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Share with care: negotiating children's health and safety in sharenting practices

Introduction

Over the past ten years, a new term has been included in the vocabulary of social scientists who study social media: *sharenting*. It refers to the practice of sharing contents (e.g., picture, videos, and texts) concerning children by their parents or guardians in online settings (Nottingham, 2019). Sharenting is a contested practice as it potentially affects the construction of children's digital identity before they can reach the age of consent. Therefore, a full definition of sharenting should include its potentially harmful characteristics as the parent or guardian shares identifying and sensitive information of minors, which are thus often overexposed online by the same adults who should protect them. The practice is a form of parental mediation among others (e.g., Leaver, 2017) that needs to be taken into consideration in its actual local and global manifestations and in its future potential development in order to envision risky and harmful practices, and protect minors. Furthermore, sharenting needs to be studied for its conjunctions with general practices and meanings of sharing shaped by social media platforms policies and by contemporary cultural shifts (see, for instance, Katrini, 2018) which show frictions with

privacy and security needs (e.g., Miekle, 2016; John, 2017) and outline new dynamics of power and resistance between social media platforms companies and users (see, for instance, Fuchs, 2013).

The practice is part of the emerging digital cultures enabled by affordances provided by new media technologies of which social media platforms constitute an example. In this respect, sharenting is best categorized as a new digital culture of parenting, bringing the practice within the purview of media and cultural studies.

Sharenting has been explored as a practice both in general (e.g., Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2017) and in relation to privacy issues in particular (Chalklen and Anderson, 2017; Kumar and Schoenebeck, 2015). The topic has also received attention from the media, even if in a sporadic way (e.g., Hsu, 2019). Sharenting practice has been considered from different perspectives such as law, media, communication and cultural studies, educational sciences, computer science, childhood studies and more recently criminology, mostly with exploratory, descriptive studies (for an overview, see Lavorgna et al., 2022).

Social media studies have explored different types of parents' online communities, for instance, communities addressing mothering in general and children's special needs or education (e.g., Haslam et al., 2017; Johnson 2015). However, an articulated and comparative analysis of how sharenting practices occur and are questioned in those

communities is lacking. Issues such as the privacy vs openness tension (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017) about sharing content concerning children's health and wellbeing by parents, and the influence of parenting cultures (Faircloth, 2014) on this tension have been explored only fragmentarily. Therefore, there is a need to better understand how sharenting practices and risk perceptions are influenced by different parenting cultures. This paper addresses these issues and offers an empirical contribution to the study of sharenting in online Facebook communities. It focuses on specific topics of interest for parents, such as children's wellbeing and health and aims to describe and analyse: (1) how online and offline parenting cultures affect sharenting practices; (2) how the consequences of sharenting are addressed in online communities; and (3) how the privacy vs openness tension about sharing contents concerning children's health and wellbeing is negotiated by parents with regards to their own and children needs in online communities even in terms of digital security.

Moreover, this paper aims to discuss the extent to which the issue of sharenting and the dynamics presented in this study are in continuity within wider dynamics of social media sharing and non-sharing. Therefore, beside the contribution to current understanding of how parents negotiate risks and benefits in sharenting practices and to raising awareness around a potentially harmful practice, this paper contributes to the wider debates on the practices

and discourses about sharing in digital media advancing a relatively recent, but socially relevant, research path.

Literature review

Sharenting is an umbrella term for different practices, from sharing children's pictures on Instagram (e.g., Ranzini et al., 2020) to sharing children's data on pregnancy apps (e.g., Leaver, 2017).

Sharenting can be included in the study of the wider practice of sharing in the digital era that traces, on one side, the introduction of cultures of self-disclosure in the 20th century, and their subsequent 'normalization' (e.g., John, 2017), and that claims, on the other side, the need of developing ethics of visibility (e.g., Meikle, 2016).

A wide, interdisciplinary scholarship on mediated parenting and the sharing of children information online by parents has emerged (see, for instance, Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2017). However, even if studies on parents using the resources of the web to show parental pride, or simply to discuss and share parenting concerns and practices only started emerging a few years ago, they appear fragmented (Lupton et al., 2016).

