Sharenting: Parental Adoration or Public Humiliation?

A Focus Group Study on Adolescents' Experiences with Sharenting against the Background of their own Impression Management

Abstract

Parents share posts and pictures about their children on social network sites (SNSs), a practice referred to as sharenting. Whereas existing research mostly covered parents' perspective on sharenting, this study investigated adolescents' perceptions of and experiences with sharenting against the background of their own impression management. A focus group study was conducted among 46 adolescents from 12 to 14 years old. The results indicated that although adolescents seem to generally approve sharenting and most of the adolescents show trust in their parents, the practice seems to lead to some frustrations now and then. Adolescents described some contradictions between the image they are trying to construct online and the posts of their parents, which might create embarrassing situations. In order to avoid conflicts, adolescents indicated that parents should respect a couple of boundaries, concerning what types of posts can be shared, how often and with whom. Moreover, they should ask permission before actually posting about their children.

Keywords: sharenting, impression management, adolescence, identity development, social network sites

1. Introduction

In the past ten years, the amount of social network sites (SNSs) has exploded (Otero, 2017). People of all ages have become active users of the platforms as they get increasingly important for a wide range of their human experiences, such as maintaining or expanding friendships, and collecting or sharing information (Duggan, Lenhart, Lampe, & Ellison, 2015). During this evolution of the information technology, a new generation of adults joins the ranks of parents. Consequently, today's parents are raising their children in a first digital culture (Brosch, 2016). In the United States for instance, 83% of the Internet-using parents are active on SNSs (Duggan et al., 2015).

On SNSs, parents love to share posts and pictures about their children (e.g., Wagner & Gasche, 2018). Especially Facebook appears to be a popular platform among them to extensively share updates and photos about their kids (Marsali, Suhendan, Yilmazturk, & Cok, 2016). The practice of parents sharing things about their children on SNSs is referred to as sharenting (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Otero, 2017), which is a combination of the terms "parenting" and "sharing" (Marasli, Suhendan, Yilmazturk, & Cok, 2016). Research on sharenting has mostly concentrated on parents' underlying motives for this behavior, with the results pointing to several reasons, such as involving the family with the growing up of the children (Brosch, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015), showing off with one's kids and building on one's self-presentation (Collett, 2005; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Davidson-Wall, 2018), receiving social support (McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2012; Duggan et al., 2015), and collecting memories (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Although parents seem to be aware of the potential risks associated with the online sharing of photos and information about their children (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), several of them admit that they sometimes share inappropriate things (e.g., nude pictures) (Davis et al., 2015), which might have some consequences for their children (Davidson-Wall, 2018).

Research on the perspective of the children though, is rather limited and restricted to studies with a quantitative methodology. One study for instance, indicated that adolescents are oftentimes embarrassed about the content their parents share on social media (Levy, 2017). However, several questions remain unanswered, such as when and why adolescents think it is embarrassing? Do they understand why their parents share things about them and do they plea for some restrictions?

These questions will be considered against the background of adolescents' identity development. Adolescence is a crucial period for experimenting with one's self-presentation (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002) and SNSs offer teenagers many opportunities for this (Davis, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Adolescents can develop their online identity by disclosing personal information on SNSs (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). However, this information is also subjected to feedback from their social relationships, in the form of likes and dislikes (Burhmester & Prager, 1995; Kietzmann et al., 2011). As adolescents are concerned about the impressions they make on peers and the extent to which they feel accepted by them (Steinberg, 1996), adolescents will carefully consider what they do (not) share with their social relationships (Boyd, 2007; Family Online Safety Institute, 2013). Nevertheless, the Impression management theory (Goffman, 1959) states that one's online presentation is not only determined by one's own strategic use of expressions, but also by the online behavior of others, such as parents. Through sharenting, parents thus shape the digital identity of their children even before they become active in the online world themselves (Davidson-Wall, 2018; Steinberg, 2016). This online representation might contradict with the way adolescents strive to represent themselves (Davidson-Wall, 2018). The goal of this study is therefore to investigate how adolescents

experience sharenting against the background of their own impression management. This will be investigated using a focus group study among early adolescents.

2. Sharenting

On SNSs, parents often give their contacts an online peek into their children's life (Brosch 2016; Wagner & Gasche 2018). Most of the time, this online peek is given through pictures, followed by videos and status updates (Kumar & Schoenebeck 2015). A term that is used to describe this practice is sharenting (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Otero, 2017). Previous research indicated that the phenomenon of sharenting is growing rapidly (Brosch, 2016) as SNSs have become essential in the daily lives of parents. Parents already start with sharenting when their children are little or even unborn. Previous research indicated that 56% of the mothers and 34% of the fathers from children up to four years old share information related to parenting topics (Davis et al., 2015).

