(Non-)Sharing as a Form of Maternal Care? The Ambiguous Meanings of Sharenting for Mothers of 0- To-8-Year-Old Children

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Abstract

The present article reports on findings from a survey administered in (country anonymised) to a national representative sample of parents of children aged 0-8 around their sharenting behaviour. We first frame sharenting as a complex phenomenon where gendered, generational and agentic matters intertwine and mingle in complex ways. We then report results from a cluster analysis aimed at identifying different sharenting styles reflecting the scale and scope of parents' sharing behaviour among our sample. The relationships between sharenting styles and parents' socio-demographics, as well as parental practices of privacy management are further explored and reported. Altogether, findings provide insights into the experience of sharenting in family life pointing to a variety of sharing practices, while also showing first that sharenting represents a key site of identity performance for young mothers, and then how parents negotiate and manage related issues of agency and privacy.

Keywords: sharenting, surveillance culture, gender.

1. Introduction

That our homes, and our sense of homeness and family, are constituted by and through the media is nothing new (Silverstone, 1999). However, the current stage of mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) involves a deeper co-determination and mutual implication of digital media and family life. Parenting has become increasingly mediatized (Damkjær, 2018), as exemplified by the frequent use of pregnancy apps (Barassi, 2017; Lupton & Pedersen, 2016),

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parenting apps (Thornham, 2019) and wearable devices to monitor babies' health (Leaver, 2017; Lupton, 2020; Mascheroni et al., 2020), as well as by parents sharing photos and videos of their children online as soon as they want to communicate their transition to parenthood (Leaver, 2017). The increasing interdependence of family practices and relations on digital media generates unprecedented amounts of "online quantified data" (Van Dijck, 2014, p. 198) that are converted into profitable commodities. Ultimately, the datafication of childhood is largely driven by processes of data extraction that take place in the domestic context, either in the form of mediatized parenting practices and children's digital engagement, or in the form of internet-connected devices (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021).

This paper focuses on a particular mediatized and gendered performance of parenthood and the self (Holiday et al., 2020): sharenting. Sharenting – a portmanteau of "sharing" and "parenting" – indicates the now popular practices through which "parents share information about themselves and their children online" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017, p. 110). The concept of sharenting has entered public discussions to denote the controversial and ambivalent nature of this practice. In fact, through sharenting, parents perform the contemporary practices and imaginaries of "good" and "caring" parenthood (Damkjær, 2018) within online networks of interpersonal communication (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2018). However, a side effect of sharenting is that parents create digital footprints for their children. Thus, the practice of care intertwines with dataveillance (Lupton, 2020). This mediatization gives rise to new forms of "intimate surveillance" (Leaver, 2017) which constitute children as data points, monetized according to the data-driven logic of "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2015), at the same time when they are positioned as recipients of care and affection in the intimacy of parent-child relationship.

In this respect, prior research has suggested the value of examining the practices of everyday family life, whose uncertainty and messiness generates complex entanglements of data and practices (Barassi, 2018; Lupton, 2020; Mascheroni, 2020).

Accordingly, empirical research is now looking at the several ramifications of sharenting as a practice which combines routines of dataveillance and parental care, exploring how sharenting can be understood as a complex act of care. This work follows this line of inquiry by empirically documenting and analysing the experiences of sharenting in children's and families' everyday life. First, it will review the extant literature on sharenting as a gendered, generational and agentic performance, mostly performed by mothers. Second, it will present the results of a cluster analysis of survey data gathered from a nationally representative sample of Italian parents to 0-to-8-year-old children. As the

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clustering reflects the scale and scope of different sharenting behaviour, the results provide insights into the lived and gendered experiences of sharenting in families' life. Specifically, the paper will identify how sharenting styles are constructed within the domestic and communicative spheres. Furthermore, the discussion will point to the association between sharenting and sociodemographic variables, showing that sharenting represent a key site of identity performance for young mothers. Finally, the discussion will take into account how parents negotiate issues of agency and privacy in the everyday management of sharenting. Taken together, the paper will shed light on how families perform and attribute meanings to sharenting and data traces by appropriating, negotiating and resisting surveillance imaginaries (Lyon, 2018).

