Managing sharing is *caring*
Mothers' Social Media Dilemmas and informal reflective practices on the governance of children's digital footprints

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Abstract

"Sharenting" is a usual habit for families in the digital age. While media outlets describe parents as inattentive and naïve about it, empirical data shows that many of them face digital dilemmas about this practice. Little is known, though, about the reflective practices parents engage in when trying to tackle these dilemmas. To fill this gap, this study explores how a parenting forum can work as an informal reflective and learning site where parents naturally discuss Social Media Dilemmas (SMDs) associated with sharenting. The contribution reports on findings from a thematic analysis of 1,626 posts from 47 discussion threads, where parents sought their peers' advice and support to deal with these kinds of predicaments, looking at how these naturally occurring conversations can help parents learn about and make sense of the new challenges posed by the evolving communication ecology in terms of governing their children's digital footprints.

Keywords
Sharenting, social media dilemmas, domestication theory, social media governance, parenting forum, reflective practices

Introduction

Sharenting – or the act of sharing pictures and multimedia representations of one's child online – has become a common practice for many parents in the digital age (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Studies suggest that the creation of children's social media presence starts before they are born, with ultrasound sharing (Leaver, 2017), and continues to grow at the transition to parenthood, with research finding that 79 pct. of new mothers and 76 pct. of new fathers upload photos of children on social media at least monthly by the time they are born (Bartholomew et al., 2012). Posting about children tends to reach a peak with those under four years of age, with a decrease in frequency as a child grows into adolescence (Livingstone et al., 2018). In this regard, early childhood has been described as a critical site of *datafication* for children, which is "the ability to transform almost every aspect of social life into online data" (Mascheroni, 2018, p. 517).

The very same idea of creating data traces for children online has caused controversies among scholars and public opinion in general, with the former stressing potential negative outcomes deriving from exposing children's lives online and their lack of agency in the process (Steinberg, 2017), and the latter engaging in what Barassi (2020) calls a "narrative of blame", where parents who share about their children are framed as inattentive and naïve about the long-term consequences of their photo-sharing behavior.

Research, however, suggests that some parents grapple with dilemmas when deciding whether and how to share about their children on social media (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Chalklen & Anderson, 2017), with some families taking an even more radical stance and opting for "anti-sharenting" policies in the household (Autenrieth, 2018).

What is currently lacking in the literature, though, are studies specifically reporting on the reflective practices parents engage in when making decisions about their children's social media presence and, overall, in the broader process of the *domestication* of social media as a family album and the normalization of sharenting (Holloway & Green, 2017). The present article tries to fill this gap by focusing on the Social Media Dilemmas (SMDs) parents experience when reflecting on the legitimacy of creating a digital footprint for their children on social media. To this end, a parenting forum was used as a site of research, through a thematic analysis of 1,626 posts from 47 discussion threads, where parents sought their peers' advice and support to deal with these kinds of predicaments. This approach allowed me first to focus on dilemmas that parents themselves felt a need to discuss as *disorienting* in terms of courses of actions to take, and then to explore how talking to peers enhanced the creation of "mediated" hermeneutic circles (Gadamer, 1975), where parents co-engaged in *conversational reflective practices* as potential opportunities to foster critical thinking on the interacting parts for the topic being discussed and their *perspectives of meaning* about it (Formenti & West, 2018).

As such, the present investigation looks beyond the narrative of blame about sharenting, reporting on SMDs experienced by parents through the ongoing and ever-evolving process of *domestication* and *governance* of social media in the family environment

(Aroldi, 2015; Silverstone, 2005) and stressing informal reflective practices fostered by naturally occurring discussions on the matter.

Literature review

The domestication of social media as a family album and the normalization of sharenting in family life

The past few years have seen a remarkable rise in the adoption of digital technology and social media by family members, with many parents incorporating them into their daily parenting routines. Mascheroni and colleagues called this phenomenon "digital parenting", as an expression indicating "emergent mediated parenting practices" (2018, p. 11) such as sharenting, which is the focus of this contribution.

Although apparently "new", photographing children and showing their pictures in front of an audience has been going on for generations. The introduction of the first Kodak Camera in 1885, in fact, allowed many people to incorporate photography in their daily life (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). The progressive acquisition of cameras by families led to the establishment of a new practice around family domesticity: photographing children (Chalfen, 1987). It is not surprising, then, that among the reasons for the rise in mass photography, scholars list the arrival of a newborn in the family and, generally, parents (and specifically, mothers) taking pictures of their children (Boerdam & Martinius, 1980).

The evolution of digital technology, such as mobile devices with incorporated cameras, favored a progressive dematerialization and virtualization of the family photograph, which gradually started to be showed on screen, at first sending emails to extended family members and friends attaching pictures of children, and then posting them on social media (Rose, 2010).

