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Photographs On A Refrigerator : A Display Of Visual Culture

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PHOTOGRAPHS ON A REFRIGERATOR:
A DISPLAY OF VISUAL CULTURE

by
Anna M. Jedrzejowski
Bachelor of Applied Arts, Ryerson University, 1997

A thesis presented to

Ryerson University and George Eastman House,

International Museum of Photography and Film

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

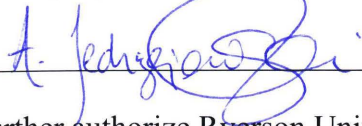
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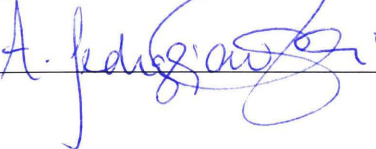
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Photographs on a Refrigerator: A Display of Visual Culture

Master of Arts, 2009
Anna M. Jedrzejowski

Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Ryerson University and George Eastman House,
International Museum of Photography and Film

ABSTRACT

This project will focus on family based vernacular photography and modes of display, with specific attention paid to the household refrigerator as a framing device. Photographs on refrigerators are in many North American homes. Since the invention of photography, the home has and continues to be an area of display for vernacular family photographs. These displays of family photographs are important to consider because they are an example of how people use photographs in their everyday lives, and provide a representation of a family, generation and culture. This investigation will show that people display similar photographs for similar reasons, and that photographs are a common form of record making and celebration for families.

Finally, this project will address vernacular photographs within the context of institutional collections. What collecting biases do vernacular photographs confront, and how does the commonality of vernacular photographs raise new questions about institutional collection practices based on the rarified and the valuable cultural object?

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DEDICATION

To Aiden, may you always believe in yourself and your potential.

In loving memory of

Aniela (née Baj) Janusz

and

Helena (née Jedrzejowski) Pasternak

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Literature Review	3
Family Photography in the Domestic Kitchen	8
Modes of Display and Interaction	11
Description of Refrigerator Photographs	17
Methodology	24
Analysis of Refrigerator Photographs Interviews	26
- Subject Types	26
- Chart A – Identification of Photographic Subjects	27
- Arrangement of Photographs	29
- Photographic Mediums	30
- Photographic Modes: Professional and Vernacular Images ...	31
- Display & Affect: Photographs and Emotional Attachments..	33
Surface Relations: Case Study of Family 9	36
Issues of Image Preservation and Archival Standards	39
Collecting Vernacular Photographs: Interview with Maia-Mari Sutnik	41
Conclusion	43
Bibliography	47

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Flickr refrigerator photograph	13
Figure 2. Flickr refrigerator photograph	13
Figure 3. Magnetic photo frame.....	14
Figure 4. Decorative magnet	14
Figure 5. Promotional magnet	15
Figure 6. Word magnet and photograph	15
Figure 7. Poem magnet	15
Figure 8. Dentist magnet	15
Figure 9. Family 1, photographic display	16
Figure 10. Family 9, detail of display	19
Figure 11. Family 8, example of the use of grids	21
Figure 12. Family 4, photograph of grandparent	22
Figure 13. Family 4, photograph of grandparent	22
Figure 14. Family 3, photograph of grandparent	22
Figure 15. Family 3, randomly arranged display	28
Figure 16. Family 6, neatly arranged display	28
Figure 17. Family 2, Polaroids on display	31
Figure 18. Family 9, photo booth photographs	33
Figure 19. Family 10, photographic display	34
Figure 20. Family 9, refrigerator	36
Figure 21. Family 9, detail of father's section of refrigerator	38
Figure 22. Family 9, detail of mother's section of refrigerator	38
Figure 23. Family 9, detail of child's section of refrigerator	38
Figure 24. Whirlpool refrigerator with digital photography display	45
Figure 25. Digital Photo Frame Fridge Magnet	45
Figure 26. Side view, Digital Photo Frame Fridge Magnet	45

INTRODUCTION

This project will focus on family-based vernacular photography with specific attention paid to the household refrigerator as a display space. The refrigerator has two functioning roles in the home. Its first role is to organize, hold, and preserve food. Its secondary role is as a display site. Generally, the 'fridge door' is covered by photographs, drawings, calendars, prayers, school notes, and emergency phone numbers, suggesting that it is considered a site of symbolic order within the home.

The refrigerator has become a place to display the daily practices of social interaction within a family, yet it tends to blend almost unnoticed into the background of the kitchen.¹ Displaying photographs on a refrigerator is a common strategy for 'housewarming' or symbolically gathering family, especially those who may live at a distance.² The refrigerator door has become a space on which to remember family, events, and celebrations. The members of the family transform it into a kind of billboard advertisement for many strongly held values about what a home should be, what sort of emotional and moral tones should distinguish it, and how it should run.³ Hidden within these displays are relationships among the photographs and other objects on the refrigerator that portray special messages for the viewer(s) at home and visitors to the home.

In this project, the analysis of the types of photographs on a refrigerator will focus on how vernacular photographs say something important about our time and our visual culture. Finally, the project will address vernacular photographs within the context of

¹ Helen Watkins, "Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Refrigerator," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13.2 (2006): 143.

² Ibid, 143.

³ Ibid, 146.

institutional collections. The commonality of vernacular photographs raises new questions about institutional collection practices based on the rarified and the valuable cultural object.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Very little is written about the display of photographs on refrigerators within the homes of many North Americans. It is a cultural phenomenon that has been researched and discussed only briefly in sociological and visual studies disciplines.

Although each display of refrigerator photographs is different, there are common elements such as the home, the kitchen, family photographs, magnets and modes of interaction, and the refrigerator surface. This analysis will examine displays of photographs on refrigerators to determine how they tell a story of a family unit, considering issues of relationships between photographs and people, vernacular photographs, and the domestic space.

The importance of the relationship of photographs to people is established in Rodney Carter's *Photography and Personal Mythology*.⁴ Carter's discussion focuses on how photographs function as a record of events, and how they are fundamental tools for sharing experiences and values. He elaborates on how and why people make and create memories through the medium of photography, and how that in turn creates personal myths that can guide individuals through their lives. Carter states that many people cherish the positive aspects of life, special moments, and things of which they are proud through the documentation and display of photographs within the home.

Geoffrey Batchen's "Vernacular Photographies" in *Each Wild Idea* provides an insightful and thoughtful description of vernacular photographs and their importance to the society of the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Batchen describes photographs as designated indexical signs, referentially connected to the objects depicted

⁴ Rodney G.S. Carter, "Photography and Personal Mythology," *Queen's Quarterly* 114.4 (2007): 558-569.

in them.⁵ He also describes the importance of photographic displays. The displays are less about conveying truthful information about their subjects than they are about enacting social and cultural rituals through an assortment of forms, design, and object-audience interaction.⁶

David Halle's *The Family Photograph*⁷ provides a groundbreaking analysis of the use of family photographs. He randomly selects families in three areas of New York City, and interviews the homeowners about the photographic displays in their homes. The result is an investigative analysis that provides insight about photographic displays and the meaning of the locations of the displays. Furthermore, Halle provides an analysis of how families present stories about themselves within the home, the hidden messages of the displays, and what they suggest about the society of a specific time. This particular study is especially valuable because the focus is on North American families, while similar studies tend to focus on areas in the United Kingdom.

Gillian Rose's '*Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice*': *An Emotional Geography of some Mums and their Family Photos*⁸ reveals the importance of spacing, as well as examining the treatment and placement of family photographs displayed within the home. Rose conducts seven interviews with the organizers of the photographs in the home, and the mothers discuss what the family photographs mean to them. These interviews were particularly useful for this project, and provided insight as well as a starting point for the interview questions and the project's process of analysis.

⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 61.

⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁷ David Halle, "The Family Photograph," *Art Journal* 46.3 (1987): 217-225.

⁸ Gillian Rose, "'Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': An Emotional Geography of some Mums and their Family Photos," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5.4 (2004): 549-564.

List Making in the Home,⁹ by Alex S. Taylor and Laurel Swan, discusses the work of mothers in the home. Taylor and Swan's research stems from an ethnographic study on the importance of a mothers' work within the home, and the positive and negative aspects of lists in the daily functions of running a household. The cooperative elements of lists and the sentimentality of the paper object help to frame the importance of objects found on a refrigerator.

In *Never Done: A History of American Housework*,¹⁰ Susan Strasser analyzes how the family and the home changed with the introduction of mechanical and industrialized machines from the 1890s-1920s. As domestic life modernized, the homemaker (the female of the household) and her daily chores were made easier by new household appliances such as the stove and the refrigerator. The introduction of these appliances changed the way homemakers worked and used the home and, by extension, and in turn they changed how a family interacted with neighbours and society. From its beginnings as an icebox, the refrigerator evolved into an electrical appliance in many North American homes. Strasser provides a relevant history of a new economic system and a capitalist society, and how these elements changed housewifery from a social-public activity into a private activity within the home.

Most recent, and of great importance to the understanding of the image and context of photographs and other objects of refrigerator display, is Helen Watkins' *Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Fridge*.¹¹ Watkins establishes that a

⁹ Alex S. Taylor and Laurel Swan, "List Making in the Home," *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Archive*, ACM Press (2004): 542-545.

¹⁰ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

¹¹ Helen Watkins. "Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Refrigerator," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13.2 (2006): 143-152.

refrigerator supports the daily practice of a household and that it has become normalized as a notice board. She expands upon valid arguments made by Rose regarding the domestic space of a home,¹² and examines how the refrigerator is simultaneously a device used to preserve food, a display site, and a gendering of technology. The article provides a historical overview of refrigerators, along with an analysis of the introduction of other appliances into the home. Like Strasser, and expanding upon the use of advertising, design, and promotion of the refrigerator, Watkins establishes that refrigeration reconfigured the kitchen, the home, and housewifery.

Donald A. Norman discusses refrigerator doors and message centres in the book *Turn Signals are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles*.¹³ He presents information based on the geographical, family size, occupational, cultural, and sociological aspects of families. He provides a chart and discussion of how types of families display their photographs and how they use refrigerators as a communication hub in the home.

Another current publication that considers the use of the refrigerator as a display site, along with the objects found on refrigerators and support (such as magnets) is *Notes on Fridge Surfaces*¹⁴ by Swan and Taylor. They present relevant insight into the display of items and their organization on the refrigerator, and discuss the material properties of refrigerator magnets and their use. This is not a widely treated topic, and the article reaffirms the relevance and importance of the project at hand.

¹² Gillian Rose, "Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings: A Case Study," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 28.1 (2003): 5-18.

¹³ Donald A. Norman, "Refrigerator Doors and Message Centers," in *Turn Signals Are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 48-58.

¹⁴ Laurel Swan and Alex S. Taylor, "Notes on Fridge Surfaces," *Conference on Human Factors*, ACM Press (2005): 1813-1816.

Taylor et al. establish new research in *Augmenting Refrigerator Magnets: Why Less is Sometimes More* by introducing a number of augmented refrigerator magnet concepts for the everyday use of refrigerator surfaces. The focus of the article is the design of new technological refrigerator magnets, which are incorporated into family-household routines.¹⁵ Taylor provides insight into the importance of the central location of the refrigerator, the organization and planning of family activities, and the refrigerator surface within the home. Discussions of the properties of interaction of the refrigerator and modes of interaction such as magnets, tape, and the vertical space of the refrigerator surface were useful for the purpose of this paper.

The preceding information will help to structure and lead into an analysis of the importance of the domestic family photograph on the refrigerator in the kitchen space.

¹⁵ Alex S. Taylor et al, "Augmenting Refrigerator Magnets: Why Less is Sometimes More," *Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, ACM Press (2006): 115-124.

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DOMESTIC KITCHEN

Historically, photographic displays began with the invention of photography, and stemmed from the artistic tradition of displaying paintings in the home. Families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries displayed numerous large framed photographic portraits, tables and mantles covered in photographs, and smaller stands or photographic viewing machines.¹⁶ As the home evolved, so did the display of artifacts, photographs, albums, and stereocards within the home. The parlour became the room in the home where family and visitors would gather to entertain and look at photographs.

In the Victorian home, the kitchen was not an area where the family gathered on a daily basis, rather it was the domain of the working staff. During the late 1880s and 1890s, innovations developed that made refrigerators a staple of the home, and kitchens and provisioning in the home were reconfigured accordingly.¹⁷ Approximately four-fifths of the families studied in a 1908 survey of New York were working people who reported owning refrigerators.¹⁸ The refrigerator continued to evolve and reconfigure the kitchen, and its popularity grew from the 1920s and increased into the 1960s. Now the refrigerator is a staple appliance in the majority of North American homes.

Electrical appliances were designed with a consideration of which gender was to use them the most. Women, unlike men, often located their gender identity in household labour. Caring, domestic work is a crucial element in the ideological construction of

¹⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget me not: Photography & Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 70.

¹⁷ Helen Watkins, "Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Refrigerator," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13.2 (2006): 145.

¹⁸ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 20.

femininity.¹⁹ The association between the refrigerator, the homemaker, femininity, and modern appliances continues today and can be seen in many homes. Styles of refrigerators continue to evolve and change as new technologies are integrated into appliance design, and as the layout and interior design of homes change.

Taylor et al.²⁰ conducted an investigation in which three observations of photographic displays emerged. The first observation considers the work involved in the co-construction of family photo displays. It concerns the coordination of activities in the preparation of photographs for display, describing how different family members as well as distant relatives can contribute to a display's content. The second observation considers social obligation as a motivating factor in displaying photographs of particular people (usually family members), and how this is played out within different families. The third observation considers what appears to be a centralized control over a home's displays, or at least some of them. Taylor et al. describe this as a form of "curatorial control" whereby one person fashions the final appearance of his/her home's various displays.²¹

In the United States, the refrigerator has evolved into an appliance that is the centre of the kitchen, and the kitchen has become the centre of the home. The large refrigerator-freezer combination is an American concept, whereas smaller refrigerators are found in countries outside of North America and play a different role in the kitchen, the home, and

¹⁹ Helen Watkins, "Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Refrigerator," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13.2 (2006): 144.

²⁰ Alex S. Taylor et al., "Designing Family Photo Displays," *Proceedings of the Tenth European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work*, ACM Press (2007): 2.

²¹ *Ibid*, 2.

family life.²² The common need or desire is to have a message and communication centre within the home, and in North America the refrigerator is the popular choice.

²² Donald A. Norman, *Turn Signals Are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 51.

MODES OF DISPLAY AND INTERACTION

Refrigerator doors are made of steel, and steel is magnetic. Refrigerator doors are large, flat, and unadorned.²³ Magnets seem to enhance the refrigerator's role as an interactive surface in the household's everyday affairs.²⁴ Magnets, magnetic frames, earth magnets, bulldog clips, and adhesives such as tape are objects that interact with photographs, other objects, and the refrigerator surface. The properties of the magnet can enhance the arrangement of materials across the refrigerator and promote a fluid structure and movement of the arrangements.

