Parents Frame Childhood for the World to See in Digital Media Postings

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PARENTS FRAME CHILDHOOD FOR THE WORLD TO SEE IN DIGITAL MEDIA POSTINGS

by

AYŞENUR BENEVENTO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Adviser: Professor Colette Daiute

With the wellbeing of children being at the center of contemporary media discourse (Livingstone & Bovill, 2013), developmental studies are ever more challenged to understand both children’s and adults’ behavior in online spaces. Parents and children are involved in the human development process in complementary ways (Johansson, 2010; Uprichards, 2008) while using media platforms. As the development and use of innovative media technology are accelerating at a fast pace, theory and methods for analyzing uses of digital media for human development have lagged behind. This study examines adults’ postings of photos of their children on social media and offers a unique methodological approach to studying social media. The study considers posting behavior with Instagram hashtags of #fashionkids and #letthekids as a contemporary parenting practice. A major innovation of this study is first, to enact the concept and method of narrative analysis (Daiute, 2014) to the postings as a 21st-century practice. Having applied this method, the study also offers findings about the diverse values that emerge across two specific digital parenting communities, with implications for ongoing research.

Research questions guiding this study include 1) How do the two digital cultures of childhood postings occur online? 2) What values seem to guide the creation and posting of photographs to the two digital cultures of childhood? 3) How do parents and children interpret exemplars of children’s photos from the research? To answer these questions, a sample of Instagram captions and photographs with the hashtags of fashionkids and letthekids posted in a 12-day period in 2016 was collected and analyzed. In
addition, a projective activity, where children (ages 7-10) and mothers created a story about a sample picture depicted as fashionkid and letthekid, was conducted.

Analyses of postings with #fashionkids and #letthekids define these hashtags as cultures in terms of the distinct values (norms and beliefs) of an ideal childhood. Specifically, what the parents presented as ideal in the #fashionkids culture include values of looking good, expressing gender, posing, and being associated with possessions. Posts with #letthekids, on the other hand, revealed a wide range of values, including conflicting and ambivalent ones regarding children’s emotional distance from the parent, and the life at home. The diverse emphasis in values expressed in children’s photographs, in turn, allowed mothers and children to highlight different values they have about media use and parents’ strong influence in children’s depiction in photographs. This comparative analysis of postings and participants’ narratives 1) provides a method for research design and analysis to understand the co-construction of childhood in contemporary times and thus insights into how parents are using the Internet to define childhood in society, 2) reveals how societal values, in this case, about childhood, are performed in digital spaces, 3) provides a foundation for a discussion about children’s privacy rights and, 4) provides a basis for furthering parent’s understanding of the significance of their practices in online spaces.

Keywords: digital media, parenting, visual narrative, childhood, Instagram
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CHAPTER I

Capturing Their Aspirations: Parents’ Creation of Childhood Cultures

Figure 1. Family snapshot by Hacı Ali Ataman

My father, Hacı Ali Ataman, took the photograph above in 1986. The legs belong to him. The child, whose shoulders are carrying the legs, is my brother, Mehmet Ataman. This candid photograph has never managed to live its life in a comfortable frame, been exposed to and adored by every guest and family member. Instead, the photo remained in a closet among many other insignificant family photographs, only shown when family members are bored and finally feel some desire go through old photographs or somebody in the family dies.

In her well-known 1977 book, “On Photography”, Susan Sontag asks whether we remember the events of our past themselves, or whether we remember photographs of them. I was born in 1987; therefore I have no memory of this photograph being taken. For the child, my brother, the moment this
photograph is taken has no significance. He cannot remember anything about having his dad’s legs on his shoulder or even the day this was taken. He likes the photograph for esthetic reasons. Unfortunately, my father is not alive any longer to explain why he framed this photograph in this way and its meaning to him.

As a human development researcher and a devotee of photography, I can speculate on my father’s technical skills, his composition and the feelings my brother may have of having this photograph as one of the mementos of his childhood. By putting his legs on my brother’s shoulders, my father may have wanted to be part of the frame. He centered his son’s face and focused on it before clicking on the shutter-release button. In this eternalized scene, my brother is not smiling, not surprised, not posing. In fact, he has a seemingly expressionless face. The photo seems to be captured spontaneously. Perhaps this was a scene from some sort of a boyish game, and my father had the camera around to have a quick snapshot of his son. We do not know. What we can infer, however, is that my father’s composition of this image relates to his role as a parent and offers an indication of his relationship to his son as a close and endearing one.

I discovered this photograph in a dusty part of my memory when I started to write this dissertation and to develop my research questions concerning children’s and parents’ experiences and meanings related to childhood photographs. I remembered the photograph because of the unusual involvement of the parent into the frame, the vagueness of the child’s feeling, the background that hints home environment and most importantly, the photograph’s history as a document. The photograph has not been shown to many people since it was taken. It was not displayed in our frequently visited living room. My father did not share it with his friends to show how “cute” his son was. The photograph surfaced in my memory, the memory of the sibling who is now 31 years old, when I discovered the concept of oversharenting¹ and its possible meaning for our current and future selves and general understanding of childhood based on visual images.

¹ Oversharenting is a cultural trend that sees parents overtly sharing personal information of their children online.
By sharing the photograph my father took, I am re-purposing his expression about being and becoming a father with his child conveyed in the photograph. The composition of the photo occurs, I hypothesize, in relation to his relationship with his child and broader cultural interests. This dissertation presents theory, method, and findings to address this hypothesis.

Because of the widespread use of digital photographs in digital media, I take my personal thoughts and observations and turn to research on uses of social media in the construction of childhood and, ultimately, in children’s rights to their own images. After reviewing the literature on perspectives of childhood, sense-making, functions and affordances of digital media postings, uses and implications of childhood photography, and finally parents’ uses of digital media postings, this dissertation investigates two contrasting yet similar digital childhood cultures that were formed by parents on Instagram. These two cultures organize themselves with the use of #fashionkids and #letthekids. Based on three phases of rigorous analyses in which I compare these two childhood cultures, I will be purposely answering the following three questions: 1) How do the two digital cultures of childhood postings occur online? 2) What values seem to guide the creation and posting of photographs to the two digital cultures of childhood? 3) How do parents and children interpret exemplars of children’s photos from the research? The methods applied to address each question are implemented to understand how photographs of children are used as cultural tools on personal social media postings and to consider how this cultural activity has implications for public-private life boundaries and power dynamics between parents and children. This approach is also a way to examining cultures of parenting.

The developmental inquiry here 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’ practice of taking, accumulating, and preserving photographs of childhood by publishing them online. The activity itself, as a process, replicates representations of childhood that precedes the practice while explicitly re-
producing and transforming the existing meanings attributed to the medium, in which the photograph is displayed. Therefore, I consider postings to be a cultural activity that helps share, make sense of and transform historical, personal, and societal experience and knowledge. Building on this theoretical framework, the study has three end goals: Firstly, the research examines ways of expressing values relevant to childhood via the digital postings of children. These postings have interactive, verbal, and visual components with diverse affordances. Because the concept of affordance is often positioned at intersections of design and uses (Gibson, 1982), I am particularly interested in combining theory and practice on the platform where the postings occur: Instagram. Although I examine Instagram’s digital specifics, I also move my focus beyond Instagram. I analyze parents’ postings of their children’s photos on social media as an “activity-meaning system” (Daiute, 2014) in which individuals across dynamic systems interact and develop meanings that are understood by each other globally via media as cultural tools (Daiute, 2014). This theoretical orientation from developmental theory is consistent with defining “socio-technical systems” where “technology shapes sociality as much as sociality shapes technology” (Niederer & van Dijck, 2010; van Dijck, 2012, p.6). The study considers posting behavior as a socio-cultural practice and examines techniques and meanings of Internet postings of child images as a system. This study focuses on the composing and sharing of photographs as socio-cultural activities, and their diverse affordances and meanings on diverse socio-cultural understandings of childhood are the main focal points here.

Secondly, much of the focus on parents’ involvement in media technology has considered parents as controllers and regulators (Uhls, 2016). It is only recently that scholars and practitioners advise parents to have an active dialogue with their children and teenagers about the use of digital technology rather than recommending parents strictly prohibit children from using media (Livingstone & Bovill, 2013). Now we have reached a point in time in which the millennial generation - generally accepted to be those people
born between 1980 and 2000 (Strauss & Howe 2000) - and original digital natives, who were the teenagers in these original studies, are entering their late 20s and 30s and becoming parents themselves. This means parents are the ones who also actively use media in front of and with their children. They are the adults who mostly post photographs of children (McPeak, 2015). Their interaction via specific media devices and media productions, however, has not been well studied. Despite the public interest in the impact social media has in people’s lives, only a few studies have focused on parents’ social media using habits and the potential influence their practices may have on their child’s development. For example, Note to Self - a podcast aired by New York Public Radio - asked three mothers: “Should you post your children’s photos online?” This episode was aired first in 2015 and then in 2016 again because of public demand. In the episode, three mothers discussed their practices and opinions about posting children’s photos. Not a single child was on air. The lack of the child’s voice is not news in public media. However, it is news that scholars still have not done empirical research to offer children’s opinions about childhood photos. Children’s role in the sense-making process, as participants, observers, and interpreters advances beyond social construction of childhood by powerful others, like parents, communities, and institutions. Children’s interpretations not only inform what parents have posted but also provide a contemporary historical narrative. The present research will not only investigate how people use digital media to construct childhood but also will consider how children make sense of the picture-taking and sharing practice.

Thirdly, the present research is consistent with a few childhood scholars and developmental psychologists who have been defending children’s power in making decisions for themselves. With those scholars, I also argue that we should start seeing children not as subordinate, inferior and in need of control, restriction and protection, but as “competent social actors” (Prout, 2005; Wyness, 2000). Parents’ photo sharing practice is an interesting one here because although parents and children may enjoy the activity of photo posting and captioning today, the documentation may socially, emotionally or even physically affect
the child and their relationships in as yet unknown ways in the future. Although there has been growing interest in the relationship parents and children build via the use of media and the ethical considerations that arise with sharing information about minors without their consent, not many studies dare to question parents’ contribution to children’s digital footprint. 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.

**Perspectives on Childhood in 20th and 21st Century**

This study is theoretically positioned within childhood studies and development studies. The traditions and perspectives of these distinct yet overlapping disciplines will offer me a particular framework to formulate research questions, create a research design, and carry out rigorous analyses.

Childhood studies emerged as an academic discipline during the 1980s and 1990s, with a commitment to interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on psychology, sociology, anthropology, geography, history, law, and other areas (James, Jenks & Prout 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1992/1982; Qvortrup, 1994; Woodhead, 2008). Focusing on children as developing persons was not childhood studies’ innovation. A major shift from assuming that children were empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and personality began to occur with major theoretical and empirical studies across the 20th century. Concepts related to the child’s construction of knowledge, sociality, and so on were proposed and examined by developmental psychologists (e.g. Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1978); sociologists (e.g. Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1951); and anthropologists (e.g. Mead, 1928; Opie & Opie, 1959). Toward the end of the century, the interdisciplinary childhood studies discipline began to ask “what is a child?” (Jenks (1992 [1982]) and how do history and culture define the meaning of “child” (James & Prout, 1997)?
Childhood studies, whose theoretical approach has been referred to as a paradigm shift, has a strong emphasis on the social construction of childhood (Alanen, 2001; Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1984; James et al., 1998; Johansson, 2011; Mayall, 2002; Prout, 2005; Wagg & Pilcher, 2014; Woodhead, 2008). Although we seem to “repeat” similar childhoods, our childhood is different from that of our parents’ generation, contemporary childhood is different from ours, and all children do not experience the same childhood. This means that childhood cannot be discussed and analyzed outside of its dynamic social structures and contexts. Childhood is understood “in a structural form” and “in a generational context” (Qvortrup, 2002, p. 46), in other words, in relational terms. Studying children and childhood in isolation is of limited value because childhood is constructed through dynamically changing relationships (Alanen, 2001; James & Prout, 1997; Johansson, 2011; Woodhead, 2008). Childhood is not just a socially constructed categorical group, but children live within it and construct their particular social group in relation to others, by interpreting the meanings and significances made by other social groups. Childhood varies based on temporary, spatial, and cultural contexts; each individual child or local group goes through different experiences. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a plethora of individual or/and local childhoods within a singular macro childhood (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2001; Qvortrup, 2008).

While the emphasis in the relatively recent interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has been on the social construction of childhood, much of developmental psychology has also dedicated time to studying how children construct reality and relationships (see Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky 1978). Across theories, developmental psychologists acknowledge in greatly varying degrees the interactive role of biology, society, and culture, albeit in different ways. The cultural-historical school of developmental psychology in particular has been close to childhood studies in its recognition that child and society interact to create meaning and human development (Vygotsky, 1978, Daiute, 2013). Consistent with this view, parents also use digital media 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. 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 media 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. The theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for the study design and analysis that will be described later.

Looking at The Problem from a Socio-Cultural Lens and Seeing with Narrative Inquiry

The content that media brings to the home both represents and influences our culture. Children and parents learn from what is offered, acquiring, solidifying, and actively changing their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Dorr, Rabin, & Irlen, 2002). Media use is an activity that both parents and children engage in. Children are situated in particular activities, within which they learn how to participate at ever increasing levels of skill (Vygotsky, 1978). More skilled people guide children’s participation (Rogoff, 1990). Parents can also be the ones to whom the child is apprenticed via their media use and serve as the more skilled participant in use of a particular media. On the other hand, affordances of digital interactive media are different than non-interactive media forms such as newspapers, books, and magazines. Therefore, the way that parents and children engage in dialogue, direct attention and modulate their own media-related activities are also likely to be different from interactions around non-digital media. The
Figure 2 below, illustrates processes of cultural mediation through media.

![Diagram showing cultural mediation through media]

**Figure 2. Parents’ cultural use of media.**

Humans are a biological species yet also defined in terms of their cultural activity. Situated social interaction in meaningful activities in the material world is the source of the development of culture (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). Culture is “the repository of social learning and socialization, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their position in the world” (Kline, 1998, p. 95). We use cultural tools, which some call artifacts\(^2\), to learn dynamically developed regularities and similarities (Rogoff, 2003) that we have not experienced in first hand and act, again, using these tools. Humans do not act directly on the world without the mediation of a cultural understanding and tool. They use cultural tools to reflect the activities prior generations were engaged in through to the present. Only other human beings can create the special cultural context needed for that engagement to occur at the present. That is the reason why cultural tools do not carry static functions and meanings for every person’s use.

\(^2\) Artifact is not meant as a material object here. Inspired by John Dewey, Cole (1996) defines artifact as “an aspect of material world that has been modified over time of its incorporation into goal-directed human action” (p. 117).
One of the most frequently used examples of a cultural tool is language in the socio-cultural theory literature. The study posits here that we could think of media, which influences various activities and mediates interaction among human beings and with their environments, as a cultural tool as well. This theoretical direction allows one to think of media as an object and also as a process in the context of research (Weltevrede, 2016). 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 based on the purpose of the photographer (e.g. on Christmas card, on Instagram, in a frame in a living room). The structure the photographer used 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. Similarly, by writing, an individual may use the language as a tool to communicate with others in a letter format, a structure that has its own history, stylistic criteria, affordances, and constraints. Table 1 make the comparison between language and photography as a media form clearer from the socio-cultural theory’s perspective.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Christmas Card</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Frame</td>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
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</table>
Both photographs and language 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, 1995/2010) and contribute to the cultural development of society (Bruner, 1986; Daiute & Nelson, 1997; Emig, 1977).

Today, we live in a world where the written word is no longer the only principal mode of communication. Slater (1995) claims that photographs, especially everyday photographs are “a form of communication rather than a reflective representation” (pp. 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. Symbolic character of language and photography is fundamental here as it allows a work of function and form developed by humans. Harrison (2002) discusses whether photographs are capable of narration or whether photographs 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. Bateson & Mead, 1942; Becker, 1974; Collier, 1967; Schwartz, 1989) and has been used as a research technique in many studies (e.g. Clark, 1999; Esin & Square, 2013; Esin, 2017; Luttrell, 2003; Orellana, 1999; Rasmussen, 1999; Rich & Chalfen, 1999; Squire, Esin, & Burman, 2013). These studies make it evident that visuals, mainly photographs, can elicit stories and therefore, be used in research to examine different perspectives, values, emotions and memories of research participants.

Photography narrates as it bridges the world between past and present; personal and public like a story does. Photography enacts values and significances the photographer has within a frame. Similar to stories, the photographs posted still consist of characters, plots, themes, and emotional tones within the
frame. By consciously choosing a setting and constructing a composition, the photographer also narrates a story to be told to an audience. Details of the photographs can be regarded as values that reflect socio-cultural norms and principles the photographer want to represent within the frame. Therefore, photographs can be used not only as a technique in research but also as a resource for understanding cultural processes within and beyond photographs.

In the context of home, parents and children learn and produce their own cultural knowledge using media, as well as many other cultural tools. In this study, I am interested in the digital productions of cultural knowledge – digital postings of the cultural learning process adults and children engage in together. The research here proposes that parents’ photographs of their children in digital media provide an important clue of their interaction with online cultures, individuals and their children, as children become transitional objects in enabling parents’ values and meanings to be narrated.

Digital Media Postings as Artifacts and Their Organization by Users

There exists a disproportionate balance between the overwhelming rapid changes in digital technology and the slowly growing interest in conducting good empirical studies on recent media tools among social scientists. Many unanswered questions persist in terms of the influence digital media has in people’s lives. For example, despite its popular use among new parents, we still do not know much about what media tools parents use to establish contact with each other, and with the rest of the world, to create meanings related to parenting and how those meanings might influence their children’s perceptions of the same media tools. The use of photography on social network sites will guide my way in responding to the unknown world of visually mediated interaction between parents, children and the world.

Visual media tools (e.g. photography, emojis, animated images) have gained much power in the recent years. In an age where people communicate not only via words but also via visuals, our dialogues are slowly shifting from textual to visual modes in digital media environments. The term digital media
postings can employ both visual and textual modes of communication. They refer to content users create in social network sites. Digital media postings can especially be influential and impactful in expressing an experience to a wider community.

Over the past decade, new devices and formats have entered the fray, from televisions with digital video recorders to video-and Internet-enabled mobile phones, iPods and tablets. Such new devices allow dynamic interactivity between users by requiring user action and input. User input, in turn, creates an ongoing dialogue between the platform and the user. While the users are no longer a passive recipient of a message, they also have the constant and instant power to shape and share the message with a wider community. Blogging, social networking via platforms like Twitter, Instagram, etc., watching videos on Youtube have become essential communication extensions for many people. Arriagada (2014) argues that digital technologies, particularly the Internet and social networking sites, help individuals to configure and situate themselves in networks where cultural flows circulate. Participation and management of the networks are done through a set of activities (e.g. posting, liking, messaging, commenting, etc.). In this sense, social networking sites are a bundle of technical possibilities through which processes of cultural groups and activities are realized and transformed.

For this research, Instagram will provide the cultural context as it feeds a rich field of visual and textual data. Essentially, Instagram is a social networking site that enables its users to share pictures and videos online. Unless users of the platform change their settings and select only a group of people who can see their sharings, all the photographs they share are publicly available to anyone in the world. In addition, Instagram allows its users to utilize hashtags. This way, users can identify messages on a specific topic on the site and virtually "connect" and interact with each other through images. As Adam Mathes (2004)

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3 According to Instagram’s statistics from 2016, half of the accounts on Instagram are private.
explained, social tagging leads to a folksonomy — the combination of the words folk and taxonomy — indicating the collective social organization and description of information at the metadata level. A folksonomy is emergent in the sense that it is always in the process of being generated by users and updated with new contributions (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Importantly, a folksonomy is a socially and collectively produced alternative to the pre-determined organization or static structure. Having a private profile and maintaining existing connections in a controlled setting is possible but then, using hashtags becomes redundant unless the user wants his/her followers to be aware of the existing hashtags without creating new connections.

By using hashtags, individuals join communities of discourse and reflect their own understandings of the existing trends and cultural developments. However, one needs to realize that although diversity among those reflections still exists, people tend to emphasize currently popular styles, a set of cultural values even more collaboratively. Here, these publicly available pictures "are those designed to catch a wider audience –an anonymous aggregate of individuals unconnected to one another by social relationship and social interaction, although falling within the same market or the same political jurisdiction, the same outreaches of appeal" (Goffman, 1979, p.10).

Tagging and folksonomies can be employed not just for the basic organization of media and information for the users of a platform but also for social researchers to harness and systematically collect data. The prevalence of big data, aided by the availability of tools for capturing and processing large datasets, has been noted across disciplines with its limitations and pitfalls (e.g. Boyd & Crawford, 2012). As Highfield and Leaver (2015) note, “simply reporting metrics around activity per day or measuring the most active users or most-mentioned users and content, while an important output of the dataset, does not necessarily account for why this has happened, and may overlook reasons and behaviors influencing social media use”. Statistically, finding correlations and patterns among variables becomes possible because of
enormous quantities of data. Of course, big data is not synonymous with quantitative analysis (nor small data with qualitative), and there are important insights to be acquired from large-scale analysis and tracking. Approaching research questions both quantitatively and qualitatively becomes a possibility for social researchers then to zoom in on the affordances of a platform while exploring distinct meanings users create with each other. Through the section below that concerns affordances of the tool, it is my hope that the reader will have a better idea about the dynamics of the intertwined world of digital media postings on Instagram.

**Affordances of digital media posts.** Theoretical considerations of affordance originate at the intersection of perceptual and cognitive psychology, specifically within the context of Gibson’s (1982) work from the mid-60s onwards. According to Gibson (1982), affordance intends to account for the actionable properties of a physical object or environment. An object’s affordances, in other words, describe its phenomenological qualities, projecting potential uses, delimiting possible actions, and signaling perceived functions. The concept is generally used to describe what tools, such as media technologies, allow people to do. Here, I will use the concept of affordances to portray well known functions of digital posts.

Different forms of communication privilege different constructions of reality and create different relationships between users and audiences (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Jones, 2005). These differences exist because of the kinds of affordances offered by different types of digital media. The growing media research literature has been expanding from asking questions of access and distribution of media to asking questions about intentions behind media use and accessible content (Livingstone, 2003); thereby gradually building a comprehensive understanding of families’ media-related activities at home in relation to social class, education, and gender. Much of the research shows that the main form of technology exposure is still television at home (Gutnick, Robb, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011; Plowman, Stevenson, Stephen & McPake,
2012). However, beyond television, we know that children and parents use a range of digital media devices in their homes such as computers, Internet, and smart phones and on average, children spend more time with screen media than has been recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.\(^4\) Increasingly, scholars perceive the value in understanding the home media context (Clark, 2012). Mapping the landscape of families’ home media use, such as posting their family photos, is critical not only for its own sake but also to understand the technological affordances of the widely used medium in situ: digital media postings.

