

## How Do Children and Their Mothers Make Sense of Photographs Containing Other Children?

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*Photographing is a cultural activity that helps people share, make sense of, and transform historical, personal, and societal experience and knowledge. The widespread practice of parents' photographing and posting photos of their children inspired this study. The study asks: How do mothers and children use photographs of children to make sense of childhood? The research included an activity where children (ages 7–10) and their mothers narrated stories using two photos of children. Children and mothers emphasized some shared and importantly different values. Values that differ in emphasis across participants reflect their different positions in everyday life or conflicting perspectives.*

**Key words:** *photography; children; Instagram; sharenting; narrative*

This inquiry is grounded in the idea that parent-child activities are central to the cultural development of society. To address this larger theoretical premise, I examine parents' and children's sense making of photographs of childhood. Photographing itself, as a process, replicates representations of childhood that precede the practice while explicitly reproducing and transforming the existing meanings attributed to the medium in which the photograph is displayed. Therefore, I consider photographing to be a cultural activity that helps people share, make sense of, and transform historical, personal, and societal experience and knowledge.

The cultural-historical school of developmental psychology has been close to childhood studies in its recognition that child and society interact to create meaning and human development (Daiute, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Dynamic developmental theory (Daiute, 2014) is important to emphasize

here, in part to provide a focused study of child-adult interaction with uses of digital photography in the development of society. Dynamic developmental theory values collaboration between individuals and their surroundings and accepts everyone, including children, as active participants of their social environment, both as individuals and as members of a cultural group. Another major tenet of this contemporary developmental theory is the role of symbol systems, like language, rituals, and icons, as cultural creations that people use to mediate their interactions in societies and the meanings of life. Consistent with this view, parents use digital photography to create social environments and cultural messages for making sense of their environments, making their own choices and acting at this technological moment in time. In that dynamic transformation, not only the ways we relate to children and childhoods change. The ways we express our relationships also go through rapid evolution due to the technologies we use to manifest our experiences. For example, taking family photographs every Christmas morning after breakfast may become a tradition in a household. By helping form this tradition, parents can structure, in everyday activity and discourse, the use of media in which children participate. Photography, in this example, is a particular form of media. It has its own type of communication in visual mode that developed over time. The output of this communication could be shared in any form (e.g., on a Christmas card, on Instagram, in a frame in a living room) based on the photographer's purpose. The structure the photographer uses has its own history, stylistic criteria, affordances, and constraints, yet the reason for taking the photograph and the myriad details involved are all

cultural interactions.

Building on this theoretical framework, the study involved both adults and children in the inquiry. Much of the focus on parents' involvement in media technology has considered parents as controllers and regulators (Uhls, 2016) and not necessarily as users. It is only recently that scholars and practitioners acknowledge that parents are the ones who actively use media in front of and with their children (Livingstone & Bovill, 2013). For example, they are the adults who mostly take and share photographs of children online (McPeak, 2013). The widespread practice of parents' photograph posting even created a term, *sharenting*, which forecasts the possible implications of the uses of photography in the daily lives of children (e.g., Ammari, Kumar, Lampe, & Schoenebeck, 2015; Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Fox & Hoy, 2019; Le Moignan et al., 2017; Minkus, Liu, & Ross, 2015). Nevertheless, an important point which has been greatly missing from research is children's thoughts and experiences regarding being photographed by adults. To this date, only a few newspaper and magazine articles have included children's thoughts and concerns about their online photographs (e.g., Dell'Antonia, 2016; Lorenz, 2019). Scholars still have a lot to do to offer children's opinions about childhood photos. Rather than being subordinate, inferior, and in need of control, restriction, and protection, children are "competent social actors" (Prout, 2005). Childhood photographs are an interesting data source because although parents and children may enjoy the activity of photo taking and sharing today, the documentation may socially, emotionally, or even physically affect the child and their relationships in unknown ways in the future. The present study establishes theoretical and methodological foundations to design research examining and defending children's ability to objectively assess practices related with documenting childhood visually.

### **Why is childhood photography an important source of information?**

Today, we live in a world where the written word is no longer the principal mode of communication. Slater (2013) claims that photographs, especially everyday photographs, are "a form of communication rather than a reflective representation" (p. 138). If photographs are vehicles of communication, they carry material and symbolic significance for individuals who take, take part in, and look at the photograph. The symbolic character of photography is fundamental here as it allows a work of function and form developed by humans. Photographs afford opportunities for individuals to make sense of personal experiences and to be able to share their experiences with others. By symbolizing personal experiences in verbal and visual forms, people can narrate the challenges and significances they ascribe to a life experience. When narrating personal experiences, individuals can create their own voices in a unique way (Fairclough, 2010) and contribute to the cultural development of society (Bruner, 1987; Daiute & Nelson, 1997; Emig, 1977).

Harrison (2002) discusses whether photographs are capable of narration or can be used only to *trigger* narration of experience. According to her, photography may function both to narrate and to enable narration depending on the researcher's goal. The latter, the use of photography as a prompt, has been addressed by many scholars (e.g., Becker, 1974; Collier, 2009; Schwartz, 1989) and has been used as a research technique in many studies (e.g., Clark, 1999; Cleovoulou et al., 2013; Esin, 2017; Esin & Squire, 2013; Luttrell, 2003; Orellana, 1999; Rasmussen, 1999; Rich & Chalfen, 1999; Squire, Esin, & Burman, 2013). These studies make it evident that photographs can elicit stories and therefore be used in research to examine different perspectives, values, emotions, and memories of research participants.

