

MOTHERHOOD & EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY PRACTICES

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During the initial stages of this project, my job was to conduct research with the Kodak Canada Corporate Archives and Heritage Collection at Ryerson University. I delved into photographic publications between 1900-1935 that instructed individuals “how” to perform photography. Various photographic texts, monthly journals, trade circulars, magazines, and books were researched to locate advertisements, photographs, articles, and photo essays that highlighted the various methods of making photographs. And throughout much of this material, ideas relating to motherhood continued to influence and shape a great deal of the early photography movement.

Motherhood appeared to function as an ideological framework that shaped particular photographic perspectives and practices. These texts encouraged idealized notions of childhood, motherhood, and the nuclear family, while also emphasizing how important photographs were in preserving both time and memory. Photography became a tool for families, particularly mothers, to capture these elements—one that was arguably designed for the maternal perspective.

STUDIO LIGHT23




THERE will be a broad gap in the family record if you don't have another picture of those growing youngsters soon. Make it a group picture this time, including mother and Jane.

THE PYRO STUDIO

FIG 1

Make the soldiers happy with pictures of home folks



Cloudy or bright days are equally good for sittings. Make the appointment to-day.

THE PYRO STUDIO

FIG 2

It was believed that women photographers had a unique approach and skill set for photographing children. Many texts argued that their “natural” ways created the most realistic child portraits. This technique was demonstrated most effectively in a professional studio setting. The formality of this approach became the prominent method of creating child portraiture during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and women photographers were at the forefront of capturing some of the best shots in the industry. This skill set distinguished women’s work from men’s and it also helped to elevate their professional status in child portraiture and studio work.


This belief continued to grow and develop outside of the studio setting, as well. Women played the role of family historian by capturing child portraits and family snapshots, as well as organizing and compiling the family album. This role became somewhat of a responsibility however, as the expectation was that women would be the ones to capture the everyday nature of motherhood and family life. This was seen demonstrated very clearly in the numerous mother/child portraits that were portrayed throughout the texts. Photographs would often reflect an idealized image of this relationship, whereas male figures were rarely depicted alongside women and/or children. Men seemed to receive the photograph, rather than actually be included in the image. An example of this was seen in the many advertisements that encouraged women and their families to send photographs to men who were away at war.

The relationship of motherhood and photography was extremely informative and instrumental in understanding the societal influences that helped shape the medium during the early 1900’s. And it was particularly useful when understanding child portraiture in relation to street photography and genre photography – both of which were explored extensively in our research project.

“How I shall miss you
When you are grown.”

What the poet sang every mother’s
heart has felt. Baby’s photograph
taken now and then will preserve the
image and memory of baby days for
all time.

Clever photographers, with the fast
lenses and fast plates of to-day, also
get wonderful results in baby pictures.
How long since you have had your
baby’s picture taken?



There’s a photographer in your town.
Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

FIG 3



FROM AN ARTURA IRIS PRINT

Home Portrait
By Miss Reinecke
Kansas City, Mo.



FIG 4



FIG 5

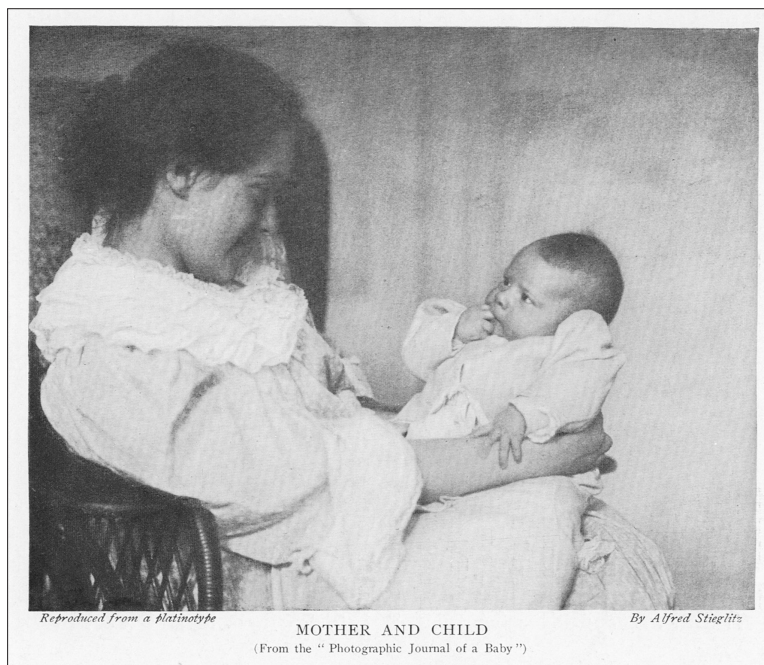


FIG 6

1. C 36. Kodak. *Studio Light and the Aristo Eagle*. Jul. 1919. V 11, No. 5, p. 23
2. C 35. Kodak. *Studio Light and the Aristo Eagle*. Jan. 1919. V 9, No. 11, p. 23
3. C 30. Kodak. *Studio Light and the Aristo Eagle*. Feb. 1913. V 4, No. 12, p. 5
4. C 30. Kodak. *Studio Light and the Aristo Eagle*. Jun. 1913. V 9, No. 11, p. 23
5. C 35. Kodak. *Studio Light and the Aristo Eagle*. Jan. 1919. V 9, No. 11, p. 7
6. TR6.42.C33. *Photography as a Fine Art*. Charles H. Caffin. 1901. p. 29