

### **4.3. Photographic public sphere: Identity building with vernacular photography**

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**ALTTI NÄSI**  
University of Lapland

# Photographic public sphere: Identity building with vernacular photography

## ABSTRACT

*The foundation of the article is based on the notion that self-disclosure is one of the most significant factors of contemporary vernacular photography. Argued through conceptual analysis and real-life examples, the role of self-disclosure is analysed in relation to the somewhat institutionalized functions of vernacular photography: (1) preserving memories, (2) maintaining and creating new social relationships, (3) self-presentation and (4) self-expression. The article sheds light on the widespread use of cameraphones and how the role of self-disclosure differs notably within the four chosen functions, since its absence among private photographs contributes to personal and unique memories; and within shared photographs, it defines how people want to be seen by others and themselves. The benefits and challenges of private and shared photography are also evaluated.*

## KEYWORDS

vernacular  
photography  
cameraphones  
self-disclosure  
visual communication  
preserving memories  
photographic functions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is both to provide an overview of the evolution that has taken place in amateur photography over the last fifteen years and to add to the theoretical understanding regarding its functions. The two parallel technical evolutions of digitalization and the birth of information networks have produced new visual means for people to share experiences when physically apart.

The primary approach of this article is in regard to photography, not social media. Surely, photography contributes significantly to the *visual communication* seen in social media, but it is important to understand that social media consists of much more than just photography, and only a proportion of all taken photographs end up in social media (Larsen 2014; Rose 2014). In order to take into account both private and shared photographs, the four functions of vernacular photography introduced by Nancy Van House and Marc Davis (2005; Van House 2011) form an appropriate basis through which to analyse the use of cameraphones in this article. These functions are as follows: (1) preserving memories, (2) maintaining and creating new social relationships, (3) self-presentation and (4) self-expression. Moreover, similar to the study by Van House and Davis, within this article, photography is discussed as a whole, not merely as a reception study that views photographs from an audience's perspective. Self-disclosure should guide an individual's actions in all areas of life, and to this, photography makes no exception.

It is noted that this theoretical division of the functions of vernacular photography has come under some criticism of its generality and universality (Lister 2014: 4). However, as such and to the same extent, this article aims to build an overview of the issue whilst also introducing literature of precise detail to those more interested in the specificities of the research topic.

Thus, the objective of the article is to explain the role of self-disclosure within an age of networked vernacular photography.

## 2. METHODS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Making use of interpretative concept analysis (Takala and Lämsä 2001); and real-life examples, the article at hand provides a theoretical refinement to the existing understanding on the functions of vernacular photography. The interpretative concept analysis is applied by considering the four-division concept laid out by Van House and Davis (2005) as a norm of digital vernacular photography. The four functions are treated as separate concepts, and by introducing overlapping and close concepts on photography, the article will clarify the significance of self-disclosure within vernacular photography (Figure 1).

The chosen photographic theories and photographic procedures by which self-disclosure is either evident or could have relevance were identified and carefully analysed. Alongside clarification, active observations of the author are shown in the presentation of typical uses of the cameraphone. These real-life examples are results from a time period of six months during which the author took notes of photographic occurrences that are universally relatable. As a theoretical article, the given examples should help demonstrate and concretize how self-disclosure works in real life.

Next, this article continues by clarifying the terminology regarding vernacular photography and self-disclosure. Thereafter, self-disclosure is analysed in more detail in relation to the somewhat institutionalized four functions of vernacular photography. Lastly, the final section comprises the conclusions and contribution of the article and presents a critical discussion in regard to self-disclosure in photography.

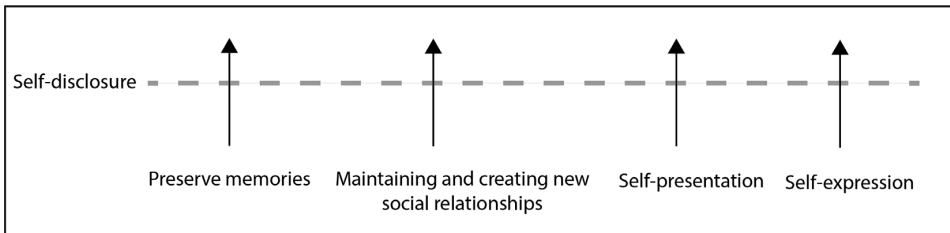


Figure 1: Theoretical framework for this research.