Kumar and Schoenebeck (2015) pointed out that parents generally share four types of pictures of their children on SNSs, namely pictures of milestones, pictures with family/friends, and pictures they consider to be cute, or funny. These findings are in line with research conducted by Brosch (2016), who indicated that parents often share pictures of their children expressing happy moments. Those happy moments are grouped by Brosch (2016) into three categories, representing pictures of daily life (e.g., pictures of meal-time and with family), outings (e.g., pictures of holidays), and special events (e.g., pictures of the first day at kindergarten).

Despite the fact that parents love to share content about their children, they also admit that they sometimes share information about their children which might be perceived by others as inappropriate, or might disclose too much personal content (e.g., pictures showing that the child

is sitting on the toilet) (Brosch, 2016). Parents' consideration to share or not to share information about their children is the subject of the privacy-openness paradox (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). According to this paradox, parents experience a dilemma when sharing content about their children. More specifically, when parents share information about their children, they will benefit from the advantages that sharenting offers them. However, they will also experience privacy issues, such as revealing too much (inappropriate) information (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Parents thus have to balance between privacy-protective behavior to protect their children's privacy (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Wagner & Gasche, 2018) and the benefits that sharenting offers them (Wagner & Gasche, 2018).

Previous research distinguished several reasons or advantages of sharenting for parents. First of all, sharenting seems to be a way for social participation (Wagner & Gasche, 2018). It offers parents the possibility to keep their families and friends up-to-date about their children (Wagner & Gasche, 2018). Duggan and colleagues (2015) indicated that 93% of the parents on Facebook are connected with family members other than their own parents and children. In addition, parents perceive sharenting as a way to collect memories (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). Facebook for instance, provides parents with the opportunity to make photo albums and reports memories of (a) year(s) ago with the "on this day" feature. Sharenting is also a way for parents to receive social support during parenting, for example by getting useful information and answers to questions. Because of the social support parents receive from their contacts on SNSs, they feel less alone in their parental struggles (Duggan et al., 2015). McDaniel and colleagues (2012) even found that mothers' well-being is related to their time spent on SNSs. Furthermore, sharenting allows parents to work on their self-presentation (Collett, 2005). Parents want to be perceived by others as good parents and will

therefore show their parental competences by sharing certain content about their children

(Collett, 2005; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). Managing the online image of them as parents can

be regarded as a form of impression management (Cialdini, Finch, De Nicholas, Cody, &

McLaughlin, 1990; Collett, 2005).

3. Impression Management Theory

The Impression management theory (Goffman, 1959) makes use of metaphors derived from the

theater world to explain how people manage their self-representation. According to this theory

people have two stages: The front stage refers to one's idealized self-representation, which is

shown to the others and the back stage describes the private self, where the presentation for the

front stage is prepared and which is hidden for others. Goffman (1959) distinguished two

different ways of sharing information about the self on the frontstage: Via expressions given and

via expressions given off. The first type of expressions refers to classic forms of verbal

communication, whereas the second type covers non-verbal signals, on which one has less

control (Goffman, 1959). Impression management then describes the processes of presenting

oneself in a strategic manner by determining, controlling, and optimizing the impressions toward

others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Impression management is mostly guided by wishes of how

one would like to be on the one hand and how one is expected to be based on the social roles one

fulfills (Leary & Kowalsi, 1990). People then try to represent themselves as good performers of

their roles (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Several scholars have applied the Impression management theory in the online context

(e.g., Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Krämer & Winter, 2008). Online technologies offer extra

opportunities for managing one's presentation, such as more time before responding, more tools

for adapting photo's etc., allowing a more precise and more complex impression management (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Through the extensive availability of cues, both verbal and non-verbal (e.g., emoticons), people have more control over the signs they share online, which enables an even more "perfect" presentation of the roles they fulfill (Ellison et al., 2006).

Parenthood is one of those social roles that strongly steers one's self-presentation (Collett, 2005). Parents try to show their parental competences through their online representation (Collett, 2005). In order to do this, parents need to share information on their children. This is called an indirect self-presentation (Tedeschi, 2013). In this type of self-presentation, individuals use other persons to whom they are closely connected, such as their children, to shape their own representation (Tedeschi, 2013). In that case, the evaluations and values associated with those others, contribute to the self-presentation of that person (Tedeschi, 2013). The study of Collett (2005) used participant observations to examine how the representation of children (for instance their clothes) is reflected on the mother. The results indicated that mothers actually use their children to confirm their role as a mother and to create a positive self-presentation, which in turn increases their subjective well-being. Sharenting might thus be perceived as a form of indirect self-presentation.