Which photographs are suitable to understand childhood as it is visible online? Historically, the storing, displaying, and circulating of family photographs has been a strongly gendered activity (Chambers, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Halle, 1993, Rose, 2010; Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). Such imagery certainly reconstructs

childhood and restates the everyday lives, needs, and interests of children. This study seeks to redress what it feels is missing in the literature on children's representation in the public sphere so far—namely mothers' and children's own voices, experiences, and meanings, which can give equally valuable insights to social scientists as those of general media. In this study, I am interested in the perception of digital productions of cultural knowledge, specifically photographs of children publicly published on Instagram. The main research question is: How do mothers and children use photographs of children to make sense of childhood? The research proposes that parents' photographs of children provide an important clue to their interactions with photography and childhood, as photographs become transitional objects in enabling mothers' and children's values to be narrated. The study's findings inform us about how the variety of ideals conveyed in photographs containing children are perceived by mothers and their children. Children's role in the sense-making process as participants, observers, and interpreters advances beyond the social construction of childhood by powerful others, like parents, communities, and institutions. Children's and mothers' interpretations not only inform why the photographs are taken but also provide a contemporary historical narrative.

## Method

Narrative is relational. It is created across symbolic and physical spaces where people interact (Daiute, 2014). The current inquiry considers children and mothers as experts in informing us about the meanings the childhood photos entail from their perspectives. Because the goal is to examine development, differences across mothers' and children's perspectives are important to analyze. Children and mothers participate in the research as co-researchers and relevant actors to deconstruct the already assembled values presented in photographs containing children while relating, transforming, and narrating their own values about childhood.

## Data collection

The data collection involved a projective activity with children (ages 7–10) and their mothers to collect their narratives about photography. The activity included group discussions of sample pictures of two online childhood cultures with the goal of creating a background story about the child presented in the picture. The selection of the photographs used to prompt participants to talk was based on previous research on Instagram (Benevento, 2018), and that is a central feature of this design. The photographs illustrate already established Instagram childhood cultures organized and created by parents via two different hashtags (Benevento, 2018). The photograph selection is consistent with those in previous studies that established criteria for public story design: potentially interesting, worthy of discussion in a research workshop (Daiute, 2010; Daiute, Ataman, & Kovács-Cerović, 2015). Rather than eliciting reflections on the process of parent posting in any pure way, which would be impossible in any case, the research presented exemplars of the two childhood cultures for interpretation by mothers and children. The goal was to explore whether and how participants' interpretations as co-researchers compared in values and whether/how those might have differed across parents and children. The photographs were selected among the public ones where the child's face is not completely recognizable or visible, to protect the depicted children's identity. The two photographs used in this activity are shown in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. Sample picture of #letthekids used in group discussions.



Figure 2. Sample picture of #fashionkids used in group discussions.

The call for participants was for parents with children aged 7 to 10 years old and their children. A flyer was distributed to after-school programs and acquaintances who work as caregivers. Interested participants were asked to distribute the call to their friends and organize a meeting with other mothers they knew in places suitable and convenient (e.g., home, school, café). In separate forms, children and mothers gave their full consent to participate in the study.



Children and mothers participated in the discussions in separate sessions in the summer of 2017. Ten sessions, five with children and five with mothers, were held. The discussions started with distribution of sticky notes and pens. Participants spent a few minutes writing their first impressions of the children they saw in the photographs. Then with the assistance of the following questions, the participants discussed what they saw in the photographs: How do these children look? Who are these children? Who took the photo? Why the photo was taken? What happened after the photo was taken? If this were your friend (your friend's child) what would you think of them? If these were your photographs (your child's photographs) what would your friend think of you? The expectation was that participants would state diverse perspectives surrounding photography and media use, drawing on their experiences as parents and children.

The discussions were held in Turkish in Turkey. According to Statista's 2016 report, Turkey was ranked fourth (with 16.34 million monthly active users) among users accessing Instagram, following the United States, Russia, and Brazil. The group discussions took approximately 30–40 minutes. They were audio recorded and transcribed.

## Sample

In total, 30 children (13 males and 17 females) and 24 mothers, including two grandmothers, participated in the group discussions. No fathers responded to the call or participated in the discussions. The two grandmothers joined two separate sessions as caretakers. The mothers were not asked if they were users of Instagram. The main reason why the participants were not selected within the Instagram community was to give a wider audience a chance to freely reflect on the act of sharing photos online, a new cultural activity many parents engage in nowadays. Each discussion group had about six participants. On a few occasions, siblings joined the discussions.

## Analysis

To identify participants' interpretations of the photographs, I applied values analysis to the transcriptions of the discussions. The rationale for this analysis method was to identify how mothers and children understand and organize existing norms, values, and principles, usually implicitly (Daiute, 2010, 2013; Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003; Todorova, 2017). Because values are "culturally-specific goals, ways of knowing, experiencing, and acting in response to environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances" (Daiute et al., 2003, p. 85), they provide an important clue to how an individual's diverse cultural beliefs and goals may be interacting with, and situated within, a larger context. In other words, what is happening and being conveyed in the photographs prompted the participants about the kinds of values they had regarding photographing children or being photographed as a child.

