

# Family Practices, Holiday and the Everyday

SARAH MARIE HALL\* & CLARE HOLDSWORTH\*\*

\**Geography, School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK*

\*\**Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, School of Physical and Geographical Sciences, Keele University, Staffs, UK*

**ABSTRACT** *Holidays are central to the rhythm of everyday family practices and consumption, and are often depicted, within both academic literature and consumer marketing, as a defining moment in contemporary family life. To date, academic accounts of the experiences of travel and tourism have been mostly developed outside of the realm of everyday family practices and intimate relations. In this paper, therefore, we advance an interpretation of family holidays as a constituent of everyday family practices. To do this, we bring together three distinct yet interrelated conceptual frameworks: those of family practices, holiday and the everyday. Presenting and analysing data collected from ethnographic research with six families and exploring the themes of anticipation and utopian family practices, we identify how the notion of family holidays can be used a conduit for realising not only relationality between family members but also as a means of easing out the tensions and aspirations of everyday family life, a way to perfect the everyday and also to make it more palatable.*

**KEY WORDS:** Family, Holiday, Everyday, Intimacy, Family practices

## Introduction

January is traditionally the time for promoting the ‘family’ holiday. As the Christmas television schedules finish, commercial advertisements roll in for the ‘perfect’ family holiday for the forthcoming summer. In winter 2013/2014, one leading travel company in the UK based its advertisement around the idea that ‘it’s amazing what holidays can do’ and showed an ogre gradually transform into a man whilst relaxing on his family holiday. In 2010, a somewhat notorious and cheesy advertisement featuring celebrity couple Louise and Jamie Redknapp (Kay 2010) showed the couple on an idyllic South African beach against a narrative of how we dream, research, plan, fanaticise, and shop for and about holiday. These and many other holiday advertisements seek to present an idealised view of ‘family’; one that is restricted by structure

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*Correspondence Address:* Sarah Marie Hall, Geography, School of Environment, Education and Development, Arthur Lewis Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. Email: [sarah.m.hall@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.m.hall@manchester.ac.uk)

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(two heterosexual parents and an unspecified number of dependent children) and function (a combination of relaxing, leisure and outdoor activities). ‘Family’ holidays are sold as an opportunity for families to spend ‘quality’ time together and recharge their batteries. As such, family holidays are depicted as defining moments in contemporary family life (Daly 2001; Cheal 2002).

Despite the centrality of holidays<sup>1</sup> to the rhythm of family life and consumption, academic accounts of the experiences of travel and tourism have been mostly developed outside of the realm of everyday, ‘banal’ (Franklin and Crang 2001) and ‘mundane’ (Haldrup and Larsen 2003, 2010) family practices. In this paper, we advance an interpretation of family holidays as a constituent of everyday family practices, by exploring the ways in which holidays and the everyday are interwoven within family life and relationships, in order to contribute to geographical debates around everyday life and holidays (see Edensor 2000; Franklin and Crang 2001; Haldrup and Larsen 2003, 2010) and family practices and intimate relations (see Valentine 2008; Holdsworth 2013; Hall 2014).

Our account of holiday is directed towards the lived experiences and the creative and imaginative capacity of holiday. The promotion of utopian holidays blends the real and the imagined, we are encouraged to identify with *who* goes on holiday, as the figurative holiday-maker needs to be reachable. Yet at the same time, we are encouraged to dream about and anticipate imaginary experiences, and to buy into an ideal of perfection that contrasts with our everyday lives (Franklin and Crang 2001; Cheal 2002; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Haldrup and Larsen 2010). Holidays are celebrated as a time for playing out fantasies of place, doings and intimacy, and the selling of holiday packages seeks to bring these to an achievable goal. However, in being positioned as a means of perfecting everyday family life, and also because of the intensity of ‘family time’ whilst on holiday, family holidays can also be a space of tensions between intimates, a source of frustration, disappointment or conflict as much as happy memories and dreams (Daly 2001).

This paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss and review the literature on family practices and personal life, followed by an interweaving of the literatures on family, holiday and the everyday, as a means of synthesising this work as well as identifying omissions. From here, we describe the ethnographic study from which our findings are drawn, before moving onto analysis and discussion of this empirical material. To conclude, we argue that not only do holidays and the everyday coincide through both mundane and imaginary family practices of, for instance, preparing for and dreaming about holiday, but that these everyday practices, from which families might want to escape by holidaying, are in fact reproduced by holiday. The quest for the ‘perfect’ holiday is more than imaginary or aspirational but is *embedded* in the everyday and is a means of making the everyday more bearable.

### **Family Practices and Personal Life**

We are deliberately directing our attention to the practice of family holidays, rather than more generic accounts of travel and tourism, as we seek to theorise holidays as collective experiences. As such, ways of theorising family are central to this paper. By taking a ‘family practices’ approach, ‘the emphasis [is] on doing, on action, or social action’ (Morgan 2011b, 2), on the enacted and interactional aspects of everyday family life. A family practices approach encourages a focus on the ‘normal, regular, everyday’ practices and interactions that make up, and are made up by, family

life (Millar and Ridge 2013, 566). Whilst developed mainly by sociologists (see Finch 2007; Morgan 2011a, 2011b), the notion of family practices has gained increased attention more recently within human geography as a means of understanding ‘the way that people are “doing” family and what affective relations or structure constitute personal relationships’ (Valentine 2008, 2104).