Leaver and Nansen (2017) observe that sharenting seem to be dominated – on one hand – by the parents or relatives' desire to share routinely children's milestones and cuteness by mainly visual contents (Kumar and Schoenebeck, 2015), and, on the other hand, by commercial forms of sharenting in order to gather views and possibly build a 'brand' (Abidin, 2017). Sharenting is thus often addressed with criticism for a lack of consideration toward the consequences for minors' digital identity and safety. However, critics do not consider sufficiently that sharenting presents a *bi-frontal* nature: indeed, it also allows parents to access support systems, find networks of relevant others, or even earn an income. This bi-frontal feature is at the center of our reflection as it concerns the negotiations and strategies that parents perform in their everyday life juggling between digital risks (mostly for their children) and the needs of supportive networks (for themselves or their children).

The cultures of intensive parenting and the discourses it generates (e.g., Hays 1998; Faircloth et al., 2013) have an important role in defining sharenting practices. Intensive parenting disposes a set of strict standards on child rearing by which children become the only legitimate concern of their parents. From a societal perspective, parents are thus considered solely responsible for child rearing, and this legitimates the representation of 'bad parenting' as the cause of all social problems (e.g., Lavorgna et al., 2023; Gillies,

2008). The literature shows that social media are spaces in which discourses about good or bad motherhood or mothering practices are performed and constructed (e.g., Gray, 2013).

Moreover, sharenting has a gendered nature because mothers are more prone to share contents online (e.g., Kang, 2012; Fox and Grubbs, 2019). Participation in online communities allows mothers to develop social capital while they are socially isolated or marginalized from due to the phases of the children's life (e.g., newborns) or their health (e.g., children with autism or physical disabilities) (e.g., Chalklen and Anderson, 2017). Das (2017) suggests the need to understand 'the formation of new lines of maternal social capital, inclusion, and exclusion online', to develop a critique of affective and immaterial labor, to examine how the mothers' digital participation contributes to the formation of networked maternal audiences. These communities become affective networks, and they act as drivers for parents towards a continued sharing and engagement as the value of the network is exactly based on the practices of sharenting. For this reason, understanding resistance practices, which try to limit data sharing concerning children, has been described as necessary and a new path for research (Leaver, 2017). At the same time, the communities can be vehicles of gender stereotypes concerning parenting (e.g., Douglas and Michaels, 2005).

The literature on privacy and social networking has discussed a 'privacy paradox' created by users who disclose personal information on social media platforms although they express their concern about privacy issues and are not at all naïve about how to develop protective practices (e.g., boyd and Hargittai, 2010; Masur and Scharkow, 2016; Young and Quan-Haase, 2013). For instance, Chalklen and Anderson (2017) explored this paradox among Australian mothers on Facebook. They explored how Facebook's affordances allow mothers to easily share information about their children, and how the use of these affordances is shaped by the concern for risks for their privacy. The study developed different users' profiles based on their strategies for negotiating the disclosure of information while posting images of their young children, and found that mothers mainly negotiate ways to protect their privacy while enjoying the benefits of openness. Overall, participants considered Facebook a resource to connect with other parents, find social and emotional support, access information for parenting, and solve problems; however, to seek information or advice they need to share anecdotes and personal information about their children (Chalklen and Anderson, 2017). Interestingly, participants reported a lack of family and community support as a reason to search for connecting through Facebook with others who are considered able to provide more congruent support to their needs. In this way they aim to avoid relatives' judgment and dispute about their parenting (Haslam et al.,

2017), and thus reduce their sense of insecurity and guilt as inexpert parents (Sullivan-Bolyai and Lee, 2011). Hence, it is not surprising that parents, and in particular mothers with young children or with children affected by health issues are more prone to use platforms like Facebook to find support and advice (e.g., Ammari et al. 2014).

In support of this understanding of the privacy vs openness tension, the study of Locatelli (2017) on breastfeeding discourses on Instagram shows strategies enacted by parents to protect their children's privacy. This confirms a granular approach to privacy management by parents already showed by previous research (e.g., Litt and Hargittai, 2016). In other words, the relationship between privacy and publicness can be represented as a continuum with different degrees of management affected by several factors.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to note that recent literature has also stressed how parents seem to face ambivalence concerning the concept of 'good parents': While they are 'good parents', successful in connecting with other to seek for help, support, advice, and collecting the benefits of SNS for their parenting, they are perceived as 'bad parents' because of their disclosures of children private information, the creation of their children premature digital footprint that is and will be mainly outside of their current and future control (Garmendia et al., 2021). In this context, the concept of *privacy stewardship* (Kumar and Schoenebeck, 2015: 9) is useful: it defines the 'responsibility that parents take

on when deciding what is appropriate to share about their children online and ensuring that (others) respect and maintain the integrity of those rules'. On this responsibility even weighs the awareness (or non-awareness) of children's current and future vulnerabilities (e.g. Fox and Hoy, 2019). Furthermore, in their study of the antecedents of parents' sharenting on Instagram, Ranzini and colleagues (2020) demonstrate that situational or general privacy concerns do not influence parents' sharenting behavior. It is instead a parent's supportive network and frequent sharing habits which make frequent sharenting more likely. However, efforts to understand antecedent behaviors or characteristics that have a causal effect on sharenting have some limits.

