

## The “5 Ws and 1 H” of *Sharenting*: Findings from a Systematized Review

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# *The “5 Ws and 1 H” of Sharenting: Findings from a Systematized Review*

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## **Abstract**

This paper is based on the results of a systematized review analyzing a corpus of empirical literature on the topic of *sharenting* following the conceptual framework of the *5Ws and 1 H*, here mobilized to map the characteristics and modalities of this practice through the analysis of 49 empirical studies. Findings provide information in terms of *who* shares contents about parenting and children online, *what* is shared and *where* (in terms of platforms used), *when*, as in life phases during which sharenting takes place, *why*, as in the rationale behind it, and finally *how*, in terms of parents' decision-making, governance and privacy strategies about whether and how to share of their parenting and children online. Future directions are finally discussed.

Keywords: sharenting, digital parenting, children online.

## **1. Introduction**

Sharenting is an English neologism that gained popularity in the past few years to designate the act of parents sharing contents and representations about their parenting and/or children on social media (Blum-Ross, Livingstone, 2017). While several studies have tried to take a grasp of the phenomenon, to date no literature reviews are available summarizing what empirical studies have found on the matter.

The present paper reports on findings from a *systematized* review (Grant, Booth, 2009) analyzing a corpus of empirical literature on the topic following

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the conceptual framework of the *5Ws and 1 H* (Singer, 2008), here mobilized to map the characteristics and modalities of sharenting as a domestic *media practice* (Couldry, 2012). Specifically, a mapping of the phenomenon will be proposed by taking into account what has been reported so far in terms of: *who* shares online contents about parenting and children, *what* is shared, *where* (in terms of platforms used), *when* (with respect to moments and phases of life during which contents are posted), *why* (as in the rationale behind sharenting), and *how* (in terms of modalities and strategies adopted to share).

Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 49 empirical studies on the topic, this work aims at contributing to the literature on sharenting by offering scholars and practitioners concerned with media, child, and family studies a clear and organized glance at this phenomenon to get an evidence-based understanding of it, inform future research and interventions.

## **2. “The map is not the territory”: the rationale behind a systematized review**

While research on sharenting is still in its infancy, scholars, public opinion and media outlets have expressed interest towards the topic. No studies, however, have looked at what the empirical research on the subject has found so far in a systematized fashion, so to offer insights about key features of such a practice and illuminate possible paths to pursue in future inquiry by informing the construction of research questions and hypotheses (Stebbins, 2001).

This paper seeks to move a step in this direction by reporting on findings from a systematized review. I refer to a *systematized* instead of a *systematic* review in line with the taxonomy on the fourteen types of reviews proposed by Grant and Booth (2009), which differentiate – among many options – between the generic, the systematic and the systematized literature review. Such a differentiation is relevant here to better outline the type of work this paper describes, conducted as part of a doctoral research project on sharenting.

According to the authors, the *generic* literature review represents one of the most common approaches to review scientific materials published on a certain topic, with differentiated, not guaranteed, nor a priori established levels of systematization and replicability. The rationale behind the selection of empirical materials and its analysis pertains mainly to the subjectivity of the researcher, who can decide what to include and what not in his report without being required to make explicit the set of inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted, nor to declare what databases were used, for the goal of the generic review is to provide a general overview of an epistemic object without aiming to offer a representative account of the literature, nor to make methodological judgments

on the quality of the selected studies. The final product of such a review aims to introduce the reader of a certain work (whether it be a paper, a thesis, a doctoral dissertation or a book) to the object of inquiry.

Different is the case of the *systematic review*, whose peculiarity is precisely the systematicity of the process that aims to collect, evaluate and synthesize empirical evidence on a given epistemic object following specific and agreed upon standards and guidelines shared by a scientific community in terms of steps a researcher is expected to take in order to guarantee the validity of the finished product. The sampling aims to be exhaustive and the inclusion and exclusion criteria often concern not only formal characteristics of the study (i.e., the presence of an empirical design) but also a quality assessment of it (i.e., assessing whether the study meets certain quality criteria to be included in the final sample). The assessment component of the *systematic review* represents a peculiar element because – based on the epistemological positionality of the researchers who use it – it establishes what is and what is not knowledge worth of being further synthesized and disseminated. The systematic review aims to “objectivity” and “replicability” (even if the researcher’s subjectivity is always present, although risking going unnoticed within a process and a product that are presented as objective and unbiased). Because of this feature, findings from *systematic reviews* serve not only to identify underdeveloped areas and issues not covered by existing literature in order to guide future research, inform professionals and policymakers, but also to express uncertainty and criticism about other scholars’ works and courses of action to take so to adjust and improve methods and goals in future studies.