Going on holiday is endorsed as a shared practice, often with family, as well as friends or even complete strangers; so much so that solo holidaying (as opposed to, say, backpacking) remains an often marginalised and suspicious activity (see Heimtun 2010; Jayne et al. 2012; McIlvenny 2013). The relational experiences of family holiday, we suggest, constitute a significant aspect of everyday family life: how holidays are thought about, planned for and enacted as a way of reconfirming and reflecting on everyday family practices. However, we want to move beyond a discussion of how holidays are done with other people, to consider how family practices and everyday life are interwoven in the preparation and experiences of holiday (Franklin and Crang 2001; Haldrup and Larsen 2010), as well as in their imaginary potential for providing the opportunity to perfect the everyday – such as the activities family members do together, the time they spend in each others’ company, or the food and drink they consume. In other words, we use family not an adjective to define holiday, but as a verb (Morgan 2011a), to develop an account of holiday practices.

Family practices are often unremarkable and the focus of family practice research is mostly on how family is ‘done’, in contrast to more popular discourses of family that emphasise a more functional and directive role (see Gillies 2011). This morphs into a sense of family as active, fluid and almost banal. Family practices can, in some instances, be taken as too trivial to be commented on or distinguished from other events, but a family practices approach argues that the minutiae of family matters as much as the big events. A potential pitfall of a family practices approach is that the emphasis on the banal implies an unintended distinction between ordinary and celebratory of ‘special’. Indeed, when discussing the further application of a family practices approach, Morgan (2011b, 6 – emphasis added) describes how:

family practices can be conducted when negotiating a mortgage, *planning a holiday* or in demonstrating against government cuts. Alternatively, *everyday or routine activities* taking place within the home can be seen through new pairs of spectacles that make us reflect on their significance.

Although perhaps unintended, the implication here is that the practising of family through holiday is not part of the everyday.

In this and other literature (see Miller 1998), family holidays are mentioned rather fleetingly and flippantly and, as in the above instance, are positioned as being ostensibly *different* from the everyday. We are not seeking to reify the everyday as mundane and trivial, but that it is characterised ‘by ambiguities, instabilities and equivocation’ (Highmore 2002, 17). The everyday, as with family, is not necessarily what is self-evident or given. Rather, as we explore, family holidays can be a site for emancipatory thoughts and actions, such as ‘to perform acts of excess and emotional and bodily release’ (Edensor 2000, 325), to behave in a way which is ‘removed as far as possible from [the] mundane facts of life’ (Cheal 2002, 73).

One way in which this distinction between prosaic and novel practices can be overcome is through recognising the imagined potential of holiday. The imaginary, as Carol Smart (2007) has argued, has an important role to play in how family

relationships are understood, envisaged and replicated. This can take the form of memories, thoughts or desires, ‘since these are just as real’ as what families do (4). Family holidays, in particular, incorporate different facets of the imaginary including remembering as well as anticipating futures (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). Writings on tourist photography have also discussed at length the significance of tourism imaginaries, representing an embodied and ongoing ‘intersection of mobility and vision’ (Crang 1997, 366). A number of authors have also reflected on family photographs within tourism practices, as a means of producing and projecting ‘identity, social relations and “familyness”’ (Crang 1997; Haldrup and Larsen 2003, 26; Rose 2003; Finch 2007).

Yet, we need to be wary of eulogising the imaginary potential of holiday. We suggest that what is missing in Löfgren’s (1999) discussion of utopian ideals of holiday, and Haldrup and Larsen’s (2003) ‘family gaze’ framing, is the frustrations and disappointments, conflict and tensions, which are as central to everyday family and intimate relations as love and care (Holdsworth 2013; Hall 2014). The observation by Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006, 4; emphasis added) that ‘the social sciences have still failed to fully recognise how the spatialities of social life presuppose, and frequently involve *conflict over*, both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, event to event’ still holds resonance. We now move on to discuss the relationship between holiday and the everyday, real and imagined, in further detail, looking to academic writings around tourism and everyday life and highlighting the centrality of family and intimate relationships to these debates.

## **Family, Holiday and Everyday**

### *Holiday and Everyday*

We start with the simple observation that holiday has a dialectic relation with the everyday (Franklin and Crang 2001); the purpose of holidays are to cease the everyday, to stop work and have a break that is sanctioned and endorsed by others, often family members (Daly 2001). Lefebvre (1991) also writes about the vicious cycle of work and leisure, that we have to work hard to achieve leisure. Leisure, by this definition, can only have one meaning: ‘to get away from work’. Thus as Lefebvre (1991, 40) argues, ‘leisure appears as the non-everyday in the everyday’. Lefebvre’s interpretation of work and leisure does not prioritise the exotic quality of leisure, but instead recognises that the break from the mundane can only be conceived of in relation to point of departure, rather than destination. As such, holidays as moments of suspension are framed by activities that are broken or temporally stopped.

The impossibility of understanding holidays without reference to what is *not* holiday brings being ‘on holiday’ to public scrutiny. On the one hand, holidays are associated with non-economic activity and with frivolous, less grounded or rational activities. Going on holiday, planning for or purchasing holidays can be readily dismissed as not worthy of serious attention. And yet, holidays are also regarded very seriously (Franklin and Crang 2001). For example, in the UK, the holiday destinations of politicians, celebrities and royalty are held up for public inspection, and popular holiday choices are examined as a calibrator of public mood and finances. Thus, a common disclaimer in tourism studies is to reassert the seriousness of holidays (Urry and Larsen 2011).<sup>2</sup> This can be reclaimed in a number of ways, through

economic criteria (holidays are big business), or the demographics of holiday experiences (numbers of people embarking on holiday), but also on moral and philosophical grounds.

The claim for the significance of holiday as a focus of theoretical and empirical research is essentially dialectical. This has been a defining approach in tourism studies; established literature on tourism, holidays and mobilities acknowledges that, whilst there remains an aspiration for 'different' experiences when on holiday, there has been a progressive erosion or 'blurring' in the distinction between 'home' and 'away' (Edensor 2000; Franklin and Crang 2001, 11). This notion is exemplified in Urry's (1990) influential writings about the tourist gaze, which has recently been modified in order to develop a more nuanced and active understanding of the everyday/tourist dichotomy (Urry and Larsen 2011). We can move seamlessly between different modes of doing and being a tourist, which are not place or time specific (see Larsen 2008; Gale 2009).