2.   Sharenting as a gendered, generational and agentic practice

The pervasiveness of digital media in everyday life has led to the normalisation for people to engage in a range of personal data practices (Lupton, 2017), and data relations (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), where social interactions, self-presentation and identity practices are enacted on digital platforms and amidst continuous data collection. The normalisation of dataveillance applies to families as well, within a broader framework of mediatized parenting practices, which contribute to a wider and, sometimes, taken-for-granted process of datafication of childhood and family life (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021). Against this background, the practice of sharenting has acquired popularity among parents, as a way to both perform their social roles and establish/reinforce interpersonal connections, which provide emotional support and advice (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2018). Here we briefly review the extant literature on the gendered, generational and agentic components of this mediatized practice.

The gendered dimension of sharenting is not a given. In fact, while some studies support that women are more likely to share about their children on social media than men (Ammari et al., 2015; Davis, 2015), others report no significant differences in the amount of pictures posted in the span of a month by mothers and fathers (Livingstone et al., 2018). When looking at sharenting through the lens of a narrative domestic practice, however, scholars have argued that narrating family life is, indeed, a gendered activity - as in Humphreys' (2018) theorization of "media accounting", according to which women have long played the role of family "historians" through diaries and baby books to narrate their motherhood and document their children's development. Empirical data support this notion, since mothers report using social media platforms as a "modern day baby book" (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015) and generally being

more involved than fathers in creating, sharing, and managing representational content about children on social media (Ammari et al., 2015). Furthermore, becoming a mother is a transformative phase in women's lives (Das, 2019; Kruger, 2003), charged with numerous social expectations on how to better perform this role even before the child is born, in line with normative neoliberal accounts holding women responsible for their children's wellbeing (Neiterman, 2012). Sharing about one's motherhood, then, can be understood as a way of performing parenting according to the intensive mothering tenets (Hays, 1998). In fact, maternity has historically been subjected to normative discourses (Lupton, 1999). Sharenting, in this sense, becomes a performative digital practice through which mothers normalise such normative judgments, thus contributing to a broader process of surveillance (Lazard et al., 2019). Accordingly, sharenting becomes a way to "perform acts of maternal caring" (Lupton, 2020). Besides, a further layer of external pressure comes from the examples set by influencer "mumpreneurs": bloggers who promote a normalisation of sharenting in parents' everyday life while reinforcing a set of ideas on "how to" perform motherhood (Archer, 2019; Leaver, 2017). Studies focusing on the "content" of sharenting show how mothers align to the intensive mothering framework (Locatelli, 2017; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). It follows that given the set of societal expectations and macro-discourses on being a good (digital) mother (Das, 2019), sharenting, as a form of interpersonal interaction between posters and recipients, becomes a tool for identity-making for mothers in the digital age, since "selves arise in interaction with others" (Shepherd, 2006, p. 24) who can provide validation for mother's "performance" (Cino et al., 2020).

Generational aspects are also relevant when it comes to sharenting, stemming from matters of external social support and previous incorporation of online sharing into one's daily life. Becoming a parent has long been a tough path for many, especially mothers who may feel alone and in seek of support and validation during this phase of their life (Russell, 1974). This is especially true nowadays, when family life has undergone a process of "privatization" in Western and industrialized countries like (country anonymised), where the traditional nets of mutual support parents historically relied on have changed, and being a parent became a more private, thus lonely, experience (Gigli, 2007; Lee et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, feelings of loneliness have been linked to increased social media sharing by mothers, especially for younger and first-time mothers who find in sharenting a way to face solitude and get social and emotional support (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Dworkin et al., 2013; Gibson & Hanson, 2013). Sharenting, in this sense, may compensate for the increased privatization of parenting by providing parents with new opportunities to maintain their social ties and find venues for self-expression (Davis, 2015;

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Webb & Lee, 2011). In this sense, sharenting can be framed not only as an act of "childcare" (e.g., by showing to be a good and loving mother – Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), but also of self-care (i.e., taking advantage of sharenting to reflexively make sense of and learn about her new social role as a mother – Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017).