From our perspective, by applying a sociological interactionist framework, sharenting practices and actors can be seen as immersed in a flux of interactions: parents negotiate their decisions in interaction with other social actors, who are both online and offline. For this reason, parenting cultures – how they are situationally constructed and reconstructed, and how their meanings are negotiated – should be studied to understand the processes and practices of sharenting. Nevertheless, the role of structural dimensions (e.g, the role of social media policies) in shaping parents' experience cannot be neglected.

Our contribution

This paper draws on insights from data generated as part of the interdisciplinary ESRC-funded research project *ProTechThem - Building Awareness for Safer and Technology-Savvy Sharenting* which addresses gaps in the sharenting literature**.** Among other things, the project looks at both Italian-speaking (Italy based) and English-speaking (UK based) social network sites to classify and assess current sharenting practices and online risky behaviours by parents and guardians. Based on some of the *ProTechThem* project's results, this paper hypothesizes that sharenting practices and risk perceptions are influenced by different parenting cultures, which need to be better understood. To be sure, we do not aim to demonize sharenting as a whole or to stigmatize parents who are active sharers. Rather, we aim to contribute to efforts to raise awareness around a practice that can be socially harmful in some of its manifestations. More specifically, in the context of this contribution we are interested in understanding how parents negotiate risks and benefits of sharenting, and how they protect their children's digital identity and control their social media footprint. More specifically, through a sociological interactionist approach and following the Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) methodological approach, this paper discusses (1) how online and offline parenting cultures affect sharenting practices; (2) how the consequences of

sharenting are addressed in online communities; (3) and how the privacy vs openness tension about sharing contents concerning children's health and wellbeing is negotiated by parents with regards to their own and children needs.

By drawing on these topics this paper allows tracing connections between sharenting and sharing practices and discourses in digital and social media (e.g., John, 2017; Lange, 2018).

Data were collected in the course of an innovative triangulation of passive digital ethnography and both qualitative content and visual analysis of posted material in a purposive sample of social media groups (Kozinets, 2010; Pink, 2016; Lavorgna et al., 2023). In particular, this paper analyzes the findings of the monitoring of two public, open Facebook groups: one in the UK (with 277.300 users) and one in Italy (2.200 users) concerning sleep advice and training for children, where children's health and wellbeing were discussed through a frequency of dozens of posts daily. In comparison with other groups, these groups were selected because of their publicness, frequency of posts, number of users, topics' coherence.

To conduct this analysis, we observed research participants in their online interactions, annotated the material collected (i.e., textual and audiovisual material) through a detailed observation grid we developed from monitoring these groups, and analysed the data thematically. In line with the ethical approval obtained for this study, we did not interact

with users. We collected information concerning groups' rules, sharers, their children, contents shared (texts, pictures, videos), reactions of other users to their posts and the contents they shared in reply, the reactions of moderators, sharers' reactions to other users' comments, sharers' perceived motivations, debates on sharenting itself, interactions between users (both inside and outside the main platform analysed), and the specific jargon used about sharenting. The passive ethnography of these two groups lasted four months (January-April 2022). In addition, a search for specific posts concerning directly how sharenting topics were discussed in these groups was conducted by analysing posts from 2016 to 2022 through searching options on Facebook and keywords: 'shar*', 'risk*', 'safety', 'safe', 'dangerous*', 'privacy'.

For this type of ethnography, ethical standards are still under refinement, with variations across disciplines and countries (e.g., Lavorgna and Holt, 2021). Some standards traditionally applied by researchers and ethical boards are inadequate to this framework (e.g., Lavorgna and Sugiura, 2022). Data were anonymized immediately after collection and we did not profile research participants according to any potentially sensitive information (e.g., personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs). For concerns related to users' anonymity, we do not use personal identifiers. Similarly, when we use some quotes as examples we are slightly

changing the wording to make them unsusceptible to retrieval via a simple browser search, in line with beat practices for digital research (e.g., Social Data Lab, 2019). Anonymized data have been stored in the UK Data Service open repository.

