field’ of the Photo Hut, I study how families participate in the popular American family ritual of producing an annual Easter Bunny photograph. Located at a local outdoor shopping mall, the Bunny Photo Hut is an accessible, public space for observing patterns of interaction among multiple families performing photo-making rituals. Family members are visible walking between shops, waiting in line, and orchestrating the production of photographs. I observe families creating visual and material traces of their Easter Bunny visit, which reveal and conceal stories about their embodied ritual practices. In this chapter, I write about communication among participants in the Easter Bunny ritual, including employees, adults and children as they wait in line, pose for the camera, view their images, and at times, resist this ritual.

Cultural Myths and the Annual Easter Bunny Photo Ritual

Despite easy personal access to cameras of their own, families still engage in a public photo-making ritual with the Easter Bunny. The symbolic value of this photograph involves the iconic image of the oversized bunny. Families, especially children, immediately recognize the Easter Bunny waving at the mall, and squeal with excitement (or fear). Unlike Santa, stories of the Easter Bunny
do not include his name, his age, a known home, family, friends, or personal characteristics. Caplow and Holmes Williamson (1980) describe the cultural myth of the Easter Bunny, which constructs a religious-secular figure representing growth and renewal (p. 224):

- [He] is male by gender but never has a wife or indeed any family. He comes early on Easter morning to hide eggs supposed to be laid by himself – double anomaly – in the yard or garden among grass and flowers, to be discovered later in the day by children. The conduct of the children has no effect on the Easter bunny’s behavior. The eggs are for whoever finds them – i.e., not directed to specific people. The Easter Bunny has no fixed abode. He never sends or receives letters or communicates with anyone; indeed, like a real rabbit, he has no speech.

Cultural myths and storytelling define the Easter Bunny’s role; however, the annual photo-making ritual presents children with an otherwise unlikely opportunity to meet him.

- When speaking about the Easter Bunny, families emphasize the visual (i.e. “See! See!” “Look!”), which is interesting, because typically the Easter Bunny remains invisible to children. He visits once they fall asleep to deliver baskets of candy and hide eggs, but then disappears until the next year. His goal is to avoid being seen! The ritual of visiting the Easter Bunny, seeing him at the mall, looking at him, waving at him, and especially posing for a photograph with him is counter to cultural stories of this tradition. In some ways, the Bunny Photo Hut presents a stage for observing the mythically unobservable.

- In Clark’s (1995) ethnographic fieldwork of children visiting Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny at the mall, she found that particularly for Easter, children shape cultural practices in an active manner and occupy positions of cultural power during these rituals (p. 101). According to her study, children carry on holiday celebrations amongst themselves by participating in their own Easter customs and mythic practices. Hickey, Thompson, and Foster (1988) suggest that kids tell their own stories in order to protect the fantasy associated with the Easter Bunny. The bunny embodies childhood imagination, which goes beyond the sensible, material, externalized reality (Clark, 1995) and takes shape in the stories children share about the Easter Bunny’s make-believe
world. Unfortunately, adults largely ignore the active role children play in their own fantasy experiences. However, they employ cultural myths to acquire a photograph of their child smiling beside him. Together, family members craft a narrative about the bunny as a giver of gifts in order for young children to understand and enjoy this photo-making ritual.

Typical family photo-making practices may be difficult to observe due to the private nature of family life; however, the Bunny Photo Hut at the mall offers a specific site for merging an ethnographic approach with visual studies. By grounding my approach in an ethnographic perspective, I challenge ideas of family photographs as ‘records’ of culture, and instead, question how this record is produced. In the following section, I describe how my methodology guides my understanding of family photo-making rituals at the Bunny Photo Hut.

**Methods at the Bunny Photo Hut**

At the Bunny Photo Hut families perform photo-making rituals, which function to construct their roles and relationships in an observable, public space. Employing an ethnographic approach to study the production of Easter Bunny photographs, I explore how families engage, stage and create the visual (Noy, 2014), and watch as they walk away from the Photo Hut with a printed picture. *Being there* affects what I see, experience, describe and interpret.

Although the Easter Bunny is an icon at the center of each image, children are the focus of this photo-making ritual. Photo Hut employees, parents, and other families in line watch in anticipation for each child to meet the Easter Bunny. Beyond the brief interactions between children and the Easter Bunny are other performances, which constitute this ritual (i.e. waiting in line, instructing how to pose, viewing photos, and making purchases). Family members choreograph their own poses and select souvenir photographs. As an ethnographer, I not only watch what others are watching, but also watch them. My observations extend to communicative performances and interactions in which the Easter Bunny photograph is produced and embedded.
Entering the Field

Arriving to observe for the first time Sunday March 24, 2013 at 4:00 p.m., I sat alone at an umbrella-covered table in the nearby children’s play area. The Easter Bunny’s visiting hours were listed on posters with logos from Photo Hut sponsors listed at the bottom, including Florida Hospital, Farina Orthodontics, and Tampa Bay Times. Social media icons are also prominently displayed, prompting families to share their photos with others.

Hoping to find a long line waiting at the Photo Hut, I had searched for a family friendly shopping center (i.e. scheduled events and outings, and types of stores) hosting an Easter Bunny near the University of South Florida. Based on these criteria, I chose the Shops at Wiregrass, which is an outdoor mall in the suburban area of Wesley Chapel, located ten miles north of the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. As a middleclass, white, young woman, my presence in this area goes unnoticed. Handwriting in a notebook, not hiding behind a computer screen, I note the obstacles for watching photo-making here, and snap a few photographs. Wearing a USF t-shirt, I appear to be completing a homework assignment while waiting for someone shopping at the mall.

Pastel colored pinwheels and Easter eggs decorate the courtyard landscape along with a few crumpled Easter Bunny brochures left behind in the grass. A plastic white picket fence closes off any entry to the Photo Hut except from the front entrance. Large signs with bold-faced font warn patrons not to take pictures of the bunny with a cell phone (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Signs at the Bunny Photo Hut entrance remind families “Cell Phone Cameras Are Not Permitted.”

These signs act as markers discouraging parents from taking their own photographs, “guarding the visual capital of the industry” (Noy, 2014, p. 58). The Photo Hut surrounding the Easter Bunny has large, open windows, but the blinds are drawn, blocking the view of the Easter Bunny. The commercial structuring of this photo-making event constrains the experience through space, physically demarcating clear boundaries.

Traffic moves slowly. Motorcycles and SUVs rumble by drowning out some of the dialogue. A large, loud portable air conditioning unit muffles the conversations between workers and family members coordinating their photos. Packing up my bag, I decide to walk around and get a better look.

There is no line of excited children waiting to see the Easter Bunny.

Instead I find three employees sitting on the ground staring at their cell phones.

Rather than give up and go home, I make disappointments into opportunities. I pay attention to interactions, sayings, and doings on the outer edges: children talking about the Easter
Bunny while playing or walking by, adults pointing out the Easter Bunny to kids, and families asking how much photos cost and then commenting on the high price. Similar to Neumann’s (1992) ethnographic eye seeing and studying at the Grand Canyon, I direct my attention away from the main attraction and toward life before the flash and behind the camera in order to emphasize the embodied interactions of families at and around the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, and the social processes of producing photographs.

**Data Collection**

In four consecutive years of visiting the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, I conducted 31 hours of participant observation resulting in 79 single-spaced pages of field notes and 21 single-spaced pages of memos.

**Fieldnotes.** My fieldnotes are detailed scribbles and thick descriptions of conversations and performances staged at the Photo Hut. I wrote notes in shorthand (i.e. EB for Easter Bunny), and organized descriptions of families drawing lines to divide sections, half circles in the margins to clump conversations together, and arrows returning to a previous family or interaction. Using symbols (i.e. stars) and neon colors, I highlighted emergent connections in my notes. By paying attention to seemingly trivial interactions, I open possibilities for understanding cultural practices, which (re)produce visual imagery, emotional investments, and constructions of family identity through photo-making.

The tedious process of transcribing my field notes trained me to notice family photo-making in new ways. I started by handwriting observations, making the field manageable by deciding what to write down, what to write about, and when to write (LeCompte & Schensul, 2012, p. 31). Throughout my fieldwork, I continually typed my notes and printed copies to analyze. Transcription became more than repetition, but rather a reliving of my experience in the field, and a generative process of interpretation.
I spent four months writing, revising, interpreting, and editing descriptions of this photo-making ritual. Choosing specific language took thought, time, creativity, and experiences of being there. I questioned what the little boy’s voice sounded like when I heard him say, “I can see his ears!” Was it a yell, shout, exclamation, scream, or squeal? Doing ethnography meant being there – with people or with pages (and pages and pages…) of observations – in order to craft in text what I learned (Rose, 1990, p. 12).

**Photographs.** Employing Pink’s (2013) ideas about ethnographic photography in the field, my reflexive approach to photographing means being aware of theories informing my own practices, of my relationships with employees and the families I photograph, and the theories that inform their approaches to photography (p. 76). For example, I followed the rule not to use my cell phone to photograph the Easter Bunny inside the Photo; however, I did take 82 photographs of the Photo Hut itself and photo-making rituals surrounding it. Creating pictures as part of fieldwork accomplishes different goals. For me, photographing signs, decorative displays, off duty employees, families waiting together in line, etc., allowed me to focus on listening and observing ritual performances as they unfolded.

I was also a photographer of the photography equipment. I snapped photos of the monitor used to publicly display families’ Easter Bunny photographs. When I viewed these images I noticed a thick black diagonal shadow across the screen. I deleted the image, moved a few steps to the left to avoid the same mistake, and snapped another. The same thick black diagonal line appeared…plus two more! I studied the screen. No sign of a shadow. I raised my cell phone and looked at the screen through my camera viewfinder.
Bingo. Thick black diagonal lines popped up (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Digital photography equipment presents obstacles for parents trying to use their personal cell phones to take pictures of their children, which are displayed on computer monitors at the Bunny Photo Hut.

I did not notice these lines years before and I am surprised this seemingly outdated computer had such a tech savvy upgrade. Cherry Hill Photo uses this equipment to control how family photo-making rituals are performed at the Photo Hut and how photos are (re)produced here, protecting against parents who want to take photos behind the scenes. This restricted access indicates how family photo-making undergoes heavy gate-keeping when photographs are produced for profit in the public, consumer space of the shopping mall.

Using my camera as a visual note-taking tool to help trigger descriptions of the contexts where I conduct ethnographic research, I align with Wilder’s (2009) perspective that the process of making a photograph is best approached as a dialogue that requires listening to participants. On two occasions, I am asked to photograph a family leaving the Photo Hut, so parents can pose with their children. My writing is interrupted, but I prioritize my role as a participant rather than observer ‘in the field.’ For these reasons, I consider myself an ethnographer taking photos as part of my fieldwork, rather than a photographer in the field.
Participant observation. In addition to crafting field notes and creating photographs, I talked with employees about family photo-making. Each time I visited the Photo Hut, I introduced myself to the workers on shift. Gaining access in ‘the field’ was a continuous process.

Over time, I recognized returning employees from years past, and also got to know new faces. Experienced employees shared stories comparing shifts at the Bunny Photo Hut to Santa’s Workshop. “If it was the week before Christmas, not Easter, there’s no way we would have time to talk to you,” one worker said, reminding me of Santa’s popularity.

Workers were often available to talk to me and happy to help when the line was short or vacant; however, they became rigid with the rules and less willing to talk with me when their manager was present, so I kept my distance during her shifts. Being there taught me how (not) to ask questions at the Photo Hut. Interruptions and distractions defined my interactions with workers who were busy assisting families and snapping photos. I adapted to the discontinuous flow of our conversations, which made them ethnographic, rather than sterile interviews (Rose, 1990, p. 33). Establishing rapport with employees meant learning the culture and rules of their work, and being mindful of our continually developing relationships and how they shaped my participation in the field.

During one shift a befriended worker invites me to stand beside the photo equipment to observe, and I can’t believe the view from inside the Photo Hut! I could see interactions and overhear conversations without peering through blinds or straining to hear over the hum of an air-conditioning unit. Through my relationships with workers (including the Easter Bunny), I learn about families’ photo-making rituals from multiple perspectives. I also participate in the ritual myself by posing for and purchasing my own photos with the Easter Bunny.
Analysis and Interpretation

My family photo-making research at the Photo Hut illuminates mundane interactions happening before posing for a photograph, in front of, and behind the camera: Waiting in line, posing for the camera, resisting the ritual, and viewing photographs as a family.

Waiting in Line

The sun bears down on sweaty children ready to meet the Easter Bunny. Even in the shade, families cannot escape the humid Florida heat in March.

“Momma, I’m hot,” a little girl whines.

Despite the weather, the line remains long. Parents fold brochures to fan themselves and keep cool. Some split up to save a place in line while the other takes a child to the bathroom or to find relief in the shade. The camera stops flashing when an hour-long ‘Bunny break’ begins, and families wait while employees change shifts. A photograph with the Easter Bunny is a photograph worth waiting for, and waiting shows how important this ritual is to families.

Most parents stand together by their stroller. Moms attend to toddlers while a few fathers wait with one hand on the stroller, the other hand cupped over a cell phone trying to avoid a glare. Clustered together in groups pinched between a black velvet rope and a wooden fence, families spend this time together preparing, practicing, and narrating their anticipated photo-making experience. In this section, I analyze the ritual performance of waiting as a family, highlighting the time and effort invested in producing a family photograph, and the different roles embodied by family members. I note mothers in particular who are engaged in emotional work, attending to others’ needs in line. Some kids ask Mom to play cell phone games or provide snacks to pass time. Others sneak passed Mom to climb the fence and see inside the Photo Hut.

“See! See!” one boy calls to another. His face lights up. “Look, there he is!”

“Ether Bunny! Ether Bunny!” a toddler chants.
“He can’t hear you,” his mom laughs. “He’s busy getting ready for pictures.”

“Get down right now,” another mom scolds her son. “You want to look nice for the Easter Bunny.” Children are dressed for the occasion, and moms monitor their behavior while waiting in line, so they remain picture ready.

“Don’t touch that. You’ll get your dress dirty.”

“You’re messing up your hair.”

“Stop climbing on that.”

“Over. Here. Now,” a father commands, pulling on the collar of his son’s white dress shirt.

White is a popular choice but frustrating to keep clean while waiting in line. Infants and toddlers wearing lacy dresses and bow ties evidence rules of dress associated with the Easter Bunny photo ritual. Although everyone blends together in line, children in each family are easy to spot in coordinating spring colors. Two sisters in identical pink bunny shirts join the line with their parents. The brothers in a family ahead of them are dressed in plaid red shirts, gray shorts and matching fedoras. All the girls in another family wear white flowers in their hair including the baby leaning out of her stroller. Dressing siblings to match is a popular photo-making choice, because these outfits are a visual marker defining individual members as a family. However, parents dress much differently than their kids. A woman in black leggings and a baggy t-shirt stands next to her husband who is wearing jeans, a sport shirt, and baseball cap. They both appear comfortably casual while waiting to see the Easter Bunny with two little girls in fancy floral dresses. It is evident who will pose for their picture.

These deliberate clothing choices show this is not a spontaneous visit to the Photo Hut; families came to the mall dressed to pose for and purchase a photograph. Maintaining a presentable appearance not only communicates care for the child, for the family, and for creating a memory, but also indicates the resources required for performing this ritual (i.e. money for clothes and
photographs, time, and effort of getting everyone together). I watch families wait for almost an hour surrounded by the Photo Hut walkway’s beautiful greenery, grass, dirt, and mulch, which threaten to ruin a good photograph. Parents promise their children they can play, but “not until after the picture.”

“Hands up,” a mom instructs her son. It is almost time to visit the Easter Bunny, and she is ready with a change of clothes. Pulling his grass-stained t-shirt over his head, she replaces it with one to match his younger brother. Her preparations indicate this is not her first visit to the Photo Hut. Both little boys now stand side by side wearing white t-shirts with black ties and suspenders printed on the fronts. She tops them off with two furry blue bunny ears. Efforts to keep clothes clean emphasize how significant visual appearance is for families performing this photo-making ritual.

Trailing behind her mom and dad, a little girl twirls and sparkles in a silver Easter dress with matching shoes. Long dark curls fall down her back and skim the pink ribbon tied around her waist. She stops suddenly, sits on the ground, and takes one shoe off.

“They’re hurting,” she whines.

“We can take them off as soon as you get your picture with the Easter Bunny. But we need your picture first. As soon as you’re done I’ll take them back to the store,” Mom says.

“I don’t want to wear it anymore.”

“Don’t you want to look pretty for the Easter Bunny?” Mom asks, stuffing her toes back into the shoe. She expects her daughter to endure some discomfort in exchange for a desirable photograph. The little girl slumps forward, defeated.

Families emphasize visual appearance in the annual Easter Bunny photo ritual, intertwining consumerism as part of their ritual photo-making performances. In preparation for a visit to the Photo Hut, many parents purchase holiday-themed clothing (i.e. Easter dresses, bunny ears) for their children to wear. Posing with the Easter Bunny requires a special shopping trip, because families
hold fast to particular ideals for how this ritual should be visually represented and remembered.

How children are dressed as they repeat similar poses contributes to the extraordinary ordinariness of these family photos. Two mothers exchange compliments while waiting in line, pointing out how well their daughters are dressed.

“She looks adorable.”

“Thank you! Target’s gonna make me go broke.”

Clothing choices are a popular topic of conversation in line. Mothers discuss the costs of creating a desirable photograph, including spending money and spending time getting ready. Seeing the Easter Bunny is an event considered so special by and for family that it is still common to purchase and wear special non-everyday dress, and pay for professional photographs to mark it (Kuhn, 1995, p. 73). The financial and emotional demands of maintaining how children look in this photograph are burdensome; however, families continue to do it year after year.

I see a couple arguing near the Photo Hut entrance. The Easter Bunny is on break for the next hour, but their daughter is ready now.

“Are you kidding me?! I’m going to cry.” The woman glares at her husband.

“Look at this line. I mean, come on. You really want to wait an hour for this? Do we need another picture in this outfit?” he asks.

“Yes. We’re getting this. You forgot about it,” she snaps. “We told your parents we were going to send them one, and this is her first one.”

She walks away and he follows her, pushing the stroller to the back of the line. The Easter Bunny is more than a prop for family photographs. His iconic presence produces modes of representation collectively associated with celebrating Easter as a family. Family members use Easter Bunny photos to engage in gift-giving rituals, circulating visual/material representations of family
rituals in order to strengthen relationships (Rose, 2012). With grandparents and other family members’ expectations in mind, the pressure to perform this ritual builds.

Two little girls try their best to see if the Easter Bunny is back. Speaking softly amongst themselves, they help each other up onto the fence to get a better view of an empty, white trellis.

“That’s where he’s gonna come, right there,” one girl points to the empty seat. “See? Can you see him yet?"

“No, can you?” her new friend asks.

She squints, straining to see a sign of the Easter Bunny.

“No. He’s probably shopping,” she states matter-of-factly.

“For carrots?”

She rolls her eyes. “No. not at the mall!”

I am impressed by how she makes sense of this. Standing nearby, I scribble a few notes. When the Easter Bunny is on break the ethnographer is at work.

Telling stories builds excitement and creates a meaningful ritual. While in line, parents often create stories about ‘bunny break’ in order to entertain their kids and explain the long wait. These stories detail how the Easter Bunny spends his time: eating carrots, taking a break from his job, or visiting his bunny family. Although it might be assumed that parents are the storytellers, I overhear children eagerly answer each other’s questions about the Bunny’s whereabouts as well. In the grip of stories, waiting in line becomes a meaningful part of this photo-making ritual. Unfortunately the little girl’s mom is not interested in listening to her tell stories, especially when she is sitting on top of a dirty fence.

“Come over here right now or we’re going to leave and you’re not going to see the Easter Bunny,” her mom threatens. She uses the Easter Bunny to sanction her daughter’s behavior (Hickey, Thompson, & Foster, 1988), and both girls jump to the ground.
It’s almost five minutes before curiosity brings them back to the wooden fence.

Other parents reminisce about “last year’s” photo, sharing horror stories about when their kids were younger and afraid of the Easter Bunny. Posing a child with the Easter Bunny is discussed as a sort of initiation for new parents.

“I was scared once,” a 5-year-old boy chimes in.

“Yeah, you were,” his mom nods, and then tells the story to the parents waiting in line ahead of them.

Waiting in line connects families to a shared tradition. Some spend this time demonstrating how to pose. Some snap pictures of their children in line to practice smiles. I watch a mother model the appropriate pose for her youngest son. She clasps her hands, right over left, in her lap. Although children are the only family members pictured in these photographs, families perform this ritual together. Families maintain a presentable appearance, practice how they will produce a photo with the Easter Bunny, and narrate why waiting is important all while standing in line. This is where the emotional work invested in the annual Easter Bunny photo-making ritual starts to become publically visible.

A loud knock comes from inside the children’s playhouse. One of the workers walks over to answer the door. They whisper back and forth, but I can’t make out what they are saying. The worker turns to explain to the kids waiting in the front of the line.

“The Easter Bunny needs help getting dressed for the day,” he says. He motions for his co-worker to join him, and she enters the playhouse to help. Kids stand in silent awe, looking for the first signs of the Easter Bunny.

He emerges with a wave, welcoming families to the Photo Hut, and the kids cheer. Parents stand up, brush their children’s bottoms off, straighten their bow ties, and fluff their dresses. It is picture time.
Posing for the Camera

Holding an umbrella above his head, one of the workers blocks the sun shining between the Photo Hut roof and the Port-a-cool air-conditioning machine, so a little girl can smile for the camera without squinting. Structured roles and rules for photo-making create a unique power dynamic. Workers defer to parents, especially Mom, when creating a family photograph.

While the employee is busy blocking the sun, Mom stands behind the photographer using her cell phone to snap her own photos. Clearly marked signs prohibit the use of cell phones inside the Photo Hut, but parents ignore the company's policy. They want more poses, more photographs, and more access to this ritual event.