Magnets are not permanent fasteners, and this quality encourages temporary and interactive displays on the refrigerator. They do not leave permanent signs of use as a nail leaves a hole in a wall, or a thumbtack pierces a photograph, or tape leaves an adhesive residue on a surface. Thumbtacks require the piercing of a surface and a slight effort – both suggesting more permanence – as well as lasting damage to the surface of the pierced object.²⁵ Magnets both affix things and represent things, or places. Many families have magnets that were brought home as souvenirs by family members or received as gifts from a family member or friend. Therefore, magnets on a refrigerator are useful, and over time can become imbued with sentimentality, along with the photographs or other objects that are held upon the refrigerator.²⁶

Most conventional magnets have distinct north and south poles. However, flat refrigerator magnets are made using composite materials, and are generally constructed

²³ Ibid, 46.

²⁴ Alex S. Taylor, Laurel Swan et al., "Augmenting Refrigerator Magnets: Why Less is Sometimes More," *Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, ACM Press (2006): 118.

²⁵ Alex S. Taylor, "Notes on Fridge Surfaces," *CHI*, ACM Press (2005): 1815.

²⁶ Alex S. Taylor, Laurel Swan et al., "Augmenting Refrigerator Magnets: Why Less is Sometimes More," *Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, ACM Press (2006): 119.

with alternating north and south poles on the same surface of the plane.²⁷ William Zimmerman of St. Louis, Missouri, USA, reportedly obtained the first refrigerator magnet patent in the early 1970s. He patented small, colored, cartoon magnets that were intended to be used for decorative display and convenience.²⁸

Since magnets are easy to move and accessible on the refrigerator, one might think that people would change refrigerator photographs on a regular basis. However, based on the completed interviews for this thesis, the average time photographs remained displayed on a refrigerator surface ranged from two months to seven years. The displays of photographs changed or rotated on a monthly, seasonal, or annual basis. Many families did not remove or take apart the photographic displays from the refrigerator, except when they were moving into a new home or replacing their refrigerator with a non-magnetic stainless steel model.

Before moving into a new home, some families chose to photograph their refrigerator displays before taking the displays off from the refrigerator. They did this for sentimental, nostalgic, and emotional reasons, while others documented the display as a sign of change, taking the past with them and creating a clean slate for the future. Of the families interviewed, one chose to photograph a display as a document for memory's sake. Others photographed their displays to document their artistic talents and creative natures. The artistry of these displays often leads people to photograph their refrigerator

²⁷ J. Mallinson, "One-sided fluxes – A magnetic curiosity?" *IEEE Transactions on Magnetics* 9.4 (1973): 678- 682.

²⁸ James Tanner, comment on "History of the Refrigerator Magnet," Where Nothing Has a Place Blog, comment posted on April 8, 2009, <http://wherenothinghasaplace.blogspot.com/2009/04/history-of-refrigerator-magnet.html> (accessed May 24, 2009).

displays and post the pictures onto photo sharing websites such as Flickr (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figures 1 and 2. Flickr refrigerator photograph

In the cases where a family replaced their refrigerator with a newer stainless steel model, the structure of the non-magnetic surface was physically limiting and did not allow families to display their photographs with magnets. Other modes of display such as single or double-sided tape were not an option for stainless steel refrigerators because they could eventually damage the surface of the refrigerator. In some cases, the choice not to adhere photographs to a stainless steel refrigerator was related to the interior design or style of the home the family was trying to portray. Therefore, people who do own these types of refrigerators have stopped arranging photographic displays because they can not easily arrange photographs with magnets, and do not want to use tape.

A magnetic photo frame (see Figure 3) allows for the easy placement of photographs without permanent affixing to the support. The displays are easily changeable. However the photographs placed on the refrigerator surface do not have the

chronology of a photo album.²⁹ Manufactured and mass-produced magnetic photo frames can be purchased separately or in a set that includes magnetic photo corners, magnetic letters, words, and quirky sayings. These magnetic photo frame sets are two-dimensional and resemble a framed photograph, scrapbook, or photo album found within a home. The use of two-dimensional objects that resemble three-dimensional objects in a refrigerator display can be seen as a modern and easy way for people to replicate traditional photographic home modes of photography, such as the framed photograph, scrapbook, snapshot or photo album.

A decorative magnet (see Figure 4), a promotional magnet (see Figure 5), a photograph with a word magnet (see Figure 6), or a poem magnet that is mass-produced and pre-packaged in a sentimental format (see Figure 7) adds artistic flair to the photographic display. From the interviews conducted, the arrangers of the photographic displays had purchased or often received magnets as gifts or promotional-marketing tokens from family doctors, dentists, and companies (see Figure 8).



Figure 3. Magnetic photo frame

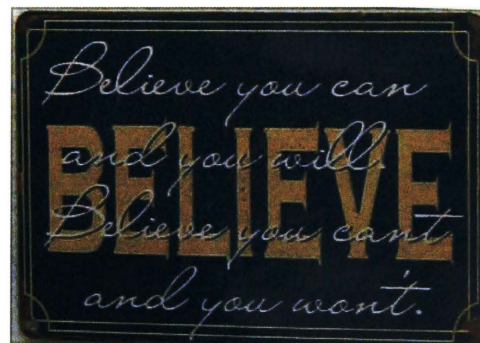


Figure 4. Decorative magnet

²⁹ Alex S. Taylor, Laurel Swan et al., "Augmenting Refrigerator Magnets: Why Less is Sometimes More," *Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, ACM Press (2006): 119.



Figure 5. Promotional magnet

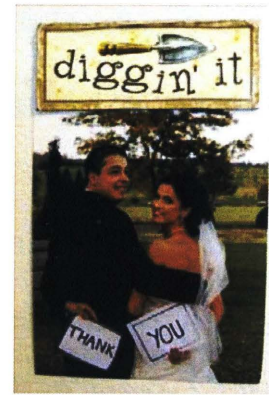


Figure 6. Word magnet and photograph

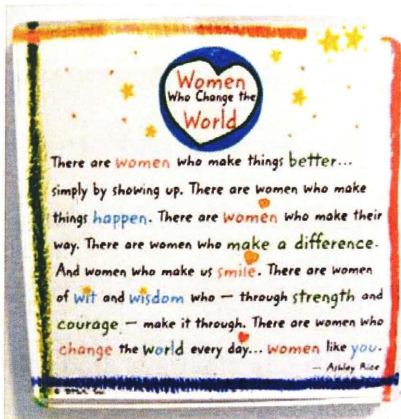


Figure 7. Poem magnet

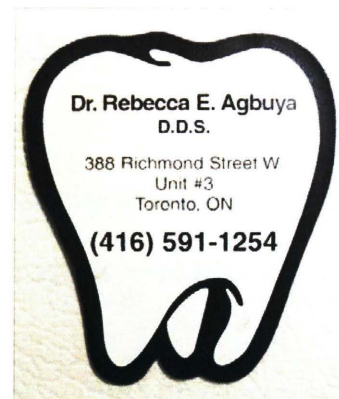


Figure 8. Dentist magnet

During the interviews, the mother of Family 9 talked about where and from whom she had received the magnets on her refrigerator: “My mother in law, stepmother, and housekeeper are the ones who buy me magnets as gifts or souvenirs from their trips.” For example, she displays a photograph on her refrigerator of her father, stepmother, and child strategically held to the refrigerator surface with a magnet from Jerusalem, a souvenir from her stepmother’s trip. The magnet and photo are intentionally arranged for her stepmother. The mother of Family 9 believes that the act of giving and receiving a decorative, souvenir, spiritual, or poem magnet is female-oriented.³⁰

³⁰ After questioning other women, the act of giving magnets does seem to be a female dominated practice, although more research is needed in this area.