Finally, the *systematized review* is an approach that adopts some principles of the *systematic review* with the intent, precisely, to *systematize* the corpus of knowledge obtained from the bibliographic research process and make it transparent, without however aiming at exhaustiveness, representativeness or objectivity. The researcher’s choices have implications on the selection of the material, its organization, analysis and interpretation. Its use is well placed within studies that, due to resources allocated in terms of funding, workforce and timing, do not allow to follow all the steps involved in a rigorous *systematic review*, such as sifting the (almost) totality of existing studies on a given topic, the adoption of protocols to control the quality of the reviewed material, as well as collaboration with experienced researchers who can express their opinion on the empirical quality of this material to decree its inclusion or exclusion from the final database. This being said, a systematized review, however, should not be conceived as a fallback. The effort of systematization typical of this approach, in fact, asks the researcher to explain the crucial steps and rationale behind the collection of the reviewed material, the adoption of certain inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the organization, analysis and interpretation of

results, fostering a commitment to transparency and accountability that can facilitate self-assessment and hetero-evaluation processes, reflexivity, and awareness of the limits of its findings and conclusions. The *systematized review*, therefore, in recognizing a priori its limits, aims to present situational and contextual results, that though not “objective” or representative, can prove valuable to inform research questions and hypotheses guiding both exploratory and confirmatory studies, but also pave the way towards future systematic reviews. Furthermore, the use of systematized reviews is well documented in the scientific literature across a heterogeneity of disciplines (see, among many others, Mandracchia et al., 2019; Memon et al., 2018; Nicolson, Fell, Huebner, 2018; Sawka et al., 2013).

For the purpose of this work, I opted for a systematized review of the existing literature on sharenting. The rationale behind this choice lies first in the paucity of available literature on the topic, which would compromise a broader understanding of the phenomenon would have strict inclusion and quality-assessment criteria been adopted; second on structural limitations I faced in my doctoral research in terms of available funding and time to involve experienced researchers to review a corpus of studies and decree its quality; third on the exploratory aim guiding this work which was more concerned with gaining a first and general outlook at what has been produced so far about the topic, mindful of the inability to opt for a fully systematic approach. Opting for a systematized method, however, allowed me to go beyond the limits of a generic literature review, by systematizing the process I followed, documenting all the steps taken to synthesize research data available on my topic of inquiry, and simultaneously carrying out a second level analysis – informed by the *5 Ws and 1 H* framework, as will be better highlighted later in this paper– which benefited from the presence of a rigorous and defined analytical structure. As such, findings from this review do not intend to be exhaustive and representative of the entirety of research on the subject carried out to date, in line with the assumption that “the map is not the territory” (Bateson, 1997), keeping in mind, however, that a situational but precise map may still prove more useful than a less accurate one, or even no map at all.

### **3. Sampling, database generation and data analysis**

The term sharenting is a relatively recent neologism (Meakin, 2013). Even though the expression is increasingly used both in everyday and academic language, the media practice it identifies dates back to the creation and diffusion of family websites, that allowed parents to narrate their domesticity online as would later do modern social media (Pauwels, 2008).

An important step involved in every literature review concerns the adoption of one or more keywords to be used through one or more search engines in order to identify results relevant to one’s interests and epistemic needs. This means that the researcher will have to make two decisions at once: which (types of) keywords to adopt and what database(s) to use.

For the purpose of this research, I decided to focus on a single keyword: *sharenting*. This choice was motivated on one hand by the intent to focus only on the body of research that investigated the phenomenon by framing it within the expression that has defined it in recent years, and on the other by the need to confine the results to a specific media practice that is not to be confused with the more general act of online *sharing*. With respect to the choice of the databases, I adopted three primary and two secondary research sources: the Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar databases; the bibliographic lists of publications selected from these databases and the addition of relevant but not present titles among the research results (as an implementation strategy informed by Arksey and O’Malley, 2005). Sampling took place in October 2020.

Whatever the nature of the bibliographic sources, the publications identified were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

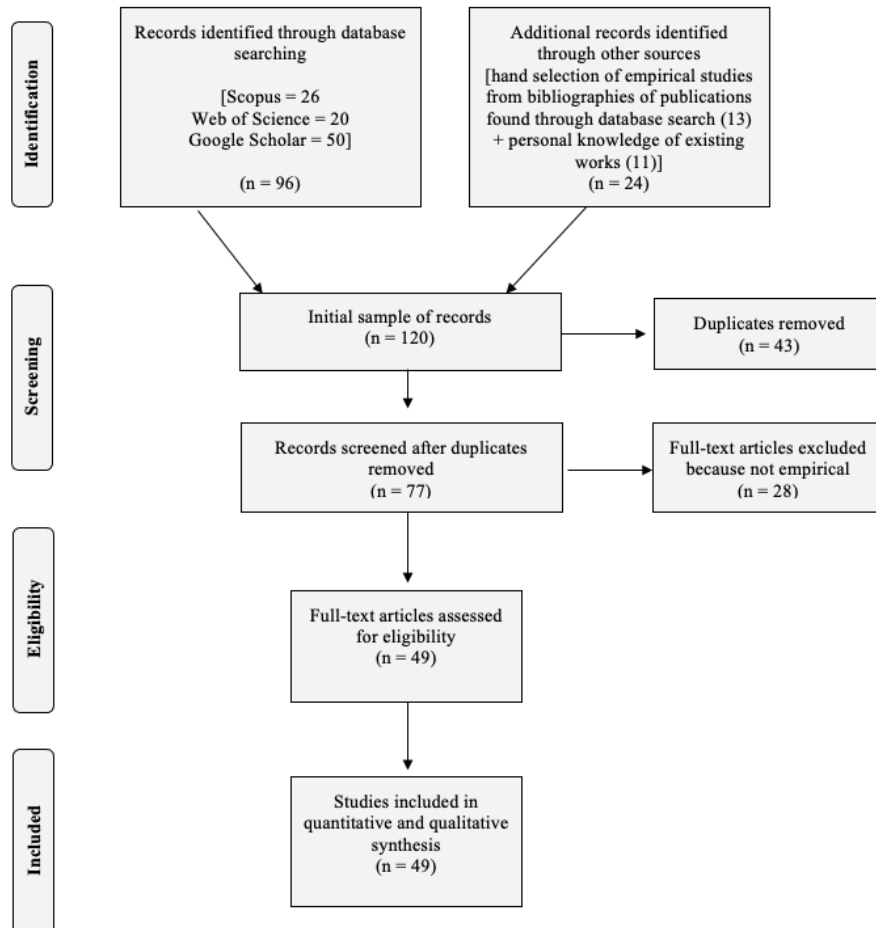
1. The contribution concerns the topic of sharenting;
2. The contribution is in English or Italian (according to the research team members’ language skills);
3. The contribution reports on findings from an empirical study, excluding purely theoretical or speculative texts, not anchored to data collection and analysis, as well as texts of non-academic nature.