Posing requires emotionally intense communicative acts of production. Rather than follow one family move through the Photo Hut, I observe and analyze patterns of greeting the Easter Bunny, preparing to pose, and how individuals participating in this ritual relate to one another (i.e. parents, siblings, spouses, and workers). In this section, I highlight what is not captured, but nevertheless experienced, in front of and behind the camera.

Stacks of photography equipment, monitors, and printers create a barrier between waiting children and the Easter Bunny. A festive floral tablecloth drapes a splash of spring color across it. A digital camera is set up on a tall metal pole. Long black cords connect the camera to computer systems. Next to this, a black case on wheels holds a monitor for families to view their images as well as two printers for producing their material photographs. A stack of photo envelopes sits nearby with instructions for how families can access the digital file of their image using a site called Shutterfly. To the right is another computer for scanning credit and debit cards.

Families pass by this equipment as they walk back to the Easter Bunny’s white trellis to pose. I watch a small child strain to stand on his tiptoes and see around it. “I can see his ears!” he squeals.
Mom carries a baby girl in her arms to greet the Easter Bunny. She follows one of the workers around the equipment barrier. He points out where to place the baby to be photographed, but he does not take her. Instead Mom props her up, then stands just out of frame to the left.

“It’s her first picture with the Easter Bunny,” Dad explains. He implies this “first” photograph is the start to many upcoming visits. With a diaper bag over his right arm, he stands back behind the computer screen to see pictures as they are taken.

“You look so pretty!”

“What a beautiful smile!”

All three workers cheer, waving above their heads. They speak in singsong voices, laughing and encouraging the baby to imitate them. Standing on the same side behind the camera, workers and family members cheer for Easter Bunny photographs; however, there are clear rules guiding how they participate. Parents do the work of positioning their kids in front of the camera and showing them how to pose. Workers assist in photo-making by handling the equipment. They use a squeaky rubber duck or colorful maracas to grab attention and call for kids to say “Cheese!” or “Monkeys!” “Look here!” and “Smile!” They do not offer suggestions unless families ask for help. The photographer lets family members decide what photographs are ‘good enough,’ seeking approval both before and after snapping photos. How workers and parents communicate with one another shows whose opinion matters most in this photo-making ritual.

Between camera flashes, Mom steps in to adjust her daughter’s headband, fluff her dress, and reposition her legs, crossing them at the ankles. Dad leans his head toward the camera and waves at his daughter to keep her focused. “I love you! I love you!” he calls to get her to smile.

The camera flashes again, and again, until Mom says, “That’s a good one. Perfect!”
I notice the photographer gives direction by asking questions to families rather than making requests. “Did you want to try to set them on his lap or are they okay where they are?” she asks Mom.

The camera flashes.

“Move your head down, and relax your hands, honey. Now lean back just a little. Right up next to him. That’s good,” Mom says, gesturing to show the appropriate pose.

Watching family after family pass through the line, I notice gender-specific roles. Many dads wait near the cash register to handle the payment while Mom, and usually the kids, too, review digital images and select the one. Mom chooses and Dad pays without weighing in on the decision. Similar to Gillian Rose (2003), I observe mothers undertaking the work of family photography differently than fathers. While two parents are often present and participating in this ritual, it is rare for Dad to tend to children’s needs before (i.e. combing hair and changing clothes) or during (i.e. adjusting collars and fluffing dresses) the pose. Mothers curate the family photo archives while fathers finance their production at the Photo Hut.

“Come on, all of us are going to be in it,” one dad tells his 13-year-old son. The teenage boy hangs his head as he sits next to the Easter Bunny beside his two younger brothers. As his parents stand behind the camera, I make a note that ‘all of us’ means all the kids.

I ask one of the workers about the range of ages for children in Easter Bunny photographs. “I’d say the range is 0 to 19 years old. It’s mostly little kids, but older siblings have to pose with them sometimes. Teenagers come grumbling with their families, and say stuff like, ‘This is my last holiday picture,’” he laughs. “Here, I’ll show you. The computer saves up to fifty pictures before it starts deleting them, so we can go back.” He presses a button, and scrolls through images, until he finds what he’s looking for.

“There,” he points. “That’s the kid who said it was going to be his last picture.”
I lean in to get a closer look. His younger brothers have identical shirts, but his family spared him the added embarrassment. I can’t help but smile when I see the big grin on his face. Even if he didn’t want to be there, he certainly tried his best to make someone else happy.

“Come on, guys. You have to be in it. We won’t show any of your friends. They’ll never know,” another mom says. She urges her two older sons to join their younger brother by the Easter Bunny. The boys avoid eye contact, pretending not to hear her.

“Keegan and Tate, let’s go! Final warning!” their dad says. The boys stand in solidarity. Some parents use guilt to coax kids to participate. Others bribe their children with promises to buy items at the mall like clothes, candy, food, or ice cream. A few parents use threats to coerce children into performing the ritual.

“I just bought you those shoes,” Dad reminds them. “And we’re not leaving without a picture, so I’ll just stay right here until you’re ready.” He sits on a shaded bench near the children’s play area. The photographer pushes the button and a flash of light brightens their forced smiles.

“Roxie, move her hair. Take the glasses off, Olivia. Sit up straight, girls. Not that tall, Olivia,” Mom scolds the youngest of three sisters. Between pictures the 7-year-old slips on a pair of neon pink sunglasses, but Mom catches her. The workers patiently wait for Mom to tell them the girls are ready to be photographed.

“Big smiles girls – I want to see your teeth!” Olivia juts out her jaw and makes a funny face, refusing to honor the serious business of this ritual. Mom frowns.

“Stop it, Olivia.”

Photo-making, like other family rituals, constitutes identity, constructs meanings, and displays values, but in visual ways. Families put the camera to work to immortalize and celebrate the happy, high points of family life (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 26), and American idealism influences the ways in which this photo-making ritual is performed. I observe as pressures for depicting family
togetherness create conflict and stress between family members. In the tradition of formal portraiture, parents want to achieve a highly conventional pose and desired feeling of family, and how their children look matters as they work to reproduce the extraordinary ordinariness of this photograph.

A huge smile spreads across a little boy’s face when his bare leg rubs against fur. He sits on the Easter Bunny’s lap wearing a fuzzy chick suit, and giggles. Picture perfect.

“Wait!” Mom stops the photographer, and wants the Port-a-cool air-conditioning unit turned off, because the cool air is blowing the bunny’s whiskers out of place. In her role producing an ideal family photograph, she not only manages her son’s appearance, but also the Easter Bunny’s. One of the workers nods, and as instructed, shuts it down. I lift my sunglasses to wipe sweat from the bridge of my nose, and think about what it requires to be the Easter Bunny at an outdoor mall in Florida. I wonder how much hotter I might feel covered in thick fur with someone sitting on my lap.

Mom fixes the whiskers and her son imitates her, turning around to stroke the bunny’s face. “This way,” she says. She faces him toward the camera and then walks back out of frame. The camera is much less interesting than the mythical Easter Bunny, and the little boy is quickly distracted from his role in this ritual.

“Sebastian!” Mom calls. The Photo Hut is a place for using names as parents compete for their children’s attention. Two workers repeat after her, clapping and cheering for the little boy to smile. The emotional work involved in photo production increases with updated technologies. Now parents can immediately view images on computer monitors, which creates an opportunity for negotiating how families desire to be represented and remembered (Van Dijck, 2007). Sebastian gets kisses, hugs, and a lollipop as soon as Mom is happy with the photograph.

Photographs continue throughout the afternoon, and the line never ends. Mall maintenance arrives to the Photo Hut in a bright yellow flatbed truck and parks out front on the street. Large
tattoos cover the arms and neck of a man called to fix the air conditioner. He bends down beside the Port-a-cool unit to open the panel and check the coolant levels. I watch as he pours water into the tank and then restarts the pump. He stands just out of frame while families pose their kids. Photo-making continues without interruption, but his presence creates a stark contrast between performing the ritual and what is pictured in photographs. Observing behind-the-scenes, I learn what physical and emotional work is necessary for this cultural myth to become a photo-worthy reality.

“Carly, baby, say cheese! CHEESE!”

“The sun is in my eyes!” Carly whines. But sacrifices must be made.

“Say cheese!” Mom repeats.

Sunshine eliminates shadows from Carly’s face. Although she is frustrated and uncomfortable, it is only for a few minutes, and this picture is for the family archive. Parents show little hesitation regarding how their children react to being photographed. Photos can be narrativised by families however they want (Rose, 2012, p. 56), and parents possess the narrative authority to choose which stories to tell. Later, when viewing this photograph, they will not reminisce about how long they waited in line, but rather how adorable their kids looked back then. The ritual performance of creating the photograph will be taken for granted – photo-making forgotten – because “it is only the positive aspects of life (as it was or how we would like it to be) and those things of which we are proud that are typically documented” (Carter, 2007, p. 560). For this reason, families prioritize documenting the experience of meeting the Easter Bunny, instead of experiencing the experience: It is all about the photograph.

In four years, I only witnessed a handful of parents posing with their children. Children and parents are separated in this genre of family photography. Parents, grandparents, and other family members standing behind the camera are a part of and apart from the photograph. Parents remain
absent from the photograph, yet present in facilitating its production, which is not a simple process. Beyond the frame of Easter Bunny portraits, parents bend forward and reach out their arms. They not only show kids they are within arm’s reach, but also tell them, “It’s okay. Mommy’s right here” to emphasize togetherness in performing this family ritual. This symbolic role – not pictured, but present – emphasizes the communicative family practices in which a material photograph is embedded. Constructing the desired image of an ideal, happy moment requires at least four photographs per family. Unfortunately, children’s reactions to the Easter Bunny are unpredictable, and the purchased photograph often obscures the emotional work that constitutes this ritual.

I watch as a dad brings his four-year-old daughter into the Photo Hut to see the Easter Bunny. He asks her something in Spanish. She hides behind the equipment cart in a yellow Mickey Mouse tank top and matching fedora, and shakes her head no. She steps back, pressing her small body against the supporting wall of the playhouse. Her dad asks again and points to the camera. The only words I recognize in his question are Easter Bunny.

She shakes her head again.

“Okay,” he says and reaches for her hand. Asking a child whether or not she wants to pose with the Easter Bunny is an exception to this ritual, not the rule. This expectation for children to participate reveals how parents exercise power to create an idealized holiday, and imaginative staging of family life in a ‘photographic world’ produced by and for family (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 28).

As the little girl walks out holding her dad’s hand, I overhear one worker tell another, “Yesterday was all tears.” It is clear most children are not presented with a choice.
Resisting the Bunny (Ritual)

A little boy can’t wait to see the bunny. He darts passed his Mom, and then stops. Eyes locked on the furry monster before him. He plants his feet firmly in the fake grass, and turns back to look at his mom.

His lower lip quivers.

“We’re going to take our chance,” Mom laughs holding her baby girl on her hip. “We don’t know how this is going to go. One will be fine if they’re screaming.” She expects her kids to be afraid, and prepares the workers for the worst. Although her children – like many others – are terrified of getting close to the Easter Bunny, she poses them on the bunny’s lap and pressures them to smile for a happy family photograph. Creating a photograph becomes a power struggle, but Mom is devoted to creating the rituals, myths, and images on which the enchanted world of family can depend (Gillis, 1996, p. 77). In this section, I explain how photo-making becomes an emotionally charged family experience. I describe tensions and contradictions between the desired normative ideals for producing a photo and the fearful acts of children resisting this ritual. Family communication – silences, “No bunny! No bunny!” screams and parents’ pleas – creates the context in which these photographs are produced.

The Photo Hut blinds are closed, but a young boy’s desperate screams echo in the courtyard. “No mommy, I don’t want to! No bunny! NO!!!!!!”

I walk around the side of the playhouse to get a better look.

Mom sits next to the Easter Bunny with her three-year-old son on her lap. He clutches her blouse in both hands.

“What’s his name?” one of the workers asks.

“Vinny.”
“Look, Vinny,” the worker holds up a stuffed bunny hopping through the air. Vinny’s chest heaves in shallow sobs. As soon as he looks, Mom hands him off to the Easter Bunny and jumps out of the photograph. Vinny struggles to escape, but she pushes him back on the bunny’s lap. “It’ll be a good memory,” she says. I wonder if she’s talking to him or to herself. Instead of focusing on Vinny’s fear, she shifts attention to producing a photo and creating a memory, “in order to make use of it in the future when the present will be past” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 52).

The camera flashes.

Vinny arches his back, throwing his arms overhead, and hurls himself into the Easter Bunny’s stomach. He collapses on the ground, and crawls to his mom’s feet.

“Okay, I think we’re done,” she laughs, and lifts him up. He wraps his arms around her neck. “Mommy will never forget this. And I don’t think the Bunny will either. Do other kids do this?”

“Kids usually smile from far away, because the Easter Bunny looks friendly from a distance, but when they get closer he gets scary. There is a line they shy away from,” the worker explains, drawing a semicircle in the air around the bunny.

I watch another little boy pull away from his mom when they reach this imaginary line.

“No! Come on,” Mom reaches for him, but misses.

“Noooooo!” he screams. He ducks under the black velvet rope and runs over an advertisement for Farina Orthodontics (Figure 3), which states ‘Bunny Smiles Start Here!’

Dad chases after him and Mom follows behind her family shaking her head. They do not return.
The next family in line moves in to set up their photograph.

A little girl smiles and then shies away from the bunny, nestling her head into the comfortable crevice of her mom’s neck.

“Pick her ears up,” Dad directs from behind the photo equipment. Mom adjusts the furry purple bunny ears on top of her daughter’s head. Crouching down next to the Easter Bunny, Mom sets her daughter on his lap, and then stands up just inches away. The little girl reaches out her pudgy arms and belts out a devastated wail.

“Sophia!” her mom scolds before turning to apologize to the Easter Bunny. “I’m so sorry.”

A worker holds a squeak toy above her head, and squeezes it to get the little girl’s attention. It works; the crying stops.

“Hurry, hurry, hurry, Momma! Before she notices,” Dad whispers. Mom sits on the ground, crossing her legs and waving her hands above her head.

“Sophia!” Dad calls. He claps his hands and waves to her.

“You gotta jump around and spin. Try it, Momma.”
“I don’t want to be in front of the camera,” she says. She struggles to stay close to her daughter, but far enough away not to interfere with the picture. Maintaining a ‘photo first’ approach is difficult as she watches her daughter cry. “You’re okay. The Easter Bunny’s nice!” Mom tells her, but the little girl’s face turns bright red.

“MOMMA!” she screams between gasps for air. Tiny outstretched hands beg for mercy.

“Yup, we’re done,” Mom says. She passes a threshold and stops fighting for a photo. She leaves with her daughter cradled in her arms and a photograph in hand, and the Easter Bunny lumbers out of the Photo Hut. He bends at the waist to avoid hitting his head on the roof, and gestures in my direction. I look behind me, but no one is there. I turn back and wave. He motions for me to come to him. My stomach flips and I realize I have my own fear of the Easter Bunny. As an ethnographer gazing at the Photo Hut, I do not expect the bunny to look back at me.

I stand up and walk to meet him at the white picket fence. His long ears make his head stretch to the sky. He towers above me. Close enough now to see a man’s nose through the black screen of the Easter Bunny’s mouth, I worry my research will end today. I’m not shopping, I’m not an employee, I’m not with a family… Is he going to ask me to leave the children’s play area?

“Yes?” I say tentatively, knowing I am in trouble.

“Can I ask what you are doing taking notes?” he asks. He’s not supposed to talk, but I don’t say anything about this rule.

“Is it for a class or something?” His presence demands a response.

“Yes, I’m researching family photos with the Easter Bunny.”

“Oh,” he nods, showing my answer meets his expectations. “So, what do you have so far?”

“A lot of screaming and No! No! No!”

“Well I hope it gets better for you,” he laughs and I am relieved.

“For you, too!” I say.
He waves, returning to his seat in front of the camera as a silent prop. In this moment, I feel empathy for the children afraid to pose for a photo, because I, too, fear the Easter Bunny. Being seen by the Easter Bunny calls me to be reflexive. I had become too comfortable and somewhat complacent as an experienced ethnographer returning to “my” field, forgetting that my visual practices were also visible at the Photo Hut.

Speaking with two workers after their shift, I learn what employees fear here: Parents.

“Parents make for some of the worst photos. They get mad at us when their kids won’t stop screaming. I don’t know what they think we’re supposed to do,” one worker explains.

“People think this is professionally done, but none of us are professionals, and then parents get angry about the photo and forget about their kids meeting the bunny. It’s frustrating for everyone,” the other says, shaking his head. “Just the other day a baby got hysterical. She wasn’t just crying. She was terrified, like not breathing. And her mom kept asking for retakes. Three times! She was trying to get her other two girls to smile, but I don’t like that. Parents have expectations that we just can’t meet. It’s not going to be perfect, especially if the kids are scared.”

A new family arrives to set up their photograph.

Two girls give the Easter Bunny hugs, and invite their little sister to sit on his lap. When the bunny turns to her, tears surge.

“Look, Mom is going to be here by the Bunny. And look, Sissy’s right here. Look!” Mom points. “Come on. You did it last year. One picture. One. And that’s it, okay? Please? Mommy wants a picture.” Although her two older daughters are ready, Mom focuses on the youngest, because it is not enough to photograph the children who want to participate in this ritual. An Easter Bunny photo must show all of the kids together as a family. Many families rely on older siblings to act as an extension of their parents. Adults stand off to the side and out of the camera’s view, shouting
directions for big brothers and sisters to model good behavior and show how the ritual should be performed.

The next family in line passes by the equipment cart to pose for their photograph.

“Smile! It’s okay. Smile,” Dad says to his two sons. He begs for a nice picture, but the youngest starts to cry. “No, smile!”

“Teach him, Johnny. Put your arm around him,” Mom instructs the oldest boy to help. Johnny is expected to comfort his brother in order to create a photo-worthy pose.

The camera flashes.

An eleven-year-old boy hugs his younger sister tightly to restrain her on his lap. She lets out a shrill scream.

“Everybody smile!” the photographer says.

Both hands clutch big brother’s shirt. She sees a furry leg and screams again.

The camera flashes.

“Lean in closer,” Mom says. She wants her kids right next to the Easter Bunny for the picture.

The camera flashes again.

“Perfect! That’s a good one.” Mom is happy.

The camera flashes stop.

The Easter Bunny is frightening even when he is nice to kids, offering hugs and high fives. A little boy stares at the bunny’s face without saying a word. “Not yet,” Mom instructs the photographer. “I’m going to jump out if I can.” She is holding her son in her lap to keep him calm and camera ready while creating her escape plan.

“That’s a big carrot. Do you see this? Wanna give him a carrot?” Mom picks up a plastic prop. He nods, wiping tears from his eyes.
“Okay, sit on his lap just for a minute.” She puts him on the Easter Bunny’s lap and steps back.

The photographer is ready and the camera flashes twice, but the little boy melts down, crying so hard his nose runs down the front of his dress shirt. Mom tries to hand him the carrot, but he pushes it away. He wants her.

“I got two right before the cry,” the photographer says.

“Oh good!” Mom says. She meets her son’s outstretched arms, sweeping him off the bunny’s lap into a big hug, and brings him with her to view the images on the photographer’s computer screen.

**Viewing Bunny Photos as a Family**

Families view their photograph immediately, which allows me to observe this ritual performance at the Photo Hut. I watch Mom and Dad bend down behind the photography equipment to scrutinize their options on the computer monitor, leaving their son on the Easter Bunny’s lap. As soon as he loses sight of his parents, he bursts into tears. The bunny tries bouncing the baby on his knee and even offers a lollipop bribe, but a stranger cannot console him. Not even with candy. The Easter Bunny must wait helplessly for Mom to come back for her baby.

She takes her time choosing a photograph to purchase.

Viewing photographs occurs twice: First, families look through digital images presented on a computer screen before deciding on a photo to purchase, and then after paying they view the same image again only this time it is in print. In this section, I deconstruct ritual viewing practices in order to study how families learn to appreciate photo-making and regard their family photographs as sacred material objects. Embracing the communicative function of media technologies, which Van Dijck (2007) describes as not only creating personal memories but also giving meaning to one’s past and present (p. 171), I describe why mediated representation matters. In addition, I show how different
visual/material displays shape the ways families interact with their photographs and use these images to communicate with one another.

Mom bends down beside Grandma to scrutinize her daughter’s photos. “Can I see the other one again? Sorry,” she says.

“That’s okay,” the photographer replies. She presses keyboard buttons to move back and forth, so the two women can compare poses. “Here’s 1, and 2, and then…”

“Oh, I like *that* one,” Mom stops the photographer at number two. Blue drool runs down the lollipop stick in her daughter’s mouth. Dripping from her chin, it soaks into her dress, but Mom does nothing, because keeping her clothes clean is no longer so important.

“She looks so cute,” Grandma gushes, staring at the images displayed on the computer.

Another family stands together staring at the computer screen.

“Who is that handsome boy?” Dad asks. “Look at that!” he points to the digital image. “What a great smile. Good job, Buddy.” He puts his hand on the little boy’s shoulder and lovingly squeezes. He is clearly proud of this photograph and his son’s performance.

No tears. No screams. His son appears as happy as Dad imagined he should.

Evaluating and judging, and eventually selecting and purchasing preferred photographs constructs family “as myth” (Carter, 2007, p. 561). This selection process is shaped by family power dynamics, which secure a child’s place in the family narrated by adults, specifically by her/his mother. Furthermore, through ritual viewing practices, mothers become curators of family memory performing the emotional work of selecting and preserving the family image in an archive that reflects how family *should* be represented (Holland, 2001; Tinkler, 2008).

According to one mother, mediated technologies ease this burden.
I overhear her talking with the photographer after her children pose with the Easter Bunny. “It was so hard when they were young. We bought it and that was it. But now I get to see all the photos and choose – it’s so nice.”