The relevant literature in this article has been introduced and analysed – not like in most scientific works, in a separate ‘earlier literature’ section, but in the respective areas of the text. This is because the literature is rich but fragmented, and this article strives to introduce several equally important viewpoints in each discussed issue.

### 3. TERMINOLOGY

#### 3.1. Vernacular photography

One could term contemporary vernacular photography as ‘consumption’, as *fast-food photography*; the whole process of planning, shooting, editing and sharing has become cheaper, easier and quicker. It has also resulted in a state of feeling gorged from image overflow (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008: 23). The photographic public sphere is packed with many photographs, which results in a behaviour pattern in which photographs are not even necessarily looked at (Lister 2014: 12). The use of camera-integrated phones has become part of an everyday routine.

Due to the ever-changing nature of photography, a considerable number of research studies have been conducted. Consequently, different terms have been used to describe photographic performance that takes place outside economic, institutional and professional engagements. Terms such as personal (van Dijck 2008), amateur and user-created (Lange 2011), domestic and vernacular (Cobley and Haefner 2009; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011), witness (Peters 2001; Tait 2011; Frosh and Pinchevski 2009), home mode and snapshot (Chalfen 1987) and family photography (Sontag 1978) are used to refer to non-professional photography. Considering the approach relating to the structure of this article, the term vernacular photography is mostly used due to its generality.

The distinction between professional and vernacular photography in this article follows the ideas of Robert Stebbins (1992). According to Stebbins, in contrast to amateurism, professionals: (a) put a substantial amount of time into the outcome, (b) achieve income from their work, (c) master and specialize in techniques and competencies within a professional culture, (d) self-identify with other professionals, (e) draw on institutionalized means for validation and (f) enjoy a publicly professional status.

#### 3.2. Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure can be described more broadly as the self-observation and self-control exhibited when conducting oneself appropriately in social situations,

with the guidance of situational cues (Snyder 1974). With photographs, the phenomenon is about visually expressive behaviour and the evaluation of how an individual wishes to be perceived.

The use of printed photographs has significantly diminished, having been replaced by modern cameraphone users who either join or are invited to various digital social communities in which a vast number of images are shared. Participation in digital photo-sharing is an enactment of identity where self-disclosure determines much of the online identity visible to an audience.

Photography carries the burden of an ideal identity that demands an individual to consider the visual stories that are represented to both others and themselves. Self-disclosure is comparable to a writing or composing process; in terms of online photography, people do not merely represent but rather enact (Poletti and Rak 2014; Van House 2011, 2016). Controlling the process of sharing personal photographs is at the core of modern vernacular photography.

Self-disclosure also means that one has control over privacy, which provides a sense of ownership over one's information (Petronio 2002: 1). Consequently, the type of disclosure often determines the nature of a relationship. In the following sections, real-life examples are provided to point out the different types of self-disclosure that can affect relationships by increasing, improving, decreasing or damaging the intimacy between individuals and groups. These examples also demonstrate the context-sensitive nature of self-disclosure. On the one hand, there are risks of sharing private photographs with potentially the wrong people or at the wrong time, but alternately, photographic self-disclosure can also be very enriching by providing, for example, such elements as empathy, encouragement and care (Venema and Lobinger 2017; Litt and Hargittai 2014).

## **4. SELF-DISCLOSURE IN VERNACULAR PHOTOGRAPHY**

### **4.1. Self-disclosure in preserving memories**

The first of four functions (Van House and Davis 2005), under a more detailed review, is the preservation of memories. To begin with, from a perspective of self-disclosure, philosopher Jeffrey Blustein (2008: 57) argues that to understand who we are requires that we understand where we came from. In light of this, photographs are concrete evidence of something that used to be.

