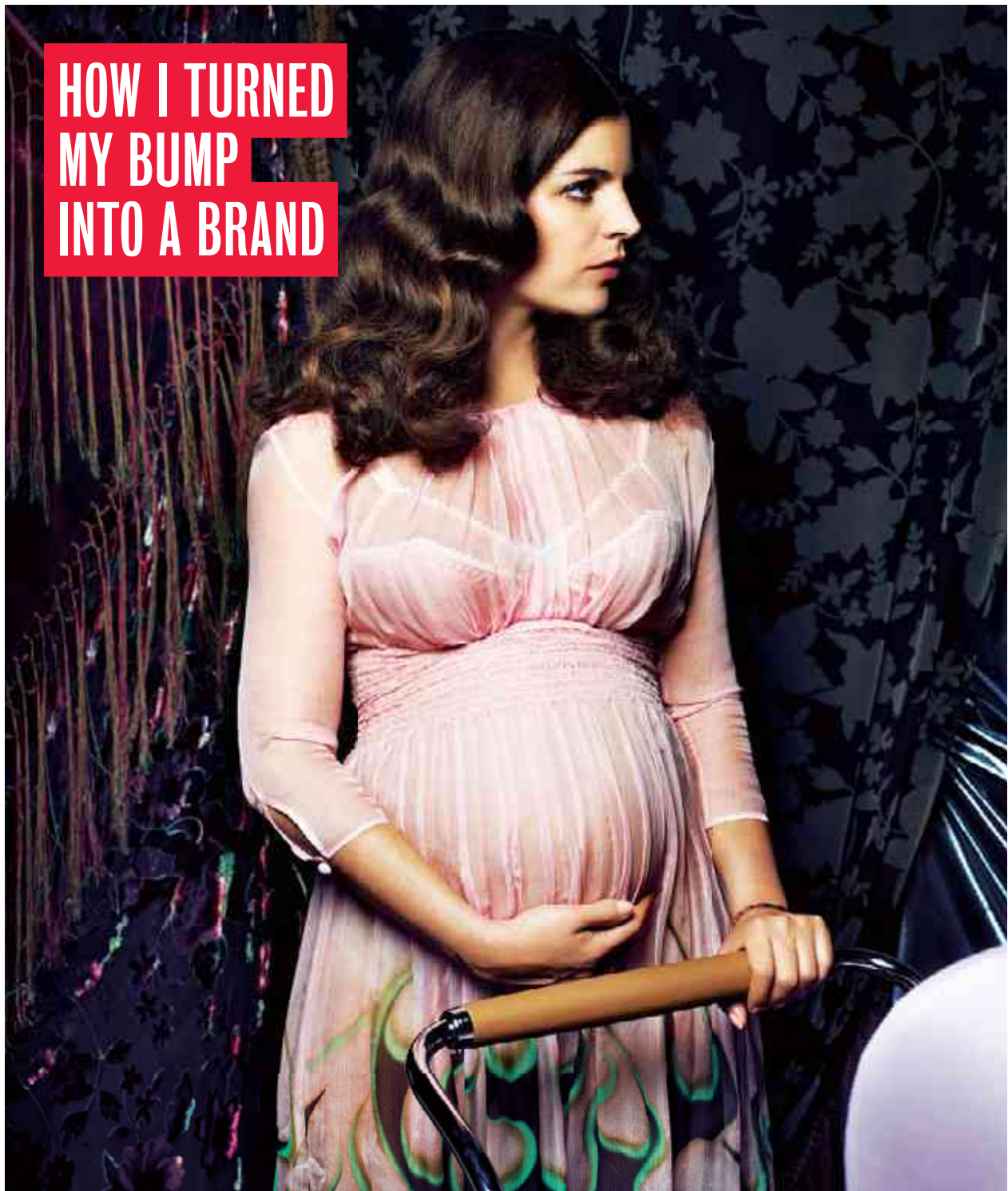


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**HOW I TURNED
MY BUMP
INTO A BRAND**