It is important to emphasize that focusing only on empirical literature necessarily delimits a very specific field, leaving out theoretical contributions that could however prove useful for researchers to better conceptually frame this phenomenon. The goal of the present paper is, however, to look at the topic of sharenting referring to inferences and descriptions supported by data.

Adopting these search filters led to a first identification of 120 titles that were then further analyzed to assess whether they should be included in the final database. The process is schematically summarized in Figure 1 using the PRISMA flow diagram (Moher, et al., 2009).

As shown in the figure, the three databases used led to the identification of 96 titles: 26 from Scopus, 20 from Web of Science, 50 from Google Scholar. Whereas Scopus and Web of Science generated the totality of the reported titles already filtered by language (scarce, probably due to the high selectivity criteria of the platforms in inserting a record in their databases), Google Scholar – given its more extensive scope – generated 656 results.

FIGURE 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.



To manage the vast number of results from Google Scholar, many of which irrelevant to my scope, I first confined my sampling to the first 250 records, selected for a second manual filtering. This approach, although relatively arbitrary, was informed by the literature on the use of Google Scholar as a search engine for literature review following a “case by case” logic (Younger, 2010), where the steps to follow are established by the researcher in the moment considering the relevance of the identified records. In my case, I conducted an initial screening based on relevance criteria. Since the 250 results were distributed on 25 pages containing 10 records each, a checklist was



prepared to screen every single page adding to my initial provisional sample entries that would meet my three inclusion criteria, thus excluding all the results that would not concern the topic of sharenting, were not empirical and whose abstracts were written in languages other than English and Italian. In this step, 50 records were selected, which added to the 46 of Scopus and WoS led to a total of 96 items that were entered in an Excel spreadsheet to be further filtered. As a further implementation strategy, I then reviewed the bibliographic lists of all the records included that far (net of duplicates), manually adding those relevant to my research in line with my inclusion criteria, for a total of 13 additional records, as well as 11 additional titles of my direct knowledge, relevant to my review, but not present among the results (informed by Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The inclusion of these 11 additional titles was deemed to be appropriate because of their scientific relevance, mindful that in line with the declared non-replicability purposes of the systematized reviews such a strategy would have not compromise its value (Grant, Booth, 2009).

At this point, I conducted a second, more thorough, screening of these 120 titles, removing 43 duplicates that led to a total sample of 77 titles. As a third step I downloaded and screened all the full papers, finding that 28 of them were not empirical and were thus removed from the database, for a sample of 49 entries. The remaining papers were then fully read. Since no further conflicts with my inclusion criteria were present, all 49 contributions were included in the final sample which was then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed and summarized.

The contributions in their entirety have been analyzed following a coding procedure applied to literature reviews (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, Hwang 2016), with variables of interest being the methodology adopted, the nature of the data analyzed, the subjects involved in the research and the presence or absence of information related to the *5 Ws and 1 H*. Two undergraduate research assistants independently coded a portion of the database, discussing disagreements during team meetings. Interrater agreement was calculated through Cohen's Kappa statistics, with final levels of agreement ranging from .81 to .93. Once disagreements were solved, the sample was split in two parts with each coder coding one.

With respect to methodology, studies have been coded as “quantitative”, “qualitative” or “mixed” ( $\kappa = .91$ ).

As for the nature of data analyzed, studies were classified as “self-report” all those times where a researcher collected data from participants as part of a survey, interview, focus group, etc. (or any other occurrence of *researcher-generated data* - Lester, Muskett, O'Reilly, 2017). Data were instead classified as “natural” when the researcher did not directly contribute to their construction, as it is the case with the analysis of posts autonomously published by users on social media

in spite of the study and before it was conducted (Lester, et al. 2017). Data were finally categorized as “both” self-report and natural in cases where the research design included both types ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

As for the subjects of the study, coders coded whether the study was focused on behavior, opinions, experiences, and the like of “parents”, “children”, “parents and children” or “other” ( $\alpha = .93$ ). In case of self-report studies this means that parents and/or children and/or others were surveyed, interviewed, etc. In case of natural data (e.g., content analyses of postings concerning children and/or parenting) entries were coded with respect to the subject(s) who shared the “natural” content that was analyzed in the study.

Finally, the *5 Ws and 1 H* framework (Singer, 2008) was mobilized coding each study through a binary code to indicate the presence or absence (0 = absent; 1 = present) of information about “who” shared, “what”, “where”, “why”, and “how” ( $\alpha$  ranging from .83 to .88).