The very act of posting representations of one's family online can further be understood with respect to the fact that, having grown in a context of normalised online sharing (Van Dijck, 2013), especially younger generations are used to narrating their life on social media and, generally, taking part to a process of participatory surveillance (Lyon, 2018; Marwick, 2012). As such, as a major transition in one's life, posting about one's parenting and children on social media can be seen as a taken-for-granted way of accounting one's life, leading us to our next point, concerning matters of parents' and children's agency.

As Leaver (2015) makes the case for, when sharing on social media the presumption is that users' agency is central in managing their online identity. While this might be true on one hand, since parents who share do control their own narrative, things get more complicated when third parties are involved, like children. In this regard, scholars have argued that the boundaries between the parent's and the child's selves blur in sharenting (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). The notion of an "extended self" (Holiday et al., 2020) has been theorised, which implies that parents become the agents not only of their own, but also their children's digital identities. While children gain greater representational agency as they grow into adolescence (Garmendia et al., 2021), younger children's digital traces are more dependent on their parents' sharing behaviour, in line with the notion that early childhood is a critical site of datafication (Mascheroni, 2018). It is in this sense that sharenting, as a data practice, calls into play power relations in terms of data ownership and representational agency (Lupton, 2020), that may cause dilemmas in parents (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Some parents, in fact, govern their children's digital footprints through forms of privacy stewardship (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), that are enacted by mothers more than fathers, as a new gendered domestic activity (Ammari et al., 2015). However, the dimensions of maternal performance and care enhanced through sharenting are, at the same time, both fostered by broader social expectations of reflexive self-monitoring (Lupton, 2017), and condemned by broader social discourses on parental data accountability (Barassi, 2019; Cino, 2022a), pointing to a neoliberal paradox where producing and sharing data about one's child is framed as an act of care, while privacy protection is framed as an individual responsibility blamed on parents alone (Mascheroni, 2018). As such, mothers may feel "trapped" amidst conflicting discourses on how to better perform their morally signified role in

the digital age (Cino, 2022b). Choosing to conform to an idealised "good" digital mother displayed through sharenting, mothers end up exposing their children to the short- and longer-term consequences of datafication, including allocational and representational harms that may narrow future opportunities and life trajectories of children based on data collected since they are in the womb (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021). Social pressures to conform to normative standards of intensive mothering, then, clash with equally normative expectations that mothers should protect their children online.

3. Research questions

Informed by the above-mentioned literature, the present article aims to examine sharenting as an ambivalent data practice which is gendered, generational and performative. First, we investigate the patterns of sharing among a national representative sample of parents of 0- to-8-year olds children in order to identify the presence of recurrent sharenting styles; second, we examine the relationship between sharenting styles and parents' sociodemographic (including parents' age and gender, and age of the child/children), and between sharenting styles and parental practices of privacy management adopted in order to govern their children's social media presence. As such, we ask the following three research questions:

RQ1: Can we identify sharenting styles based on patterns of similarities and differences in sharing behaviour across the sample?

RQ2: To what extent does sharenting vary based on parents' age and gender, and child's age?

RQ3: How does sharenting relate to parents' privacy management practices?

4. Method

As part of a research project on the datafication of childhood and family life, a survey on the data practices within the domestic context was administered online in September 2020 to a sample of 1000 (anonymised) parents of children aged 0-8, recruited through a nationally representative panel by IPSOS. The survey, and the whole research project, received ethical approval by the Ethics Committee of (anonymised). Slightly more mothers (N=538) than fathers (N=442) responded to the survey. Conversely, the sample is more balanced in terms of gender (Nmale= 514, Nfemale=486) and age (N0-4 y.o =524, N5-8 y.o=476) of children.

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The answers to the items concerning sharenting practices were examined with reference to the sharing frequency, child's agency and privacy management and reasons for not sharing.