The affordances of digital media postings enable vast numbers of people to participate in online communities. As will be discussed later, mothers, for example, join a virtual community online and share the difficult and cheerful experiences about becoming a mother. Why might they even bother engaging with a mostly non-visible group of people rather than spending time with their children and cleaning their houses? Below, I will list a few of the affordances of sharing images of children, not only words, in interactive digital media for recent parents:

**Immediate:** One way in which interactive digital media has influenced digital photography is through “affording the expression of a form of visual co-presence arising out of the temporal nature of social streaming technologies, inflected by the portability of mobile media” (Zappavigna, 2016, p.2). These affordances mean that a style of “you could be here with me photography” (Zappavigna, 2016, p.2) has emerged in which photographers include themselves in the frame and invite the viewer to imagine themselves into the frame. Given the relative ease of taking out a mobile device, both within the rhythm of

\(^4\) American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) currently suggests that “pediatricians recommend to parents that they limit children’s total media time (with entertainment media) to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming per day and to remove television sets from children’s bedrooms.”
a domestic routine, or while navigating public space, visual sharing can approach synchronous time. In other words, images delivered either to massive online audiences or to smaller networks of associates, friends, and family were seen, “liked” or “commented” immediately.

Supportive: The relationships that parents develop through social networking sites do not fit traditional definitions of friendship, or even social support. Fellow users of a platform may never meet in person and may never even know what each other looks like. They may never attend social gatherings together, visit over coffee, or carry on a complete conversation. But, nonetheless the relationships may be meaningful and akin to mentoring (Stern, Cotton, & Drentea, 2012; McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2012; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Emotional support digital networks provide, especially for recent mothers, will become the topic of discussion later on in this chapter.

Trend-setting: Digital media tools extend acts of consumerism and commercial exchange to a range of new spaces and times that were previously separate from commercial forces. Individuals can participate in the branding activities, which traditionally belong to marketers. For example, a parent can take a photograph of her new sandals and write how comfortable they are when going out to play with her child. Parents can learn about conventions of representing children in visual social media, compare their photos with many others, and this may influence their purchasing decisions as well as their ways of having (e.g. getting C-section during birth) or raising (e.g. homeschooling) their children. While this characteristic in some form existed in 20th century photograph, it is certainly one of the main central features of networked camera for its ability to reach many audiences at once.

Archival: Digital photo albums are taking over the role physical photo albums have. Parents use the interactive digital media platforms as a cloud service, a system that would stay intact even if their personal computer crashes. By sharing photographs of children in a particular space, they save the copies
of photographs and eliminate the risk of losing them in their personal computers. Moreover, for parents, the digital account becomes a domain that could be inherited to the child.

Broadly accessible: Becoming a parent may be a daunting task. Photography becomes a language for parents to communicate with viewers not necessarily known by them. Among these viewers, there may be parents who experience similar ups and downs of being a parent, some who simply like looking at cute baby pictures while collapsing in a couch after a stressful day at work, a baby clothing brand representative who may be on the look out for the latest trend among parents, or a Ph.D. candidate who is interested in the topic of expression of parenting in media.

Searchable: Content posted in interactive digital media platforms provides affordances – especially through hashtags—that make it searchable (what Zappavigna (2012) calls “searchable talk”) and, as such, helpful to the work of Internet research. Social researchers who are interested in how individuals interact with each other using the same tool at a certain time period can pick a topic that has been ‘picked up’ by its users. By using the hashtags, users do what usually appears to be the researcher’s job: systematically categorizing the shared knowledge and experiences of a group of individuals.

Profitable: The way the interactive digital media platform users interact with each other is different than how people interact face to face. Interaction in online space may be through the ‘like’ button. One may express likeness of a post with a click, without saying a word. The number of likes of a post indicates reputation of the person who made the post. This reputation is scalable, therefore comparison between users is quickly visible in the first few hours of the post’s life. More followers or friends may bring more likes and more likes will make users visible in the vast field of other users in platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Therefore, for some regular users, aside from the hidden pressure of getting the most likes, having more followers may become a priority. From a marketing perspective, these regular users have a special importance for companies because they carry the potential to join big companies’ efforts to promote their
products. In other words, ‘word of mouth’ becomes ‘word of post’ in the context of interactive digital media. Above sections described how these regular users, who have a lot of followers and receives a lot of likes, are described as influencers and how they monetize their uses of interactive digital media platforms. Users can sign contracts with big companies and become their faces or receive freebies from companies to promote their products. Platforms like Instagram were not designed for this purpose but the users re-purposed the affordances of the platform.

Participatory: Although much research shows that TV is still the most frequently used media outlet in home environment, the young generation is mostly reading and distributing new information using interactive digital media tools. Among the resources available for expression and experimentation in the development process are digital media that enable broad networking through self-oriented content production and sharing via photos, videos, blogs, and ubiquitous texting (Bennett, Freelon & Wells, 2010). Young citizens display increased interest in environmental issues, human rights, and consumer politics (Inglehart, 1997; Zukin et al., 2006; Torney-Purta, 2002). We do not see an apathy in terms of social issues. In fact, we see that many more people are choosing to express their thoughts and emotions in online platforms, using more humorous, creative and collective ways to voice their opinions than ever in the past (Benevento & Okuyan, 2017). Individuals express their values, ideologies, beliefs, get a chance to connect with like-minded people and even partake in actions regarding the topic they care about without meeting with each other in person. The easiness and freedom interactive digital media offers to its users is making the tool truly remarkable and worth for investigation.

It is important to acknowledge that the binary between childhood and adulthood is socially constructed and negotiated, and deconstruction of this binary contributes to better understanding of both individual and collective situated and interdependent practices. As the first generation to grow up with interactive digital media, children of today are comfortable with collaborating and sharing information and
do so “in ways that allow them to act quickly and without top-down direction” (Rainie, 2006, p.7). For example, after getting permission to play an online game on her parents’ smart phone, a 12-year-old can easily use the Internet connection to share her score with others, preferably friends, who play the same game. Situations like this, of course, have profound implications and complications for the relationship that parents and children have via media. Within the context of this proposed research, the focus is partly on the interaction children, parents and wider audience build using photography and media as cultural tools. Who initiates the interaction, who is in charge of creating the photography and who is effected the most after using the media tool is not yet clear and perhaps not even important. What’s clear and important is that parents and children both are being and becoming adults and children in complementary ways (see Johansson, 2010; Uprichards, 2008) while composing, posing, taking and sharing photographs in media platforms. In the following section, I will provide a historical account of photography and the ways in which we take photographs of childhood to trace the dynamic interaction built between audience, taker, and the depicted child.

**Photographic Visions of Childhood by Parents**

Contemporary multi-modal social media like Instagram are not the first to be used toward the co-constructions of childhood. In this section, I will examine how contemporary childhood is changing and, because we live in a world that increasingly deals with visual imagery, I will begin with the definition of photographic visions and parents’ representation of childhood. In order to better understand the shift in production, representation, and sociality that children’s photographs represent, it will be helpful to, first, consider a brief social history of some of the transformative moments in photography.

Photography has been part of our lives since 1839. The first camera intended for the public in terms of simplicity and pricing, was introduced in 1888. Writers who have tracked the evolution of personal photography seem to concur that the rise in its popularity can be linked to the emergence of a
connection between photographic practice and private memorialization in the public imagination (van Djick, 2008; Gye, 2007; Rubinstein, n.d.). Kodak Eastman – the premier manufacturer of portable devices in the late 19th and early 20th century – lead this change in public perception. Kodak produced easy-to-use cameras and defined photography through their advertising (e.g. 1903: “A vacation without Kodak is a vacation wasted”, 1909: “There are Kodak Stories everywhere. see Walton, 2002, p. 38) for years.

According to Zimmerman (1995), over the years, photography became not simply an immensely popular leisure/consumer activity, but also an organized social and artistic practice that was valued for its spontaneity, authenticity, naturalness, and emotionalism. She says: “photography became the social and cultural site where one could revive one’s true self, which was invariably vivacious, ambitious, and imaginative” (p.10).

When we look at what is depicted in a photograph, what is taken, in other words, we ignore the materiality of the photograph and the process of making it (Tifantale, 2016). Socio-historically, the attention paid to the process of making or the image itself has influenced perspectives about who the photographer is. Murray (2008) claims that there are two types of everyday life photographers: those who take photos for fun or to record special events, and those “serious amateurs” who consider themselves engaged in the making of art but who were also enmeshed in middle-to upper class leisure. Everyday photography, whether taken with serious intentions or for fun, is a socially designated and highly regulated cultural practice (Bourdieu, 1990). It includes both the production of imagery and its consumption (Harrison & Aranda, 1999). Along with the mass dissemination of cameras came the rise of snapshot photography and perhaps stronger divisions between those who took themselves seriously and those who viewed photography more functionally. Since 2000, the production of photography has become very cheap and simple with the convergence of digital cameras and mobile phones. The consumption, on the other hand, became quantifiable with the number of clicks on digital contexts.
This level of development and accessibility helped photographs to borrow different social functions than simply esthetic ones. With the introduction of social media and popularity of mobile phones with built-in cameras, now everybody has a chance to be the producer and consumer of photography. Tifentale (2015) focuses on the cellphone cameras’ image-making, image-sharing and image-viewing functions and describes this camera as the “networked camera”. Uses we might want to make of every day photography, captured in networked cameras in research will require an understanding and functions of such online image-sharing contexts. The foci in this research will be both the network, the social functions, of the camera and the everyday photography parents’ produce of children/childhood.

Parents’ Snapshots of Children

In a distinctively important study, Higonnet (1998) looks at how children have been portrayed and photographed since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century until the end of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Higonnet (1998) argues that we are living through a major change in our understanding of childhood but this change is not happening for the first time in history. She shows how romantic representations of childhood were constructed through a semiotic opposition with adulthood in the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century and how the visuals extract childhood from social life in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. She claims that by the time we reached the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, artistic and commercial branches of illustration had enough imagery to use for the purposes that concern children. For the childhood imagery in 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Prout (2005) states, “although images of children virtually disappeared from modernist art of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the romantic legacy lives on in the images still used on birthday cards, biscuit tins, and in the sort of advertising that wishes to convey a sense of unproblematic family life” (p. 11). As described above, in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, individuals slowly had chances of owning cameras for personal use. With the wide accessibility of cameras and photography development techniques, romanticized and innocent image of childhood became the essential template for the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century family snapshots (Higonnet, 1998), at least in The United States. Parents take their children’s photographs,
adore their beauty, display the photographs in their living rooms, and create holiday greeting cards to send
grandparents and friends have become the most reasonable thing to do. Special events and leisure
activities, along with parents, grandparents, and other close relatives or friends, have constituted a cocoon
within which the snapshot version of childhood is sheltered. “Smiling, embraced, celebrated, dressed up,
cute and cuddly, the romantic child played the central role in photography’s performance of family”
(Higonnet, 1998 p. 94).

As photographic variations on innocence accumulated over time, by the final decades of the
twentieth century the domination of this sentimental ideal was under challenge (Prout, 2005). More and
more sexual meanings have been attributed to photographs of children both past and present, whether
because of what is taken in the photograph or what is made by the audience. Just like stories, photographs
attract multiple interpretations, sometimes layered on different discourses. The trend to interpret sexuality
in photographs of children accelerated in the late 70’s (Higonnet, 1998). Public have discussed
inappropriateness of some controversial commercial art photographs (e.g. Mapplethorpe’s photographs of
naked children from 1976). At the same time, western world was beginning to define child pornography as
being generally visual and specifically photographic because photographs look realistic to us. Ever since
child abuse was recognized as a social problem around the mid-19th century, western nations have been
using the tools of law, social policy, and protective agencies to eradicate it (Hacking, 1991). The
assumption was that a child molester would not find a painting from 16th century, similar to one in Figure
3., as appealing as a photograph like Sally Mann’s in Figure 4.
Figure 3. A painting of a woman and a child from 16th century. Adapted from “Madonna and Child,” by Gossaert, J. (1527). In Marisa, B., 2016, Jan Gossart and the invention of Netherlandish antiquity, Princeton University Press, pp. 120 ff.81.

The discussion about the reality of photographs is beyond the scope of this study. What is relevant here is that Gossaert’s painting presented in Figure 3 has never been censored while Mann’s snapshot of her child Virginia was published with a black cover in her eyes, nipples and pubic region in Wall Street Journal (Mann, April 2015). Sally Mann is an important point of discussion here not because of her position as an artist but as a mother. The photograph above is one of the many snapshots of her children in her Immediate Family series, which was published as a book in 1992. The series is probably her best known and most controversial body of work. She was heavily criticized by art critics (see Woodward, 1992) and the public (see Mann, 2015). After being at the center of a very heated debate for over 13 years and keeping silent, Mann defended herself in a New York Times article in 2015 by reminding her audience that she is a photographer:

“For all the righteous concern people expressed about the welfare of my children, what most of them failed to understand was that taking those pictures was an act separate from mothering. When I stepped behind the camera and my kids stepped in front of it, I was a photographer and they were actors, and we were making a photograph together. And in a similar vein, many people mistook the photographs for reality or attributed qualities to my children (one letter--writer called them “mean”) based on the way they looked in the pictures. The fact is that these are not my children; they are figures on silvery paper slivered out of time. They represent my children at a fraction of a second on one particular afternoon with infinite variables of light, expression, posture, muscle tension, mood, wind and shade. These are not my children at all; these are children in a photograph.”

Could a mother distance herself from her children by approaching them as subjects of her photograph? Yes. Despite so many pictures of children in family photograph collections, children are not always the active subjects of their mother’s archive (Rose, 2010). Bourdieu (1990) notes: “as a private
technique, photography manufactures private images of private life... Apart from a tiny minority of aesthetes, photographers see the recording of family life as the primary function of photography” (p.30). As will be discussed below, even in the Western world, it is still hard to convince the public that a mother “can” take another role in the re-production of the imagery of her children and use the end product to express her values and experiences as a mother. Such imagery certainly re-constructs childhood, re-states the everyday lives, needs, and interests of children, and demolishes the boundaries between adulthood and childhood. This study seeks to redress what it feels missing in the literature on children's representation in public sphere so far - namely parents’ own voices, experiences and meanings, considered as giving equally valuable insights to social scientists as those of general media and children themselves.

**Becoming a Parent and Influencing Other Parents in Social Networking Sites**

In the section concerning affordances of social networking sites, I wrote about supportive and profitable functions of digital networks. To draw possible links between photographs of children and the social functions of these images, this section will explore reasons why parents may want to document their experiences.

Becoming a parent is a developmental event that most adults experience. For the most part, parenthood is looked forward to with great joy and anticipation. Both men and women hold expectations of what the passage into parenthood will entail. As a function of our socialization and cultural upbringing, for women, joy and fulfillment are recognized as two of the most anticipated outcomes of becoming a mother (Higgins, 1989; Wolf, 2003).

Just as starting school for the first time, becoming a college student, or beginning a new job hold unique challenges and difficulties, transitioning into parenthood is a complicated event with life-altering changes (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2002). While both men and women experience difficulties when
becoming a parent, this transition may be particularly challenging for women, for numerous reasons (Arendell, 2000; Goldstein, Diener, & Mangelsdorf, 1996; Nordenmark, 2004).

The roles that men and women play in Western families is still immersed in tradition. Gender is a social context in which men and women occupy different roles. Femininity is considered a female trait that denotes nurturing, caring, childbearing, and rearing. The male trait of masculinity promotes the notion that men are strong, protective providers for their dependent wives and children. The traditional family is composed of a supportive wife who cares for and nurtures her children at home while the husband blazes a successful trail in the working world. This traditional family was socially constructed to promote successful child rearing and to ensure portrayal of the successful family unit.

In the modern world, however, the reality of the composition of a family has changed dramatically, but the idealized roles of men and women remained very much the same (Coontz, 1992; Hare-Mustin, 1988). Although many women’s desires, ambitions, and career expectations have changed, society’s expectation of their role as wife and mother has not (Cha, 2014; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2001). During the transition to motherhood, a woman may find that her workload increases sharply in comparison to that of her male partner (Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). This may cause her to feel a sense of unfairness or increased stress (Offer & Schneider, 2011; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Nevertheless, in spite of the social definitions of gender roles, many women have made huge strides over the past decades by breaking into the professions and careers previously held exclusively by men. This has been and continues to be a struggle for women. Many of the careers women occupy give little to no accommodation for women who want to become mothers. Women, who have come to love their careers and success, more often than not must choose: family or career (Arendell, 2000; Crittenden, 2001; Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2013; Williams & Cooper, 2004; Yavorsky et al., 2015).
For many women, choosing motherhood can be a difficult decision. In the past, a woman may have grown up expecting to ultimately devote herself to the raising of children and keeping her house. Today, the transition to motherhood may be more difficult for women whose modern expectations include a dynamic career and increasing mobility. If a woman chooses to continue her career while also taking over the role of motherhood, she may experience many obstacles with balancing work and home (Arendell, 2000; Crittenden, 2001; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Maushart, 1999; Williams & Cooper, 2004; Wolf, 2003).

According to Pew Research Center’s research done by Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi and Gasser (2011), social networking sites are used by 65% of all adult internet users – half of all American adults. Another report that the same center published also indicates that groups that are particularly likely to use social network sites are adults who have some college experience and parents with young children living at home (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). This data indicates that a large number of social network site users may be undergoing the transition to parenthood. Why may recent parents, especially mothers, use social network sites more so than other adults?

Most research done on parents’ social network site use is based on social capital framework (see Bourdieu, 1986), which refers to the aggregate of the actual or potential resources embedded in durable social relationships (see Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Kamp Dush & Sullivan, 2012; Doty & Dworkin, 2014; Jang & Dworkin, 2014; Schrock, 2016). Major transitions in a woman’s life may demand a greater need for, or reliance upon, significant relationships. Among these relationships, the most important and supportive ones are the ones built with the partner, peers and mother-mentors (e.g. grandmother) (Arias, 2016). Given the fact that many women in modern family settings do not live with the extended family, the support that comes from mother-mentor is usually limited. The partner, which is the father in heterosexual family contexts of course, has been more involved in supporting the mother in
child rearing in recent decades but the traditional family roles still, unfortunately, influence their level of assistance. That leaves the modern mother with one type of supportive relationship: peer support. A woman, when becoming a mother, may be more likely to accept social support from her network of relationships. The Egyptian feminist writer, Nawal El Saadawi says “Solidarity between women can be a powerful force of change, and can influence future development in ways favorable not only to women but also to men.” Today, any woman can and may prefer to build peer groups freely with women who have similar experiences (Arias, 2016). Building relationships with other mothers can provide a sense of camaraderie, validation, and connectedness for women who may otherwise feel marginalized by their society, overlooked in their communities, and taken for granted in their own homes.

In addition to more readily accepting peer support, a woman’s self-concept is associated with the degree to which she feels empowered, engaged, and willing to use authentic self-disclosure in her relationships (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002). Use of social network sites for mothering and the consequential self-disclosure may very well have a hand in changing the culture of parenthood for future generations. For example, in 2015, a few mothers, who were told to cover up their breasts or asked to stop breastfeeding in public places, shared their personal stories online. With the help of fellow mothers, they organized and mobilized a campaign to support women who would want to breastfeed their babies in public by using social networking sites (Cunha, 2015). Examples like this suggest the positive impact these networking sites may have in spreading powerful messages among the populations who are struggling on a daily basis.

Aside the dominant gender roles and high stress levels, what else influences mothers use of social network sites? Jang and Dworkin (2014) suggest that mothers’ age impacts their comfort with technology, which was associated with their number of social network site activities. Moreover, the same authors reported that mothers’ social network site use has positive impacts on bonding and bridging social capital.
This was varied by children’s age. More specifically, mothers’ frequent use of social network sites increased their bridging social capital when their child was preschool aged. Also, positive attitudes toward technology were a significant factor explaining both the frequency of using social network sites for parenting and number of social network site activities for mothers of adolescents only. These nuanced differences replicate Lauricella, Wartella, and Rideout’s (2015) study and suggest that parental needs and media related behaviors are influenced by child’s age and probably, developmental needs. These studies reveal the complex nature of mother’s social network site use as children’s age and mothers’ own attitudes toward Internet both factor in the reasons why mother’s use social network sites. The needs for parent-child communication undoubtedly change as children get older. For example, in 2012, the Pew Research Center found that parents of younger teens were more likely to be concerned about their children’s online presence than parents of older teens (Madden, Cortesi, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012). This implies that parents may be simply interested in connecting with their older adolescents, as adolescents are likely to be online frequently. As a matter of fact, Doty and Dworkin’s (2014) study revealed that parents of adolescents use social network sites for parenting more often than other online social activities (e.g. instant messaging, Skype, blogging, etc…), mainly with the purpose of communicating with their children. Parents of adolescents who use a greater number of social network sites and had positive technology attitudes were more likely to use social network sites to communicate with their children and their children’s friends (Doty & Dworkin, 2014).

The amount of research aimed at investigating parents’ motivations and attitudes regarding networking sites, unfortunately, is not close to the number of studies that examine their habits of use. Parents often play a supervisory role in their child’s Internet use. They are seemingly the natural protector of their child’s digital behavior and footprints. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later in this chapter, parents are not always the sole protectors of their children’s digital rights. The information they post on
social network sites about familial life may negatively impact their child’s life. Interestingly, although adults are also the main users, only children’s, not parents’ Internet use sparked growing concerns about privacy, safety, and access to content while parents’ behavior and decisions on Internet have gone largely unaddressed (Shmueli & Blecher-Prigat, 2011).

Quite a few studies have considered the characteristics of one platform – the blog – (see, Elliot, Squire & O’Connell, 2017; Hays, 1996; Rose, 1999) when investigating parents’ digital habits and sense making of parenting experience. A study done by Bartholomew et al. (2012) appears to be the first of its kind to investigate parents’ social networking site (Facebook) use during this stressful life event. The authors suggested that mothers use Facebook more than fathers. Also when more mothers’ Facebook friends were family members or relatives, and when fathers reported connecting with more of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook, they reported better parental adjustment. Parents who reported that their friends were likely to comment on photos they had posted of their child also reported greater satisfaction in the parenting role. Taken together, Bartholomew et al. (2012) suggest that it may be reciprocity in interactions with friends on and outside of Facebook that is behind the extent to which Facebook serves to maintain or increase bonding social capital for new parents.