She appreciates the digital technology, which enables her to purchase the best picture. “Now they’re going to print it,” she says, explaining the ritual to her son. A worker positions the print in a protective envelope so it remains visible, and carefully hands it to Mom who immediately shows her kids. I watch as the entire family gathers around for a second viewing of the same image.

Another family huddles around their printed photograph near the EXIT sign.

Mom cradles her son in her arms, and they admire it together. “Aww, look at you,” she says, pointing to the picture.

Dad peers over her shoulder. “That’s good. He moved his hand in one and messed it up. Then in another one he wasn’t looking,” he says, sharing stories about what is not pictured. During the shoot, he stayed behind the photographer, so he could view the images as they popped up on the computer monitor.

Updates to technology continue to shape this annual family photo-making ritual at the Photo Hut; however, changing practices are taken for granted. With new technological inventions immediate viewing is made possible, which heightens pressures to control family memory and to produce an ideal representation. “How does it look?” is now a common refrain between the photographer and family members staring at a screen between flashes.

I stand with the photographer as the next dad in line pays for a photo package, and watch him bring the print to his wife. When she sees it, she frowns. “I wish the bunny was smiling,” she tells him. She looks at the print as though it no longer matches the image she picked out just minutes before from a display on the computer screen. Parents do not hesitate to express their
disappointments and harsh evaluations when what they see on the screen does not meet their expectations.

Another couple stops right outside of the Photo Hut entrance. Mom removes the photograph from its envelope and shows it to Dad. He holds it for two seconds without comment and then hands it back to her. Neither of them seems happy with the picture, even though they selected it moments before from a line up on the photographer’s computer. The value of a family photograph is not inherent. Family members must learn to appreciate it.

“I want to see! Mom! Mom, give me the picture!” their son hops up and down, reaching for the photo in his mom’s hand.

“Don’t bend it! It’s expensive,” Dad snaps.

Mom shakes her head. “Not right now. This is the only copy,” she tells him.

While most families take the print out of its protective envelope before leaving the Photo Hut in order to view it as a family, children are rarely allowed to touch the photo. Although these photographs are accessible by phone, email, and Shutterfly account, parents handle their print as if it cannot be duplicated. Additionally, parents engage in conversations about the visual display of family by pointing and gesturing (i.e. “Who is that? That’s you, do you see?”), sharing stories about the picture and who is pictured, and reenacting performances of its production. How parents hold, touch, and interact with their photo teaches children the importance of this material object.

Photographs with the Easter Bunny are viewed and experienced differently when mothers crouch over a computer screen with a hand shielding the sun’s glare than when family members stand side by side with the tangible object in mom’s hand. Togetherness is constituted by how this photo is seen (Rose, 2004, p. 557). Therefore, through communication, family is constructed and thus, a family photo becomes a sacred, material/visual part of this process.
I overhear a woman ask her friend to show her the print. “I didn’t get to see it!” she says. Her friend indulges her.

“Ohh, that looks good,” she smiles. Both of them laugh as they point to the baby’s expression, and then turn the photo, so he can see – but not touch – it, too.

Another couple admires their printed photograph, but their kids do not appear interested.

“Come look at your photo!” Mom calls to their daughter. The little girl wanders over, stares at the photo, and then walks away without saying anything. She prefers to observe a bird in the courtyard instead of staring at her picture with the Easter Bunny. Mom frowns.

“Grandma will like this,” Dad says, holding the picture in his hand. Viewing it as a gift, he describes this photograph as a valuable means to produce family relationships, and include Grandma in their Easter celebration. Photographic viewing practices represent, establish and maintain relationships between people, and belonging is performed through the use of photographs exchanged or gifted as a mode of communication (Tinkler, 2008, p. 261). Family members show and tell how to interact with family photographs (i.e. “Be gentle,” “Look, don’t touch,”), treating images as though they are irreplaceable possessions, and teaching each other to value these material/visual objects and what they represent.

“Aww!” one of the workers says as she hands a printed photograph to Mom who holds it up and points, showing her little boy. “You’re so cute!” Mom tells him. She laughs when he reaches for it and slides it back into the envelope before hiding it in her purse, away from his sticky fingers.

“Last year he was terrified, but this year he did great!” she says, giving the Easter Bunny two thumbs up. “Do you remember us from last year? I’ve calmed down a lot, and so has he. We still have your picture up from last year, and we’re going home to replace it with this one. We’ll come back and do it every year,” she tells the bunny before waving goodbye.
Discussion

The annual Easter Bunny photo ritual produces an iconic visual artifact used to represent a happy childhood, and as a result, also a happy family. As a result, the pressures to create a ‘good enough’ photograph, and the resources dedicated to that aim, can be observed in interactions among family members at the Photo Hut. Parents tune out their children’s fears in the present for the (potential) joy of viewing photographs as a family and preserving select visions of family life for the future. In this ethnographic study, I addressed the practices involved in the production of such an iconic family image. By shifting focus from what is shown in a photograph to what happens between family members participating in this ritual, I learned to pay attention to the mundane practices of family photo-making, which occur before and behind the camera. I described the performances beyond the photo frame (i.e. bribes used to coax children to smile, Port-a-cool machine maintenance, and emotional work involved in photo-making as crying kids fight against it).

Family members learn how to appreciate what a photograph represents through ongoing communication practices. Parents explain the value of family photographs to children by participating in this photo-making ritual. By showing and telling kids how to prepare, pose, view and interact with photographs, parents treat these material objects as though they are irreplaceable possessions, and set aesthetic and social norms for how (young) family members should be represented. In addition, sharing photographs with others (i.e. grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins) makes waiting in line and feeling afraid ‘worth it’ to purchase a photograph, print it, and send it to family.

Observing the annual Easter Bunny photo-making ritual, I witnessed the production – preparing, posing, resisting, selecting, purchasing, and viewing – of a photograph that families create to remember. Iconic representations of family life include images with the Easter Bunny, a mythical character holding a mundane pose with family members juxtaposed nearby. How families talk about
their Easter Bunny photographs and tell stories from “last year,” how they dress and instruct poses, how they scrutinize over which image to purchase, and then carefully touch the photo itself as if it is a sacred object indicates the significance of this photo-making ritual. Year after year, family memory is constructed around this annual photo-making ritual, and the Easter Bunny’s presence in these photos never changes. He becomes a familiar icon incorporated in family imagery, which is juxtaposed with children who continue to grow and change.

In this chapter, I showed how families choose to perform for the camera and communicate about their photographs. I interpret these images, and the family efforts and resources that go into producing them each year, as a form of communication in everyday life. My ethnographic approach examines the context and communication rituals, which constitute family photographs with the Easter Bunny. By questioning how photographs are created, why and for whom photos are taken, and what photo-making rituals reveal about being a family, I construct a deeper understanding and appreciation for the complexities of visual communication practices in family life.
CHAPTER FIVE:

“WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU DIVORCE?”:

RENEGOTIATING PHOTO-MAKING RITUALS

For families experiencing divorce, sharing stories and photographs becomes increasingly difficult. A divorced family does not present the popular image of a mother, father, and their biological children, and “when a family does not fit the canonical model, words like abnormal or dysfunctional are often applied” (italics in original, Jago, 1996, p. 498). Therefore, divorced families are expected to construct an account of what happened and why.

When a marriage ends, social expectations shape what family roles and relationships are deemed acceptable. For example, the classical perspective set the standard for a healthy divorce based on the emotional and physical separation between former spouses (Kressel, Lopez-Morillas, Weinglass, & Deutsch, 1978, cited in Graham, 2003). However, more recent research suggests maintaining this friendship can be beneficial for families, specifically for a couple’s children (Graham, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Changing family definitions reflect new meanings of “togetherness” and reshape expectations for how family members participate in photo-making. In this chapter, I ask how family photo-making rituals might contribute to renegotiating co-parenting relationships following a divorce.

Rather than study divorce as a deficiency in families, Riessman (1990) explores how men and women talk about their divorces and construct positive meaning out of loss. Her research embraces an interpretive understanding of the process through which individuals make sense of their past marriages in their present lives. According to Selater (1997), coming to terms with divorce is a complex process, which involves “tension between past and present, between the marriage and the
divorce, between the self-that-was and the self-that-now-is” (p. 427). Therefore, (re)creating displays and, (re)telling stories about family photographs that meet the needs of multiple family members experiencing divorce can be complicated.

The family home – a domestic space where we expect to see family photo displays – provides a context for this gendered labor. Family photography is part of what Munro and Madigan (1999) call “women’s traditional responsibility for domestic order” (p. 114). Furthermore, Drazin and Frohlich (2007) identify the woman of the house as the most common curator, consuming and framing family photographs. Similar to family “stories, rituals, traditions, icons, and sayings – the lore of family and family culture itself” (Stone, 1988, p. 19) – photographs also seem to be preserved and promulgated primarily by women. While shared belongings, homes, and personal lives can be separated after marriage, children present a continuous connection to this past relationship; therefore, motherhood creates a unique circumstance for women narrating experiences of divorce. The challenge for mothers is weaving a narrative between past experiences with an ex-husband, and her children’s present relationship with their father.

Entering 'the field' of mothers’ homes, this chapter builds on my conversations with six mothers about their rituals of “passing down” photographs and the stories they embody and elicit. I study how these mothers choose to curate family photographs in their homes, and how these choices shape a narrative inheritance for their children following divorce. In the succeeding literature review, I first explain the gendered responsibility of photo-making in family life. Next, I describe how meanings attributed to family photos are made and remade through embodied, ritual practices of family memory. Finally, I emphasize the emotional work involved in performing these family photo-making rituals.

**Doing Family Photo-making: A Mother’s Role and Responsibility**

By the end of the 19th century Kodak turned attention to family-oriented production and
consumption (Munir & Phillips, 2005, p. 1677), encouraging mothers to be efficient and meticulous archivists of family life (Hirsch, 1997). Conventional cultural narratives of motherhood compel women to participate by taking photographs of their young children (Titus, 1976; Rose, 2004), and visually documenting their growth and experiences over time. Maintaining a family’s photographic record requires conscious effort—as the last chapter demonstrated with regards to Easter Bunny photos—practicing smiles, attending to dress and appearance, bringing equipment, and arranging poses. Once photographs are created, mothers feel obliged to do a lot with them and these photo-making practices demand time (Rose, 2004).

In her study of American holidays and leisure, Feller (2008) describes scrapbooking as “the most popular of feminine hobbies…[to transform] a basic photo album into an elaborate production” (p. 183). Family photography emerges through the choices these women make. Goodell and Seiter (2011) analyze the construction of family discourse through scrapbooking—a ritual activity, which they note is often performed by women—to understand how values and relationships are visually expressed in doing family.

Crafting a Narrative Inheritance

Acting as “architect[s] of memory” (Drazin & Frohlich, 2007, p. 64), mothers construct stories about family photographs, which they produce, care for, and eventually pass on to future generations. Finch (2007) defines the concept of display as a process “by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute ‘doing family things’ and thereby confirm that these relationships are ‘family’ relationships” (p. 67). Mothers use family photo displays to teach young children “who [is] who in the family” (Rose, 2004, p. 556). Visual/material displays, such as albums and wall hangings, are used to craft a narrative inheritance and reproduce family identity through ongoing communication about/around photographs.
According to Rose (2004), the performance of family extends beyond the mere snapping of shared moments. In her study of fourteen white, middle-class mothers, she finds ‘togetherness’ is important in the genre of family photography and this is communicated in several ways: Through the spatial proximity of family members pictured in photos, how these photos are displayed, and how they are audienced (p. 555). “Family photographs cannot be understood through their visual content alone” (Rose, 2012, p. 71); therefore, she encourages further investigation of the embodied practices contributing to family togetherness, and I attend to these practices in this study.

**Choreographing Photo-making Practices**

Tending to family photographs is part of the everyday routines of domestic labor performed by mothers (Rose, 2010). The materiality of family photographs varies – in a shoebox, album, frame, cell phone, computer hard drive – which, in turn, evokes different practices and performances integral to the construction of meaning (Edwards, 2002). Mothers express how they feel about their family photographs through embodied viewing practices – gently touching, holding, and caressing these sacred objects as if they are family members in need of care. Choices regarding where photographs are kept, how they look, and who can look at them reflect these embodied practices.

Although family imagery itself is banal, showing celebrated rituals: birthdays, holidays, weddings, graduations, and vacations, Rose (2004) asserts “family photos – photos taken by family members, of family members, for viewing mostly by family members – are indeed extraordinarily important, emotionally resonant objects” (p. 549). Especially following divorce, mothers may remain responsible for producing and sorting photographs, sharing stories, and curating memory for a family including ex-partners and extending between households. This labor-intensive emotional work is often masked as a hobby or leisure activity; however, in this chapter, I identify the emotional investment mothers make in maintaining family photo displays and archives as a significant contribution to these rituals.
Embracing Emotional Work

Photo-making rituals in divorced families are sustained in part by the taken for granted emotional work of mothers. This emotional work involves not only a mother’s feelings as a woman experiencing divorce, but also, and often more importantly, attending to and feeling the feelings of her children as part of her own (Steinberg & Figart, 1999, p. 11). My approach to family photo-making research embraces the emotions entangled with dynamic, embodied experiences of remembering.

Applying Van Dijck’s (2007) mediated memories as “a conceptual tool for the analysis of dynamic, continuously changing memory artifacts,” I study the emotional and relational acts of memory, which constitute family photo-making (p. 23). My ethnographic methodology focuses critical reflection on relationships, both among family members and with photo objects, rather than texts produced for research (Rose, 1990). I understand family photographs are not fixed in time; therefore, in this chapter I appreciate the difficulty of viewing old photographs, which portray a version of family not yet changed by divorce. “The pastness of a photo is sometimes a reason why they move us” (Tinkler, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, when looking at family photos with participants, it is impossible to predict how they will feel. Barthes (2010) describes this as a photograph’s punctum, a poignant accident – a lightning-like and intense detail – that pricks a viewer and arrests her gaze.

Employing photo elicitation (Harper, 2002; Wilton, 2011), I integrate photographs within interviews in order to understand how mothers’ photo-making rituals make these family photos meaningful.

Methods of Studying Family Photo-making at Home

Employing an ethnographic approach, I explore how mothers engage, stage and view family photographs in the personal, domestic space of home. Being there to audience these photo displays affects what I see, experience, describe and interpret. In this chapter I use family photos to explore
embodied practices and rituals of (re)constructing what it means to be family following divorce. Studying family photo-making in this way emphasizes that photos do not determine their own interpretation, but require interpretation, resulting in many possibilities to be explored.

**Entering the Field**

In October 2012, I used a snowball sampling method to invite colleagues, neighbors, friends and family members to participate in a pilot study (see Noy, 2008a). My initial recruitment criteria for this study invited any adult who self-identifies as a family member who experienced divorce (i.e. father, mother, child) to participate. In a recruitment announcement shared via social media and email message in late October, I stated, “If you are an adult who has experienced divorce in your family and you are interested in participating, I would love to hear from you.” However, after conducting my first interview with Shira, a divorced mother, I learned how she felt obligated to provide her children with memories through intentional poses and displays of family photographs. She also described how the tasks of sorting through and separating photos in her family’s archive became her responsibility following divorce. Our conversation inspired me to narrow my focus to study mothers specifically in order to better understand photo-making rituals in divorced families.

The resulting sample for this study included six, white, middle class women who self-identified as divorced mothers. They had an average of three children, and had legally divorced a partner(s) anywhere between 3 – 20 years before our interview. My relationship to these women varied from meeting for the first time to reuniting with family friends to interviewing my own mother.

**Data Collection**

I met with these women from October 2012 to September 2014 in the family homes of participants in Tampa, Florida (within close proximity to University of South Florida) and East
Lansing, Michigan (within close proximity to my own family homes). In total, I conducted 7 hours of interviews and participant observation resulting in 200 double-spaced pages of transcriptions and field notes, and 27 single-spaced pages of analytical memos.

I engaged in individual face-to-face, photo elicitation interviews with these six women to explore how they use family photos to (re)construct what it means to be family. Each interview began with a domestic tour of family photo displays allowing participants to point out photos and narrate their own experiences (Harper, 2002). In this way, I used existing family photos selected by participants to start our conversations, and evoke feelings, stories, and questions. In addition, I asked participants to choose one photograph to represent their family, which I could later display in my published research.

**Domestic photo tour.** I visited each mother’s home and observed her family photo displays in public domestic spaces (i.e. kitchen, living room, foyer) and private rooms (i.e. mother’s bedroom, children’s bedrooms, basement storage) (Chalfen, 1987; Halle, 1987; Musello, 1980). Conducting interviews at home allowed me to witness mothers interacting with their family photos – picking up frames, touching faces, and pointing out visual details – while telling me stories about the people pictured or the objects themselves (Rose, 2004). I used photo displays to introduce reflexivity by creating the discursive space for mothers to revise and reframe past struggles in the context of the changes that have occurred in their families (Twine, 2006, p. 507). I asked questions about specific photographs including their ex-husbands, and if/where/why these photos were displayed. I also wrote field notes including thick descriptions of each home, the photos mothers shared with me, and how they handled them.

**Photo elicitation.** Employing photo elicitation in this study, I show how seemingly mundane photos can provide a wealth of information and possibilities regardless of their aesthetic
quality (Harper, 2002). The mothers I interviewed create stories using photos, sharing not only what they see, but also what they feel (Pink, 2013).

Divorce can be a deeply personal, sensitive topic, so I approached my interviews accordingly, and allowed mothers to guide the discussion. Mothers shared stories about their personal anger toward ex-husbands and how these feelings influenced the ways they view family photos. We also discussed how family photo displays changed after a marriage ended, and why particular family photos were stored “for the kids.” I listened to mothers tell their stories to learn how they integrate a shared past into visions of their future.

Taking an ethnographic approach encourages me to reflect on my own emotional responses to mothers’ photographs, and my role as a researcher in co-constructing these interviews. My identity as a child of divorce creates an opening for understanding the stories, social relationships, and processes within which family photos are embedded (Bresnahan & Keller, 2016), and shapes how mothers in this study respond to me. I noted the questions mothers asked (i.e. “I wonder how many divorced families still take pictures together for special occasions?”), the topics they believed were significant (i.e. keeping wedding albums, circulating photos between households), and the types of displays they showed me (i.e. family albums, photos hung on the refrigerator). I integrated their questions and ideas in my next interview(s) and the resulting protocol is a collaborative effort generated in conversation with these women.

All six interviews were audio recorded, and later transcribed. I used pseudonyms in storing digital files for this research and throughout my analysis in efforts to ensure all interview data remains confidential.

Photographs. During my interviews, I talked with mothers about their family photographs. Through my very first experiences engaging in photo elicitation, I learned family photos were central to my interviews, and I wanted to include these images – with their permission – within my analysis.
Most importantly, I wanted participants – not the Institutional Review Board – to be able to decide what photos I could use and how (i.e. Should I alter/blur any particular family members for anonymity?). The biggest challenge I faced in integrating family photos in my visual research was persuading the IRB to allow me to use identifiable photographs. The Vice Chair of IRB responded to my initial application stating “I assume that the family photographs would include images of people other than the participant. While gaining the participant's permission to reproduce their image in a journal publication would be appropriate, the participant cannot provide permission for you to publish the images of the other individuals in the photographs.”

The issue of confidentiality regarding whether or not a photographer’s consent is sufficient for photos featuring other family members has been explored in previous research using visual methods. Meo (2010) implies that a photographer’s consent is enough, “provided that the specific environment is anonymised so that the location cannot be pinpointed, and provided that the image itself is not ‘potentially damaging’ because of immodest content” (p. 154, see Pain, 2012 for an extensive literature review evaluating the choice and use of visual research methods). In addition to a consent form for the interview, each woman participating in this study signed a photo release form approved by the IRB at the University of South Florida permitting me to use photos of her family photos in my published research. I told participants they could choose not to share a photograph in this study if they were concerned with matters of confidentiality, violating family expectations of privacy, and/or if they preferred their family photos not be reprinted.

In this study, mothers selected the photograph(s) and granted permission for their use. However, conducting this research was a learning process for me, and consequently, I did not ask to snap photos of every mothers’ photographs, particularly during my first few interviews. In addition, my approach to photographing changed as I gained experience interviewing mothers and asking questions about divorce. My photo-making became more ethnographic and I made an effort to
include the interaction between mothers and their photo displays in my images. The best photographs I created show the kinds of displays I looked at in participants’ homes, and create a bridge between their stories and readers’ interpretations in a way that textual descriptions alone would struggle to achieve (Meo, 2010).

Obtaining consent by collecting signatures from all family members pictured in each photograph, as IRB requested, posed a difficult challenge, because many of the family members pictured no longer lived with their mother, so I needed to contact them (or have their mother contact them) by phone or email to obtain a signature. All consent and release forms were received from participants and their family members for this study.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Weaving together my conversations with six divorced mothers, I show the complexities, ambiguities, and possibilities for understanding family photo-making rituals following divorce. First, I describe how photographs are used to create a visual presence for a non-residential parent. Next, I explain how mothers craft a narrative inheritance by engaging with photographs in relational acts of memory. Finally, I emphasize the emotional work mothers engage in as curators of family photo displays and archives.

**Visual Presence**

Using photographs, mothers construct a separate togetherness, which reflects changing family definitions following divorce. In this section, I show how mothers purposefully display photos for their children in order to create a visual presence for a father absent from their homes. Here I share stories from three mothers, which illustrate the ongoing presence of an ex-husband/father in family life through photo-making rituals.

***

91
Standing on the front stoop, the silver letters of “The Adler Family” nameplate shine under a dimly lit porch light. I check, once again, that I have everything I need for my interview. Piled in the bottom of my handbag are a notebook, a pen, an extra pen, and a short list of questions I emailed to Mrs. Adler earlier this week. She invited me to her home to see her family photo displays, but these images will not speak for themselves.

