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## The Privacy Paradox by Proxy: Considering Predictors of Sharenting

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Article

## The Privacy Paradox by Proxy: Considering Predictors of Sharenting

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### Abstract

Despite being worried that children may compromise their privacy by disclosing too much personal data online, many parents paradoxically share pictures and information about their children *themselves*, a practice called sharenting. In this article we utilise data from the EU Kids Online survey to investigate this paradox. We examine both how individual characteristics such as demographics and digital skills, and relational factors, including parental mediation styles, concerns about children's privacy, and communication between parents and children influence sharenting practices. Counter-intuitively, our findings show that parents with higher levels of digital skills are more likely to engage in sharenting. Furthermore, parents who actively mediate their children's use of the internet and are more concerned about the privacy of their children, are also more likely to engage in sharenting. At the same time, and further emphasising the complexities of this relational practice, many parents do not ask for their children's consent in advance of sharing information about them. Overall, parents seem to consider the social benefits of sharenting to outweigh the potential risks both for themselves and for their children. Given the paradoxical complexities of sharenting practices, we propose further research is required to distinguish between different kinds of sharenting and their potential implications for children and young people's right to privacy.

### Keywords

children online; children's digital rights; Europe; parental mediation; privacy paradox; sharenting

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

"Sharenting," a portmanteau of share and parenting, refers to parents sharing personal information, such as stories, photos and videos about their children's lives online (Steinberg, 2017, p. 842). Sharenting can reveal aspects of children's behaviour and development and parents' feelings towards children (Marasli et al., 2016). As such, it can be seen both as a form of self-presentation and a relational practice that represents the relationship between parents and their children (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017, p. 111). It can therefore have both positive and negative implications. The practice is also paradoxical, as parents are on the one hand responsible for

protecting their children, but at the same time disclose personal information that might compromise the privacy of their children online (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Cino & Formenti, 2021).

Despite expressing privacy concerns, individuals might still regularly disclose personal information online. This gap between intention and behaviour is recognised as "the privacy paradox" (Norberg et al., 2007, see also Barth & de Jong, 2017; Kokolakis, 2017). Previous research on the privacy paradox has typically focused on individual motivations, concerns, and practices implemented to manage privacy (Barth & de Jong, 2017; Harigattai & Marwick, 2016). Users of social networking sites might for example engage in a balancing act

between protecting their privacy and exploring the potential of these platforms (see for instance Chalklen & Anderson, 2017; Taddicken, 2014). Reasons for sharing personal information despite significant concerns about privacy have been found to include perceived short-term benefits of information disclosure, a lack of knowledge about the potential consequences of disclosure, and an overestimation of the benefits and underestimation of the risks involved (e.g., Gerber et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2016; Kokolakis, 2017). However, the extent to which individual disclosure of personal information also introduces privacy risks *for others*—a privacy paradox by proxy—has not been sufficiently investigated.

Therefore, in this article, we seek to better understand the relational dimensions of the privacy paradox. To do this we specifically explore predictors of sharenting amongst European parents. Sharenting is a pertinent example for our investigation as parents have both a direct continuous relationship with their children and significant knowledge of and access to their child's personal information. At the same time, parents have the responsibility to keep their children safe, including protecting their autonomy and privacy. Article 16 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides that children "should not be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, p. 5). At the same time, it is noted that children are particularly vulnerable to breaches of their privacy because of the range of situations in which adults have power over them. Furthermore, Article 12 of the UNCRC provides that children have a right to be heard in all matters affecting them and that the views of the child should be "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, p. 4).

Thus, understanding more about parents who choose to share information about their children, and about the factors that influence their sharenting practices, might further our understanding of overall privacy dilemmas regarding digital participation.

To achieve this, we use data from the EU Kids Online survey, a cross-national representative survey with children aged 9 to 17 and one of their parents. Parents from Norway, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Spain answered questions about sharenting as part of this survey ( $n = 5,630$ ). Harnessing the potential of this combined dataset we add to the evolving body of research on sharenting which to date consists largely of studies limited to one country or online context (such as Twitter, Instagram, or a specific forum). We analyse how various individual and relational factors that have previously been found to influence the extent to which parents engage in sharenting, contribute to our understanding of this paradoxical practice. These include individual demographics, digital skills, approaches to parental mediation, and concerns about children's privacy. We also investigate how communication between parents and chil-

dren about sharenting influences sharenting practices. In doing so, we highlight how and why it is important to consider the relational aspects of the privacy paradox and the factors that perpetuate this paradox and complicate our understanding of it.