The digital revolution has challenged the major analogue-time photographic theories introduced by Roland Barthes (1981) and André Bazin (1981), where photographs were looked upon as something that *has been*. In a sense, the whole foundation of photography has transformed. This particularly relates to the photography of families and friends, in which the primary mission was to preserve and strengthen personal and collective memories or stories. Photographs acted as a means to access that which is in the past. Simultaneously, these photographs carried the burden of loss, absence and even death. The viewer would see images of themselves ageing in time, or images of deceased family members, relatives and friends. As an example of this, in his book, Roland Barthes himself grieves for his mother as he studies her photographs ([1980] 1981: 73).

Today, we are forced to look at photographic performance as a tool of communication. The question has evolved from *what has been* to also include *what is going on*, as Villi suggests (2014; see also Ito and Okabe 2005; Lee 2010;

Sarvas and Frohlich 2011; Larsen and Sandbye 2014). This is an evolution that sees some of the images now perceived as visual messages, having moved from the concept that is an 'archived' family album. However, this does not mean that the memory function of photographs is now completely obsolete; the very nature of photographs is such that, at a certain stage, all images inevitably turn into memories.

When considering self-disclosure and its effects on the memorabilia function of photography, a vast change has occurred within the extension of photographic decision-making. Various alternative visual memories of a certain event are documented, as opposed to just one, thus providing any individual operating a camera with the power of visual memory-building. Family photography was previously a collective operation where the photographs represented a mutual history conducted by one family member who operated a shared camera (Chalfen 1987); the photographic decisions were at the whim of one person and thus represented just one perspective (Mäkiranta 2012).

Today, photographic self-disclosure begins at an early age. In the Nordic countries, after children reach school age, they start operating their own cameraphones. Due to this, and the decreasing role of a shared family camera, the task of self-disclosure is left to the individual. These various individual memories can be perceived as an enriching factor. As noted in the introduction, only a small fraction of photographs are shared with others; most pictures end up as digitally coded archives on hard-drives (Larsen 2014; Rose 2014). Without a question, opening these huge digital archives later in life, whether it is individually or within a group, strengthens and revives both personal and collective memories. Van House (2016: 276) addresses memory preservation in her study, naming it *personal and collective memory*. Whether individually or together with close friends, browsing through private photo archives revives the time as it was, thus acting as a memory.

Furthermore, in regard to the safeguarding of most personal photographs, contemporary private photographs build a realistic personal memory in the minimal or complete lack of self-disclosure. For the photographer's eyes only, these photographs provide rough evidence of a certain situation and, therefore, do not meet the necessary criteria for sharing in the public view (discussed in the following sections).

Having a digital photographic memory means that the cameraphone works like a hub, in which personal photographs blend together with photographs received from other individuals in various personal communities and different public sources. Consequently, an individual's photo collection as a whole is unique, but contains small pieces identical to the photo collections of others.

Finally, in an interesting note regarding memory, many use cameraphones as a direct support tool. This happens, for example, when students take photos of overheads during lessons, when customers take pictures of items on sale and when individuals take pictures of documents to assist in remembering challenging number combinations (birth dates, lock access codes or invoice reference numbers). Using the cameraphone in this manner is an easy, free and quick way to create a visual note. One could say that digital vernacular photography, to the letter, has kept its function as a memory-helping tool.

As discussed in this essay, the memory-building function of vernacular photography has not perished completely, but has a smaller role than before. Its significance has shifted from preserving collective visual memories to preserving memories that are mostly personal.

#### **4.2. Self-disclosure in maintaining and creating social relationships**

The second function under review is the maintenance and creation of social relationships (Van House and Davis 2005). The emotional and informational connection between friends and family members created by vernacular photographs can be perceived as a concept that significantly enhances an individual's well-being. Naturally, the level of self-disclosure is dependent on the characteristics of the relationship; for example, some individuals are closer with their best friend(s) than with their family members.

A significant amount of photographic communication between family members is similar to *extending the discussions of the dinner table*. Earlier studies indicated that sharing photographs deepens the sense of community and togetherness of a group, especially within a family (Rose 2010: 43–45, 2014: 76; Prieto-Blanco 2016). As Prieto-Blanco (2016: 134) describes, when family members are physically apart, mobile image-sharing illustrates two contemporary phenomena of digital photography: the search for immediacy through pictures, and the need to overcome space. These results are also consistent with the studies introduced in the earlier sections. Prieto-Blanco's idea emphasizes the ease in narrowing the mental distance over the physical distance; today, an individual can live physically far away from those closest and still share personal visual content, thus decreasing the mental – not the physical – distance that exists.