Parents use social networking sites, not only to communicate with their children, monitor their behaviors, and connect with other parents to find social support, but also to simply share information about their children, which is mainly the focus of this research. While some parents share mundane happenings of their children’s everyday experiences or about special events; some parents post about their children’s mental health, their problems, or detailed information regarding their children’s medical conditions. According to a survey conducted in Turkey, parents mostly like sharing pleasant things about their children, like social activities done with their children, and they prefer Instagram as a platform to make those experiences available (Marasli, et al., 2016). In the United States, 92 % of two-year-olds already have
an online presence (AVG, 2010). Particularly on Instagram, 63% of parents reference their child’s first name in at least one photo in their stream, 27% of parents write their child’s date of birth, and 19% share both pieces of information (Minkus, Liu, & Ross, 2015). Furthermore, a poll done by C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital (2015) in the United States reveals that about two-thirds of parents are concerned about someone finding out private information about their child (68%) or sharing photos of their child (67%), while 52% are concerned that when older, their child might be embarrassed about what they have shared on social media. Furthermore, the majority of parents who use social media (74%) know of another parent who has shared too much information about a child on social media, including parents who gave embarrassing information about a child (56%), offered personal information that could identify a child’s location (51%), or shared inappropriate photos of a child (27%). Many parents think that their postings about their children will not be visible to the public once they select an audience for their account (McPeak, 2013). While this technical measure could work for many parents, because they use little discretion sharing with their chosen audience, they cannot control if their intended audience saves and repost the data in alternate online platforms (McPeak, 2013).

Historically, the storing, displaying and circulating of family photographs is such a strongly gendered activity (see Chambers, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Halle, 1993, Rose, 2010). The platform used to share personal experiences and photographs may help a mother to build a network of mothers and encourage participants to open themselves up to allow the help of the virtual village in tackling the, sometimes, daunting task of raising children. As discussed earlier as one of the affordances, sometimes, the shared snap with a piece of information may not only give a sense of community and solidarity or allow individual to narrate parental values freely but may also provide monetary prizes. There are more and more mothers who monetize the practice of sharing information and photographs of their children by collaborating with brands that produce toys, clothes, educational material
or cosmetics for children. Influencers – a vernacular marketing term inspired by Katz & Lazarsfeld’s (2009) notion of “personal influence” that predates Internet culture – are one type of micro-celebrity; they are everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their followers in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating advertorials into their blog or social media posts and making physical appearances at events (Abidin, 2015). Influencers are what I would prefer to call “cultural agents” who understand, organize, construct and sometimes transform mutually shared meanings.

Around the time I am writing this dissertation, a photo of 15-month-old Harlen Bodhi White from U.K. amassed 200,000 followers on Instagram, a world record for a child his age. His mother Chelsea runs the account. She denied that she was exploiting her child by saying: “Baby models earn around £70 an hour which isn’t worth it because you don’t get travel covered. With Instagram I can do it in my own time and I can control what goes out there” (Graham, 2017, February 18th). The news articles claim that Harlen already earned close to one million-dollar.

The influencer industry is highly personalized but also colloquial. Influencer’s photographs usually depict “inaccessible”, “personal”, and “private” aspects of mundane, everyday life to curate qualities that feel “authentic” to fans (Marwick, 2013 p. 114), and more accessible than traditional celebrity (Senft, 2008). Jenna Baker (2015), Mom News Daily’s in-house financial specialist, believes any event can become a photo shoot and every mother can “monetize” her “baby:

“Is your child going to the park? Is their birthday party coming up? Hire a set designer to stage the event and a freelance photographer to capture it beautifully. If your baby’s friends are not

5 Online source for female parents, as advertised. www.momnewsdaily.com
physically attractive or dress like poor people, consider hiring child models to stand in their immediate frame. I know one family who has all of their children’s dentist appointments sponsored by Pfizer.”

So far, most of the literature on the issue of childhood representation focuses on children’s images made by professionals, and recently, the influencers. The little research that has been done on contemporary family photography is generally rather dismissive of the concept of childhood, although there are exceptions to this (see, Batchen, 2008; Chalfen, 1987; Halle, 1993; Larsen, 2008; Rose, 2010). The ordinary photographs that we all take, keep, and display or not display have not been found important enough to warrant critical scrutiny. According to Rose (2010), it is necessary to make the feminist point to explain the neglect of family snaps in accounts of contemporary, globalizing visual culture. The work of Griselda Pollock (1999), for example, among many others, has shown that the association of women with the domestic is a major cause of their exclusion from making “art” objects; “art” is not made in homes, it is made in studios where lone geniuses can rely on someone else to do the cooking, washing, and parenting. Similarly, an important essay by Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, and Hanson (2002) argues that far too many accounts of globalization exclude the domestic from the constitution of their object of study. The global is familial as well as social, commercial and political. It is true that family snaps are not as disruptive or qualitatively different than ordinary snaps. Nevertheless, if we are interested in how visual images portray children’s position in family and society and how images of children can co-construct our local and global understanding of childhood and parenthood, then family snaps must be analyzed as well. Without forgetting the different affordances of digital photographs and platforms; this study will contribute to our understanding of diverse representations of childhood and parenthood in the digital context.
Children’s Photographs in Public and Private Spaces

Bourdieu and Whiteside (1996) observed in their sociological study, *Photography: A Middle brow Art*, the desire to photograph is not given – it is socially constructed and culturally specific. Immersed in the rapidly changing technological world, our definition of public and private is constantly changing. We desire to photograph to share, to shape, and to receive immediate feedback. The discussion of the changed nature of family snaps when they are digitized and shared online echoes the work of other scholars on other assemblages of everyday digital imaging technologies (van Dijck, 2008; van House, 2011). The mobility of children’s images through easily accessible and free online platforms are simplifying the work mothers used to do when dealing with their children’s photographs as an object. It is obvious that the boundary between the images depicting domestic lives and the global visual economy is disappearing. Family snaps can cross the boundary between private and public. For example, to promote the iPhone6, Apple created an ad campaign called “Shot on iPhone 6.” The series featured photographs that were shot simply by using the built-in camera in the phone and shared online. The ad campaign lends credence to the idea that “you might only need one device on you at a given time” to make your photograph suitable for massive size billboards out in the real world.

As Rose (2010) argues, the visual economy created by private and public has not merged entirely into a single field. Nor has the domestic taken over the public, as Noble (2008) speculates. We are living in a new space, neither public nor private. We are living in a visual culture that has a multiple and nuanced geography. The visual culture, then, must be thought of as a differentiated series of spaces, activities and meanings. This complex understanding of the visual culture allows us to address the mobility of images in more careful kinds of ways, as images from one circulation move into another with various influences. What happens when parents’ snapshots of children move from domestic spaces to the spaces of the mass
media? Does that practice violate children’s privacy rights? If it does who recognizes and defends children’s privacy rights?

The groundbreaking point in the child rights area was the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention is now the most widely ratified treaty in history and the most comprehensive of universal human rights treaties. Since its adoption in 1989, it has been ratified by 140 states. It has transformed the status of children as the holders of rights (Alston & Tobin, 2005). Cass (1992) described the effect of it as “to question the public/private dichotomy” and “to disaggregate the rights of children from the rights of ‘families’, to constitute children as independent actors with rights vis-à-vis their parents and vis-à-vis the state” (p.141). The UN Convention expressly refers to children’s right to privacy. It establishes the right to privacy as one of the fundamental rights of the child by stating “no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, or correspondence, or to unlawful attacks on his or her honor and reputation” (The Article 16). This article touches upon the issues of the privacy of relations and communications, and control of access to personal information about the child (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998). The right to privacy requires that national legislation ensures that the child: knows of the existence of the information stored about him, knows the reason of such information storage, has access to such manual or electronic records, has a possibility to object and if necessary, to correct or eliminate the stored information, if necessary with the help of an independent authority (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998; Steinberg, 2017).

Were Sally Mann’s children aware of their role in their mother’s photographs before those photographs were published in their mother’s book? She states they were. They even participated in the selection of the photographs for the famous Series. In regard to children’s naked images in public, Arthur Danto (1992) states that our modern western culture does not believe that children can give consent to adults because children are inherently powerless in relation to adults. The issue of consent is extremely
problematic in the case of photographs taken by a child’s parents. The person who is taking the consent is the parent, whom most researchers and artists find valuable to ask for permission, in the case of publicizing the child’s photograph. On the issue of consent, Higonnet (1998) says:

“Consent will remain a key issue in the interpretation of photographs. Any investigation into the circumstances of a photograph has to include questions about coercion, power imbalances, and authority. Consent, however, is not an infallible or conclusive test. Arguably, no person less powerful in any way than their photographer can give genuine consent: no person poorer, less mentally stable, racially discriminated against, socially marginal, etc.; yet many legitimate photographers including many great documentary photographers have argued that the disadvantaged benefit from becoming culturally visible. Moreover, if we were to maintain that consent is essential to photography, yet also that no child can give consent to any adult, then all family snapshots of children become unethical, which is patently absurd.” (p.169)

Is it absurd to ask children their opinions about the possible audiences of their photographs? Can we not question parents even though they claim to be doing a favor to their precious children by eternalizing special moments in their lives and distributing those photographs to public to help them be culturally visible and powerful?

Prout (2000) argued about children’s power in the interpretation, negotiation, and use of their own bodies and challenges the notion of long existent controllable childhood. Scholars also discuss how childhood is the life course stage during which social class distinctions of “taste” become embodied (James, Jenks, & Prout 1998), whether through the “inheritance” of parental consumer tastes and practices, or through parental investment in children as “trophies”, whereby children’s clothing may symbolize parental material and cultural capital. An organic t-shirt, for example, may indicate privilege, the value of protection, and care all at the same time. The argument regarding parents’ strong position perhaps urges us
to bear in mind that while children’s agency must be fully acknowledged, the parental figure remains as an important influence for children, often through how they negotiate the use of media, clothing, materials and representations of themselves and of their relationships with others, including one another. Parents, as adults, are allowed to use social network sites independently, can earn money and spend on products and places to express their tastes and values, and can play a supervisory role in their child’s personal information in a public arena. If they can use digital media postings for their own social, emotional, and maybe even economic benefit, what choices do they have but use digital media? Do parents think their use of digital media has any impact on the interactions they have with their children?

Literature suggests that parents’ heavy digital technology use is associated with a decrease in verbal and nonverbal interactions with children (Radesky et al., 2014) lower parent responsiveness (Radesky et al., 2015), and possibly more parent affect dysregulation (Kabali et al., 2015). Although technology-based self-expression may be an important tool for many stressed parents, the ideal balance between this method of parent stress relief versus displacement of parent-child interaction is unknown. Parents describe many internal conflicts regarding their use of interactive digital media (Radesky et al., 2015). Helping parents understand the healthy balances in terms of their approach to media may be crucial in 21st century but is not the direct aim of this study.

The findings of this study will lay the foundation to better understand how digital media posting connects and expresses values regarding childhood, and how the variety of ideals conveyed in the postings are perceived by parents and children. The research explores whether there exist ways to share postings about childhood while at the same time giving voice to children. Broadly, the study aims to understand how photographs of children are used as cultural tools on personal social media postings and to discuss whether this cultural activity has implications for public-private life boundaries and power dynamics between parents and children. This involves research design to identify social media cultures (i.e. hashtags)
and then to examine whether and how those two diverse posting cultures manifest themselves (i.e. with expressive devices and values). Particularly, the study will shed light on three questions:

1) How do the two digital cultures of childhood postings occur online?

2) What values seem to guide the creation and posting of photographs to the two digital cultures of childhood?

3) How do parents and children interpret exemplars of children’s photos from the research?

This study creates an understanding and a method for addressing the above questions.
CHAPTER II

Studying Digital Media Postings as Cultural Developments

The study considers digital postings as manifestations of online communities defined in terms of their shared values as enacted in posts of and about children. Sampling and analyzing two specific and apparently different parenting posting cultures in social media provides insights about the development of society and childhood.

In order to answer the three research questions, the study included three phases of data collection and analysis. Consistent with the activity-meaning system research design, individual phases are independent yet, they interact with one another. Table 2 shows the individual data source, research activity, and method of analysis planned to use for each phase.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Research Tools</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do the two digital cultures of childhood postings occur online?</td>
<td>12 day period from October 2016 postings of #fashionkids and #letthekids pictures</td>
<td>Netlytic, Iconosquare</td>
<td>Descriptives, Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What values seem to guide the creation and posting of photographs to the two digital cultures of childhood?</td>
<td>Sample of 250 #fashionkids and 250 #letthekids pictures collected on Instagram</td>
<td>Atlas.ti</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) How do parents and children interpret exemplars of children’s photos from the research?</td>
<td>5 groups with children = 30 participants, 5 groups with mothers = 24 participants</td>
<td>Group Discussion</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 54 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hashtags of *fashionkids* and *letthekids* on Instagram provide the context, based on my hypothesis that participation in such hashtags is akin to participation in a culture, a hypothesis that the analyses address. Below, I explain three phases of research inquiries.

**Phase One: Laying the Land**

Because of the vast range of social media reach, identifying social collectives, like the two focal hashtag groups in the present study – *#fashionkids* and *#letthekids* – involves new kinds of broad data collection strategies. Digital tools are also available to assist with some of the analysis. While search tools are not yet organized around meaning, I have applied narrative analysis tools to guide a first phase of inquiry into what I refer to as the “lay of the land” of two posting sites relevant to the construction of childhood.

This phase aims to accomplish four goals to answer how the two digital cultures of childhood postings manifest themselves: 1) to help establish the hashtag cultures necessary for the analysis, 2) to inform the researcher about the extent of the use of both hashtags on Instagram, 3) to provide understanding of the purposes of the both hashtags with the analysis of captions and network structures, and 4) to help provide a corpus for analysis of visual narratives in the following phase.

First, the study involved identifying and sampling postings and comments of child photos on two hashtags (*#fashionkids* and *#letthekids*). I became acquainted with *#fashionkids* from personal experience. Around 2013, an Instagram friend of mine, whom I have not seen since college years, had a child and consistently started using *#fashionkids* in her postings. Prior to having a child, she managed a fashion blog while working as a dentist. I witnessed the little child’s improving posing skills and development via her mother’s postings and once awhile clicked on the hashtag to assess other children like her. Overtime, I became interested in studying similarities and differences amongst children’s photographs and their thoughts and feelings about the camera between their mothers and themselves. The idea of identifying
another hashtag culture emerged in my development of a theoretical framework for this study of parenting via digital media. Sampling an activity-meaning system involves, in part, gaining access to the perspectives of different communities around an issue of inquiry. Furthermore, the demonstration of equivalence is essential for any cross-cultural comparison (He & Vijer, 2012). The other hashtag had to be qualitatively different but also quantitatively comparable and as geographically dispersed as #fashionkids was. Therefore, I had to systematically analyze the #fashionkids on Instagram both to scale the context of its use and to find a corresponding hashtag community.

After closely following other hashtags in #fashionkids postings, I came across #wildandfreekids and #letthekids, which could fit my research purposes. However, #wildandfreekids appeared to be used mainly by a community of parents who homeschool their children in United Kingdom and the United States. “It depicts an emerging group of mothers and homeschoolers who want their children to not only receive a quality education, but also to experience the adventure, freedom, and wonder of childhood” their website states (https://www.bewildandfree.org/about). Moreover, the amount of posting on Instagram was not adequate for a meaningful comparison with #fashionkids. Subsequently, #letthekids surfaced as a good option, as it is used in many countries and had good amount of posts and engagement rate at the time of the data collection. In addition, it is possible that the #letthekids emerged with the Facebook account named “Let The Kids Dress Themselves.” This account was opened in June 2011. For having a basis relevant to dressing up and carrying the qualities suitable for their comparison, these two hashtag cultures are the informants for the analysis as they present themselves on a relatively large sample.

As the previous Chapter on the rationale for the study states, language and other symbol systems are cultural tools that people use to exist, create meaning, and transfer information. Depending on the historical, social, political, and economic changes, the purpose and the structure of the language used changes as well. Captions written under photographs support, transform, and enhance the cultural meaning
created in the images. Thus, systematically examining the captions and the network users build by employing Instagram’s affordances have become one of the essential steps of this research to examine possible purposes individuals have for becoming part of the hashtag cultures.

**Data collection.** Instagram changed its Application Programming Interface (API), set of definitions, protocols, and tools for building software and applications, in June 2016. Before this change, entities with coding experience could build their own applications to extract publicly available metadata from Instagram. At first sight, this change in Instagram may sound like a positive development for protecting its user’s data. However, what happened was that empirical research using this platform got more and more difficult for social researchers (Bernhard, 2016) who already have limited resources. By making such a change, Instagram allowed big third-party companies, who mostly develop tools for marketing research, not for public understanding of human behavior, thinking and emotions, to access their data. After spending a few months with a software developer to get access to Instagram’s API, I kept receiving notifications that the application we developed was denied. Therefore, I had to search and pay for two existing software programs that have API access for Instagram. I could export any metadata data linked with photographs – usernames, caption, number of likes, date posted, name of the filter used, geotag) in Comma Separated Values (CSV) format from the two software.

The software, Iconosquare, is predominantly used by market researchers. It is a company based in France. One needs to have an Instagram account to be able to use their service. By purchasing an Elite user account, the user of the tool is able to analyze up to three hashtags over time and export hashtag reports. Tracking only starts when the user sets-up the hashtags, therefore, there is no history available. Posts from private accounts are not taken into consideration in these reports. It is possible to filter the dates of the hashtag reports manually on the exported file.
The digital tool, *Netlytic* (Gruzd, 2015), allowed for a second analysis of the text the user posted under the picture. On Instagram, this text is called *caption*. Other users who follow the particular user can comment under the photograph and the caption. This text is called *comment*. In Figure 5, the caption is “the happiest little birthday bear 😊”, and the photograph has 43 likes and three comments.

![Instagram screenshot](image)

*Figure 5. Screenshot of Instagram picture with caption and comments*

Netlytic offers two options of query: search by hashtag or search by location. These two options cannot be combined. For example, a researcher cannot search for #research in New York City. The software can import 100-10,000 records each time query is ran. There is an option to enable data collection
every hour for up to 31 days. Here, it is important that the researcher knows the scale of the hashtag in focus to be able to receive similar amounts of metadata for two hashtags.

**Sample.** According to the analysis ran on Iconosquare, on October 28th 2016, there were 4,810,199 #fashionkids and 957,057 #letthekids posts on Instagram. Between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016, #fashionkids was a more widely used hashtag than #letthekids. However, #letthekids posts had more geolocated data (15.20%) and received more likes and comments on average than #fashionkids. Below is the table that compares statistical data collected between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016 for the two hashtags, #fashionkids and #letthekids:

Table 3.

*Overview of the statistical data on #fashionkids and #letthekids uploaded between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#fashionkids</th>
<th>#letthekids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media posted</td>
<td>116,092</td>
<td>47,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos posted</td>
<td>113,296</td>
<td>46,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos posted</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geolocated media</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>6,742,906</td>
<td>3,468,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>259,050</td>
<td>219,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average likes</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average comments</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average likes on photos</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average likes on videos</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average comments on photos</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average comments on videos</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis run in Iconosquare revealed that #fashionkids had, on average, twice the amount of posts (≈7500) than #letthekids (≈4000) in a day during the month of October 2016. These numbers represent the number of postings uploaded to Instagram with the respective hashtags.

Among these postings, Netlytic allowed me to collect 100 #fashionkids postings every hour for 13 days (October 28\(^{th}\) 2016 – November 10\(^{th}\) 2016) and 500 #letthekids postings every hour for 11 days (October 28\(^{th}\) 2016 – November 8\(^{th}\) 2016). I used different amounts of data points to be extracted to compile heterogeneous, and approximately similar amount of data for each hashtag from all over the world. As a result, Netlytic allowed me to obtain 79029 #letthekids and 61584 #fashionkids records.

Although the movement on Instagram is built on its users’ instant postings and interactions, sometimes users find a photograph posted at an earlier date and comment under it. For example, I may find a photograph posted on September 1st, 2016 and comment under it on December 1\(^{st}\), 2016, not necessarily immediately. That movement is enough for the recently made comment to be part of the metadata collected using Netlytic between December 1st and 10\(^{th}\) 2016. Because this study is interested only in captions written by parents, not comments written under photographs, I cleaned the dataset by deleting all the metadata that belongs to comments. I used photography filters to differentiate comments from the captions when cleaning the dataset from comments because comments are not associated with photography filter metadata. At the end of this cleaning, 25333 #letthekids and 31742 #fashionkids records of captions were obtained. These numbers represent the corpus of captions analyzed in this phase. The aim was not to conduct a representative corpus of the captions on Instagram, but instead to conduct a case study in which linguistic variables and network structures were held constant to provide an understanding of users’ meanings in two hashtags on Instagram.

**Analysis.** As the analysis of Iconosquare indicated, on October 28\(^{th}\) 2016, there were 4,810,199 #fashionkids and 957,057 #letthekids posts on Instagram. To calculate the growth rate, I looked at the
number of posts for both hashtags after six months, on April 28th 2017 and after one year, on November 5th 2017. Following the simple growth rate formula - (Present) - (Past) / (Past), I calculated how the two hashtags grew over time.

In addition, I used the existing geolocation information to locate countries and cities in which these hashtags were used during this time. Geotag means an electronic tag that assigns geographical location to a posting on a social media website. To add a geotag to a photograph, an Instagram user has to purposefully enable Global Positioning System (GPS) on her smartphone and allow the Instagram application to use the location information in the posting. This way geographical identification metadata (latitude and longitude coordinates) can be added to the posting.

Captions written under photographs support, transform, and enhance the cultural meaning created in the images. Thus, systematically examining the captions has become one of the essential steps of this research. Using Netlytic, I analyzed captions and network users’ attempts to build via comments and mentions. Netlytic does not only help retrieve metadata from Instagram but also analyze the accompanying hashtags, most frequently used words in captions, and evaluative words researcher categorizes (e.g. negative feelings; bad, nervous, scared, etc.) in captions. The first two – most frequently used words and hashtags – are informative to explain topics users visit when writing their captions. Yet, examining significant mechanisms people employ in their narratives rather than searching for static topics is important to me, so that I can understand more about the users’ purposes and meanings in their captions and photographs.