In a sense, the practice of sharing family photos on social media has undergone a process of *domestication*, which refers to the physical incorporation and symbolic adoption of media technologies within the domestic environment (Silverstone, 2005). Originally, the domestication framework studied the adoption of traditional media in the home. This framework lies on four main theoretical tenets, according to which, when entering the household, media undergo a process of appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion (Silverstone, 2005). According to Silverstone (2005), the process of *appropriation* concerns the negotiations coming with the decision to introduce digital media to the household, *objectification* refers to the "geographical" location of media in the house, *incorporation* indicates how people fit the use of media within their routines, while *conversion* suggests how possessing and managing media (or not) becomes a way for people to construct and frame their identities with respect to technology use. These stages are not discrete but are interrelated and speak to a complex ongoing process where technologies can also be "re-domesticated" or "de-domesticated" when their role in people's lives change or if they get totally discarded (Haddon, 2017).

Originally focused on media such as the television, and then the computer, the domestication framework has incorporated the study of social media as well (Haddon, 2011). Following this line of inquiry, Holloway and Green (2017) comprehensively accounted for the domestication of social media as a family album and the consequent normalization of sharenting, advancing that posting representations of family members (and, specifically, children) online sheds light on how families integrate social media (in that case, Facebook) in their daily lives. Analyzing qualitative interview data following the four abovementioned tenets of the domestication framework, the authors found that they can be applied to social media as well.

Specifically, the *appropriation* of social media as a family photo album can start with the expectancy of a child when posting sonograms, or even in whatever following moment when a parent decides to start sharing about the child. Deciding to share about one's child (or not) can further be understood as a result of the *normalization* of children's social media presence. This is to say, that as current and future parents get used to seeing pictures of children or sonograms posted online, such a practice may be understood as a new "implied" social norm, or at least something normal and – to some degree – expected and taken-for-granted (Leaver, 2017).

Following, while traditionally the *objectification* process would refer to the space given to a specific object in the home (e.g., a printed and framed photo hung on the living room wall), with digital photographs, it takes place through their being displayed using a technological tool, whether it be a mobile or a fixed-location device (e.g., a smartphone or a desktop computer). According to Holloway and Green, "choices about the networked objectification of images include who to share the photograph with, and how the photograph is displayed (unedited, edited, and/or captioned)" (2017, p. 361). In this sense, the objectification of social media sharing crosses space and time boundaries of the domestic walls, where traditionally family photos have been shown to a very specific audience of people visiting the house.

The *incorporation* of social media, in turn, takes place through the acts of posting, sharing, and viewing pictures as part of parents' – and, generally, family members' – routines, integrating these practices in one's daily life. Finally, the *conversion* process speaks to the way in which sharing about children on social media becomes a way for identity-making (e.g., framing oneself as a *caring* parent, who either shares to create digital memories for his/her child or doesn't share to respect his/her child's privacy).

Sharing photos of children online implies that content can be available for longer and to an extended audience than they would be compared to the delimited domestic environment where traditionally they have been shown. As such, deciding whether and how to engage in sharenting asks parents to confront questions regarding the opportunity to create a digital footprint for their children, and potentially how to do that. This process of governance of children's datafication will be further explored in the next paragraph.

Parents' governance of children's datafication as an act of care
Datafication can be understood as a process by which many aspects of one's life are turned into online data because of the adoption of digital technologies allowing users to produce data about themselves and others (Mascheroni, 2018). Although when sharing online there might be a presumption that the user can control his/her digital footprints, this is not always a given when producing data traces about third parties (Leaver, 2017).

When it comes to sharenting, some scholars stress the absence of children's agency in the process, and thus their inability to control their online narratives (Steinberg, 2017), while others document children's negative opinions about the practice (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Popular media outlets, as argued by Barassi (2020), have in turn embraced a "narrative of blame", where parents are portrayed as guilty of putting their children's data privacy at risk, understanding sharenting as the result of immoral behavior. The idea that parents may violate their role of protecting children from risks is accompanied by a broader social tendency in framing them as "negligent" (Formenti, 2019). Despite sharenting being a controversial topic for the abovementioned reasons, straightforwardly associating it with parental negligence is, at the very least, simplistic.

Empirical evidence, in fact, supports that while many parents do recognize benefits of their photo-sharing behavior (such as an increased sense of connectedness with important people), they also tend to evaluate possible risks for their children, living a "privacy/ openness paradox" situation (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Others try to govern their children's social media presence by managing privacy settings and deciding what to share online and with whom (Ammari et al., 2015), engaging in "privacy stewardship" (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), or even discussing the matter with the children themselves (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). More radically, some families adopt an anti-sharenting position, where no pictures or content of their children are posted on social media whatsoever (Autenrieth, 2018).