## 2. Previous Research on Sharenting Practices

Previous research about the privacy paradox indicates that individuals share personal information online because they overestimate the short-term benefits of such disclosure. Research on sharenting has identified that motivations for this practice are diverse and include: (a) collecting and curating memories (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015); (b) staying connected with family and friends (Brosch, 2016); (c) getting affirmation and support (Duggan et al., 2015; Marasli et al., 2016; McDaniel et al., 2012) or exchanging advice about parenting challenges (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017); and (d) impression management or presenting oneself as a good parent (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015, see also Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Kumar and Schoenebeck (2015) identified four types of pictures typically shared: photos of important milestones, photos with family and friends, funny, and cute pictures. In line with this typology, some studies suggest that parents post mainly "pictures of happy moments" (Verswijvel et al., 2019, p. 110) including daily life, outings, and special occasions, as well as joint social activities. However, research has also found that some parents disclose more serious and sensitive information about their children online, including health and educational issues (Marasli et al., 2016).

Thus, sharenting occurs for a range of reasons and represents diverse aspects of the relationship between parents and their children. From this point of departure, we seek to understand more about parents who engage in sharenting, and about whether they understand the risks involved, and the actions they might take to mitigate against these risks.

### 2.1. How Socio-Demographic Factors Relate to Sharenting

Previous research investigating how socio-demographic factors relate to sharenting is somewhat inconclusive. In a systematized review of the field, Cino (2021) finds that while some studies imply that mothers are more prone to sharenting than fathers, this could be because the aim of these studies has been to investigate the practice amongst mothers. At the same time, no gender-specific trends are found in studies investigating sharenting amongst both men and women (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Livingstone et al., 2018). The review also revealed no correlation between parents' age and frequency of sharenting (Cino, 2021). Livingstone et al. (2018) find in addition that higher levels of socio-economic status correlate positively with sharenting.

## 2.2. Digital Skills and Sharenting

One potential explanation for the paradoxical practice of sharenting is that parents may not have the skills required to protect their privacy, or the privacy of their children, in digital environments. Barnes and Potter (2021) found for example that parents' digital skills may not always extend to understanding when their sharenting practices might compromise their child's privacy (see also Choi & Lewallen, 2018). In this regard, Livingstone et al. (2018, p. 1) found that only 58% of parents in their study were able to change their privacy settings. Overall, younger parents in this study were better able to manage their privacy online.

## 2.3. Parents' Strategies Towards Their Children's Internet Use and Privacy

Turning to more relational aspects of sharenting, previous research has explored how parental mediation strategies influence sharenting practices. In general, parents are considered to adopt two broad kinds of strategies when mediating their children's use of the internet. These include "enabling mediation" where parents encourage their children to use the internet, increasing their opportunities for online interaction but also their exposure to related risks, and "restrictive mediation" where parents take measures to restrict their children's internet use, reducing their exposure to risk, but also their opportunities (Livingstone et al., 2017). Some parents mediate their children's use of the internet by establishing privacy-related rules, e.g., to protect identity and personal information (Hiniker et al., 2016, p. 1380).

It could be assumed that more restrictive approaches to mediation correlate with lower levels of sharenting, as parents who restrict their children's internet use would also be less likely to disclose personal information online themselves. However, Garmendia et al. (2021), building in part on data gathered from the EU Kids Online survey implemented in Spain in 2018, found that both the use of enabling strategies (apart from encouraging children to learn things on the internet) as well as restrictive strategies are significantly associated with a lower frequency of sharenting. Furthermore, restrictive parents in the Spanish context tend to publish significantly less information without their child's consent compared to those who use enabling strategies. We therefore considered it relevant to further explore how various mediation strategies related to parental sharenting practices.

## 2.4. Parents' Concerns About the Privacy of Their Children

Research on the privacy paradox indicates that individuals may engage in self-disclosure online because they do not fully understand the risks involved (Gerber et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2016). Despite the benefits that sharing information about children can have for par-

ents, the practice of sharenting can present an indirect risk to children's right to privacy in digital environments. Specifically, sharenting can interfere with children's right to a private identity, autonomy, impression management and safety (see also Donovan, 2020). Both parents and third parties can also potentially use data about children in ways that can be revealing, embarrassing or even dangerous (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Holiday et al., 2022; Ranzini et al., 2020). This includes:

The misuse of children's pictures and information for purposes such as harassment by paedophiles, digital kidnapping (stealing images of children to be re-posted as one's own), potential commercial misuse of children's images to sell products, or children's monitoring for commercial purposes. (Jorge et al., 2021, p. 2)

Parents may therefore fail to understand how sharenting introduces risks for themselves and their children (see Choi & Lewallen, 2018). For example, the regularity and public nature of sharenting vary (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Siibak & Traks, 2019) and can be considered key factors that enhance risks to children's privacy. However, previous research indicates that parents are aware of the risks involved in disclosing personal information online and take measures to mitigate these risks when sharenting. Such measures include sharing content with family and friends only (Livingstone et al., 2018) or not publishing child-focused content on a regular basis (Ranzini et al., 2020).