As stated in the socio-cultural theory in the above sections, meaning and sense-making in interactive media are relational and express not on only referential phases of meaning (topics) but also evaluative meaning (significance in evaluative devices and values) (Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997; Daiute, 2014). Evaluative meaning is important to investigate because it offers the implicit information
about the narrator’s point of view and position. By focusing on the evaluative meanings, researchers can interpret where a narrator places emphasis, how they explain thoughts and emotions, and how they use elements of language differently depending on the audience (Labov & Waletzy, 1967/1997). Moreover, because captions are conventionally short writings, “small words” (Hunston, 2008) with a function to imply a meaning other than the literal meaning of the word can become useful to study these hashtag cultures qualitatively. By using the framework of significance analysis (Daiute, 2014) in text, I manually entered 572 evaluative words to the automated analysis that would signify users’ purposes and meanings. To express this in a different way, I created a dictionary of the evaluative words specifically for these hashtags. The analysis was done on captions written in the English language. The list of words is based on my extensive read of captions after cleaning, Netlytic’s existing categories, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) Engine, and past research on evaluative devices in narratives (see Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997; Francis, 1982; Gunsch, Bronlow, Haynes & Mabe, 2000; Peterson & Bigg, 2001; Daiute, 2014; Lucic, 2013; Kreniske, 2016; Benevento & Okuyan, 2018). The list of these words can be seen in Appendix A. Following are the categories:

1. Cognitive state ($n = 34$): Words that indicate or observe active though processes regarding action (e.g., know, discover, realize).

2. Bad affective state expressions ($n = 72$): Words that indicate or observe negative emotional processes regarding action (e.g., scared, sad, bored).

3. Good affective state expressions ($n = 69$): Words that indicate or observe positive emotional processes regarding action (e.g., happy, love, smile).

4. Appearance (qualifiers) ($n = 217$): Words that carry evaluation of referential action, mostly in the form of adjectives (e.g., nice, beautiful, dangerous).
5. **Intensifier** ($n = 42$): Words that provide additional emotional context and undertone (e.g., very, a lot, double exclamation mark)

6. **Negations** ($n = 16$): Words that deny or invert the meaning of action or other words (e.g., no, not, none.)

7. **Causal connectors** ($n = 33$): Words that connect two or more separate ideas, by ordering one to the other(s) (e.g., because, even though, since).

8. **Possessive determiners** ($n = 10$): Words that indicate a possession. These words were also counted when used in combination with words that indicate children (e.g., my girl, our, mine).

9. **Socializers** ($n = 15$): Words and phrases that attempt direct interaction with an audience (e.g., hello, good morning, please share).

10. **Demonstrative pronouns** ($n = 8$): Words that point at items and people in space and time demonstratively. These pronouns were counted only when used in combination with words that indicate children (e.g., this girl, these boys, this baby).

11. **Information seekers** ($n = 8$): Words and phrases used to indicate a need (e.g., could you, can you, help me).

12. **Gender state expressions** ($n = 21$): Words that indicate significance of gender roles and identities (e.g., lady, masculine, babe).

Instagram is a social networking site. Analyzing the network hashtag users create to connect other users could be meaningful in understanding the kinds of motivations and strategies people employ when formulating postings. To analyze network structure and user interaction, I used @ sign in caption to examine mentions of other users in the caption and the number of comments made in each posting.
In sum, an analysis of the locations where the postings happened, captions, and networking behavior can inform us about user practices on this platform. By examining the networking behavior of users and their captions, we can increase an analytic method and knowledge of characteristics of the cultural contexts the hashtags afford on similar digital platforms.

**Second Phase: Values Organizing Digital Cultures in Photographic Visions**

This phase attempts to do what has not been generally done in digital media research: systematically deconstructing and analyzing digital photographs in non-digital ways both to appreciate physical features (items depicted, aesthetics, etc.) and to grasp their underlying cultural meanings. The inquiry here offers a method of systematic observation of visual narratives as well as adding another layer of meaning to the previous analysis done on text and network structure. While questioning what computers can and cannot see, it also provides a way of incorporating narrative inquiry methods to analyze photographs and to enrich our visual understanding of the two cultures of childhood.

Most social research done using Instagram has been as part of an ethnography of a few Influencers (e.g., Abidin, 2015; Zappavigna, 2016) selected based on particular hashtags (e.g., Highfield & Leaver, 2015; McCune, 2011; Le Moignan et al., 2017). Moreover, some studies determine the unit of analysis to be a place or a geographic area where the postings happens at one point in time (e.g., Hochman and Manovich, 2013; Indaca & Manovich, 2016; Silva et al., 2013). These studies are significant as they are the first attempts to investigate what seems to be a ubiquitous platform. They have shown how hashtags or geographic filters may be used to define the scope of a research project and the types of information available for such projects, which can then be supplemented by textual and visual analysis of relevant digital media. Nevertheless, the analysis of visual data happens to be problematic as the researchers are not
transparent about the methods they used to conclude the kinds of findings they have gathered in their inquiries.⁶

**Data Collection.** Collecting visual data on Instagram has become harder over the past years because the platform changed its API (Application Programming Interface) on May, 2016. The data collection activities done in the previous phase helped me use web links to scrape photographs. This method of data collection, at the moment, is a unique solution to the problem faced by many social researchers interested in using Instagram.

Scraping and calling APIs are two prominent techniques for the automated collection of digital metadata linked to individual postings. Both techniques have different affordances and limitations. They make it possible to automatically download data from the web. In addition, APIs give full control over the selection of data available for researchers. APIs are generally easier to use (Weltevrede, 2016) and allow “live” analysis but they are more political for social researchers to handle. For example, because Instagram changed its API, it became harder for social researchers to quickly and economically conduct research on the platform. Scraping, on the other hand, enables the repurposing of digital data, rather than analyzing or categorizing it like APIs. For having interest in manually analyzing the photographs and experiencing problems with Instagram’s API access, I decided to collect photographs by using the scraping method in

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⁶ To find economic and systematic ways to analyze photo content, more and more studies attempt to develop and use artificial intelligence and employ automated categorization methods on relatively large samples of photographs (e.g. Hochman, Manovich & Chow, 2012; Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014; Manovich et al., 2015; Tinkus, Liu & Ross, 2015; Matzen, Bala & Snavely, 2017; You, Garcia-Garcia, Puluri, Luo & Joo, 2017). Some of this work focus on quantifying characteristics of visual content to analyze and predict people’s behaviors on social networking sites (Manovich, 1996). Although a major progress in machine recognition of characteristics of images and photography has been made over the past years, this field of inquiry is still underdeveloped and many problems are still open waiting to be researched.
this phase. After having the metadata with medialinks of the individual posts in a CSV file I ran the following script to download images in the file directory I have the Instagram medialinks on December 23rd 2016: `egrep -o 'https?://scontent[^ ]+\+'/yourfile.csv | xargs -n1 wget`. This downloaded the files and put them in the directory with all of the query string of the url as part of the filename. Later, I cleaned that up with: `for file in *.jpg; do mv "$file" "$file%%?*"; done`.

The effort resulted with the collection of 23928 #letthekids and 23875 #fashionkids photos. One may question the difference between the number of photographs and the number of captions (25333 #letthekids and 31742 #fashionkids records) presented in the previous research phase. The process of cleaning the data set and formulation of the above script took over one month (between November 12th – December 23rd). Therefore, retrieval of the photographs was delayed and in that delayed period, some users are believed to have either deleted their posts from Instagram or changed their privacy settings. It appears that 1405 #letthekids and 7867 #fashionkids posts got lost during the development of the script.

**Sample.** Perhaps one of the biggest problems I have encountered in this research was to develop a strategy to sample a number of photographs to include in the analysis. As stated above, 23928 #letthekids and 23875 #fashionkids photos were obtained. Because the research is concerned with whether the hashtags #fashionkids and #letthekids are online cultures and how they are used, I chose not to use any filter (e.g. geographic location, number of likes, number of comments, etc.) when selecting the photographs to be analyzed in this phase. Rather, I relied on the random selection as the golden standard for giving each photograph equal chance to enter the corpus. The only filter I used when creating the corpus for this phase was the date. I used date as a neutral filter to decrease the number of records to be able to select a small number of posts I can manage to analyze.

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7 Developed by Zachary Benevento.
Among the 12 days between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016, I excluded October 31st, the date of the Halloween; November 9th and 10th, for lacking #letthekids posts in my data set from phase one. Because the hashtags mainly are concerned with clothing and presentation, the custom of dressing up for this American holiday, I thought, could have influenced the kinds of values that appear in photographs. The date I selected by using a random choice generator was November 5th 2016. Among the photos uploaded on November 5th 2016 (2033 #letthekids and 1984 #fashionkids photographs), I, again, randomly selected a sample of photographs with hashtags of fashionkids (n = 250) and letthekids (n = 250). This sample of photographs became the new corpus of this phase. Random selection assured that the photographs included in the analysis had equal chance to be part of the manual coding. When randomly selecting the corpus of photos, I made sure that each included photograph was posted by a unique user.

Because Instagram does not collect demographic data from its users, we do not have information about the users’ or the child’s age, sex, or ethnicity. Photographs can fill this void and provide very basic but still visually informative demographic details about the photographed child, which then can inform us contextualize our findings. As stated previously, a number of studies have gone further than solely performing tasks such as face classification in automated settings. For example, researchers attempted to identify emotions and individual characteristics solely from human faces (Deghan et al., 2017; Srinivasan et al., 2016; Wu & Zhang, 2016). The algorithms are used not only by researchers but also governments in various places in the world. Past research, however, shows that the accuracies of face classification systems are systematically lower for females, people of color, or youth (between the ages of 18-30) (Klare et al., 2012). The National Institute for Standards and Technology in the United States also shows that algorithms performed worse for females (Ngan et al., 2015). One recent study, also cited in a New York Times article, empirically proves that three commercial gender classification systems performed better on male and light faces than female and darker faces (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018).
Despite the evidence that suggest inaccuracy of available facial recognition and classification algorithms, I performed Clarifai’s demographics model on photos uploaded on November 5th 2016. I selected Clarifai because it offered gender appearance, age, and multicultural appearance classification features in their facial analysis software and their code was publicly available for testing. The below screenshot exemplifies the demo of the analysis.

**Figure 6. Clarifai demo of the demographic analysis**

For gender and multicultural appearance classifications, Clarifai provides lists of results with different probability values, as seen above. In selecting the gender appearance, I considered 0.80 as the threshold to determine femininity or masculinity. Anything below 0.80 probability as the first result was coded as “ambiguous.” Therefore, for example, the child’s gender in Figure 6 was classified as ambiguous. For multicultural appearance and age, the top results, regardless of their probability values were noted. Children whose ages were detected to be over 18 were not classified in the age category. In some instances, more than one children appeared in photographs either because the child was with other children or
because the user created collages of the same children. Only the first detected face with high gender probability is presented in the Table 4 below.

Table 4

Clarifai results on the distributions of demographic information on #letthekids and #fashionkids photographs uploaded to Instagram on November 5th 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fashionkids (N=1984)</th>
<th>Letthekids (N=2033)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>486 (24.5%)</td>
<td>294 (14.5%)</td>
<td>780 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>109 (5.5%)</td>
<td>139 (6.8%)</td>
<td>248 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>387 (19.5%)</td>
<td>306 (15%)</td>
<td>693 (17.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No face detected</td>
<td>1002 (50.5%)</td>
<td>1294 (64%)</td>
<td>2296 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (&lt;18)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>3.43 (3.66)</td>
<td>2.8 (3.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Multicultural appearance** | | | |
| White                 |                      |                      |          |
| People of color ¹     | 502 (25.3%)          | 576 (28.3%)          | 1078 (27%)|
| Asian                 | 113 (5.7%)           | 62 (3%)              | 175 (4.3%)|
| Black                 | 282 (14.2%)          | 70 (3.4%)            | 352 (8.8%)|
| No face detected      | 83 (4.2%)            | 31 (1.5%)            | 114 (2.9%)|
| ¹Hispanic and Latino, Middle Eastern, Hawaiian, American Indian. |

The above table presents the sample characteristics using visual cues on children’s faces. I present the findings while cautioning readers not to fully rely on the above numbers. Even though I took certain measures to have an accurate description of the sample of photographs, which I will further analyze, image detection algorithms not only have problems related to detecting gender and ethnicity of anybody but also have problems handling children’s faces in determining demographic variables. Children are not fully developed to present sexual characteristics to provide enough cues for these algorithms to take in hand. Therefore, after the venture on Clarifai, I manually analyzed sample characteristics of the children using the same small sample (n = 500) I randomly selected. The method of reliability is presented below in the analysis section. The manual analysis was important for checking on the accuracy of the information I
collected on Clarifai. I gathered information about sex, age, and ethnicity of the depicted children to further enrich our understanding about the demographics. Table 5 below presents demographic information summary based on analysis of the selected corpus, 500 photographs.

Table 5

Manual coding results on the distributions of demographic information on #letthekids and #fashionkids photographs uploaded to Instagram on November 5th 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fashionkids (N=250)</th>
<th>Letthekids (N=250)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>159 (63.6%)</td>
<td>121 (48.4%)</td>
<td>280 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>78 (31.2%)</td>
<td>81 (32.4%)</td>
<td>159 (31.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>13 (5.2%)</td>
<td>48 (19.2%)</td>
<td>61 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td>112 (44.8%)</td>
<td>107 (42.8%)</td>
<td>219 (43.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>109 (43.6%)</td>
<td>94 (37.6%)</td>
<td>203 (40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>29 (11.6%)</td>
<td>49 (19.6%)</td>
<td>78 (15.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multicultural Appearance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>130 (52%)</td>
<td>202 (80.8%)</td>
<td>332 (66.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of color</td>
<td>78 (31.2%)</td>
<td>37 (14.8%)</td>
<td>115 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>29 (11.6%)</td>
<td>10 (4%)</td>
<td>39 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13 (5.2%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>14 (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When coding the sex, I used not only appearance but also gender appropriate clothing as a clue to determine the child’s sex. For instance, headbands with bows and flowers, skirts were used as signs for femaleness. The fact that female and male codes are expressively higher than the ambiguous code shows that gender was not hidden or left for interpretation in the majority of the photographs. Regarding specific sexes, #letthekids has more photographs of children with no indication of gender-focused appearance than the #fashionkids photographs.

When coding the ethnicity, I had to be extra cautious about not making questionable decisions about variety of ethnicities for such decisions may lead to strong conclusions about the two hashtags. The
categories of white, Asian, and black are less likely to be up for interpretation. In the meantime, Clarifai acknowledges that there are many other possible ethnicities (e.g., Latinos, Indians) that could have been added here. On one hand, having such diversity at hand could be useful when interpreting results from social-cultural perspective. On the other hand, however, making judgment calls without the aid of a language could have been problematic. Thus, the photographs of children that could not fit into white, Asian, and black categories were coded as people of color.

Interestingly, both Table 4 and 5 portray similar sample characteristics. Overall, females appeared more frequently than males in photographs. Age difference does not seem to show a meaningful pattern among the two hashtags, other than #letthekids having slightly more younger children in the photographs than the #fashionkids. In total, more white children than children of color appeared in the photos. The photos with #fashionkids, on the other hand, demonstrated children with varied multicultural backgrounds, which is also in line with the diverse geographical locations the photos were uploaded from.

**Analysis.** Photographs are a way of sharing experiences. Our experiences are unique but are also influenced by the social, cultural, and spatial narratives in which other individuals are embedded. Therefore, the manifestations of our experiences, whether in verbal or in visual formats, are organized around big differences and similarities. The spontaneously picked and qualitatively different childhood cultures are communicating through and with how they visually present the child in a photograph.

Hashtags become cultures in the sense that they gravitate to one another based on common values or norms and in the process of their functioning, whether and how the hashtag-specific posting conform to sets of values offer information about their cultural organizations. I analyzed the photographs using values analysis (Daiute, 2014; Daiute, Ataman & Cerovic, 2015; Todorova, 2017). In the previous chapter, I explained how photographs can and do function to tell stories through use of visual media. I selected values analysis, as it is appropriate for examining how parents reflect their experiences and perspectives
around their visual narratives. Also, there is a broader process for comparing the value enactments across these different parenting practices represented and organized via hashtags. Because values are “culturally-specific goals, ways of knowing, experiencing, and acting in response to environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances” (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003, p.85) they provide an important clue to show 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 photographs informed me about the kinds of values narrators reflected in visual forms.

Historically, there are many studies that systematically analyzed visual data such as photographs, paintings, videos, drawings, etc. However, in reading various methods of visual analysis, I realized that there are not many studies that aim to infer cultural meanings based on visual data. As an exception, Lutz and Collins (1993) suggest that if the coding of the content of images is carefully formulated, analysis can be used as a tool to interpret the cultural meaning of images. Similarly, analysis done in the current study aims at using visual clues to address the kinds of ideals photographers have about them and their subject: children.

After identifying relevant values in a subset of the data, I entered the 500 images as “Primary Documents” and the value labels as “Codes” in the Atlas.ti data analysis software database. Atlas.ti is a German based qualitative research program, which allows text, pictures and videos to be annotated by user generated codes and analyzed. The following codes include the codes related to demographic information. These initial code groups and codes included the following (These individual words are short for value statements, each completed with “is important”):

1. Age (Infant, Toddler, Child, Ambiguous)
2. Sex (Male, Female, Ambiguous)
3. Ethnicity/Race (White, Black, Asian, Ambiguous)
4. Structured activity (Eating, Educational, House chores, Looking at artifacts, Posing, Sports)

5. Unstructured activity (Play, Sleeping/Laying, Walking/Crawling/Running, Ambiguous)

6. Acknowledgement of camera (Yes, No, Ambiguous)

7. Visibility of face (Yes, No, Partially)

8. People (Alone, Elderly, Father, Mother, Family members, Others, Peers/Siblings)

9. Indoor settings (Bathroom, Child’s room, Common area, Home Set-up, Kitchen, Studio, Shop/Restaurant, Ambiguous)


11. Style of Photograph (Casual, Professional, Styled/Designed)

12. Miscellaneous (Smile, Distressed, Still face, Funny face, Adult accessory/clothing, Extra childish clothing, Matching outfit, Costume, Toy, Addition of text/symbol, Collage/identical photos in a frame, Added text, Child in arms, Message/humor via clothing or signs, Black/white photograph, Naked/semi naked, Pet/animal, Visibility of a brand/ Merchandize, fire/sparkler, Injury)

After the baseline of values that emerged overall from my analysis, I re-organized, merged some values and deleted the ones that appeared to be unimportant. Below, I first give the final list of 30 values in 9 categories and 3 groups and then, describe how these code groups came about in detail.

- Values relevant to presenting children in context:
  1. Activity the child is doing is important (Presenting children doing unstructured or unstructured activities is important).
2. Environment the child is in is important (Presenting children in indoor or outdoor is important).

3. Social setting is important (Presenting children alone or with others is important).

4. Composition of the photograph is important (Photographing children in casual, styled or professional visual genres is important).

- Values relevant to children’s connection with the audience:

5. Child’s acknowledgement of camera is important (Presenting children with awareness of camera, with no awareness of camera or ambiguous awareness of camera is important).

6. Visibility of child’s face is important (Presenting children’s face, not presenting children’s face or partially presenting children’s face is important).

7. Gesture in child’s face is important (Presenting children while smiling, looking sad/bored, with a still expression or a funny face is important).

- Values relevant to children’s possessions and outlook:

8. Props are important (Presenting children in arms, conveying message/humor via clothing or signs, presenting children naked/semi naked child, including pet/animal or having a brand or merchandize visible is important).

9. Body Adornments are important (Presenting children with adult clothing/extra childish clothing/matching outfit or modifying the photograph - adding text and symbol, editing it into black and white photograph, creating collages with multiple photographs is important).

Each photograph was considered as a unit of analysis. The process of conducting inter-rater reliability was based on the ratio of agreement and the number of codes in the photographs (10% of the
corpus). With one other researcher, I achieved 91% reliability based on 79 codes sorted under 12 categories. Values including gesture, props and body adornments were the only ones that did not appear in every photograph. The idea of grouping values based on their relevance to visual narrative activity emerged during the writing process. With the hope of informing future researchers about the conceptualization of the coding list and supporting their execution of the analysis, I will explain each of the three code groups below.

*Presenting children in a context.* A photograph of a child always composes the child as he/she is doing something in a setting with or without others. The person who takes the photograph implicitly and sometimes explicitly takes and uses a photograph to tell more than the child. In other words, the photograph becomes the cultural tool for the person to illustrate the kinds of values and beliefs around childhood. This provisional illustration becomes especially relevant for the lives of children if the user of the tool, the photographer, is the parent. Here, I present what I see as the foundational elements of the visual narratives of childhood: activity, environment, characters, and composition.

Identifying the values enacted in the activity the child does is important not only to sort out what these children were doing when the photograph was taken but also to understand the movements and interests that photographers associate with these hashtags cultures. Activities can be classified in many other ways but the two types – structured and unstructured activities instigate the kinds of values and meanings this research is interested in.

Children act in contexts in which they engage in with self and others. Like adults, they engage in existing, programmed activities or create activities for themselves. By considering the kinds of activities children participate in, it is one of this study’s goal to gain an understanding of the level of freedom children have in shaping their actions in both cultural contexts.
Structured activities refer to activities with clear agenda set by parents or other adults. Here, I considered posing, visiting a museum or zoo, eating, educational and self-care related acts, shopping, house chores, partying, gathering, and extracurricular or school performance as structured activities. Unstructured activities, on the other hand, are flexible, varied, and mostly controlled by the child such as play, walking, crawling, sleeping, laying, sports, physical and finally, ambiguous activities.

One main structured activity enacted is posing. Identifying this value required sensitivity towards the whole posture of the child rather than the visibility of face or the expression on the face. For instance, if a child was looking afar but had her hands on her belly as she was posing, the photo was coded with posing activity. Moreover, in some instances, the child was captured in a designed space for a photo shoot or the other people in the photo were dressed up as if they are participating in a special occasion. Even though the target child was not looking directly into the camera I classified those children as posing since it was clear that the activity on the agenda was modeling. In other words, even after the photo was taken the activity was not going to immediately stop for the child.

The environmental setting the child is in enacts the ecological ideals parents have for their children. Indoor and outdoor distinction with sub values appeared to be helpful in analyzing the settings children are located.

Who are the people performing in these visual narratives? The wording of the hashtags helps us determine the main character: the kids. In the meantime, a methodological problem emerged when deciding who the other people (e.g., peers/siblings, mother, father) accompanying the kid could be. The decision made here could be speculative for claiming, for example, the young woman in the photograph as the mother. However, I observed that the depicted children often appear to be accompanied by familial figures irrespective of the person who posts them. When the child was with mix of adults and peers, unless
the child is performing in a school setting or outside of home setting, the researcher assumed that the social context was a familial one.