4.1. Measures

The frequency of sharenting practices with family and friends, but also with broader audiences, was measured with two items – "In the past month, how often have you shared a photo/video of your child online where only friends and family could see it (on WhatsApp, social media, etc.)?" and "In the past month, how often have you posted a photo/video of your child where more people could see it (social media, WhatsApp status, etc.)?" - using 6-point Likert scales (1= Never to 6= Several times a day; 98= I don't know; 99= I prefer not to answer).

To examine how parents negotiate (their own and children's) agency as well as issues of privacy in their everyday management of sharenting practices, we asked the same questions of a European comparative survey (Garmendia et al., 2021; Smahel et al., 2020), which asks "When you have shared photos or videos of your child and/or children online has any of the following applied?". Response items, using 5-point Likert scales (1= Very untrue to 5=Very true; 97= None of these; 98= I don't know; 99= I prefer not to answer), include: "I did it to keep in touch with family and friends"; "My child asked me to post the photos/videos online"; "My child asked me to remove something I posted about them online"; "I regretted something I shared about my child/children online"; "I asked my child if it was OK in advance"; "I didn't show my child's face clearly in photos", "I don't see anything much to worry about".
Reasons for avoiding sharenting ("What prevents you from sharing on social media about your child/children?") were measured with eight items used in a survey conducted in the US by one of the authors (Cino & Wartella, 2021) (including: "I'm afraid that stranger people on the Internet can be dangerous"; "I am mindful about the data I may leave behind about him/her/them"; "I think he/she/they is/are their own persons and should make their own decisions about their online presence"; "I fear the website would own the picture"; "I am afraid his/her/their peers could bully him/her/them"; "I feel like nothing is private on the Internet in spite of privacy settings"; "My partner/ex-partner doesn't want me to"; "I don't care") using 5-point Likert scales (1= Strongly disagree to 5= Strongly agree; 98= I don't know; 99= I prefer not to answer).

4.2. Clustering and data analysis

To identify different sharing patterns, corresponding to diverse sharenting styles, a two-step cluster analysis based on the frequency of sharing children's photos/videos with family and friends or more publicly with larger audiences, was conducted. We employed a cluster analysis using the two-step method, due to the large size of the sample (N=1000). The Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC) was selected as the clustering criterion for its suitability to models with few parameters (Weakliem, 2004), as is the case. We set four as the maximum number of clusters for interpretative purposes to avoid the over-proliferation of groups and to ease comparisons. The results indicated that a three-cluster solution produced a good fit. The frequency of sharing with family and friends showed the highest input (predictor) importance for clustering (1.00), followed by the frequency of sharing children's photos/videos more publicly (0.63).

Accordingly, the clusters analysis generated a classification of parents in three categories - (1) the unsharer; (2) the close-knit sharer, and (3) the regular sharer – which reflect the scale and scope of sharenting, based on the frequency of sharenting, the degree of openness in sharing, and the motivations underpinning sharing practices.

One-way ANOVA on ranks (Kruskal-Wallis H Test) employing Dunn's pairwise tests (Dunn, 1961) and Bonferroni post-hoc test (Olejnik et al., 1997) was adopted to confirm the distinctive characteristics of three clusters and examine how these groups differ significantly in the diverse dimensions of analysis. The Kruskal-Wallis H Test (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) variant was adopted because the data violated the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and the normality of distribution requested for the application of the traditional one-way ANOVA. To test the significance of clusters' differences regarding the categorical variables (e.g gender) Chi-Square test was performed. All the analyses were conducted with the software SPSS version 25.

In the following section Results, only items that show significant differences between clusters are reported (for the levels of significance see Table 1, 2, 3 and 4).

5.   Results

In total, responses from 980 parents were used in the data analysis (54.9% Female; Mage = 39.09; Rangeage=18-54; SDage = 8.55). The survey asked parents to answer the questions thinking of their child aged 0-8. In the case of more siblings aged 0-8, the kid was automatically selected by the software in order to balance gender and age quotas (51.4% Male; Mage = 4.32;

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Range$_{age}$=0-4 y.o (52.2%), 5-8 y.o (47.8%); SD$_{age}$ = 2.47). WhatsApp (87.5%), Facebook (43%) and Instagram (34%) emerged to be the most common platforms for sharenting.