Interestingly, however, Ranzini et al. (2020, p. 1) found that parents' privacy concerns were uncorrelated with sharenting, and that parents' privacy self-efficacy did not play a role in the extent to which they shared information about themselves or their children. They discovered on the contrary that having a network supportive of sharenting positively predicted this practice. Related to this, Livingstone et al. (2018) found that British parents who were especially concerned about privacy also shared more images or videos of their child(ren) online. The authors propose that the benefits of sharenting, including specifically staying connected with family and friends, may outweigh privacy concerns for these parents.

Research to date is inconclusive with regard to the extent to which parents' concerns about the privacy of their children, and their own privacy correlate with their sharenting practices. The relationship between parents' concerns for the privacy of their children and sharenting therefore merits further consideration.

## 2.5. Communication Between Parents and Children About Sharenting

Discussing the need for an increased awareness of group privacy in social networking sites, Helm (2018), building on Altman (1975), argues that it is important that

privacy be understood as a social practice that is necessary to sustain intimate relationships. This may also apply in relationships between parents and their children. However, sharenting can happen both with and without children's consent (Udenze & Bode, 2020), thus representing a potential infringement of children's right to privacy in digital environments. A report examining Norwegian children's experiences of sharenting based on the children's data from the EU Kids Online 2018 survey found that one in three children had experienced that a parent had posted something about them online, without asking for permission first (Staksrud & Ólafsson, 2019). Furthermore, an Estonian study examining pre-teens' and parents' reflections on information disclosure and sharenting on Facebook found that "even when the parents knew that their children resented sharenting, they still continued this practice" (Lipu & Siibak, 2019, p. 63).

Unsurprisingly, children and pre-teens are particularly inclined to object to sharenting where it involves photos that they consider embarrassing, visually unflattering or otherwise negative (Lipu & Siibak, 2019, p. 65). As children get older and become teenagers, their disapproval of sharenting seems to increase. Verswijvel et al. (2019), found that most of the teenagers surveyed considered it embarrassing and useless. This was especially true for adolescents who perceived sharenting as an impression management issue and those who were more concerned about their online privacy. Furthermore, Hiniker et al. (2016) found that, in general, children view sharenting as more problematic than their parents. They also report that parents should not "overshare" information about them online without their permission (p. 1385).

At the same time, not all sharenting practices are considered problematic by children. Children might be okay or even comfortable with their parents sharing photos that support positive online identities, such as achievements in school or sports or "information that reflects a positive parent-child relationship or happy family life" (Moser et al., 2017, p. 5224). Furthermore, Verswijvel et al. (2019) found that girls and teenagers who had a closer relationship to their parents were more positive about their parents' sharenting practices.

In their study of sharenting practices among parents in the UK, Livingstone et al. (2018) found that parents who engaged in sharenting more often were more likely to ask their children for permission before sharenting, or to have shared content at the child's request. The authors submit that it would therefore seem likely that, rather than not sharing at all, these parents communicate with their children to try to develop acceptable forms of sharenting.

Drawing on previous research investigating the privacy paradox, as well as these findings that indicate the complexities of sharenting, we seek to further investigate the predictors of sharenting. Specifically, we want to examine whether and how age, gender, and other sociodemographic factors are associated with sharenting. We also want to investigate how parents' levels of digi-

tal skills relate to their sharenting practices. Furthermore, and related to the extent to which individual practices can also introduce privacy risks *for others*, we want to investigate how different approaches to parental mediation, concerns about children's privacy and communication between parents and children influence sharenting. We therefore ask the following research questions:

RQ1: How do parent and child demographics, including age and gender, influence the extent to which parents share child-related content online?

RQ2: How do parents' digital skills relate to their sharenting practices?

RQ3: How do parents' mediation strategies, e.g., whether they allow their children to share information online or not, relate to sharenting practices?

RQ4: How do parents' concerns about children's privacy and their own privacy influence their sharenting practices?

RQ5: How does parent and child communication about sharenting influence sharenting practices?