In order to conduct a meaningful analysis of the framing of the subject, an analysis of aesthetics had to be included. The issue of aesthetics is highly subjective. People use specific visual aesthetics and styles to define themselves within particular cultures and lifestyles (Woo, 2009). In this study, I experimented with different aesthetic values photography uses. Among those were use of light, blurriness, crispiness, contrast, focus, angle of the photographer, the composition. Using such detailed rule-based criteria brought a few questions to be investigated: How can one researcher make judgement on the virtue of a visual narrative? Do narrative researchers rate the quality of narratives they analyze? Are badly written narratives analyzed differently than the well written ones? The solution was to consider the platform the photographs were displayed, Instagram, and to re-think what is known about photography.

There exist many purposes and aesthetic values users have when creating their visuals for and within Instagram. In reference to aesthetics of images on Instagram, the following genres were in focus: casual, professional and styled (designed). Casual photographs aim to document a content. This content could be a person, a situation, or an experience. They do not necessarily follow the rules of “good photography.” On the other hand, they are not necessarily bad photographs but photographs that are intentionally or unintentionally documenting artifacts or people without following an established scheme. Professional and styled photographs are photographs with established aesthetics with the styled photography being more contemporary and “cool” for Instagram.

**Children’s Connection with the Audience.** People narrate with an audience in mind. With different purposes, they employ different words and strategies to ‘speak’ to an audience. The literature review previously stated reasons why recent parents may choose to narrate verbally and visually in social media sites about their lives centered on their children. The analysis of the captions and the network users
build via the use of the hashtags inform us about the purposes of the digital media use. There, we use evaluative words and users’ input to gather understanding about the strategies adults use to tell their stories. Here, because the subject is child, I investigate how adults strategically use children’s awareness of the media to communicate with their viewer. Analyzing these visual strategies across these two different childhoods helps us understand the kinds of values parents have about spontaneity and connecting with an audience. Three values will be under investigation: acknowledgement of camera, visibility of child’s face, and child’s facial expression.

One essential aspect in children’s online photographs is the issue of consent and identification. Because this research design does not follow a few children and their parents’ accounts, there is no possibility to gather data about whether the depicted children agreed to being photographed. One way of tapping into this issue was to analyze children’s acknowledgement of the camera. The assumption was that if a child is aware of the camera, there has been a mutual understanding of the implications of photo taking between the photographer and the child. This does not always mean accepting the photograph to be taken since there may be cases where the child is attempting to stop the camera. To identify whether the child acknowledged the camera or not, the coder made note of the position of the face and eye contact.

All photos collected for this research are publicly available photos. Therefore, visibility of face was an important aspect to determine in this analysis to examine parents’ principles around the protection of the child’s identity. To cover the shaded area where the child’s face is not completely visible because the photographer was concerned about the face’s visibility, a “not recognizable” code was added. Not recognizable refers to shots where the photographer does not pay that much attention to getting a candid shot or is not concerned about the child noticing the camera.

With an attempt to identify the child’s gesture in photographs, I considered four measures: smile, sad/bored, still expression, funny face. These were not the only facial expressions found in the
photographs. Yet, these four facial expressions emerged as meaningful standards for the contexts this research is interested in. The values acknowledged here are not mutually exclusive, meaning; not all children with visible faces received one of these four codes.

**Children’s Possessions and Outlook.** Here, common characteristic features – props and body adornments (e.g. addition of text into the photograph, child appearing nude or semi naked, etc.) related to childhood and photography are analyzed. These features belong to and assist to the child so the photographer can convey meaning, rather, explicitly. They are not mutually exclusive as in the values above (except the gestures). For example, every visual narrative with a child in it is in a setting where the child acts but not every one of them uses the props and the body adornments.

**Third Phase: Parents’ and Children’s Narration of Photographs**

This phase completes the dynamic narrating activity-meaning system design with reflections of parents and children on postings that enact the research analysis. In this phase, I change my research distance and invite children and mothers to join my journey of making sense of children’s online photographs.

Researchers display interest in topics that matter to them. These topics may be subjects that they possess *a priori* knowledge with the setting and people they are researching. There are two things that may disqualify the sensibility of the inquiry I describe in both steps of inquiry. One is that I have never been a child with an already existing digital footprint. Second, I am not a parent. On one hand, I’m what Lewis (1973) calls a ‘sensitized outsider’, who produces research that provides an objective view of reality. By being a user of the platform parents use to share their photographs of their children, I accomplish one important step in becoming a complete observer. Nevertheless, hearing from children and mothers and examining more than what was present and performed in the online space became a necessity for the research to include reflections of potential participants of the meaning making system that Instagram is.
**Data collection.** This phase involves a projective activity with children (ages 7-10) and their mothers to collect their narratives about photography. The activity includes group discussions of a sample pictures of *fashionkids* and *letthekids* with the goal of creating a background story about the child presented in the picture. The findings from the analysis of the photographs informed the selection of the sample photographs. Furthermore, photographs were selected among the ones where the child’s face is not completely recognizable or visible. The two photographs I used in this activity are shown below.

*Figure 7.* Sample picture of #letthekids used in group discussions.
Data collection happened in Turkey. According to Statista’s 2016 report, Turkey was ranked fourth with 16.34 million monthly active users accessing Instagram, following the United States, Russia, and Brazil.

Children and adults participated in discussions in separate sessions. Ten sessions, five with children and five with mothers, were held in places suitable and convenient (e.g. home, school, café) for participants to join. 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 from 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 these were your friend (your friend’s child) what would you think of them?”, “If these were your photographs (or your child’s photographs) what would your friend
think of you?”. The expectation was that participants would state understandings of diverse perspectives surrounding photography and media use, drawing on their experiences as parents and children. The group discussions took approximately 30-40 minutes. They were audio recorded and transcribed.

**Sample.** The call for participants was for parents with children 7 to 10 years old and their children. No fathers responded to the call and participated in the discussions. Two grandmothers as caretakers joined two separate sessions. The children and mothers were not necessarily 'fashion kids' and ‘let be kids’, and the mothers were not necessarily 'instamoms'. The main reason why the participants were not selected within the Instagram community is to give the wider audience a chance to reflect on the act of sharing photos online, a new cultural activity many parents engage in nowadays.

In total, 30 children and 24 mothers, including two grandmothers, participated in the group discussions. Each discussion group had about six participants. On a few occasions, siblings joined the discussions together.

**Analysis.** To identify participants’ interpretations of the photographs, I applied values analysis. The rationale for this analysis was to identify how mothers and children understand and organize existing norms, values and principles, usually implicitly (Daiute, 2013; 2010; Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003; Todorova, 2017).

The analysis process examined transcriptions of 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 created in the room.

The first 40 values emerged based on my turns and multiple reading on all the conversations. Then, similar to the process described above in the analysis of photographs, I refined the list to 7 categories and 29 value expressions (see below). These values were generated from the narratives, guided by the
question “What values and sensitivities appear to have guided the answers and narratives expressed in the data set?” From the basic list of principles, I grouped these per focal topics (see Figure 9). Another researcher, whose native language is Turkish, and I achieved 85% reliability on 20% of the data. After the establishment of acceptable reliability measure, I completed the analysis.
| Identified Values* | Group process is important. | Interacting is important  
| | | Clarifying/Repeating is important  
| | | Focusing on the task is important  
| | | Personalizing interpretations  
| | | Debating is important  
| | | General commentary is important  
| | Portraying the character is important. | Place, SES, time is important  
| | | Demographics is important  
| | | Activity is important  
| | | Naming is important  
| | | Child's acknowledgement is imp.  
| | | Emotion is important  
| | Recognizing the qualities of photography is important. | Photographer is important  
| | | Intent is important  
| | | Display is important  
| | | Stylistic qualities are important  
| | | Identifying photoshop is imp.  
| | Using small details to understand the context is important. | Clothing and outlook are important to observe  
| | | Meta message of the photograph is important  
| | Acknowledging the use of and thoughts about media is important. | Children's use of media is important  
| | | Parents' use of media is important  
| | | Children's dislike on being photographed is important to note.  
| | Acknowledging power dynamics within and between the people involved in the photograph is important. | Attributing parents' strong influence on photography is imp.  
| | | Acknowledging child's agency and interests are important.  
| | | Interaction between photographer and the child is important  
| | Perspective taking and commenting are important. | Giving feedback to the photographed child is important  
| | | Giving feedback to parents of the child is important  
| | | Accepting peers reaction being similar to ours is important  

*Figure 9. Values emerging across children and mother groups in the projective narrative activity.*
CHAPTER III

Capturing Aspirations via Scale, Words and Networks

This chapter presents results of an analysis based on the scale of #fashionkids and #letthekids, searches of evaluative words in captions and networking strategies used in all posts on given days to address the first research question: How do the two digital cultures of childhood postings occur online?

The main motivation behind this inquiry is to provide a basis to inspect systematically whether and how the two hashtags reflect two childhood cultures. Analysis of the scale and the network posters create inform us about the magnitude of the two cultures. In addition, this chapter systematically analyzes captions and identifies patterns of significance in the use of evaluative words as markers of cultural expression across the two hashtags. Because the theory-guided analysis of scale, words, and networks is possible with digital tools that can be applied to large databases, I present this analysis before the analysis of the visual narratives, which requires more frame-by-frame readings.

The answer to the research question of “how” informs the inquiry of “why” these two cultures are picked and used by users. The findings suggest that both hashtags have established distinct cultures of expressions, with different purposes. There exists a considerable difference of size between the ways the two hashtag users engage in communication with fellow users. The online behavior, which is measured by the input the users create, already informs the inquiry about the possible underlying social and personal reasons why and how they participate in producing content for and with the hashtag community. The inquiry also offers a general view of the two hashtags by informing the methodology for the subsequent research phases.

**Discovery and identification of relevant descriptive data linked to postings.** On the day the data collection began, October 28th 2016, there were 4,810,199 #fashionkids and 957,057 #letthekids posts on Instagram. To calculate the growth rate, I looked at the number of posts for each hashtag after six
months on April 28th 2017: there were 6,144,776 #fashionkids and 1,554,789 #letthekids posts. Following the simple growth rate formula presented in Chapter 2- (Present) - (Past) / (Past) – I found that #letthekids (0.62) has grown at a faster pace than the #fashionkids (0.28) in six months. In about a year from the day the data collection began, on November 5th 2017, there were 7,586,808 #fashionkids 2,205,006 #letthekids posts. In one year, #letthekids (1.30) has grown at a much faster pace than the #fashionkids (0.58).

The number of unique users is distant to each other with #fashionkids being 10833 and #letthekids being 24275. The noteworthy difference in these numbers indicates that #fashionkids users posted multiple photos at the given period because 25333 #letthekids and 31742 #fashionkids records of posts were obtained.

The place where these posts were made can be informative when situating cultural trends within and beyond what is immediately apparent in the digital postings. Previously in Chapter 2 we saw that #fashionkids users employed fewer geotags (n = 3425) in their posts than the #letthekids users (n = 4061). Among 86 unique countries all around the world, the following four countries used #fashionkids the most according to the clean data set: Russia (n = 710), Brazil (n = 488), United States (n = 433), Indonesia (n = 316). Furthermore, Moscow (n = 183), San Petersburg (N=134), San Francisco (N=68), San Paulo (N=46) appeared as most common cities where #fashionkids photos were posted among 871 different cities. On the other hand, #letthekids was shown in 73 unique countries around the world while appearing most in the following four countries: United States (N=2395), Canada (N=265), Australia (N=229), United Kingdom (N=220). In terms of cities; Los Angeles (N=60), San Diego (N=50), Moscow (N=46), New York (N=41) were found to be the four most common cities among 1386 cities where #letthekids appear. The geographical distribution of posts using both hashtags reveal that #letthekids users localize mainly in the United States while there are a small number of instances of the hashtag being used in many different cities.
around the world. On the other hand, #fashionkids appear to be geographically widespread in the way it is popular in certain countries and cities.

Instagram allows users to apply filters to photographs to enhance or set a particular mood. Analysis of the filters demonstrates that both hashtags did not differ much on the level of filter use. A majority of users (82% of #letthekids users and 84% of #fashionkids users) of both hashtags did not use a filter. Clarendon, Gingham, Juno and Ludwig are the most common filters for both hashtags.

**Patterns of user engagement.** Essentially, Instagram activity is based on the premise of engaging with other like-minded individuals and acquaintances. The divergent networking patterns among users of #fashionkids and #letthekids suggest dissimilar motives for why the users of the hashtags chose them.

![Figure 10. Screenshot showing mentions and replies of a #letthekids posting.](image)

Users of Instagram can comment under photographs while also mentioning each other with @ sign (see Figure 10). To measure the size of the network among users of a particular hashtag, the @ sign in captions and the number of comments under the captions are used as measures. The number of
#fashionkids users who mention each other \((n = 5907\) among 31742 posts) is proportionally higher than #letthekids users \((n = 4176\) among 25333 posts). As result of these mentions, #fashionkids users created 18617 ties with each other while the number of ties were 11510 for #letthekids (see Figure 11).

![Graph showing the comparison between #fashionkids and #letthekids users](image)

**Figure 11.** Number of #fashionkids and #letthekids users who mention others and the number of the ties they create based on posts uploaded between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016.

The number between the count of users who mention another and the ties they create is vastly different because captions are not limited in the number of mentions of other users. In other words, one may mention as many users as one may desire in one caption. The sharp increase between the number of users and number of ties, therefore, indicates the high number of users who mention more than one other user in a posting. Postings with #fashionkids appear to exemplify such indication with users mentioning more than one account in captions in comparison to #letthekids posts.

Analyses of commenting patterns reveal that more #letthekids users \((n = 18045)\) received and replied to other’s comments than #fashionkids users \((n = 11489)\). These comments created 26334
dialogues between #letthekids users while creating only 15804 dialogues between #fashionkids users. It also appears that individual #letthekids users commented on their posts multiple times. Figures 12 shows the connections built upon the number of comments.

![Figure 12](image)

*Figure 12. Number of #fashionkids and #letthekids users who replies to others and number of ties they create based on posts uploaded between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016.*

**Explicit and implicit meanings conveyed in captions.** In addition to the degree of the hashtag use and the network structures, the meanings conveyed in captions deserved analytic attention. As stated in the method section, hashtags are labels put by users. Users who aim to be found by the general population of the platform or to attain more followers use more than one hashtag. If hashtags are cultures, as I claim, and cultures may also share similar meanings and values with cultures identified as others, investigating what those other cultural contexts are may be informing. By looking at the most accompanying hashtags,
researchers might be able to gain some insight into the overlapping cultural contexts depicted in a particular hashtag.

It is common practice for a user to use multiple hashtags in one caption. In fact, the data collected for this research shows that #fashionkids users employed 44938 unique hashtags along with the #fashionkids. On the other hand, #letthekids users used 26964 unique hashtags in addition to #letthekids. It needs to be noted that 230 users used both the hashtags in 917 captions. Table 6 shows the number of the first ten mostly used hashtags accompanied with #fashionkids and #letthekids.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hashtag</th>
<th>#fashionkids</th>
<th>Hashtag</th>
<th>#letthekids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#kidsfashion</td>
<td>6773</td>
<td>#childhoodunplugged</td>
<td>5021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#fashion</td>
<td>5365</td>
<td>#candidchildhood</td>
<td>4864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#kids</td>
<td>5297</td>
<td>#clickinmoms</td>
<td>3774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#ootd*</td>
<td>3981</td>
<td>#momswithcameras</td>
<td>3310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#instakids</td>
<td>3822</td>
<td>#letthembelittle</td>
<td>3046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#baby</td>
<td>3034</td>
<td>#pixel_kids</td>
<td>2831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#kidzootd</td>
<td>3045</td>
<td>#littleandbrave</td>
<td>2368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#cute</td>
<td>2964</td>
<td>#our_everyday_moments</td>
<td>2367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#kidsootd</td>
<td>3118</td>
<td>#momtags</td>
<td>2272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#babyfashion</td>
<td>2791</td>
<td>#cameramama</td>
<td>2484</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The abbreviation “ootd” stands for “outfit of the day.”

After the accompanying hashtags are deleted from the captions, the most frequently used words in captions for both hashtags are counted. The list of 10 most frequently used words in the captions for the both hashtags can be seen in Table 7.
Table 7

Number of Instances of The Most Frequently Used Ten Words in The Captions of #Fashionkids and #Letthemkids Posts Uploaded between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>#fashionkids</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>#letthekid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>follow</td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>2449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>1481</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>1627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>size</td>
<td>1454</td>
<td>halloween</td>
<td>1495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order</td>
<td>1383</td>
<td>today</td>
<td>1481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>featured</td>
<td>1353</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>1449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>baby</td>
<td>1084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>code</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baby</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dress</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kids</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>morning</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most words in Table 7 have referential meanings and are not connected to the social without the aid of other linguistic devices or functional words (Exceptions are love and happy – positive affect state expressions; and beautiful and good – qualifiers). For example, because the word Halloween appears more in #letthemkids we can infer that Halloween was a subject visited by #letthemkids users more than #fashionkids users. This is unexpected as Halloween is a special day with a particular focus on costumes and dressing up. Nevertheless, by looking at the number for the word Halloween, one cannot claim that users who used #letthemkids are emotionally or cognitively invested on this special holiday more than #fashionkids users. In other words, by looking at sole words with no linguistic function than to refer to something, we cannot interpret meanings narrators tried to reach. To investigate the implied cultural meanings of specific words we need to look at words that carry on specific purposes and evaluative significances.
Figure 13. Percentages of evaluative words in captions written in English across postings of #letthekids and #fashionkids uploaded between 10/28/2016 and 11/10/2016.

The significance analysis presented in Figure 13 reveals major differences in the percentages of evaluative words used in #letthekids and #fashionkids captions. Proportionally, the kinds of evaluative words that appeared more in #fashionkids captions than #letthekids ones were: Appearance (qualifiers), good affective state expressions, socializers, and gender state expressions. Expressed in a different way, #fashionkids users narrated photographs to connect others with a positive outlook while putting an emphasis on gender excessively. Especially the high percentages of gendered and appearance focused words are not very surprising in the captions of #fashionkids. The following captions are few examples:

“After a Christmas outfit that's a little bit different to the normal red floral? We're loving (good affective state expression) this new green based floral. pair it with some red Scrunchie Shorts- and your Christmas outfit is sorted!”

“My baby girl definitely has the model stare down to a T! My oh so serious gal! (gender state expression)”
“and her toothy smile just makes me want 25 children! I think Ivy’s very excited to hear it’s almost the weekend! (emojis) What have you got (socializer) planned for the next couple of days? We’re taking off on an impromptu camping trip. But in true husbo fashion we’re just not quite sure where we’re going yet (emojis) We’ve got these beautiful (good affective state expression) bloomers and skirts of the same print online now. Limited stock left though so hop to it!”

The examples suggest that users attempt to catch the audience’s attention by employing varied evaluative devices. Especially the higher rate of socializers (e.g. good morning, look at her, etc.) in the captions of #fashionkids compared to the ones in #letthekids corpus shows that #fashionkids users purposely utilized words and phrases to capture their audience’s attention and connect with them virtually. The attempt to build a social connection is not necessarily demanding others’ attention as in phrases directed at seeking information.

Users who labeled their photographs with #letthekids used more causal connectors, demonstrative pronouns, bad affective and cognitive state expressions, information seekers, intensifiers, possessive determiners, and negations more than the users of #fashionkids. The complex language users employed under photographs tagged with #letthekids indicates that the users attempted to enrich their meanings of the perhaps equivocal or personal photographs they posted. Here are some examples of the #letthekids captions:

“I love watching these two (demonstrative pronoun) do just about anything, but when they work together to achieve something, that just makes my heart sing. I’m so honoured to participate in @siblinghoodlove’s 10k followers loop today!! This wonderful hub and theme are so close to my heart, it celebrates one of the most unforgettable parts of childhood! As both moderator and participant, I couldn’t (negation) be more excited that it’s grown so much so (intensifier) quickly, and hosts such heartwarming images! Tap the tag in the image to visit the next participant in the loop.”
“I failed my driving test today, and I just felt so flat and disappointed (bad affective state expression) in myself as my driving instructor drove me home. I however (causal connector) got home to these two smiley faces being dropped off and everything was put right back into perspective. This isn't me taking a step back, it's me taking a step forward, another step closer to my driving license. My boys (possessive determiner) think mummy's don't drive because I don't, and one day soon I'm going to show them otherwise.”

The above honest expression of personal difficulties suggests that the mother is using her children’s imagery as a prompt to tell a story about herself. In the meantime, what is most interesting to me is that although the literal meaning of the hashtag “let the kids” implies allowing children to be free, parents used more possessive word pairs such as “my girl, our home” than the parents who present their children’s “feel good” appearances. Possessive determiners signify the custody of the “moment maker”. One would expect the demonstrative pronouns such as “this boy, these children” to be used more among the users of #fashionkids but the results indicates quite the contrary. Users of #letthekids both, distanced and claimed ownership of the depicted children. Kids who were let be were also conflictingly described as some children who belong.

Moreover; high rates of cognitive words, bad affective words, and connectors in #letthekids captions reveal that #letthekids highlighted on the way children or the photographer thinks and knows in relation to other negative emotional things happening. In the case of #letthekids, it is possible users focused more on the space, the location, the thoughts, the history, and the future when organizing their captions for the photographs while users of #fashionkids had a more direct purpose (e.g. to tell how good the children look) in their sense making. It is safe to say that the message intent is given quite clearly by #fashionkids users while #letthekids users portray a more complex meaning making activity using captions.
Summary. Overall, the findings show how the analyses revealed differences across the hashtag cultures in terms of scale, origin sources, networking and significance. The existing scale, the progression of the hashtag cultures, and the geographical locations where the postings were made suggest that both collectives express themselves with different purposes. The analysis of the networking patterns and the verbal accounts hint at the diverse purposes the users of these hashtags had at the time when the postings happened. The #fashionkids users aspired to virtually connect with others on the platform by referring to fellow users and attempting to socialize with them without carrying an interactive dialogue. Posts of #letthekids, on the other hand, suggest a responsive effort put forward by the users while including much more complex meanings in captions.