Although magnets are more popular than tape, three families chose to use transparent tape to attach individual photographs to the refrigerator surface. The families felt that tape was more permanent than a magnet, thus that a smaller or highly cherished photograph would be more secure. Because magnets may shift, move, or fall off if a person walks by and bumps into the refrigerator, or if the force from the opening and closing of the refrigerator door causes the photographs to fall off, Family 8 wanted to guarantee that their photographic display would be kept in place at all times. They selected photographs, glued them onto a magnet sheet, cut the individual photographs down to size, and arranged them neatly on the refrigerator in rows, alongside calendars, a monthly planner, and lottery tickets. Family 1 also chose to display two photographs on the refrigerator with tape. They did so because no other magnets were available, and tape was both available and easy to use (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Family 1, photographic display

DESCRIPTION OF REFRIGERATOR PHOTOGRAPHS

“It is... an effort to evoke directly the lived experience of history, a reminder that history is continually unfolding itself in the materiality of the present – in the presentness of whatever photograph from whatever era, happens to be before us.”³¹

- Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea*.

What we do with a set of pictures is a socialized activity.³² Many North American families use the refrigerator door to arrange and theoretically bring family and friends together by creating an ideal collage of a family. The reasons why people arrange photographs on their refrigerators have to do with the symbolism of both the family and the photograph. The photographs construct meaning when put into relation with other images and objects within these displays.

Why do people choose specific photographs and place them on a flat, vertical, magnetic surface in a kitchen, with little protection for the surface of the image? Why are the photographs not matted or framed, behind glass or Plexiglas, hung on a wall, or displayed on a mantle amongst other family photographs? Will any of the photographs displayed be matted or framed, and if not, what does that mean? Furthermore, what do these choices say about the photographs or the family in a particular home?

The refrigerator is the centre of the kitchen and it has become both a holding place for memories and a reminder of past, happy moments. Even though the refrigerator is large, and a visible part of the overall space of the kitchen, it blends into the layout of the kitchen. The photographic displays, in turn blend onto the structure of the refrigerator.

³¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2001), x.

³² Halla Beloff, *Camera Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 197.

In a sense, the photographs are trapped in the past moment in which they were taken. Yet they become a part of the present moment and part of a family's everyday life because they are viewed on a regular basis.

Through the types of photographs displayed we learn what families deem valuable or worthy to include and display to themselves as well as their friends and acquaintances, and even strangers. Other objects that are displayed on refrigerators, such as lists, invitations, school notices, calendars, and appointments, act as signifiers and are markers of time and upcoming events.

Textual objects such as letter magnets, decorative magnets with words, or magnets with poems relay underlying messages that the family can see depending on their placement on the refrigerator. The messages work together by interacting with the photograph and creating an additional layer of meaning. Family 9 provides an example of this, where the wife had purchased a magnet with the inspirational word and phrase: "*Believe.*"

This was a message intended for the husband and a message of inspiration. She then chose three of her favourite photographs of them together as a couple on past vacations and a family celebration and arranged them in colourful decorative magnet frames, one with the message "*We are family.*" The display was planned by the mother of the family, who intentionally chose magnet frames in order to recreate and maintain a connection and spirit between the couple. However the placement of the "*Believe*" magnet has now taken on a different role as it has become not only a message for the husband but a message for the couple and their relationship. The placement of the "*Believe*" magnet creates a semiotic display that combines two messages into one

connected statement. While the first message supports and encourages the father of the family, the placement of the magnet below the couple's photographs now sends a second message that is for the couple. The message is for the couple to believe in themselves, their relationship, and their family (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. Family 9, detail of display

In the case of the photographic display, the individual objects and photographs near and dear to the family such as a special occasion, family trip, birthday celebration, school portrait, first day of school, dance lesson, or the birth of a child work together to create a pattern that resembles a page from an album or collage.

The element of collage is relevant to these photographic displays because the individual photographs would not convey the same image or story of the family if displayed separately. Many families had photographs and other objects that covered the refrigerator surface, while others had a few photographs that created different meanings. Individual photographs work together in these displays to create a pattern, grid, or collage

of family life. Batchen makes an important observation regarding the formation of grids, and explains that the gridding of photographs provides all the images with the unmistakable structure of narrative: The combined photographs can tell a story, which is not always possible with individual photographs.³³

The collage is an interesting element of these photographic displays because of the use of found objects in the combination of items such as photographs, drawings, and text. The display is almost accidental. The photographs, arranged over time, from various people and family members are combined with objects such as magnets, calendars, and emergency number lists. Together they tell the story of a family.

Family 8 combines photographs, an erasable monthly planner, a yearly calendar, lottery tickets, and a yearly calendar from the children's school board. The calendars, planners, and lottery tickets are variations of grids and, combined with the photographs and arranged in a row, create a grid. The photographic display becomes a grid within a grid (see Figure 11).

³³ Ibid, 66.



Figure 11. Family 8, example of the use of grids

The refrigerator acts as a transitional holding spot for food and is an interactive site for the display of photographs. The displays are also transitional because they are changeable. The majority of families interviewed chose to display casual and informal photographs of their family in candid, fun moments along with recent portraits such as school photographs. The refrigerator photographic display can be one in which the family expresses no familial obligation to display other members or extended family who do not live in the home.

The photographs on the refrigerator are different from photographs found in other locations in the home. These photographs are generally professional portraits or pictures from a celebratory family event, such as a wedding, that are matted, framed, and displayed for long periods.

The permanent photographs are located in formal areas of the home, such as the living room or dining room, and arranged on a mantle or framed and displayed on a wall among other formal family photographs. In some cases photographs of grandparents are not displayed in the home, but are stored in albums or storage boxes. However, Family 9 chose not to display any formal photographs of their child's grandparents in any area of the home. Instead, the mother selected two candid photographs of the grandparents and incorporated them into the photographic display on the refrigerator for their upcoming visit. The mother included the photographs in order to make the grandparents feel like part of the immediate family.

Four other families chose to display candid 4x6 photographs or small studio proofs on the lower part of the refrigerator. They have done this so that the child or children can look at them whenever they want, and be reminded of grandparents or other relatives they do not see on a regular basis or who live at a distance (see Figures 12, 13 and 14).

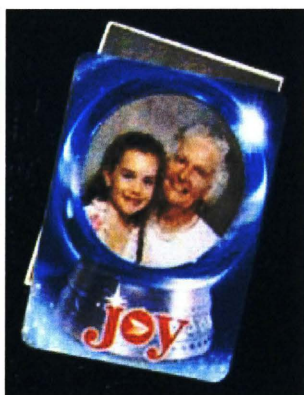
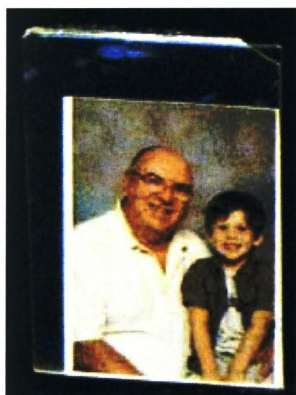


Figure 12 and 13. Family 4, photograph of grandparent Figure 14. Family 3, photograph of grandparent

The contemporary kitchen is a semi-private area of the home. It is used for multiple purposes, sometimes several at once, such as bringing in groceries, cooking, and

cleaning, and it has become the modern 'communication and control' centre of the home, the place where the family congregates for information, conversation, and activities.³⁴

³⁴ Donald A. Norman, *Turn Signals Are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 45.