Values analysis acknowledges that narrators do not openly state what their values are but are guided by them when narrating. Implicitly, values guide their selection of details, characters, and connections between events (Daiute, 2014). As discussed in the introduction, it is fundamental to understand that each narrative is in dialogue with a societal and cultural context (Bakhtin, 1986). Thus, it is important for researchers to be sensitive to the context in which the participants are expressing their narratives and to design a research setting to enable them to hear expressions that interact with the topic of interest.

Toward that end, the current analysis process examined transcriptions of the discussions. In that process, I determined each conversational turn to be the unit of analysis. After that, I duplicated all the transcripts and initially coded only my turns. This process allowed me to zoom in on the narrations of the participants and their reactions to the cultural context I had created in the room.

Based on multiple reading of all the conversations, 28 value expressions organized into 7 categories emerged (see Table 1). As a native Turkish speaker, I analyzed the transcripts with another researcher, whose native language is also Turkish. Once we had achieved 85% reliability on 20% of the data, which is an acceptable reliability measure, I completed the analysis.

### Findings

Participants used the above photographs as prompts to narrate stories about the depicted children and to make sense of own experiences. Children narrated the photographs while relating to the depicted child, while mothers expressed values about raising a child and taking their photographs. Children and mothers emphasized some shared and importantly different values. Figure 3 presents the percentages and frequencies of the major value categories in the discussions.

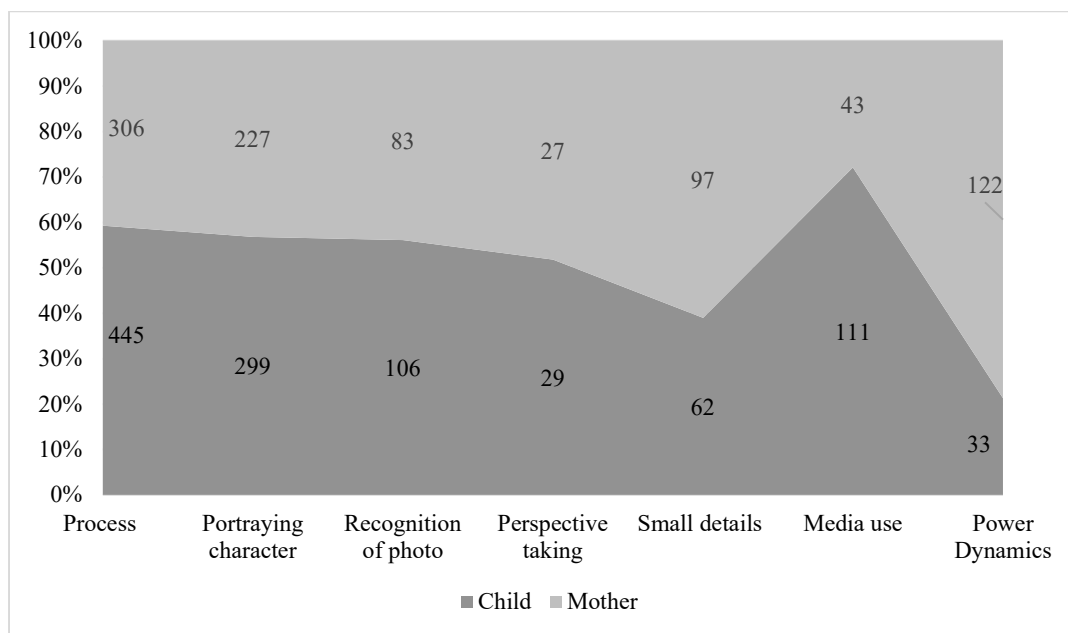


Figure 3. Percentages and frequencies of major value categories of conversational turns across children’s and mother’s discussions.

The values analysis revealed that the mothers and the children shared an emphasis on the importance of the group process, describing the character, the qualities of the photograph, and perspective taking based on empathy. The importance of small details and power dynamics between the children and adults appeared moderately frequently in the mothers’ narratives and less frequently in the children’s narratives. On the other hand, children expressed values regarding media use more often than their mothers. Values that differ in emphasis across participants reflect their different everyday life positions or conflicting perspectives. To better examine these diverse value systems among mothers and children and to distinguish my position as a researcher, I present Table 1.

Table 1

*Percentages and Frequencies of Major Values in Group Discussions Across Researcher, Children, and Mothers*

Identified values	Participant groups		
	Researcher % (N)	Children % (N)	Mothers % (N)
<b>Process is important</b>			
Interacting	28.37 (246)	25.16 (267)	22.66 (194)
Clarifying and repeating	37.02 (321)	3.58 (38)	1.99 (17)
Focusing on the task	18 (156)	2.64 (28)	1.64 (14)
Personalizing interpretations	0.46 (4)	2.83 (30)	7.01 (60)
Debating	0.35 (3)	4.52 (48)	0.82 (7)
General commentary	0	3.2 (34)	1.64 (14)
<b>Portraying a character is important</b>			
Identifying place, SES, and time	2.31 (20)	9.33 (99)	5.02 (43)
Identifying demographics	1.73 (15)	5.66 (60)	5.49 (47)
Identifying activity	0.92 (8)	4.15 (44)	3.5 (30)
Naming	1.85 (16)	3.86 (41)	0.93 (8)
Child's acknowledgement	0.23 (2)	2.36 (25)	2.1 (18)
Identifying emotion	0.12 (1)	0.75 (8)	3.97 (34)
<b>Recognition of photography</b>			
Identifying the photographer	2.08 (18)	2.73 (29)	3.15 (27)
Identifying intent	1.04 (9)	2.17 (23)	3.62 (31)
Identifying future display method	1.61 (14)	2.17 (23)	0.47 (31)
Acknowledging stylistic qualities	0.46 (4)	1.32 (14)	2.1 (18)
Identifying use of Photoshop	0	1.6 (17)	0.35 (3)
<b>Perspective taking is important</b>			
Giving feedback to the child	0	1.98 (21)	0.23 (2)
Giving feedback to parents of the child	0	0	2.1 (18)
Friends think alike	0	0.75 (8)	0.82 (7)
<b>Small details are important</b>			
Clothing and outlook	0	4.62 (49)	9.7 (83)
Meta message	0	1.23 (13)	1.64 (14)
<b>Media use is important</b>			
Children's use of media	0.23 (2)	6.79 (72)	0.93 (8)
Parents' use of media	0.35 (3)	1.89 (20)	3.97 (34)