We can reorient this observation to identify the mundane routineness of doing tourism and being on holiday. As Edensor (2007) argues, there is an awful lot about tourism that is habitual and 'ordinary'. Edensor (2007, 200) contends that 'rather than transcending the everyday, most forms of tourism are fashioned by culturally coded escape attempts'. There is therefore little that is exceptional about tourism, but rather coded practices and performativities 'which reflect common sense understandings of how to be a tourist as well as being a time in which a heightened reflexivity is sought in the confrontation with sensual and cultural difference, an inclination to reflect which is embodied in tourist dispositions' (Ibid., 200). Furthermore, as post-colonial critiques of tourism have revealed, so many of these tourist imaginaries are about the erasure or concealment of local cultures, as with 'gated security guarded, even fortified, private enclave[s] of the all-inclusive resort' such as those in Caribbean (Sheller 2003; Tolia-Kelly 2006; Sheller 2009, 189), or the quest for authentic experiences, opportunities 'to capture and devour the exotic other' (Crang 1997, 361; Edensor 2000).

In practice, there is a seamlessness between exotic and mundane, particularly if this is not framed with reference to specific times and localities (also see Sheller 2003). Holidays do not have to involve travel, but rather are a temporal configuration, a break from everyday routine, although usually reinforced by travel. This temporal framing is not linear – we do not move between holiday and non-holiday as an ordered and structured break – but the practices and habits of holiday and non-holiday are mutually reinforcing (Edensor 2000; Franklin and Crang 2001). The anticipation of holidays and the need to escape remove us from the rhythm of everyday and to either speed up or slow down the everyday, where 'anticipation emerges as complex relations of guiding, projecting, and repositioning via creative, fluid practices' (Rose 2003; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Scarles 2009, 477; Haldrup and Larsen 2010).

There is also a moral dimension to this distinction between everyday and holiday to consider, which gets to the centrality of problematising the everyday (Highmore 2002). Holidays do more than make the everyday palatable. For instance, we frequently talk about needing or having earned a holiday. The moral economy of holiday-making is pluralistic and holidays are taken as indicators of both prudence and profligacy. Expenditure on holiday can be justified as saved for and earned, although this desire for holiday can also be associated with unnecessary and excessive consumption. The holidays that we actually embark on are framed with

reference to what goes on before, and what we return to, and can be contrasted with ‘dream’ holidays – those that are not earned but are acquired through luck or chance, such as winning a lottery. Yet, we posit, these earned holidays do more than provide a momentary break from the everyday: holidays are opportunities for perfecting (and sustaining) the everyday (see Daly 2001; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). The utopian bliss of holiday is not just framed by the suspension of the rhythm and paucity of the everyday, but by the possibility of doing something better. This includes the anticipation of either the intensification or the relaxation of everyday routines and behaviour whilst on holiday, for example drinking, eating, sleeping more or better.

This moral interpretation of holidays can be understood as an expression of authenticity. Whilst the concept of authenticity has been refuted in tourism literature with regard to locality and doings of tourist subjects (Crang 1997), an existentialist reading of authenticity may be applicable to the relationality of holidays as it is on holiday that we are able to be our true selves. Authenticity is relevant to a point as long as it does not infer an essentialist reading of practice. Rather, it is the relationality of authentic family practices whilst on holiday that is relevant for our purpose. The qualities that are aspired in the authentic practices of holiday cannot be judged without reference to non-holiday. This is not simply a matter of comparison; rather, the constraint, denial and mundaneness of everyday makes holiday possible. Linking back to the television advertisement discussed at the start of this study, we do as the Redknapp’s remind us: save for, plan for, spend for (etc.) holiday. But what is missing from this particular advert, whilst being overt in most other holiday advertising, is that holidays are often for and about *family*. Thus, it is to holiday and family that we now turn our attention.

### *Holiday and Family*

The fact that tourism and holidays are usually embarked upon in the companionship of family or friends is often overlooked in the context of demarcating the familiar and the exotic in tourist studies (Sheller 2003; Carr 2011; Obrador 2012). As a number of commentators have observed, the focus of tourism literature has very much been geared towards individual experiences:

The invisibility of family is a theoretical problem, the result of the way we think of tourism, which leaves no room for relations of domesticity and thick sociality. In emphasizing loneliness and detachment, most perspectives effectively de-socialize tourist subjects, draining tourism of significant others. (Obrador 2012, 417)

Franklin and Crang (2001, 7–8) similarly identify that tourism studies have ‘tended to downplay the banal in tourism – such as the gendered domestic family life that travels and also the “ordinary” tourist’.

There are, however, some notable exceptions to the absence of family in tourism studies. Halsdrup and Larsen (2003, 23), for instance, ‘bring the performing family into tourist studies through the notion of “the family gaze”’. They argue that, through this approach, ‘photography is shown to be a performance that displays the unity and love of the family and that produces its cohesion and intimacy; it both documents families’ tourism experiences and constitutes a major performance of

tourism experiences' (25). Similarly, using ethnographic research of family holidays in Menorca, Obrador (2012) argues for a reappraisal of the 'relation between tourism, thick sociality and domesticity, reclaiming it from the world of the exotic' (403), given that 'only a handful' of writings on family holidays 'actually challenge the marginalization of family in tourism theory' (402). Carr (2011, 1) has also written of the provisioning of holidays for children, centred on the 'lives desires and needs' of children within the family (also see Barker et al. 2009). Other examples include research on historical studies of 'vacationing' and mass tourism (Löfgren 1999), as well as debates about welfare and therapeutic tourism which have integrated family and lifecourse perspectives (McCabe 2009; Conradson 2013).