While parents share photos and information about their children online in order to boost their self-presentation as a parent, they also shape the digital identity of their children (Davidson-Wall, 2018). Parents even start to share things about their children when they are still very little (Brosch, 2016). The result is that most children already have a digital identity before they become active in the online world themselves (David-Wall, 2018), or even before they are born, as sharing behavior increasingly starts with the "ritual of pregnancy", during which parents share pregnancy ultrasounds (Brosch, 2016; Leaver & Highfield, 2018). Given the public and

permanent nature of online material and the regular reinforcement of it by other people who like and share the posts (Jackson & Luchner, 2018), the influence of it on the identity development of adolescents might not be underestimated (Davidson-Wall, 2018). The latter author likes to refer to it as "children as the player of the public and permanent representation of their parents" (Davidson-Wall, 2018, p. 6). Furthermore, Davidson-Wall (2018) argued that potential conflicts might arise between this parental impression management and the restricted autonomy for teenagers to develop their own identity during adolescence.

4. Impression Management among Adolescents

Adolescence is a crucial period for the creation and validation of teenagers' identity (Steinberg, 2014). During this development, adolescents become more aware of their psychological dimension and start paying more attention to their own positive and negative personality traits (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002). As a result, their self-image becomes increasingly differentiated and more complex (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Apart from their self-image, adolescents learn that others have different images of them and that they can influence other's perceptions about them by the way they represent themselves (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002). Therefore, adolescents deal more consciously with impression management. During this period of experimenting and searching for one's own identity, adolescents typically develop different personae and self-presentations, depending on the context and situation (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 1997). Michikyan, Dennis, and Subrahmanyam (2015) investigated this idea of multiple self-presentations among emerging adults, and distinguished three types of self-presentations: The real one, the ideal one, and the false one. Adolescents extensively make use of the online

opportunities to play around with these self-presentations (Davis, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Receiving feedback of peers on these constructions of the self is very important to further guide adolescents through the processes of identity development (Davis, 2012). Adolescents highly value the validation of their peers and try to fit in certain groups by presenting themselves in the "correct" way (Boyd, 2007). A stronger feeling of acceptance by peers results in a higher self-value and a better general well-being (Boyd, 2007).

While the time spent with peers becomes increasingly valuable during adolescence (Steinberg, 1987), parents gradually become in the background. Adolescents not only physically create more distance toward their parents, by spending less time with them (Steinberg, 1987; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), they also increase the emotional distance toward them (Steinberg 2001), as an element of their processes toward independence and autonomy (Steinberg, 2001). One popular way during adolescence to distance themselves from their parents is by creating conflicts with them (Montemayor, 1983; Steinberg, 2001). Adolescent-parents conflicts are often the result of differences in both perspectives, interests, and interpretations of situations (Montemayor, 1983; Steinberg, 2001). Whereas adolescents increasingly expect certain behaviors to be their personal choice, parents oftentimes experience these behaviors as social or moral obligations within their role as a parent (Steinberg, 2001).

This might also form the basis for conflicts concerning sharenting. In the focus group study of Madden and colleagues (2013) adolescents described how they experienced restrictions in their online freedom, because their parents are also present on SNSs. Adolescents therefore seem to use several strategies to manage which things are visible for their parents and which are not (Boyd, 2007). These results are in line with more general research on the

importance of online privacy among adolescents (Madden et al., 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2014). Adolescents seem to highly reflect on the potential reach before posting on SNSs (Madden et al., 2013). Moreover, adolescents regularly check and adapt their privacy settings and try to keep control on who has access to certain content (Madden et al., 2013; Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck & Heirman, 2012). However, having full control over this is impossible, as their online safety is also dependent of how others deal with their privacy (Marwick & boyd, 2014). Adolescents are well aware of this and seem to share some social norms within their peer network on what can be shared and when and why permission is necessary (Davis, 2011).

Although this works well among peers as they manage their online presentation from the same perspective and with the same goals (Davis, 2011), this is not always the case for parents. One study, for instance, indicated that adolescents are oftentimes embarrassed about the content their parents share on SNSs (Levy, 2017). While several studies have put some light on the privacy issues related with sharenting (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Wagner & Gasche, 2018), less is known about how this content created by parents might form an obstacle for adolescents' own online identity development. According to Davidson-Wall (2018) potential conflicts might arise between parental impression management and the restricted autonomy for teenagers to develop their own identity during adolescence. Having enough freedom and autonomy for creating their own identity is important for adolescents, as it helps them to develop independence (Shmueli & Blecher-Prigat, 2011). This study will therefore, explore adolescents' experiences with sharenting against the background of their own impression management. More specifically, this study tries to shed some light on the extent to which adolescents' experience conflicts between sharenting and their own impression management (RQ1) and which boundaries they distinguish for avoiding these conflicts (RQ2).

Increasing our knowledge on adolescents' perspective toward sharenting is necessary to capture the full picture behind this new phenomenon. This knowledge can help to improve the oftentimes 'difficult' relationship between young adolescents and their parents and is relevant for practitioners who try to formulate guidelines for parents' social media use.