METHODOLOGY

One of the major challenges of this study was deciding how to find and analyze refrigerator photographic displays. The first option was to select random Flickr accounts,³⁵ and the second was to interview people such as family and friends.

Based on preliminary research, especially Gillian Rose's article "'Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': An Emotional Geography of some Mums and their Family Photos", and after visits to friends and family, I decided to concentrate on the interview process. A detailed analysis of the results helped to determine what photographs people chose to display on their refrigerators (see Chart A). The shared patterns found in the analysis showed the similarities present in the photographic displays. Initially, two family friends were selected as subjects to test the survey, and from those results the survey was then revised and an additional eight families were interviewed.

The families provided a one-hour interview, and are referred to as Family 1, Family 2, and so on. The person selected for the interviews was the person in the home who primarily arranged and organized the photographic displays. In all of the selected families, the wife or mother of the household oversaw the organization of the photographic displays, while other members of the household (the male or father and the children) look at the photographs or re-organize the photographic display. The selected

³⁵ Initially, I searched Google using terms such as "refrigerator photo magnets", "photographs on refrigerators" and "display of photographs on fridge/refrigerator," which led to postings on Flickr, an online photo management, and sharing Web site. Using the advanced search the following terms were selected: "Everyone's uploads," "fridge photos" and "Tags only," that resulted in 165 postings, of which 143 were refrigerator photographic displays (accessed March 16, 2009). The second advanced search was: "Everyone's uploads," "refrigerator photos magnets" and "Tags only," that resulted in 33 postings of refrigerator photographic displays (accessed March 16, 2009). Some postings included tags or short descriptions, but in general, it was difficult to determine what type of a photograph was in the display.

families range from middle class to upper middle class couples with one, two, or three children, or married couples living with pets. The families consisted of stay-at-home mothers, part-time, and full-time working professionals. The families represent the following cities in southwestern Ontario: Toronto, London, and Oakville. One important limitation to note is that there are no working professional photographers in the selected families, and no single people.

The following questions were chosen based on David Halle's and Gillian Rose's previous studies of the use of family photography,³⁶ together with other questions I considered to be useful for the analysis:

1. How many photographs are on the front, left, or right side of the refrigerator?
2. What is the brand name of the refrigerator?
3. What photographic medium and size are the photographs?
4. Who is the photograph of and when was it taken?
5. Who arranges the photographs?
6. How long have the photographs been on the refrigerator?
7. How often are new photographs put up?
8. How often are the photographs taken down, and where do they go?
9. Why were these photographs chosen for display?
10. Are the photographs on the refrigerator found in other areas of the home? If not, why?
11. How does the arranger of the display feel about the photographs?

³⁶ David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; Gillian Rose, "'Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': An Emotional Geography of some Mums and their Family Photos." *Social & Cultural Geography* 5.4 (2004): 549-564.

ANALYSIS OF REFRIGERATOR PHOTOGRAPHS INTERVIEWS

The following section will look at the various aspects associated with the refrigerator displays such as subject types, arrangement of photographs, photographic mediums, photographic modes, and display and affect.

SUBJECT TYPES

Based on the interviews, Chart A is a breakdown of the photographic displays and an identification of photographic subjects by the number of photographs in each display created (see Chart A).

The number of photographs displayed on the refrigerators ranged from five to twenty-one. On average, the number of photographs displayed was twelve. Some families randomly placed the photographs on the refrigerator, in no specific order or pattern, and some arranged the photographs around the rectangular surface, in rows and patterns. Chart A reveals that the largest number of photographs were:

- the child or children who lived in the home (31 images)
- the child or children posed with a family member (19 images)
- groupings of immediate family (14 images)
- family friends (9 images)
- extended family, such as cousins (9 images)
- special occasions, such as weddings and births (6 images)
- children at school (5 images)
- children and friends (5 images)
- the family pet (2 images)

The chart signifies what photographs the interviewed families deem important to display and the patterns evident in the photographic displays.

CHART A – IDENTIFICATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS

Subjects	Family 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Groupings of Immediate Family</i>	0	11	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
<i>Extended Family</i>	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	2	0	2
<i>Children</i>	6	5	1	4	0	3	0	6	0	6
<i>Children & Family Member</i>	2	2	5	5	0	0	0	3	6	0
<i>Children & Friends</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
<i>Couples</i>	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
<i>Children at School</i>	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
<i>Friends</i>	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
<i>Special Occasions: Wedding, Birth</i>	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2
<i>Pet</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Family 3 displays an assortment of photographs from the child's school, friends, and family who live outside of the home. When the mother receives a photograph, she likes to put it in the first open spot because she does not have time to think about arranging the display, even though she enjoys looking at the display. The photographic display on the lower part of the refrigerator is arranged for the child of the family. They are photographs of the child's favourite cousins who are an important part of their life and a visual reminder of them. Four times a year the mother prints her digital photographs and arranges them in photo albums. The photographs she receives may go up on the refrigerator because there is no room for them in her photo albums or because

there are already similar photographs in the albums. The photographs in the display may come down on a seasonal basis or during a cleaning frenzy and be put into a miscellaneous album (see Figure 15).

By contrast, Family 6 has a neat and organized photographic display that the mother selects and spends time organizing and changes on a six month to one year basis. The calendar is also an important aspect of this photographic display as it documents important milestones in the children's lives, such as their first smile, first tooth, first steps, etc (see Figure 16).



Figure 15. Family 3, randomly arranged



Figure 16. Family 6, neatly arranged

The most frequently displayed photographs were of the children who lived in the home, varying from individual photographs of the child as a baby to photographs with siblings, cousins, parents, grandparents, close friends children, extended family and friends who live at a distance, and school photographs.

The photographs displayed the least were photographs of pets and wedding photographs. The youngest child in Family 5 asked if a photograph of their dog (who was given to another family) could be put up on the refrigerator because he missed him and wanted to look at him. Even at a young age, children can understand the emotional

connection that the photograph carries and are comforted by the fact that they can look at the photograph of a lost loved one. Family 5 and Family 10 displayed wedding photographs in the form of small photographic “thank you” cards that are fun, easy, and the perfect size to include in a photographic display.

ARRANGEMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Generally, the arrangement of photographs is organized in rows along the upper part of the refrigerator surface at the eye level of the parents or couple of the home. The lower part of the refrigerator tends to have an assortment of family photographs specifically selected for the child or children, along with their artwork, magnetic letters, or commercial magnets of characters such as Winnie-the-Pooh or Cinderella. The children of the home can easily move and rearrange the displayed objects and generally the mother or female of the household lets the children interact with the objects and does not rearrange their displays. The displays are used as a form of entertainment for the children and become another toy. While the mother is in the kitchen, the magnetic letters encourage children to spell words, and the photographic and art display is a creative outlet to encourage the artist within the child.

Seven of the ten families interviewed displayed photographs of family or friends who lived at a distance. Family 9 did so for reasons of social obligation as well as for the children of the family. The rest of the families displayed distant family members to remind the children that they are an important part of their lives. All of the displays were arranged with some thought and effort by the mother of the family, while other members of the family participated in rearranging or adding photographs and other objects to the refrigerator, such as drawings and artwork. Family 3 was the only family that did not

spend a lot of time in the organization of the display, because the mother does not have time but creates the display for her child.

Family 9 created a display that incorporates three generations of the family at two different eye levels, yet is categorized into four different arrangements and perspectives for the various family members in the home. They are rearranged and expanded for an upcoming gathering, seasonal holiday, or other occasion when close friends and family visit the home.