Results

Users and sharers of these two Facebook groups are mostly mothers of babies. During our ethnographic observation, they mainly posted questions about manifest or potential sleeping problems and training procedures to improve sleeping. Less frequently, mothers posted questions about nutrition or health issues, which did not concern sleep. Posts initiated interactions with other users, which could last a few hours or some days. We were able to observe some important differences between the British and the Italian Facebook groups selected. The UK-based group had 277.300 users, with dozens of posts each day. This group is wider in comparison to other local (national) groups. Because English language is the common language, many mothers from different English-speaking countries (and so from different continents) or others who are also able to speak English language interact on it. This makes the audience wider and not only local/national. Given these

characteristics, a frequent and accepted practice by users was to post a question with an accompanying picture of the baby, to characterize the post in an original way. These posts were usually accompanied by the phrasing: ‘Pic for attention’. In other words, the picture worked like a ‘hook’ useful to retrieve the posts later among the many others and to attract the attention of the other users.

We found that health and personal information concerning parents and children were detailed in such contexts where many mothers’ profiles allowed a precise geographical location, often accompanied with personal information (e.g., the current employer, job address, etc.). A small number of posts was by mothers who shared pictures only for fun or pride. However, these posts received a lot of appreciation and positive reactions and, often, other mothers replied by sharing pictures of their babies in the thread. In addition, the mothers on this group shared not only pictures but also videos to show to the other users the behaviour of the baby or to show a practice by the mum or a routine (e.g., bath time). ‘I am at a loss’ or ‘at loss’ is a frequent statement about their feeling of failure in managing babies’ issues and their urgent need of help from the peers.

The Italy-based group had about 2500 users. Compared with the UK-based group, there are fewer users and interactions between users and no posts with pictures of children. Posts are usually textual in form of written questions and sleep-related issues, and information

concerning children is less detailed and ‘personalized’, so that sharenting concerning personal and health information is less frequent. Data saturation about this group was reached rapidly because posts, behaviors, interactions were often similar.

These last aspects reflect not only different shareting practices and cultures about online safety between the two groups, but also social situations with different social premises. For both the UK and the Italy based groups, it was observed that sharenting is more likely in comments which reply to posts where children’s information, photos, or videos were shared.

The interactions between users were usually supportive and friendly, in particular in the UK-based group, with dozens of comments from other users offering practical help and suggestions for solving the problem, and with appreciation, reciprocity, and care for the sharer herself. Mainly there was no presence of offline interactions between users, therefore interactions and relations were exclusively established within the same online group. Overall, the social situations we observed present combinations of online self-help and social support, similar to a virtual community of care (e.g., Burrows et al., 2000) and a virtual community of practice (VCoPs) (e.g., Chiu et al., 2006; Dube’ et al., 2006). Posts like the one exemplified below were frequent and show the value of online self-help and

social support for these mothers, and the affective environment of these networked communities.

My [child] just turned [age] today and I am excited to celebrate [them]. I want to thank you all so much for responding. You have been so supportive on this first post I made here. It helps a lot when we all have outside support from people we may not know. I hope all of you have a great day today. Hug your babies and your children a little extra today, just because. Good morning mamas!!! [source: UK-based group]

In this virtual space, some mothers, after giving birth, often faced the process of identity adjustment and loneliness in the restricted space of their homes with new and unexpected issues concerning the child body and health and their personal and social life, search for and give help. Consider for instance the following snippet:

help! [food] allergies – sleepy mommy. My [age] weeks old just tested positive for dairy allergies. I mainly pump/breastfeed. But now I supplement with formula, I don't make enough. The doctor recommended [treatment name] but my [child] doesn't like it. Recommendations please! Photo so we don't get lost! [source: UK-based group]

Emoticons and updates, personal details and affective and colloquial styles create a social situation of mutual trust and solidarity, and in which material information is shared and re-shared to solve health and behavioral issues, and doubts about how to parent as others do.

Regarding online and offline parenting cultures and the impact on sharenting practices, results highlight the pressure of offline parenting cultures like intensive parenting which, in itself, determines involvement in these groups to find a balance between external expectations (from offline relatives, friends, and professionals), internal expectations (self-representations of their own parenting), and online parenting resource. Fragments like the following are once again frequent and highlight the attempt to construct a shared, horizontal, collective responsibility and offer some relief from the requirements and expectations of intensive parenting.