Photographs can also possess valuable or useful information. For example, some time ago, my sister was able to share with my family, through an online group chat, a photograph demonstrating the location of the spare key to her house. Naturally, this type of photograph is highly informational and more self-explanatory than the equivalent would be in words. Furthermore, if the photograph were to end up in the public sphere, the result could be potentially harmful.

If family members live far away from each other, participation in birthday parties and other meaningful events is sometimes impossible. Sharing images through a private messenger application is a way to overcome this space and to convey the atmosphere to the absent individual. Regardless of whether the self-disclosure through photographic content is more informational (as to demonstrating the location of a hidden key) or emotional (such as congratulating a family member on a birthday), these photographs possess a significant intimacy value; they are an indication of closeness and trust.

Maintaining social relationships is one thing, but when creating new ones, photographic self-disclosure determines much of what the audience sees. Creating new contacts on various online platforms has become the norm, but nevertheless, organizing, polishing and archiving processes are found to be somewhat tedious assignments to most people (Larsen 2014: 39). This explains why people tend to publish only one or two images out of a large quantity. Taking many photographs of the same situation and choosing the most polished picture to share is a typical mode of self-presentation in contemporary vernacular photography. Therefore, although it might feel as if the photographic public sphere is drowning in an overflow of photographs, it must be noted that this is only a fraction of the images that exist as the majority are not on display.

Thus, polishing is not pervasive of the whole photo collection, and is a means of self-presentation. It is an instrument used to portray the desired

message of the individual aiming to create new relationships or a positive online identity. Camera phone applications offer thousands of editing tools for retouching every part of the human body. In addition to adding desirable and removing unwanted features in one's personal appearance, it is also easy, for example, to remove undesired people from multi-person photographs.

The risk with failed self-disclosure is when sending inappropriate content without consideration. One of the biggest risks is in the changing nature of human relationships. Photos sent with assumed confidentiality can be exposed in the public sphere, causing distress and legal complications. In some cases, this could lead to lawsuits and pose a number of problems as peoples' relationships change.

An example of a failed visual friendship maintenance was seen in 2016 where Finland faced its first major WhatsApp group scandal. A famous TV presenter was accused of filming dozens of women without their consent during sexual intercourse.<sup>1</sup> The convicted entertainer had posted visual material to a WhatsApp group consisting of his close friends. After one of the victims noticed this, the incident not only ended up as a legal case with sanctions, but also resulted in a loss of reputation for all the members of the group. The case reaching the public sphere caused strong emotions among the victims, including depression, shame and anger. Therefore, there are major risks to not only sharing visual content but also in the act of creating potentially illegal or sensitive pictures or videos in defiance of getting caught. Here, the self-disclosure process is down to one individual, but the gatekeeping function is assigned to fellow users *after publishing*. While social media service providers expect other users to directly address the sender or service provider of unwanted photographic content, the damage is intrinsically irreversible; once uploaded online, the content is permanent. Many individuals take copies or screenshots of the inappropriately shared images, after which removing the content completely is even harder.

The functions of photographs to maintain and create relationships differ substantially between close relationships and public domains. Evaluating the actions with a camera and through the level of trust with other peers is inevitable. Through wide media coverage and prejudiced cases, the understanding of the importance of self-disclosure increases.

### 4.3. Self-disclosure in self-presentation

In following the categorizing of the contemporary functions of vernacular photography by Van House and Davis (2005), the next element under revision is self-presentation. Although Van House and Davis justifiably find differences between self-presentation (self-portraits or 'selfies' and images where the photographer is in the spotlight) and self-expression (artistic, entertaining, experimental, informational and funny ambitions), the separation also leads to some questions of ambiguity in the overlapping characteristics of the two categories. The difficulty would be found in placing many photographs into just one category. Many self-portraits have elements of self-expression, and vice versa.