To answer RQ1—namely, to identify different sharenting styles group parents based on the scale and scope of sharenting practices— from the two-step cluster analysis (based on the frequency of sharing children's photos or videos in a private space and with a selected number of people, and on the frequency of sharenting in more public forms with invisible audiences as well), three clusters emerged. The largest one is what we labelled *Regular sharers* (*N*=466, 47.6%), including parents who share photos/videos of their child/children with friends and family daily or almost daily, while only occasionally (a few times in the past month) sharing with wider audiences, followed by parents who hardly ever share photos or videos of their child with friends and family and never make them public and accessible to others beyond close, intimate contacts (the *Unsharers*, *N*=298, 30,4%). The smallest group, that we named as the *Close-knit sharers* (*N*=216, 22%) consists of respondents who share children's photos or videos with friends and family a few times a month, while hardly ever posting these images in more public forms.

Confirming the distinctive characteristics of the three clusters identified by the cluster analysis, a one-way ANOVA on ranks (Kruskal-Wallis H Test) employing Dunn's pairwise tests and Bonferroni post-hoc test has shown that the three groups differ significantly in terms of their sharenting practices with respect to sharing frequency with family and friends and in more public forms.

The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of two-step cluster analysis (N=980).

Items	Unsharers (n=298)	Close-knit Sharers (n=216)	Regular Sharers (n=466)	Total (980)	Sign. H (df)
Frequency of sharing children's photos with family and friends	2.28$_a$ (0.96)	2.93$_b$ (1.00)	4.27$_c$ (1.49)	3.37 (1.40)	*H(2)=385.05****
Frequency of sharing children's photos online in more public forms	1.29$_a$ (.45)	1.49$_b$ (.50)	3.35$_c$ (1.30)	2.31 (1.37)	*H(2)=535.01****

Note: Means that do not share the same subscripts between the clusters are significantly different at $p < .05$ after Bonferroni adjustment; ** $p <.01$, *** $p <.001$.
Means are given in replacement of their respective ranks.

To answer RQ2 (see Table 2), Chi-Square test and one-way ANOVA on ranks (Kruskal-Wallis H Test) employing Dunn's pairwise tests and Bonferroni post-hoc test were performed.

The analysis indicates that females are more likely regular sharers (*N*=282, 60.5% within-cluster), suggesting a stronger sharenting attitude of mothers; in

turn, the gender distribution is more balanced among unsharers and close-knit sharers.

Table 2. Demographic antecedents by parents' groups.

		Unsharers (n=298)	Close-knit Sharers (n=216)	Regular Sharers (n=466)	Total	Sign.
Gender % within cluster	Male	148 49.7%	110 50.9%	184 39.5%	442	χ2=11.4**
	Female	150 50.3%	106 49.1%	282 60.5%	538	
	Mean (SD)					
Parent Age		40.6ₐ (8.21)	41ₐ (8.08)	37.2ᵦ (8.57)	39.09 (8.55)	H(2)=44.87***
Child Age		4.69ₐ (2.36)	4.42 (2.47)	4ᵦ (2.5)	4.32 (2.47)	H(2)=12.18**

Note: Means that do not share the same subscripts between the clusters are significantly different at $p < .05$ after Bonferroni adjustment; *p<0.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.001.
Means are given in replacement of their respective ranks.

In terms of parent's age, the regular sharers group is significantly younger (on average 3.6 younger; 40.8% are between 18 and 34 years) than the close-knit sharers and unsharers groups, with mothers representing the majority (70%) of those between 18 and 34 within the cluster. However, there is no significant difference between the close-knit sharers and the unsharers.

Considering the child's age, regular sharers have significantly younger children than the unsharers: over half of kids (*N*=260, 55.8% within-cluster) are between 0 and 4 years. Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of parent's age and gender, and child's age.

To answer RQ3 (Table 4), a one-way ANOVA on rank (Kruskal-Wallis H Test) employing Dunn's pairwise tests and Bonferroni post-hoc test was carried out.