I consult my cell phone for the time and as promised, I knock promptly at 7:30 p.m.

A loud bark and the clacking of nails against a hardwood floor tell me someone knows I’m here. I see the wagging tail of a white and grey miniature rat terrier jumping just high enough for her pointed ears to greet me through the window.

“Looks like we have a visitor, Peaches,” I hear Mrs. Adler say.

I breathe in deeply, nervous to talk to this friendly stranger about her divorce. Four years after my parents’ unexpectedly ended their twenty-year marriage, I still long to hear how others cope with change in family life.

The door opens.

“I hope you don’t mind dogs,” she smiles, pulling Peaches gently by the collar to give me room to step inside.

“No, I don’t mind at all. She’s adorable,” I assure her, bending low enough to scratch behind a pointy white ear.

“I’m Krystal,” I say, shaking Mrs. Adler’s hand.

“It’s nice to meet you. Please call me Shira,” she smiles.

“You have a beautiful home,” I tell her, admiring the family photos decorating the hearth of a small redbrick fireplace. The surrounding white walls showcase the life she shares with her family. Large, elaborate frames hang side-by-side with wallet-sized snapshots.

“Thank you.”
I take note of her end tables, which are covered in an overwhelming number of family photographs, yet still appear neat and orderly. Every photograph seems to have its place.

“I can see that family photos are important to you,” I say, trying to ease us into the interview.

“Yes, I was going to show you some of the photos in the hallway,” she says, leading Peaches and I through the house. Her family photo trail continues from the living room down a long, narrow hallway.

Peering around the corner, I find hundreds of unfamiliar faces staring back at me. Shira explains that to my left are photos of her family, including her daughter and son from previous marriages, while on the right is her husband Adam’s family, including his parents and his son. There is a clear distinction between his side and hers.

“This is Adam’s son Noah when he was young.” I nod and smile as if I am being introduced for the first time to a six-year old version of her stepson. “Now he’s twenty-six, so obviously very young here,” she laughs.

“Here he is again,” she points, and then turns to the wall to our left. “And this is my son on his Bar Mitzvah and here is my daughter’s wedding. And then this is my mother with all of her bridesmaids. And there’s my father in that one. This might be of interest to you. I noticed actually that I have a picture of my ex-husband here.” She points to a photo collage enclosed by a worn wooden frame.

I search the pictures for him, but he doesn’t stand out.

“Right here. That’s him, my ex-husband.” She directs my attention to a small photo of three people in a park. Lying flat on his back, a shaded figure rests at the bottom of the picture. A tree looms large in the background and casts a shadow over him. His arms rest behind his head, and a hat covers his face. His jeans stretch over bent knees, and he appears relaxed and happy, shaded
from the summer’s sun. Shira is pictured beside him, younger then, sitting in the grass. She looks lovingly at her toddler who stands near his father’s feet, wearing nothing but a diaper and a smile.

“Even though my ex is here, you don’t really see him. He’s lying down and shadowed, and I think this is a cute picture of my son when he was a baby.” Her explanation makes sense, but while she sees her son in this photo, I stare intently at her ex. He is the surprise – the picture’s punctum – with the power of expansion. Somehow while remaining a detail, his image fills the whole picture (Barthes, 2010). She’s living with her new husband, and her ex-husband is pictured here. This photograph isn’t hidden in a box in the basement, or safely stored under socks in a dresser drawer – it is on display. I expected Shira to systematically leave him out of her family’s photos, eliminating his presence in her “complete” record of family life (Chalfen, 1987), yet her ex-husband’s image still lingers in the background of an old family photo, and she seems comfortable with his presence preserved in her hallway and in the stories she tells. Seeing this photo, I realize I bring my own experiences, concerns, and questions to others’ family photos, and I need to address my own taken-for-granted assumptions. With our remaining time together, I try to create a reflexive space to discuss the meanings attached to her family photos following divorce (Twine, 2006).

“I guess I left it hanging here, because my daughter put this together when we were still married,” she explains, gently tracing her fingertips along the edges of the frame. “So there is a photo of my ex on display, even though, it’s not a big picture. He’s kind of like a phantom. I did actually take out some photos that had him more prominently displayed,” she admits.

“But I left this one where he was.”

Shira describes this photograph as a visual, material, and symbolic resource for memory work. She points out the figure of her ex-husband in the image, and then touches the object as she looks at him. This “phantom” is both physically present in her home and also symbolically represented in her stories. “Photos carry a part of the person they picture, and in that sense they –
the photo and the person – are real, beyond representation” (Rose, 2004, p. 560). Shira left *this* photograph where *he* was, which emphasizes how she interprets his embodiment and subjectivity in her home. She displays photos of her ex-husband even after divorce, inviting her children to feel their father’s presence in their lives.

***

Lindsay tells a personal story demonstrating how important the visual presence of a parent can be for a child of divorce. At age seven, her son Tommy spent seven weeks at his dad’s house in the summer. According to her custody schedule, he was supposed to stay with his dad for two weeks at a time and return to her home for weekends in between.

Tommy packed his clothes, his toys, and his favorite blanket for the trip. When his mom asked if he is ready to leave, he wanted to pack one more thing: a picture of his mom squeezed between him and his older sister Jessa.

“He wanted a piece of me to take with him,” Lindsay says. “So I printed it on computer paper and rolled it into a cleaned out peanut butter jar so he could see it, and take it with him, and it wouldn’t break. Jessa said he would sleep with it when he was at his father’s house. And he used it for three summers in a row! He loved that.”

Lindsay describes feeling comforted that this photograph was by her son’s side when she couldn’t be there with him. Now Tommy is 13 years old, and she no longer has the peanut butter jar he used to carry with him, but she still has their family photo saved to her computer.

After our interview she sends me an email and attaches the image (Figure 4).
After receiving my email two weeks ago, Grace welcomed me into her home and led me on a tour of her family photo displays, so I could ask questions. Now, she sits in the chair across from me.

“Patrick, are you listening?” she calls to her son from the living room.

“No,” he yells back. I smile at his witty reply.

The legs of a wood chair scrape against the linoleum floor in the dining room, and I wait to see if Patrick will join us. I sent Grace a list of interview questions before our meeting to help her prepare for our conversation, but I wasn’t expecting Patrick to discuss family photographs with us. Grace wasn’t either. She purposefully scheduled our interview for a day and time her teenaged son would be out with her ex-husband. Unfortunately Patrick’s dad is running late, and I wonder if she feels uncomfortable talking about her past divorces in front of her son.

“I’m going to shower,” Patrick says, and disappears up the stairs. I am eager to ask Grace a question I have been holding back.
“Have you taken a picture with your ex-husband after your divorce, because Patrick wanted it?”

She describes a recent photo taken at Patrick’s graduation party where they both “jumped in,” but when we hear the bathroom door open her voice lowers to a whisper and she leans in with hunched shoulders. It is obvious this is not a story she wants to share with her son.

Our conversation falls silent as Patrick walks back down the stairs to grab clothes from a basket in the hallway. He doesn’t seem to notice. Grace’s volume rises and falls in tandem with his presence.

When he is out of sight, she motions toward the stairs. I have to read her lips to get the message: I don’t want him to hear.

“Dad’s here,” Patrick yells. “I’ll be home after dinner.”

“Ok, honey. Have fun!” Grace calls back. When the front door closes she sits back into her chair and puts her feet up ready to continue our conversation.

“For Patrick’s graduation party, he actually had a big say in the pictures. His sister and her friend made a photo display board for him, but my daughter’s friend didn’t know anybody in the pictures. So she just arranged them as they fit in terms of size, not significance. He tore apart the entire thing just an hour before his party, and made sure it displayed what he wanted,” Grace says.

“Wow! Really?”

“Yes and it was really neat for me to see what mattered to him. He took pictures out and put others in. He was specific about who be wanted on the board, and he made sure there were an equal number of pictures of him with his father and with me.”

For Tommy, these photographs of his parents became literal presences to which he could point and reference as symbols of a shared history (Banks, 2001; Bell & Bell, 2012). The family as a
group creates a sense of belonging through patterns of visual representation; therefore, how these photos were arranged and displayed mattered to him.

“Mothers have mentioned choosing the same number of photos to represent each kid, but I hadn’t thought about a child doing it, too,” I say.

“He sure did. There are two photos of each of us on his board. I’m glad he felt comfortable enough to change the display, and that he had pictures to draw from.”

I nod, appreciating that her photo collection includes her ex-husband, not for her, but for Patrick. Grace proudly preserves an archive, which includes images of her ex-husband, so her son can include his father in his own family photo displays. As the custodian of family history (Tinkler, 2008; Rose, 2003), she uses photographs to show family relationships are working (Finch, 2007), and although *she* does not display these photos, she encourages her son to do so.

***

All six mothers I interviewed continue to curate family memory following their divorces. They describe how important it is for their kids to see their father in family photographs. The visual quality of these photographs is not significant, but rather what matters is *who* is shown. Shira’s “phantom” in the hallway, Lindsay’s peanut butter jar, and Grace’s photo archive represent how mothers use photographs as objects embedded in family photo-making rituals in order to (re)negotiate a visual presence for an absent family member. Family photographs prompt silences and storytelling, possibilities for mothers to forget and children to remember. In addition to creating different kinds of family photo displays, these women maintain archives to situate themselves in the past and present, reshaping ideas of self and family in the course of living (Van Dijck, 2007, p. 25).

**Curating Family Photos for Future Remembering**

Family photos are unique anchors for memory work. These photos do not simply show a family’s past, it is what family members do with them – how they use photos to create their past in the
present (Kuhn, 1995, p. 16), which constructs family history. Through viewing practices family members become connected now (Van Dijck, 2007). Therefore, photo archives become rich visual resources for crafting a narrative inheritance used to (re)construct family identity.

In this section, I describe why two mothers, Ellie and Faye, decide to keep their wedding albums, and how relational acts of memory shape their present choices for archiving family photos.

***

After welcoming me into her home, Ellie and I start our conversation in her kitchen. She points to a line of nine photographs hung on the fridge (Figure 5). “These are our Christmas photos. They go from the time the kids were little all the way through to this year,” she says. Each photo shows her son Matt and daughter Ali dressed in matching Christmas outfits, and smiling in front of a decorated tree.

Figure 5. Ellie shows me her impressive family Christmas photo collection (left) and selects one photo (right) to represent and share how she views her family.

“Awww! She was so small when you started this.”

“Yeah, she was just three months old when the first photo was taken. Christmas is the one time of year that we actually do a family photo,” Ellie laughs. “I’ve made a point to continue doing it
since I’ve been divorced, too.” She gently touches the corner of a more recent photo. I notice the last three photographs include her and her new husband Robert posing with the kids.

“It’s funny, as Ali got older, well, she was three months here. Then here she’s one, two, three, four, six, seven, eight, and nine,” she points to each photograph and recites her daughter’s corresponding age. “There’s one year in between that I didn’t take a Christmas photo…

The year I got divorced.”

The missing photo represents a gap in the ritual she feels the need to explain.

“Change happens so quickly. That’s why I like to do this every year, so I can compare each photo to the year before. It’s not only a way of charting the kids’ growth, but also my own. That’s what you want to talk about, right? Divorce, change and family photos?” Ellie asks.

I nod, encouraging her to share.

“Alright, well, let’s start with the divorce. Here, we can sit down,” she says, leading me back to the living room. “I don’t want you to have to carry that computer in your arms while we talk.” My bulky piece of recording equipment reminds us both this home visit is an interview.

“Thanks,” I laugh, following her to the couch.

“My divorce took ten months from the time I filed to the time the divorce was final.”

Her voice quiets as she continues.

“I think mine was much worse than a lot of other people, but then again how could I compare? I don’t know that many divorced people…” she trails off. “Each situation is different. Sometimes divorce is something both people want, but either way, having kids makes it difficult.”

What is the story for a successful divorce? I wonder.

“I remember wanting to get rid of all my wedding photos afterwards, and Ali didn’t want me to. Really, had I not had children, I would have just burned everything. I didn’t want to keep any of the memories of the heartbreak. It was too hard to look at photos, and I didn’t want to keep the
wedding album as a reminder, but Ali wanted it. She was only four at the time! I kept the wedding photos for her, and my ring, and small mementos like an invitation I had. It’s all closed up in a box, and put away. I haven’t looked at it since.”

She keeps her wedding album in storage, so her daughter can have it when she grows up. She tells me about another box filled with photos of her children’s father, because she believes they might want to look through them one day.

“Are there photos you got rid of after your divorce?” I ask.

“I had a bunch of photos that I liked of myself, but he was in the picture, too, so instead of getting rid of them, I just cut him out. I have a whole pile of pictures that are lopsided or have holes that I’ll probably never put in an album, but I like how I looked, or the outfit I was wearing, so I kept them for me,” she smiles.

I imagine a bedroom floor covered in photo scraps and think about life’s messiness. Revising a life story is an art (Bateson, 1989), and cutting up photographs is one way to craft her own memories, separating herself from her ex-husband.

***

Sitting on a couch across from Faye in her living room, I smile at her suggestion that her three teenaged boys might never be interested in their parents’ wedding album. “I have the whole album upstairs. It’s beautiful, but I don’t know what I’m going to do with it, because the boys, well they’re boys,” she laughs. “I don’t know what they might want from it, but they’re certainly welcome to any picture. Who knows? There are pictures of Michael and I, of course, but there are a lot of our families, too,” she says. I note that she sees her wedding album differently than Ellie sees hers, although both mothers are holding onto these family photos for their kids.

“How do you think your sons feel about family photos now?”
“As a hassle,” she laughs. “They’re like, ‘Really Mom? We gotta do this again? How long do we have to stand here?’ But they did just have a really big family photo taken by Michael’s mom and dad out at the Country Club, and I saw it on Facebook, so I think photos might mean more to them than they let on. Someone else needs to organize it, and say this is what you have to do, and then they complain, but I don’t think they really feel that way.”

She describes doing family photo-making together, but emphasizes her caregiving role in constructing the image. Her sons rely on her to do the time-consuming work of arranging poses and producing photos.

“What did you do with your family photos when you divorced?” I ask.

“Well, photos were really important in our… whole… thing. It was a big deal for us. I’ll never forget going down in the crawlspace and getting out the bins of pictures, because we had a million…” she draws in a deep breath.

“…and then going through every single one that had his family. He had so many that I was like, ‘Here. Take these.’ I gave him everything and he made copies, and then gave back whatever were our shared pictures. His mom had given me all sorts of pictures, so I’ve got pictures of him all the way back to high school. And I still have them, because… I don’t know, for some reason I think women are more in charge of the pictures. That just tends to be the way it is.”

Tears fill the inside corners of her eyes.

Faye continues to perform the emotional work of photo-making for her family, including sorting photos, creating and changing displays, and making space in storage for photos of her ex-husband. While parents might share responsibilities for photographing family life, other photo practices – framing, sorting, displaying, and gifting photos – are strongly gendered (Rose, 2010, p. 57). Citing her own parents as an example, Faye describes this domestic labor as part of a woman’s role in the family.
“When my parents divorced, my dad had nothing. I don’t think he ever cared to have photographs,” she explains. “So, we started creating them for him. We did big family photos with him and his wife and the whole family for his 70th birthday. We try to help him and he proudly displays those photos in his house. With Mom, she has all the pictures, and we tend to be with her more, so we don’t feel that need.”

“What about family photos made before your divorce?” I ask, wondering about photos from her previous marriage, which exist outside storage boxes. “Another mother intentionally put a picture of her son’s father in his bedroom after her divorce, and I saw a picture of Will with his dad in his bedroom upstairs. Did you put it there or did he?”

“I think he did. It’s been eight years, and when we got divorced the boys were really young. And all three of them had pictures of Michael in their bedrooms. I had a ton of ‘em, and I think they just chose one and asked if they could put it up in their rooms, and I encouraged it.”

The photographs she describes seem to provide a visual and material presence for her sons, showing Dad’s still here, even if he’s not physically here. Making and displaying snapshots creates a symbolic family – a family of symbolic representations that both reflects and promotes a particular look at life and way of relating to one another (Chalfen, 1987).

“But there’s not a lot of the old family stuff around here now,” she says.

“Could I have that? Yes. Have I chosen to do that? No. But, now that you bring it up, it’s an interesting thought, and it might need to be embraced a bit more. When you ask specifically about what is displayed, that says a lot to me. You know? I mean that means a picture out on the piano or on the wall or a shelf. Keeping them in boxes is different. But, it’s so hard to pick, because every picture tells a story.”

Does she think I expect her to display more family photographs? I wonder.

Faye’s questions interrupt my own.
“Really it’s interesting to think, what do you do when you divorce? Do you just bury everything that was your past? Because it is hard, but at the same time, this is our family,” she says, pointing to a framed photo hanging on the living room wall.

“But that's our family too. So, it’s not like this is better. It’s just important that the kids know we are all their family. In some ways, nothing’s changed. The whole family’s still around them, and their parents have changed, but not really,” she laughs.

I nod, understanding that amid the uncertainty of learning how to relate to her former spouse and her current husband she feels her role as a parent remains consistent (Graham, 2003).

“At some point we’ll do family photos together. I think most people wait until a wedding to start, but it would be good to break the ice before then. I feel sorry for my sons’ future significant others. They’ll be like, ‘this is the first time all of the families are going to be together, are you kidding me?’ Like, ‘how’s your mom going to be? How’s your dad going to be?’ And my plan is to think about the grandkids. Because we will be doing family vacations together, and attending birthday parties, because the kids aren’t going to be able to separate these things and they’re not going to have time. I know, because I came from a divorced family. So it’s not going to work to divide this family from that one.”

I smile as she describes her vision of the future.

***

On the surface, the family photography functions primarily as a record … but recording is the very least of it. Why should a moment be recorded, if not for its evanescence? The photograph’s seizing of a moment always, even in that very moment, anticipates, assumes, loss. The record looks towards a future time when things will be different, anticipating a need to remember what will soon be past. – Kuhn, 1995, p. 49

Keeping family photographs is not simply a way to look back. Although the mothers I interviewed do not wish to be reminded of the past or pose in photographs as a family in the present,
they understand family photos represent relationships, which continue to unfold in the future. Therefore, they keep photos of their ex-husbands within family archives to show a “whole” picture or story of their children’s lives. In the following section, I describe the emotional work, which is made invisible in family life, yet expected of mothers who carry on these photo-making rituals following divorce.

**Investing Emotional Work**

Although nothing visually depicted in family photos shows the complexity of changing family roles and relationships – the tensions, ambiguities, or feelings of loss following divorce, family members redefine what it means to be family through photo-making rituals. Mothers make creative choices in how they look at and talk about family photos, composing new versions of the stories they tell themselves and to their children (Bateson, 1989). In this section, I explore how mothers construct memories in response and relationship to others (Kuhn, 2007), and reaffirm family definitions for their children by participating in photo-making rituals. First, I share a story about a photo I found of my father on display in my mother’s home. This example portrays one way mothers might negotiate a separate togetherness through existing family photos in order to manage emotions beyond a photo’s frame (Kuhn, 1995).

***

After interviewing Shira Adler, I carried her story home with me. I expected the family photographs my mom displayed to exclude my father. Surprisingly, a 4x3 photograph of Dad from Father’s Day circa 1999 still hung in her hallway. I waited months before mentioning this photograph to Mom. I wanted to know why she had Dad’s photo on display, so I asked her to join me in an interview.
“I purposely kept one picture of your father,” my mom tells me. “I got rid of everything else. I mean I packed it away. I knew it was important for you kids. But I kept that picture for a totally different reason than you would think.”

I wait for my mom to tell me why she kept it. Instead she mentions the size of the photo.

“It’s interesting that you noticed that it was even there. It’s very small.”

“It is small and it’s in an entire wall of photos,” I say, emphasizing its mystery.

“Uh huh, I know,” she laughs.

I hesitate before asking, “Um, but, what do you mean you kept it for a reason I wouldn’t think?”

We are both careful, and choosing words slowly. Our thinking interrupts speaking.

“Well...” she starts again, “My reason wasn’t for you guys, it was for me. I mean...” she whispers. The seconds stretch. “You want me to just tell you what I was thinking when I...?”

“Yeah, I want to know.”

“Well... there are things that you can’t know, because it just wouldn’t be right, and... and it’s hard to explain why I am the way I am and I feel the way I feel without sharing those things to... show you... It’s easier just to know it’s over, and we can move on.”

I don’t know what to say.

“Does that make sense?” she asks. “It takes time to get past everything... and if I shared with you what I went through it would only hurt you. And, that’s not worth it...” My mom chooses to suppress her own feelings in order to protect my relationship with her ex-husband, my dad.

“Sometimes it’s hard for me,” she admits. “When I look at pictures, I see something you don’t. I know something that happened before a picture was taken... but at the same time, I look at you kids and your dad in those pictures and I think... I did that. And-and that means something. It’s happy and sad at the same time.”
Sharing stories about family photographs creates memories, but boundaries exist between my mom and I in the things we say and things we cannot. My mom looks at a photograph of her ex-husband and believes she’s said everything she feels she can about his picture (see Caughlin, et al., 2000; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). My father is her phantom, a secret hidden in plain sight. However, she does not claim the right to define the memories evoked by this photo; instead, my mom encourages multiple interpretations to exist. She knows how she feels about my dad, but she has not lost touch with how I feel about him.

***

The mothers in my study imagine their children will desire family photos, which represent conventional family definitions showing both parents together in one picture even after divorce. This shapes how the women I interviewed plan to participate in family photo-making rituals, no matter how they feel.

When I ask Ellie if she would consider posing for a photograph now as a family, she asks me to clarify. “Do you mean with their father?” Choosing this language, she generates a frame for family that does not include their father.

“I would never want to do that. I still feel like cutting him out of pictures. But if the kids wanted it, I would do it. That would be the only reason,” Ellie tells me. By defining the purpose for the kids, she calls on her role as their mother to perform this photo-making ritual.