Although we concur with Obrador's (2012) suggestion of the need to develop accounts of thick sociability through engaging with family holidays, we suggest that it is not just about the theorisation of travel and tourism through the lens of sociability. In developing an account of family holidays, it is not sufficient to turn the tourist gaze on those with whom we travel and to consider the sociability of *being* on holiday, as this can reify a rather limited and structural interpretation of family. Thus, family holidays are marketed as parents travelling with dependent children, but this relies on a structural interpretation rather than a practice-informed understanding of family.

Holidays blend both public and private: public in its visibility, but private in that they make sense in tandem with everyday practices. The intimacy of family holidays is contradictory in a number of ways; going away is associated with privacy and intimacy, shielded from the monotonous visibility of the everyday, although holidays are also practices of display and sharing intimate relations (Edensor 2000; Haldrup and Larsen 2003; Finch 2007). Going away allows families to carve out space for intimacy that might be restricted by the spatial and temporal (re)ordering of domestic family routines, so, for example, parents might identify the need to spend time with their children (see Daly 2001; Carr 2011). Holiday is a realm of family life open to public scrutiny from acquaintances and colleagues. Planning and experiencing holidays are acceptable topics of conversation during encounters and between acquaintances (doctors waiting rooms, hairdressers) that assumes the ubiquity of holiday and its untroubled nature – it is the ideal time, therefore trouble free, so a topic for casual conversation. The point of asking questions about family holidays is that it is diverting attention away *from* the banality and tensions of family life, but, at the same time, providing a conduit for resolving these (Franklin and Crang 2001; McCabe and Stokoe 2010).

We therefore appear to be at a contradictory point here, oscillating between holiday and everyday as both mutually supporting and in opposition to each other. In our analysis, we use this contradictory position to unsettle assumptions about family holidays that place these practices outside of everyday encounters, either with reference to spatial, temporal or moral frames. That is, we do not seek to identify holidays as a set of distinctive personal, mobility or social practices but rather consider how they are a conduit for realising relationality between family members and easing out the unevenness between the tensions and aspirations of everyday family life. To do this, we apply findings from a study of everyday family life which was not focused on holiday experiences but incorporated elements of holiday within family consumption, serving to reinforce our claims regarding the importance of holiday in everyday family practices.

### The Research Study

In drawing on data from a longitudinal ethnography with families, the findings in this paper ultimately reveal how the everyday is based around aspiration as much as it is around practice and experience; that family holidays, and everyday family life, are about planning ahead, saving up and looking forward. Ethnography, as Herbert (2000, 551) argues, ‘uniquely explores lived experience in all its richness and complexity’. Ethnography relies on observational techniques and (emotional and physical) immersion into the field (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), with a focus on ‘what people *do* as well as what they *say*’ (Herbert 2000, 552). This methodological approach is thus regarded as especially useful in examining lived experiences, and as being able to reveal the complexities and subtleties of everyday life, as well as the tensions between aspirational and actual practice (Herbert 2000).

The ethnographic fieldwork discussed in this paper involved six families living in the North West of England – the Grey, Green, Johnson, Robinson, Silva and Smith families – from 2007–2009.<sup>3</sup> This fieldwork was conducted by Sarah Marie Hall (SMH) as part of a wider project exploring everyday ethics in consumption. Families were recruited through gatekeepers from community centres, nursery and toddler groups, places of worship and youth groups, along with snowballing techniques. The project was interested in consumption practices and negotiations, and ‘families’ were defined as two or more people living together and related by kinship. For a family to take part, all members of the household had to agree to participate. The families participated in the research for different amounts of time, ranging from 4 to 24 months, and in 1–3 ‘episodes’ – periods of participation lasting 3 to 4 months with intervals of around 4 months between. Table 1 presents basic information about the six families.

**Table 1.** Basic information about the six families.

Family name	Family members	Age at start of project	Occupation	Period of participation
Green	Nicola	31–40	Part-time lawyer	4 months
	Joseph	31–40	Full-time lawyer	
	William	0–5	–	
Grey	Cath	41–50	Disability benefits	18 months
	Paul	41–50	Caretaker	
	Clare	11–15	–	
Johnson	Ann	51–60	Part-time receptionist	24 months
	David	51–60	Self employed consultant	
Robinson	Graham	16–20	Unemployed	18 months
	Emma	21–30	Unemployed	
	Tom	21–30	Disability benefits	
	Mary	6–10	–	
	Peter	0–5	–	
Silva	Ben	0–5	–	6 months
	Kim	21–30	Graphic designer	
	Paulo	21–30	Student	
Smith	Joanne	41–50	Teaching assistant	16 months
	Edward	41–50	Police officer	
	Jenny	11–15	–	
	Amy	11–15	–	

A mixture of traditional and innovative ethnographic techniques were utilised, including observations of everyday consumption activities (shopping, day trips and mealtimes), single-person and group interviews, and participatory tasks (shopping receipt analysis, tours of kitchens and kitchen cupboards, and photo diaries narrated by participants) (see Hall 2011). This multi-method approach revealed the connectivity between talking about and practising holiday (see Crang 1997), such as with the use of photographs which participants took during the research intervals, including whilst on holiday.

Family holidays was a recurring topic in participants' discussions and within everyday consumption practices, regardless of family composition, socio-economic background or preferred form of holiday-making. SMH was privy to discussions and musings about holiday, and observed families planning for and returning from holiday. In particular, the themes of anticipation (thinking about, planning and saving up) and utopian family practices strongly emerged from the analysis. It is important to note that 'holiday' was defined by the participants, and there was variation in our sample of the different ways of doing holiday. This includes annual two-week trips, weekends away, staying in hotels and caravans, holidays abroad and in the UK, and involving various combinations of family members.