### 3. Methods and Measures

We analyse data from the EU Kids online survey, a representative study of children aged 9–17 and their parents, conducted between 2017 and 2019 (Smahel et al., 2020). Data were collected either in households or at school by using CASI/CAWI (computer-assisted self-interviewing/computer-assisted web interviewing), CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing), or PAPI (paper-assisted personal interviewing). The survey was mainly aimed at children, but countries could implement an optional parent module. Six countries (Estonia, Germany, Spain, Norway, Poland, and Russia) included questions related to sharenting. The overall sample included 5,630 parents across all six countries. Not all of the questions were used in every country. As a result, the number of valid cases varies between different sections of the analysis (see notes for the figure and tables). It should be noted in this respect that the aim of the analysis is not to generalise about point estimates in the population of parents but rather to estimate the effect of different variables on sharenting practices. We acknowledge that there are likely to be cross-national and cultural differences when it comes to sharenting practices, but we feel that exploring these would go beyond the scope of the data.

#### 3.1. Measures

Sharenting is measured by the question "how often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online?" Answers ranged from *never* (classified as non-sharers)

and *hardly ever* (classified as infrequent sharers) to *at least every month, daily* and even *several times each day* (all classified as frequent sharers).

Demographics include age of parent (ranging from 25 to 65 years and with a median age of 42 years), gender of parent (41% men), age of child (ranging from 9 to 17 and with a median age between 12 to 13 years), and gender of child (58% boys).

Parent digital skills in this survey encompass an expanded range of digital skills. This includes the adoption of the Internet Skills Scale, as developed and validated by van Deursen et al. (2016). This identifies skills measures in five areas of competence: operational skills, including safety skills; information navigation skills, which enable critical engagement with online information; social skills, i.e., the ability to manage online relationships with others; creative skills, namely the capacity to produce online content; and mobile skills, related to the use of mobile devices. This also includes 11 internet-related activities where respondents can say how true it is that they can do them. Responses are added up to form a scale ranging from 0 to 10. We have classified those ranging between 0.0 and 7.9 as being lower-skilled (47%) while those ranging from 8.0 to 10.0 are classified as higher-skilled.

Parental mediation is measured on two dimensions (enabling and restrictive) in line with the approach suggested by Livingstone et al. (2017). Enabling mediation is measured by seven questions where parents indicate how often they do the following: Encourage your child to explore and learn things on the internet (27% *often* or *very often*), suggest ways to use the internet safely (44% *often* or *very often*), talk to your child about what they do on the internet (53% *often* or *very often*), do shared activities together with your child on the internet (16% *often* or *very often*), help your child when something is difficult to do on the internet (25% *often* or *very often*), explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate (43% *often* or *very often*), and help your child when something bothers them on the internet (35% *often* or *very often*). For each of these questions, the parents could indicate that they do them *never*, *hardly ever*, *sometimes*, *often* or *very often*. The scores for all seven questions were added up and the scale set to range from 0 to 10. Those scoring between 0.0 to 5.0 (48% of parents) were classified as lower on enabling mediation and those scoring between 5.1 to 10.0 as higher on enabling mediation. Restrictive mediation is measured by three questions asking parents if they allowed their children to do the following things on the internet or if they needed permission to do them: use a web or phone camera (46% allowed to do that any time), download music or films (54% allowed to do that any time), and use a social networking site (57% allowed to do that any time). For these three questions, we count the number of things the parents say their child is not allowed to do at any time. Parents allowing their child to do at least two of these things any time are classified as less restrictive (54%) and

those allowing either one or none of these things any time are classified as more restrictive.

Parents in all countries, except Poland, were asked if they worried a lot about a range of things related to their child's internet use, including their child "revealing personal information online" (42% yes). This is used as a measurement of parents' concerns about their children's privacy online. Furthermore, information about parents' attitudes towards their own online privacy was available for two countries (Norway and Poland). This is measured by answers to the statement "I am worried about my privacy on the internet." Parents could choose between four response options, *strongly disagree* (6%), *somewhat disagree* (15%), *somewhat agree* (50%), and *strongly agree* (29%).

Parents' communication with their children about sharenting are measured with reference to whether they asked their child if it was OK to share content about them in advance (38%), whether they never ask their child if it is ok to post videos of them (7%), whether their children asked them to post the photos/videos online (10%), and whether their child asked them to remove something the parent had posted about them online (7%).