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MEET THE QUEEN OF THE INSTAMUMMIES

Forget moaning on Mumsnet: a new generation of parents are sharing photos of their idyllic family life, with perfect children in spotless cashmere – and making a living from it.
By Richard Godwin



Julia Restoin Roitfeld, the most famous of the new parenting bloggers, while pregnant with her daughter, Romy. Photographs by Mario Sorrenti

DON'T CAVE IN TO ANY DEMANDS FOR MINIONS T-SHIRTS. IT'S £79 SMOCK DRESSES ALL THE WAY: 'IT'S NON-NEGOTIABLE IN THAT DEPARTMENT'

It was a grey morning in Shepherd's Bush, west London. Anna Whitehouse, 34, the founder-editor of Mother Pukka – a multimedia platform for “people who happen to be parents” – was pushing her daughter, Mae, 2, on the swing when her phone ran out of batteries. “I would normally be scrolling through social media – one eye on the toddler, the other on Instagram – but on this occasion I was able to look around more,” she recalls. And as she surveyed the scene, she realised pretty much every parent there was glued to their phone. “They're building their empires with one hand and parenting with the other.”

Welcome to parenting, 2015. To judge from the scenes at the co-working space I share with my own toddler – the sandpit in Finsbury Park, north London – this could have happened anywhere. We're a generation who are umbilically linked to our phones, who run our lives according to complex algorithms, and who broadcast the edited highlights to convince our followers (and ourselves) it's all OK. And Whitehouse is in the vanguard, as part of a new wave of smart, sexy, social-media instaparents who are drawing on the stuff of 21st-century family life as a means of securing an income.

Whitehouse uses her phone to shoot the cheerful vlogs on Mother Pukka, such as the one where she's dressed as a Nineties rapper and Mae is dressed as a shark, and they're unloading the dishwasher. She also uses it to keep track of 9,814 Instagram followers at @Mother_Pukka (#parentingtheshitoutoflife),

as well as her Facebook, Twitter and YouTube channels. And she's so beyond questions of work-life balance, she doesn't even recognise the distinction any more, making her peace with the precarious parenting that results.

“There's an increasing number of savvy men and women working from the playground,” she says. “It's a sacrifice, yes. I won't lie. There have been times when I've been distracted and Mae has taken a tumble and I think, ‘I have to stop this.’ But, then, the alternative is not being with her – a decision loaded with financial, emotional and logistical



implications. There's no ideal. We're doing the best we can with the tools available.”

Of all the tools, it's Instagram – the photo-sharing site that recently overtook Twitter in terms of unique users – that parents are turning to in their millions.

The combination of low effort (it's really easy to scroll through with one hand while feeding a mewling infant) and high reward (as long as you have enough followers to “heart” your own pictures) have made it a hit even with those who simply use it as a private means of sharing photos with family and friends. Gramming photos fits quite nicely into the tiny time slots of parenting you get, giving you a sense of achievement as you abandon other projects. And for those with alluring enough lifestyles, it's increasingly viable as a business in itself, with brands currently spending an estimated \$1 billion (£658 billion) per year on sponsored Instagram posts.

The queen of the instamums is the New York-based French model Julia Restoin Roitfeld, 35, who signalled her intent with a raunchy underwear shoot when she was pregnant with her daughter, Romy. She now has 224,000 followers for her own Instagram feed (@juliarestoinroitfeld) and 34,000 more

for her parenting site, Romy and the Bunnies (@romy_thebunnies). “I basically spend my whole time at work online,” she tells me. “Instagram isn’t even fun any more; it’s basically a work tool. It’s very time-consuming.”