These findings and the focus on family practices, we argue, bring to light the co-constitutional nature of everyday and holiday, imaginary and practice, in a way that studies of family holiday or less immersive methodological approaches have not to date. Furthermore, holidays can take a variety of forms. As we see with the family experiences in this paper, holidays might be about temporal distinction such as 'time out' from work, or they might involve geographical distinction such as 'going away' to a caravan, or flying to another country. Participants did not discern between these different ways of doing holiday, nor did they privilege one experience over the other; they tended to have a family 'ideal' or 'typical' experience. And yet all these forms of holiday have something in common; they illustrate how everyday life is inexorably linked to experiential and imaginary family holidays. The following section goes on to discuss these findings in detail.

## Analysis

### *Anticipation – Saving and Earning a Holiday*

Holidays, as we have argued, are part of the rhythm of family life, punctuating daily rituals and orientated around reconciling and transcending public and private. Contemporary concerns about reconciling work/life balance are often focussed on the daily or weekly balance between public and private (yet holidays are incredibly bound up within this reconciliation of daily practices. One way in which this is manifested is that holidays are earned through everyday endeavours:

[...] holidays are something that are really important to us, we wouldn't, I wouldn't sacrifice that at all [...] I'd rather go on holiday than have anything else or do anything else, I'd rather do without quite a lot, like nights out or anything, because it's quite important to us, particularly for Joseph because he works really hard, like he works on-going still. So like for him going on holiday is quite important. (July 2007, interview)

As Nicola Green describes above, her husband works hard (Joseph is a full-time lawyer) and as such has earned his holiday. Yet, this ideal – that you save up and earn your holiday – is more than just about it being a break. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, it is how the daily reconciliation of work and family makes sense, in that working long hours can be offset by the expectation of a holiday. Working overtime can be rationalised as it facilitates leisure time through paying for a holiday, even if it restricts everyday family encounters. Furthermore, saving for holiday is also associated with sacrifice (see Miller 1998), whereby Nicola Green described how her family will ‘do without’ in order to guarantee a holiday. Thus, the anticipation of the holiday may guide, shape, project and reposition experiences and imaginaries of everyday family practices and relationships (see Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Scarles 2009; Haldrup and Larsen 2010).

Holidays can mark (and in some cases reward) the end of a process – whether it be the school year, a stressful time at work or a period of dedicated saving – or can be a refreshing start to forthcoming events. For some respondents, this time frame is more condensed. For example, when asked about their everyday consumption practices, the Smith family stressed that they have ‘a winter and a summer lifestyle [as] alternative sides to their family life’ (April 2008, observation notes), facilitated by owing a caravan as a means of escape. During the summer, the family – Joanne, Edward and teenage daughters Jenny and Amy – go to the caravan once a fortnight and this summer routine shapes their (annual) consumption patterns. Moreover, talking about the summer engaged other family members in the research, with children (particularly in the Grey, Robinson and Smith families) talking eagerly about their plans for the summer (see Barker et al. 2009; Carr 2011). Again here we see how holidays combine the aspirational with the realisable (Smart 2007), they are anticipated and enjoyed.

Furthermore, saving up and looking forward to an annual holiday was described as a shared family activity (Obrador 2012; McIlvenny 2013). Ann and David Johnson and their son Graham talked about this anticipation when discussing their plans for going to America for their annual family holiday:

Ann: As David said, we’re off to the states, hence our big map in the corner, on holiday, and it’s something we kind of budget for in as much as it’s something that’s important to us, isn’t it?

David: yeah, but already the principle is, in each town we’re going to, in each week going up to the holiday we do an internet search on each town, and then we look at what attractions there are in the town, all the things to do etc. And then we’ve also started doing a list of things we want to buy when we go, and so we’re doing a comparison between how much are they here, how much are they in America and where’s the best place in the places that we’re going to get the best deal. (January 2008, interview)

By displaying a map on the wall and having a very visual representation of holiday planning, this practice becomes part of everyday family life (see McCabe 2005; Gale 2009). At the same time, this anticipation was on a relatively short-term time scale, which served to reinforce the desire to go on holiday. The displaying of these images and references to their holiday, and the public demonstration of their intentions (albeit in their home) served to act as a means of displaying family (Finch 2007). The forthcoming family holiday becomes something tangible and traceable, part of the routine aspect of the Johnson’s family life together. Thus, holidays are habitual as well as exceptional practices which would concur with Bissell’s observation that ‘habit also signals capacities for transformation and for being carried away’

(2011, 2650). Saving and planning for holidays are part of the routine of everyday life, but a routine that anticipates the exceptional. In particular, the anticipation of holiday is realised through everyday economic practices and the need to pay for future expenditure.

Holidays feature in daily family budgets and consumption decision-making, not just with paying for the holiday but in buying items to take and use on holiday. As the Grey family described when discussing their annual holiday to Butlins, shopping for holidays is more oriented around ‘treats’ than regular shopping, an activity that Cath and Paul’s teenage daughter Clare willingly engaged in:

- Paul: she’s also a very good shopper isn’t she, because when you go on holiday and Clare goes shopping with you, she is excellent isn’t she?  
 Cath: I don’t bother going shopping when I’m on holiday, because Clare  
 Paul: Clare does it all doesn’t she [...]  
 SMH: do you enjoy that responsibility, going shopping for you and your mum?  
 Clare: yeah, it’s good [but] I have to push the trolley and that’s the bit I don’t like [laughing]  
 Cath: we fight over the trolley don’t we? (July 2007, interview)

By taking responsibility for the holiday shopping, they later explain, Clare was granted more choice and thus was able to treat herself to more of the food items she enjoyed.