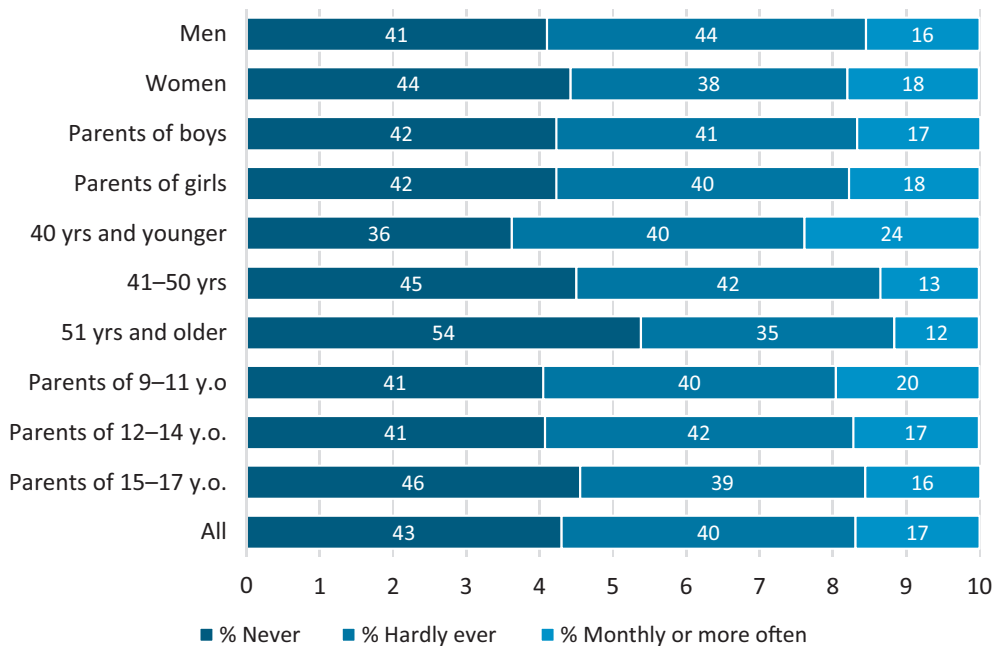
### 3.2. Data Analysis

Results are shown in graphs and tables with percentages for selected response options. We have weighted the data so that each country contributes equally to the results as the sample size is not the same in all countries, except where results are analysed by country. We also use binary logistic regression analysis to assess the effect of various independent variables while controlling for the effects of demographics and country differences.

## 4. Results

In response to RQ1, Figure 1 explores the effects of parent and child demographics on the extent to which parents share child-related content online for the combined data across all six countries. More than half of parents (57%) say that they have shared photos or videos of their child but of those, the vast majority seldom does so. A little under one in five parents are what might be called "frequent sharers" (blogging or posting photos or videos of their child monthly or more often). Looking at parent and child demographics, the age of parents has the strongest correlation with frequency of sharenting with 24% of the youngest age group (parents aged 40 years or below) being frequent sharers compared with 13% and 12% of parents in the older age groups. Parents in the oldest age group (51 years or older) are also most likely to be non-sharers. Children's age correlates to a certain extent with the frequency of sharing but this might be because parents of older children are on average older than parents of younger children.

The parents belonging to the group of frequent sharers (posting photos or videos at least monthly) were



**Figure 1.** How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? By gender and age of parent and child. Notes: Data from all countries; parent gender n = 5,461, gender of child n = 5,265, parent age n = 5,424, age of child n = 5,286.

asked about the number of items they shared online in the past month. Mostly the parents said they shared somewhere between one and 10 items. Looking at the reasons for sharing photos or videos 61% of those engaged in any kind of sharing said they did this to “keep in touch with their families and friends.”

In response to RQ2, and to test the explanation that the privacy paradox arises because of a lack of digital skills, we examine whether parents’ level of digital skills influences their sharenting practices. We look at digital skills as measured by the digital skills scale (van Deursen et al., 2016). Surprisingly, our data reveals that parents who are more skilled share more frequently and are much less likely to belong to the group of non-sharers (see Table 1).

Considering more relational aspects of sharenting, and in response to RQ3, we examine whether and how parents’ mediation strategies correlate with their sharenting practices. We use a measurement of mediation practices along two dimensions, enabling and restrictive mediation (see Livingstone et al., 2017). On each dimen-

sion, the parents are defined as higher or lower along a median split. Table 2 shows the percentage of parents falling into each of the three groups in terms of frequency of sharing by their approaches to mediation of their child’s online practices. This shows that parents who use strategies that would be labelled as enabling share photos and videos more frequently. The same applies to parents who use strategies that would be labelled as restrictive, i.e., these also share more frequently.

In response to RQ4, and to examine whether parents’ concerns about the risks that sharenting presents influence their sharenting practices, we looked at how parents responded to a question about whether or not they worry a lot about their child revealing personal information online. This information is available for all countries except Poland (i.e., 5,222 parents in five countries responded to this question). Table 3 shows the percentage of parents falling into each of the three groups in terms of frequency of sharing by whether or not they worry a lot about their child revealing personal information online. Paradoxically, the tendency seems to be for

**Table 1.** How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? By parent digital skills.

| % Parents who share... | Parent digital skills |        |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                        | Lower                 | Higher |
| Never                  | 49                    | 32     |
| Hardly ever            | 38                    | 47     |
| At least every month   | 12                    | 21     |
| Total                  | 100                   | 100    |

Notes: Data from all countries, except Germany; parent skills scale n = 4,451.