“I can imagine they might want that when they get married. And like I said, I kept some pictures just because the kids might want them. It’s part of their history, and he is their father,” she tells me. Although Ellie is willing to pose for future family photographs with her ex, she does not wish to produce or display these images. Our conversation drains me and I realize she does this emotional work every day with her kids, new partner, and ex-husband/co-parent as she maintains her family relationships. Viewing her photographs and listening to her stories, I make an effort to empathize
with her. I wonder if her personal sacrifices will be worth a few photos representing family harmony in her children's wedding albums.

When I ask Grace if she will pose for a photograph as a family in the future, she tells me she would never have a use for that picture. “At this point, in my eyes, there are two lives. Patrick has a father who loves him very much, and his dad’s family, and he has me who loves him very much, and my family. The pictures I have are of my family, my life, and I just wouldn’t see any reason for me,” Grace explains. “I wish I knew how my son Patrick feels about not having any pictures of his mom and dad together. You know, how he feels as a child going through it…”

I tell her how my own parents’ divorce led me to speak with her, and explain how my interpretations of our family’s photos have changed after talking with my mom.

“That would be a twist to your project. I've never asked my kids if they want pictures of their mom and dad together. Do you want that?”

“No, I don’t,” I say, shaking my head. “Another mom I met imagined her kids wanting traditional wedding pictures, and she considered posing with her ex-husband for portraits if her kids asked.”

“I'd definitely do a family photo for the bride and groom, but it's not a picture I would put in my house because that’s not my family anymore. That’s their family, but mine has changed.” Grace engages in the emotional work of performing photo-making rituals, which “arise out of the intersection of experiences and imaginings of the past” (Edwards, 2009, p. 136). She tells stories about her family photos being redefined through experiences of divorce, and how the visual “traces of former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, re-making, making sense of, [her self] – now” (Kuhn, 1995, p. 19).

“I had to remind my own mom of that. She had pictures of all five of her kids with their spouses displayed in one of her guest rooms. After we were divorced, she still kept our picture up
for five or six years. Finally, I said ‘I don’t care if there’s a bare spot on your wall, it’s time to bring it down.’”

“And did she take it down?”


We both laugh. Stories imbue photographs with meaning, and as she shares stories about her family photo displayed in her own mother’s home, I recognize that there is no single, linear narrative provided in this visual record (Freund and Thomson, 2011). I reflect on the work mothers must do to create, display, and archive family photographs in order to craft a narrative inheritance for the future. These photographs are embedded in multiple intersecting and ongoing narratives, and often meaningful to more than one person. I wonder about the conflicting memories particular photographs evoke for family members following divorce (Kuhn, 2007).

When I ask Shira if she would consider posing for a photograph now as a family, she describes family photos created after her divorce, which display her and her ex-husband together with their son.

“When my daughter graduated from high school, my ex-husband and I had a photographer do her senior photos, and because he was already there with his camera equipment, we all dressed up, too, and took a family photo with my ex-husband and I, my son, my daughter and the cat,” she smiles, remembering the event.

“It was a special photo. We had copies made and sent to family members, and I had it framed. When my current husband and I got married and moved in together my daughter was already out of the house so I took that photo and put it in my son’s room. There was a little spot between the bookshelf and the wall. He could see it from his bed but I couldn’t see it.”

Her voice softens as she explains where this particular family photo was displayed.
“I wanted him to have something he could see every day that would remind him of a time we were all together, especially because my ex and I were arguing about the joint custody schedule and sharing holidays. My son was only seven when his dad and I split up, and I worried he would lose the memory of us as a family. At the very least, that photo in his room reminded him of that. He never objected to it being there or said anything… it was just there. That was one photo I specifically held on to and put in a special place,” she says, and then quickly adds. “A place I didn’t have to look at it every day.”

I laugh, appreciating her honesty. Although the mothers I interview admit they do not want to pose for or look at particular photographs of family life, they are all willing to do the emotional work of family photo-making for their children’s future remembering.

Discussion

Perhaps memory offers a constantly changing perspective on the places and times through which we – individually and collectively – have been journeying? Perhaps it is only when we look back that we make a certain kind of sense of what we see?

- Kuhn (1995, p. 128)

Family photographs present an intersection of family identity, materiality and memory (Freund & Thomson, 2011). Photo displays and wedding albums are visual/material artifacts that provide opportunities for narrating “many possible pasts” of a family’s shared history (Harrison, 2002, p. 102). These mothers focus on their family’s future, which requires intensive emotional work. Although Ellie wants to throw her wedding photo album away, she keeps it in storage. Similarly, without asking her sons if they want their parents’ wedding photos, Faye still holds on to them for the kids. Faye’s sons want to know if it is okay with Mom before displaying photos of their father in their own bedrooms. She encourages her ex-husband’s photo to be put on display because she believes his presence is comforting for her kids. Still, this image represents tensions regarding who counts as family. Performing “Mom” requires these women to suppress their own stories and
feelings in order to curate mediated family memory for their children: producing photos and constructing displays, caring for and attending to archives, and participating in photo-making rituals even after divorce.

Divorce connects a sense of loss with a desire to share traces of family history with future generations. In her study of divorce narratives, Sclater (1997) explains the importance of participating in ‘re-storying’ and constructing personal meanings, first looking back to make sense of a marriage before moving forward to the future. Sclater’s ‘re-storying’ process complements Rose’s practice-oriented approach to family photography research. Rose (2004) explains how embodied practices of ‘seeing’ family photographs, which are often performed in tandem with storytelling, can communicate ‘togetherness.’ In this chapter, I showed how family photos are ‘re-storied’ and used by mothers in order to negotiate the complexities of ‘togetherness’ after divorce. “Pictures of former family members – a spouse or in-law – can easily be removed, and the remaining pictures arranged to reflect the new composition of the family” (Halle, 1987, p. 223). An ex-husband/father can be defined as apart from her family and a part of her family, depending on who is audiencing these photographs and if/how they are displayed. It is possible to eliminate material traces from a family’s visual record completely, and this absence could create gaps and silences in storytelling.

However, absences do not equate with unimportance (Tinkler, 2011, p. 49).

Understanding family photos as subjective images with emergent meanings allows my participants to re-story undesirable meanings in their lives (Koenig Kellas, 2005). Making meaning of family photos is an interpretive and communicative process for family members facing changes in their relationships. “When people tell stories about their family, they provide listeners with clues as to how they feel about family members . . . The issues they choose to discuss or avoid, the attributions they make about family members’ behavior, and the way they position themselves vis-à-vis the story line can reveal interesting information about how they view family relationships”
(Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999, p. 336). The women I interviewed do the emotional work of creating visual displays to show who counts as family following divorce, but they also manage tensions for how to remember family life by making choices about which photographs to keep and which to throw away. As a mother they expect to sacrifice themselves to nurture others and ensure family tensions are not visible to others. They believe their family photos are meaningful, because they show “us” as a family, which minimizes expressed relational tensions following divorce. They describe feeling responsible for creating and maintaining a family photo archive, which generates a narrative inheritance for their children. These mothers accumulate family photos and sort through the material objects of mediated family memory consciously separating their children’s understandings of photographs from their own.

Remembering is a creative, communicative, and future-oriented act (Drazin & Frohlich, 2007), and these mothers interweave what seem to be two separate stories of family life, stitching them together with one thread of consistency at a time. My ethnographic approach examines the relational context and communication rituals, which constitute past family photos in the present. I wanted my participants to share emotional family memories and personal stories about divorce; therefore, I felt compelled to share my own when they asked. I also shared stories from my conversations with other mothers. With each conversation, I gained a deeper understanding of the relationships between family members struggling to make sense of their pasts, and between photographs and stories in my research (Freund & Thomson, 2011). As a result, my questions changed, and my perceptions of motherhood and the responsibilities of maintaining a family archive when coping with divorce are more complex.

Family photos are more than past memories captured in time; they are symbolic resources for (re)creating shared moments in the future. By questioning how photographs are selected, why and for whom photos are put on display, and what photo-making rituals reveal about being a family, I
construct a deeper understanding and appreciation for the complexities of visual communicative practices in times of family transition.
CHAPTER SIX:

“When Are You Getting Snapchat?”:

PHOTO-MAKING RITUALS BETWEEN ADULT SIBLINGS

I mentioned earlier that in 1882 Kodak introduced the roll-film camera – an invention considered at first to be of little use – and then successfully transformed and democratized this technology into a commonplace tool integral to social life. The company created new roles for women and children as photographers by embedding new technology in institutionalized domestic practices (see Munir & Phillips, 2005 for a detailed discussion). Major historical disruptions, including Kodak’s roll-film design and advertising strategies, continue to change the social functions shaping photography (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). The recent transition to digital imaging and a turn toward social media continue to (re)construct everyday photo practices, and the Snapchat app presents another radical and disruptive innovation to family photography.

Snapchat is a recent technological development in mobile phone applications for photo-making. Many similar social media platforms are available for producing, posting, and sharing photographs (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, Shutterfly); however, Snapchat offers an important new niche in the social media market that targets millennials. Snapchat users engage in ephemeral photo-sharing, which represents a desire to create images meant to disappear. Rather than keep photographs, contemporary families are embracing a counterintuitive desire to forget.

According to Sontag (1977), “photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life” (p. 8). Emerging digital networks make it possible for the act of sharing a photo to occur only seconds after it has been made (van
Dijck, 2007). This increasing mobility of family photography may affect how photos are displayed, exchanged, and valued (Rose, 2010). Barthes (2010) describes the age of the Photograph as “the age of revolutions, contestations, assassinations, explosions, in short, of impatience, of everything which denies ripening. – And no doubt, the astonishment of ‘that-has-been’ will also disappear” (p. 93-94, italics in original). Furthermore, Sarvas and Frohlich (2011) identify the snapshots users of social networking services capture and share as “more for social bonding, communication, and demonstrating a specific identity than preserving memories” (p. 148). Choices for how to visually narrate experiences through temporal (i.e. Which moment to photograph?) and spatial editing (i.e. From which perspective or field of view should I photograph the moment?) are limitless thanks to the Snapchat app. (Tinkler, 2013). While conventional family photography practices are mnemonic and aimed at remembering – archiving, preserving, and representing – family, today instant photo-messaging tools like the Snapchat app offer family members new ways to enact ‘togetherness’ by doing things immediately with their photos.

Family photographs derive their power and importance from their embeddedness in rituals (Hirsch, 1997). Advancements in technologies continue to shape how family members participate in photo-making rituals. Parents are no longer the primary producers of visual representations in everyday family life. By integrating new technologies into existing practices, any family member may choose to share what is happening now, enhancing the use of photos to overcome the geographic distances and temporal absences that separate families (Carter, 2007).
This cartoon\(^1\) (Figure 6) pokes fun at the anxiety of losing “valuable moments” created through family rituals and points to how Snapchat may (or may not) be used. In contrast to traditional understandings, where family photography and family memory are closely tied, ephemeral content is changing visual communication practices in families.

![Figure 6. A bride and groom appear devastated when they learn their photographer used a snap app to document their wedding day rituals. Comic from Nate Fakes’ Break of Day, 12/16/2014. Permission to reprint in Appendices.](image)

Entering the field of digital photo-making, I play with possibilities for family members to engage in photo-making rituals using Snapchat, specifically learning and observing patterns of interaction among adult siblings. I begin with a brief history of the app as a visual digital technology. Next, I explain why my study of Snapchat as a site for family photo-making is unexpected due to the app’s perceived uses, and then I describe my methods for conducting this research.
How-to Snapchat: A Brief Technological Overview

The basic function of making a photo – or a “snap” as it soon came to be called – starts with a camera screen. Users tap a circle button to create a “snap,” then share it with a “friend” or post it publicly to their “story.” More savvy Snapchat users employ a range of interactive photo-making features including text captions, drawings, emoji stickers, and photo filters. Snapchat requires content to be created close to the time it is shared, and then deletes this shared content by default soon after it is sent and/or viewed (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2015).

In 2012, the app integrated video messages followed two years later by live text and video chats (Gallagher, 2012; Dillet, 2014). In 2013, Snapchat users received more than 400 million snaps every day. Comparatively, Facebook and Instagram photos must be combined in order to match the same number of photos shared in the same period (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Today (October 2015), Snapchat boasts more than 100 million users generating and sharing visual messages (Stone & Frier, 2015). While possibilities for how to produce content continue to emerge, one unique function remains consistent: All messages are set to self-destruct within ten seconds (reference Figure 7 to see how users set this timer from the app’s home screen).
Figure 7. These images show the “home” screen for Snapchat users creating an image (left) and setting a timer up to 10 seconds for viewing the image (right).

The Snapchat Team addresses this revolution in photo-making practices on the company’s blog (http://blog.snapchat.com/page/3), stressing that Snapchat is a communication (rather than content) based tool (emphasis in the original):

A common thing we hear about social media today is that near-constant picture taking means not ‘living in the moment’. *We should put the phone down and just experience life rather than worry ourselves with its documentation.* This sentiment **wrongly** assumes that documentation and experience are essentially at odds, a conceptual remnant of how we used to think of photography, as an art object, as *content*, rather than what it is often today, less an object and more a sharing of experience. But not all social media are built the same, and I think we can use a distinction in social platforms: those that are based in social media versus those that are more fundamentally about communication... an image becomes a photograph, in part, by having borders. The
frame makes the photo. Tellingly, a Snapchat usually exists unframed, full-screen, more moment than an art object. Less than sharing experience-trophies and hoping communication happens around them, an ephemeral network leaves the art objects to fade in favor of focusing on the moments, the experience, the communication; more social than media, more social than network.

Although the Snapchat Team frames this shift from durable to disposable content as a hopeful possibility for social sharing, many skeptics remain suspicious of the service they provide. News websites, business magazine articles, and blog posts question why users would want photos to disappear. Media stories created Snapchat’s “naughty reputation” as “a racy communication tool that [leaves] no fingerprints” (Hempel & Lashinsky, 2014), assuming the app’s primary use is to produce and share inappropriate, illegal, and sexual content.

**How did Snapchat become Synonymous with Sexting?**

While Snapchat co-founder Evan Spiegel insists his photo-sharing service was not intended for sexting, media critics ridicule disappearing content as a dangerous illusion. Sexting – a term merging “sex” and “texting” – refers to sexually suggestive or explicit images (or videos) depicting a nude or semi-nude body sent via short-message service (SMS), social media platform, or other digital delivery (Chalfen, 2010). Experts claimed Snapchat use could easily become abuse, and called on parents to talk to their teens about the risks of using the app. Even if snaps are set to self-destruct, sharing illicit content through *any* app is not consequence-free.

The ubiquitous presence of cell phone cameras and immediate access to photo-sharing tools increases sexting capabilities across mobile apps; however, media reports made Snapchat synonymous with sexts. CNN deemed the app “a service for randy sexting teens and secretive philanderers” (Kelly, 2013). Negative publicity provokes parents’ fears by citing potential dangers and risks, generating cautionary headlines such as “New Snapchat App Worrying Parents” (2012),
“What is Snapchat and Why do Kids Love it and Parents Fear It?” (Magid, 2013), and “Inside Snapchat: The Little Photo-Sharing App that Launched a Sexting Scare” (Crook, 2012). By diminishing the value of Snapchat to a sexting platform, media coverage frames the app as a family hazard. Snapchat continues to be described as inappropriate for family use, and as a result, their ghost logo triggers safety concerns, especially when displayed on the cell phone screen of a teen or tween.

In a rapidly changing landscape of new and updating technologies, everyday family life is immersed in “a networked era… characterized by pervasive and increasing digital and social connectivity” (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014, p. 477). Parents are under pressure to learn about the latest mobile social media tools and how children are using them, and to negotiate acceptable standards for an overwhelming number of apps. Complex questions regarding privacy, trust, and safety lead parents to monitor how apps are used and with whom, control what content is shared and when, and to prevent children from publicly broadcasting messages (and mistakes). Parents seek help “navigating both the online social world, and their children’s relationship to it” (“You did WHAT,” 2015). Responsible parenting often calls for supervision. Although the risks associated with sharing sexual content are not exclusive to Snapchat, disappearing content incites fear because supervising is difficult. “Good” parents are expected to ban “bad” apps or, at the very least, establish limits in how they are used.

Snapchat offers a guide for parents, which defines the app as “a fun ephemeral messaging application for sharing moments through pictures, short videos, messages and video chat” (Snapchat Support, online). In a subsection entitled SAFETY, the company states their position regarding sexual content in bold-faced font: “Under no circumstances is it okay to create, send, receive, or save a sexually explicit image of a minor (under federal law, a person under the age of 18)... It is extremely important that Snapchat not be used in this manner and parents are
strongly encouraged to educate their minor on this subject” (Snapchat Support, online). Rather than suggesting Snapchat become inaccessible to children, the company encourages parents to have an open conversation about what is appropriate to share online in order to help make sure everyone enjoys their experience. Families are invited to use the app – as a place to be funny, honest or however else users might feel when sharing snaps – and to talk about the associated risks together.

Sensationalized media reports have narrowly defined Snapchat as a harmful “sexting app,” and, as a result, an unfavorable technology for families. In the following section, I challenge this popular narrative and reconceptualize Snapchat as a site of family photo-making. I argue that shifting the focus from photo content to visual, embodied communication rituals allows me to learn how family members use Snapchat to communicate with one another.

**Shifting Perceptions of Snapchat Use: From Sexting to Family Snaps**

Recent studies in computer science and human behavior are debunking myths about who uses Snapchat and why, including assumptions regarding sexting. Roesner, Gill, and Kohno (2014) surveyed 127 adult Snapchat users to explore how, and for what reasons, people really use Snapchat. Results indicate only 1.6% of respondents use the app primarily to send sexual content. Majority (59.8%) reported using the app for sharing fun, silly or mundane messages; therefore, the research team identifies having fun as Snapchat’s key appeal.

Snapchat offers a new way to share brief, fleeting moments. Despite media reports stressing security concerns, it seems users are well aware that archiving is still possible. Surprisingly, survey respondents in Roesner, Gill, and Kohno’s (2014) study believe screenshots are an acceptable practice. They don’t care that friends and family save their photos; in fact, they find it funny. “Deletion by default” enables users to choose what to keep, instead of automatically saving all photos, which changes how users engage in photo-making practices.
Piwek and Joinson (2016) conducted an exploratory online survey aiming to better understand the content people create and send via Snapchat. Responses from 209 participants indicate users enjoy the playful sharing of funny, mundane content including selfies, images of food, objects, other people, locations, animals, etc. According to this study, Snapchat is embedded in daily communication practices, and people use the app mainly to enhance strong emotional ties. Majority of participants use Snapchat in addition to multiple other social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – because of the unique, intimate, and conversation-like mode of communication the app offers for sharing photos with close friends, partners and family members.

These exploratory studies suggest Snapchat may be a site for researching families’ visual communication practices; however, a number of questions remain unanswered. Roesner, Gill, and Kohno (2014) cite their use of multiple choice questions to collect self-reports as a limitation of their study, and suggest future research includes observations. Similarly, Piwek and Joinson (2016) note their sample is limited to a single snap per user. Unfortunately, online surveys investigating users’ content disregard communication involved in photo-making, and context – the ongoing relationships in which snaps are exchanged. Therefore, content analysis misses an opportunity to explore how families engage in creating and sharing self-destructing photographs. Furthermore, both research teams in these studies recruited majority of survey respondents through email messages sent to university lists, which could hinder many family members from participating.

Popular media stories and empirical research often approach mobile technology use in families with a focus on youth culture: Millennials, teens or tweens, and mediated communication between parents and children. As I mentioned earlier, Snapchat even provides a guide for parents to engage with their children using the app, but sibling use is not mentioned or explored. Family is reduced to parent-child relationships while the communication between other family members is largely underrepresented. I aim to better understand how adult siblings integrate this mobile app into
everyday family communication. The underlying issues motivating this chapter explore how adult siblings communicate via Snapchat, what and who is being visualized in their family snaps, and how and why siblings use Snapchat to create and participate in meaningful family rituals.

Methods for Studying Siblings’ Snapchat Use

Before choosing my approach, I considered why family members might use Snapchat. Two of my own siblings, Sara and Chase, persuaded me to download the app and use it with them (Figure 8). I saw a Snapchat notification glow on my younger brother Chase’s iPhone screen.

“Sara keeps bugging me to get that app,” I told him.

“You should. The only people who don’t have Snapchat are old people.”

On Facebook, my friendship with Chase was “limited”, which means I could only access a profile picture on his page. We didn’t talk on the phone when I was away at school, and it was rare for us to text. I wondered if he’d respond to me on Snapchat.

![Figure 8](image.png)

**Figure 8.** My younger sister encouraged me to download the Snapchat app via text message (left) and I quickly learned how to enhance my selfies using the app’s text and drawing filter tools (right).

Using an ethnographic approach, I explore how adult siblings engage, stage and view family images in the digital space of a social media app. *Being there* during group interviews to audience these
exchanges (often via Skype) affects what I see, experience, describe and interpret. In this chapter I explore embodied and mediated practices of constructing what it means to be family and observe the mundane visual communication rituals in which Snapchat use and the snaps produced are embedded.

**Entering the Field**

Employing a snowball sampling method to solicit participation (Noy, 2008a). I specifically chose to use social media for recruiting participants (Figure 9) in hopes of recruiting tech-savvy family members.

![Figure 9. I posted the brief status update pictured here to my personal Facebook page as a recruitment message for this study.](image)

My status totaled 17 likes and 9 comments, and 14 of my Facebook friends shared my post on their own pages. Eight people responded to my initial recruitment message. Seven of these potential participants identified a sibling as the family member who uses Snapchat with them, which narrowed my focus for this research to adult siblings.
To be eligible, participants had to be 18 – 70 years old and already using the Snapchat app to communicate with a family member. Unfortunately siblings under the age of 18 years old were not permitted to participate. Additionally, most siblings using Snapchat together lived apart, and despite the convenience of technology, scheduling interviews with both siblings at the same time proved to be impossible for a few families. Only half of the original eight respondents met the criteria for participation and completed an interview.