Taken together, these studies speak to a form of family governance of children's social media presence that can be broadly understood as an act of taking *care* of children's digital identities. Historically, parents have always been considered responsible for governing their children's relationship with the media (Wartella, 2019). Such a commitment continues to be understood as a socially expected moral enterprise parents are supposed to embrace in order to be considered "good enough parents" (Caronia, 2010). The evolving nature of digital technologies and the practices they allow users to engage in, though, pose challenges to media governance. According to Rivoltella (2013, as cited in Aroldi, 2015), traditional media governance concerns four main areas of control: the *time* spent with the media; the *space* where children engage with the medium; the *content* they watch; and the social *relationships* they can foster or hinder. However, Aroldi (2015) argues that the boundaries of these dimensions tend to blur when trying to govern online experiences, as users can go online anywhere (thanks to mobile devices), at any time, access more content, and produce them on their own.

The governance of sharenting, however, is even more peculiar. As above, the literature on media governance has generally focused on how parents mediate their children's experience with media when it is children themselves who use them. When it comes to parents creating an online presence *for* them, though, the governance strategies may change; even if they are still aimed at controlling how the child's data (indirectly) enter the web, it is parents' online behavior that is "governed" in this case. Informed by the abovementioned literature, I advance that – taking into account Aroldi's (2015) differentiation between governing traditional media and the Internet – the four dimensions of time, space, content, and relationships (Rivoltella, 2013, as cited in Aroldi, 2015) can be applied to the governance of sharenting as well.

Specifically, when posting about their children on social media, parents may be concerned about *time*, as content can persist online for longer than expected; *space*, in view of "context collapse" (Marwick & boyd, 2011), which is the possibility for materials shared online to be viewed by significantly more people than originally envisioned by posters (if one's social media account is not private, for example, or even if private when someone takes a screenshot and reposts a photo in a different profile or website); *content*, as parents may want to be mindful of the type of pictures they are posting online (as in Autenrieth, 2018); or *relationships*, because posting online means engaging in a communicative process with an audience, and the very same act of sharenting has often been motivated by intepersonal relationship goals (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017).

Studying online interactions as reflective practices to face and make sense of Social Media Dilemmas

Taken together, the abovementioned literature suggests that parents may experience dilemmas when it comes to domesticating social media and governing sharenting, as several areas of concern are at stake (e.g., managing the audience who can see the pictures, deciding what content to share and where, etc.). Little to no research, however, has investigated the reflective practices through which parents conceptualize and face these dilemmas.

The present article seeks to fill this gap by building on a broader project studying Social Media Dilemmas (SMDs) about sharenting discussed by parents on a parenting forum. Building on the broader notion of "digital dilemmas" by Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), I conceptualize SMDs as situations, experienced either before or after posting, where parents question the legitimacy of sharing about their children on social media and crafting their digital identities.

Extant literature shows that when faced with different kinds of dilemmas, many parents in the Global North tend to look for information and support online to learn how to face them, using many online sources such as parenting forums (Lupton et al., 2016). Parenting forums are particularly suited for discussing daily dilemmas, as they allow post-

ers to open a conversation anonymously targeted to a specific audience who can be of help (in this case, other parents), and discuss these problems with peers. It is important to stress, though, that these spaces are predominantly used by women, thus they are more likely to reflect gendered dimensions of parenting challenges (Dworkin et al., 2013; Lupton et al., 2016). According to Das (2017), informal conversations among mothers on these forums create *mediated frameworks of reference* for interacting parts, as lenses through which looking at and (re)interpreting the social world and one's personal life.

This study seeks to investigate whether and to what extent parents' SMDs discussed online with peers can foster informal critical reflective practices for parents to better make sense of and learn how to face digital-related quandaries. In doing so, I argue that such an endeavor can be understood as an act of maternal *care*, where mothers try to learn how to manage their sharing behavior to safeguard their children from potential risks and respect their representational agency online.

In order to investigate SMDs that parents themselves felt a need to discuss, data for this project were collected from the United States-based BabyCenter community, which is deemed to be one of the most popular and widely used parenting forums online (Lupton et al., 2016). According to the website's information page, it reaches more than 50 million parents all over the world, with 7 in 10 new and expectant mothers using it monthly in the United States (BabyCenter, n.d.). A content analysis of the website (Jang & Dworkin, 2012) found that most members are mothers of around 20-30 years of age.