#### 4. Results

Table 1 reports, case by case, the results of the analysis for every entry included in the final database.

TABLE 1. Literature review summary table.

	Author(s) (year)	Method	Nature of data	Subjects	5 Ws and 1 H
1	Verswijvel K., et al. (2019)	Quant	Self-report	Children	Who, What, Where, When, Why
2	Ouvrein G., Verswijvel K. (2019)	Qual	Self-report	Children	Who, What, Where, When, Why
3	Holiday S., Norman M.S., Densley R.L. (2020)	Qual	Natural	Parents	What
4	Marasli M., et al. (2016)	Mixed	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
5	Campana M., Van den Bossche A., Miller B. (2020)	Mixed	Both	Parents	Who, What, Where, Why
6	Brosch A. (2016)	Mixed	Both	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
7	Lipu M., Siibak A. (2019)	Qual	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, Where, When, How
8	Wagner A., Gasche L.A. (2018)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
9	Fox A.K., Hoy M.G. (2019)	Quant	Both	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
10	Kopecky K., et al. (2020)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, How
11	Choi G.Y., Lewallen J. (2018)	Qual	Natural	Parents	What, Where
12	Blum-Ross A., Livingstone S. (2017)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How

Davide Cino  
*The “5 Ws and 1 H” of Sharenting: Findings from a Systematized Review*

13	Atwell G.J., Kicova E., Vagner L., Miklencicova R. (2019)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Why, How
14	Sivak E., Smirnov I. (2019)	Quant	Natural	Parents	What
15	Sarkadi A., et al. (2020)	Quant	Natural	Children	What, When, How
16	De Wolf R. (2020)	Quant	Self-report	Children	When, How
17	Cino D., Dalledonne Vandini C. (2020)	Qual	Natural	Parents Others	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
18	Damkjaer M.J. (2018)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, How
19	C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital (2015)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Why, How
20	Cino D., Demozzi S. (2017)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
21	Altun D. (2019)	Quant	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, When
22	Latipah, et al. (2020)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, Why
23	Nicquette (2017)	Qual	Natural	Parents	What, Where
24	Southerton C., et al. (2019)	Qual	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, Why, How
25	Abidin C. (2015)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When
26	Ammari T., et al. (2015)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
27	Ammari T., Schoenebeck S. (2015)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
28	Bartholomew M.K., et al. (2012)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
29	Chalklen C., Anderson H. (2017)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
30	Das R. (2017)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
31	Das R. (2018)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
32	Das R. (2019)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
33	Hiniker, A., Schoenebeck, S. Y., Kientz, J. A. (2016)	Mixed	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, Where, When, Why
34	Jaworska S. (2018)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
35	Kumar P., Schoenebeck S. (2015)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
36	Le Moignan E., et al. (2017)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When
37	Leaver T., Highfield T. (2018)	Qual	Natural	Parents	What, Where, When
38	Livingstone S., Blum-Ross A., Zhang D. (2018)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
39	Locatelli E. (2017)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When
40	Minkus T., Liu K., Ross K. W. (2015)	Mixed	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When
41	Morris M.R. (2014)	Mixed	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
42	Orton-Johnson K. (2017)	Mixed	Both	Parents	Who, What, Where, Why

43	Pedersen S., Lupton D. (2018)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When, Why
44	Tiidenberg K., Baym N. K. (2017)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where, When
45	Zappavigna M. (2016)	Qual	Natural	Parents	Who, What, Where
46	Autenrieth U. (2018)	Qual	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, How
47	Holloway D., Green L. (2017)	Qual	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
48	Demozzi S., Gigli A., Cino D. (2020)	Quant	Self-report	Parents	Who, What, When, Why
49	Moser C., Chen T., Schoenebeck S. Y. (2017)	Mixed	Self-report	Parents & children	Who, What, When, How

Looking at findings, 59% of the 49 studies were coded as adopting a qualitative method, 27% as quantitative and 14% as mixed. With respect to the nature of the data, more than half of the studies (59%) were coded as self-report, 35% as natural and 6% as both. In the vast majority of cases studies concerned parents (80%), less frequently parents and children (12%), and more rarely children only (8%). In only one case, the study concerned apart from parents also teachers.