Analysis done here is important for two reasons. First, it provides researchers a method of using Instagram as a data source despite the challenges the platform presents to social scientists. Second, the inquiry lays the land for future research activities on the phenomena of sharenting and changing imagery of childhood in domestic context. The latter is fundamental to the studies of childhood as there has been a publicly supported assumption on the negative impact digital media has on children with little attention to parents’ own use of media devices in the home context. This study could be an important step in understanding parents’ values and meanings in creating settings where children are not the sole users but also are objects of the media.

The results explained above describe the ways parents use their child's photographs as cultural tools on the Internet, only partially. What they do well is to analyze user’s texts, activities, and social network structures to advise further steps in the full research design. The following phase, where I analyze the photographs, will hopefully bring more light to the meanings encapsulated in captions by examining the photographs themselves. The photographs are going to hint at the attributed meanings and values parents have in regards to parenting and childhood.
CHAPTER IV

Values Organizing Digital Cultures in Photographic Vision

Having described differences in the expressive and social qualities of captions accompanying child photos in the #fashionkids and #letthekids hashtags, I now present an analysis of values in the visual narratives, which are central to defining both cultures. To enrich our understanding of the two cultures of childhood, this chapter presents the findings of the values analysis of 500 photographs.

Results show a range and patterns of values enacted 500 photographs by the two social media cultures. Specific values emerging from my examination of the photos address the following question: “What values, norms, principles or beliefs seem to guide the creation and posting of this photo to the hashtag community?” In general, the values analysis of 500 photographs of children indicated that parents who identify with different childhood cultures emphasized mostly different but also some similar values. While #fashionkids photos visually emphasized children’s attendance to the photo making activity with stress to their possessions, #letthekids photos expressed mixed values of free and domestic happenings with a strong emphasis on unawareness of the photo taking and togetherness. Below, I present three major groups of values emerging from the analysis: Presenting children in context, Children’s connection with the audience and, Children’s possessions and outlook.

Presenting Children in Context

As shown in Table 8, both visual cultures highlighted children’s appearance in photographs when they are alone and outdoors; while expressing complete opposite values regarding activities children partake in and the way the photograph was composed.
Table 8

| Number of Guiding Values Under Presenting Children in Context Category Per Photo |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Values                          | Fashionkids (n = 250)   | Letthekids (n = 250)   | Total      |
| Presenting children in context  |                         |                        |            |
| Activity                        |                         |                        |            |
| Structured activity             | 143                     | 90                     | 233        |
| Unstructured activity           | 107                     | 160                    | 267        |
| Environment                     |                         |                        |            |
| Indoor                          | 101                     | 98                     | 199        |
| Outdoor                         | 149                     | 152                    | 301        |
| Social                          |                         |                        |            |
| Alone                           | 205                     | 148                    | 354        |
| With others                     | 45                      | 102                    | 147        |
| Composition                     |                         |                        |            |
| Casual                          | 145                     | 98                     | 243        |
| Styled                          | 99                      | 122                    | 221        |
| Professional                    | 6                       | 30                     | 36         |

*Note: Categories are abbreviations for the fully stated values.*

**The child’s activity is important.** The photos with #fashionkids include details emphasizing the importance of depicting children in structured activities while #letthekids photos portray children in unstructured activities. Unsurprisingly, #fashionkids photos indicate the importance of posing (n = 121), a prevalent sub-value, with twice as many photos expressing the value than in #letthekids photos (n = 61). Meanwhile, eating and educational activities presented themselves more in #letthekids photos (n = 13) than in #fashionkids ones (n = 2). Regarding unstructured activities, one noteworthy difference is noticeable in play activity. Again, perhaps not surprisingly, #letthekids photos (n = 69) appeared to capture children during play more than the #fashionkids photos (n = 33).
Examples above depict children engaging in the prevalent acts of structured and unstructured activities. Children with #fashionkids pose in places where no point of significance is present in the immediate surroundings and their clothing and posture hints at the act of posing. The photographer set the agenda and the children perform in both photographs. On the other hand, #letthekids photos exemplify children acting on their own and playing either with toys or everyday items.
The environment the child is in is important. Overall, the findings indicate the value of presenting children outdoors \((n = 301)\) versus indoors \((n = 199)\). Although indoor and outdoor settings appear have similar worth across the photos with \#letthekids and \#fashionkids, further variances within those settings appear to be meaningful.

When compared, children’s room surfaced as a meaningful setting in posts with \#letthekids \((n = 14)\) as opposed to the posts with \#fashionkids \((n = 5)\). This difference could indicate value put forward in having and locating children in their own space among \#letthekids parents. It is possible that children’s bedroom emerges as a setting that is recognized my many \#letthekids users. The photograph below, presents a \#letthekids child playing in her bedroom.

![Image of a child playing in her bedroom](image)

*Figure 16. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children indoors is important: in child’s room” in a \#letthekids post.*

Moreover; kitchen \((n = 8)\), common areas in the home \((n = 48)\) (e.g. living room) and, designed spaces for photo shoots at home \((n = 5)\) appeared as settings more frequently among \#letthekids photos than the \#fashionkids photos \((n = 0; n = 35; n = 1)\). Such settings emphasize the domesticity of the children and are often materialized in \#letthekids photos. In the photographs below, we see domestic environments
#letthekids posts make use of frequently. The one on the left presents a child close to an adult who seems to be making pizza in a kitchen. The chair the child is standing on was probably put for the child to engage in and observe the act of making at ease. The child on the right is in what I describe as the common space at home playing with her device in a perfectly crafted and lighted area.

![Image of child making pizza and child playing with device]

Figure 17. Photos expressing the value “Presenting children indoors is important: kitchen and common areas as domestic spaces” in #letthekids posts.

By comparison, designed shoots at home emerged more commonly in #letthekids ($n = 5$) than the #fashionkids ($n = 1$) photos. These are especially interesting because they reveal the level of investment the photographer put forward in presenting a home life in which the child performs.

Are #letthekids more domestic than #fashionkids? They are not completely and consistently homely in all the settings. In fact, wild nature as a setting manifested itself as a noteworthy outdoor context #letthekids were portrayed in (see examples below). Analysis of various outdoor settings suggest that #letthekids are photographed more in wild nature ($n = 55$) – not as much in manicured green spaces like parks, backyards and playgrounds comparing to #fashionkids ($n = 20$).
Sidewalks as outdoor spaces manifested themselves as thought-provoking settings as they present kids on the move to and from home. For parents who would like to have photos of their children outside of the home, sidewalks and backyards are possibly the best settings. There were substantially more #fashionkids ($n = 31$) photographed in sidewalks then #letthekids ($n = 18$). On the other hand, #letthekids had slightly higher rates of backyard photos ($n = 20$) then the #fashionkids ($n = 16$).

Furthermore, when looking at the values guiding photos, one notices the signifying power of domestic settings such as common areas in home, bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, and backyards. For example, 57 #fashionkids and 96 #letthekids photos depict children in these domestic settings. This means although children in #letthekids posts were pictured in wild nature in many instances, they were also portrayed in domestic settings relating to home environment.

**Social context is important.** The majority of photos portray kids alone in the photographs. The posts with #fashionkids appear to emphasize this solitude even more than the #letthekids photos. It is
possible that the portrayal of the child alone worked best for the photographer to move the attention to the
clothing with no interaction with a companion in the frame when using the #fashionkids.

Regarding the other people shown in the photographs, we see more presence of family members
such as mother, father, or mix of those in #letthekids photos. This could be interpreted as stronger value put
towards being together as a family in #letthekids culture. The greater rate of peers/siblings alongside the
target child especially indicates the importance of peer relationships in #letthekids posts.

The photographer’s composition is important. The findings show that the most commonly
used style among the photographs of children was the casual. The posts with #fashionkids (n = 145) valued
a casual kind of composition more than the #letthekids photos (n = 98). If we were to think of clothing as a
form of artifact, the fact that #fashionkids posts employ mainly the casual style in their images is not very
surprising for documenting and highlighting the clothing items more than the child wearing the clothes.

Figure 19. A photo expressing the value “Photographing children professionally is important” in a
#letthekids post.

The lower rate of casual photographs among #letthekids posts is also surprising for contrasting one
of the most accompanying hashtags, #our_everyday_moments in captions. One would assume that
#letthekids would portray kids in their natural selves more so than the #fashionkids because of the
emphasis put in caption. However, it is also possible to infer that #letthekids users developed a modern
visual language of the casual by adopting snapshot aesthetics from art photographers. The higher number of styled photographs and professional photographs in #letthekids posts may also be explained by this “up-to-date” quality of #letthekids users. They seem to negotiate with different prospects of the different genres of Instagram photography better than #fashionkids users.

Children’s Connection with the Audience is important.

As shown in Table 9, both hashtag cultures expressed mostly different values in regards to having children’s awareness of the camera. While #fashionkids photographs give a sense of a child’s full acceptance of the photo taking activity, #letthekids photographs portray a vagueness in regards to child’s knowledge of the camera.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Guiding Values Under Child’s Connection with Audience Per Photo</th>
<th>Fashionkids $(n = 250)$</th>
<th>Letthekids $(n = 250)$</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The children’s connection with audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No acknowledgement of the camera</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging the camera</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face is visible</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face is not recognizable</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face is not in the frame</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad/bored</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still expression</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny face</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Categories are abbreviations for the fully stated values.
The child’s acknowledgement of camera is important. Among all 500 photographs analyzed, more than half portrayed children as they were not aware of the camera ($n = 271$), with #letthekids having the greatest number of children with no acknowledgement ($n = 166$).

![Figure 20. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children when they are not aware of the camera is important” in a #letthekids post.](image1)

![Figure 21. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children when they are not aware of the camera is important” in a #letthekids post.](image2)
In Figure 20 and 21, children do not seem to have been informed about the camera. In most instances, like in the examples, children are captured when their back is turned to the camera. One reason may be that candid photography where the subject is not deliberately aware of the camera is valued the most by #letthekids users. In fact, based on the analysis of captions in the previous phase of inquiry, we saw that the second most used hashtag accompanying #letthekids was #candidchildhood. This shows that photographs of children with #fashionkids did not put as much as importance into spontaneously taken photographs as #letthekids photos. High rates of posing activity can explain the elevated number of the acknowledgement of the camera value among the #fashionkids photographs.

**Visibility of face is important.** Analysis shows that in many photographs children’s face is visible. Comparison of the two contexts reveals that most #fashionkids users were not very concerned about the visibility of the child’s face as there were only nine photos out of 250 in which a child’s face did not appear in the frame. In the meantime, #letthekids (n = 157) users seem to have relatively less interest in having child’s face in the photo than the #fashionkids users.

**The child’s facial expression is important.** Analysis reveals that across the four dimensions of gesture, smile (n = 178) was valued the most in the photographs. Smile is followed by sad/bored (n = 43), still expression (n = 32), and funny faces (n = 13). Smile, unsurprisingly, appeared commonly among photos with #fashionkids. Because the analysis of the captions revealed that #letthekids captions employed more negative affect words than the captions with #fashionkids, I had expected sad/bored children to appear more in #letthekids photos but that was not the case. In fact, #fashionkids photos enacted sadness and boredom more frequently than the #letthekids ones. The biggest difference among the two contexts in gesture values was still expression. The photos with #fashionkids had significantly more photos with children with still expression than #letthekids. This comparison is interesting as it confirms one of the standards of fashion photography genre in #fashionkids photos in perspective. The still expression in the
face conveys self-control and ability to be unshakable. However, because all the other gestures analyzed are still higher than the ones in #letthekids we can conclude that the variety in children’s unprofessional fashion photography still exists.

Children’s Possessions and Outlook

As shown in Table 10, what children have and how children look with or without the aid of objects differ by the hashtag even in this small corpus of photographs. The props and adornments that appeared meaningful in the inquiry assist #letthekids posts to depict children with sentimental values, and #fashionkids ones to centralize on commodities.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Guiding Values Under Child as a Subject Thread Per Photo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fashionkids</strong> (n = 250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s possessions and outlook</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message/humor via clothing or signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility of a brand or merchandize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked/semi naked child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet/animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Props</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult clothing/extra childish clothing/matching outfit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying the photograph (adding text and symbol, black/white, collage)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Categories are abbreviations for the fully stated values.

**Child specific props within the frame are important.** Overall, #letthekids (n = 67) photos employed more props than #fashionkids (n = 58) that emerged to be meaningful and salient. A deep look into the props reveals considerably more photos where children are held in arms among #letthekids posts.
than in #fashionkids posts. This finding compliments the findings of the significance analysis. Significance analysis had shown that #letthekids users employed more possessive determiners such as “my, our” in their captions than the #fashionkids users. The fact that #letthekids users depict children held in adults’ arms may purposefully signal the intimacy between parents and children.

On Instagram, when a user wants to use words instead of messages portrayed by the image alone, they use the caption area. Meanwhile, some users choose to incorporate words and messages into their photographs, not necessarily through edits but through t-shirt printing and signage. For instance, a parent may get a t-shirt for her child that says “I have O.C.D. Obsessive Christmas Disorder” for Christmas. These messages we see in children’s photographs are usually ironic or sarcastic with a sense of humor (e.g., a bib with “give me food!” sign). There is a big children’s clothing market surrounding important holidays or developmental milestones (e.g., first Christmas, first time out) as well. Such clothing verbalizes static images and children, sometimes before they even learn how to speak or understand what the message is saying. The efforts as such are seen more in #fashionkids posts (n = 34) than in #letthekids posts (n = 9). In Figure 22, we see a young girl posing with her beautiful dress and leggings that says “be” on one knee and “kind” in the other knee. There seems to be nothing else in the frame that would support the content of the message: “be kind”. It is possible that the #letthekids users trust that their photographs are visually good enough to convey a meaning or are not invested in the market for such clothing as much as #fashionkids users.
Visibility of a brand and merchandise (e.g., Mickey Mouse t-shirt, Star Wars hat) may indicate materialistic values the photographer had. Given that these photos are mostly taken digitally and one can make a conscious decision on re-taking a photo because a brand is visible in the frame, the coder thought prominence of a known brand would be an important distinction to note when coding. The findings show that #fashionkids photos \((n = 15)\) had higher rates of photos with a visible brand’s name or symbol and, merchandize than the #letthekids photos \((n = 3)\).

Chapter 3 on photographic visions of childhood refers to an increase in nude child photography based on the trend of capturing “real” children in natural and comfortable settings in 1970’s. In the corpus, 11 children appeared naked or semi-naked in photographs. Even in this small sample of photographs we see no naked or semi-naked photos of children among #fashionkids photographs while there were 11 of
them among #letthekids photographs. The example of a semi-naked child’s photograph below is the only photograph among the 11, in which the child’s face is not visible completely. It is possible that for #letthekids parents, all the other values presented in the photograph far outweigh any other concerns they may have about protecting the child.

Figure 23. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children naked or semi naked is important” in a #letthekids post.

The posts with #letthekids (n = 8) had considerably more photos with pets or animals in them than the #fashionkids posts (n = 2). This indicates that parents of #letthekids valued owning a pet or being around a pet more than #fashionkids parents.

**Body adornments and photographic embellishments are important.** The analysis revealed that body adornments and edits on photographs are prevalent among #fashionkids photos. Children with adult clothing and accessories (e.g., uncomfortable cuts, big sunglasses, adult-appropriate jewelry and watches) and extra childish clothing (e.g., big bows, tutus, hats with big animal figures on them) appeared more among #fashionkids photos (n = 62; n = 26) than the #letthekids photos (n = 10; n = 7). Examples for both are seen in Figure 24 and 25. Wearing identical outfits, whether full dress, a t-shirt, or a pair of shoes,
with others in the photograph emerged as a rare but also important feature in the corpus. All the instances of matching outfits co-occurred with either peers and siblings or mothers. There did not seem to be much difference between the both hashtags with #fashionkids ($n = 7$) having slightly more occurrences than the #letthekids ($n = 5$) in terms of matching outfits. Because the focus is on outfits, it is not surprising that #fashionkids users marginally value portraying meaningful moments that target the child wearing intensified pieces of clothing materials. Totals of these three noteworthy differences suggest efforts of, what I call, adultification and childification of children in #fashionkids photos. To a certain extent, parents are attempting to manipulate the appearance of what is normally perceived as a child by either making them look very young or very old.

![Figure 24](image-url)  

*Figure 24. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children wearing childish clothing is important” in a #fashionkids post.*
Figure 25. A photo expressing the value “Presenting children wearing adult appropriate clothing is important” in a #fashionkids post.

Furthermore, users of #fashionkids have slightly more photos with added texts ($n = 28$) and collages ($n = 18$) than the #letthekids users ($n = 17; n = 7$). Adding text or symbol, creating a collage with multiple photos, and transforming colored photos into black and white photos indicate an extra effort put forward in editing a photograph digitally with help from a separate application on a device.

Most of the time, the text added to the image is an Instagram user’s name with an @ sign. These signs that the photographer adds to the image can be interpreted as trademarks of a photographer. In a way, users who add such texts or symbols claim the copyright of the work and cease the possibility of others repurposing their photograph. Regarding collages, by bringing collections of photos together in one post, users intensify the meanings they are conveying and bring variety of acts, settings, gestures to one frame. Sometimes, they also collage identical photos together to augment the image.
Figure 26. A photo expressing the value “Adding text to the image is important” and “Creating a collage with multiple photographs is important” in a #fashionkids post.

Black and white photographs are listed as modifiers here since it requires the photographer to edit the colored digital photograph and turn it into a black and white one. The black and white photo also suggest nostalgia around the image of childhood. There were drastically more black and white photos among #letthekids posts ($n = 37$) than #fashionkids posts ($n = 2$). This finding implies #letthekids photographers’ sentimental longing for the past by giving hints of the artistic approach to photography.

**Summary.** Analysis of photographs enabled this research to assess the importance of visual qualities at delivering photographers’ values. The values analysis reveals a range of values enacted in 500 photographs. Findings indicated that parents who picked an online culture via the two hashtags emphasized variety of values in their photographs.

The findings suggest variety of interplay between activity, environment, social context, the aesthetic form in which the narration takes place, emotions, and props could be distinctively different than each other in different visual cultures of childhood. While the qualities of childhood images collected in the same period hint at meaningful patterns, the way those qualities interact with each other in distinct cultures
suggests that there is not one ideal image that could represent childhood in the best possible way and the photographers’ values very much influence the visual sense making of what’s being portrayed in children’s photographs.
CHAPTER V

Parents’ and Children’s Narration of Photographs

Narrative is relational. It is created across symbolic and physical spaces where people interact (Daiute, 2014). The above steps of design and inquiry attempted to go beyond the surface by studying the interactions that took place in the online space. In this final inquiry, I add the analysis by involving groups of children and parents in the sense making process. In this way, I have enlisted relevant actors as co-researchers reflecting on characteristic postings that evolved from my detailed analysis.

Drawing knowledge from the previous analysis, this last phase considers children and parents as experts in informing us about the meanings the childhood photos entail from their perspectives. Because the goal is to examine development, differences across parents’ and children’s perspectives are important to consider in relation to my analysis. Similar to what I did as a researcher in the previous chapter, children and mothers de-construct the already assembled values presented in two photographs (see below, again) while relating, transforming and narrating their own values about childhood.
Participants used the above photographs narrate stories about the depicted children and as prompts 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 important differences. The Figure 27 presents the percentages and frequencies of the major value categories in the discussions.
Figure 27. Percentages and frequencies of major value categories of conversational turns across children and mother’s discussions.

The values analysis revealed that group process and portrayal of the character were important value categories across the narratives while perspective taking based on a hypothetical scenario where the child and the photographer are familiar people in their lives appeared to be less important. The mothers and children shared an emphasis on the importance of the group process, describing the character, the qualities of photograph and perspective taking based on empathy. The importance of small details and power dynamics between the child and adults appeared moderately frequently in the mother’s narratives and less in children’s narratives. On the other hand, children expressed values regarding media use more so than their mother’s. Values that differ in emphasis across participants reflect their different positions in everyday life settings or conflicting perspectives. To better examine these diverse value systems among mothers and children and to distinguish my position as a researcher, I present the Table 11. The detailed findings will mainly focus on different value expressions by mothers and children to indicate dilemmas and directions for future research.
### Table 11

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Values</th>
<th>Participant groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher % (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process is important</strong></td>
<td>28.37 (246)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting</td>
<td>37.02 (321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying and repeating</td>
<td>18 (156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on the task</td>
<td>0.46 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalizing interpretations</td>
<td>0.35 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>0.46 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portraying a character is important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying place, SES and time</td>
<td>2.31 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying demographics</td>
<td>1.73 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying activity</td>
<td>0.92 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming</td>
<td>1.85 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s acknowledgement</td>
<td>0.23 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying emotion</td>
<td>0.12 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition of photography</strong></td>
<td>2.08 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the photographer</td>
<td>1.04 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying future display method</td>
<td>1.61 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging stylish qualities</td>
<td>0.46 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Photoshop</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective taking is important</strong></td>
<td>2.4 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback to the child</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback to parents of the child</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends think alike</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small details are important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and outlook</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta message</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media use is important</strong></td>
<td>0.23 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s use of media</td>
<td>0.35 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ use of media</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power dynamics are important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ strong influence</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s choice and interest</td>
<td>0.12 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction between child and the photographer</td>
<td>0.35 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100 (867)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Individual values under categories are abbreviations for the fully stated values.*
As shown in Table 11 and described in research design in Chapter 2, the researcher provided a context for participants to narrate using two photographs that emerged from the 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 directions that were not previously planned. 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 in 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 in their interpretations of the photographs. Rather than eliciting reflections on the process of parent posting in any pure way, which would be impossible in any case, I presented exemplars of the two cultures for interpretation by parents and children. These exemplars were chosen based on the previous analysis – and that’s a central feature of this design. The purpose was not to check whether I was correct or to assess any decontextualized opinions about the process. But to explore whether and how participants’ interpretations as co-researchers compared in values and whether/how those might have differed across parents and children. Noticing the distinction between the values that were expressed on the spur of the moment and the ones I initially introduced, the following sections will first visit the values I created the context for and then the ones voluntarily emerged during the discussions.

Values Directly Influenced by The Visible Cues in The Photographs

**Group process is important.** Overall the most prominent value category expressed in the discussions of the #letthekids and #fashionkids photographs was the importance of process. Within this value, emphasizing processes, were six related values (interacting, clarifying and repeating, focusing on the task, personalizing interpretations, debating and making general comments). An overwhelming majority of
the conversational turns (1501) indicated the importance of the group process. I, as a researcher and facilitator of the group discussion, enacted half of the process values (750). The six related values indicating the importance of process include interacting among the group (707 turns), clarifying and repeating (376 turns), focusing on the task (218 turns), personalizing interpretations (94 turns), debating about proposed interpretations (58 turns), and making general comments on the photographs (14 turns).