Parenting forums have been described by scholars as good sources of naturally occurring data, building on users' responsiveness to generate rich conversations around a topic and allowing researchers to focus on collective meaning-making processes (Holtz et al., 2012). According to Zittoun and Brinkmann, collective meaning-making "by which people interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses in light of their previous knowledge and experiences" (2012, p. 1809) is an important facet of informal learning. Adopting this approach allowed me not only to explore dilemmas that parents deemed *disorienting*, and for which possible interpretations and courses of actions were sought, but also to closely focus on these conversations as an expression of reflective practices through which parents can critically reflect on their dilemmas and collectively learn how to tackle them. This is an original approach in the literature on sharenting, and digital dilemmas in general, as studies have generally employed traditional quantitative or qualitative self-report methodologies where parents report on a topic because a researcher asked them about it. In this study, in turn, posters discussed sharenting in a public parenting forum because they felt a need to do so strongly enough "to initiate such a thread, in the knowledge that it may be read by thousands of other people" who could react and provide their opinions and experiences (Pedersen & Lupton, 2018, p. 59).

Database generation and research questions

In order to collect a sample of discussions for the broader project this article is part of, I searched the forum for occurrences of threads dealing with my topic of inquiry using the website's search engine through a combination of keyword search terms (e.g., "children"; "social media"; "sharenting"). By employing a sequentially top-down data collection approach (Eriksson & Salzmann-Erikson, 2013), I screened the first 150 pages of results to filter threads pertaining to my study's focus (i.e., when parents discuss the topic of posting about children on social media). I chose this parameter to confine the corpus of discussions to a manageable number, informed by previous studies on similar forums (Pedersen & Lupton, 2018). This led me to a sample of threads focusing on posters' dilemmas concerning sharing either about one's pregnancy or one's child on social media. In this article, I focus on the latter. Specifically, findings are presented from a thematic analysis of a purposive sample of 1,626 posts from 47 discussion threads, where posters discussed their dilemmas about sharenting, questioning the opportunity and legitimacy of contributing to the construction of their children's digital identity.

The analysis was guided by the following exploratory research questions:

RQ1: What dilemmas related to sharenting do posters discuss?
RQ2: What strategies do posters offer to address sharenting-related dilemmas?
RQ3: What reflections do posters offer about their sharenting-related dilemmas?

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive coding approach, looking for common themes among discussion threads and comments (Boyatzis, 1998), treating every single post within a thread as a unit of analysis. With the aim of fostering a dialogue between different perspectives, I worked with two external research assistants who voluntarily helped with team-based codebook development. Engaging in an iterative process, I first developed an initial list of codes to analyze these conversations with the help of one of the research assistants, reading threads independently and applying initial codes to be compared and revised. This led to a round of *pattern coding*, where we organized the initial codes in a smaller number of categories to develop a provisional codebook containing definitions, examples, and instructions. After going through the posts again to apply the revised codes, discussing and resolving discrepancies through discursive agreement based on "dialogical intersubjectivity" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 35), the second research assistant tested the codebook independently, taking analytic memos and revising it with the team. Finally, we completed a third confirmatory pass together, revising and discussing all the threads and updating the codebook as needed.

Ethical considerations

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) provides guidelines on how to treat online data for research purposes, inviting scholars to make decisions on a case-by-case basis and not along binary lines (Franzke et al., 2020; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). An important element to consider is whether online interactions take place in the form of archived, asynchronous, and pseudonymous conversations on public websites (like this forum) or, on the other hand, as synchronous communications in a chatroom, where users can be identified (e.g. a WhatsApp group, etc.). According to Ess and the AoIR (2002), the former is more public than the latter; thus, there is common consensus that researchers may treat data as an expression of public behavior (Holtz et al., 2012). Following the indications of the AoIR, and after carefully and extensively reviewing the literature on studies conducted on the same or similar forums (see, among many others, Das, 2017; Jang & Dworkin, 2012; Pedersen & Lupton, 2018; Whiteman, 2012), I focused only on publicly accessible discussions (i.e., published on the *public area* of the forum, with no need of registration/password/authorization to be accessed), anonymous (i.e., with posters using usernames), asynchronous, and archived as no longer active at the time of collection. As an additional step to ensure anonymity, following the ethical advice of Smedley and Coulson (2018), I also checked the reported quotes using the Google search engine to make sure they could not be traced.

Findings and discussions

The threads analyzed were discussed by users who either with usernames or in the comments often presented themselves explicitly as mothers. No occurrences of posters presenting themselves as fathers were encountered. Additional contextual cues (such as pronouns and users' avatars) suggest this interpretation as well. This was the case for both original posters (OPs – i.e., those who initiated a thread) and commenting posters (CPs – i.e., those who replied to the thread). This is in line with the documented female-dominated environment of parenting forums (Dworkin et al., 2013; Lupton et al., 2016; Pedersen & Lupton, 2018). Additionally, research on sharenting has found that within the family, mothers do most of the disclosure management work to govern family photographs online as a new gendered domestic labor (Ammari et al., 2015).