FIGURE 2. *Studies distribution over the years.*

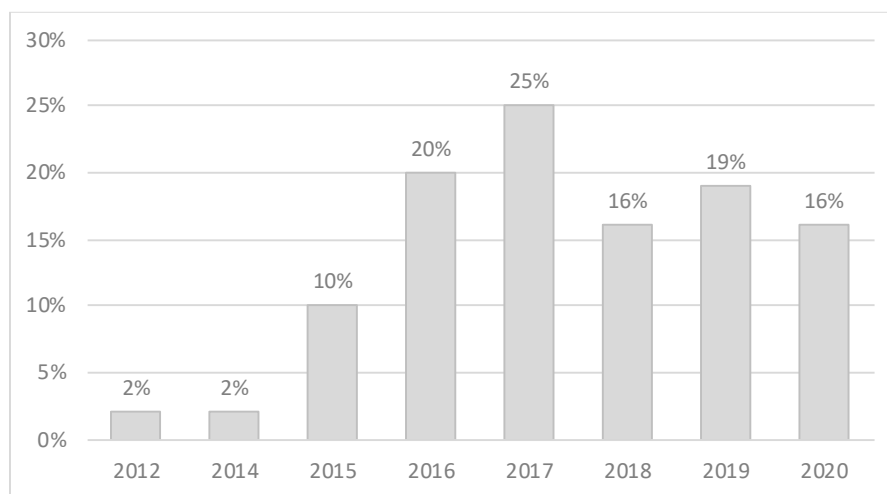
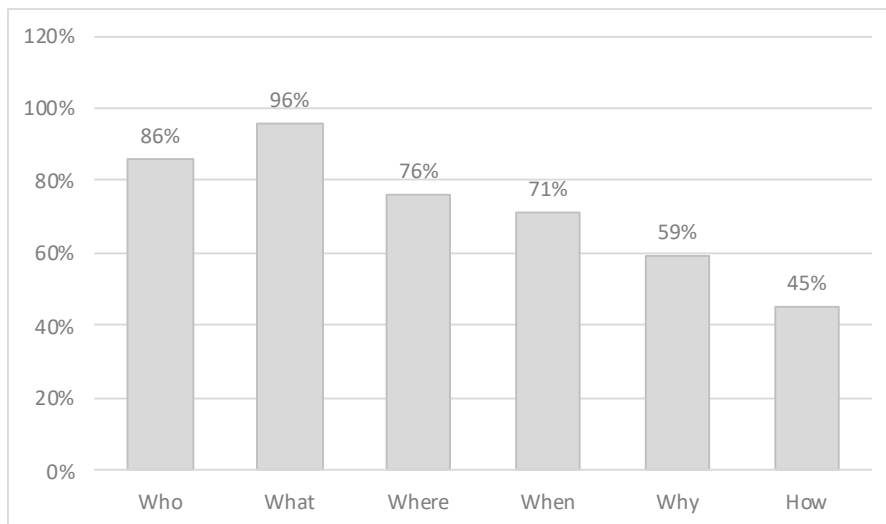


Figure 2 below shows the distribution of studies over the years. With respect to this sample, an irregular trend is present with the number of studies reaching a peak in 2017 (25%). While it is plausible to believe that empirical research on the topic started in 2012 due to an increase in popularity of the term “sharenting” among academics, media outlets and folks, it is important to emphasize that due to the non-representative nature of the sample this trend

can only be seen as an estimate to be further corroborated with future systematic studies, possibly testing whether the increase in scientific publications on the topic followed the increase in coverage by media outlets.

As for the *5 Ws and 1 H* framework, 86% of the studies provide information about *who* shares, 96% about *what* is shared, 76% about *where*, 71% about *when*, 59% about *why* and 45% about *how* (Fig. 3). As above, though concerning this specific sample of studies, these data suggest that the “how” of sharenting, which indicates the decision-making process concerning whether and how to share, is the least investigated aspect of this phenomenon.

FIGURE 3. Distribution of the 5 Ws and 1 H of Sharenting.



#### **4.1 The 5Ws and 1 H in depth**

Below a more detailed and qualitative account of the 5 Ws an 1H framework will be reported to provide a better overview of the topic.

##### **4.1.1 Who**

Eighty-six percent of the selected publications provide information about *who* shares representations of parenting and/or children on social media. Though most of the time it is parents who share, there are also occurrences in which subjects outside of the family publish photos, videos or stories of children on social media, such as members of the extended family, parents’ friends (Ammari et al., 2015), and even children’s teachers (Cino, Dalledonne

Vandini, 2020). Parents, however, represent the group that most often was found to engage in sharenting, as also reported by children and adolescents themselves when asked about their experiences with sharenting (Ouvrein, Verswijvel, 2019; Verswijvel, et al. 2019).

With respect to gender, data provide an ambivalent picture. A representative study from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital (2015) with a sample of U.S. parents with children aged 0-4 found that although using social media, forums and blogs to share about one's parenting was common for both mothers and fathers, the former engages in sharenting more frequently than the latter. This is in line with previous literature reporting that online parenting platforms are primarily used by mothers (Dworkin et al., 2013). At a first glance, then, some studies seem to suggest that mothers are more likely to share stories and representations of their parenting and children online. While this is in line with the role historically played by women as narrators of family life through diaries or photographs (Humphreys, 2018), this finding may also be due to the methodologies adopted by many of these studies which focused primarily on mothers (see, as an example, Cino, Demozzi, 2017; Kumar, Schoenebeck, 2015; etc.). A large-scale study conducted with a representative UK sample, in fact, found no significant differences in mothers' and fathers' sharing behavior (Livingstone, Blum-Ross, Zhang, 2018), as well as a study conducted with a sample of American parents, where mothers and fathers reported to share about their children on social media to a fairly similar extent (Bartholomew et al., 2012). Qualitative findings from Ammari and Schoenebeck (2015) with a sample of fathers also show that sharenting is an established practice for many of them, suggesting that the claim according to which sharenting mainly concerns women needs to be problematized. On the other hand, several studies considering sharenting as a multimodal narrative practice (i.e., concerning not only posting photos of children, but, in general, telling family narratives through multimodal representations – written, video, photographic, etc.), suggest that mothers in particular engage more often in it (Atwell et al., 2019; C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2015; Kumar, Schoenebeck, 2015).