5. Method

Adolescents' experiences with sharenting were examined using a qualitative method, namely focus group discussions. The use of focus groups is appropriate for exploring new research areas as the participants interact with each other (Becker, Bryman, Ferguson, & Swift, 2012). Furthermore, focus group discussions are appropriate for examining sharenting as this behavior occurs on SNSs, where group processes play a central role (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

5.1. Participants and Data Collection

The participants included 46 Flemish adolescents (12 to 14 years old) from 2 different secondary school classes. With the aid of the coordinator, both classes were randomly divided into three smaller groups. Hereby, it was ensured that the groups consisted of adolescents with the same age and that they knew each other well. This was considered important as sharenting is a sensitive topic due to its relatedness with adolescents' privacy and identity development. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of participants for each focus group discussion. We focused on early adolescents as this group starts experimenting and searching for their own identity (Harter et al., 1997). Additionally, adolescents are generally allowed to use SNSs from the age of thirteen (Anderson & Jingjing, 2018).

[Table 1 near here]

The focus group discussions were organized in April 2018. The adolescents participated voluntarily in the study and informed consent was provided. Prior to the study, we asked permission from the school board and the parents of the adolescents. Each focus group discussion lasted 50 minutes.

At the beginning of each focus group session, the researcher explained the purpose of the discussion and emphasized that all data would be processed anonymously. The researcher asked semi-structured and open-end questions, whereby there was room for probing and clarifying questions to reach an in-depth understanding. The questions examined how adolescents perceive sharenting behavior and how they experience sharenting against the background of their own impression management. The focus groups were recorded with an audiotape. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp.

5.2. Data Analyses

Based upon the audio recordings, each focus group discussion was transcribed. Two researchers took part in the coding analyses. The first researcher analyzed the transcriptions using a deductive coding technique, with the possibility to make adjustments when a code was missing or superfluous. The second researcher used the resulting codes from researcher one. Kappa agreement scores were calculated between the two raters and interpreted based on the rules of Landis and Koch (1977). When there were disagreements between the two raters, peer debriefing was used to assign the correct code. After a vertical analysis was conducted for each focus group discussion separately, a horizontal analysis across all focus group discussions was carried out to

gain general insights and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These general insights and patterns were illustrated with quotes in order to increase the validity of the results.

6. Results

An almost perfect agreement was found between the two raters' judgements when they assigned the findings from the focus group discussions to certain codes ($K = .84$, $p < .00$).

6.1. Adolescents' own Experience with Sharenting Behavior

The first part of the conversations focused on adolescents' own experiences with sharenting. To increase our knowledge on this, we first asked adolescents to reflect on their own impression management and the importance of it. Next, they discussed the role of others, parents in particular, in the construction of their online image, which brought us to the central topic of this work, namely sharenting. Lastly, adolescents were asked to think about their prevention and intervention strategies for dealing with sharenting and the potential consequences of situations in which they were unable to avoid the embarrassing experience.

6.1.1. Adolescents and their impression management

Adolescents seem to be well aware of their own impression management and how this has developed during adolescence. They are also aware of the fact that age is an important element in explaining this. Several of them recognized that online appearance has become more important across the past years and indicated that they try to represent themselves slightly better online, especially concerning their physical appearance. Adolescents make use of online tools (e.g.,

filters) for this purpose and avoid posting ugly pictures. At the same time though, the online

image should look effortless and real.

> "We are now spending more time on how we look and so on, when I was 5, I had no interest in whether I was wearing pants or a dress and whether it was green or pink, but now we are working on that, also on social media." (Focus group 6)

> "When I'm stepping, they sometimes take pictures and they put those online, when I look good on those pictures I leave them online, but when I'm looking ugly, I ask to adapt that photo or to delete it." (Focus group 5)

The online image cannot differ too much from who you really are, because that creates the

impression of being fake or striving too hard for more online popularity, two things that were not

appreciated among the adolescents. Moreover, adolescents appeared to be a bit scared of creating

a too perfect image of themselves, because it can easily generate negative comments, which can

escalate and again touch their online image.

> "If you know somebody in real life and then you see that this person posts lots of photos that are totally different, you will wonder what he is doing and you will have a different perception of that person and ignore that person, because he is doing fake things (Focus group 5)

While striving hard to create their perfectly-balanced online image, this online representation can

be distorted by what others do online.

6.1.2. The influence of parents on adolescents' online representation

One's representation is not only managed by oneself, but also depends on the behaviors of

others, such as the behavior of friends and parents. All adolescents had been the subject of posts

of others on SNSs. Concerning the behavior of friends, the general feeling among adolescents is

that peers know which things are allowed to share and which are not. When in doubt, they just

ask.