The idea that self-disclosure is the counterpart of self-presentation is not a new concept. In the 1950s, Erving Goffman (1959) explored the importance of audience consciousness in determining the ways in which one behaves. He argued that a performance takes place as a result of a performer's awareness and whenever the social is involved. Although self is not always the purpose

1. [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/ex-vj\\_sentenced\\_for\\_secret\\_sex\\_tapes/9484082](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/ex-vj_sentenced_for_secret_sex_tapes/9484082).



of performance, it is always a product, and this is more evident than ever before as a result of the widespread use of digital photography.

Many photographic self-presentation studies are based on Goffman's ideas, where the aim of self-presentation is to convey an ideal image of oneself that is deemed socially desirable. Idealization (and thus the presentation of oneself) varies from performance to performance as audience spheres and performance contexts change (Goffman 1959).

Zizi Papacharissi's (2010) research results are in accordance with Goffman's concept. According to Papacharissi, the process of self-presentation is an ever-evolving cycle through which individual identity is presented, compared, adjusted or defended. It is modern technology that paves the way for this stage of identity negotiation, linking the *networked self* separately or simultaneously with multiple audiences. Furthermore, in everyday cycles of self-disclosure and impression formation, individuals perform on multiple stages and, in doing so, blend social communities online that may have been separate offline. This might sometimes confuse private and public boundaries when evaluating the role of self-disclosure. Also, by time, motivation and goals can change, and thus the cycle is indeed ever-evolving.

In studies emphasizing photography, van Dijck (2008) argues that the roles of personal images as identity builders and as a means of experiencing communication are of a greater importance than ever before. The communication mode has become, in some sense, a superior function (van Dijck 2008: 70). Self-disclosure is a gatekeeping instrument because photographs work as building blocks for personal identity. Garde-Hansen (2014: 97) has termed this future memory dynamic *modern image entrepreneurship*, effectively branding identities through online self-portraiture. The cameraphone is a tool not only for publishing but also for the self-reflection of the changeability of everyday life in regard to places, friends and activities.

Location is equally important to the self-image and has a solid history in tourist photography. An example of this is the case of a young individual from a football stand at the Camp Nou football stadium in Barcelona. The young man had bought plenty of team merchandise, including club jerseys, scarves and flags, and was posing with these for his friend with a cameraphone. All the purchases were well presented before him with the football stadium acting as a backdrop. The behaviour that aroused my interest was that straight after updating the photographs to his various social media feeds, the young man fell asleep before the game even began and slept until the end of the match. Here, as in many photographs, location is a significant factor in self-presentation. In this example, posing in a football arena and sharing the images with the public was more important than watching the actual game.

Among online forums, a considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding Facebook photo-sharing and the association between self-presentation and personality traits (e.g. Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky 2010; Gosling et al. 2011; Moore and McElroy 2012; Ross et al. 2009; Wang et al. 2017). Moore and McElroy (2012: 271) argue that there is a higher prevalence of self-presentation in the sharing of photographs among women, which suggests that self-disclosure works differently among genders. Ok Lyu (2016) uses the term *objectification* in her study to explore how women strategically take touristic selfies because they are more conscious of their outer appearance as objects, where they are constantly monitored and evaluated by others (see also Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Siibak 2009). However, it is

difficult to generalize issues such as this, as the degree of image-sharing varies heavily among individuals; as the example of the young man at the football stadium demonstrates, this is not gender-specific.

In an interesting study conducted by Michael Stefanone et al. (2011), the behaviour of young people was studied in relation to their opinion of their self-worth. The researchers argued that people's self-esteem can be categorized into two main classes according to how they behave. One class, defined as approval, consisted of individuals who based their self-esteem on public-based factors, such as physical appearance and outdoing others in competitions. The other class, defined as academic competence, consisted of those who based their self-esteem on private factors, such as family love and a personal sense of morality. Those who both valued the first elements and whose self-worth was most dependent on appearance displayed a higher intensity of online photo-sharing. The conditions by which people assess their self-worth represents a new approach to understanding how personal identities are developed and maintained.

Although self-presentation with vernacular photography is an upfront element difficult to bypass by anyone using a cameraphone, it is sometimes overstated. According to a recent survey by Matikainen and Villi (2015: 160), regardless of age, most Finns see themselves as traditional passive online followers. Executed on over 1000 random participants, the research indicates that online participation focuses primarily on personal networks and communities, signifying that people are not evenly interactive, but rather concentrate on relationships that are most meaningful. In other words, people share a more diverse range of photographs within their closer communities, whereas a wider audience sees only a selected few. This is particularly the case on social media forums, where many peers do not have a close relationship to the individual; as a result of its obvious presence, they might consider the self-presentation function more meaningful than it really is.