Children dislike being photographed	0	1.79 (19)	0.12 (1)
<b>Power dynamics are important</b>			
Parents' strong influence	0	0.19 (2)	5.96 (51)
Child's choice and interest	0.12 (1)	2.45 (26)	7.83 (67)
Interaction between child and photographer	0.35 (3)	0.47 (5)	0.47 (4)
<b>Total</b>	100 (867)	100 (1061)	100 (856)

*Note:* Individual values under categories are abbreviations for the fully stated values.

As shown in Table 1 and described in the section on research design, the researcher provided a context for participants to narrate using the two photographs, which emerged from the previous study analysis as characteristic of each hashtag community. The questions and the feedback participants received during the process of discussion were mostly structured and standardized across the groups, but sometimes the group dynamics allowed the conversation to go in unplanned directions. Values regarding the importance of small details, media use, power dynamics, and commenting were examples of such expressions that spontaneously emerged during the discussions. I, as a researcher and facilitator of the discussions, did not directly enact those values with my questions and feedback. Without being asked or prompted, participants spontaneously introduced the norms and values regarding those in their interpretations of the photographs. Given the distinction between values that were expressed on the spur of the moment and ones I and the photographs initially introduced, the following sections will first visit the values the research design created the context for and then the ones that emerged during the discussions.

## Values directly influenced by the research design

### *Group process is important*

An overwhelming majority of the conversational turns (1501) indicated the importance of the group process. I, as researcher and facilitator of the group discussion, enacted half of the process values (750). Within this value, emphasizing processes, were six related values (interacting; clarifying and repeating; focusing on the task; personalizing interpretations; debating; and making general comments).

The most prominent value I emphasized during the discussions was clarifying and repeating (321 turns) what I heard from the participants. Clarifying and repeating includes turns devoted to reiterating and verifying what participants had said. Reflecting and reiterating what I heard from participants was important to me since I wanted to substantiate a rich dialogue among participants while making sure I verified my understandings.

A major difference between children's and mothers' ways of using process values is seen in the use of debating and personalizing interpretation values. Debating as a value emerged when participants questioned the previous interpretations or suggestions. Participants debated a number of issues, most prominently the ones related to the portrayal of the character's name, sex, and location. While children debated the child's name and location, mothers discussed the children's gender identity by emphasizing their strong role in influencing children's masculinity or femininity.

### *Portraying the character is important*

Portraying the character was the second most prominent value after orientation to process (588 turns). Identifying



specifics of the unknown character depicted in the photographs included importance of place, SES, and time, demographic details, the activity the child was engaged in, the child's personality and interests, the child's name, acknowledgement of the camera, and emotion were among the values visited in this category. These values characterize the children, the mysterious persons, portrayed in the photographs. I enacted these values (62 turns) with questions such as "Who is this child?" and "Where are they?" When discussing the child's identity, children (299 turns) and mothers (277 turns) emphasized different but mostly similar values. Three important differences between mothers' and children's discussions appear in the findings: importance of place, SES, and time; naming; and child's personality and emotional state. During the discussions, while children focused on basic characteristics like gender, age, place, names, etc., mothers highlighted the significance of multifaceted characteristics like interests, personalities, and emotions. The importance of personality and emotion in mothers' discussions goes beyond the values of confidence, freedom, or happiness and presents the intense complexity of humanness of a child the mothers perceived.

In their attempts to find the most relevant name for the child in the photograph, children pondered various names for various reasons. Among those reasons, one, I believe, was the playful nature of finding a name for an unknown character. The other reason, I suppose, was the symbolic and defining quality names have in representing many characteristics about a person. Some names were directly linked to the place they envisioned the child was from or the child's socioeconomic status as some names sounded old-fashioned and conventional and some were contemporary and popular. Some child participants, for example, suggested the #fashionkids child had a foreign name or was from a foreign country (e.g., Germany, Japan, USA).