"Those are your friends. You know that they won't do anything that you don't like. You know that they will think about that" (focus group 3)

"When my best friends take a picture, I don't mind, because I know that they are my best friends and I know most of their followers as well, that is no problem." (Focus group 5)

This clearly differed for the sharing behavior of their parents. When talking about how posts of others had an influence on their own online image, in almost every conversation adolescents spontaneously started talking about the behavior of their parents. Nearly every participant could remember that one of their parents placed a post about them online. Most of the posts parents shared concerned special events, such as birthdays, games and milestones.

"My mom posted a picture of me on my first day at school, it was a picture with me and my bike, ready to go to school." (Focus group 1)

Adolescents seem to understand why their parents are sharing things about them. They could list several reasons, such as out of proud, to brag with their kids, to ask for advice and to build memories. Moreover, approximately half of the adolescents had confidence in their parents' online sharenting behavior and mentioned that they knew their parents would not do anything wrong. These adolescents trust their parents in protecting their privacy.

"I think that my mom will only post the pictures of which she thinks I'm looking good on it and if she thinks I'm looking good on that picture, then I trust her and I won't be embarrassed of how people will see me." (Focus group 1)

Nevertheless, the other half expressed some concerns about that. Especially the fear for one of their parents sharing ugly and embarrassing pictures of them was much higher compared with peers. Embarrassing pictures were described as pictures on which the child behaves weird or looks weird, or nude pictures. In every conversation, it was mentioned several times that parents cannot just share those pictures, as such pictures might distort adolescents' online image. Some

adolescents formulated it as a clash between their parents' sharenting behavior and the online image they are trying to build, because they are trying to make a "better" version of themselves.

> "Always when my mom takes pictures I'm not wearing my best clothes and then she posts it online, but it is not my most beautiful picture and I'm bothered about that, because on social media you try to make yourself beautiful." (Focus group 2)

> "My mom used to put a lot of pictures of me on Instagram when I was little, but that didn't matter then, because you are just a kid and everyone does this when you are little, but once you are our age, it is just embarrassing." (Focus group 3)

6.1.3. Adolescents' prevention and intervention strategies

In order to avoid "unexpected" posts adolescents indicated that they like to have control over posts of others that might contribute to their own online image. Adolescents try to do this by making use of the privacy-settings on SNSs. They were quite informed about the possibilities on SNSs such as, private accounts, blocking people and permissions when being tagged. Having a private account seemed to be the most important setting according to them, as this will restrict the spread of posts in which they are tagged.

> "On Instagram, you can make your account public, which means that everyone can follow you, but you can also put it on private and then people have to ask permission to be able to follow you." (Focus group 5).

Moreover, adolescents regularly check their online "safety". Therefore, they type in their own names in Google in order to see which pictures can be found about themselves.

> "Sometimes I look on the Internet and I type my name in Google and then I find the pictures that I have posted on Instagram, but that is it." (focus group 1)

Nevertheless, it does happen sometimes that parents share pictures, which the adolescents dislike. Several of the adolescents had experienced this situation. The sharing of those pictures mostly happened on Facebook. Although some adolescents mentioned that they can get really angry about this, most of them stayed calm and just asked their parents to delete the post.

However, some parents ignore this and leave the post online. This seems to create frustration among the adolescents and they sometimes go on their parents' accounts to delete the posts themselves.

> "My mom always makes videos of my brother and then I'm sitting behind him with a weird face and then I ask her to remove the video and she says: 'no' and then I secretly take her phone and delete the video myself." (focus group 3)

> "They don't delete them because they think it is adorable, then I get really angry and I go on their account and delete them myself." (Focus group 2)

Deleting these pictures immediately is very important according to these adolescents, in order to limit the potential impact of it, but some parents did not seem to understand this. Whereas some adolescents had a feeling that their parents are well informed about the potential impact of such pictures and of online risks in general, others did not. According to the latter group, parents are unaware of the potential consequences of their sharenting behavior. Some of them even indicated that they do not understand why their parents are so "reckless" online, because for them certain precautionary measures such as setting your profile on private are just very evident.

> "It is not that he is doing things wrong, but cyberbullying and stuff like that, he has no idea what it is." (Focus group 4)

> "Sometimes my dad shares too much and his account is not on private, that is not OK I think, I don't understand that." (Focus group 3)

6.1.4. The consequences of sharenting

Carefully considering privacy settings and handling fast when noticing an embarrassing picture of yourself online was considered as very important according to our adolescents, because sharenting can have considerable consequences. When talking about these consequences, adolescents mostly referred to perceptions and reactions it might generate among others, which

thus forms a "problem" for their self-presentation. They referred to how others might develop wrong ideas about them because their online representation is not "perfect". This might eventually lead to higher risks for receiving negative comments and for being (cyber)bullied. By expressing these fears, adolescents indirectly reflected on the importance of peer acceptance and their high wishes to fit in, and the role of their online image in achieving these goals.