In terms of other demographics, when looking at parents' age, though not all studies provide sufficient information on this variable, and some are mainly focused on millennials (Latipah et al., 2020), the reported results across studies do not report significant differences according to age, posing the question whether generational matters are actually at stake or not when it comes to parents' sharing behavior. What do seem to make a difference, in turn, is new parenthood status: new parents, in fact, seem particularly inclined to sharenting for reasons that will be better explained in the "Why" section (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Cino, Demozzi, 2017; Das, 2017, 2019; C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2015; Holiday, Norman, Densley, 2020). An Italian study found statistically

significant relationships between time spent online, education level, and sharing habits: parents who spend more time on the internet and those with a lower education level are more likely to share photos of their children on social media (Demozzi, Gigli, Cino, 2020).

Finally, a specific case concerns *celebrity* and *influencer* parents, mothers and fathers (Abidin, 2015; Campana, Van den Bossche, Miller, 2020), representing a peculiar “category” with respect to both the *what* and *whys* of sharenting, as we will see later.

#### *4.1.2 What and Where*

Almost all of the studies reviewed (96%) provide information about the “what”, i.e. the contents shared, and 76% about the “where”, in terms of platforms used to post. The rationale behind presenting these two categories together lies in the fact that, looking at the literature, the *what* and *where* of sharenting seems to be related.

As for the “what”, the range of representations reported in the literature is vast and varied and includes photos and narratives of pregnancy, sonogram and ultrasound scans, breastfeeding images (Leaver, Highfield, 2018; Locatelli, 2017), photos and videos of the offspring published on several social media (Choi, Lewallen, 2018), but also written threads on parenting forums about parenting experiences (Das, 2017; Pedersen, Lupton, 2018), as well as blog posts (Blum-Ross, Livingstone, 2017; Orton-Johnson, 2017) and YouTube videos (Das, 2018). Some data suggest that when it comes to sharing representations of the offspring, sons are more often mentioned than daughters (Sivak, Smirnov, 2019), and pictures tend to reproduce gender stereotypes about clothing, poses and games (Choi, Lewallen, 2018). Content analyses of materials posted by parents found that some of these representations portray potentially embarrassing children’s intimate and private moments, such as bathtime photos, pictures or videos of children angry or throwing a tantrum, and the like (Brosch, 2016). When it comes to celebrity and influencer parents, contents generally sponsor a specific brand by showing moments of daily domesticity representing children and parents (Campana, Van den Bossche, Miller 2020), also trying to implicitly construct a façade of natural and amateur authenticity “everyday” parents can relate to (Abidin, 2015).

With respect to the “where” of sharenting, the literature reviewed seems to suggest that different contents get shared on different platforms. Visually oriented platforms, such as Instagram, for example seems to be particularly suited to share idealized representations of pregnancy and family life in general (Le Moignan et al., 2017; Tiidenberg, Baym, 2017) in line with the “intensive parenting” and “mothering” framework, according to which parenting and childrearing are idyllic and happy moments (Hays, 1998; Shirani, Henwood,

Coltart, 2012) and, more broadly, with the “biased” nature of the family photo (Pauwels, 2008). Anonymous and written-based platforms like parenting forums, on the other hand, seems to offer a space where it is possible for users to put in words and narrate parenting challenges and daily dilemmas, sharing the most difficult and dramatic experiences of being a parent which would be socially unacceptable or even “untellable” in platforms where users’ offline and online identities coincide (Das, 2017; Jaworska, 2018). Nonetheless, Facebook Parenting Groups are equally used to share both photos and videos of children, as well as parenting experiences and advice about children’s upbringing, education, diet, health, and the like (Cino, Demozzi, 2017; Das, 2019). Finally, studies focusing on parenting blogs suggest that these spaces are also used to narrate parents’ everyday domestic life and question assumptions and cultural expectations about parenting, as well to report under-represented experiences (as in the case of a mum blogger who would use her blog to narrate challenges and experiences of her disabled daughter, as reported in Blum-Ross, Livingstone, 2017). Some parents also use blogs to take an explicit critical stance towards societal expectations on what it means to be a “good” parent in the contemporary age (Orton-Johnson, 2017).

Taken together, the corpus of literature analyzed suggests that the *what* and *where* of sharenting contribute to the construction of media narratives that can reinforce or question idealized models of good parenting and family life (Das, 2017, 2018, 2019; Jaworska, 2018; Kumar, Schoenebeck; Le Moignan, et al., 2017).

#### 4.1.3 *When*

Seventy-one percent of the studies reviewed provide information about the “when” of sharenting, or the moments during which this media practice takes place. Overall, sharenting seems to start well before the child is born by posting about sonograms and pregnancy (Tidénberg, Baym, 2017), continues with the birth of a child and through the early stages of parenthood (Bartholomew et al., 2012), goes on until children come of age and reaches a peak during early childhood (Livingstone et al., 2018). These timeframes refer both to sharing children’s photos and parenting stories and experiences, with data suggesting that although sharenting can cover virtually every “phase” of parents’ and children’s lives, the transition to parenthood and the first eight years of children’s life seem to be crucial sites of online posting (Atwell, et al., 2019; Livingstone et al., 2018).

As far as sharing contents about children goes, the inverse tendency in sharenting as a child grows into adolescence seems to be due to children reaching a greater understanding of this media practice and its implications in terms of being in control of their digital identities (Livingstone et al., 2018; Lipu,



Siibak, 2019). Findings of a study with Swedish children aged 4-15, on the other hand, reported that, conversely, adolescents tend to find sharenting more acceptable than younger children (Sarkadi, Dahlberg, Fängström, Warner, 2020).