**Table 2.** How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? By parent mediation strategies.

| % Parents who share... | Parent enabling mediation |        | Parent restrictive mediation |        |
|------------------------|---------------------------|--------|------------------------------|--------|
|                        | Lower                     | Higher | Lower                        | Higher |
| Never                  | 48                        | 39     | 42                           | 44     |
| Hardly ever            | 39                        | 41     | 42                           | 39     |
| At least every month   | 14                        | 20     | 16                           | 18     |
| Total                  | 100                       | 100    | 100                          | 100    |

Notes: Data from all countries; enabling mediation n = 5,494; restrictive mediation n = 5,480.

**Table 3.** How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? By whether or not parents are worried about their child revealing personal information online.

| % Parents who share... | Worry a lot about their child revealing personal information online |     |
|------------------------|---|-----|
|                        | No  | Yes |
| Never                  | 42  | 38  |
| Hardly ever            | 41  | 41  |
| At least every month   | 16  | 21  |
| Total                  | 100   | 100 |

Notes: Data from all countries, except Poland; parent worries n = 4,806.

parents who are worried about their children revealing personal information online to share photos/videos of their child more frequently.

In addition to recording the extent of parents' concerns about their children revealing personal information online, parents in two countries (Norway and Poland) responded to whether or not they agreed with the statement "I am worried about my privacy on the internet." 81% of respondents in Norway and 74% in Poland somewhat or strongly agree with this statement. Table 4 shows the percentage of parents in each country falling into each of the three groups in terms of frequency of sharing by whether or not they agree with the statement "I am worried about my privacy on the internet."

Parents in Norway who are more worried about their online privacy may share less frequently than others. However, the same pattern is not observed in Poland. This could be related to the fact that parents in Poland

are overall much more likely than parents in Norway to belong to the group of non-sharers.

Binary logistic regression (see Table 5) was performed to further assess the impact of the factors presented in Figure 1 and in Tables 1–4). The same set of variables are not available for all of the countries so each model controls for age and gender differences as well as country differences in addition to the other factors tested. Norway is used as the reference point as there is data available for Norway in all instances.

The first model includes only demographics (age and gender of both parent and child as well as controlling for country differences). This model uses age as a continuous variable and confirms the importance of parent age over other demographics. The likelihood of the parent being a frequent sharer is cut on average by 7% for each year the parent grows older. The second model confirms the correlation between higher digital skills and

**Table 4.** How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? By country and by whether or not parents are worried about their online privacy.

|                   | % Parents who share... | I am worried about my privacy on the internet |       |
|-------------------|------------------------|---|-------|
|                   |                        | Disagree                                      | Agree |
| Norway<br>n = 981 | Never                  | 21  | 29    |
|                   | Hardly ever            | 60  | 60    |
|                   | At least every month   | 18  | 12    |
|                   | Total                  | 100   | 100   |
| Poland<br>n = 408 | Never                  | 59  | 55    |
|                   | Hardly ever            | 32  | 36    |
|                   | At least every month   | 10  | 10    |
|                   | Total                  | 100   | 100   |

**Table 5.** Logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of a parent being a frequent sharer of photos/videos.