> "When you are a shy girl and you are being bullied and then someone finds such a picture of you on social media, the bullying might get worse." (Focus group 2)

> "For me, when there is a reasonable chance that you will be bullied about that picture or that you will experience negative things because of it, then I would ask immediately to delete it, otherwise it is too late." (Focus group 4)

Apart from the consequences for their image in the short run, adolescents also expressed concerns on the long-term impact of embarrassing pictures. Several adolescents referred to how ugly and embarrassing pictures might become a problem when looking for a job, as recruiters always scan online profiles nowadays and they are well aware of the fact that these pictures will stay online forever.

> "For instance, you do something at school, something technical and you fail and your parents put that online and you want to do a technical job later, people will always be able to find that post and that can be bad for you." (Focus group 1)

> "I'm scared that someone would take my phone and post a picture that you really don't want online and then even if you delete it, it will always stay online somewhere." (Focus group 6)

For the first research question, it can thus be concluded that most adolescents trust their parents when sharing things about them. Sharenting is not really experienced as problematic, although it can be a bit irritating for adolescents who are trying to create a good online impression, which will help them to achieve some social goals (e.g., fitting in certain peer groups). Given the high importance of their online representation, adolescents experience some difficulties in having no control over what their parents are sharing about them online, especially

because they are well aware of the potential serious consequences of the sharing of embarrassing pictures, in the short and in the long run. In order to avoid conflicts with parents or embarrassing situations online, adolescents formulated a couple of boundaries their parents should accept.

6.2. Adolescents' Boundaries associated with Sharenting

Despite adolescents' general approval of parents sharing posts and pictures about their kids, they clearly recognized four boundaries (Table 2) These boundaries relate to the type of content, the intimacy of the information, the regularity, and the involvement of the teenager.

[Table 2 near here]

6.2.1. Type of information

Firstly, parents should respect that not all kinds of pictures can be shared. What kinds of pictures can be shared or not depends on the child's age and his or her consciousness about the online world. Several discussions evolved on which age and which level of consciousness should be used as a norm. Adolescents expressed that for baby's, most things can be allowed, as they just look very cute and people will not recognize them anymore when they grow up.

> "[sharenting about a little brother]. I think it is ok, because he is not on social media yet and he is in kindergarten, it doesn't matter." (Focus group 4)

Most adolescents agreed that when children become aware of the fact that there is an online world and that they are represented there in a specific way, their parents' sharing behavior should be more considered and more restricted. According to the majority of the adolescents, this level of consciousness is reached around the age of 13, which is also the minimum age for the use of SNSs in Europe (Anderson & Jingjing, 2018). Others placed it a little bit earlier, around

10 years old, or a little bit later, by the age of 15-16, as online representation only then really

starts to matter.

> "Now I understand why you are only allowed on social media when you are 13, before that I
> didn't realize what the impact was, I really did wrong things that cannot be erased anymore."
> (Focus group 1)

> "I think starting from 9-10 years old, because then you start thinking more logically and more like
> an adult." (Focus group 4)

From this period on, parents cannot share ugly and embarrassing pictures or stories of their

children anymore. Two exceptions were distinguished: Birthdays and group pictures. For

birthdays, the rules are less strict, slightly embarrassing pictures are allowed then, as long as it is

funny. For group pictures, it appeared that when most people on the picture look good, but you

do not look good, you just have to accept. Nude pictures though, were never acceptable.

> "My mom always takes pictures when we are tired and we fall asleep on the couch, I really don't
> get this, no one likes to see pictures of themselves when they are sleeping I think?! (Focus group
> 5)

> "When children are young, it doesn't matter because everyone has had little children and for
> instance a picture of a child in bath, that is completely different from parents who would take a
> picture of us now in bath, at our age we are just much more bothered about that." (Focus group 6)

6.2.2. The Intimacy of the Information

Secondly, adolescents acknowledged a boundary on how personal the information their parents

share can be. Several teenagers were worried that their parents would share too much personal

information about them online. An example that was mentioned several times was that parents

post that they are going on a holiday, which gives potential burglars too much information.

> "I know somebody and her sister was moving out and her mom posted a picture of that sister with
> the text 'she is moving out' and then her new address; But her profile is not private, so everyone
> will know where her child was going to live. That is not OK." (focus group 6)

6.2.3. The Regularity of the Information

The third boundary adolescents mentioned concerned the regularity of parents' posts about their children. Oversharenting refers to sharing too much and too often. Oversharenting appeared to be a real problem for a couple of parents. One adolescent even used the term stalking in this context.