When we examine privacy management in everyday sharenting and children's agency as recognised by their parents before, during or after sharenting, we can observe a strong difference between close-knit sharers and regular sharers, and between unsharers and regular sharers. Unsurprisingly given their young age, children do not seem active in asking for sharenting practices, and those who do so, especially children of regular sharers and unsharers, are between 5 and 8 years old (see Table 5).

Common across the three groups is parents reporting that their children did not ask them to remove shared photos, even if the regular sharers diverge significantly to unsharers and close-knit sharers, showing a higher average value.

More surprisingly, instead, none of the groups seems to be used to ask their children for permission before sharing photos or videos portraying them.

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Nevertheless, a modest difference between close-knit sharers and regular sharers emerged, with the latter being more likely to ask for consent compared to the former. The unsharers and regular sharers diverge significantly also regarding the practice of disguising children's faces in photos, though the difference is little: the latter tend to apply this privacy protective measure more often than parents who are less frequent sharer.

Table 3. Parent's and child's age range frequencies, accounting for parent's gender.

		Unsharer (n=298)	Close-knit Sharer (n=216)	Regular Sharer (n=466)	Total
Parent Age Range % within cluster % of women within cluster	18-34	74 24.8% 62.2%	51 23.6% 52.9%	190 40.8% 70%	315
	35-49	192 64.4% 49%	145 61.7% 50.3%	249 53.4% 56.6%	586
	50-54	192 10.8% 31.3%	20 14.7% 30%	27 5.8% 44.4%	79
Child Age Range % within cluster	0-4	141 47.3%	111 51.4%	260 55.8%	512
	5-8	157 52.7%	105 48.6%	206 44.2%	468

Regular sharers are also more likely to express feelings of regret after sharing than close-knit sharers and unsharers, with a significant difference. At this stage, and with the data available, we can only speculate that regular sharers, since they engage in sharenting on a more regular basis, have more occasions for reflexive engagement with their own practices, and thus develop greater perceived regret. On the other side, regret could be regular sharers' answer to social pressures around over-sharing. In fact, when we examine the item measuring parents' concerns about sharing, regular sharers are more likely to report that they "don't see anything much to worry about".

When it comes to the reasons for avoiding sharenting, half of the respondents reported that their main reason is that they are not interested in sharing their children's photos with others online. However, evidence of a difference between close-knit sharers and regular sharers, and between unsharers and regular sharers emerged. Understandably, regular sharers seem more interested than the other groups, especially in comparison with to close-knit sharers.

Moreover, being mindful about leaving behind data traces of their children shows a significant difference between close-knit and regular sharer. Generally speaking, almost half of the parents are reportedly aware of the consequences

of sharenting for children's digital identity, but regular sharers show a lower average value, suggesting a lower degree of awareness

Table 4. Sharenting attitudes by parents' groups.

		Unsharer (n=298)	Close-knit Sharer (n=216)	Regular Sharer (n=466)	Total (980)	Sign. H (df)
Child's agency and privacy management	Child request for sharing	2.12ₐ (1.33)	2.00ₐ (1.32)	2.52ᵦ (1.49)	2.35 (1.44)	H(2)=15,9***
	Child request for removing	1.45ₐ (.82)	1.28ₐ (.70)	1.97ᵦ (1.32)	1.75 (1.17)	H(2)=35,9***
	Asking permission before sharing	2.05 (1.35)	1.96ₐ (1.33)	2.37ᵦ (1.47)	2.24 (1.42)	H(2)=9,89**
	Protection of child's face in shared photos	2.64ₐ (1.40)	2.71 (1.53)	2.97ᵦ (1.42)	2.85 (1.44)	H(2)=8,86*
	Regret for sharing	1.87ₐ (.98)	1.81ₐ (.91)	2.29ᵦ (1.28)	2.12 (1.18)	H(2)=18,2***
	Concern about sharing (lack of)	2.89ₐ (1.29)	2.75ₐ (1.31)	3.28ᵦ (1.19)	3.11 (1.25)	H(2)=22,2***
Reasons for not sharing	Not interested in sharing	4.19ₐ (.99)	4.22ₐ (1.00)	3.88ᵦ (1.12)	4.15 (1.02)	H(2)=8.04*
	Mindful of children digital traces	4.25 (1.01)	4.38ₐ (.91)	4.07ᵦ (1.03)	4.26 (.98)	H(2)=22,2**

Note: Mean (SD); Means that do not share the same subscripts between the clusters are significantly different at p < .05 after Bonferroni adjustment; *p<.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.001.
Means are given in replacement of their respective ranks.