The most prominent value I used during the discussions was clarifying and repeating (321 turns) what I heard from the participants. Clarifying and repeating includes turns devoted to re-iterating and verifying what participants had said. Reflecting and re-iterating 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.

Interaction values indicate fluidity in discussions and the value of cooperation. Both children and mothers valued interaction between each other during the discussions, with children interacting slightly more (267 turns) than the mothers (194 turns). Children were more likely to provide me and each other feedback during the discussions.

Major difference between children and mothers’ ways of using process values is seen in the use of debating and personalizing interpretation values. The 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 about name and location of the child, mothers discussed the gender identity of the children by emphasizing their strong role in influencing children’s masculinity or femininity. Turns allowing participants to introduce a personal experience to endorse the interpretations of the photograph were identified as “valuing personal interpretations.”
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, demographics details, the activity the child is engaged in, child’s personality and interests, child’s name, acknowledgement of camera, and emotion were amongst 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?”, “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 the 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.

In attempt to find the most relevant name for the child in the photograph, participants in the children’s group pondered over 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 socio-economic status as some names sounded old fashioned and conventional and some were contemporary and popular. Some children participants, for example, suggested the #fashionkids child to have a foreign name for being from a foreign country (e.g. Germany, Japan, USA). Following excerpt is an example of the intertwined progression of naming and debating:
Researcher - OK, then I'll help you a little bit. Who is this boy? Would you want to name him? (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Child- OK. That kid’s name is Ali. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Child- It looks like a girl. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics)

Child- It is a boy. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics)

Child - Let's pick the name Tony. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Researcher- Tony? OK. (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Child- No. (Process is important: Debating)

Child- Tony. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Children – Because the name is funny, I call it the young girl Polly. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Researcher - Young girl Polly. (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Child- No. (Process is important: Debating)

Child- Polly. God, so ridiculous. (Process is important: Debating)

Child- I said Polly. (Process is important: Debating)

Child- Let her be Mia. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Child- No, her name is Zeynep. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

Child- You always choose English names. (Process is important: Interacting)

Child - Zeynep is from my class. (Process is important: Personalizing interpretations)

Child - Naming comes up in the games. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

Child - Let's call it Emir. (Portraying a character is important: Naming)

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. I, as a facilitator of the discussions,
did not ask questions or make comments pertaining to the value of the depicted children’s affective states.

The following excerpt is typical of those introducing the importance of portraying a character regarding emotions:

**Researcher**- Now, let’s discuss these with the group, okay? How do they look? What do you think?

(Process is important: Focusing on the task)

**Mother**- This one is sad and this one is happy. Looks like they were dressed up forcefully. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying emotion)

**Mother**- But this one is very well free and happy. Looks like she/he has confidence. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying emotion)

**Mother**- She/he is looking confident. Something different… distinctive. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

**Mother**- Self-assured. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

**Mother**- Like the kids in TV series, different. She/he has high self-confidence. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

As the above extract illustrates, mothers recognized the importance of 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. The 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 for the sadness were either the parents’ control over the child’s clothing choices or the lack of freedom. The following turn exemplifies how the complexity of the various considerations emerged altogether in one turn:

**Mother**- Now, two different children are affected by the environment they live in, growing while adapting. Of course, both are happy in their own worlds. For example, the other child’s clothing style suits to her the
place she lives in. But I can also interpret the other as follows: That child is a child with dreams, who have a different mindset like one who looks a little bit closer to the world in his own inner world. A child who can have dreams, I say so. His hands like that, you know how children open their arms when they say "like me more". He is representing that here. It may be that the child is a very creative, imaginative child, but the environment he lives, because he lives in a natural place, may not be good to dress up like a girl. But if he were going to the same school he might have had different ideas.

For the other child, she's a bit influenced by the family, probably mimicking the mother. There's absolutely imitation there. A child at that age live 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 to think that her life is so beautiful because she sees the 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. (Portraying a character is important; Identifying emotion)

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 why the photograph was taken, displaying method, the esthetic 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 the photographs was taken?”, “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) as opposed to mothers’ (4 turns), and children’s identification of Photoshop (17 turns) as opposed to mothers’ (3 turns) appear to be two major difference in this line of findings. Children’s attention to the exposition of the photographs indicate interest and knowledge about the places where the photographs are usually shared. It appeared that children are not only aware about the platforms adults share photographs but also find them worth mentioning when discussing their peer’s photograph. Among places where children suggest the photograph being displayed are Internet, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and a poster in an apartment building. Children were also quick to notice and then carefully review the collage in the #fashionkids photograph (17 turns) more so than the mothers (3 turns). The major differences in the two value statements reveal that children are informed about 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 from the perspective of the photographers, not the child who was being captured. The below excerpt exemplifies the speculations regarding how fathers and mothers take different kinds of photographs:

*Mother* - I think this one looks like this was taken by father; by family. *(Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)*

*Researcher* - The boy? *(Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)*

*Mother* - I don't think like a boy or girl. Like might have been taken by father; or mother. *(Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics)*

*Mother* - I think this one definitely is taken by a mother. *(Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)*
Mother - I agree. I think it's taken by a mother. (Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)

Mother - So a lady has certainly taken her. (Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)

Mother - Or a fashion photographer. (Recognition of photography: Identifying the 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 ... (Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics)

Mother - A careful father or an attentive mother may have taken it. Someone who knows. (Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)

As seen in the above excerpt, who the photographer was important in making sense of what is happening in the photography 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 offering explanations as to 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. One mother, for example, said: We don’t have any photographs of our own. I mean, I have but in very limited numbers. Now children have photographs of their every moments. That’s a very nice thing. (Recognition of photography: Identifying intent) Broadly speaking, it appears that mothers admitted that they are the ones who take family photographs and expected some form of appreciation from children of 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 these were your friend (your friend’s child) what would you think of them?”, “If these were your photographs (or your child’s photographs) what would your friend think of you?”, I
influenced participants to take the perspective of their peers who are 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 child’s peers or the child’s parents’ peers. I call this
kind of positioning as commenting since many participants already had expressed scenarios where they
saw the photos in social media. To whom they comment to, however, became more important than the role
they positioned themselves to be in.

Findings show that children were more interested in talking to their peer 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
see in the photographs.

According to some mothers, the assumption was that the parents were responsible for what was
going on in the images and needed to receive feedback on their visual expressions. Children, on the other
hand, were tempted to say nice things to their peers. This feedback was neither about the power
relationships between the child and other figures nor the intent photographer had. Most the time, children
expressed desire to simply react to the role their peers played in the photo. Following are few turns from
separate discussions: “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 tell her right away after
school opens like you looked really good.” (Perspective taking is important: Giving feedback to the child)

Values Participants Spontaneously Introduced

Using small details (props) to understand the context is important. The interpretations of both
children and mothers on the present photographs emphasized the importance of clothing and outlook, and
the message intent 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; #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 up 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 that they also use clothes to indicate that 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. (Small details are important: Clothing and outlook) Children referred this inconsistency solely to the characteristics of the child (SES, personality and interests). Many attributed her clothing style to her being a fashionista, smug or rich and inconsiderate. Following excerpt is an example for showing how clothing is related to the impression the child may have on her peers:

**Child** - My best friend would be very jealous of me if I had a photo like this. (Perspective taking is important: Giving feedback to the child)

**Researcher** - Would they be jealous? Why would they be jealous? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)
Child - If I were to dress up like this… my friend does not have clothes like this. Her mother doesn’t like it. I’m sure she would cry. She is always offended by me about stuff like this anyway. (Small details are important: Clothing and outlook)

Researcher- So, she would envy. (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Child- Maybe you are rich and she is poor. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying place, SES and time)

The above expression of the forecasted dispute between the depicted child and her friend due to jealousy was not unique. It appeared a few times in children’s discussions.

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, parents’ use of media, and identifying children’s dislike in being photographed).

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 are 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. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)
**Researcher** - Is that so? Who else does things like that? How about you? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** – I take my mother’s or my father’s phone and take photos together with my sibling, and then share them. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Researcher** - How do you do that? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** – On Facebook (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** – I must take photos on my own, I don’t have a sibling. I took my mothers’ phone. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Researcher** - What do you do then with the photos? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** – Stays with us. I don’t share them. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** – I take normal selfie, don’t share. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** – I also take selfies but don’t share them. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** – I only share them only when we go to place. Like when we go sightseeing or on holidays… And I only put them on WhatsApp’s status. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

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. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)
**Researcher** - Where do you see it? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** - My friend. They are rich are probably rich, because they have a lot of money. The girl comes in to school every day with four perfumes. So. The girl is in our class every day, I think her name is Bensu. Not sure.... New girl. Every day, she smells like four different heavy fragrances coming to class. Sometimes we close our nose in class and talk like that or something. (Process is important: Personalizing interpretations)

**Researcher** - Where do you see her photographs? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** - There are some photos on the Internet. Some photos put to the Internet. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Researcher** - How do you see it? You have an Internet account? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

**Child** - There is now a channel, Youtube. When you open a YouTube channel, you automatically have an account. But unfortunately, my smart dog Badem has broken my iPad, so now my account in Youtube stayed like that. I cannot upload any videos. I lost my subscription. There are four left. I stayed with three videos. I had just opened my channel. It was so. I regret Badem now; we fall out.

**Researcher** - Are you all watching Youtube? Do you like it? (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**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. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** - I left Youtube a few days ago. I'm just downloading game videos from Youtube. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

**Child** - There is a channel I do not like the most in there Papy, there are all thirty seconds of direct videos like this: I'm Papy, I'm Papy, I'm Papy ... (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)
Child- Are you watching Papy? (Process is important: Interacting)

Child- No. (Process is important: Interacting)

Child- I'm Papy, I'm Papy, I'm Papy is for people over eighteen years old. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

Child- Yes. (Process is important: Interacting)

Child –Thanks to first graders... (24.36) Papy is a girl… the most stupid, the most ruthless, and most feared of Youtube. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

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. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

Researcher - I understand. Well, then, is there anything else you want to tell me? (Process is important: Interacting)

Child- No... (Process is important: Interacting)

Researcher -OK. I can give you as much paper as you want. (Process is important: Interacting)

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, Orkan Işıman, Baturay and so on. I know all the videos right now. They make me watch a video called Papy Over. (Media use is important: Acknowledging children’s use of media)

The dialogue above suggest that children are critical about their and their peers’ use of media. Children highlight importance of regulation, age appropriate content, and utter disturbance when given a chance. Interestingly, not only disturbing content and the peers’ behavior are identified as sole sources of annoyance around media. Identifying parents’ unwarranted practice of photo taking also appeared
important for 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? (Process is important: Interacting)

Child - Yes, we have. (Process is important: Interacting)

Child- I have only four pictures. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Child- I hate being photographed. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Child- I have just four pictures that I look nice. (Media use is important: Children dislike being

photographed)

Researcher - Who took them? (Recognition of photography: Identifying the photographer)

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. (Media use is important: Acknowledging parents’ use

of media)

Researcher - Have you gotten a professional photo? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Child - Always on a holiday. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying place, SES and time)

Child- I hate being photographed because my parents are taking pictures everywhere. I’ve started to hate

that now. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

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. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Child - Me too. (Process is important: Interacting)

Researcher - What are they doing with those photographs? (Process is important: Interacting)

Child- Because my brother (older) also repeatedly gets photographed a lot, when the picture is taken, he

looks like this or like me. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)
Child - We do not like to be in friendship pictures. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Child - I do not like it either. Even if I was there or with cousins, when I was photographed, I was there like this (still face). (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Child - They only get me laughing like this, because I put my hands on a camera in case they try to take my photos. (Media use is important: Children dislike being photographed)

Researcher - They're taking it without you knowing. I understand. So, what are they doing with so much photo? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Child - They put it on the Internet, they say: “Here is a photo.” (Media use is important: Acknowledging parents’ use of media)

Children’s dislike on being photographed as a value expression appeared to be one of the most imperative utterances I heard from children because it allowed me to hear children’s perspectives in understanding the number of values (gesture is important, composition is important, posing is important, acknowledgement of camera is important) I analyzed in photographs in previous steps of the research.

Acknowledging power dynamics between the people involved in the photograph is important. The importance of recognizing power dynamics between the people involved in the photograph in participants’ interpretations of the #fashinkids and #letthekids photographs included expressing parents’ strong influence in the creation of photograph (53 turns), recognizing 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 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 demonstrated an overestimation of the effect parents might have in dressing the children in the depicted children. The following turn is not typical but unique of those introducing the influence parents have over the children: I saw this: For example, there is a boy in this photo, and this is a child who grows in nature in such a natural environment. It can be a child growing up in a town or a village rather than a city. It looks like a single tree sign in a wheat field, like saying "I exist", like how you pose and become sun in yoga and stuff. In fact, that sign means a tree, and then you do the arms as the sun. It is as if the child has integrated himself into nature and made a mark like that. But not because he knows it. For example, I take my child to yoga. When I tell him "make a sign of the sun", he knows. But I saw the child in the photo doing this on his own like the movement is coming from within himself, not because he was taught. And I interpreted this child as a boy. I think these two girls are the same kids over there. Only one is drawn closer and another is behind. It could have been taken farther. I think this is a child living in a bigger city, a girl child, and a child using media, things like television and phone, electronic goods because her sunglasses, hairstyle, clothes likened to celebrities from art or fashion community. But not only because it is a matter of small town or big city, also because her parents support these children to be in this way. For example, this child's family grows up in a natural environment and provides such an environment, but this child's family may be provided with electronic goods, and at the same time her parents have supported this style. I saw them this way, for example, these two. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)

While introducing other values that also emerged prevalently in the analysis, the above turn’s essence is that parents think they provide, shape, and direct children’s lives as well as their depictions. In another group discussion with mothers:
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 life style 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. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)

Researcher - Where did we get that? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

Mother - From the posture. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying activity)

Researcher - From the posture? (Process is important: Clarifying and repeating)

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 motived 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. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)

Mother - I saw two girls. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics- gender)

Mother - I did not say that already. This is a happy child. Intertwined with nature. However, a child who feels comfortable and safe because he knows that his family is there. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying emotion)

Mother - There’s also the following: he has survived the boredom, oh., what a relief. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying emotion)

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.” (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)
Mother - *This is directed by the mother, the father, and this one himself*... (13.10) *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)*

Mother - *Maybe it is the gender difference is between them. Freedom between girls, boys. We raise men freer because the mothers raise the girls a little more carefully* ... *(Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics - gender)*

Mother - *When you compare these two photographs, maybe you can say that, but in this one it is not clear if the child is girl or boy. I can not say anything because of that.* *(Portraying a character is important: Identifying demographics - gender)*

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 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. This girl looks externally imposed, and this other one is freer. Maybe like she said, living in a small place but I do not know, maybe a big city... From here it looks like a small place. He points at his freedom and the sun.* *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)*

The obvious counterargument to the parents’ sense of power over children’s life is that the children have their personalities and choices. Despite the acknowledgement there exists 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. The perplexity emerged when mothers questioned their authority and success in influencing the children. Intriguingly, children did not appear as the stakeholders who defended children’s
choices to go against the seemingly contradicting parents’ strong influence argument. Some mothers, again, were the ones who 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, father dress them up ... there are children who are like that.* *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)*

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

**Mother** - *They determine it. Efe (her son) determines himself.* *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)*

**Mother** - *Yes. We are trying to pay attention, maybe they do not listen to us. They choose what they want.* *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)*

**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 Efe (her child) would know to pose such way? (parent's influence)*

**Mother** - *I think it depends. But Talha also knows. Look, his father never ... (18.20) (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)*

**Mother** - *Why is that? He sees from the father, he sees it from us. After all, our children are our picture.* *(Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)*
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. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)

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 venturous the child would never do things like that. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

Mother - They would be embarrassed if they were shy. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

Mother - It’s not a bad thing. If it was a bad thing we already would knew it as a mother and a father; we would not do it. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying parents’ strong influence)

Mother - They cannot, right. They would want to do it but feel embarrassed and withdraw. (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

Mother - When we go to the field and put on our şalvar (comfortable pants worn mostly by farmers in rural areas), the children have long sweatpants, short sleeves on them and we take photos in them too. But I show those photos to everyone and I share them with everyone as well. (Media use is important: Acknowledging parents’ use of media)

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. (Portraying a character is important: Identifying emotion)

The debate on the issue of power dynamics is consistent with the attention paid to the clothing of the #fashionkids child. The details of the clothing items worn by the child generated most of the discussion among mothers: I said that she had observed adults and behaves like one. But she seemed more authentic
to me, because girls usually like to wear classic shoes in combination with clothes. I thought the glasses were her own choice too. Obviously, these are sports winter shoes and they look original to me because they stand out differently on her; but I said she was very observant of her surroundings. After that, she's well-groomed. I could not say much else. The mother participant’s empathetic attempts to understand both children and parent’s perspective did not appear as important in children’s discussion. In 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.* (Small details are important: Clothing and outlook)

**Child** – *She is trying to be a smart-ass.* (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

**Child** – *Yes.* (Process is important: Interacting)

**Child** – *I think she is being a smart-ass to a boy.* (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

**Researcher** – *Okay, what does this other one do?* (Process is important: Focusing on the task)

**Child** – *Doing a ballet.* (Portraying a character is important: Identifying activity)

**Child** – *That one is doing ballet in his own concept.* (Power dynamics are important: Identifying child’s choice and interest)

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.

**Summary.** 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 position about exemplars of parent postings of their children that emerged from my detailed analysis. Both children 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 are generated from the narratives guided by the question, “How do parents and children use photographs of children to make sense of childhood?” 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. Therefore, importance of group process, importance of the portrayal of character, recognizing photography as a genre, and taking perspective of people who are involved in photography appeared as three focal topics that the research design predisposed them to emerge in participants’ narratives. Recognizing details related to clothing and essence of photograph, importance of media use, importance of power dynamics between the child and his/her surrounding, on the other hand, spontaneously emerged in discussions with children and mothers. Interestingly, the kinds of values that belong 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 were expressed by participants 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 and sharing photographs.
CHAPTER VI

Discussion

This study examined parents’ postings of photos of their children on social media. In particular, the study considered posting behavior as a cultural practice as enacted with Instagram postings marked by hashtags of #fashionkids and #letthekids. The inquiry included analyses of a sample of Instagram captions and photographs with hashtags of fashionkids and letthekids posted in a 12-day period in 2016. In addition, a projective activity, where children (ages 7-10) and mothers created a story about a sample picture depicted as fashionkid and letthekid, was conducted.

Meaningful patterns emerging from the examination of the postings and transcriptions of group discussions addressed the following question: “What values, norms, principles or beliefs seem to guide the creation of the photographs to the hashtag community?” An activity-meaning system design with a sampling of postings in those two hashtags and reflections on representative examples of the postings yielded that the two hashtags are cultures formed by collectives of individuals who have distinct norms, beliefs, and values regarding expressing ideals about childhood. Specifically, meanings conveyed in the #fashionkids culture appear to reflect clear and consistent motives across the captions and photographs while #letthekids postings revealed diversity of meanings, including conflicting and ambivalent ones regarding childhood and parenting. The absence of consensus in the meanings conveyed in #letthekids postings suggest that the hashtag endorsed users to be unrestricted and spontaneous in their sense-making. The diverse emphasis in values expressed in children’s photographs, in turn, allowed mothers and children to highlight different values they have about media use and parents’ strong influence in children’s depiction in photographs. In the following paragraphs, I will connect findings of the research with theory and existing research to study contemporary digital cultures and offer lessons taken for researchers who are interested in replicating or designing their own studies.
Different Reasons for Posting

The research considered two hashtags as diverse cultures with the idea that social media sites can be examined as cultures or spaces where communities gather, and hashtags allow individuals to communicate similar thoughts, feelings, and values with each other. The two hashtags related to child development and parenting were #fashionkids and #letthekids. These two contexts do not necessarily conflict with each other but inform the research about diversities that exist in the same digital platform.

The two hashtags are widely used while #letthekids became more and more popular over time. This change in trend may be due to the increasing awareness on the importance of raising self-reliant and free children (Skenazy, 2008). Furthermore, more young people go into further education, entry into the workplace is delayed (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) and age of becoming a parent has increased. There is already existing evidence that shows most users of digital media may be undergoing the transition to parenthood (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012), which is a stressful period considering most parents are also climbing ladders in their careers while becoming a parent. These wider social changes influence the use and value of media at home, for they transform the nature of family relations. In seeking to explain parents’ own use of media, mainly Internet, few studies (Jang & Dworkin, 2014; Doty & Dworkin, 2014) suggest that using social network sites do not only help parents to be connected to peers and relatives outside of the home (Stern, Cotton, & Drentea, 2012), they also help them monitor their own children via the medium their children already prefer to use. For researchers, the breadth of social changes that contextualize media in the family poses an empirical challenge.

Building communities of interest. Analysis of the network parents create using #fashionkids and #letthekids suggests possible links between the purpose of the use and the extent in which the hashtags are used. In terms of building community, it is clear that #letthekids users are more interested and invested in engaging in a dialogue with fellow users of the platform more than the #fashionkids users for having more
replies to each other. This line of findings suggests that the users of #letthekids might be spending more time on their smart-phones to maintain the dialogues they have within their communities.

If #letthekids users are replying to their followers’ comments on their accounts using their mobile phones, it is possible that they are absorbed by the ongoing digital engagement they have with their peers at the expense of attending to their children. It has been well-established that the quality of parent-child interaction critically influences child’s cognitive, emotional, and social development. The concern of parents’ mobile device use instead of interacting with and attending to their children has received a good deal of media attention (e.g. AVG Technologies, 2016; Parents on Phones, 2016) but according to the literature review conducted by Kildare and Middlemiss (2017), the question of how parents’ mobile device distractions during parent child interactions affect the parent-child relationship has been addressed empirically only in a few studies. More research is required to explore the ways parents use their phones in the presence of their children, and the indirect implications these interrupted parent-child interactions have on the quality of child development. Identifying hashtags that generates high user engagement like #letthekids may be useful in sampling parents that spend extensive amount of time using their mobile phones.

To follow fashions and use of brands. Those who post photographs with #fashionkids arguably mention brands and other users to create an activity that could provide them more followers and likes. Branded clothing for children is a thriving industry. According to Zukin (2004), branding an item is a way to get consumers to accept new products. Almost all social networking sites, but especially Instagram, are moving into a direction where the platform’s main purpose is to advertise and market new products based on the user’s online activities. Algorithms in play target individual users with advertisements and suggested users that they would be interested in following. Given that some parents monetize their Instagram activity via their children’s photographs, the fact that #fashionkids generate more mentions among its users than
#letthekids is not very surprising but also empirically significant. It would be valuable for future research to longitudinally study the development of children who are faces of certain styles, brands and products from early years of their lives.