> "My sister has Instagram for 8 years now and she has 5 pictures online and then my mom has a new account and she has 115 pictures on her account in only one year and then I wonder why she takes that many pictures of her children?" (Focus group 6)

For adolescents, oversharenting was not just about sharing too often, they also associated oversharenting with sharing useless things such as when the children are eating or walking with the dog. These are just everyday actions which should not be shared. According to the adolescents, sharenting should be restricted to special events, such as a sports game, a family trip or a vacation. Oversharenting of one's parents can make an adolescent feel embarrassed about them.

> "I used to have a babysitter and now she has children and she talks about them all the time and she posts pictures, all different pictures, one picture of her kid doing this, one picture of her kid doing that, it is really too much, you don't have to put everything that they do online." (focus group 3)

> "I think that they should post about special things like, Christmas diner, first day at school, Eastern, such things. Then, I wouldn't mind, but when we are on a vacation and we are in the pool or something, then I find it inappropriate, I wouldn't post that myself. (Focus group 1)

6.2.4. The Involvement of the Adolescent

The last boundary distinguished by the adolescents had to do with asking permission. Here again, adolescents had a similar discussion on the appropriate age and level of consciousness for parents to ask permission for sharing something about their children. The general conclusion was that when children understand what the impact of pictures and posts can be, which was again

around 13 years old, parents should ask permission. Nevertheless, it also seems to depend on the relationship with the parents, as some adolescents expressed real confidence in their parents' behavior, whereas others found it very evident that parents should ask permission first. A couple of adolescents referred to a privacy violation when parents post without permission.

> "For me, my parents should not ask permission, because I know they won't post pictures that I wouldn't (Focus group 5)

> "I would not be happy about that if they didn't ask me, that is a privacy violation." (Focus group 1)

Some adolescents indicated that they do not wait for their parents to ask permission, they just indicate immediately after the picture was taken, whether it is "social media acceptable" or not. This does not appear to be a guaranty though, as some parents ignore adolescents' wishes. Sometimes, parents even seem to use the fact that their SNSs is only for family as an excuse for sharing things their children do not want them to put online. Such behaviors might distort the relationship between parents and adolescents. For adolescents, it important that their parents respect their opinions.

> "You are working on something and then all of a sudden she [mother] takes a picture of you and then I say: 'Don't put that on Instagram' and she answers 'no no' and then the next day I see my ugly face on a picture online." (Focus group 3)

> "I was wearing a onesie and I had my ears in and I was singing out loud and I didn't know that my dad was filming me and then he shared this online and I said: 'no, you can't do that', but he said: 'it doesn't matter, it is only for family'." (focus group 3)

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Many parents share posts and pictures about their children, a practice referred to as sharenting. Most research on sharenting has focused on the perspective of parents, outlining the underlying motives for this behavior (e.g., Brosch, 2016; Collett, 2005; Duggan et al., 2015) and the

magnitude and nature of the posts (e.g., Brosch, 2016; Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Much less is known about the other party involved in sharenting: The children.

SNSs play an important role in adolescents' lives, as teenagers use these tools for their impression management (Davis, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). During impression management, one tries to manage the different elements that contribute to one's own online representation (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is especially important for adolescents as they are still experimenting with their own image and looking for approval and feedback of others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). These developmental processes though, might become restricted by the sharing behavior of their parents (Davidson-Wall, 2018). Whether this is actually the case and how adolescence might experience these restrictions formed the topic of our first research question. The results confirm adolescents' feelings of a certain contradiction between how they are trying to present themselves and what their parents share about them. Trying to look good online is especially important for adolescents and they highly embrace the online opportunities, such as using filters, for achieving these goals, which aligns with the results of the study of Madden and colleagues (2013). However, this does not always seem to stroke with the goals of sharenting. Whereas teenagers seem to share some social norms on acceptable online sharing, parents and adolescents not always share the same ideas on this. One of the issues on which children and parents seem to have different views is the importance of physical appearance online. Adolescents indicated to try to look as good as possible and use filters to further boost their physical appearance. Parents on the other hand, mostly share from their role as a parent in which a perfect physical appearance is not their first concern, but a "naturally" looking family life is. This explains why parents like to share pictures of their children in pyjamas sitting on the couch, and the children rather like to see these pictures being deleted.

Several adolescents indicated that they find these kinds of pictures embarrassing and uninteresting, which does not fit with the image they are trying to create. This seemed to generate some feelings of irritation, although it did not feel as a "real" obstacle for most adolescents.