The results published by Matikainen and Villi are in accordance with many other studies concerning the degree of photo-sharing in social media (Blanchard and Markus 2004; Rotman et al. 2009; Rotman and Wu 2014; Malinen 2016). For example, according to Malinen (2016: 34), online one-to-one and small-group relationships display a higher degree of photo-sharing. Photos are, therefore, shared less frequently with a wider audience and, instead, more photos are circulated amongst close family members and friends.

To summarize, self-presentation in vernacular photography is strongly connected with a positive presence on public forums (concerning photography, see also Slater 1995: 134; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011: 6). The factor of self-presentation affects peoples' behaviour with the camera, and the decisions regarding self-disclosure are down to the cameraphone user. The conscious performances carried out by the subject and the photographer (who may also be the same person, such as in the case of selfies) contribute to the output of the image and affect identity formation inside and out.

The presence of self-disclosure is all-encompassing; the selection and choices are often made beforehand (in planning and taking the camera along) during the shooting (location, atmosphere, framing, composition or light) and afterwards in editing (selecting, removing, manipulating or sharing images).

#### 4.4. Self-disclosure in self-expression

Lastly, self-expression is to be discussed as a function. Many find it comfortable to manage their personal imagery by documenting and sharing photographs from their own hobbies and interests in life. For some, photography and the visually rewarding outcomes are the core focus of interest. One can experience a feeling of success from building up photographic abilities, which would increase, for example, the quality and aesthetics of the photos taken. Enthusiasts and dedicated hobbyists exist in great numbers.

Some recent studies, such as Lee (2010), Lange (2011), Morlot (2013), Sandbye (2014) and Schreiber (2015), demonstrated that photography has kept its ground as an art that is playful, fun and entertaining. This is surely an element that has fundamental roots deep in analogue times. Following on from, for example, Lange's article (2011: 41), younger individuals approach image-making with more fluidity, with aims and purposes traversing both memory preservation and the instant sharing of experiences. Lange's article mainly discusses online image production by younger people, in how it is deemed as a way to have fun, to become closer with peers, to improve technical skills and to help friends with similar interests.

Classic pioneering examples of hobbies in which the use of the camera coalesces with the action itself are skateboarding and snowboarding. The presence of a camera has been apparent within these communities from the very beginning, and many shots are executed on photographic terms. A fresh example of photographic self-expression in the Nordic countries are the so-called *moped meetings* (in Finnish: *mopomiitti*), where young people gather at a pre-arranged road-strip with various types of mopeds and other motorized vehicles to demonstrate acrobatic tricks. Photography and filming are a built-in element of these moped meetings. The visual results are important and shared through social media channels.

There are various ways that make photography self-expressive. It could be part of a social event (as described above) or for purely personal aesthetic gratification (Morlot 2013: 29). Sometimes the purpose is to depict the course of time (Lee 2010: 272) within a series of photos. In the late 1970s, Sontag (1978: 5) acknowledged that photography could at times act as a defence against anxiety. Back then, as much as now, vernacular photography could be approached in how individuals experience and enjoy being both behind and in front of the lens. Some may use the camera as a protective shield, or perhaps as an escape route in social situations. In the example of moped meetings, using the cameraphone easily justifies the presence of many individuals who are not interested in performing themselves.

Photographing aesthetically pleasing details, such as nature or animals, also offers a comfortable and risk-free way to manage personal imagery. When sharing photographs with a vast audience, this neutral form of self-expression requires very little self-disclosure due to its non-controversial content. Similarly, this neutrality is the reason why the content of readers' images on Finnish newspapers are nature-orientated (Näsi 2014). Photographs of animals, landscapes and seasonal hobbies offer an aesthetically rewarding, but simultaneously risk-free, way to engage the community with the newspaper.