Hey mamas! Very anxious first time mom here! My [child] is [age] months and I've finally been able to get her on some sort of schedule and s/he's finally sleeping 4-5 hour stretches at night. However, last night was the first time s/he's ever slept in her room by herself. S/he's right across the hall from me and I can see into their room when I look up from my bed. My question is 'how can I make myself not want to get up every five seconds to check on [them]?' […]. I just need some peace of mind. [source: UK-based group]

I need help. I have a [age] month old. S/he does nothing but cry and winge and especially when I leave the room s/he just screams. […] I am a single mum and do everything by myself so I am exhausted. […] baby is

going to a child minders because I physically cannot cope anymore. I am going insane and it's affecting my mental health drastically. What am I supposed to do? [source: UK-based group]

While trying to avoid judgment from offline social circles, mothers measure the right amount of concern and anxiety about their performance by comparing their own concerns and anxieties - and so their behaviors and decisions – with other parents absent from the offline communities.

Our analysis of sharenting practices and discourses also revealed how parents negotiate care and online security needs. For instance, even if many mothers in the UK-based group share pictures of their children with often the name and detailed information on health issues, behaviors, habits, and routines, the issue of privacy is not completely neglected. As soon as the climate of trust in the group cracks, the mothers implement strategies to protect their privacy and that of their children.

Just wanted to clarify I deleted my post about my [age] month old naps. Not because of […], not even because of the woman claiming I am neglecting my child. Someone shared it and I cannot see who shared my post, to where, and what they said. I feel is not okay I understand this is a public group but sharing to your own page or otherwise should not be tolerated. [source: UK-based group]

Is this a public group? I guess is there a way to make it that posts can't be shared? I made a post asking about a sleep training course with a picture of my [child] and someone shared it but I couldn't see who because their privacy settings didn't allow it… I do not approve of that. I deleted the picture and will no longer share pictures in this group. […] Am I being paranoid? [source: UK-based group]

I have always blanked the faces out because there are thousands of people in this group […] so I didn't like the idea of all these people seeing the full picture. [source: UK-based group]

I like that our posts do not have to be approved or denied to be posted. I do not mind the type of questions posted […] but the ability to share should be turned off. [source: UK-based group]

This kind of active care and attention to prevent re-sharing of images – and thus control children's digital footprints – and strategies parents adopt even when they do not seem vigilant are confirmed by other studies on tensions between openness and privacy concerns (e.g., Chalklen and Anderson, 2017).

Some examples of strategies concern the choice to post pictures taken from the Internet (not pictures of their own babies), and memes. Mothers with greater concern for privacy share only questions and (few) personal information. Those more 'open' and confident share photos but with attention to those who then re-share and reuse the contents trying to adopt micro-strategies in their everyday life and circumvent platforms' and administrators'

limits. However, it is only partially possible to control the use made of those contents, as evidenced by the response of an administrator to a mother who raised the problem of privacy in the UK-based group. Consider, for instance:

> Hi, Admin and group founder here. Even if the group was private, anyone can screen grab a post or copy a picture. There is nothing I can do about that. It is your decision what you post and I absolutely understand you want some privacy. I'd encourage you to use a stock image […] if you aren't comfortable with one of your baby but still want the post to be easily findable. It is not as cute as your own baby pic for sure, but this is still an online group with over 138K members globally so it is not private. [source: UK-based group]

Navigating through these pitfalls and exercising the *privacy stewardship* (Kumar and Schoenebeck, 2015) through profile 'pruning' such as editing, unfriending and removing tags, and adjusting privacy settings (boyd and Hargittai, 2010) requires a certain amount of time and labor, time that always young mothers or mothers who work do not have within the social limitations and isolation they experience while caring for infants, and labor that is unpaid and/or uncompensated digital labor. Furthermore, the privacy vs openness tension becomes in this context also a material paradox, as users cannot control all uses of their posts outside the platform (e.g., screenshots).

The privacy vs openness tension becomes even more evident when sharenting happens in groups concerning children's health like those considered by this study. While parents look for support and advice and are thus focused on benefits they can receive through openness for themselves and their children, children's digital fingerprint remains on the periphery. However, in this process, children are not at the periphery, but have a central position because in these groups parenting is not on the frontstage, but it is simply acted in function of the primary interest of these children while parents negotiate their parenting style and find comfort to their doubts and uncertainties. Parents seem in fact involved in an open process in which, while they wait for support and help to their uncertainties, are prone and open to adhere to different parenting cultures and styles provided that these cultures and styles are collectively legitimized in a space of expert knowledge shared from below.