#### 4.1.4 *Why*

Fifty-nine percent of the studies examined investigated the reasons behind sharenting. Overall, parents' sharing behavior seems to be driven by two main needs supported by the literature: the desire of connectedness and interpersonal relationships, with both important people in their or their children's lives and peers in general (Livingstone et al., 2018), and the quest for self-presentation and external validation (Kumar, Schoenebeck, 2015), in line with a broader process of *impression management* (Goffman, 1956). These two clusters of motivations, moreover, are theoretically in line with Nadkarni's and Hofmann's (2012) model for social media use, which sees in the need for belonging and self-presentation the two basic human needs influencing users' sharing behavior.

Several motivations behind sharenting were reported, among which:

- Parents' desire to create memories for their children (Blum-Ross, Livingstone, 2017),
- Sharing to show pride and positive emotions about children and parenting (Wagner, Gasche, 2018),
- Keeping in touch with friends and family, even as a request from children themselves (Livingstone et al., 2018),
- The desire to learn and perform models of “good” parenting and receive external validation (Ammari, Schoenebeck, 2015; Kumar, Schoenebeck, 2015),
- The need of getting peers' social and emotional support (Fox, Hoy, 2019; Pedersen, Lupton, 2018), especially for new parents (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Cino, Demozzi, 2017; Das, 2017, 2019; C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2015; Holiday, Norman, Densley, 2020),
- Wanting to question social expectations with respect to being a “good” parent and proposing alternative models of parenting regarding, for example, childbirth and childcare (Das, 2017, 2019, 2018; Jaworska, 2018),
- In the case of influencer parents, representing a mundane everyday domesticity so to create a semblance of closeness and relatedness with their followers while sponsoring products and brands (Abidin, 2015; Campana, Van den Bossche, Miller, 2020).

While these studies looked at parents' self-reported motivations, research with Belgian adolescents found that youth think their parents share because of a need for parental support, impression management goals, and to create family memories (Verswijvel, et al., 2019), converging with parents' actual reasons.

#### 4.1.5 How

Less than half of the studies investigated the “how” of sharenting (45%), here understood in terms of parents' decision-making and governance strategies about whether and how to share about their parenting and children online. Questions concerning the governance of children's social media presence are particularly relevant, with studies showing that questioning “if” and “how” to share opens the door to a set of digital dilemmas, as reported by Blum-Ross, Livingstone (2017), who found in their sample of parent bloggers that sharenting is not only a source of personal satisfaction, but also a possible cause for concern. This feeling was formally conceptualized by Chalklen and Anderson (2017) in terms of a *privacy/openness paradox*: a situation in which parents recognize both benefits and potential hazards of sharenting, living internal conflicts of no easy solution. Issues related to managing children's digital presence also emerged from studies involving children, reporting that according to some girls and boys parents should ask their permission before posting about them (Moser, Chen, Schoenebeck, 2017), while others reported feeling uncomfortable with sharenting, highlighting discrepancies between their parents' sharing behavior and the household's social media rules (Hiniker, Schoenebeck, Kientz, 2016). In some cases, sharenting seems to be approved in principle by children - as showed in a study with adolescents by Ouvrein and Verswijvel (2019) – provided they are aware and agreed on the contents to be shared, while in other circumstances lacking a common framework of reference between parents and children in terms of what can or cannot be posted generated conflicts (Lipu, Siibak, 2019).

Within these studies, different strategies were adopted by parents to govern sharenting, ranging from “anti-sharenting” policies, where parents decided not to share about their family and offspring online at all (Autenrieth, 2018), to personalizing their sharing habits taking into account both the contents and the target audience (Damkjaer, 2018); from the use of “camouflage” strategies to protect children's identities, such as covering their faces with emoticons (Wagner, Gasche, 2018), to the use of private groups and privacy settings (Kumar, Schoenebeck, 2015); and again, from establishing boundary rules with friends and extended family members stating who, whether, and what can be posted by third parties on social media (Ammari et al., 2015), to the use of coordination strategies between parents and children in order to decide whether and what to make public about their domestic life online (Livingstone et al.,

2018). In this regard, Kumar and Schoeneback proposed the expression *privacy stewardship* “to describe the responsibility parents take on when deciding what is appropriate to share about their children online and ensuring that family and friends respect and maintain the integrity of those rules” (2015: 1310).

Overall, the “how” of sharenting contributes to the construction of certain parental identities (e.g. the “good” and “responsible” digital parent), privacy rules and framework of reference to be adopted in the household (Damkjaer, 2018), and can also involve potential digital dilemmas parents face with respect to their own (Blum-Ross, Livingstone, 2017; Chalklen, Andersen, 2017) and other people’s sharing behavior that, if channeled, can lead to the construction of framework of references and courses of action to take to govern children’s social media presence, as in the case of parents trying to manage their offspring’s online identities when teachers shared about them (Cino, Dalledonne Vandini, 2020).

## **5. Discussions and conclusions**

The present review mapped the media practice of sharenting through a systematized analysis of the empirical literature on the topic. As already stated, the goal was not the replicability of the process, nor the exhaustiveness of the product -for which a systematic approach will be more appropriate- but the transparency of the procedure and the summary of what has been found so far on the subject within the selected studies.