When children's age was reported, this was generally in the early childhood range, in line with the notion that this is a critical site of children's datafication (Mascheroni, 2018).

To address the article's research questions, I organized the findings as follow: First, I report on the range of SMDs voiced by these posters; then I focus on the range of solutions and courses of action proposed to face these dilemmas; and finally, I highlight how such interactions allowed posters to normalize their feelings and take a critical stance towards social media use and sharenting.

"If you share it's risky, if you don't share people think you don't love your child"
– The double bind of sharenting

The original posts were opened by users who found themselves questioning the legitimacy of creating a digital footprint for their children by sharing about them on social media. The different dilemmas voiced by these posters concerned the broader ongoing processes of the normalization of sharenting (as adapted by Holloway & Green, 2017).

For some posters, for example, the *appropriation* process – or the phase in which parents decide to share about their children online – was particularly critical. Sometimes posters would start worrying about the legitimacy of creating an online presence for their children even before they were born, while others thought about it once the baby "arrived". In both cases, these users looked for support for reflecting on the *normalization* of a practice – sharenting – (Leaver, 2017) that they were not completely at ease with. The following two excerpts are an example of that:

> Greetings! I am struggling with social media anxiety today. I don't want to post photos of
> the baby when he gets here online. I understand that it's common and acceptable, but I am
> just questioning it. I don't want to share his image with people I don't know well, or at all
> (my family's profiles). Does anyone else struggle with this question? Should I or shouldn't?
> I just had my baby girl, and I still haven't decided whether or not I'll be posting pics of her
> on social media. My main reasoning is all these kids have no say in it. What if our kids grow
> up to be upset there are all these pics of themselves out on the internet and they had no
> control over it? Anyone else still undecided for this or their own reasons?

Similar predicaments were reported with respect to the *objectification*, *incorporation*, and *conversion* processes of social media domestication as well.

Several posters, for example, found themselves wondering about the consequences of the "networked *objectification* of images" (Holloway & Green, 2017, p. 361) (i.e., *who* to share the photos with and *how*), worrying about not only *context* but also time *collapse* (Brandtzaeg & Lüders, 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2011). These concepts refer to the loss of control of the shared content across space and time, indicating that once something is posted on the Internet, it can reach a broader audience than expected and persist online for longer than one anticipates.

The next excerpt exemplifies a poster thinking about the long-term consequences of her own photo-sharing behavior for her child, with particular concern for how long the content might stay online and who can access and re-post it:

> I keep thinking about the fact that one day my baby will be an adult, and anything and
> everything that gets put on the Internet will remain there until technology ceases to exist.
> I don't want my kid turned into a meme or have somebody try to pass my pictures off as
> their own. I don't want my kid to read embarrassing conversations about how much he
> pooped or how he had a tantrum over something …

Dilemmas about the *incorporation* of sharenting into one's normalized routine were also reported, with posters wondering whether they should continue posting about their children or not and looking for their peers' perspectives to help them reflect on it. In the following excerpt, for example, a user is asking for input to balance the pros and cons of her "controlled" sharing behavior, in order to learn whether she should adjust it by considering additional viewpoints on the matter:

> Some parents feel very strongly about not posting any photos online of their children, and I am trying to understand why that is. I have heard various arguments on the matter. I have a Facebook that I use to post maybe a picture every week or two of my son. I have my privacy set to friends only for everything and I manage my friends list so that every person who is on there is someone who I would feel comfortable say, giving an actual photo of my child to. […] However, with hearing all the parents so against posting pics on social media, I am really trying to research this to see if my stance on posting photos could actually be harmful to my child, so I'm wondering if anyone has different viewpoints on the matter that I haven't considered. I appreciate the input!

Finally, dilemmas about the *conversion* process – concerning how parents describe their identities with respect to sharenting – were present across original posts whenever posters wondered whether sharing would frame them as loving caregivers who share to show love for their children, or responsible ones who don't share to protect them from online risks. Posters reported feeling caught in a *double bind* (i.e., a paradoxical injunction with no easy solution, Formenti, 2012), stressing that "it's hard to find a comfortable balance" between sharing or not, because of both personal reasons and external judgments. For example, as this poster claims: "On one side I'm thinking yes why not show the world my bundle of joy, but then on the other side I'm thinking that I should prevent my kid's face to end up on social media, at least until a certain age". Or, as put by another: "If you share it's risky, if you don't share people think you don't love your child. […] It's so hard when you're so proud!"

Overall, SMDs appear to be a common element across the ongoing and interrelated processes of social media domestication and the normalization of sharenting. The next paragraph will report on how the collaborative reflective practices of discussing SMDs with peers led to the construction of different interpretative lenses and possible solutions to adopt to tackle the dilemmas.