Table 5. Children's agency in asking to share their photos or removing them.

		Unsharer (n=191)	Close-knit Sharer (n=98)	Regular Sharer (n=456)	Total (745)
Child request for sharing % within cluster	0-4 y.o.	14 14.1%	7 12.7%	49 19,2%	70
	5-8 y.o.	30 32,6%	14 32,6%	108 53,7%	152
Child request for removing % within cluster	0-4 y.o.	2 2%	0 0%	31 12,2%	33
	5-8 y.o.	6 4,3%	3 7%	51 25,2%	60

Note: frequencies and percentages report merged "quite true" and "true" answers.

6. Discussion and future research

In this paper, we aimed to contribute to the literature on sharenting which highlights the tensions and ambivalent meanings of sharenting for parents. To achieve this goal, we have situated sharenting within the imaginaries and

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practices of dataveillance as reported by a national representative sample of Italian parents of children aged 0-8. Their answers suggest that sharenting is accomplished as a gendered, generational and agentic performance of parenthood.

In relation to its gendered nature, our data show that, while the unsharers and close-knit sharers are balanced in terms of gender compositions, those who engage in sharenting practices on a regular basis are more likely to be mothers. Furthermore, the gendered nature of sharenting intersects with its generational nature: indeed, the regular sharer group is comprised primarily by mothers in the age group 18-34 (70%), whose children are four or younger, suggesting that sharenting is more frequently practised in the early stages of motherhood, when mothers are more likely to feel isolated and lonely. The literature on motherhood in the digital age (Das, 2019; Thornham, 2019) helps us make sense of the gendered dimension of sharenting suggested by our findings. Pregnant women and new mothers are discursively regulated by the dominant discourse of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1998), a normative model which has intensified with the expansion of both mediatized parenting practices (Damkjær, 2018) and neoliberal discourses of individual responsibilisation (Neiterman, 2012). Several studies have demonstrated that, whenever they post, interact with others or read about other mothers' experiences on social media, or when they use pregnancy or parenting apps, new mothers are confronted with a highly normative standard of "good" and "caring" mothering, which is child-centred and highly demanding in terms of the emotional and temporal investment required. One source of tension and ambivalence can be observed here, which is also highlighted by our results. In fact, while social media platforms provide emotional support in the form of pre-existing (offline) intimate ties, or temporally-contained networks of perinatal connections, they equally build an "infrastructure of anxiety" fixing mothers into a "cycle of blame" (Das, 2019). In this scenario, the practice of sharenting is part of the repertoire of (communication) practices through which new mothers try to find support through relational maintenance, and, simultaneously, to adhere to an idealised "good mother", who is able to manage the conflicting roles and duties that she is called to play in her everyday life. In this sense, posting about one's mothering can represent simultaneously an act of "childcare" (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Lupton, 2020), but also of reflexive parenting (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). However, the very means which provide support and a sense of fulfilment, can easily turn into sources of frustration, anxiety and guilt for failing to conform to the 'good and caring mother' type, insofar as mothers are constantly pushed to compare their parenting practices against this normative standard. Indeed, feelings of regret for oversharing their children's lives are primarily expressed by regular sharers.