The *5 Ws and 1 H* framework was helpful in this respect, since it allowed us to take a thorough look at the practice of sharenting identifying evidence-based information that will help scholars get a grasp of the phenomenon while also paving the way for future inquiry. In this regard, in terms of empirical studies, all of the six areas considered could be further implemented and researched to fill some gaps.

With respect to the “Who”, while we have reasons to believe that sharenting may concern mostly women, especially in its broader sense of sharing representations of parenting and children, this should not be taken completely for granted since some studies also documented fathers’ sharing habits, suggesting that gender differences may be due to a selection bias as women’s experiences may have been more investigated than men’s. A more balanced approach is then needed, not only in terms of gender, but also to reach more diverse and heterogenous samples and not only focusing on “W.E.I.R.D.” (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic – Henrich, Heine, Norenzayan, 2010) families. Furthermore, very few studies reported on the experiences of other actors, external to the nuclear family, sharing about

children, such as grandparents engaging in “grand-sharenting” (Damkjaer, 2018), or even teachers (Cino, Dalledonne Vandini, 2020), representing an interesting and little explored area of inquiry for scholars to look at, especially in light of the broader normalization of children’s social media presence that may lead people to feel legitimized to craft a digital footprint for minors (Leaver, 2015).

As for the “what” and “where” of sharenting, it is interesting to notice that these two elements seem to be related, to the point where the choice of what to post may somewhat depend on where parents are posting, in line with Hogan’s (2010) notion of the common denominator approach, according to which people select contents to share online keeping in mind the audience they will reach. Such a relationship is scientifically interesting, suggesting that sharenting may differ in scale, scope and place and that what gets shared and where could provide information on this heterogeneity. As such, future studies could investigate the actual existence of such a relationship here mainly theorized and discerned through this secondary analysis, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and digital ethnographies to understand how parents’ sharing behavior varies across platforms, as well as by statistically testing whether significant relationships exist between different types of contents and platforms used.

As for the “when”, the reviewed studies show that parents tend to share from the very same moment they find out to be expecting a baby and that sharenting reaches a peak during early childhood and decreases as a child grows into adolescence. When looking at how children feel about it, it seems reasonable to believe that as they become more aware of their digital presence, they try to control it more, so that parents tend to stop sharing about them. On the other hand, as we have seen, some evidence suggest that adolescents are actually more accepting of sharenting than younger children. Future research should then better investigate the temporal evolution of sharenting, and whether this changes because of children reclaiming their representational agency, or parents of little children being more involved in their life thus more able and willing to document their life as a form of an “extended self” (Holiday, et al., 2020) which tends to blur as children grow up.

With respect to the “Whys” of sharenting, as we have seen, the evidence suggest that the double model of social media use of interpersonal connection and self-presentation described by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) can be adopted to explain the main motivations behind parents’ sharing behavior. Future psychometric study could then be used, informed for example by the Uses and Gratifications Theory as adapted to social media (Whiting, Williams, 2013) in order to test which gratifications better explain and relate to parents’

sharing behavior, not only in terms of sharing or not, but also what, where, when, and how to share.

This leads us to the sixth investigated area, the “How” of sharenting, describing the decisions parents make when establishing whether and how they should share on social media and setting rules for themselves and other people to govern their children’s social media presence, quite often living digital dilemmas concerning the domestication of sharenting and its broader implication. The reviewed literature, however, do not tell much in terms of the role played by children themselves in negotiating rules with their parents and third parties to be in control of their digital identities, which is an area future research should look more in depth at. Also, in reporting on digital dilemmas, while we do know that parents experience these predicaments, little knowledge is available in terms of strategies adopted to face and learn from these dilemmas and whether and how they can function as critical incidents and foster reflexivity contributing to the social construction of cultural models on the “hows” of sharenting in particular, and *digital parenting* in general (Mascheroni, Ponte, Jorge, 2018).

Future research could also build on findings from this review not only to inform and develop new empirical studies, but also to gain an evidence-based understanding of the phenomenon useful to take a theoretical and critical stance towards the digitalization of family life, and even as a base for systematic literature reviews that could implement the approach used in this study and even refer to the *5 Ws and 1 H framework* here mobilized to better organize results, adjusting it as needed. In this regard, it is finally important to stress that while these areas were here presented separately to offer specific information on each one of them, they are actually not discreet, but mingle and intersect in several ways, since different people may have different motivations for sharing, adopt different privacy management strategies, use different platforms, share different contents and in different phases of life.

While media narratives on the topic often focused on the “negative” and “dangerous” sides of sharenting, it is important to stress how sharing representations of one’s family on social media should in turn be understood as a situated media practice (Couldry, 2012), moving beyond essentialist accounts on the relationship between families and digital media (Barassi, 2020). In this sense, the studies here reviewed may help take a grasp of the phenomenon anchored to empirical data so to better understand the broader context within which sharenting takes place, while also focusing not only on the fairly unknown and mostly speculative consequences of sharenting, but most of all on some of its antecedents in terms of personal characteristics and motivations, but also governance strategies put in place in the composite work of managing

children's digital footprints in an ever-evolving digitalized ecology contemporary families are part of.

While mostly descriptive in nature, the intricate web of connections outlined in this review shows the complexity behind what seems to be a simple media practice, whose normalization in families' everyday life (Leaver, 2015), however, represents a fertile soil for future research to look at. Findings from this systematized review can help scholars moving forward in this direction.

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