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIUMS

Colour photographs were the most popular choice of medium in the photographic displays. The photographs included colour prints on photographic paper, which are easy to print at the local lab or through an online printing service.

The second largest numbers of photographs in the displays were Polaroid photographs (see Figure 17). Family 2 chose to display Polaroids of family birthday dinners at their favourite restaurant. Unfortunately, the restaurant can no longer purchase Polaroid film and therefore does not now photograph families while they enjoy their dinners.³⁷ Black and white photographs were least common, posted on only two of the interviewed families' refrigerators. The low number could be related to the high cost associated with processing black and white photographs, or the difficulty of having an online or digital lab process a black and white photograph in the proper tones. Artists or

³⁷ <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/polaroid-abandons-instant-photography/?scp=2&sq=polaroid&st=cse>: Polaroid started in 1937 making polarized lenses for scientific and military applications. They introduced the first instant camera in 1948, just as the baby boom began and parents were looking for new ways to take photos of their kids. Currently, the Polaroid Company is concentrating on digital cameras and printers; they filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2001 and acquired by a private investment company in 2005. <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/polaroid-abandons-instant-photography/?scp=2&sq=polaroid&st=cse>.

professional photographers artistically use the black and white medium, and it has become less popular with the increased use of digital photography by the public.



Figure 17. Family 2, Polaroids on display

PHOTOGRAPHIC MODES: PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR IMAGES

Families 4, 6, and 8 display studio photographs of their children that are wallet-sized portraits or studio proofs. The photographic display of Family 6 includes nieces and nephews who live at a distance and are the same age as their children in the same poses as the children. These small photographs have a temporary quality because they are a substitute for the larger photograph that is enlarged, matted, framed, and displayed in another area of the home, such as the children's bedrooms or living room. The mother of Family 6 intends to rotate the children's photographs on a regular basis, as well as adding new photographs of her nieces and nephews as she receives them in the mail.

The process of having one's portrait taken is not as spontaneous or instantaneous as that of a photo booth and requires time, patience, and money. The Walmart Portrait

Studio has monthly promotions, and currently a one-pose package includes thirty portraits of the same image, ranging from 2 x 3 inches to 11 x 14, for \$7.99.³⁸ The person chooses an outfit and considers travel time to and from the portrait studio, as well as the duration of the portrait session, which generally takes fifteen minutes to a half an hour. During the photo session, it is important to entertain the child or children for one good photograph. The person then waits two to two and a half weeks to receive the photographs.³⁹ The length of time it takes to receive the photographs may be longer, especially, during a busy holiday season such as Christmas.

Family 5 and Family 9 chose to display self-portrait strips from an automated photo booth⁴⁰ and did so because they were fun to make and instant, in and of the moment.⁴¹ Family 9 displays two photo booth strips (see Figure 18) taken on two separate visits to the local mall, which the family visits frequently, especially during the winter months. The photo booth strip works in two different ways: To prove identity and “for a laugh.”⁴² One strip of photographs pictures the father and child and the second strip pictures the mother and child (see Figure 18). The mother loves the photo booth strips because of their fun and spontaneity. Having a photograph taken in the photo booth has become a

³⁸ Walmart Portrait Studio, “Over 30 Portraits for \$7.99,” Walmart Portrait Studio, http://www.walmartportraits.com/canada/wmps_canada_home.htm (accessed June 24, 2009).

³⁹ Walmart Portrait Studio, “Unforgettable Memories. Unbeatable Prices,” Walmart Portrait Studio, http://www.walmartportraits.com/canada/wmps_canada_home.htm (accessed June 24, 2009).

⁴⁰ Babette Hines, *Photobooth* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 2. The Photo booth was invented in 1925 in New York by Anatol Josepho, known as the ‘four strip’. Within 20 years there were more than 30,000 in the United States alone, an explosive growth due largely to World War II, as soldiers and loved ones exchanged photos, hoping to cling to memories or moments in a world turned upside down. But by the 1960s the advent of Polaroid photography spelled the doom of the “four strip” that had become a fixture at arcades and drugstores everywhere.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2. Mr. Henry Morganthau purchased the photo booth to make personal photography easily and cheaply available to the masses of the United States and to do in the photographic field what Woolworth had accomplished in novelties and merchandise, and Ford in automobiles.

⁴² Halla Beloff, *Camera Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 187.

family tradition for Family 9. They plan to continue and eventually create an album or framed display of these images.

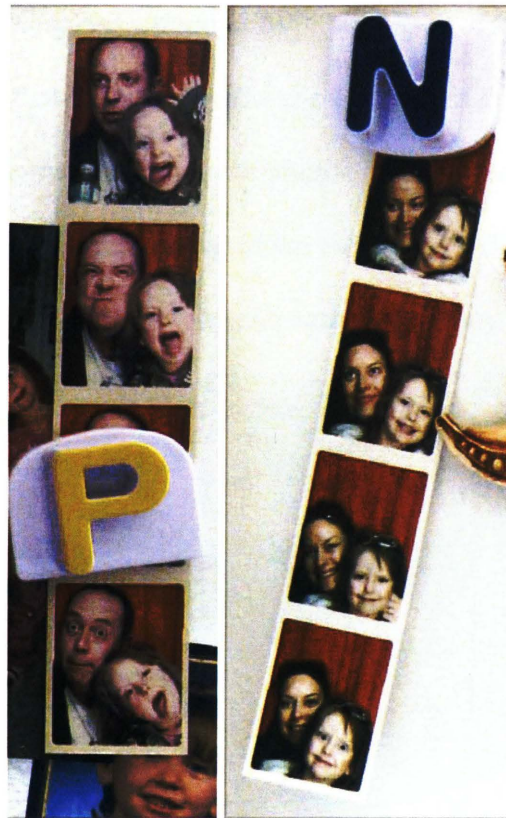


Figure 18. Family 9, photo booth photographs

DISPLAY AND AFFECT: PHOTOGRAPHS AND EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

Emotions and sentiments are some of the biggest reasons that people display photographs. Many mothers or females of the house spend a great deal of time in the kitchen and they look at the photographs more often than other family members do. The homemaker of Family 6 reveals that these particular photographs are her favourites: “I love them and look at them all the time. They are photos that do not really belong anywhere else, so I put them on the fridge.”

Emotions and sentiments were an essential part of the interview discussions. The longer a photograph is displayed the stronger the sentiment becomes and it can remain on

looks at them frequently. The photographs have become an important reminder for the mothers or wives of the families, and allow them to relive past memories in the present moment.

The mother of Family 9 looks at the refrigerator numerous times during the day, and the photographs remind her of the past: “The photo booth pictures make me feel young and remind me of something I would have done with my mom. The photo booth pictures are never about how good you look they are about that moment, having fun, and the anticipation and excitement of waiting for the photograph.” The inclusion of photo booth pictures along with the other photographs, act as a reminder to the mother to live in the present moment: “At times I look at the fridge and it reminds me of my life from the past and at the same time in the present moment. I feel like I am always planning for the future and that I do not live in the present moment yet the fridge is in the moment and reminds me of that.”

SURFACE RELATIONS: CASE STUDY OF FAMILY 9

To conclude this section, the following is an analysis of Family 9's refrigerator that connects the organization of the family and social relations within the family.

Family 9's display (see Figure 20) begins on the left side of the refrigerator where three photographs of the owners of the home are displayed with a message of belief, along with an artistic birthday card.