The last aspect analysed is thus how online communities address the consequences of sharenting. Within the two groups considered there were no overt discussion started by parents about these consequences with the exception of a few posts and interactions about this concern. In a comparison with other groups analysed in the ProTechThem project (e.g., Lavorgna et al., 2023), data shows that each community has its own rules and styles to address such consequences and administrators play an important role in orienting and ruling parents towards some essential values and behaviors with the aim to protect children's

privacy. Groups' rules provided by administrators are often porous and general, aimed more at ensuring a pleasant affective environment and a useful experience within the group than protect children's privacy.

> RULES: Join here to get tips for baby (and toddler) sleep training. Connect with other parents on the journey! Group rules from the admins: 1, support each other: Sleep training isn't always easy, but it can be awesome. Help each other, help our babies and toddlers. 2, no hate speech or bullying: Make sure everyone feels safe. Bullying of any kind isn't allowed, and degrading comments about things like race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender or identity will not be tolerated. 3, Be kind and courtoeus: We're all in this together to create a welcoming environment. Let's treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural, but kindness is required. […]. [source: UK-based group]

> […] I started this group to involve all those who wish to discuss the subject of children's sleep. It is a space where you can ask questions, share your stories, efforts and successes in managing your children's sleep, *so you don't feel alone during the day or at night*! [source: Italy-based group]

These statements do not address directly the consequences of sharenting as, as explained by some administrators interviewed during the research project, each group has its own style, parents are used to share pictures and sometimes making a different choice can penalize the group and loose participation. In other words, administrators tend to comply with the

requests of users about this specific topic. In these interactions between users and between users and administrators, a continued negotiation between children needs for care, parents' social needs and needs for online safety (e.g., protection of children personal data) is thus confirmed.

Discussion: how online and offline parenting cultures affect sharenting practices

The results suggest that offline parenting cultures urge parents to ask for help online. The pressure of intensive parenting (Faircloth, 2014) makes parents seek communities in which large amounts of horizontal direct experience and knowledge is freely available without judgment or requests. The cost of accessing this knowledge and social support is sharing contents with strangers, but a mother imagines these strangers as a homogeneous and reliable audience of mothers with the same needs, and this motivates access. Online parenting cultures are not merely a reflection of offline parenting cultures. The medium and its affordances enable mediated cultures of parenting, which only partially reflect the influence of offline cultures. First, readily available information shared by other parents allow users to develop insights on how to better protect their children from risks and

dangers, to reinforce their decisional autonomy when they face dilemmas after consulting practitioners. An example of this comes from a young mother who shares her experience of medical neglect which was resolved thanks to her autonomy, and the knowledge shared through the Internet and reshared by her for the benefit of the community:

> I hope that writing this will help at least one other baby. [Name of her baby] was breastfed from the start. We didn't really notice anything the first few weeks. When s/he was about [age] weeks old however I had not slept well and felt empty one day. I prepared a bottle of formula as I always did but a few hours after her taking it s/he vomited. S/he became very limp and tired so we took them to the hospital. I explained what happened and they told me it was a [flu]. […] When I tried again with the formula, a few hours after she vomited again but this time a lot more and instantly went limp and unresponsive. We rushed back to the hospital. I explained again I had given her formula and by this point I KNEW it had something to do with that. The hospital yet again sent us away with no answers. I read into CMPA and realized [name of the baby] literally had every single symptom. It's an ALLERGY. Because I wish someone had told me about it before I just thank god every day that s/he's okay and it didn't get as bad as it could have been.

Sharenting is thus represented as part of online parenting cultures as it has a social value for parents and children.

The definition of users' needs offered by Couldry (2012) allows a reconsideration of parents' needs in this specific situation of sharenting and identification of the tension

between different ways or styles of conceiving of parenting. The first style can be identified within the UK-based group in which mothers are less careful about sharing contents such as pictures and personal detailed information of their children and therefore less careful in protecting children online 'exposition' and their future digital/social identity. This generates a kind of internal paradox (Chalklen and Anderson, 2017) for intensive parenting culture (Furedi, 2002; Hays, 1996) in which the need to promptly solve health or behavioural issues seems to prevail over other needs such as digital security and protection. The outcome is a lack of consideration for digital risks concerning children. On the other hand, the Italy-based group seems to not accept – or at least not to the same degree as the British one – the compromise between care needs and online security needs and, therefore, do not face this paradox. However, the affective climate of support and the material help provided by the Italian group is tangible less meaningful in comparison with the UK-based group.