The Johnson family take this idea of the treat even further, as they anticipate spending money whilst on holiday. On their holidays to the US, David likes to take advantage of the cheaper prices:

- David: on my list for America I was going to get a new computer, a new camera, lots of different, I was going to spend about two or three thousand pounds on things and as I’ve researched it and looked into it I’ve thought ...  
 Ann: and spoken to me  
 David: we’ve talked about it and said well actually no, I’m not going to do that now, I’m going to do this, we’re going to do that. We’re going to buy Graham [son] a new computer for uni, because it’s just so much cheaper, it’s half the price. (January 2008, interview)

Being away and being able to buy items at a cheaper price justifies this expense, though Ann was keen to point out that this expenditure is a shared decision and one that she is not comfortable with David making without consulting her first. Here, Ann and David do not only discuss buying items for themselves, but also for Graham (the youngest and only one of their four children still living at home at the time of the research). This idea of treating the whole family whilst on holiday, where such items could be bought at a reduced rate, was also about making their money go further (Miller 1998; Hall 2011), and was discussed and enacted as part of their everyday consumption and decision-making practices.

For some of the families, saving up for a holiday was not an option. However, rather than not go on holiday, cheaper alternatives were sought. The Robinson family could not afford to go away on holiday because both parents, Emma and Tom, received state benefits and they had three (later four) children aged under seven to support. Knowing this, their neighbour collected vouchers for them from a national newspaper, for a week-long caravan holiday that would cost just £9.50 per person. Although this holiday was not something that was saved up for, it was earned in other ways. For example, Emma Robinson told her children that if they tidied their room during the week, they would be able to enjoy the holiday

even more. Thus, the children were earning their entitlement to enjoy their holiday. The children even described to SMH that they were looking forward to going on holiday ‘where everything is free’ (July 2008, observation notes). Interestingly, as Emma Robinson explained, the price per person was slightly higher for a caravan with heating. As they could not afford even a slight premium, they made the decision to take portable heaters with them, because the electricity in the caravan was free. Here, the family were creating as much flexibility for comfort as they could afford, whilst minimising the costs of their ‘free’ holiday.<sup>4</sup> The value of anticipating the holiday for the Robinson’s was not just the act of going away, but this anticipation was a way of disciplining everyday behaviour: holidays are a reward for hard work and good behaviour.

Therefore, holidays are more than a break from daily routines, and the ideal of saving up for a holiday is a way of manifesting family consumption patterns. Holidays are shared experiences, sometimes with other family members and friends, and as such consumption in preparation for holidays, even if carried out *for* an individual, is essentially a shared activity. However, family holidays are more than just the experience and planning of holiday, and include ideals and imaginaries, as we now discuss.

### *Utopian Family Practices*

There are two important aspects of holiday as utopian family practices. The first relates to the expectation that holiday is a way of expressing an ideal of family life. For example, the Green’s choice of holiday reflected that: ‘we’re not really sort of sun worship-y type people, so we like the sort of things where you can do things, we’ve been on safaris and that kind of thing’ (July 2007, interview). Second, and related to this ideal of authenticity, the performance of holiday is often about performing family as it *should* be. Ideally, holidays should be experienced in a ‘better’ space than everyday life, and can make way, as noted earlier, for emancipatory thoughts and actions (see Edensor 2000).

This utopian quality of holiday can be realised in a number of ways. For some people, it might be associated with luxury and excessive consumption, whereas for others, it might be through the absence of material needs and the aspiration for a healthier, or spiritual, experience (see Conradson 2013). For example, Ann Johnson describes the experience of being in the forest that she and David have recently purchased:

[...] it’s fantastic, it’s so relaxing, it’s stress free, we get out of the car, and there is no stress, there really isn’t and it’s totally different. You’re in the fresh air, it’s beautiful, it does just make you appreciate nature. (January 2008, interview)

For other families, the ideal of holiday consumption is associated with eating healthier and better quality food. The Smith family described that at their caravan, they ‘tend to cook outside more’ and ate more salads (March 2008, interview). They also did not take food from home with them to the caravan – except perishables from the fridge so as not to waste – as the preferred option was to do a food shop upon arrival. They justified this with reference to the higher quality of goods they could buy close to the caravan. When shopping in supermarkets at home, Joanne was observed buying mid-price eggs, saying ‘we tend to buy a middle of the road egg [...] we can’t afford to be righteous about what we spend our money on’. And yet when in Wales, where their caravan is sited, they buy free range ones that, according to all

the family, are ‘lovely’ (March 2008, interview) and a ‘treat’ (May 2009, interview). The ideal of eating ‘better’ is not just about being healthy, but also in the buying of supposedly better quality goods, as a signifier of being in a different place.

Holidays can also be a time to reconfigure family relationships. The Grey family do not go on holiday at the same time, sometimes it is only Cath and Clare, whilst husband and dad, Paul, stays at home due to work commitments (as a caretaker he works shifts and is often unable to find cover for extended periods of time). Cath and Clare take advantage of Paul not being there and treat themselves to ‘goodies’. As Cath explains, when she is at the caravan without Paul, she and Clare sign up for lots of evening entertainment and therefore have less time to cook:

I mean being at the caravan, it’s always an upside down situation because we go at different times obviously. If we got to shows we eat at different times, so we tend to find when we are in the caravan, personally me and Clare, seem to only have like two meals a day. (November 2007, interview)

For Cath, being at the caravan without Paul is a break from the routine, what she intuitively calls ‘an upside down situation’, of having to cook a family meal on a regular basis. Paul’s diet changes when Cath and Clare are away. He tends to eat more pasta and Cath fills up the freezer. Being on his own, Paul does not bother to cook, only doing so to make snacks like ‘sausage butties’. Clare and Cath’s trip to the caravan without Paul thus facilitates a break in routine and different consumption patterns for *all* family members. As Edensor (2000, 325) explains, holidays are often considered as a time when you can discard your ‘everyday mask’, when ‘no one will make you conform to expectations about yourself’.