The other interesting observation about the portrayal of character is that mothers emphasized the value of acknowledging the child's emotions more than the children did. The mothers recognized the importance of a child's personality and emotions, sometimes by inferring unwarranted meanings based on one photograph. Both the children and mothers perceived the child in the #fashionkids photograph to be sad. Sadness also appeared to be a prominent emotion in the life of the child, not only at the moment the photograph was taken but also in general. The reasons given for the sadness were either the parents' control over the child's clothing choices or a lack of freedom. The following turn exemplifies how the complexity of the various considerations emerged altogether in one turn:

**Mother:** She's a bit influenced by the family, probably mimicking the mother. There's absolutely imitation there. A child at that age lives primarily as a child. She thinks that she is happy when everybody says "very sweet, your dress looks very beautiful," but she is not a happy child. She will notice it when she grows up. I do not think she wears the clothes she wants. Totally wannabe, just trying to look good. The fact that a child of that age has hair made up like this, worrying it doesn't get messed up, etc. ... (7.58) is not a living child. She is under the assumption that her life is so beautiful because she sees that life is like that from older people and her surroundings. If you ask whichever is happier among them ... both seem happy, but the actual scene, if we were to go deeper, the other one (#letthekids) is happier.

#### *Recognizing the qualities of photography is important*

The participants narrated using two photographs, and the acknowledgement of photography, as a medium, became an important part of the conversations. Recognizing the photographic qualities included the need to identify the photographer, the reason the photograph was taken, the display method, aesthetic features, and edits made on the photograph. Similar to the values regarding character, I facilitated the emergence of these values by asking questions like "Who took this photograph?", "Why was the photograph taken?" and "Where do we see this photograph?" (45 turns). Children (106 turns) and mothers (83 turns) stressed different but mostly similar values

in regards to photography.

In terms of frequency, children's mentions of photography display methods (23 turns) and their identification of the use of Photoshop (17 turns) as opposed to mothers' appear to be two major differences in this category. Children's attention to the exposition of the photographs indicates interest and knowledge about the places where the photographs are usually shared. It appeared that children not only were aware of the platforms where adults share photographs but also found them worth mentioning when discussing their peers' photographs. Among the places where children suggested the photograph might be displayed were the internet, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and a poster in an apartment building. Children were also quick to notice and careful to review the collage in the #fashionkids photograph (17 turns) in comparison to the mothers (3 turns). The major differences in the two value statements reveal that children are informed about the visual strategies around sharing photographs digitally.

Although children and mothers emphasized identifying the photographer and the intent of the photograph at similar rates, some important distinctions emerged in their reasoning behind these value expressions. In almost all conversations, mothers offered parents or grandparents as possible photographers. While reflecting on the photographers, mothers highlighted gender differences, but this time relating to the photographers, not the child who was being captured. The excerpt below exemplifies speculations regarding how fathers and mothers take different kinds of photographs:

**Mother:** I think this one definitely is taken by a mother.

**Mother:** I agree. I think it's taken by a mother.

**Mother:** So a lady has certainly taken her.

**Mother:** Or a fashion photographer.

**Mother:** Men are not so detail oriented if they are not photographers. But men do not have that much detail in them. They photograph directly just like that. But this one's definitely ...

**Mother:** A careful father or an attentive mother may have taken it. Someone who knows how.

As seen in the above excerpt, *who* the photographer was mattered in making sense of what was happening in photographs of children. In answering *why* the photographers took the photographs, children highlighted the following reasons: to save the memory or to advertise the clothing style. Mothers, on the other hand, almost always cherished the photographs as documentations of the present for the future. When explaining why this act of memory saving is important, children referred to their parents' personal desires and habits while some mothers stressed the lack of their own childhood photographs. Broadly speaking, it appears that mothers admitted that they are the ones who take family photographs and they expect some form of appreciation from their children in the future, while children acknowledged the photographs as artifacts to communicate and share what is happening here and now.

*Taking the perspective of people involved in the photograph and commenting are important*

By asking "If this were your friend (your friend's child) what would you think of them?" and "If these were your photographs (your child's photographs) what would your friend think of you?", I influenced participants to take the perspective of their peers who were involved in taking the photograph. I enacted these values in 21 turns. Participants, in return, used photographs to narrate a story about the depicted child while positioning themselves in roles as the child's peers or the child's parents' peers. I call this kind of positioning commenting, since many participants had already expressed scenarios where they saw the photos in social media. To whom they comment,

however, became more important than the role they positioned themselves to be in.

The findings show that children were more interested in talking to their peers to make remarks on how they looked (21 turns) while mothers expressed interest in contacting the parents of the depicted children to give feedback (18 turns). None of the children entertained the idea of contacting the parent of the child they saw in the photographs.

According to some mothers, they assumed that the parents were responsible for what was going on in the images and wanted to receive feedback on their visual expressions. Children, on the other hand, were tempted to give feedback to their peers. This feedback was neither about the power relationships between the child and other figures nor the intent the photographer had. Most of the time, children expressed a desire to simply react to the role their peers played in the photo. Following are a few turns from separate discussions about the #letthekids photo: *If I had a photo of me like this my friend would probably congratulate me for doing sports. I would think he looked good but also say that he blocked the sun. I would tell her right away after school opens that she looked really good.*

### Values participants spontaneously introduced

*Using small details (props) to understand the context is important*

The interpretations of both children and mothers of the photographs emphasized the importance of clothing and outlook, and the message intended to be given beyond the immediate content. The analysis revealed that both photos seemed to endorse one value over the other in this category. As acknowledgement of the details regarding clothing and outlook appeared to be most valuable to talk about when participants were discussing the #fashionkids photo, the #letthekids photo generated expressions related to the possible essence of the photograph: protecting the earth.

As a facilitator, I did not specifically ask any questions that could direct participants' attention to the mentioned details. Both children and mothers valued clothing and outlook during the discussions, with mothers expressing it more (83 turns) than the children (49 turns). Mothers demonstrated careful attention to the clothing and outlook to argue the degree of control children have in dressing themselves. Based on the adult accessories they identified in the #fashionkids photo, they discussed the power dynamics between children and parents. They also sympathized with the possible photographer of #fashionkids by admitting they also use clothes to indicate they care for their children.