This generates the opportunity to further reflect on the *bi-frontal* nature of sharenting. In the UK-based group sharenting allows access to a support system and a network of relevant others who promptly help users mostly regardless of their age, class, geographical location. As the benefit is immediate, sharenting is also immediate and without particular or frequent questions. This temporal characteristic seems to have to do with the intensive parenting

style which, then, within the group, is the object of remaking and negotiations, adjustments and reinterpretations allowing to learn nuanced and more self-regulated forms of intensity. Similarly, in the UK-based group the issue of privacy is less evident and present, somehow scotomized by benefits received from participation in the group. This observation finds confirmation in what Ranzini and colleagues (2020) observed: in situations in which parents are not directly questioned about privacy protection, they are less effective in understanding privacy risks and less active in terms of privacy protection.

The data collected during passive ethnography of these two groups suggest further reflections. Parenting cultures can be practiced and reproduced by parents within the social situation of the Facebook group – as a shared community's value (the British group) or as an individual's value (the Italian group). Therefore, while posting, mothers appear to reproduce and so confirm the values of the offline and online community to which they belong and construct their social – and so moral – identity, but, at the same time, they try to distinguish themselves in the continuous effort of negotiating between online and offline community and self-identity. These results are connected with already existing literature (e.g., Smyth and Craig, 2017). The result is a hybrid and heterogeneous online parenting culture in which parents experience more freedom and autonomy in comparison with offline cultures.

The imagined audiences play an important role in this social situation of sharing. While Stsiampkouskaya and colleagues (2021) focusing on mechanisms of photosharing explain that individuals often adopt their audience's perspective when choosing a photo to post, Litt and Hargittai (2016) suggest the existence of two ways in which users cope with large audiences on social media: by generalizing their viewers into one broad imagined audience, or by focusing on a specific subgroup of their audience, to become the basis for an imagined target audience. In our study, we observed different mechanisms and a paradox. While most of the UK group users seem to imagine a unique community of mothers sharing the same aims and values even if the group has hundreds of thousands of users, the Italian group users appears to recognize the heterogeneity of the audience and the risks that this entails. Collapse of contexts (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014) thus appears as an insufficient explanation to these dynamics in a social situation in which cultural shifts concerning sharing (e.g., therapeutic cultures concerning self-disclosure) lead to a normalization about sharing personal contents (John, 2017). Hence, not only personal, social and cultural factors, parenting cultures and personal and social needs, but also the relying on administrators of the groups and platforms security controls seem to affect the construction of an imagined audience in these communities which are – reminding it is important – public Facebook groups. Nevertheless, parents are often not aware of how those very

mechanisms of sharing which can undermine individual privacy and security, are the same which – overtly or covertly – allow success and existence of such social media platforms companies (e.g., Gillespie, 2010; John, 2013: Fuchs 2013; John, 2022). For these reasons, we argue that sharenting practices observed by our study seem to be grounded in more complex social dynamics and cultural aspects, which depict more nuanced parenting ideals.

Once more, the timing of intensive parenting triggers the need of a representation of the audience as restricted and similar to those who post, a representation supported by the frequent and numerous reactions and interactions of the British group. At the same time, a culturally-based minor sensitization of the mothers users of the British group to digital risks and dangers seems to expose these parents to a misrepresentation of the social situation and an underestimation of the risks. Otherwise, the Italian group is immersed in a culture of digital anxieties concerning paedophilia and child abuse, developed over the last thirty years through moral panic waves and frequent attention by mass media towards online and offline paedophilia and different national cases of alleged child abuse (e.g., Baraldi, 2018; Dei, 2019). This makes parents exert self-censorship and data parsimony (Masur and Scharkow, 2016). Anyway, the mothers of both groups show a sufficient knowledge of risks and online context limits and, within these limits, they look for tactics and strategies to get where they want by managing or sacrificing privacy in an aware way. Similar to what

Leaver and Nansen (2017) suggest with their study, in our study we observe that sharenting is constructed in interactions with others, as differences between anticipated and received feedback shape posting behaviors.