Ranging in age from 18 to 58 years old, a total of 8 participants included two of my own siblings, two of my cousins, and two sibling pairs who are not related to me, but communicate with each other using Snapchat. I learned why these adult siblings enjoy using Snapchat together, and what they deem snappable. By collecting, analyzing, and interpreting several kinds of data, I explored how they create their own everyday family photo-making rituals using the app.

Data Collection

Participants employed mobile applications (i.e. Skype or FaceTime) to invite me into their homes in various cities across Michigan, Maine, and Ohio between June 19, 2015 and January 26, 2016. In total, I conducted nearly 5 hours of interviews resulting in 181 double-spaced pages of transcriptions, and 43 single-spaced pages of analytical memos and journal entries. I collected 14 snaps to visually demonstrate how siblings in my study use Snapchat, and I also engaged in participant observation as an ethnographer using the app myself.

Written reflection. Prior to the interview, I asked each participant to write a reflection in response to the prompt: “How do you use Snapchat to communicate with your family?” I did not specify a length requirement. Reflections varied from 48 to 706 words. One participant did not write a reflection before her interview. In addition, I wrote in a journal throughout the data collection process to reflect on my experience employing qualitative methods to research family photo-making. Writing my own journal entries created space for me to reflect on my research practices, challenge
and learn from my assumptions, and account for my decisions throughout this emergent process (Gonzalez, 2000).

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted using the popular visual communication apps Skype and FaceTime, because all siblings lived in distant places. I interviewed siblings within their own homes to help them feel more comfortable sharing personal stories and making decisions regarding their participation. Reflecting on Ellingson’s (2012) description of interviewing as an embodied communicative practice, I find this perspective especially important for Skype interviews as I attend to the tools participants choose for viewing others on a screen (i.e. laptop, cell phone, iPad), and where they choose to conduct the interview (i.e. in the privacy of a bedroom, or in a living room surrounded by other family members). I also pay attention to how participants visually present themselves (i.e. sitting on a bed, or a couch, sipping wine, or laying by a pool).

Framing Snapchat use within a relationship *between people*, rather than as an individual activity, I interviewed siblings in pairs, so they could discuss their Snapchat practices together. I listened to siblings tell stories about creating and sharing photos and I watched them teach each other how to use new features, observing meaning in the making. All interviews except one included two siblings and me. One participant could not schedule a time to interview with his sister, so after several attempts, I interviewed one sibling via Skype and then used Facebook messenger to continue the conversation with her older brother.

To begin each interview, I read a script of verbal consent to participants, which was approved by University of South Florida’s Institutional Review Board, and then both audio and video recorded her/his responses before proceeding with questions. I also provided a digital copy of this script via Facebook or email for her/his review and record. Using technology for interviews presented obstacles including outdated apps, broken headphones, dropped calls, and weak WiFi signals. At times, engaging in three way video calling interrupted the flow of conversation, because
participants talked over one another and then hesitated to speak up. The delayed pauses of Skype remind us to take turns to speak, but this formal approach didn’t seem to fit siblings’ styles for everyday conversation. Interviews ranged from 54 minutes to 82 minutes. I did not offer participants confidentiality or maintain the privacy of their identities. I explained my intent and that anonymity would not be offered for this study.

**Snaps.** The default for Snapchat remains *not* to archive snaps; however, new features continue to enhance how adult siblings use the app to communicate. Messages sent and received through this app are meant to disappear once users leave the conversation (i.e. move from this screen). This technology promotes recurrent sharing, because self-destructing photos are expendable. Although saving snaps by making screenshots is becoming an increasingly acceptable practice for users, I did not want to bypass the ephemeral structure of Snapchat. Instead, I worked with users and their disappearing data and asked each participant to email me saved snaps to represent how s/he uses Snapchat with their sibling(s). I received 14 snaps in total.

Participants chose the photographs they wished to include in this study. These snaps visually displayed participants alone or along with family members. I implemented a two level consent process approved by the University of South Florida’s Institutional Review Board: 1) a script of verbal consent for participants outlining information about how I would use their snap(s), and 2) a photograph release form signed by and obtained from any persons whose image was depicted (see Appendix B). Every visible person provided a consent/photo release form. This release form was presented in person, or sent/received/returned via email.

**Participant observation.** Snapchat introduced a *Story* feature in October 2013 offering users a new way to share everyday life. Using *My Story*, participants string snaps together into an ongoing narrative, and make photos and videos accessible for a 24-hour period. During this time Snapchat friends can view snaps repeatedly. I invited participants to add me as a “friend” on
Snapchat, so we could use the app to communicate and to share snaps. Four participants are now my Snapchat friends and, as a result, I was able to observe Story updates from my own participating perspective. Their public updates continue to show me how they use Snapchat with family members in real time.

Analysis and Interpretation

My family photo-making research in the digital space of the Snapchat app explores why adult siblings choose to use Snapchat, what they choose to snap and share, and how images described as “literally just us existing” are made meaningful when shared between family members.

Why Snapchat?

All of the family members I interviewed already share images through texts, emails, and Facebook. In a multi-app environment, I wonder why adult siblings are willing to download one more photo app on their phones. Why do they choose to use Snapchat?

First I ask my younger siblings. My brother Chase sits beside me wrapped in a blanket on the futon in Mom’s basement while our sister Sara joins us from Virginia through a cell phone propped on the coffee table. “You already use a bunch of apps to share photos, so why add another?” I want to know.

“Because it’s a different idea,” she explains. “The fact that your pictures disappear takes less time than waiting for a picture message to load and send through text or Viber. I downloaded it knowing I could take pictures and add captions, and my photos would disappear.”

“Snapchat’s more like ‘this is happening, now this is happening’ in snippets up to 10 seconds. It’s like instant messaging using pictures instead. It just makes it easier to send them. And it’s more fun,” Chase elaborates.
“Yeah, it’s another way of communicating in real time. Especially how I use it,” Sara agrees. “I can’t be in Florida with you when you’re at school, because I live here, so it’s a way of keeping updated and carrying on our relationship long distance. Snapchat represents sharing to me. Sharing my life with my family. Whether, you know, it’s stupid day-to-day stuff, or stuff I actually care about and want them to know. I share pictures so you can be part of it too.”

“And I don’t send ugly faces through any app but Snapchat,” she adds.

Adult siblings in my study refer to Snapchat as “quicker,” “instant,” and taking “less time” compared to other photo-sharing apps. Snapchat is a preferred channel of family communication among participants, because using the app requires little effort. The app eliminates the extra step of toggling between two apps, the camera and messenger, to send a photo. The features available – filters, emojis – are limited, and photos and videos only last 10 seconds or less. Siblings choose to respond to snaps more often than texts, because it saves time. Texting is perceived to be a “longer process,” so rather than “wait for it to go through,” Snapchat makes it easier for them to share pictures. Snapchat does not automatically create an archive of picture messages, which can add the inconvenience of deleting unwanted photos and depleting internal memory space from their phones. The app provides convenient access to sharing the visual dimension of everyday life, and siblings describe feeling closer to each other through an ongoing exchange of disappearing snaps.

Siblings Darcie and Jordan love using Snapchat to stay in touch, so they responded to my Facebook status update right away. Unfortunately their opposite work schedules made it impossible to get a time to talk with all of us together (even via Skype!). Darcie sent an email response to my writing reflection prompts and cited our difficulty scheduling an interview as one of the reasons why Snapchat is a “great way to keep up pretty frequent communication” with her older brother, because it’s “quick and easy to send messages.”
“Snapchat is more than just texting someone, I can actually show them what’s going on. I can snap me laughing or a scowl and it goes with the conversation. Like last Sunday, I went to see Amy Schumer, so I sent my brother a couple Snapchats, and a video of her doing a little bit of her show. He sent back his face like “Yay!” with a caption. He could easily text me that, but it’s just funnier to have his actual, physical expression. We do that a lot,” Darcie laughs.

“If I’m just sitting on my couch with my cat drinking a glass of wine, it’s funnier than texting it. I don’t always have to put a caption on it, that’s enough. It isn’t permanent and that makes it kind of fun.” She tells me about a series of snaps sent back and forth with her older brother Jordan where he drew cat faces on himself.

“I take a lot of pictures for Snapchat, but I might only post one of them on social media. That’s probably part of the reason technology has come this far, because it is important to people to have more platforms to share more pictures with each other. That’s one of the reasons I like Snapchat. I see my family a lot more now. Instead of just seeing something they post on Facebook, I can actually physically see them every single day even though they’re hours away.”

When comparing mobile phone applications, the siblings in my study explain how easy it is to create and share photos using Snapchat. Unlike posts to Facebook or Instagram, they do not take several photos in order to find one worth sharing. Snapchat is not purposeful, posed, or deliberate. Instead, siblings describe snaps as more natural, almost careless, even ugly.

“I can’t post too much on Facebook, or else I become the annoying girl,” Lily says, and her younger sister Eliza laughs. Sitting side by side on a day bed, both sisters look similar with long, light brown hair and big smiles. Their green and pink bedroom walls brighten my iPad screen as we chat over Skype.

“People who post a lot of pictures on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter get a negative stereotype of being narcissistic and obsessed with themselves. People don’t want to see all of these
selfies, because that’s not what those apps are for. But on Snapchat it’s totally acceptable. For example, I’m super selective on Twitter. I only post if I know I’m going to get a lot of favorites, but with Snapchat I can post more because it’s only temporary,” Lily explains.

“You don’t need to save all those selfies. They don’t really mean anything, so why put them in a text message, which is more permanent, if you don’t need to?” Eliza agrees. “I just want to send it for a few seconds, I don’t want to keep it forever.”

“It’s just a good way to start conversation,” Lily continues. “We don’t live in the same city, so we don’t know the nitty gritty things going on in our everyday lives. Sometimes it’s hard to ask because we don’t know what to ask.”

Both sisters describe choosing Snapchat because it is easy to use, it is fun to share impermanent messages and acceptable to share a lot of them. How they choose to use Snapchat is weighed in relation to a number of other digital platforms and the norms for their use. Seeing each other by sending selfies is also important to them, especially when maintaining long distance family relationships.

“We get caught up in our own lives and don’t talk on the phone as much, because we’re busy and I guess it’s hard to find time,” Eliza shrugs. “We’re not the best at getting back to each other.”

Lily looks at her younger sister, and then turns to me to say, “But looking at each other’s snaps is a good segue into a conversation.”

“Yeah, Snapchat gives you a feeling of connectedness because you connect with all the people you want to connect with, and you can see what’s going on in their lives,” Eliza agrees.

However, not everyone in the family feels the same way about Snapchat. Some of my participants’ siblings choose not to use the app, because they “don’t see the point.” They are “not into the visual,” and prefer to “talk on the phone more than send pictures.”
During a three-way Skype call, I ask sisters – and mothers – Valerie and Georgi why they do not use Snapchat to communicate with other family members.

“Our middle sister doesn’t even have a smartphone!” Valerie says in disbelief.

“And I can’t imagine our mom trying to use it,” Georgi says. “She’s 85 years old and still struggles with her cell phone sometimes. It’s great she can use Facebook as good as she does!” Valerie and Georgi describe sharing photos with their mom and sister in emails instead of Snapchat, choosing to use what is easiest for all members of their family.

I ask when and why they started using Snapchat and they tell me their children were already using the app. They were willing to try it, too, in an effort to find better ways to communicate and stay connected.

“I got Snapchat when my oldest got it, but I didn’t really use it. I heard negative things that kids just used it to send naked pictures back and forth. And that really wasn’t something I was interested in doing,” Georgi laughs. “But then my youngest got it, and she started using it a lot more with me.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t really until Georgi’s daughter Jenna, my niece, was on Snapchat that I thought, I’m gonna try this out,” Valerie says. “And I appreciate that my niece is 15 years old, and she even wants something to do with her old aunt.”

“Well, I am really excited to talk with you about Snapchat, because you’re both… um, sisters who are…older…” I hesitate, embarrassed that I acknowledged their age.

“Thanks…” Georgi says.

“I mean, you both have daughters that use Snapchat, too. And earlier this week I interviewed two sisters in their twenties, and when I asked who they might, and might not, use Snapchat with they said absolutely no one over 30 years old, because people over 30 probably didn’t even know how to use it. And I’ll be 30 in a couple months, so…”
Valerie and Georgi both laugh.

“I think this perception of who can and cannot use the app only limits families.”

“Well, for my sister and I, it’s important just for us to stay connected. We are so far away that we don’t get the chance to be face-to-face. We don’t take time to Skype like this –”

“We should,” Valerie interrupts her younger sister.

“We should, but we don’t. And so Snapchat is really quick and easy. I can send a ten second message and let her know that I love her and I’m thinking of her.”

In each interview, siblings describe Snapchat as an effortless tool for family communication. They admit to avoiding and ignoring messages received through other applications, but quickly replying to a snap. The ten-second time limit begs for an immediate response. However, communicating through an exchange of snaps is not easier than texting, posting, or emailing in any measurable way.

Although siblings describe their frustrations when a snap self-destructs before they can view it, they also choose to use Snapchat because the app saves them time. Disappearing photos have a downside and the app can actually make communicating more difficult. Engaging in a lengthy conversation becomes tedious, because both siblings forget what they shared. Sara and Chase prefer texting for “real” conversation. Darcie and Jordan switch to Google hangouts when they want to talk. Valerie and Georgi abandon the app entirely if they start to overthink their snaps, because it is no longer fun. Eliza and Lily snap every day, but they also see how Snapchat discourages other forms of communication in their relationship. While they think they know about each other’s day because they see snaps of it, they rarely talk about their lives.

Siblings seem to desire a feeling of constant connectedness and “always being there,” especially as they grow older and move far from home. Interlinking photography with telecommunication, camera phones are becoming “connected cameras,” which can be used by
siblings to visually mediate presence (Villi, 2015, p. 4). Fu (2011) theorizes this kind of digital kinship as “a dialectical process of making and shaping each other through daily digital practice” (para. 3). Snapchat use specifically encourages an unprecedented quantity and frequency of photo-sharing, both creating – and limiting – opportunities for keeping in touch. How and why siblings choose what is snappable and worthy to share requires further exploration.

**What is Snappable?**

Harrison (2004) analyzes “everyday” photo-making as a conventional and socially regulated practice that can be used in a number of contexts. She questions what makes a particular moment photograph worthy, pointing toward popular models, which depict what should and should not be seen and preserved. Drawing on shared cultural values and aesthetic criteria, Harrison describes canonical forms of the “takeable” photograph (p. 28).

Snapchat changes these criteria.

With disappearing photos, the genre of family photography is expanding to include taken for granted experiences of what it means to be a family. When I ask siblings in my study what is being visualized in their snaps, they describe everyday life as it is happening without the intent to preserve what is depicted. Using Snapchat together, siblings focus on what is seen and shared now, and redefine what is photograph worthy.

“I send snaps when I think there’s anything even remotely interesting: Scenery, mountains, buildings. A lot of pictures that show where I am, and pictures of my dog,” Sara says, and then pauses to think. “And a lot of what I’m eating. I got that from you.”

I laugh and nod my head, accepting responsibility for our recent Snapchat trend.

“I rarely take pictures of myself where I’m staring into the camera, unless it’s me being ugly on purpose, then I take a picture and write a small description or a hashtag joke. Or I snap you when I feel semi-pretty and I want you to see it.”
Chase mimics his sister, pouting his lips in a duck face pose and holds up a peace sign.

“Obviously, those are snaps I send you, Krystal,” Sara says. “It’s stupid day to day stuff, or stuff I actually care about and want you to know.” I wonder how she determines the difference.

“It’s lots of food and pets for me, too. And drawings. I usually snap something I’m proud of, or enthused by, or when I’m having fun. Or something I brought up earlier in conversation, and then I see it and think, ‘Oh, that’s funny,’ so I send it,” Chase says. He explains how to add colorful drawings to photos and the back and forth of drawing wars, turning selfies into art. “It’s instant messaging using pictures instead and it’s more fun. You need creativity to use Snapchat.”

CEO of Snapchat Evan Spiegel contends that the app’s purpose is to provide a silly way to communicate (Gallagher, 2012), and all of the siblings I talked with agree. They expect snaps to be funny and embarrassing, because “that’s the whole base of it.” Siblings describe taking photos when they are bored and sharing things as trivial as a cat on the couch, or a notebook with a face drawn on it.

*Anything* is snappable.
For example, this snap shared between siblings Darcie and Jordan shows the mundane moment of a family pet sitting in a laundry basket.

Figure 10. Jordan sent a collection of saved snaps from his phone and the most common subject of these images was his sister's cat (pictured here).

If anything is snappable, then is the content of snaps important? Similarly to other photos sent from a camera phone, sending snaps communicates “a specific, fleeting presence by using a photograph” (Villi, 2015, p. 16). Creating and exchanging visual messages becomes a fun, everyday practice.

“My absolute favorite is when my sister and her daughter are in the car and Jenna takes pictures of Georgi, and she doesn’t know it. That’s the most fun. Or when Jenna starts a video by saying, ‘Watch’ and Georgi has no idea she’s being filmed, and then she realizes,” Valerie says. Her grin widens from ear to ear.

“Yeah, she just surreptitiously holds her iPhone next to the car door where I can’t tell she’s videotaping me, and I really can’t help but sing the Taylor Swift!” Georgi laughs. Both sisters
continue to reminisce, using our Skype call as an excuse to chat. They admit they should do this more often.

“Once Jenna and I were at a drive thru and we looked up and it was the hotel chain Valerie works for, so we Snapchatted that and sent it to her. ‘Look where we are!’” Georgi says.

“I don’t think I have an interesting enough life to anybody other than my family,” Valerie laughs.

I ask what these snaps typically look like and they shake their heads.

“Bad,” Valerie answers. They complain about “crappy” front-facing cameras on their phones, and tell me their snaps are “not the best quality,” but lighting and composition do not matter, because the photos disappear anyway. Despite their criticism of the app, Valerie and Georgi are not discouraged by how their snaps look. Siblings in this study explain they use Snapchat to involve each other in their everyday lives, and sharing boring or bad snaps still helps them to feel connected with their brothers and sisters.

“I start taking pictures of myself when I’m just sitting around watching TV or on the computer to let Eliza know what I’m up to,” Lily says. “And I get to see what’s going on in her day when she posts snaps like ‘Today, I had a lunch break at work,’ but we wouldn’t Skype to talk about that.”

“We send each other how we look in outfits when we’re shopping or getting ready to go out. Embarrassing faces we make like a photo of all our chins,” Eliza says. She pulls her chin in toward her neck to demonstrate for Lily, and they both giggle. Rather than send emojis to illustrate how they feel, Lily and Eliza share their own facial expressions. Sending these selfies makes the visual message more personal.
“Sometimes a caption isn’t necessary. If I don’t want to talk about my day, but I want to let her know I’m in a bad place I’ll send a picture of me lying down pissed about something like ‘Failed exam,’” Lily explains. “Or you sent me a snap like ‘I hate everything.’”

Eliza nods showing she remembers.

“And then I called you, because I was concerned.”

“How many different ways do you communicate with each other?” I ask. I wonder why Lily switched from using Snapchat to calling Eliza on the phone.

Together they rattle off a list: Snapchat, text, phone calls, FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, G-chat, Skype, and Twitter. They are connected across multiple platforms, and often shift between them. They might ask, ‘What are you doing tomorrow?’ in a snap, but switch to messenger, text or email to discuss specific plans. Snapchat is preferred for seeking support or initiating conversation; however, carrying on is difficult because the messages disappear. Siblings in my study adapt to this by simultaneously exchanging snaps and texts with each other. They describe Snapchat as “kind of an Instagram, FaceTime type of thing” without likes, which eliminates the need for approval and instead emphasizes the importance of sharing experiences.

Snapchat allows them to share the in-between moments left undocumented through other social media sites. Siblings do not feel they need a reason to snap. They can share photos, which disappear within a second or two, just because. Photos and videos may be limited to ten seconds or less by Snapchat’s self-destructing timer, but siblings are inspired by this restriction to respond with a series of updates. According to my participants, Snapchat use revolves around reciprocity. They expect a photo of their goofy face to quickly prompt a similar photo from their brother or sister. They maintain their relationship through this constant back and forth.

“I snap things I would never ever post on social media,” Eliza says.

“Me too. But I can send Eliza anything, because she’s my sister.”
Both sisters trust each other with photos they would not share with anyone else. They do not expect each other to look perfect, so little effort goes into curating snaps. Disappearing photos free them to be who they are even if it appears ugly or silly. Snapchat creates an escape from the pressures they feel when posting photos on other social media platforms.

“What else can we tell you?”

“How about who is typically in the snaps you send each other? Besides your selfies.” In addition to what is shown in their snaps, I also want to know who is being visualized.

“Well, if Eliza’s in the den with our parents and they’re doing something funny or weird, like maybe they’ve fallen asleep per usual, or Dad is rambling on about something –”

“When you’re not home –” Eliza interrupts.

“ – she’ll send that to me. You’ve definitely sent me Snapchats before of Dad when you guys watch The Bachelorette together and he’s making commentary. Actually most of our inside joke material is of our parents.” They laugh and I join in.

Using Snapchat transforms mundane experiences into entertainment. All participants describe sharing funny snaps of parents – sleeping, watching TV, cooking, talking – with siblings who get the joke. This patterned everyday practice keeps siblings connected to what’s happening at home despite living elsewhere. Similar to creating photo albums, siblings in my study ritually narrate family life for each other, sharing it in photographs and videos.