For the children, one reason why the clothing of the #fashionkids child was important to mention was because pieces of the clothing altogether "did not make sense." For example, one child said: *This photo (#fashionkids) is a little bit irrational. She is not wearing short sleeves but her legs are open. She wears boots like it's winter. Winter is like that, that's the logic of winter.* Children referred to this inconsistency solely in relation to characteristics of the child (SES, personality, and interests). Many attributed her clothing style to her being a *fashionista*, *smug* or *rich and inconsiderate*.

*Acknowledging the use of media is important*

The participants used the narrative activity to reflect on their own use of and thoughts about media. Within this value emphasizing media were three related values: acknowledging children's use of media, acknowledging parents' use of media, and identifying children's dislike of being photographed.

The findings show that children and mothers emphasized media values in varied ways. An especially important observation is that children's use of media was expressed quite heavily by children themselves

(72 turns) as opposed to by their mothers (8 turns). In other words, children's media use did not appear as important in mothers' narratives as it did in children's discussions. This finding was surprising given the amount of concerns parents are known to have about the negative effects of media.

Even when they were not directly asked, children highlighted the fact that they are aware and use media to both create and share photographs. The following conversation is typical of those introducing the importance of considering the value of children's media use in creating photography:

**Child:** Sometimes I take my mother's phone and take photos with my sibling.

**Researcher:** Is that so? Who else does things like that? How about you?

**Child:** I take my mother's or my father's phone and take photos together with my sibling, and then share them.

**Researcher:** How do you do that?

**Child:** On Facebook.

**Child:** I also take selfies but don't share them.

**Child:** I share them only when we go to a place. Like when we go sightseeing or on holidays ... And I only put them on WhatsApp's status.

Children emphasized their roles not only in creating and sharing photographs by using phones and cameras but also in following photographs of others in various platforms. In the following excerpt, YouTube appeared as an outlet where children participate in actively building their own habits and self-image as well as watching what others are producing:

**Child:** I see all the photos of all my friends.

**Researcher:** Where do you see it?

**Child:** There are some photos on the internet. Some photos put to the internet.

**Researcher:** How do you see it? You have an internet account?

**Child:** There is now a channel, YouTube. When you open a YouTube channel, you automatically have an account...

**Researcher:** Are you all watching YouTube? Do you like it?

**Child:** I do not like YouTube, because ... Do not interrupt. Because there are some absurd videos out there, and some of them are perverted and show perverted photos, and there they watch YouTube within YouTube.

**Child:** I left YouTube a few days ago. I'm just downloading game videos from YouTube.

...

**Child:** But ... I actually like YouTube a little bit, because there is my favorite ... Enes Batur, because Papy's is something only children, adults, and college students should be scared of. It's so disgusting.

...

**Child:** For example, on our last day of class ... I cannot watch my Enes Batur ... or watch Papy. They are forbidden, but thanks to first graders, on the day we get our grades they kept making me watch Papy, Enes Batur, Orkun Işırtman, Baturay, and so on. I know all the videos right now. They make me watch a video called Papy Over.

The dialogue above suggests that children are critical about their and their peers' use of media. Children highlighted the importance of regulation and age-appropriate content, and they described being disturbed by some content when given a chance. Interestingly, not only disturbing content and their peers' behaviour were identified as sources of annoyance around media. Identifying parents' unwarranted practice of taking their photo also appeared important for the children (19 turns). Children expressed dislike about being the subject of their parents' photography "all the time."

**Researcher:** Have you been captured in photos at all?\_

**Child:** Yes, we have.

**Child:** I have only four pictures.

**Child:** I hate being photographed.

**Child:** I have just four pictures that I look nice.

**Researcher:** Who took them?\_

**Child:** Mom. Four of my mom's were beautiful and the other catastrophic ones were either taken by a professional man who took the camera or my father.

**Researcher:** Have you gotten a professional photo?\_

**Child:** Always on a holiday.

**Child:** I hate being photographed because my parents are taking pictures everywhere. I've started to hate that now.

**Child:** I am always in the pictures like this (not smiling). I do not open my mouth and I'm sick of it after many times of being photographed.

**Child:** Me too.

*Acknowledging power dynamics between the people involved in the photograph is important*

The importance of recognizing power dynamics between the people involved in the photographs included expressing parents' strong influence in creating the photograph (53 turns), recognizing the child's agency and choices (93 turns), and recognizing communication between the child and the photographer (12 turns). I enacted these values in my questions and interactions only a handful of times (4 turns), mainly when attempting to identify the photographer. Children also did not put much emphasis on the issue of power dynamics (11 turns).

Expressing the importance of parents' strong role in the *creation* of the child and the photograph, mothers overestimated the influence parents might have in dressing the children depicted in the photograph. The following dialogue was not typical but unique regarding the influence parents have over their children:

**Mother:** For example, I, this child—it is the same picture already; one is distant, one is zoomed in. A child who is guided by her family, perhaps living a lifestyle that the child does not want. For example, it created an impression that the child was in a photoshoot and wanted it to be over soon.