Moreover, some adolescents expressed concerns about their privacy. Privacy becomes very important at that age as adolescents are trying to become independent form their parents (Shmueli & Blecher-Prigat, 2011). As was suggested by Wagner and Gasche (2018), people will protect others' privacy better according to the strength of the relationship with that person, making parents one of the best protectors of their children's privacy. As some adolescents seemed to be aware of this, others were not really convinced and took several initiatives to protect themselves, such as using privacy settings, making profiles private and deleting posts that might disturb their image, which is a typical impression management strategy (Goffman, 1959). The problem is, according to this group of adolescents, that parents have not enough understanding of privacy settings and of the potential risks of sharing too much information, a finding that aligns with research on parents themselves (Duggan et al., 2015). As a result, adults (40+) thus seem to make less use of privacy settings compared to adolescents and (Madden et al., 2013; Walrave et al., 2012) and younger adults (18-40 years old) (Kezer, Sevi, Cemalcilar, & Baruh, 2016). Interestingly, whereas parents are thus generally considered to be their children's privacy protectors (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Wagner & Gasche, 2018), it seems like these roles are oftentimes the other way around, with adolescents giving some privacy lessons for their parents. This is in contrast with research on parents' perspective on sharenting, as these studies indicated that although parents are aware of the paradox between privacy protection of their children and the benefits of sharenting for themselves, they believe they generally succeed in this

balancing practice (Chalklen & Anderson, 2017). Our results add to this that according to the adolescents, parents' negotiating between these different needs can be improved. Several adolescents for instance, informed their parents about the possibility and necessity to make their account private. Moreover, apart from the informative teaching role, some adolescents logged in on the profiles of their parents to check their activities and to fix some situations, because their parents ignore their warnings about potential consequences of sharenting. Adolescents on the other hand, are very serious about the consequences of embarrassing posts. They did not only describe the implications in the short run, but also referred to how this might stand in their way when looking for a job. Some scholars referred in this context to digital tattoos made by parents, instead of digital footprints (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017).

In order to avoid these unwelcome tattoos, adolescents shared the opinion that sharenting behavior should be restricted by a couple of boundaries concerning the type of information, the intimacy of the information, the regularity of the information, and the involvement of the teenager. Firstly, not all kind of photos can be shared, parents should avoid to share pictures that are embarrassing or that might generate negative comments. Secondly, the shared information cannot be too personal (e.g., addresses) or too intimate (e.g., nude pictures). Thirdly, parents should restrict their sharing behavior to special occasions, as the sharing of everyday activities is considered uninteresting and frustrating. Lastly, when parents are in doubt whether things can be shared or not, they should discuss this with their children and respect their opinions.

This study has some implications for both parents and adolescents. Parents should be aware of their children's feelings when sharing things about them. Adolescents like to have control over the image they are trying to build, it might thus be a good practice for parents to think and discuss before they post. Moreover, as the parents-adolescent relationship is already

under pressure during this period, it is important that parents listen to their children's opinions and not just ignore their wishes. Adolescents at the same time, should talk about their feelings and why they are bothered about what their parents share. Parents' perspective on sharenting is completely different and oftentimes parents are unaware of potential problems.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations as well. Firstly, this study only focused on the age group from 12 to 14 years old, which is the phase of early adolescence. Privacy and independence might have a quite different meaning for adolescents who are in the last phase of development (i.e., young adults), and who are thinking about leaving the house. Future research might benefit from also including some older adolescents and comparing their experiences with sharenting. Moreover, our participants were only selected from two different classes. Replicating this study among larger and more diverse samples is necessary in order to further confirm and validate our results. Secondly, although we tried to create a comfortable discussion in which everyone was involved and worked with groups of adolescents who were familiar with each other, it might be that some adolescents did not feel "safe" to talk about their own experiences with sharenting. However, the value of qualitative research though is that it offers us first insights in the perspectives of adolescents in the context of sharenting and these insights can be implemented in future quantitative research. By using a quantitative approach, researchers can better identify prevalence rates and participant's individual experiences with sharenting (i.e., how many times they experienced sharenting, how they react to it). Quantitative studies might also include some potential moderators and mediators, such as gender and the relationship with the parents. Moreover, another interesting direction for future research is to increase our knowledge of the positive effects of sharenting for the development of adolescents' online image. Whereas our study focused on the potential conflicts between parents' sharenting

behavior and adolescents' impression management processes, it seems plausible that adolescents

can also benefit from the online image their parents construct for them. When parents post about

adolescents' achievement for instance, this can boost their online image as well.

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Table 1. The number of participants per focus group

Focus group	N	Class
Focus group 1	7 participants	First year
Focus group 2	6 participants	Second year
Focus group 3	9 participants	Second year
Focus group 4	7 participants	First year
Focus group 5	8 participants	First year
Focus group 6	9 participants	Second year

Table 2. Adolescents' boundaries associated with sharenting

Boundary	Meaning
The type of information	The older and the more adolescents are concerned about the online world, the more restricted parents' sharing behavior should be.
The intimacy of the information	Parents should not share too much personal information about the adolescents.
The regularity of the information	Parents should not participate in oversharenting.
The involvement of the adolescents	When children understand what the impact of sharenting, mostly around 13 years old, parents should ask permission.