Rituals provide patterns and rules for what is depicted in family photos. Family photos perpetuate familial mythology by creating an “image to live up to,” which often conflicts with lived reality (Hirsch, 1997, p. 8), because mundane experiences are omitted. Specific ritual performances in family life – holidays, birthdays, weddings, and vacations – are deemed photo worthy moments. These photos are staged so all family members are pictured, and their presence is visually documented. Deliberate poses and dress depict togetherness. “Family photos are rarely of
individuals on their own” (Rose, 2012, p. 41). When I ask siblings if they consider snaps to be family photos, they tell me no, because “they’re just pictures of me.” “Grouping family photos together on display reiterates the closeness/distance…photos themselves offer a presence which is a reminder of absence and distance” (Rose, 2012, p. 49).

Although many snaps depict family members, they are not family photos. Instead, siblings in my study suggested I display a collage like the one pictured below (Figure 11) to show the back and forth of their conversations. Darcie describes how her two older brothers used Snapchat to create funny images of their faces and apply photo filters (i.e. bunny rabbit, rainbow face).

![Figure 11](image)

**Figure 11.** Darcie exchanges silly selfies with her brothers on Snapchat and then posts the complete family photo collage to her personal Facebook page.
Although her dad does not have the app, one of her brothers snapped a photo of him while he was at home, so the whole family could join in the fun. Later Darcie compiled her saved snaps to create a photo collage, and then posted it to her Facebook page. These snaps establish family membership, connecting lives and stories across distances and generations (Hirsch, 1997, p. xii).

Cell phone cameras introduce radical changes in family photo-making rituals. Parents are no longer solely responsible for initiating these rituals, because children have access to their own equipment for producing and circulating photographs, and the authority over documenting family life is becoming more democratized. Snapchat use in particular shifts children from the subject of photographs into the role of photographers. Creating snaps of parents, rather than with parents, turns the camera around and disrupts conventions of family photography.

Only one participant uses Snapchat with a parent, and while Darcie carefully selects what photos to share with her mom, she tells me she can send anything to her older brother.

“Jordan lives about 30 minutes from me, but our schedules are pretty different. I knew he had a new girlfriend, but I hadn’t met her. One day he was at home and they were hanging out, and he sent me a 10-second snap like ‘This is Kendall’ with her waving. And that was it. So I sent a video back and said, ‘Hi, I’m Darcie,’” she laughs. “Can you believe I ‘met’ his girlfriend for the first time through Snapchat?”

Through photos, these siblings use Snapchat produce a visual presence for those who are not physically there, including each other in their everyday lives and reshaping how family rituals are performed at a distance. The mobility of photos stretches domestic space across long distances and reaffirms their close connection.

But do siblings share lived experiences of sadness and loss in their snaps?

While (putting off) writing in my office, a notification alerts me that Georgi updated her Snapchat Story, making her photo accessible to friends and family for a 24-hour period. I tap her
username to view a photo of an elderly man lying in a hospital bed. The caption requests prayers “for daddy.” Her sister Valerie shares snaps on her own Story from an airport, and I wonder if she is traveling to join Georgi at his bedside. Photos showing ill loved ones in hospitals are less likely to be shared on my Facebook newsfeed or in a family photo album. Maybe siblings prefer that this photo is not saved and archived, because then they will not have to be reminded of this moment. Rather than keeping photos to remember, family members might be embracing an opportunity to forget, and sending a snap allows them to share this experience in the moment.

Conventions binding photographs with memory or commemoration remain a part of family photo-making; however, new technologies like Snapchat offer emerging photo-making rituals that focus on representing what is happening now. Snapchat critics question why anyone would want to create photos that disappear if there isn’t anything ‘wrong’ with them. This critique fails to consider the communication practices, which constitute disappearing photographs. The act of sharing photos is more important than the disappearing photo itself.

Covering the lens of my camera phone, I take a photo of my hand.

On the black screen I type: “Sending prayers to you and your family.”

Before sending my snap I center the text, then add a pink heart emoji.

Within 24 hours the photo of their father disappears.

If Snaps are “just us existing,” then Why Do Siblings Use Snapchat?

Everyday things are deemed too dull to be meaningful – a belief stipulated by photography conventions prescribing what is worth documenting in family life (van Dijck, 2007, p. 6). If siblings create and share photos, but view these photos as insignificant, then why do they continue using Snapchat? Adult siblings in my study struggle to make sense of their own communication practices, and negotiate what snaps mean to them and their relationships.
“We send snaps that are literally just us existing. A little bit about whatever,” Lily says. “Yeah, there’s not a lot of point to them,” Eliza agrees. The large quantities of snaps they send are seemingly meaningless. Although siblings send and receive snaps every single day, they tell me these messages are not important to them.

“If it really meant something to me, I would post it to more than just Snapchat,” Darcie explains. “Snapchatting is a way for us to see everyday things. If it’s just a selfie of me doing something funny or cooking, it doesn’t mean much to me. It’s okay that they go away in 10 seconds, because I can send something else later. There’s always fun stuff to take pictures of. Now Snapchatting someone’s entire wedding ceremony wouldn’t work. It’s only good for brief, little things.”

Using Snapchat, siblings exchange visual moments meant to disappear, not to be saved.

Chase shrugs to show his indifference. “The actual pictures are meaningless, just selfies of other people that are like ‘Oh, ha!’ then it’s whatever. It’s nothing. Snaps aren’t more important than texts,” he says. “But if I save it, then it’s more important, if it’s something I actually want to keep.”

“They’re not important,” Sara starts. “But... at the same time they are. It’s weird, because they’re not necessarily something I want to keep, even though I can. I mean, they’re obviously important because it’s something I send someone.”

Snaps signify a connection, and through Snapchat, siblings construct rituals of visual communication, so they feel a part of each other’s lives and maintain a sense of relational closeness. Making, shaping, and circulating snaps are part of contemporary patterns of how siblings actively engage in performing and sharing family life. The process of making the memory together becomes more important through Snapchat use, because the app allows siblings to immediately circulate photos in the moment, creating permeable boundaries between their households.
“Using Snapchat just means time spent with family, making memories, even if they aren’t kept, they’re still a memory being made,” Georgi says. Siblings enjoy seeing and circulating mundane photo updates, because they care about their relationships, and at times, even wish they could save more of these images.

“There have been a couple snaps of my niece that I wanted to save – Sorry Georgi, not of you,” Valerie teases her sister. “Or, you know, my daughter sends me snaps of my granddaughter saying things, and I get frustrated when I can’t save it, because she is so cute. I want the choice to save it to my phone, because then I’ve got it there for posterity.”

During our interviews, siblings demonstrate the ways they negotiate what is meaningful and why they wish to preserve it. Georgi describes her sister’s desire to save photos through a story about their mother’s photo-making rituals. “We were raised by a mom who took pictures all the time. She has thousands upon thousands of slides, because that’s what they took back then. Over the years, she put everything on the computer. And so, we have all our family memories and photos on five or ten CDs or DVDs. We were raised watching her take those photos, keep them, and look back at them, so maybe that’s one reason it’s a little harder for us, you know, the temporariness of Snapchat,” she says.

Photo collections embedded in family rituals construct what it means to be family; however, changing technologies create more possibilities for photo-making. Different kinds of practices shift the value of photographs (Rose, 2012). Beyond recording events for future remembering, contemporary families also use mobile applications to circulate photos and establish connections in the present. Nonetheless, siblings express concerns about how using Snapchat might diminish their family photo archives.
“So often people rely on their apps for photos, but you can lose access to those photos. If you want something, you need to make sure you download it for yourself, not just rely on shared social media sites,” Georgi says.

“I think there’s a danger with the way things are stored digitally. I’m sure, you don’t print pictures out as much now do you, Georgi?”

“No, not any more.”

Valerie and Georgi describe how technology shapes the disparity in photo-making rituals across three generations in their family. They worry that focusing on sharing photos now could threaten their family photo archive in the future.

“My oldest grandson’s going to be 13 years old, and I can probably count on two hands the number of printed pictures I have of him. Like Georgi said, our mom took so many pictures, I just can’t imagine what that would be like,” she says. “And what’s to say in 100 years that you’re going to be able to read a DVD or a CD? If that technology’s gone, and we haven’t printed these things out…” Valerie shakes her head. As a self-identified early adopter she met her husband on Twitter, but she still worries about using digital tools and apps for storing family photos, questioning whether or not a digital record is reliable.

This pattern of defining snaps as less important than other saved photos becomes apparent as I listen to siblings in all four interviews. However, digital transient photos do not inherently threaten material family archives. Through this study, I learned families are not choosing between photo-making rituals, but rather engaging in multiple and more rituals for circulating and storing photos.

My initial interest in studying Snapchat was self-destructing photos; however, participants taught me about newly developed features – save buttons, replay options – during interviews, which
made this disappearing act obsolete. In fact, Snapchat users can now conveniently archive snaps in a phone photo album. Part of the fun in using Snapchat with siblings is learning how to use it together.

“Can you save your own snaps before you send them?” I ask my younger brother.

“Yeah, there’s a button along the bottom,” He points to the bottom of his phone screen. “I used to send snaps to myself, and then screenshot a photo from there, but then Snapchat added a button that lets you save your own snaps.”

Chase answers his older sisters’ questions and takes pride in his role as our tech “guru.”

“Okay so, how do you save other people’s?” Sara wants to know.

“To save other people’s you have to screenshot it.”

“I don’t think I could screenshot on my old phone, so I’m gonna have to figure out how to do that on here.”

“Press the home button and the power button at the same time. But press the home button slightly before the power button. Otherwise it’ll turn off your screen,” Chase explains.

As Snapchat develops new features, ‘doing family photo-making’ becomes a practice of learning how to communicate using new technologies. Lily and Eliza tell me about a replay option that will restore snaps for users when they miss it or want to see it again.

“Before replays were a thing, I remember asking you a few times to resend photos because I wanted to see it again,” Lily says to Eliza. “Or you’d be like ‘Do that again.’”

“Yeah, I would never want to print out anything you send me on Snapchat and hold on to it, though,” Eliza laughs. “You know? I would never think, ‘Oh, this is a great memory.’ Nothing like that.”

“Do you ever save snaps from each other?” I ask.

“Sometimes we screenshot snaps just because they’re funny or embarrassing,” Eliza says.

“It’s kind of a desired thing for your snap to get screenshoted,” Lily adds.
“If it’s funny enough.”

“Your phone has a Snapchat album. So if you take a picture and click save before you send it, then it will automatically go to your album,” Lily explains.

“Yeah, it’s funny going back through the snaps I take and seeing what’s on there.” Lily and Eliza’s memory work highlights how snaps become part of embodied viewing rituals similar to practices they might engage in with family photographs. Snaps, like family photos, are visible reminders inviting reflection on what has been, what is, and what will be (van Dijck, 2007).

At times, siblings interrupt our interview to learn about accessing Snapchat features on their phones. When Georgi grumbles about losing photos, her sister offers to help.

“You can swipe and do a screen save,” Valerie says.

“No, not on mine. I’ve tried several times.”

“Well, let me see here…” Valerie picks up her phone to look. “I don’t mean to highjack your thing, Krystal.”

“No, this is good,” I insist. “Do you have a Samsung Galaxy, too?”

“I do. We’ve actually got the same phone.”

“Yeah, but Jenna has an iPhone,” Georgi says.

“Yes, see Georgi, it let me do a screenshot.” Valerie holds her phone up to the computer screen to show her sister.

“Really? I’ll have to look at the settings and see if it’s just something I need to adjust.”

Save buttons, screenshots, and replays create more convenient possibilities for archiving photos. Creating and curating a Snapchat photo album is an important practice for siblings, because otherwise these images disappear.
“I get to decide what’s worth screenshotting and what’s not, and I don’t know how many times I’ll actually go through and look at what I’ve saved,” Darcie admits. “It’s just knowing that I have it.”

Because Snapchat does not automatically archive photographs, siblings must choose to save specific snaps. They must also negotiate technologies and compatibilities between different apps, different smartphone brands, etc. While photographs mediate remembrances of things past, they also mediate relationships (van Dijck, 2007). To limit the value of a photo to its content or collection neglects the other meaningful communication practices and rituals, which constitute family photo-making and relationships.

“Before Snapchat I used to send a lot of text message pictures, and before that I lived with my family. When I moved out there was a lot of stuff I took pictures of and then waited until I was around to share it with them, but with Snapchat I can share things every single day and it’s a lot easier. The visual part of it has become more important.”

“Yeah, sending snaps back and forth makes me feel like we are experiencing life together, even though she is an hour away,” her brother Jordan explains. “It keeps us close.”

When I ask siblings why they enjoy Snapchatting, they explain it is about “sharing my life with my family,” especially when “we can’t be in the same place at the same time.” Circulating snaps invites an exchange between siblings, and also indicates an effort to keep in touch. Toward the end of our interview, Eliza tells me the snaps themselves are meaningless, but she describes using the app as a meaningful ritual with her sister. “Snapchat gives us the ability to share, and know what’s going on in each other’s lives. That’s why it’s so important. It’s a more constant connectedness,” she explains.

“I guess you could define a family photo in terms of who sends and receives it,” she says with a smile. “And in that sense, the snaps we send each other are definitely family photos.”
Discussion

Emerging technologies contribute to both a new visual landscape of everyday family life, and new ritual activities that go into making and preserving close family ties. Haldrup and Larsen (2003) explain, "photography is not something that appears over and against reality, but forms part of the performance through which people work to establish realities" (p. 25). Applying this theoretical framework, family members use the Snapchat app to create rituals of visual communication mediating their relationships and making mundane moments meaningful.

Siblings using Snapchat recognize the epiphany of the everyday, and explore possibilities for doing family photo-making together in new ways. They transform the app into a tool (among many other available tools) for family communication, which shapes what they choose to photograph and share. They use Snapchat to create disappearing photos, because they do not think their mundane updates need to be saved. They understand their family might be the only people who care about what’s going on, and they appreciate the visual aspect of sharing snaps, and actually seeing what their sibling sees. Using the app to share ordinary, fleeting moments is not necessary, but siblings in my study voluntarily participate in these rituals in an effort to maintain their relationships.

When siblings describe what their snaps mean to them, they all tell me these photos are not important. However, they also explain how important it is “just to stay connected” through Snapchat. “Photos bring near those far away” (Rose, 2010, p. 47), and siblings acknowledge that sending snaps back and forth makes them feel close. This tension between the content of their photos and the practice of sharing them is shaped by a history of visual communication in families. Snaps are not considered family photographs, because they do not fit the conventions, which make this genre recognizable. Family photographs are produced for the future while disappearing photos are “in the moment.” Standards for a “takeable” photograph worth archiving or specifically a “snappable” photo worth sharing may vary; however, any doing of family photo-making rituals
requires communication practices. While family photographs are disposed of only rarely (Rose, 2010), snaps are typically deleted. Still, Snapchat use enables the emotional work of providing social support in long-distance family relationships to be made visible – for up to 10 seconds – through snaps exchanged during hospital visits, travel delays, and when tears stream down a sibling’s face at the end of a bad day. In this way, siblings participate in a counterintuitive reversal: they do not send a snap because it is important, but rather, the snap becomes important because they send it.

Through photo-making, siblings create, display and circulate visual snaps to stay connected despite the pervasive absence and distance of life away from home. Idiosyncratic relational practices structure patterns forming family photo-making rituals (Chalfen, 1987), which shape not only the kinds of content siblings create and share, but also the frequency of exchanging snaps, and expectations for how and when to respond. Snapchat orients family members to the here and now by shifting the focus of their photo-making from archiving for the future to instantly producing and viewing photos in the present.
CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION:

INTERWEAVING SITES OF FAMILY PHOTO-MAKING

In everyday life, family photographs are often assumed to be trivial material possessions, which illustrate family in expected poses. Conventional compositions reproduced in these photographs perpetuate myths of what it means to be family. Furthermore, family photographs are taken for granted as evidence of a shared past and as such, treated as historical products. However, changing family dynamics and definitions – as well as changing technologies of visual family communication and display – are made visible not only in visual displays (i.e. who is/not pictured), but also through observing how families engage in photo-making.

By shifting my focus away from studying photographs as texts and instead toward practices, I identified the genre of family photography as a communication problem, and explored how families perform photo-making rituals. My research illuminated the socially constructed nature of visual family communication and representations, and the practices and meanings that underlie family photo-making. I exposed the undocumented emotional labor invested in family photo-making rituals, and challenged the normative, idealized family image preserved in posed togetherness. While the familiar genre of family photography depicts a set of normative poses, the value of family photographs is constructed in visual representations of “us” doing this together as a family, in the stories family members tell about what they see and experience, and in the exchange of sharing these photographs and stories with others.

Family members perform ritualized practices (re)producing photographs to construct shared realities and define their place in them. They learn to appreciate photo-making by performing rituals
and doing things with their photographs. Rather than limit my questions to *what* is shown, I also asked ethnographically *how* families actually go about *doing* photo-making at three different sites. Observing photo-making in public, personal/domestic, and digital domains revealed the choices family members make regarding what is “picture worthy” in terms of visual family communication. *Who* creates and decides what is documented, why and when, and how this changes over time, with different tools, and in different spaces. Communication practices constitute the forms and meanings of ritual; therefore, I analyzed family photographs as symbolic resources that evoke storytelling, and trace and embody ongoing relationships, which otherwise have no shape or image.

Family photo-making is a tradition consistently characterized by change.

Comparing family portraits from a photographer’s studio in 1846 to a social networking selfie of father and son shown as a profile picture in 2008, Sarvas and Frolich (2011) describe how visual representations reflect family values of the time. The “memories and reminiscing people will be able to do 10 years from now depends greatly on how current photographs are stored, organised, and annotated – on how the digital shoeboxes of photographs will be managed” (p. 150). Memory is not about capturing the past, but rather about the present relationships among family members and how they use their photographs – to view, share, narrate being a family – in mundane, daily interactions. Technological developments converging photography and everyday life continue to shape acts of negotiating family memory (Munir & Phillips, 2005; van Dijck, 2007).

Although technology is integral to photography, and ongoing advances in camera equipment – Kodak’s Brownie, Polaroid, digital cameras, mobile phone cameras to name a few – continue to alter the visual economy of families, I focused on observing how technology use varies. Family photo-making no longer revolves around one camera or perspective. Instead, with the democratization of image-capturing, circulating and storing devices, multiple family members have access to cameras producing *more* views of family life for *more* audiences. This creates a unique prism
through which to make sense of events and construct relationships (van Dijck, 2007). Negotiating family memory requires attention to patterns of power and control, narrative and visual authority, and performances of participation. Still, illusions persist that new technologies can be a solution to improve memory storage, alleviate pressures for perfectionism, and offer more efficient methods to manage the time-consuming burden of family photo-making. In this study, I juxtaposed multiple sites of visual communication practices in order to examine the nuances of communication and technology use in family photo-making rituals.

Rather than narrow my inquiry to one aspect of photo-making or one site, I aimed to understand how these patterned practices constitute family communication rituals performed again and again across multiple, overlapping sites. I explored these taken for granted practices in three different types of family-related spaces: the public space of the Easter Bunny photo hut, the domestic space of mothers’ homes, and the digital space of the Snapchat app. Each site set the stage for unique performances of visual production, representation, and remembering (Pink, 2007), and different perspectives for ethnographically studying the often inaccessible, fleeting and private practices of family photo-making.

At the Bunny Photo Hut I watched family members conform to traditional visual representations as they (re)produced the iconic Easter Bunny photo. I saw how this ritual contributes to a genre of photography, which pressures parents to create the ideal pose and convince (or coerce) their crying children to “smile!” After witnessing family members’ private negotiations for how to position a child for the camera at an outdoor shopping center, I interweaved these observations with detailed descriptions of the public event of the Easter Bunny photo. Recasting the rehearsal behind the camera as part of this photo-making ritual (Pineau, 1995), I noticed how families – particularly mothers – performed the emotional work involved in curating family memory. Production and consumption are context-bound communicative acts constituting how family
identity is constructed, memory is mediated, and meaning is made. Although selfies, snaps, and photos of this sort are acceptable practices in other family-related spaces, at the Photo Hut Easter Bunny photos (re)produce and adhere to formal portrait-style conventions.

Myths of what it means to be family are engrained in photographic tradition, and continue to be reproduced in the specific poses, which distinguish the genre of family photography. I witnessed the power struggles at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut between parents committed to ritualized roles and representations, and children who attempted to resist the conventions of smiling for the camera. A mother scolded a 7-year-old girl for sneaking a pair of sunglasses into her family photo. One family after another, I watched children posed as props, and given no agency in photo-making. Insatiable desires to depict family togetherness created conflict and stress for families as sobbing toddlers begged for mercy and older siblings were instructed to hold them tight. Performances of this ritual made it clear that parents (specifically mothers) choose how family is defined and visually (perhaps also iconically) displayed.

I also participated in this commercial ritual when I returned to the Photo Hut each year. “Just you?” workers would ask when it was my turn to pose for a Bunny photo. This question revealed expectations for photo-making to be performed as a family. Many Easter Bunny photos I witnessed showed one child sitting on the bunny’s lap; however, she/he did not participate in this ritual alone. Other family members took part by waiting in line, standing behind the camera, and viewing, selecting and purchasing photos.

Through my conversations with six divorced mothers, I recognized the complexity and dynamic quality of family photo displays following divorce were not limited to choosing to keep it or not, or choosing to remember or forget, but rather choosing to negotiate ongoing communication processes of (re)constructing identity and mediating memory. In the domestic space of mothers’ homes, I toured and talked about their existing family photos and displays – the visual, material
traces of family transitions. Patterns of choosing how to display changing family relationships “for the kids” were shown in the creative ways mothers curated family photos and masked tensions in their visual representations of family life. I learned how other divorced families cared for the photographs they had produced together. How divorced families (re)negotiate their photo-making rituals involves communication about the meaning(s) of their participation, their family photographs, and their definitions of family. Performing these rituals requires effort, which itself communicates the importance of family and the value of photography.