Restoin Roitfeld is the daughter of Carine Roitfeld, the flamboyant former editor of ➔



PREVIOUS SPREAD: MARIO SORRENTI/ART PARTNER LICENSING. THIS PAGE: EMILY GRAY, ZOE ADLERSBERG

French *Vogue*, and a fashion sensibility runs through the site, which is a bit like a parenting version of Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop. It features an online shop (Stella McCartney Kids faux-fur coat for \$205?), handsomely illustrated parenting advice from the likes of Drew Barrymore and Kim Kardashian ("Jet lag can be tough to adjust to, especially for a baby," says the mother of North), and original shoots of fashion-forward infants, including Romy herself. She has recently collaborated on a capsule collection with LoveShackFancy and has further plans to monetise her content.

Restoin Roitfeld was inspired to create the site when she was pregnant. She turned to the internet for advice and felt alienated by the impenetrable neurosis of conventional parenting sites. "All the other websites I found were a bit ... *démodé*," she says. "The only maternity clothes I could find were boring and mumsy. It didn't fit with my life. The mums I know are active and stylish and hard-working, and there wasn't a platform for that." Once, she declared she would like to be like the American über-housewife, Martha Stewart, only sexier, and she's just as happy to post pictures of herself in fetish attire for a Hallowe'en party as she is to share pictures of Romy as a skeleton. "I really want to show that you don't need to be mumsy to be a good mum."

It's a clear break with the Mumsnet generation, who fill their chatrooms with anxious, acronym-filled discussions about tetanus jabs, school admissions and a million variants of the exchange, "AIBU?" "YANBU!" (Mumsnet-ese for: "Am I being unreasonable?" "You are not being unreasonable!"). The new generation are less concerned with ideas of perfection, and more with success, happiness and inspiration. It means the parental internet is, on the surface at least, a cheerier place. It also means that there are some pretty impossible examples to aspire to.

"I think my customers relate to me through my children," says Celia Muñoz, the founder of La Coqueta, a Spanish children's clothing store in Hampstead that also sells online. Her brood of models consists of Flavia, 7, Lucas, 6, Siena, 5, Bosco, 4, and Hugo, 3, all button-cute, immaculately dressed and, apparently, trilingual (Muñoz is Spanish; her husband is Dutch and works in finance). "We knew we wanted to have children very quickly and we wanted them to be around the same age, so I literally had children every 12 months," she explains. "Please don't laugh!" When I ask if anything

in their life has not gone to plan, she says, "Yes. We wanted to have six children."

Muñoz says that she is by nature quite private, but she soon realised that Instagram was an easy way of reaching a wider customer base – and the fact that her children appear to live in a Peter Pan dreamland, all cosy bedtime stories and wholesome rambles on the heath,

certainly helps. When they grow out of it she will stop snapping them, but until then she will produce a photo album of their lives, she says. There's a definite element of escapism in her feed, a retreat into a pre-digital idyll that's at odds with the 21st-century technology that allows her to promote it. Even if the scenes are ripe for parody (see @imaginary_quinoa for a brusque skewering of the Instagram dream), for many parents, they seem to prompt enchantment rather than envy. "Instagram seems to soothe people. It can be very frustrating to be a mum sometimes, but Instagram connects you with a different reality. That can be quite helpful," says Muñoz.

Her top tips for managing her mop-haired platoon are military planning (all days should follow more or less the same programme); cooking and freezing all meals one month in advance; restricting TV and gadgetry to a bare minimum; eliminating everything except work and family; giving the children her undivided attention when she is with them.

Oh, and when it comes to dressing them, don't cave in to any demands for Minions T-shirts or Spider-Man pyjamas. It's £79 smock dresses and £49 knits all the way.

"It's non-negotiable in that department," she says with a laugh. "Fortunately, my three boys aren't very interested in what they wear. My two daughters are very specific, but luckily we share a similar aesthetic."

Another source of infantspiration is Little Spree, a website founded by fashion editor Sarah Clark soon after the birth of her immaculately dressed twins, Tabitha and Marlow. "I now have a five-year-old son who describes anything not cashmere as, 'It hurts!'" she jokes. Her Instagram feed (@littlespree) is a seamless fusion of aspiration and solace. "I'm not sure how much parenting has changed, but I definitely think people have a lot more insight into other people's parenting techniques now," she says. She runs Little Spree with her friend, Nicky Hornsby-Clifton. "We're not necessarily going to share the more mundane aspects of parenting on our Instagram feed, simply because we don't think

our followers would be interested in messy bedrooms, meltdowns and piles of laundry. But we hope we don't present our lives in a way that is nauseatingly smug either." She admits it's a fine line: "The occasional self-deprecating hashtag can go a long way."