However, when the family are reunited, they tend to be more ‘balanced’ in their performance of home and holiday habits:

Cath: [...] we tend to eat proper meals only two meals a day, and when Paul comes down [to the caravan] it’s usually a little bit more balanced

Paul: The only thing is, when I’m down, because we’re on holiday, we have a cooked breakfast in one form or another everyday don’t we [to Cath] (November 2007, interview)

The treat for the family when Paul arrives is to have a big breakfast, something that they do not usually have time for and which contradicts Cath’s efforts to have a break away from cooking. This demonstrates how family holiday routines are not static, but may change depending on the members present. It is by acknowledging these prosaic interactions and routines that we can more fully appreciate what family means in practice.

Although family experiences of holiday were generally very positive, but this does not mean that the utopian aspiration of holiday is always achieved. The importance of the utopian quality of holiday is that it provides a way of reflecting on everyday family practices (McCabe 2005; Gale 2009) and how these fall short in some way, without having to actually change them. For example, the expectation of eating better on holiday is implicitly identifying a disappointment with the everyday yet not seeking to directly change this. Thus, the value of holiday is that it provides a space for dealing with the dissatisfactions and frustrations of everyday. However, whilst holiday may provide an opportunity to temporally change the everyday, our data suggest that this desired change is not necessarily achieved.



**Figure 1.** Photograph of Smith family eating dinner (taken by Joanne Smith, April 2009).

The Smith family agreed to keep a photo diary whilst away on holiday during April 2009, taking 21 photographs in total. When Joanne discussed these photographs afterwards with SMH, she was embarrassed about how ‘awful’ the food looked in one particular image. Below is the photograph in question (Figure 1), accompanied by the corresponding interview transcript:

- SMH: oh, is this when you’d eaten out?  
 Joanne: no what I’d cooked  
 SMH: is that indoors? It looks good  
 Joanne: no, it was awful, that, it looks awful [...]  
 SMH: [...] I see you’ve got sweetcorn there  
 Joanne: It was done ...  
 Jenny: ... it was a quick tea  
 Joanne: I suppose really it was done as a quick tea, and really I should have taken it before I gave them the plate and I didn’t but ...  
 Jenny: ... I’d finished [her meal]  
 Joanne: yeah she’d finished  
 SMH: is that your steak with it or is that ...  
 Jenny: ... its gammon  
 Joanne: gammon, so that was absolutely awful (May 2009, interview)

As SMH described in her field diary, Joanne was conscious that the photographs of their eating at the caravan did not live up to their ideal of the salads and barbecues they described as typical of their summer habits. For Joanne, and all the Smith family, holidays were when the family were believed to eat ‘better’. It was this that justified their consumption practices when not on holiday although, as the photo diary illustrates, the difference between holiday and everyday consumption was not as significant as Joanne believed.

This is not to say that utopian narratives about holiday should be dismissed, nor is it a slight on the credibility of the participants’ accounts. Rather, these narratives and their relation to practice serve to reify the importance of family holiday to doing family, and the means by which families establish and reinstate their collective identities. However, the full spectrum of ordinary and habitual practices is not usually openly displayed; ‘crying children, non-servile teenagers and stressed parents have

no place in families' "candid camera" stories' (Haldrup and Larsen 2003, 33). As other ethnographies of tourism practices have shown, 'the realities of family life are complex, diverse and rapidly changing' (Obrador 2012, 413–4) and an in-depth, qualitative approach reveals how some experiences will be 'undoubtedly negative' (McCabe and Stokoe 2010, 1135).

There is certainly scope to expand ideas around disappointment and frustration further within literature on holiday and tourism. Although holidays are often discussed as consensual, pleasurable and enjoyable (Edensor 2000; Franklin and Crang 2001), and family relationships as tender and loving (Haldrup and Larsen 2003), it is inevitable that utopian ideals of family holidays are not always realised. As Holdsworth (2013, 9) notes, family holidays can lead to 'discord and friction', whereby tensions or conflict come to the fore as they do in everyday family life (Daly 2001; Hall 2014). For the families in this study, although the utopian ideal of holiday was regularly associated with harmonious family relations, with further discussion elements of tension would often surface.

Tensions between holidaying family members may be in part explained by the fact that preparing for holidays can be stressful and time-consuming, not to mention costly, such as buying things to take and wear, preparing and designing journeys, and deciding on which activities to do whilst on holiday. In acts of holiday preparation, there were many examples of clashes between parents and children, such as Cath and Clare Grey's aforementioned 'fight over the [shopping] trolley', or Joanne Smith getting annoyed with her daughters who 'nagged' for a boat to replace the motor home 'but are now fed up of the boat too' (May 2009, field diary). Couples also argued about their holidays plans and routines; David Johnson, for example, found it 'embarrassing' when Ann would 'play hotels off against each other, going in and asking "well, what's the cheapest rate you can give us?"' (January 2008, interview), while Kim Silva argued with husband over Paulo over his 'dirty' cigarette habit and his intentions to spend their holiday in Brazil, as he put it, 'drinking beer and smoking cigarettes wrapped in corn leaves' (April 2009, field diary).

Holidays can also be enforced periods of over-intimacy, when family members spend more time together than they otherwise might, and sometimes in more confined spaces, such as hotel rooms, apartments and caravans. This close 'corporeal proximity' (Haldrup and Larsen 2003, 33), or 'bodily co-presence' (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006, 13), can lead to tension between family members, bringing everyday family practices to the fore. Cath Grey also expressed her frustration at how holidays at the caravan were oriented around what daughter Clare wanted to do (see Carr 2011), which often meant 'standing in long queues for the entertainment each evening' (July 2007, field notes). There were also examples of conflict with wider kin, such as when Nicola and Joseph Green go on holiday with Nicola's mum, dad and sister:

Nicola: ... Joseph used to be [regimented in his eating patterns] actually and my family used to laugh at him and say, like if we were away on holiday, we'd have lunch and then he'd say 'what are we going to have for dinner?', you know, he'd be thinking about it, whereas I don't think any of us are like that, and he has stopped that a bit now, although he did say at breakfast the other day 'what shall we have for tea?' [laughing]. (July 2007, interview)

Although the conflict described above was something that they joked about, Nicola tellingly comments that none 'of us are like that', referring to her parents and

sister. Nicola seamlessly flits between discussing holiday and everyday habits, defined not by location but by family practices.