Furthermore, our results show that online communities address the consequences of sharenting poorly, and the visible acts of resistance (Leaver, 2017) against the culture of sharing come from a few mothers. The expectations of an "institutional" control (administrators, platforms) rather than a social control acted by the community's members are often disregarded, leaving those parents the choice to adhere to the community dominant culture, to attempt forms of bricolage, or to leave the group. Risk-mitigating strategies used in photo-sharing (see also Wagner and Gasche, 2018) or information-sharing are more frequent in the Italian group and attest forms of bricolage and adaptation to not lose the empowerment tool (Archer, 2019) represented by the Facebook group.

Regarding the privacy vs openness tension related to sharenting practices, our results are in line with the study of Chalklen and Anderson (2017) on Australian mothers' strategies for negotiating the disclosure of information while posting images of their young children: mothers negotiate ways to protect their children's privacy while using the benefits of openness, even if these capacities are not homogenously distributed among users. More active mothers share more contents and are more active in the participation in the

community experience, while less active mothers who are more worried about privacy post less but participate in the community by viewing others' posts and information.

Unlike parents' blogs (e.g., Abidin, 2017), in the groups we observed children are not on the periphery: the focus is both on them and their parents' everyday lived experiences. For instance, the characteristics of some posts that are focused on children's health issues (for example, posts in which an image of feces is shared to seek for advice by other parents and understand how to act with a suspected illness) show the materiality and centrality of attention towards the child and the resources offered by the group through sharenting practices. The paradox resides in the fact that more parents reveal of themselves and their children, more are active in the group, and more receive benefits from the group. This seems to accomplish certain meanings of the notion of sharing as caring (e.g., Lange, 2018) rooted in specific cultural contexts, but not in others, thus offering an embryonal explanation to the cultural differences between countries and groups.

Conclusion

Our study offers an empirical contribution and reflection on the controversial value of sharenting practices in online communities which involve children's wellbeing and health issues while contributing to the debates on the practices and discourses about sharing in digital media. We described the role of online and offline parenting cultures in affecting sharenting practices and how online communities address the consequences of sharenting and manage the privacy vs openness tension about sharing children's information and audiovisual materials. Attention towards reactions, interactions and relations in these communities is central to understand how parents negotiate risks and benefits of their sharenting, in other words how they negotiate their own and children needs concerning health, wellbeing and digital security. With a sensibility toward the penalization and negative representation of sharenting practices, we aimed to recognize pitfalls and resources of sharenting in these social contexts and contribute to bring reflections for a better knowledge of a potential harmful practice and its normalization in contemporary digital contexts.

The social dynamics and cultural implications of parenting analysed in the previous section help in reconsidering the risks for children and parents' vulnerabilities when they share online contents concerning their children. The practices covered in our study do not offer insights into the social and personal situations of the mothers who share these

contents, but the analysis of their posts highlights their routines, uncertainties, pressures from intensive parenting cultures and thus their vulnerabilities and need of support in a particular phase of their life and in facing the constrictions of a still highly-gendered role. Among these vulnerabilities, their (in)competencies as users are essential. While digital networks and communities facilitate interconnectedness, the premises – embodied by their regulations – are still that the user is conceived as an autonomous and competent user. However, this competence may not be fully developed or may fail in certain phases of life (for example, when caring full time for a newborn) when the time for extra uncompensated digital immaterial labor (e.g., Terranova, 2000) is not available.

Furthermore, our study suggests the need for further observation and analysis of how parenting cultures in online and offline communities affect the risks associated with sharenting. In our sample, limited to two Facebook groups, we observed the negotiation between offline and online cultures of parenting and the everyday construction of a hybrid parenting culture. Our findings suggest that local and global dimensions of these cultures need more attention in consideration of the impact they can have on sharenting practices. Further studies involving different platforms in a comparative way are thus necessary. Moreover, an in-depth exploration of the antecedents and motivation of sharenting and the

role of experts' advice in relation to offline and online parenting cultures could allow a better understanding of parents' risks perception and privacy stewardship.

In conclusion, this article shows the paradoxes of a pervasive practice among online parents and its elements of connections with a sharing culture stimulated by some (offline) cultural shifts of the 20th century and then discursively promoted – less or more visibly – by social media companies (e.g., John, 2017). As this article demonstrates, risks for parents' and children's privacy and security and practices of resistance are shaped by the conjunctions between this sharing culture, the contemporary parenting cultures, and the technical characteristics and policies of the social media involved.

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