**To tell stories about children and themselves.** To understand more about the purposes behind the hashtag use, analysis of captions became essential. The findings revealed a few interesting results. Most frequently used hashtags and words give the impression that #letthekids posts are more family oriented and tell something about motherhood as opposed to focusing on the child as a commodity as in #fashionkids posts. Because words by themselves are not informative to make that conclusion, evaluative words, words with linguistic functions that can infer the purpose of the story teller, is analyzed. Two results are noteworthy to mention: 1) #fashionkids users use more phrases (e.g. hello, good morning) to engage with their audience while amplifying the gender of the children with the use of gendered words (e.g. gal, princess) 2) #letthekids users tell stories with interconnected thoughts and negative emotions by using relatively more connectors (e.g. however, therefore) while separating themselves from the child by using more demonstrative pronouns (e.g. this baby, these children) but also employing more possessive determiners (e.g. my baby, our home). Especially the use of demonstrative pronouns analyzed in captions provide clues about the distance the owner of the post put between the child and the person who is doing the posting – most likely the parent. Combinations of possessive determiners with child related words, however, hints at the emphasis on the ownership of the child and the family structure. In a way, the first is detaching the child from the parent while the latter is introducing a proprietorship. These seemingly contradicting evaluative devices hint at the dilemmas that exist in the purposes the members of the #letthekids community have about their position in regards to being a parent. There already exists a vast amount of literature that studied the motivations behind parents’ social media use but there is no study that considered children’s judgements on the kinds of mixed messages parents convey in their online postings.
Previously, some social media researchers questioned the accuracy and authenticity of the digital postings while emphasizing the performative aspect of the online environments (see, Kietzmann et al., 2011; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). For instance, it is possible that #fashionkids users employed more gendered words in their caption for not only valuing the gender based clothing and behavior but also to conform to the fashion industry’s mainstream gender ideals and attract the majority. It is also possible that #letthekids users choose to use their children’s photographs to tell about their complex feelings and problems. When it comes to postings about childhood, nobody dares to question the accuracy of the depiction, perhaps, not to undermine the goal the parent, the fully-grown adult, may have. Research studies may use as much as clues – captions, networks, photographs, comments – to check on the truthfulness of parents’ reflections of the child’s life. One clue, perhaps the most important, will always be missing in such research efforts: the subject’s interpretation. Unless social media researchers determine the subject(s) of online cultures they are studying and include their voices in their designs to critically evaluate the authenticity of the postings, the question of accuracy of what is conveyed in the postings will persist. In the body of research on parents’ digital postings, there needs to be more studies that considers children’s interpretations of postings made about them.

**To express values using visual affordances.** Narrative inquiry did not only define the basic research design and inform the automated analysis of the captions but also provided a framework for the analysis of the photographs, which are arguably the places where the users aim to receive fellow users’ most attention on Instagram. Research already suggests that individuals manage their visual impressions to “construct more beneficial, less threatening surroundings” (Schlenker & Weigols, 1992, p 134) and to stress facts about themselves that might otherwise be underrated in their short interactions with others (Goffman, 1959). These “given” impressions do not aim to deceive others (Goffman, 1959). They strive to enact the roles individuals carry or aspire to have (Goffman, 1959; McKillop, Berzonsky, & Schelenker,
Children as a subject appears as a useful tool for individuals to reflect, transform, and share their roles and values as parents. Doing an analysis of two distinct and visual childhood cultures allowed a perspective to be taken when reading the findings.

In total, 500 photos were analyzed with equal numbers of photos belonging to each hashtag group. Most of the photos analyzed here present children alone and outdoors ($n = 206$). Variety in values regarding activity and stylistic composition make the findings hard to generalize to the whole corpus. Nevertheless, 99 photos in 500 portrayed children by themselves, engaging in activities they structure in outdoor spaces, and in a casual style. This means almost one in every five children, regardless of the hashtag they represent, were casually photographed when they are alone and acting freely in open-air areas.

Comparison of two childhood cultures in photographs suggest differences that could be associated with the hashtag communities. The ecological preference is not that different between the two hashtags with outdoor space being almost equally cherished by both. Children in #letthekids photographs portray a sense of style and high-brow artistic value with the ideals of free play and togetherness in situated settings. On the other hand, #fashionkids photos enact values of casual posing in isolation. Moreover, photos with #letthekids emphasize the importance of physical touch through presentation of child in arms, spontaneity through naked or semi naked child, friendliness through pets and animals, and nostalgia through black and white photographs. On the other hand; consumerism with the use of personalized clothing, advertising through branded objects and edits, and glamorizing appearance emerge as values that are highlighted in photos with #fashionkids. These two similar yet different representations of values regarding childhood, prove one more time that childhood is socio culturally constructed and framed. Even in the most globalized digital application, multiculturalism exists. Multiple childhoods are portrayed and viewed at the same time.
To display cultural capital. Privilege reproduces itself, but among the less privileged, all kinds of ways of life exist (Beck-Gernsheim, October 2013). As class becomes more about taste and culture, the media takes a functional role in exposing what is liked and favored (Livingston & Sefton-Green, Class). There may be geographical and class related reasons for the existing differences in the two cultures this research focused on. Photos with #fashionkids, for example, demonstrated children with varied multicultural backgrounds, which is also in line with the diverse geographical locations the photos were uploaded from. This difference could simply be explained by the accessibility of smartphones and mobile internet. One other explanation could be the popularity of these two hashtags in certain regions in the world.

Furthermore, among the two hashtags, #fashionkids has the most photographs of children of color. The high number of people of color can be a result of the global popularity of the #fashionkids. In other words, #fashionkids photos may have come from a variety of places in the world. High numbers of Asian and Black children in #fashionkids photos, however, may be manifestations of the importance two ethnic communities pay to appearances and self-image. It is likely that Asians and Black people use fashion as a tool to convey and confirm distinctive characteristics they have about themselves while white people, being the majority, do not feel the same necessity. However, we know human development is not only about the individual, race, economy or geography. Therefore, considering the interplay between many other patterns appearing in the two hashtag cultures is helpful for researchers to investigate possible underlying influences of major differences between the two. Future research, for example, can use geographical data to focus on where the posting is made and analyze childhoods in the same region or a childhood in different regions. Although there is no way to control on the accuracy of the geotag people use in their Instagram postings, an argument can be made about the conscious decision users make when locating the post. In addition, further research can also consider values as choices parents make regarding
their child’s upbringing and argue that some “typical” looking children are not given the opportunities and restrictions privileged kids have. For instance, child’s bedroom may be a topic of interest by itself to enrich our understanding of “unequal childhood” (Lareau, 2003). An effort can be made to study traces of ways in which parents from the dominant classes facilitate through domestic settings reflected in digital postings.

**Differences in Children’s and Mothers’ Sense Making**

To carry the research from digital setting to a face-to-face setting where the appropriate audiences join me in the sense making of the photographs, the last phase of this research included an activity, where children and their mothers narrated stories using photos of #fashionkids and #letthekids. Whether their narratives were positive or negative did not matter much for the analysis as my goal was not favoring one photograph or childhood over the other. Instead, the design allowed them to use a familiar tool, a photograph of a peer or a peer’s child, to relate their experiences to the depicted child. Participants freely positioned themselves as audiences and created meanings on record. They were not told that the photos were taken from Instagram nor they were told anything about the hashtags. The freedom they were given allowed them to spontaneously make sense of and introduce values that appear to be meaningful for themselves. This projective technique offered a solution to overcome biases participants may have 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 their perceptions of the children in the photographs.

When participants were answering, debating over the values they have about the children in the photographs, they introduced ideals they seem to have a consensus on. However, once they started to get used to the freedom they have in talking and discussing about the depicted children, they introduced values that are 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 relationship with each other and media.

One goal of this research was to discuss whether the photo taking and sharing as a cultural activity has implications for public-private life boundaries and power dynamics between parents and children. Both children and parents did not find the topic of privacy worth visiting during their discussions. 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 dressed the children up, made them pose in certain ways, altered their emotions and the amount of freedom they have after talking about what is visible in the photographs. Mothers also second guessed their interpretations of overpowering parents and brought in the idea that children may choose to dress up and pose without any direction from parents. Hearing mothers’ consideration of children’s choices and interests while debating about their power suggest that adults, especially 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 few times that a parent most likely chose to dress the children up and made them pose.

Why mothers most likely to attribute the way the child look to the role of the parent of the child? Sociologist Davison’s (1983) hypothesis called 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 the topic of parents’ strong influence as if it is restricting children’s freedom and therefore, negatively affecting their emotions and lives. While there is a body of research indication that 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 a point that she made sure her daughter dressed up 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 is to keep a photo diary which she will share with her classmates on the first day of the school year. Both mothers appeared to have strong opinions on the influence the imaginary mother have on the #fashionkids child. Future research may need to take this third-person effect into consideration 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. Such research can also hopefully support the discussion visual studies started about the agency of the representation versus the agency of the represented (e.g., Chalfen, 2002).

Last but not the least, 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 rules or not is not clear particularly when sharing photographs is quickly becoming a norm among parents. While the majority of research on parenting and digital media has focused on parents’ concerns about children’s uses of devices, this study focuses on parents’ uses and children’s understanding of their parents’ media use. The concerns parents have about their children’s independent use of media differ by medium and the predominant use of it. Parents to worry about their children is quite natural. However, two things that many parents do are wrong. One is drawing causal relationships between negative developmental assets and media use based on correlations; and second is authoritatively restricting children’s use of media while not exemplifying the right behavior. Parents should make sure
their own interactions with mobile phones, social networking sites to exemplify the best they might hope ever to see in their children when they get older. “Do as I say not as I do” is not very effective parenting. This research suggest 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 using media in very informed ways. 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 that mindlessly imitate what they see and their agency should be fully acknowledged.

**On the Importance of Digital Policy and Consent**

Digital social development can serve as a tool to show that change is possible, and by what means. With the mobile phone and online platforms now firmly established as part of our daily life interactions, individuals can create and share rich and contextualized narratives of their domestic lives. Publicly available records of personal narratives- created by users, for users- provide information about personal experiences, memories, feelings, and knowledge. What gets celebrated and remembered in the digital postings communicate cultural norms and practices with wider communities.

In recent years, personal data production and collection has become more pervasive than ever. Protection of children's identity is at the core of the discussions on data regulation and protection. To meet the challenges of the era of big data and the expansion of sophisticated commercial tracking and profiling within digital environments, new regulations are being suggested and passed by state agencies in the Western hemisphere. Based on the concerns many parents have regarding their children’s media use, these regulations place considerable reliance on parents to manage their children’s access to online services. For example, according to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA) in the US, those under 13 are not able to use social media and other online platforms unless the social media site or platform obtains parental consent. The age of consent has become 16 with the establishment of The General Data Protection
Regulation (GDPR) in European countries. The reasoning behind these regulation laws is to protect minors. For example, if an organization is trying to collect data of a person younger than the above age thresholds, consent needs to be given by someone with parental responsibility. Scholars, who acknowledge childhood as a sociocultural space and see children as social actors (see James, Jenks & Prout 1998), have many questions concerning these state-level decisions. Advocates of children’s self-determination rights already questioned whether children’s privacy is sufficiently valued in personal data regulations and the degree of power parents are given in controlling their children’s access to online services (Livingstone, 2018). Besides the regulatory questions, one practical question I will ask at this historical point in time is: “Should parents be the sole mediator of whether children can access online services?”

My speculative answer is: “not always”. Posting of children’s pictures online is an interesting practice to investigate here, as the power dynamics are completely visible and documented not only for the whole family but also for the world when parents, not necessarily with the consent of the child, post a picture of their child in publicly available online platforms. This research posited that parents’ expressions about their children through photography provide an important clue for understanding children’s and parents lives and what private information parents find worth sharing. Photos posted by parents are also important to look at to understand the social and cultural understanding of childhood, the childhood that is now available for the world to see, thanks to parents, who are supposedly the protectors of their children’s privacy.

Face recognition systems have gone through rapid developments in the last few years. Via the use of computer applications, not only security officials but also any marketer, government agency, or a stranger with access to available software can identify or verify a person from a digital image or a video frame. Having the child’s face visible emerged as the most prevalent value under investigation. Children
not acknowledging the camera and having their face visible in photographs appeared as two distinct values that occurred together quite frequently \((n = 170)\). Children under age of 18 are considered minors and are assumed not capable of making informed decisions about their participation in research projects. This dissertation put careful attention into not publishing photos of children where their face could be detectable and tracked down. In the United States, parents who post children’s private data, including their faces, are protected by law because the First Amendment affords strong protection to free speech (Bessant, 2017). In addition, courts have been reluctant to grant children privacy rights in the family context (Bessant, 2017). In Europe, particularly in France and England, measures have been taken to give the right to children to be able to sue their parents due to their sharenting actions. To date, no child has brought legal proceedings against their parents to prevent them sharenting, or to obtain removal of information that has been shared (Bessant, 2017). However, sharenting is still a new phenomenon and therefore, far from being a norm. It is important that researchers take a stance not only to protect the future of their published work but also to inform public, including children, about their rights by making informed decisions about the way they store and circulate their work.

According to Rose (2016) there are three sites at which an image’s meaning is made: “the site of its production, the site of its circulation, and the site of its audiencing” (p.103). This research attempts to understand what happened at the site of the production by using the public digital postings as clues. The site of the circulation, Instagram, with its own culture and affordances, allows networks to be built and online interactions to happen. The audience is potentially the whole world with access to Internet and smart phones. Even though privacy settings can be controllable by a user, there is little to no understanding on how Instagram stores users’ data or how it shares with companies, research institutions and even government institutions. The most recent example of this confusion resulted in London based data mining and analytics firm Cambridge Analytica’s illegal use of user data from as many as 50 million Facebook
users. The firm denied any wrongdoing but generated a massive debate over Facebook’s failures to police its platform. Facebook, which owns Instagram, was also blamed for improperly obtaining user data that might have given it an unfair advantage in reaching voters in 2016 presidential elections in the United States. The “growth-at-all-costs” mentality of the social network companies leave users in a difficult position where they want to connect others at the stake of their privacy. Overly complicated and mostly hidden privacy settings are not giving the impression that these companies allow users to know and control their audiences. Therefore, the meanings created in Rose’s (2016) third site, the meanings made by the audiences, become complex, uncontrollable, and even disorderly. The questions of when, where, how the creation of meaning happens – the questions a social research would conventionally like to control settings for - become difficult to answer coherently and consistently. The research done solely on social networking sites, therefore, is doomed to be limited in explaining general social processes outside of one platform at one time in history.

**Conclusion**

While development and use of innovative technology is accelerating at a fast pace, theory and methods for analyzing uses of digital media for human development have lagged behind. A major innovation of this study is first to enact the concept and method of cultural analysis to the posting as a 21st-century parenting practice. Having applied this theory-based method, the study also offers findings about the quite diverse values that emerge across two specific digital parenting communities, with implications for ongoing research.

In this research, I examined adults’ practice of taking, accumulating, and posting photographs of childhood by publishing them online. I considered each photograph as a narrative that carries the stories, identities, and power of the photographer. By taking a photograph, the photographer purposefully takes a perspective and reflects on this perspective in a similar way a painter draws or an author writes on an issue
of interest. Looking at a photograph, alongside text and metadata, allowed me to understand how the
digital postings get formulated and convey messages.

Stories grow over time via individual’s sense makeings. The genre we use to tell the stories we
heard once makes a difference in our narration, as well as our audience. Based on socio-cultural theory, this
study argues that parents are using their children’s photographs as a cultural tool to make sense of their
parenting experiences in diverse and similar ways. Taking photographs of children is a unique cultural
activity that both children and parents engage in but what is worth posting is very much influenced by the
existing patterns of expressions. The analysis of an existing array of photographs as an outcome of the
cultural activity become essential to examine meaningful patterns and their meanings to wider audience.
The study analyzes networked photographs that are both domestic and global and provides a context for
children and mothers who narrate their domestic accounts and meanings about images of childhood.

It is still not clear whether publicity is damaging for children in the long run but understanding
children’s presence in parents’ personal social media accounts may hopefully shed some light on the
concerns that many of us share for the generation that is growing up with unprecedented access to digital
media. There may be cases when interactive digital media tools are a good supplement to achieve good
parent-child relationship – just like how we may enjoy documenting special moments in our family and
going through these photographs in our personal photo albums later in life. However, we should always
keep in mind the ethical questions that arise when we want to use the photographs for a different purpose.
Although there has been growing interest in the relationship parents and children build via the use of
media, not many studies dare to question the power parents hold when it comes to the re-purposing of
visual data created in the home environment. It is my hope that the findings of this study can: 1) provide a
method for research design and analysis to understand the construction of childhood in contemporary times
and thus insights into how parents are using the Internet to define childhood in society, 2) reveal how
societal values, in this case, about childhood, are performed in digital spaces, 3) provide a foundation for a discussion about children’s privacy rights and, 4) provide a basis for furthering parent’s understanding of the significance of their practices in online spaces. I hope that what is contained in this dissertation is not taken as critical of online social networking and parents, who have children’s best interests at heart.
APPENDIX A.

LIST OF WORDS IN SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS

**Appearance:** adorable, adult-like, adventurous, aesthetic, aggressive, alert, alive, alternative, annoying, artistic, attractive, authentic, average, awesome, bad, beautiful, better, bloody, blushing, brainy, breakable, bright, brilliant, broad, busy, candid, careful, cautious, charming, childish, chubby, chunky, clean, clever, cloudy, clumsy, colossal, colorful, cool, crazy, creative, crooked, crowded, curious, curved, cute, cutie, dangerous, daring, dark, dead, dear, deep, different, different, difficult, direct, dirty, distinct, diva, drab, dreamy, dull, easy, educational, elegant, expensive, famous, fancy, fat, filthy, flat, flawless, flowery, fragile, frail, free, free-style, funny, genius, genuine, gifted, gifted, gigantic, glamorous, gleaming, gorgeous, graceful, great, grotesque, handsome, helpful, high, hollow, homely, honest, horrible, huge, imaginative, immense, important, impossible, independent, inexpensive, innocent, innovative, inquisitive, inspirational, intellectual, jealous, large, light, little, long, lovely, low, magical, magnificent, magnificent, massive, miniature, mini, misty, modern, motionless, muddy, mushy, narrow, natural, new, normal, odd, odd, old, old-fashioned, open, ordinary, outstanding, petite, plain, plain, playful, poised, poor, popular, powerful, precious, prickly, puny, puzzled, quaint, real, real, rich, round, scary, scrawny, shallow, shiny, short, sincere, sissy, skillful, skinny, sleepy, small, smart, smoggy, sparkling, sparkling, spontaneous, spotless, square, steep, stormy, straight, strange, strange, stupid, stylish, super, sweet, sweetheart, talented, talented, tall, tame, tasteful, teeny, tender, thin, tiny, tough, ugly, ugly, unsightly, unusual, vast, wandering, weird, wide, wide-eyed, wild, wrong, youthful, zealous.

**Cognitive States:** know***, see, believe, think***, learn***, watch***, plan***, remember***, attention, expect***, guess***, recognize***, suppose***, mind, hear***, saw, seen, knew, notice***, figure***,
teach***, taught, observe***, observing, figuring, believing, recall***, collect***, explore***, check***
out, discover***, find***, found, exploring.

**Feelings (bad):** overwhelmed, angry, alone, annoyed, anxious, arrogant, ashamed, awful, bad,
bewildered, bored, clumsy, crazy, flipped-out, concerned, creepy, cruel, dangerous, doubt, defeated,
defiant, depressed, disgusted, disturbed, grumpy, dizzy, dull, embarrassed, envious, evil, fierce, foolish,
frantic, frightened, grieving, grumpy, helpless, stress, shy, picky, hungry, hurt, ill, itchy, jealous, jittery,
guilty, uninterested, lazy, lonely, nasty, nervous, obnoxious, panic, selfish, scared, sad, scary, selfish, sore,
troubled, tense, terrible, testy, thoughtless, tired, troubled, upset, uptight, weary, wicked, worried.

**Feelings (good):** agreeable, amused, brave, calm, charming, cheerful, comfortable, cooperative,
courageous, delightful, determined, eager, elated, enchanted, encouraged, energetic, enthusiastic, excited,
exuberant, fair, faithful, fine, friendly, funny, gentle, glorious, good, happy, healthy, helpful, hilarious, jolly,
joyous, kind, lively, laugh***, lovely, lucky, nice, obedient, perfect, pleasant, proud, relieved, silly, smiling,
rewarding, grateful, love, kind, generous, pleasant, blessed, successful, thoughtful, fine, outgoing, lucky,
relieved, splendid, successful, thankful, thoughtful, victorious, vivacious, witty, wonderful, zealous, zany.

**Intensifiers:** !!, very, much, really, a lot, :) ;(, <3, numerous, best, first ever, most, terrific, excellent,
fantastic, super, perfect, ultimately, extremely, totally, lots of, many, especially, million times, amazing,
everything, everyday, seriously, literally, certainly, absolutely, exactly, finally, worst, so * at, amazing,
incredible, so * of, so * to be, unreal, even more so, immensely.
**Causal Connectors:** then, later, before, since, but, even though, however, because, after, following time, eventually, next time, therefore, thereafter, despite, regard to, afterward, previously, while, whilst, nevertheless, upcoming, consequently, thus, so, , for that reason, hence, as a result, still, in spite of, anyway, anyhow, all the same.

**Negations and hedges:** almost, about to, no, none, not, will not, won't, don't, wasn't, doesn't, haven't, hasn't, by no means, nope, nah, never.

**Possession:** my girl, my boy, my * girl, my * boy, mine, hers, his, our, their, your.

**Gendered:** lady, sir, mr, mrs, mr., mrs, boyish, girly, masculine, feminine, chick, gal, guy, grrl, babe, gentleman, hero, heroine, prince, princess, madam.

**Engagement:** thanks, thank you, thnx, thx, look at her, look at him, look at me, look at this, good night, good morning, hello, hi, have a * day, the link is in my profile, please share.

**Looking for Information:** could you , can you, help me, how, where, is there anybody, is there anywhere, respond asap.

**Distancing:** this girl, this boy, this baby, this kid, these girls, these boys, these babies, these children.
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