Facing the dilemma: governing children's social media presence as an unfinished enterprise

Commenting posters tried to help original posters by reporting on their personal views on the matter and referring to possible governance strategies to adopt. As described in the literature review, media governance refers to four main areas: time, space, content, and relationships (Aroldi, 2015). The analysis of these posts shed light on the multi-layered and multi-faceted enterprise of governing sharenting, which asks parents to consider

several variables. As we shall see, a common pattern across posts was that the four facets of media governance were not treated as discrete units, but as overlapping areas for parents to control. This is to say, that governing one area has – to different degrees – implications for all the others.

Specifically, with respect to *time*, worries about content that would persist online potentially "forever" led some mothers not to share at all as a governance strategy. Others, in turn, thought that one way to avoid posting photos that could have potential negative implications for children later on was to govern *content* by only sharing "appropriate" pictures (e.g., no naked photos, nor embarrassing ones, etc.). The problem of content, however, is strictly related to the *space* where they are shared (i.e., the context): Governing the space through specific privacy settings or employing alternative ways of sharing, in fact, could potentially regulate peoples' access to specific content (though, as some mothers claimed, "nothing is really private on the Internet"). Managing privacy settings or sharing photos on private platforms was seen as a solution for keeping family members and friends updated on the child, while also taking measures to limit the audience to a selected circle of people, to govern the *relational* aspect of sharenting. Governing relationships, though, would also mean setting boundary rules with this selected audience, as – even if in good faith – extended family members or friends could re-post the content conflicting with parents' privacy orientation and jeopardize their governance efforts. This complex circular process, with all its interrelations, speaks for the *unfinished caring effort* that governing children's social media presence requires. The following excerpt is an example of how all areas of social media governance relate:

> We share pics of our daughter, but we just try to keep in mind what she would say if sees it in 10-15 years. Nothing embarrassing or naked or revealing private info (like potty training for example). We have a lot of aunts and uncles and extended family that live around the country that still like to know what's going on in our lives, so we share.

The words of this poster echo her (and her partner's – "We") strategies to manage her daughter's social media presence by considering the time, content, and relational aspects of governance, deciding to post photos or info that would not be embarrassing for her later, but still benefiting from the possibility of enhancing interpersonal relationships. These tactics represent a possible solution to the "privacy/openness paradox" (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017), where mothers are aware of the pros and cons of sharenting, offering the other posters who were living the dilemma a possible course of action. Other mothers, in turn, suggested relying on alternative ways of sharing, using different and more private platforms to share about children instead of one's personal social media profile (like Facebook or Instagram). Among these strategies were private Facebook groups or specific apps, such as Shutterfly or Tiny Beans:

> I don't know if this has already been mentioned, or might help allay some of your fears, but with my little boy I created a private/secret Facebook group for my immediate family and my husband's. It's great to be able to communicate with everyone at the same time & share things that I want THEM to see, but not necessarily the whole world.

> You should probably try Tiny Beans. I'm using it, and it allows you to post pictures of your baby and whoever you've invited to view your journal is able to see those pictures (that person must also have the app on their phone). As far as I can tell, it's not linked to social media sites like Facebook in any way. I figure with this app I can control who gets to see the photos instead of blowing up all 500 newsfeeds of my Facebook alleged "friends".

The opportunity to govern the space (i.e., the context, and thus the audience) with whom they were sharing allowed these users to feel empowered and in control of their children's online presence, emphasizing the difference between sharing in a context were even non-close or not trusted people could access these pictures (i.e., "Facebook alleged 'friends'"), versus a broader uncontrolled audience ("THEM" vs. "the whole world").

Several parents, however, stressed how sharing only with a selected audience was still not enough, as people from this very same audience could probably feel free to re-post the picture. As such, preventive actions of establishing boundaries were suggested, inviting parents to set rules with relatives and friends so they would not violate their privacy expectations (as in Ammari et al., 2015):

> Make sure you tell family what you decide. My FB is private and all people I know, but my dad has been known to repost my son's pictures. I've talked to him, but I'm betting he's too excited about this first grandchild to remember. But we parents are not in control of who our social media friends "befriend", so asking them not to post photos may be our best way to err on the side of caution.

Finally, some posters took a more radical stance towards sharenting in general, asking "how much of a digital footprint does a baby need?" and arguing that because "nothing on the Internet is really private", the only feasible way to effectively govern children's social media presence was by refraining from sharing at all, as in the following excerpt:

> I'm afraid many of you don't realize that once something is online, it never goes away, even on "friends only" settings. Social media have become the new family photo album placed on your coffee table. If you would allow total strangers into your house to view it, screen cap it, and use it however they want, then certainly post the photos of your children online.