|  | Demographics |         | Parent skills |         | Mediation strategies |      | Privacy worries |      |
|--|--------------|---------|---------------|---------|----------------------|------|-----------------|------|
|  | Exp(B)       | Exp(B)  | Exp(B)        | Exp(B)  | Sig.                 | Sig. | Sig.            | Sig. |
| Constant   | 0.18         | 0.11    | 0.18          | 0.17    | 0.00                 | 0.00 | 0.00            | 0.00 |
| Estonia  | 1.15         | 1.26    | 1.08          | 1.18    | 0.28                 | 0.61 | 0.13            | 0.33 |
| Germany  | 0.88         |         | 0.95          | 0.88    | 0.35                 | 0.68 |                 | 0.36 |
| Poland   | 0.56         | 0.62    | 0.52          |         |                      | 0.01 | 0.04            | 0.01 |
| Russia   | 1.43         | 1.59    | 1.37          | 1.45    | 0.01                 | 0.02 | 0.00            | 0.01 |
| Spain  | 1.79         | 1.77    | 1.75          | 1.67    | 0.00                 | 0.00 | 0.00            | 0.00 |
| Women (vs men)   | 1.27         | 1.41    | 1.25          | 1.24    | 0.03                 | 0.02 | 0.00            | 0.01 |
| Girls (vs boys)  | 1.06         | 1.04    | 1.04          | 1.03    | 0.71                 | 0.56 | 0.67            | 0.41 |
| Age of parents (centred on 40 yrs.)                              | 0.93         | 0.94    | 0.93          | 0.93    | 0.00                 | 0.00 | 0.00            | 0.00 |
| Age of child (centred on 12 yrs.)                                | 1.00         | 1.01    | 0.98          | 1.00    | 0.79                 | 0.22 | 0.56            | 0.75 |
| Parent worried about child revealing personal information online |              |         |               | 1.26    | 0.01                 |      |                 |      |
| Higher on enabling mediation                                     |              |         | 1.45          |         |                      | 0.00 |                 |      |
| Higher on restrictive mediation                                  |              |         | 0.75          |         |                      | 0.00 |                 |      |
| Parents with higher skills                                       |              | 1.84    |               |         |                      |      | 0.00            |      |
| -2 Log likelihood  | 4,640        | 3,726   | 4,593         | 4,285   |                      |      |                 |      |
| Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>                                       | 0.04         | 0.05    | 0.05          | 0.04    |                      |      |                 |      |
| Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.07         | 0.09    | 0.08          | 0.07    |                      |      |                 |      |
| χ <sup>2</sup>   | 219          | 222     | 245           | 209     |                      |      |                 |      |
| Sig.   | < 0.001      | < 0.001 | < 0.001       | < 0.001 |                      |      |                 |      |
| Number of valid cases  | 5,144        | 4,098   | 5,120         | 4,664   |                      |      |                 |      |

increased likelihood of parents being frequent sharers of photos or videos. The effect of mediation strategies is interesting in the multivariate context. There is a relatively strong effect for parents who are above average on enabling mediation to be more likely to fall into the group of frequent sharers. In the multivariate context when demographics have been controlled for and even more importantly, when the effects of enabling mediation have been considered, parents who are more restrictive are less likely to be frequent sharers. The final model shows that even after controlling for country differences and other demographics parents who worry about their own child revealing personal information about themselves online are 26% more likely to be frequent sharers than parents who do not worry about their child revealing personal information online.

Finally, in response to RQ5, we investigate how sharenting practices are influenced by the type of communication that parents and children might have had about sharenting. We look at four types of communication for those parents who have shared, posted or blogged photos or videos of their child online. Overall, some 34% of parents who share say that they have “asked my child if

it was OK in advance” whereas 6% say they agree with the statement: “I never ask my child in advance if it is ok to post photos or videos of him or her.”

Table 6 shows the percentage of parents who are engaged in sharenting and can be classified as “frequent sharers” (as opposed to “infrequent sharers”) by how they have responded to the four questions on communication about sharenting.

All four types of communication about sharenting are correlated with a higher frequency of sharing. This applies in particular to parents who say that they “never ask my child in advance if it is ok to post photos or videos of him or her” where 49% of parents engaged in sharenting are frequent sharers. Overall, about a third of parents who are engaged in sharenting can be classified as frequent sharers.

## 5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Limitations

Sharing photos and videos on social media is popular with both children and parents. However, when parents share information about their children online, they take risks with regard to their children’s privacy. This

**Table 6.** Sharenting practices by type of parent and child communication about sharenting.

| When you have shared photos or videos of your child and/or children online has any of the following happened? |     | % Of respondents who are frequent sharers |
|---|-----|---|
| 1. I asked my child if it was OK in advance <sup>a</sup>  | No  | 34  |
|   | Yes | 30  |
| 2. I never ask my child in advance if it is ok to post photos or videos of them <sup>b</sup>                  | No  | 28  |
|   | Yes | 49  |
| 3. My child asked me to post the photos/videos online <sup>c</sup>  | No  | 29  |
|   | Yes | 54  |
| 4. My child asked me to remove something I posted about them online <sup>d</sup>                              | No  | 31  |
|   | Yes | 47  |

Notes: (a) Includes data from all countries, n = 2,830; (b) includes data from all countries, except Germany and Spain, n = 1,935; (c) includes data from all countries, except Germany, n = 2,401; (d) includes data from all countries, n = 2,823.

happens in spite of the fact that parents are responsible for protecting their children, including protecting their privacy. We describe this complex relational practice as a privacy paradox by proxy. Research exploring the privacy paradox to date has focused on individual concerns and practices regarding self-disclosure online, and not on how self-disclosure can introduce risks for others. Our study, therefore, contributes to developing an understanding of the relational dimensions of the privacy paradox. In doing so, we further our understanding of overall privacy dilemmas regarding digital participation.