Meanwhile, Leonora Bamford, 34 (she's part of the dynasty behind the JCB and Daylesford Organic empires), sells multivitamins, organic food and infant probiotics through her site, My Baba.

Here, the cute pix are interspersed with more in-depth advice. "The internet is often the first point of contact for medical issues, and that's why I think we've been so lucky at My Baba to have been in the right place at

HELENE SANDBERG



'OUR FOLLOWERS WOULDN'T BE INTERESTED IN MESSY BEDROOMS, MELTDOWNS AND PILES OF LAUNDRY'

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the right time, with expert content our readers can rely on," she says.

Whether this advice – “Can Our Children Really Be Stressed? 8 Stress-Busting Foods to Help” – cuts through, or merely adds to, the confusing morass of the web, I’m not sure. But it’s interesting that it offers advice on the very activity it exacerbates: internet usage. [Bamford](#) admits that her children (she declines to give their names) hate seeing her constantly swiping at her phone. “I remember, age 10, begging my parents every day for a year for a Sega Mega Drive. Now it seems the norm to be tapping away on tablets from a much younger age. A friend of mine gave her goddaughter a book for her birthday and, I kid you not, she started swiping at the cover, thinking it was an iPad.”

Then there’s the smaller but growing cohort of fatherhood accounts on Instagram – such as [@mikerunt](#), which big-hearted bike-fanatic Mike Quinones uses to celebrate his son Micah, who was born with Down’s syndrome, and [@dad_beets](#), which consists of the remarkable sandwiches that Los Angeles chef Nick Neves makes for his two boys. Fathers on social media tend to be more straightforwardly celebratory than mothers are, since fathers generally benefit from lower expectations and therefore guilt levels (“Dads want applause; mums want absolution,” someone wise once said). But as nurturing roles become more fluid, all are prone to misinterpretation.

It often goes like this. You’re feeling harassed. You didn’t manage to get your work done in your son’s 90-minute nap window. Your friend stood you up because their daughter has a cold. So now you’ve got to create a cheerful mood all by yourself – but there was one moment in the sandpit where your son was a total cherub and the autumn light was falling just so, and you managed to snap a little picture of him in his bobble hat. You put it out there. Your parent-friends and family “like” it (of course, your own mum is on Instagram, too). But it’s always liable to be interpreted otherwise. Occasionally, you might get a snide comment, although in my experience this doesn’t happen much on Instagram, where there’s an unwritten “Think happy thoughts” rule. But it sometimes comes out when you meet an acquaintance face to face and they say something like, “Oh, I thought you guys were the perfect family or something.” And you realise that what was you making the best of it has been interpreted as a brag.

Because it works the other way, too. You

open your feed for a photographic relief in between nappies and Bing, and see five adorable children in expensive knitwear romping around a house you could never afford (and certainly never afford to keep so tidy).

But #instaenvy gets to the best of us. Even Restoin Roitfeld, whose own feeds appear to be the pinnacle of parental glamour. “You see

these pictures of mums with kids looking so perfect, but you don’t really know what’s going on. It’s an illusion, because you see one picture and you think it’s their whole life, but it adds a lot of pressure.” Does she not see that her own Instagram is likely to inspire those feelings in others? “I don’t feel as if I’m doing this to show off,” she says. “I just have the best time when I’m with Romy and I like to share that.”