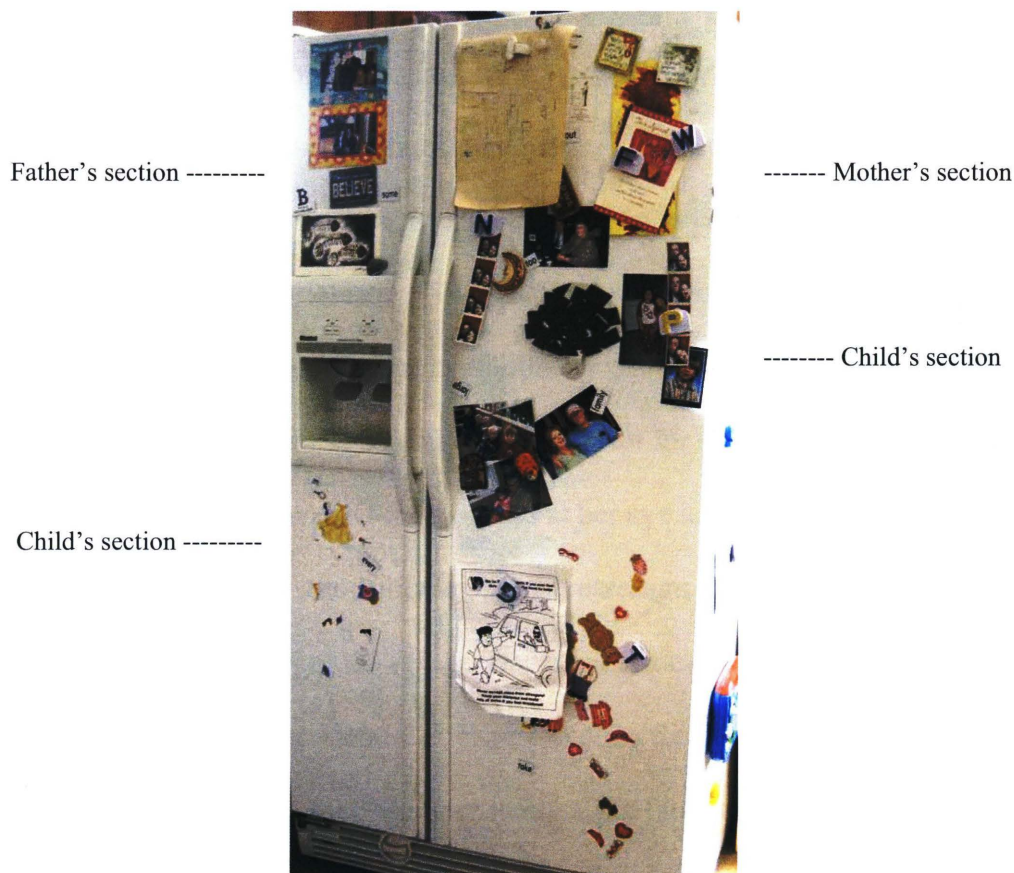


Figure 20. Family 9, refrigerator

This display arranged for the husband (see Figure 21) has become a small shrine and a symbolic display of the love and commitment the couple share, and it is a reminder of happier times.

The display on the top right (see Figure 22) is one that the mother has arranged and it is a combination of poem magnets about friendship, a save-the-date magnet for a friend's wedding reception, a child's artwork, a candid snapshot, and a greeting card from Mother's Day held up by the child's alphabet magnets.

The third part of the display at the centre of the right side of the refrigerator was arranged for the child (see Figure 23) with fun photo booth pictures, a photograph of the child and her favorite cousin, artwork, and a school photo of a friend. They are held to the surface by magnets and others are taped to the refrigerator so that the young child can easily lift off the photograph. The display moves down the refrigerator with three photographs of the child's grandparents and a magnet with the word "*Family*" that holds one photograph to the refrigerator. The small magnet that carries the powerful word of "family" holds the photograph, and symbolically holds the family together, with happy memories for the child and some unhappy memories for the parents. The photographs of the grandparents were arranged for the child at her eye level so that she can easily look at the photographs, discuss who is in the photos, rearrange, move, or remove them.

The lower right part of the refrigerator is set aside as a play surface for the child and it is an area devoted to newsletters or papers relating to issues they are discussing at home, school, or daycare, such as street safety. The family frequently uses the outside of the refrigerator as a display site and an occasion for conversations.

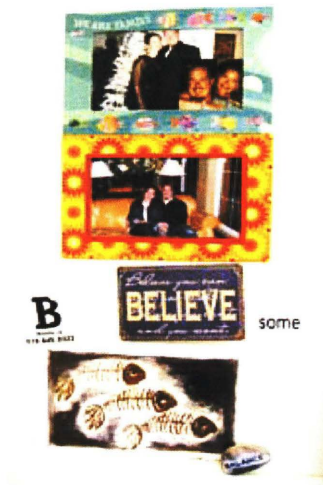


Figure 21. Family 9, detail of father's section of refrigerator



Figure 22. Family 9, detail of mother's section of refrigerator



Figure 23. Family 9, detail of child's section of refrigerator

There may be a variation of objects and photographs in the photographic displays, however they work both separately and together to create a unified and themed display of family. The refrigerator display mirrors the social world of the family and its organization and aspirations. Every member of the family has a place on the refrigerator, and the arranger decides the social organization of the display. That person chooses a photograph's location based on the person who will be looking at the arrangement the most. The display mixes fantasy with actuality, love, hope, and the details of everyday life.

ISSUES OF IMAGE PRESERVATION AND ARCHIVAL STANDARDS

Galleries began to collect vernacular photographs in the 1970s,⁴⁴ and institutions such as George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in the 1950's and 1960's.⁴⁵ This occurred because of a revived interest in the vernacular photograph and an interest in the cultural importance of photography. The mass use of photography by amateur photographers caused an increase in family photographs. However, many families do not take care or preserve their photographs in the same ways as a museum or institution. A family may value the photograph and cherish it for reasons other than preservation, such as emotional connections and sentiment.

During the spring of 1991, Karen Motylewski and Gary Albright of the Northeast Document Conservation Center published a useful source for family photograph collections titled *Advice on Preserving Family History Photographs and Documents*. The document did not include advice for the preservation of photographs found on a refrigerator, although it did offer useful and easy-to-follow tips for photographic preservation, including limiting light from any source, good housekeeping, avoiding sources of water and heat from heat-producing appliance, and maintaining relative humidity, temperature and air purity.⁴⁶

Preservation issues for photographs in a kitchen have not been researched to date. Although some results have been collected, and research has shown that more than 40% of all photographs displayed in a typical home have been put up on the refrigerator door,

⁴⁴ Maia-Mari Sutnik, conversation to author, June 25, 2009.

⁴⁵ Alison Nordström, e-mail message to author, July 29, 2009.

⁴⁶ Karen Motylewski and Gary Albright, "Advice on Preserving Family History Photographs and Documents," *The Bookmark* 49.3 (1991): 201.

these photographs are displayed without protection.⁴⁷ Prints displayed in this way are exposed to fluorescent light, high humidity associated with normal kitchen activities, and ozone.⁴⁸ Given the combined effects of various fumes, exhaust, contaminants, and humidity one can expect that preservation issues will occur. Although the majority of photographs examined in the interviews were displayed for a number of years, the deterioration was minor. Only one family chose to cover five photographs in their displays using Plexiglas frames.

⁴⁷ Margaret Brown, "Making Your Prints Last," Photo Review Australia, <http://www.photoreview.com.au/guides/digitalphotography/making-your-prints-last.aspx/>. (accessed May 24, 2009).