Most parents reported that they engaged in sharenting to stay connected with their families and friends. Sharenting therefore has an important social function. However, we find that only 17% of parents in our survey posted a photo or video of their child online once a month or more. We consider these parents to be frequent sharers. Of all parent and child demographics, age correlates most strongly with frequent sharenting. 24% of parents aged 40 or below engaged in this practice at least once a month.

Complicating previous understandings of the privacy paradox, we also find that sharenting does not correlate with a lack of digital skills. Parents who are more skilled share more frequently than others. One explanation for this could be that parents consider their own digital skills (including privacy management) to be good, which could give them a sense of control and/or lead them to underestimate the risks of sharenting, in particular as these risks relate to their children. It could also mean that parents who have higher levels of digital skills are more aware of the measures they can take to protect their privacy.

Turning to more relational aspects of sharenting and specifically how sharenting relates to parents' engagement with their children's use of the internet, we find that parents with an enabling mediation style are more likely to share content about their children. This applies to parents who use both enabling and restrictive mediation strategies. This could indicate that parents who are more engaged with their children's internet use, and

employ either enabling or restrictive strategies, are also more aware of how to develop strategies to protect their own privacy and the privacy of their children online. Interestingly, our finding in this regard (based on data from six European countries) contrasts with the findings of Garmendia et al. (2021) who found that both enabling and restrictive mediation strategies were associated with a lower incidence of sharenting in Spain. Further research is therefore required to confirm the positive association we find between parental mediation strategies and sharenting practices.

Paradoxically, and building on previous research about the privacy paradox, we find that parents who *worry a lot* about their child revealing personal information online also tend to share *more* frequently, thereby potentially compromising their children's privacy. This finding emphasises the importance of investigating relational dimensions of the privacy paradox. In fact, parents who worry a lot about their children's privacy are 26% more likely to share information about their children than parents who do not share their concerns. Overall, our findings suggest that parents are aware of the risks involved in revealing personal information on the internet. However, either the benefits of sharenting (e.g., staying in touch with family and friends) outweigh the potential risks, or they feel they can manage these risks.

In general, many parents are aware that sharenting can have negative consequences for their child if their privacy and rights are not respected. Importantly, children may object to content that is shared about them online, either because they find it embarrassing or otherwise. At the same time, children may also find that the content their parents share about them is unproblematic and may even request that their parents post videos or photos about them online. Communication between parents and children about sharenting appears to be important to develop strategies that acknowledge and respect children's attitudes towards sharenting and their right to privacy in digital environments and beyond. However, our data reveals that only 38% of parents asked for their children's permission before sharing content about them

online. Furthermore, 49% of parents who are frequent sharers state that they “never ask my child in advance if it is ok to post photos or videos of him or her.” This further emphasises the complex relational dimensions of this paradoxical practice. Parents who are more skilled, more engaged with their children’s internet use (via mediation strategies), and more concerned about their children’s privacy, share more but are also less inclined to ask their children for permission to do so. This indicates that parents may need to develop strategies to negotiate appropriate forms of sharenting with their children.

Overall, our findings enhance our understanding of sharenting as a paradoxical practice. We highlight important relational aspects that influence this practice. While on the whole, the social benefits of sharenting appear to outweigh the consequences for parents who engage in this practice, the longer-term implications of sharenting for children and their parents are less clear. Both parents and children have little control over data that they post online. Videos, photos and other data shared can be copied, stored, and used out of context—also by third parties. In the case of sharenting, parents are taking risks both on their own behalf and on behalf of their children. It is therefore problematic that many parents do not ask their children for permission before sharing content about them. In this context, it may be helpful to increase parents’ awareness of their children’s perspectives about their online actions. Parent–child discussions could lead to family agreement on how to handle sharenting. This would in turn strengthen children’s right to self-determination.

### 5.1. Limitations

This study provides interesting findings about sharenting; however, some limitations pertain. The variation in data collection methods described above precludes a direct comparison between countries. The respective surveys were conducted by different sampling procedures, i.e., partly in the home and partly at school. However, while we have not been able to systematically compare countries in this study, our findings suggest that country-specific differences should be investigated in future research.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that more research is needed to distinguish between more and less problematic forms of sharenting, and the long-term consequences of different types of sharenting practices for children. Qualitative studies in particular could further explore relational aspects of the privacy paradox by investigating how parents’ motivations and perceptions of the risks involved inform their sharenting practices. Research is also needed to further explore how communication between parents and children about sharenting can inform practices that respect children’s perceptions of sharenting and their right to privacy in the digital environment.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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