Taken together, all these strategies reflected heterogeneous perspectives and courses of action for posters to face the dilemmas. Despite their orientation, though, these posters contributed to the construction of diverse approaches for parents to consider when facing SMDs.

The next section will look at how this exchange of experiences and opinions framed these dilemmas as a common area of parental concern promoting critical reflections on the matter on the interacting parts.

Normalizing the dilemma and promoting a critical stance towards "social media culture"
Looking at the "outcomes" of these conversations as reflective practices, they helped to both normalize the dilemma, showing that it was something not only original posters but also many other users experienced, and – to different extents – foster critical reflections on the topic of sharenting in general.

Many thanked their peers and, overall, praised the conversations for letting them know that their concerns were not unheard of, like this poster who claimed: "It feels so good to know I'm not the only one that doesn't post pics of my baby on social media, really". Or, as another one put it, "I dig all the ideas here. It's neat to see what other mamas do. I've been thinking about this a lot lately and this conversation was very helpful to make up my mind on how to face this from now on!". And a third example: "I am glad someone posted this. I have been struggling with how to handle it. […] I'll be telling my husband about that, this may have just sealed our decision".

Several posters specifically referred to other people's judgments towards their governance choices about their kids' social media presence, stressing an implicit social expectation in showing them online:

> Thank you all ladies! I guess I really needed the reassurance. Sometimes I get a feeling like maybe people think I do not like being a mom or something, but I barely post any kind of photos anyway on social media! It seems like maybe people think that I'm all uppity about the issue, which I am not.

> Ok, I thought I was the only one who felt this way. I'm super paranoid about most things I'll admit, especially when it comes to my children. My social media is private, and I have limited friends. I only post photos privately, and still seldom do it. But I just get told I'm being ridiculous.

On a surface level, these conversations proposed posters' governance strategies aimed at defining "how to share". In this sense, parents learned practical ways to face their dilemmas. More in-depth, though, some engaged in critical reflections aimed at questioning "social media culture" in general, and the normalization of children's social media presence. This was evident in posters' words when they referred to the opportunity to *re-domesticate* or even *de-domesticate* social media as a family photo album. Re-domestication and de-domestication are part of the domestication framework indicating either changing or discarding media use within the household (Haddon, 2017). In this case, reflections about re- and de-domestication were frequently accompanied by critical positions towards the incorporation of social media in one's life and one's parenting, with posters reporting on the opportunity to either change their use so to better safeguard

their children or dismiss this use completely. The following post exemplifies that, with a poster lamenting the "self-comparison" trend that sharing about children can foster, and how de-domesticating Facebook was beneficial to her, stressing that if someone wants to know about her and her children, there are other "old-fashioned" ways to do so:

> I'm in the same "down with Facebook" camp as you are. I also agree with this whole keep-ing the kids off facebook mindset. It's obnoxious. "Look at what I did", "Look how awe-some and talented MY kids are", "this is how I parent, and why you should too"....it's one big pissing contest. It took me years to finally delete my page, but once I did, I never looked back- and I feel so much better being away from all that. If people want to stay in touch with us or know about my kids they can do it the old-fashioned way--through actually making a phone call, writing a letter, visiting, and generally making an effort.

Others referred to their re-domestication strategies, like the following two posters who decided to adopt alternative ways of sharing, in one case, or only to post few and selected pictures of their kids:

> Anytime I want to post a pic, I send a text of it instead to those that matter or share it on a private group with only family. Honestly, the majority of our "friends" on social media are acquaintances or people we knew in a different time of life.

> Thank you for posting this. I guess we should all talk more about the way social media impacted our life and how we can get back control. This [thread] made me think how it went for me. I used to post so much on Facebook and Instagram. Then I learned the hard way just how valuable privacy is. I learned that the more I let people see parts of my life, the more I invited negative criticism and judgement. This was a very painful lesson for me. My husband and I decided to only post minimal pictures. Also, I unfriended people that had been negative towards me. We both decided to keep our posts minimal so as to respect our baby's privacy and keep our baby away from negative people.

Conversating with peers online about sharenting, then, fostered feelings of normalization with respect to the dilemmatic situation lived, not only proposing an array of potential courses of actions to take that were appreciated by posters, but also promoting the con-struction of new frameworks of reference to foster a critical and reflective stance towards sharenting and its being a normalized and taken-for-granted practice (Leaver, 2017). The opportunity to re- or even de-domesticate social media is an example of such a critical stance, that once put into words and posted in the forum, is an alternative point of view for interacting parts to look at their dilemmas and at the role that social media play in their life in general.