Displaying family togetherness also presented a power struggle for mothers and their children following divorce. Prevalent ideals for family photographs portray a limiting view of how photo-making should be performed picturing two parents with their children. Redefining family after divorce requires emotional work invested in caring for family members, their relationships, and their photographs. The inclusive visual presence of an ex-husband/child’s father in photo displays represented a redefinition of family roles, and the process of creating family photo displays emphasized who was seen. Unlike parents at the Bunny Photo Hut, mothers described choosing their photo-making rituals for their kids while also expressing the difficulty of discussing these choices with their kids. Mothers acknowledged the multiple interpretations of family presented in their photographs, which are shared with and created for their children. For example, my own mother’s narrative authority was not as important to her as my relationship to family photographs and to my father. Instead, she chose to remain silent. This shift in power dynamics is constructed through communication as mothers talk about their photo-making choices in curating family memory and their hopes for how their children will remember family life. In this instance, what kids wanted – wedding albums, archives, celebrations, joint poses, and future photos – became more important than a parent’s authority to curate and define family.
Family begins and is maintained with specific rituals in mind (Haines, 1988), including making good photos, but mobile phone applications and sibling communication are both neglected areas of research. Snapchat presented a new technology affording more choices for how to engage in and study photo-making. Ephemeral photo-making – best embodied in the Snapchat application – was of particular interest to me, because disappearing photos emphasize how sibling relationships are constituted in reciprocal visual communication practices, rather than what visual content they exchanged through the app. Circulating ephemeral photos broadens what family members choose to share and how they communicate with one another, and adult siblings co-construct their relationships in part through the exchange of spontaneous, impermanent snaps. Siblings exchange snaps while sitting in front of the TV so they can watch their favorite shows together. They send snaps of food, or while cooking or eating in order to share meals. They say good morning, good night, and I love you through snaps. Everyday family rituals become more powerful and more present in members’ everyday lives when mediated via Snapchat and exchanged between siblings.

Doing family photo-making using Snapchat created a sense of urgency when viewing photos. Siblings shifted toward the immediate moment of sharing photos, rather than creating images to be viewed and remembered in the future, which encouraged them to “look at me” and respond. Siblings discussed their Snapchat use in relation to other – both older and contemporary visual (and non-visual) – media. Unlike traditional family photography, new forms of participation are becoming accessible as children take control of family photo-making in this digital space and turn the camera toward themselves and their parents.

Emerging technologies like Snapchat create dramatic new possibilities for performing rituals as a family. I encourage researchers to investigate how these tools are used/embodied by family members for photo-making and to make sense of how families choose to use their photographs. For example, siblings can snap a framed family photograph on display when visiting home in order to
share the viewing experience with a family member living far away. The mundane content of photographs provides siblings with more opportunities to communicate and connect with one another. “I see my family a lot more now” siblings tell me. Snapchat’s most recent update in May 2016 offered more choices for using archived content labeled “Memories” and easy access to a user’s mobile phone photo app (or “Camera Roll”). When I first learned about this change, I was distraught, because I felt saving photos defeated the unique purpose of ephemeral photo-making. However, the app’s default is still to delete photos, and I listened to siblings tell me “if I save it, then it’s more important.” Therefore, Snapchat accommodated users by providing more choices for visual communication practices and more possibilities for exchanging more photographs. This allows family members to use the app how they want. Therefore, I encourage researchers to expand the breadth of sites for studying family photo-making practices and rituals in order to embrace this complexity. I especially urge researchers to avoid dismissing new technologies as beyond family use, and instead seek to understand and explore what is going on in contemporary family relationships.

Studying family photo-making rituals at multiple sites, I recognized how families make choices about using technology. Rather than choosing whether or not to use technology, families are adopting new technologies and ritualized practices to create more, more, and more. New photography tools are not exclusively for Millennials or youth culture. Instead, this updated photo equipment is permeating family photo-making in a variety of ways. At the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, parents stood behind computer monitors to watch their children pose with the bunny. The ability to instantly view images extended the amount of time children had to sit on the Easter Bunny’s lap, because parents often wanted one more photograph (and then another). This immediate review of ritual performance shifted parents to a more future-oriented focus, because new technologies changed viewing practices and encouraged retakes, heightening desires for the ideal. Pressures mounted for parents to produce the annual iconic Easter Bunny photo representing a happy childhood. The photo had to be “worth
it” after waiting in the heat and humidity, and despite their children’s tears; some parents believed it was only one more click away. While their kids posed with the bunny, a few parents broke the rules and took more photos using their cell phones. Still, after purchasing their photos, many families posed together in the garden surrounding the Bunny Photo Hut to get more photos with a digital camera.

As digital archives continue to grow, families’ photo-making practices and expectations transform. For example, several divorced mothers in my study described Christmas as “the one time of year we actually do a family photo.” Some mothers continued posing for more family photos each holiday to show how their family carried on following divorce. A bare spot on the wall or refrigerator door left space for a missing photo, which represented changes in this ritual. Other mothers resisted the ritual altogether, telling me “we don’t have to do that anymore,” choosing instead to create new rituals and more photos to represent changes in their families. Storing this excess of family photography also requires the use of updated technologies. The mothers I interviewed described the family photos actually on display in their homes as a small number of the many, many photographs saved to computers or cell phones, which they have never seen before. After snapping more photos, these women tell me they do not have enough time to view them all. The integral role of technology choices in these family rituals requires further exploration and analysis.

Snapchat use among siblings demonstrates another shift in participation, power dynamics, and technology use, because parents are no longer the only family members who mediate family memory. Thanks to new technologies and access to mobile phones, children/siblings also use photo-making rituals to define and maintain their family relationships. In the absence of an automatic archive, siblings felt less pressure to pay attention to creating the visual, and instead focused on the exchange of photographs. Mundane, everyday moments and selfies of other family members and sites snapped back and forth created a sense of closeness between sibling when not at
home. A Snapchat-using sibling photographer may not be pictured, but he/she is present in every photo exchange. Parents are included as desired and without consent, often becoming the subject of photos, which visually represent inside jokes. Democratized or partially democratized, the visual and narrative authority of family life is now in the hands of children, and produced, captioned, and exchanged within family relationships, rather than posted or displayed for others. Family members are actually the only people who siblings thought might care to see their snaps. Changing performances of participation afforded by the Snapchat app allow children to create their own family photographs, rituals, and rules for visual communication, and to curate their own collections and tell their own stories. Combining what I learned at these three sites, I encourage families and researchers alike to embrace the multiplicity of visions constructing family life.

(Re)Imagining Family Photo-making and Possibilities for Future Research

Family photo-making rituals involve acts of imagining both past and future in the present. At one time, considering children family photographers might have been an act of imagination. In this study, I concluded that families imagine hopeful possibilities for what photographs can do to improve their relationships. For example, parents at the Bunny Photo Hut and those welcoming me into their homes showed how valuable they imagine family photographs to be in the efforts they made to produce, curate, display, and narrate these photos for me, and more importantly, for their children. Promising to return the next year, parents waved goodbye to the Easter Bunny. Mothers nodded in agreement to my questions about future photographs, preparing to pose with an ex-husband at a child’s future wedding. Today’s photo-making rituals indicated everyday effort – investing emotional work, caring for displays and archives, keeping in touch by sharing photographs – which revolved around the future viewing practices family members imagined. Practicing togetherness in family photo-making could look like: browsing annual Easter Bunny photos showing a record of
growth and commitment to tradition, pointing out a memory from when mom and dad got married from the family wedding album to a grandchild, or anticipating what silly face will make a sibling laugh and create a good segue into conversation. Creating ongoing rituals for family members and children of family members centered on maintaining relationships. “The anxiety of forgetting [was] implied in the desire not to be forgotten” (Van Dijck, 2007, p. 161), and bringing traces of a shared past into the future seems to ease the fears of families in the midst of growth and change. For example, “just knowing that I have it” when storing family photographs provides comfort, possibly because of an imagined future need or desire for these photographs.

After conducting this research, I recognized how family members reconciled the conflict between valuing family photo-making and not having enough time to perform the rituals and practices they desired: They imagined better, future possibilities for family photo-making. If only they had more time to do things with their photos, or more opportunities to get together with family to create photos, or more convenient ways to share their photos, or… the list went on. Imagining these possibilities helped family members to negotiate how they perform photo-making rituals in the present.

Family memory is often discussed as if it only occurs in relation to the past or over long periods of time, neglecting how remembering happens in everyday life. Memories are shaped in experience with others, not simply a product of these experiences, and remembering includes acts of imagination. Family memory is prone to revision as stories and photos continue to be negotiated (Van Dijck, 2007). Furthermore, choices in photo-making rituals coexist in multiple sites and change communication patterns, transforming how individuals do photo-making and construct family. Examining the value of particular, nuanced, creative, and evocative practices in relation to family photo-making at various sites may help both families and researchers to reconsider the possibilities for family constructions, stories, representations, and photo-making rituals.
After studying photo-making rituals in families, I apply my arguments to ethnographers in the field to explain how I used my camera to produce photographs in communication research. Juxtaposing my experiences of being there in multiple sites, here I offer contributions to improving visual methodologies, and urge future researchers to critically consider how they choose to represent the visual in their work.

**Lessons Learned for Improving a Multi-site Visual Methodology**

Using photographs as part of my data collection at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, I snapped more than 80 photos in this public space. Set in the mall courtyard, I felt comfortable using my personal mobile camera (phone) at this site, because this commercial environment was marked for taking photographs, and people expected it. Additionally, the images of family members waiting in line and/or interacting with the Easter Bunny displayed patterns, and the people pictured remain unidentified and anonymous representatives of this annual ritual.

Photographing family photos as a guest during home visits was another story.

Sitting in the living room with mothers discussing how they displayed family following divorce was an intimate experience, which required a relational approach to research (Ellis, 2013). I understood the sensitive, personal nature of our interviews, and in this chapter, I made the decision to use pseudonyms to protect the identities of mothers, children, and their families. Internal confidentiality within family relationships was also a concern. Several mothers explained that the conversations they were willing to have with me were not conversations they had with their ex-spouse and/or their own children. Furthermore, although I would love to show readers Shira’s long hallway of framed family photos, I did not bring out my camera during our interview, because at the time it seemed like an interruption. I did not want to risk making a spectacle out of this emotional aspect of her family life, so instead I listened intently and followed her finger through the displays as
she pointed out pictures of family members described in her stories. My decision not to photograph prioritized our relationship (Ellis, 2013), rather than my research goals.

With each successive interview I looked at photographs with mothers and listened to them talk about their families, learning how to navigate the emotions evoked and ask better questions in the process. Mothers often asked, “Did you get all you need?” “Was that good?” “Anything else you want to see?” as our conversations came to a close. There questions addressed me as an authority taking something from their homes and I struggled to end our interviews with a response that emphasized their participation instead. For my last three interviews I concluded by asking what about family photo-making interested participants, and what questions they would ask to continue the conversation. In an effort to negotiate this tension regarding how to approach and represent the visual, I asked mothers to select a particular family photograph, which they display, to include in my dissertation. Ellie made sure to remove some of the clutter surrounding her photos on the refrigerator door (i.e. school reminders, prayer notes, magnets, coupons), and commented about “how embarrassing it would be” to show this mess in my research. (Re)presenting her family for my readers demanded a different kind of performance.

Through doing this research, I learned how to make better choices. I believe returning to visit mothers’ homes for a follow-up interview and establishing ongoing relationships could lead to more insights about how family photo-making rituals are performed following divorce and how they evolve through time and technology. It is important for me and for future researchers to be reflexive about patterns of choosing how to use a camera during photo elicitation interviews, how to conduct visual ethnography, and the implications for visual research.

Drawing on a communication perspective, I created a fresh set of questions for studying how family members use a social media app for ephemeral photo-making, which focused on Snapchat practices, not content; however, visualizing this in my research proved to be difficult for several
reasons. First, the digital space of photo-sharing via Snapchat was not observable, so I had to specifically ask participants to share saved snaps (i.e. entering the ‘digital field’), which they had exchanged with siblings, to be shown in my dissertation.

Second, due to my preference for interviewing siblings together and the prevalence of exchanging selfies, I explained to participants that my study did not offer confidentiality. Rather than seeking consent from a parent, which I did for photographs used in my chapter about families experiencing divorce, participants were given choices about what snaps I included. Attending to technical and relational aspects of photo production and exchange, I needed both siblings to grant me permission to (re)produce snaps. At times, one sibling submitted a snap, and his/her sister/brother replied asking me not to include the photo in my research. I honored these requests.

Third, although participants loved the affirmation that their snaps were “funny enough” to get screenshotted by a sibling, they questioned if these snaps meant for family viewing only were research worthy. For example, while Lily had nearly 70 snaps saved to her phone during our interview, neither she nor her sister Eliza sent me snaps to include here. Months later, I sent a follow-up email and she replied, “I’ll send you snapchats when I get a chance to find them on my phone.” Sharing fun, mundane visual moments did not seem appropriate, relevant, or significant enough for research. While family members demonstrate the value of their photographs and how they are used, when participating in visual research they might question who will see their photos, how unknown viewers will interpret their families through photos, and if others will understand their value. Addressing the complexity of relationships between researchers and participants across sites and approaches in my study, I illuminate some of the ethical considerations researchers will face when choosing how to (re)present the visual.
Reflections

Employing ethnography as a practice-centered approach, I explored the different performative acts of communication as families engaged in rituals at three unique sites. My dissertation examined practical tensions between family members through dialogic visual communication. In addition, I described my struggles studying photo-making as ritualized processes, which constitute the social construction of family, using visual, ethnographic research methods at various sites. My study is a metapractice bringing a range of sites and rituals together with concrete particulars of ethnographic research to question how we do what we do, and what our choices are in how we enact family relationships.

At the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, families followed clear rules guiding their participation, which emphasized a traditional photo-first approach to producing an annual family photo that means something. At home, mothers renegotiated rules for photo-making rituals through emotionally charged performances and explained that their photos no longer mean the same thing. Through Snapchat, siblings created rules for how to relate and visually curate their relationship maintenance through snaps, which they assured me did not really mean anything. Yet through this research, I understand family photo-making rituals as communicative processes of meaning in the making.

Studying family photographs as processes, not texts, required a communication perspective exploring how choices are negotiated. As such, it is important to note, photo-making rituals mean different things to different people at different times. I observed challenges to romanticized visions of family togetherness, which also tie these three sites together. The ideal family is believed to be photographed together and enjoy ‘being together.’ However, this kind of ideal is a nearly impossible performance for families: Screaming children separated from their parents at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut, divorced family members who have chosen not to be together and prefer not to pose together, and adult siblings exchanging photos to maintain a long distance relationship. In choosing
how to perform these rituals, and which family photos to display, exchange, and/or preserve (and not preserve), individual family members curate family memory.

Bringing all three sites together, family photo-making rituals emerge as patterns of choice, which are shaped by family stories and memories, and passed on between generations. Through this research, I learned the limited binary thinking of memory (then/now), technology (digital/analog), media (new/old), and photography (material/visual) does not portray what is happening in the families I observed and with the family members I interviewed. They are doing it all: Posing for a photographer, snapping selfies, printing and paying for photos, texting pictures and posting to social media sites, using cell phones and digital cameras. Photo-making is shaped by specific technologies and ritual practices performed in particular places. However, these photo-making rituals are not unrelated. For example, I observed conversations at the Easter Bunny Photo Hut all about photos with Santa Claus or parents’ shared struggles (regardless of the occasion) to get a ‘good enough’ family photo to buy. My conversations with mothers and siblings shifted from displays after divorce to wedding photo albums and future family photo rituals, and from using Snapchat together to posting photos on Facebook. Employing a communication lens showed how families do photo-making and why it is labor worth doing. The overlapping sites and interwoven rituals highlighted in this dissertation emphasize the complexity of family photo-making. Families want more choices, more access, and more possibilities for photo-making. With more opportunities to engage in photo-making and reify family in visual representations, I urge family members to consider how they might do family photography differently, and diversify their definitions and ritual performances of what it means to be family.
ENDNOTES

1 Reading a Sunday morning newspaper, I found the work of talented cartoonist/writer Nate Fakes. He authors a hilarious “Break of Day” comic. Visit his Facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/natefakescartoons.
REFERENCES


Bell, M. E., & Bell, S. E. (2012). What to do with all this “stuff”? Memory, family, and material objects. Storytelling, Self, Society, 8(2), 63-84.


Hocker, J. (2010). It’s all come down to me: Meaning making with family artifacts. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 863-870.


Oliffe, J. L., & Bottorff, J. L. (2007). Further than the eye can see? Photo elicitation and research with men. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(6), 850-858.


APPENDIX A:

IRB APPROVALS AND PUBLICATION AGREEMENT
5/13/2013

Krystal Bresnahan, M.A.
Communication
4202 East Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00010996
Title: Exploring divorce through stories told about family photographs: A mixed-methods qualitative research study

Study Approval Period: 5/12/2013 to 5/12/2014

Dear Ms. Bresnahan:

On 5/12/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study Protocol - Version 1 - April 11 2013

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
eIRB 10996 Informed Consent Form - Version 2 - May 2 2013.pdf
eIRB 10996 Informed Consent Form for Photograph Use - Version 1 - May 2 2013.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
June 19, 2015

Krystal Bresnahan, M.A.
Communication
4202 East Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00022588
Title: Family photo-making with the Snapchat app: A qualitative study of everyday use

Study Approval Period: 6/18/2015 to 6/18/2016

Dear Ms. Bresnahan:

On 6/18/2015, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Pro00022588 Study Protocol - June 12 2015 - Version 1.docx

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Pro00022588 Photograph Release Form - Version 1 - June 5 2015.docx.pdf
Pro00022588 Verbal Consent Script - June 12 2015 - Version 1.docx **Granted a waiver of documentation

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s). **Waivers are not stamped.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review
category:

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX B:

PHOTO RELEASE FORMS
Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Granting Permission for Photo Use in this Research Study

IRB Study # 10966

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:
Exploring divorce through stories told about family photographs: A mixed-methods qualitative research study

The person who is in charge of this research study is Krystal Bresnahan. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Dr. Jane Jorgenson is the co-investigator and another research staff member involved who can act on behalf of the person in charge. Krystal Bresnahan, the Principal Investigator for this study, will be facilitating your interview.

The research will be conducted in your family home, so that the Principal Investigator may see the family photographs discussed in your interview and how they are displayed.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to:

Learn more about the complexities and ambiguities of divorce through the family stories told about family photographs after divorce. Information generated from this study will contribute to the field of communication, specifically, to understanding the relevance of meaning making processes and storytelling in families coping with the transitions and challenges of divorce.
Study Procedures
If you grant permission for your photo to be used in this study, you will be asked to:

- I am asking your permission to use your image in a family photograph for this study. You will determine if the photograph can be used for any of the following purposes:
  - Use of the photograph for data collection. Your image will be used as a supplement to an audio-recorded interview. The Principal Investigator will use your photograph during the process of transcribing the interview, analyzing data, and writing results to assist in the visual processing of information collected in this study.
  - Use of the photograph for conference presentations. Your image may be used as a visual representation of the verbal data collected from an audio-recorded interview, and shared with an audience for academic/educational purposes.
  - Use of the photograph for publication in academic journals. Your image may be used as a visual representation of the verbal data collected from an audio-recorded interview, and shared with a national and/or international readership in an academic journal for educational purposes.

- I am asking your permission to use your image in a family photograph for this study; however, your confidentiality is important to me. The photograph will be stored with restricted access in the principal investigator's office in order to protect your privacy. All photographs will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator's office. In addition, your image in the family photograph will be used with a pseudonym to make the best efforts to ensure confidentiality.

- Finally, I am asking that you determine if your image should be altered in any way in the family photograph used for this study. If you would like your image to be altered, then I would like you to specify how you would like me to alter your image. Possible options include placing a black bar across your eyes, blurring your face in the image, editing/removing any part of the image, etc. in order to better protect your identity/privacy.

Alternatives
You do not have to grant permission to use your photograph for this research study.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study
records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

**You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

**Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

*Signature of Person Taking Part in Study*  
*Date*

*Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study*
Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures or methods will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesia that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Photographer Release and Family Member Image Release Form
IRB Study # 22588

I, the undersigned, hereby consent to the use by Krystal Bresnahan, the Principal Investigator, of all photographs, or other images or recordings of me for use in the research study entitled “Family photo-making with the Snapchat app: A qualitative study of everyday use” for all purposes, in any and all media including the Internet (i.e. academia.edu, LinkedIn), publications (i.e. academic journals, dissertation research), and/or presentations (i.e. visual materials for conferences, art exhibitions inspired by this research).

I am fully aware that my likeness may appear in materials available to students, parents, faculty, or staff of USF, and individuals outside of the USF community.

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished images or other content in which they may be used.

I release Krystal Bresnahan from any liability related to the alteration, intentional or otherwise, that may occur in connection with the processing, editing, transmission, display or publication of the images, and understand that images may be cropped or altered for purposes of illustration.

I understand that all images in which I participate, including photographic prints, or digital files are the exclusive property of Krystal Bresnahan and I grant her the unrestricted right to copyright, publish and re-publish the images.

Signature of Photo Subject __________________________ Date ____________

Printed Name of Photo Subject __________________________

Signature of Photographer __________________________ Date ____________

Printed Name of Photographer __________________________
APPENDIX C:

COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS
Copyright inquiry - Permissions for "Break of Day" 12-16-14

Krystal Bresnahan
Hi Nate, My name is Krystal Bresnahan and I am currently a graduate student a...

Nate Fakes <nate_fakes@hotmail.com>
Hello Krystal,

It's no problem at all if you would like to use that particular comic in one of your dissertation chapters. I appreciate you asking permission and glad to hear you enjoy "Break of Day"!

I've attached a hi-res version of the cartoon for use.

Good luck with your project!

Best,

Nate Fakes
Cartoonist/Writer Nate Fakes Cartoons
Dayton, Ohio
Cell: 937-780-3454
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/natefakescartoons