⁴⁸ Image Permanence Institute, "A Consumer Guide to Traditional and Digital Print Stability," Image Permanence Institute with support from Creative Memories. http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/shtml_sub/consguides.asp/ (accessed June 29, 2009).

COLLECTING VERNACULAR PHOTOGRAPHS: INTERVIEW WITH MAIA-MARI SUTNIK

The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) collects photographic vernacular images. These images are not collected as individual photographs, but rather as groupings of images from an individual family or a collector (issues of storage and preservation issues with vernacular photography are considered to be the same as any other photographic objects entering the collection).

Maia-Mari Sutnik, Curator of Photography at the Art Gallery of Ontario, began developing the photography collection in 1979.⁴⁹ Ms. Sutnik very kindly agreed to an email interview⁵⁰ concerning the issues and questions that surround vernacular photography. I asked her: What collecting biases do vernacular photographs confront? Do vernacular images such as refrigerator magnets with photographs challenge the principles of connoisseurship? Would the AGO collect refrigerator magnets or refrigerator displays?

Ms. Sutnik commented on the biases that refrigerator magnets may confront when collected in an institution: "I think there are very few collecting biases for 'vernacular' photographs, that is, no more than there would be for any line of commodity based on the demands of the consumer market. It has to do with individual subjective interests – and popularity. For most people, however, photography has provided an exciting way to

⁴⁹ The Grange Prize 2009. "2009 Selectors: Maia-Mari Sutnik." The Grange Prize 2009. http://www.thegrangeprize.com/2009_selectors_Maia-Mari_Sutnik/ (accessed July 22, 2009). Ms. Sutnik has contributed to many publications, including international editions of *Contemporary Photographers and Contemporary Masterpieces*, and more recently "Deuil: New Work by Spring Hurlbut" for the Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art. Her major exhibitions include *Responding to Photography*; *Gutmann*; *Michel Lambeth: Photographer*; *Pop Photographica: Photography's Objects in Everyday Life*; and *Eisenstaedt: Two Visions*, produced in conjunction with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts exhibition *Ansel Adams*. Ms. Sutnik is currently working on an exhibition of the legendary Czech photographer Josef Sudek.

⁵⁰ Maia-Mari Sutnik, e-mail message to author, July 21-22, 2009.

record their individual private worlds, and for entrepreneurs to offer images from the commonplace to the complex. The ‘vernacular’ image presents challenges in the same ways that other forms of artistic expression challenge a viewer and a collector. Since the word *connoisseur* refers to an expert or a virtuoso critic, any field can have its acknowledged as well as its self-appointed connoisseurs.”

“The Art Gallery of Ontario’s photographic collection examines the ways in which individual invention, discovery, and photography combine and generate personal accounts of creativity. Therefore the collection represents a larger inventory of material culture than is found or considered in most histories of photography.”

Ms. Sutnik explained that collection practices based on the rarefied and valuable cultural object stem from the object-based photographica attached to amateur photography, a movement spawned by the invention of Kodak: “The photographic medium become accessible to both men and women, everyday users of photography. Of course, there were earlier productions in a range of ‘fantasy’ objects that relied on photographic images created for decoration and amusement (i.e. pins, buttons, brooches, boxes, paper weights, which incorporated daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, etc). The greater movement for ‘vernacular’ took place when it fell into the growing commodity market of popular photography and made it easier to transform images by craft and individual creativity.”

In conclusion, the information discussed reaffirms the importance of collecting the vernacular image and the importance of its staying power within family homes and institutional collections.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and results of this project show that families display similar photographs for sentimental, emotional, and nostalgic reasons. The displays serve as a reminder of happy moments of family near and far. The refrigerator's centrality and accessibility has made it a place of communication and display within the home, furthering its popularity in our modern culture. However, the introduction of digital photography and stainless steel refrigerators is slowly changing the ways families use and display photographs in their homes.

The preservation of photographs is changing along with technology: "Photography is a shifting visual universe, a passing activity and tradition. The refrigerator industry is changing; stainless steel models are popular, modern, and elegant. The way families make, use and display photographs is changing from analog to digital."⁵¹ Many families take digital photographs as opposed to analog (film), and their photographs are stored, sometimes permanently, on a home computer or external hard drive, iPod, digital camera, USB stick, CD, or DVD. Families do not print as many photographs as in the past, and this is problematic because a digital image is not permanent and is rarely displayed in hard copy as a photographic print. Therefore, the display culture of vernacular photographs is changing.

Colour prints, not electronic files, are the best way to ensure that digital images will be preserved for future generations. Many options, including traditional photographic prints, are now available for producing colour prints from digital images. When properly stored, dye-based inkjet and dye diffusion thermal transfer prints have stability

⁵¹ Maia-Mari Sutnik, e-mail message to author, July 21-22, 2009.

comparable to that of traditional photographic prints. Pigment-based inkjet and colour electrophotographic prints are even more stable. All technologies may be vulnerable to damage from light, air pollution, and improper handling. By understanding the differences between available technologies, the result can be long-lasting colour prints. With the continued popularity of digital photography it is probably inevitable that these refrigerator photographic displays will not exist in homes in the future, as video monitors and digital magnets will replace them. Until that time, we can continue to enjoy the creative and personal photographic displays of friends and family.⁵²

Many families are choosing to display their digital photographs through electronic devices such as a laptop computers or flat screen televisions that allow a person to connect their laptop and play a slideshow or a CD or DVD of family photographs.⁵³

In recent years, refrigerator manufacturers have begun to include video monitors in stainless steel refrigerator models, a modern and futuristic way of displaying family photographs (see Figure 24).⁵⁴ An accessory that is easily put up on the refrigerator is the Digital Photo Frame Fridge Magnet, which can display a selection of pictures (see Figures 25 and 26). These new technologies continue to grow with the popularity and advances of digital photography. In addition, digital files do not have the same issues of preservation as analog photographs, although there are digital preservation issues such as out of date file extensions, and hard drive failures.

⁵² Image Permanence Institute. "A Consumer Guide to Traditional and Digital Print Stability." Image Permanence Institute with support from Creative Memories. http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/shtml_sub/consguides.asp/ (accessed June 29, 2009).

⁵³ It is important to note that digital formats and files are constantly changing and it is necessary to keep up with these changes in order to ensure that ones digital family photographs will survive.

⁵⁴ The Wireless Picture Frame, "eStarling Wireless Digital Picture Frame," The Wireless Picture Frame, <http://www.wirelesspictureframe.com/> (accessed June 29, 2009).



Figure 24. Whirlpool refrigerator with digital photography display

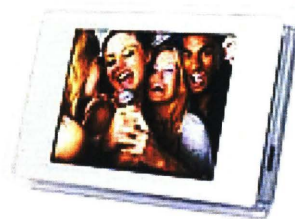


Figure 25. Digital Photo Frame Fridge Magnet



Figure 26. Side view, Digital Photo Frame Fridge Magnet

Analog and digital technologies all have an effect on our visual culture. The display sites are changing and moving into different locations of the home and onto new technological platforms. Photographs will continue to be displayed within the kitchen via new technologies such as the built in video monitor or the digital photo frame. However, the one element of the photographic display that may be lost is the refrigerator magnet, which may be replaced by new interactive and technological modes of display. Thus, the many connections of the refrigerator magnet to paper-based photograph could be nearing their end.

However, photographs are and remain a common form of record making, and celebration for families. The photographic displays reveal a story and idealized image of a family, and in many cases are part of the communication system in a home. These displays and their communicative aspect are relevant to our time and culture.

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