However, as we have anticipated above, sharenting emerges as agenerational practice, insofar as regular sharer are younger, with a higher proportion of parents belonging to the 18-34 age group. By framing sharenting as a generational practice we want to suggest that, ultimately, sharenting is a practice of self-representation (and child-representation) which responds to the rhetoric of transparency and openness typical of the social media logic (Van Dijck, 2013). In other words, as social media have become fully integrated in everyday life, especially within people's communication repertoires and their practices of the self, sharing the most intimate as well as the mundane details of one's everyday life has become imperative too. In this sense we can understand sharenting as an everyday practice of surveillance which is shaped by, while shaping, surveillance imaginaries. As Lyon claimed in his latest work (2018), the shift from a surveillance society to a culture of surveillance is manifested in the forms of appropriation, negotiation and resistance through which individuals conform to and enact surveillance imaginaries and practices. In other words, surveillance ceases to be an external force that impinges upon us and our lives. Rather, "watching and being watched" becomes "a way of life" (Lyon, 2018). Surveillance imaginaries and practices are functional to the success of "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2015) or, as more recently argued by Couldry and Mejias (2019), of "data colonialism". When parents share their parenting practices, they conform to the ideologies that legitimise, naturalise and sustain data colonialism. While contemporary surveillance is participatory (Lyon, 2018; Marwick, 2012) – even desired and initiated by citizens – however, we cannot ignore how such participation in forms of dataveillance is ultimately coerced (Barassi, 2018), since adherence to surveillance culture means turning our lives into data that are extracted by platforms for profit (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

The culture of intensive mothering and the culture of participatory surveillance that inform communicative and expressive practices on social media, both lead us to a third dimension we would like to emphasises: that sharenting is a performance of maternal (or paternal) care in front of audiences who are called to witness their new status as parents and their attempts at conforming with "good mothers". The identity of "good mother" or "good father" is both an individual and social accomplishment, achieved through acts of self-presentations and interpersonal interactions.

The identity of "good" mother or father, achieved through sharenting, is not without tensions, though. Not only is the normative discourse of intensive mothering a source of anxiety, for it confronts mothers with the need keep their performance to a high standard. Added pressures arise from the public discourses around parenting, which pose heightened expectations upon parents. While, on one hand, sharenting as a practice of maternal care and an identity marker of their transition to parenthood adheres to the social media

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logic of transparency, it simultaneously goes against the other side of the neoliberal discourse that disciplines parenthood – especially when it comes to mediating their children's media use or media visibility. Namely, sharenting seems at odds with the dominant frames of privacy as an individual responsibility (Mascheroni, 2018). In fact, the logic of intensive mothering fits well with the increasing "responsibilisation" of motherhood, whereby parents are held responsible for managing their children's digital footprints and social media presence. But the same logic contrasts with the social media logic of rendering the most mundane aspects of daily life into monetizable data. The privatisation of privacy protection is nothing new. Rather it is a further example of individual responses to social problems and 'systemic contradictions' (Beck, 1992, p. 137). What makes sharenting remarkable, however, is that it is both conforming to and violating the social expectations of parenthood in the digital age, amid conflicting normative pressures. Parents are both expected to perform their individual acts of care on social media, and to individually protect their children from the dangers of social media. Parents are torn between the demand for sharing and the need to protect their children's data. As such, they are caught between contrasting norms and expectations that revolve, nonetheless, around the same individual responsibilisation.

This study has a number of limitations, first and foremost due to the cross-sectional nature of the data analysed in this paper. Longitudinal data could provide further support of our interpretation of sharenting as a gendered, generational and agentic performance of parenthood which is enacted especially by young new mothers. Moreover, our findings show that Italian parents are more likely to share with family and friends rather than more publicly. However, the approach adopted here is consistent with the overall framework of the project on the datafication of childhood and family life – of which the survey was the initial step - characterised by an emphasis on data practices as situated and embodied. Accordingly, the present analysis framed sharenting as a situated performance which reflects the contradictions typical of surveillance capitalism. Further steps in the research will include an examination of sharenting in relation to other data practices (including the use of smart speakers), as well as a qualitative longitudinal research to investigate the lived experiences and contradictory meanings of sharenting among parents. The longitudinal temporality of the qualitative research, as well as the scope and nature of qualitative methods, will contribute to shed light on the interpretation of sharenting as a situated practice that responds to the need of new mothers find social support and re-negotiate their public identities during the early stage of motherhood.

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