Conclusions

The present article investigated dilemmas that parents experience about their children's social media presence, with a particular focus on how these dilemmas are narrated and discussed with peers online. In doing so, it has been stressed how this form of mediated interpersonal communication served as a reflective practice for these parents to make sense of new dilemmatic situations arising from the incorporation of digital parenting practices in the household, such as sharenting. This is in line with the educational literature highlighting how dilemmas can foster informal learning processes where people discuss, question, and make sense of their perspectives of meaning about a problem (Formenti & West, 2018).

All in all, these conversations allowed posters to voice new kinds of dilemmas that contemporary mothers, and parents in general, may experience, and for which they may have a hard time finding support elsewhere; to report a range of possible courses of actions for posters to learn how to face the dilemma by building on their peers' experiences and parenting strategies; and to show a new facet of sharenting, specifically the "dilemmatic" one, and the learning potential coming with these dilemmas if put into words and used to open a critical discussion with other parents.

These findings also show how the practice of sharenting and its governance are strictly interrelated, with SMDs having the potential to foster reflexivity about it. This is to say, that as sharenting can cause predicaments in parents, these very same quandaries can allow them to look for and find strategies to manage their children's social media presence, or even changing or totally dismissing their sharing habits. This is in line with the notion that "communication technologies are not only expressions of an already existing family culture and social organisation: they are ways of producing them" (Caron & Caronia, 2001, p. 50).

These findings expand the literature on digital dilemmas (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Chalklen & Anderson, 2017) by shedding light on the reflective practices parents may engage in when trying to make sense of and learn how to face them. On the one hand, this desire speaks to some level of media literacy, because not all parents pay the same level of attention to digital-related problems, nor know how to effectively use the web to learn about them. On the other hand, they also question the simplistic view promoted by media outlets (as reported by Barassi, 2020) according to which parents are generally inattentive about their children's digital footprints. These findings, in turn, resonate with broader concerns parents live with in respect to their role of "protecting caregivers", echoing discourses on the moral imperative of "good parenting" (Formenti, 2019), but also about their children's role in the process, whose agency was here taken into account when thinking about how they could feel in the future with respect to the digital breadcrumbs their parents left behind.

Domesticating social media as a new family album raises questions about the boundaries of interpersonal communication. These mothers appeared aware of the difference

between showing a framed picture in their living room and posting it online, searching for possible solutions for governing this exposure. Mindful of the contextual and situational nature of these data, findings from this article suggest that the governance of sharenting asks parents to engage in a complex and unfinished enterprise. Also, while no linear assumptions can be made with respect to the learning opportunities of these exchanges for posters (e.g., whether and how they will effectively incorporate in their daily life what they learned in these interactions), the informal learning environment created by this forum, allowing posters to interact and recount their experiences and point of view, allowed them to better reflect on such an enterprise, building on peer-to-peer informal interpersonal communication to develop and learn possible interpretative and critical frameworks as well as courses of action to tackle these dilemmas.

This study was still limited for several reasons. First, it focuses on the US section of the forum, thus findings may be more reflective of that cultural milieu. Second, we only hear from these dilemmas as lived by mothers, but little is known about first-hand perspectives of partners and children themselves. Additionally, background information was scarce, which hinders our ability to better contextualize these findings.

Finally, sharenting has become a very common practice today. Given that many parents share about their children, it is plausible that the experience of a dilemma concerns only a minority of them. This is in line with findings from Barnes and Potter (2021), which show that most parents from their Australian sample do not prioritize their children's privacy when posting, as well as Cino's and Wartella's (2021) finding that, based on a survey with American parents investigating different sharenting governance practices, only a minority engaged in privacy-protective behaviors.

As such, future research may employ methodological triangulation, adopting a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches to get an estimate of this phenomenon and more actively involve other actors to better understand whether and how SMDs are lived and made sense of by the whole family unity. Children's involvement in the research process would be particularly desirable. Research suggests ambivalent findings with respect to their stance towards sharenting, with some being more and others less accepting of this practice, always provided that their agency in the process is respected (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Sarkadi et al., 2020).

In spite of its limitations, this work increases our knowledge about the quandaries parents may face in our age of digital communication, as well as about possible interpretations and de-constructions of these dilemmas. It also shows that a parenting forum can provide parents with the opportunity to educate each other and get support and answers to challenging, unexpected questions that are not easily resolved given their relatively new and ever-evolving nature. These findings offer new theoretical nuances to research SMDs and their disorienting nature, going beyond the surface and offering a counter-narrative to the notion that parents are naïve and inattentive about their children's online presence. They can also inform practitioners working with parents and families, inviting

them to include this new set of predicaments among the areas of concern to be taken into account in supporting families in the digital age, mindful of the ever-evolving and difficult challenges they may encounter.

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