Therefore, for many, the function of self-expression offers an attractive approach to photography. As described above, it demonstrates rewardingly the proficiency and technical skills of an individual in using the camera and visually expressing something in front of the lens. Often, proficiency and the

content are equally important. Also, if we think back on the described risks of self-presentation, the types of photography discussed here offer a suitable and risk-free basis for manageable self-disclosure. Through self-expression, one can share images with people who are not necessarily close to the photographer.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

This article focuses on the evolution or – we could say – revolution of vernacular photography that has significantly commenced since the early 2000s. It attempts to provide a fresh perspective and theoretical framework to the somewhat institutionalized functions of vernacular photography by analysing how the concept of self-disclosure works within.

First, as the article proceeds, we see that contemporary vernacular photography is a complex process that involves overlapping and diffused perspectives; it is difficult to categorize photographic actions and the outcomes of these in just one of the four functions. With this in mind, the following conclusions aim to clarify the significance of self-disclosure within vernacular photography.

Second, there is a lack of research that discusses self-disclosure as the defining factor of photography. However, there are many case studies on digital photography and personality traits, gender and aesthetic gratifications that in particular concern self-presentation. In these studies, self-disclosure is often interpreted as something subordinate to various individual features and emotional motives. It is not seen as a concept of high value, nor is it seen to direct controlled decision-making of individuals. A typical example of this kind is seen in a study conducted by Wang et al. (2017). Their study aims to examine the psychological effects of posting and viewing of selfies and groupies on social media. The main focus of the study is on self-esteem, life satisfaction and an individual's need for popularity, and how these factors (as opposed to conscious preplanned self-disclosure) conduct behaviour. Thus, the standpoint differs significantly from this article. Self-disclosure means controlling the process of sharing personal photographs and control over ownership of one's photographs.

As to the critical discussions, it should be noted that approaching self-disclosure as an agent affecting all vernacular photography could lend more control to individual cameraphone users in the form of understanding causation and media literacy. Instead of considering self-disclosure as a somewhat predefined matter, it could be seen as a concept that advances parallel to the process of photography as a whole, in planning, shooting, editing and sharing. More research on the topic would also contribute to similar issues on morality, consideration, self-criticism and wider impacts. Acknowledging the nature of self-disclosure by Snyder (1974) should provide a solid basis for more manageable photo-sharing and ultimately better media literacy.

Third, self-disclosure works very differently when interpreting private and public photographs. For example, when referring to self-disclosure in preserving memories, the contemporary photographic public sphere is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, personal and privately operated modern cameraphones emphasize individuality in the sense that every individual has their own gadgets, and there is seemingly less or no need for self-disclosure. On the other hand, as these same gadgets are connected to a network

of endless audiences, it naturally insists on more individual-conscious self-disclosure.

Understanding this evolution in photography is important, especially to those who are old enough to remember analogue-time vernacular photographic culture and procedures; I myself am embarrassed when looking at some pictures taken in the 1980s and 1990s of myself from my parents' photo albums. These albums compose photographs mostly taken by my mother and are reflective of her decisions regarding self-disclosure. The photographs represent a collective visual memory for all family members. Interestingly, my own children have grown to know only the digital way. They operate their own cameraphones and make their own decisions based on self-disclosure. In contrast to analogue times, each family member now has their own digital photo album. As my children grow older, they must understand the significance of individual responsibility regarding self-disclosure when sharing pictures from their personal collections with others. They must also make their own decisions on what to do with potentially embarrassing photos; delete or keep, safeguard or share.

Lastly, the major aim of this article was to provide an overview of the evolution that has taken place in amateur photography, and to aid in understanding self-disclosure in relation to the four functions of photography. For those scholars who are just beginning to research visual communication, this article is intended as an informed perspective of historical development, as an alternative approach to the amateur photographic public sphere, and as a contribution to education and the development of media literacy skills. If nothing else, this article should be relieving to comprehend that we are influenced by selective visual fragments from other people's lives and that controlling one's own visual identity demands for active consideration of self-disclosure.

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## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Altti Näsi is a Ph.D. student at the University of Lapland. His research focuses on the functions of shared digital photographs within different types of communities.



Contact: University of Lapland, Yliopistonkatu 8, 96300 Rovaniemi, Finland.  
E-mail: [altti.nasi@gmail.com](mailto:altti.nasi@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5021-4766>

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