In fact, when I probe a little further, she admits to feeling a near-constant guilt over her choices. “Oh, this is the drama of my life ... You always find something to feel guilty about, even when you’re doing everything you can do. Like when Romy is asleep, I don’t see why it’s a problem to hire a babysitter and go out if she has no idea that I’m going out. But a lot of people do. It’s not as easy as it looks, for me and for the other mums.” She prefers to see Romy and the Bunnies as a “support network” for mothers like her, but admits this is sometimes at odds with her need to make the site more commercial so it generates enough revenue through sponsorship deals with brands.

Despite the appearance that she has family, work and social life in perfect balance, she feels the battles have not been won. “It’s easier for me because I’m my own boss, but I find it very hard to work with people who don’t have kids,” she says. “They don’t understand why you have to go home at 6pm. Or if I’m doing a modelling job and it requires three nights away, people often say, ‘Why don’t you just take her with you?’ A lot of people don’t want to hire mums because of that. But actually, when you

are a mum, you’re so much more efficient.”

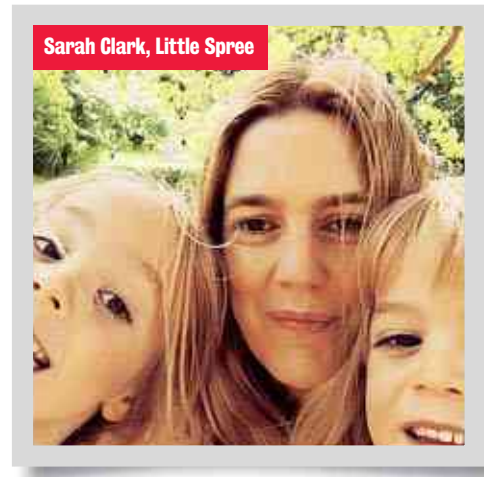
Much of the additional pressure comes from being a single parent, she admits (she does not live with Romy’s father, the Swedish model Robert Konjic, who occasionally posts his own devotional pictures of Romy at [@robertkonjic](#)). She also misses the support network of her immediate family, who mostly live in France. “It’s most difficult during the weekend, because you have no one to share the good sides of being a parent. We wake up at 8am – who are we going to go out and have brunch with? That’s probably why I share

more pictures on social media – you don't have anyone else to react immediately.”

For Anna Whitehouse, however, social media has helped to allay the guilty feelings associated with motherhood, as well as providing an alternative revenue stream (she has partnered with Avon and Hewlett-Packard and receives ad revenue from YouTube, but says it's too early to tell whether she'll ever be able to rely on it). Mother Pukka is cheerily forgiving in its approach. Her cooking tips include the “fake bake” (how to make a supermarket cake look like a *GBBO* entry), and she likes to share #parentfails (the DJ Fearné Cotton has been a prominent supporter). Whitehouse is half-Dutch and says she was inspired by the “gung-ho” style of parenting in Holland, where children don't spell the end of fun. “I think there's less guilt as parents realise it's OK to reclaim part of their former lives and not be dedicated to their kids 24/7,” she says. “It's OK to launch that cupcake business or run a successful blog. Maybe five years ago the guilt was more common, but I think there's a general consensus that we're all doing the best we can and the kids are all right.”

She also believes people use Instagram in a more sophisticated way than many imagine: younger parents tend to be more accepting of unconventional family set-ups, respect others' life choices and their means of expressing them. “I agree it's not real life, but I share my real life with real people. This is our edited version; I think most people realise that. If someone wants to post reams of photos of their kid, so be it – you can always unfollow. Where Instagram gets scary is the whole ‘50-takes-to-get-a-selfie’ element. I know one mother who photoshops the mess out of her house and uploads that image.”

When I raise the envy issue with Muñoz, she makes me feel a little mean for entertaining such thoughts. “I am a very happy person. I have a very loving husband and I have very wonderful children. I come from a close family and this is what's important to me. I'm sure that what I post can have a negative impact, but generally my posts generate a lot more positive comments than negative. But like anything in life, you just focus on what makes you happy. Let that be their problem.” ■



‘I KNOW ONE MOTHER WHO PHOTOSHOPS THE MESS OUT OF HER HOUSE AND UPLOADS THAT IMAGE’