Indeed, holidays do not always have to involve travel, but also involve the suspension of usual routines (Urry 1990; Gale 2009). School holidays were a focal point of discussion for families with children, whereby the term ‘holiday’ was always used to convey the temporality of school terms. Emma and Tom Robinson struggled to keep their three children occupied during the school holidays, particularly the six-week summer break. During research visits to their home, it was noted that ‘the kids were especially lively this morning, fighting – lots of shouting and occasional acts of violence – and playing noisily with noisy toys’ (August 2008, field diary). Similar fighting was observed at the end of holiday periods when Emma and Tom were ‘visibly at the end of their tether’ (October 2008, field diary).

Emma and Tom put incidents such as this down to boredom and being stuck in the house together. Emma in particular described feeling guilty about the kids being ‘cooped up’, but there were ‘only so many times you could go to the park’, and the costs of going out regularly (petrol, food, activities) could spiral (October 2008, field diary). Here, prolonged spatial proximity of family members within the home, which often exacerbated the sense of over-intimacy, was regarded as being at the root of tensions between family members during the school holidays. Both parents believed that these spatial tensions would only be replicated if they went away.

Underlying tensions that exist in the everyday may be dispelled on holiday through doing things better, but they can also come to the surface at this time. The intensification of family life that is aimed for on holiday is not always positive, as the family data presented would suggest, but it is not these experiences and memories of holiday that families were keen to remember and discuss. Rather, they were seen as an inevitable part of holiday experiences, as they are an inevitable part of everyday family life.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have sought to advance academic accounts of family, holiday and the everyday by drawing on the ‘family practices’ framework as well as burgeoning literature on geographies of family and intimate relations. With the use of in-depth, ethnographic research with families, we have illustrated that there is greater complexity to the doing and performing of family holidays than a first look might suggest. Holidays are a means of easing out the tensions and aspirations of everyday family life, a way to perfect the everyday and also to make it more palatable. And yet whilst holidays might be enjoyed and eagerly anticipated, they can also be stressful and difficult, a time of conflict, frustration and disappointment, in part because of the time and effort that goes into planning such events, but also because of the over-intimacy of family members, in terms of both time spent together and extended periods of close physical proximity. These dystopian elements of family holidays are just as significant for what they reveal of experiencing family holidays as utopian ideas and happy memories, despite having received minimal attention within tourism literatures.

The analysis of ethnography of family practices and consumption thus reveals the diversity of holidays. Holidays are both rational and irrational: families save up for a holiday, but at the same time this might involve working longer hours and spending less times with others in order to have some time away together. Holidays are earned

and are a reward, but they are also needed, acting simultaneously as treats and sacrifices. Yet, holidays are more than a break from daily routine but are used to frame moral identities within families. The conditionality of family obligations and relations has been a key theme in the development of family practices (Finch 1989) and holidays provide a particular context for these to be revealed. Thus, rather than revealing the authenticity of moral selves, holiday practices disclose their relationality (see also Carr 2011). For example, individual likes and dislikes are acknowledged and upheld through family. In our sample, not all family members went on holiday together in order to accommodate these, whilst in others, the negotiation of what each family member wanted to do on holiday was integrated into planning these events.

The imaginary potential of holiday is reconfirmed through our data analysis, but we also see its limitations. Holiday ideals are not always realised, such as the expectation of doing things ‘better’. Similarly, the ideal of holiday is not fixed and is not the same for everyone, and trying to negotiate different aspirations and recognising that these will change over time is central to the experience and ideal of family holidays. Furthermore, this paper also reveals the contributions of family holidays to burgeoning literature on intimate mobilities. In particular, the interweaving between everyday and holiday, and how this depends on imaginary mobilities and imaginings of place, space and time are useful concepts. The mobility practices of holiday are not just associated with the physical translocation and the act of going away, but also pertain to the intimate mobilities of everyday life that are often reconfigured on holiday. Holidays are times that families might anticipate spending more time together and in doing so have to reconfigure the spatial and temporal practices of everyday activities.

Lastly, one might ask, why does this matter? Well, changing concepts of family and changing living situations in households are all too often reinterpreted through the ‘family lost’ lens, an approach that mourns a time of strong stable family. Holidays might well represent a yearning for this utopian of family but more often are more directed towards facilitating the diversity and unevenness of family life. Holidays offer a space for family negotiation and a way of reconciling tension and difference, as much as depicting unity. Our analysis also reveals the significance of holiday for family budgeting, which we might assume a more central role in times of austerity (note the reported trend for ‘staycations’ since the 2008 financial crisis – see O’Connor 2009). We should not imagine that this lessens the centrality of holiday to the everyday. Rather, it may be that imaginings of holiday serve to change or entrench certain family ideals, as well as also making family life in these presently austere times more bearable.

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## Notes

1. In the UK, the term ‘holiday’ is most commonly used and refers to the two-week summer break; we recognise that in other cultural contexts, this would be replaced by ‘vacation’.
2. As Franklin and Crang (2001) suggest, it is important not to essentialise the seriousness of academic enquiry, and we do not deny the capacity for holiday to embrace the frivolous. Holidays are also just as important for academic researchers and in seeking to make the case for research on holiday, we should not obliterate the importance of time that is not orientated around work.
3. All names have been changed and participants are instead referred to using pseudonyms.
4. We acknowledge that both saving up and working to pay for a holiday are practices integral to family and household finances and for many going on holiday is associated with debt rather than spending money or time earned.

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