**Researcher:** Where did we get that?

**Mother:** From the posture.



**Researcher:** From the posture?

**Mother:** Posture. A child cannot stand this way. They are restless, want to move, to be free. That's the kid image I have in my head. This is a child that was trained. For example, I see in this photo that the child seems to be working, but she does not like to be there too. She made an impression that she was there motivated by her family. This is a freer child, living in nature. If you have not noticed, I have not distinguished between boys and girls. I did not say boys and girls.

...

**Mother:** He feels safe with his family, but also is in peace with nature, because he is on the fence. That's the reason why he has let go of his hands. It says "I'm free but my family is by me and can hold me if anything happens."

**Mother:** This is directed by the mother, the father, and this one himself ... (13.10)

**Mother:** Maybe it is the gender difference between them. Freedom between girls, boys. We raise men freer because the mothers raise the girls a little more carefully ...

**Mother:** When you compare these two photographs, maybe you can say that, but in this one it is not clear if the child is a girl or a boy. I cannot say anything because of that.

**Mother:** As mothers, we are more dominant on our daughters for clothes. "It would be better if you wear it, it suits you, it's fashion." It's always your mother, your father's imposition, our influences to these children. Children are raised just as we want them to be, just like us. My daughter likes dressing up just like how I like it because she sees me and because I want her to dress up like that. Still today, unfortunately, she does not choose her own clothes too much in her own way and in her own room. "You take it out, you prepare," she says to me. When I go, I bring out more fancy stuff for her to wear. Of course, we want them to look pretty. Everyone wants their child to look well and beautiful.

The above dialogue's essence is that parents think they provide, shape, and direct their children's lives as well as their depictions. In another group discussion with mothers, the obvious counterargument to the parents' sense of power over their children's lives was that children have their own personalities and choices. Despite the acknowledgment that existed about constructing children as they want them to be, mothers also introduced a dilemma in their own narratives by stressing children's choices and interests. Perplexity emerged when mothers questioned their authority and success in influencing their children. Intriguingly, children did not appear as the stakeholders who defended children's choices to go against the seemingly contradicting argument of parents' strong influence. Some mothers, again, demonstrated an interest in vocalizing the depicted children's perspective. They stressed the importance of examining each child on their own to make inferences about their lives. The following turn is an utterance of the value regarding children's agency: *But there are also children in society who are so candid in their acts on their own. I mean, it's not like mother or father dresses them up ... there are children who are like that.*

Clothing manifested itself as a topic again when discussing the degree of power children have over their lives. Deciding what to wear in everyday life situations appeared as an important point of reference, albeit a seemingly small one, to discuss how much influence parents have on their children. Some mothers claimed they did not even have a say as to what their children wore every day.

**Mother:** They determine what they wear. Efe (her son) determines himself.

**Mother:** Yes. We are trying to pay attention, maybe they do not listen to us. They choose what they want.

**Mother:** Because he decides what to wear, I mean, even if I tell him to pose him in a certain way, he gets into the pose he wants. But there is something like this, I think, at first, his father, or us saying stuff like “Here, let’s pose like this, my son” doesn’t obstruct him in the future. But I think we are always transfusing when they are young. Because how else would Efe know to pose that way?

**Mother:** I think it depends. But Talha (her child) also knows. Look, his father never ... (18.20)

**Mother:** Why is that? He sees from the father, he sees it from us. After all, our children are our reflections.

**Mother:** Of course. Yesterday, for instance, there was a private Halis Demir’s (a soldier) portrait. We said “come on, salute” and they were photographed with the soldier. It was us who were interested, in fact.

**Mother:** But at the same time, it is because of the confidence you provided for the child. Even if you say, “look, do this and do that” as much as you want, if the child does not have a little self-confidence, feel safe and is not adventurous, the child would never do things like that.

**Mother:** They would be embarrassed if they were shy.

...

**Mother:** Here, what is the matter then? Look, we come to that: Whatever the child wears doesn’t matter. Their face and the body language hints at the character of the child.

The debate on the issue of power dynamics was consistent with the attention paid to the clothing of the #fashionkids child. The mother participants’ empathetic attempts to understand both children’s and parent’s perspectives did not appear as important in the children’s discussion. In a small number of instances where children expressed their views on the child’s choices, they sounded almost too judgmental:

**Child:** I think this girl likes dressing up as an adult.

**Child:** She is trying to be a smart-ass.

**Child:** Yes.

**Child:** I think she is being a smart-ass to a boy.

**Researcher:** Okay, what does this other one do?

**Child:** Doing a ballet.

**Child:** That one is doing ballet in his own concept.

The high number of turns devoted to the discussion of clothing and the degree of power parents have over children demonstrates that fashion acted as a useful tool to make sense of the photographed children for having symbolic meaning for both children and mothers.

## Discussion

To examine photograph taking and the construction of childhood in a face-to-face setting where the appropriate audiences join the research, the study included an activity where children and their mothers narrated stories using two photos of children representative of already established Instagram childhood cultures. Overall, the values

analysis yielded a set of statements indicating a precise and in some ways dilemmatic mix of ideals from the mothers' and children's positions about exemplars of parent postings of their children. Both child and mother groups put forward the values they lived by while using the photographs as aides to support their claims and justify their reflections. As noted above, 28 values were generated from the narratives guided by the question "How do parents and children use photographs of children to make sense of childhood?" Mothers and children highlighted different values about media use and parents' strong influence on children's depiction in photographs. The latter is interesting, as the participants assumed the photographs were taken by parents.

Considering the individual group dynamics with my involvement and the context of the research, grouping the 28 values according to their sources of influence became essential in organizing the findings. The importance of group process, the importance of the portrayal of character, recognizing photography as a genre, and taking the perspective of the people involved in the photograph appeared as four focal topics that the research design predisposed to emerge in participants' narratives. In contrast, recognizing details related to clothing and the essence of the photograph, the importance of media use, and the importance of power dynamics between the child and their surroundings were topics that spontaneously emerged in discussions with children and mothers. Interestingly, the kinds of values that belonged to the latter group generated the most complex and diverse points of views across mothers' and children's discussions. In other words, the values that participants expressed without the researcher's intention appeared as the most different between mothers' and children's narratives. As participants expressed themselves in diverse stances for diverse purposes, they narrated their interpretations of the depicted children while relating their interpretations to their involvement in taking, helping with, and sharing photographs.

Whether the narratives were positive or negative did not matter much for the analysis because the goal was not favouring one photograph or childhood over another. Instead, the design allowed the participants to use a familiar tool, a photograph of a peer or a peer's child, to relate their own experiences to the depicted child. Participants were not told that the photos were taken from Instagram, nor they were told anything about the hashtags. Positioning themselves as an audience, they spontaneously made sense of the photographs and introduced values that appear to be meaningful for themselves. This projective technique offered a solution to overcome biases participants may have had and elicited people's underlying motivations, beliefs, values, and concerns. Based on the assumption that people have more information about their own environment than they do about others', we can conclude that what participants said and did not say in these discussions tells more about themselves than about their perceptions of the children in the photographs.

When participants were debating over the values they held about the children in the photographs, they introduced ideals they seemed to have consensus on. However, once they started to get used to the freedom they had to talk about the depicted children, they introduced values that linked to their roles as parents and children. Those values that spontaneously emerged in respect to the group dynamic appeared to be the most striking ones in this research for informing us about the distinct perspectives children and parents have regarding their relationships with each other and media.

One goal of this research was to discuss whether photo taking and sharing as a cultural activity has implications for public-private life boundaries and power dynamics between parents and children. Neither children nor parents found the topic of privacy worth visiting during their discussions despite the fact that rights-based approaches to children's digital media footprints have been gaining much attention in research and policy (Livingstone & Third, 2017). Interestingly, however, the degree of power parents and children have over each other's choices appeared as an important topic to discuss, with different emphasis across the narratives. Mothers excessively discussed whether the parents had dressed the children, made them pose in certain ways, or altered the emotions their children

conveyed and the amount of freedom they had after talking about what was visible in the photographs. Mothers also second-guessed their interpretations of overpowering parents and brought in the idea that children choose to dress up and pose without any direction from their parents. Hearing mothers' consider children's choices and interests while debating about their power suggests that parents do not simply look at what is visible in children's photographs but also look for ways to *see* what choices children have. The process of this *seeing* resulted in them perceiving their influence to be stronger than children's. Children, on the other hand, suggested only a few times that a parent most likely chose to dress the children up and made them pose.

Why were mothers most likely to attribute the way the child in the photo looked to the role of the child's parent? Sociologist Davison's (1983) hypothesis of third-person effect may explain this paradox. According to him, people often overestimate the effect of media messages on the generalized other. They think media has greater effect on others than on themselves. In the conversations, mothers usually brought up the topic of parents' strong influence as if it restricted children's freedom and therefore negatively affected their emotions and lives. While there is a body of research that indicates parents often believe their own children to be more immune to the negative effects of media than other people's (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), they may also be unaware of just how much media they are helping their kids consume through the use of photographs and social network sites. In one group discussion, a mother brought her mobile phone and showed me a photo of her oldest daughter to prove her point that she made sure her daughter dressed age-appropriately thanks to her efforts. Another mother, in another conversation, came to the group discussion her daughter partook in to take a photograph of us. She explained afterwards that her daughter's summer homework was to keep a photo diary which she will share with her classmates on the first day of the school year. Nevertheless, both mothers appeared to have strong opinions on the influence the imaginary mother had on the #fashionkids child. Future research may need to consider third-person effect and test creative and compassionate methods that could allow parents to candidly share their own practices around media without policing what other parents might have been doing.

Last but not the least, the present study establishes theoretical and methodological foundations to design research examining and defending children's ability to objectively assess their parents' online practices even at young ages. Children formulate and transform their own culture besides the culture their parents build around them. Children can sometimes be brokers of media within the home environment and transform the ways their parents use its tools. Especially with the increasing use of social network sites, who controls the rules is not clear, particularly when sharing photographs is quickly becoming a norm among parents. The concerns parents have about their children's independent use of media differ by medium and the predominant use of it. For parents to worry about their children is quite natural. However, many parents make two mistakes. One is drawing causal relationships between negative developmental assets and media use based on correlations; the other is authoritatively restricting children's use of media while not exemplifying the wanted behaviour. Parents should make sure their own interactions with mobile phones and social networking sites exemplify the best they might hope to see in their children when they get older. This research suggests that children learn, know, and use digital media even before they are allowed to independently own personal accounts on digital media. They evaluate and critique their peers' and parents' ways of becoming via media in very informed ways as "competent social actors" (Prout, 2005; Wyness, 2000). This finding reveals that while the parental figure remains an important resource for children as they grow up surrounded by media, children are not passive individuals who mindlessly imitate what they see, and their opinions should be fully acknowledged.

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