Aims
This article asks whether ‘sharenting’ (sharing representations of one’s parenting or children online) is a form of digital self-representation. Drawing on interviews, it explores how parents define the borders of their digital selves and justify what is their ‘story to tell’. The article focuses on parent bloggers, asking how they represent themselves as parents and the implications for those drawn into these representations (e.g. their children), how they construct their ‘networked self’, and how they contribute to a ‘networked public’ within and beyond their blog.

Key Findings
- Bloggers grapple with profound ethical dilemmas, as representing their identities as parents inevitably makes aspects of their children’s lives public, introducing risks that they as parents are, paradoxically, responsible for safeguarding against.
- Parents evaluate what to share by juggling multiple obligations—to themselves, their children in the present and imagined into the future, and to their physical and virtual communities.
- Most of the bloggers identified blogging as something they ‘do for themselves,’ a new iteration of previous creative or professional interests which had to be reconfigured given the time pressures especially of early parenting.
- For many bloggers the purpose was the curation of memories, a modern photo album built to share snapshots and stories of the child(ren) not only for far-flung family and friends in the present but also for the child(ren) as imagined into the future.
- The blogs were described as something the parent does for the children, blogging is seen as an extension of the care work of parenting. Yet being public blogs, the potential audiences is much wider than that of the yellowing hard-copy photo albums of the bloggers’ own childhoods, raising new questions not only about the children’s safety but also about ownership of the family narrative—even, on occasion, creating competition for the child’s future memories.
- Bloggers described a struggle between respecting the child’s boundaries and keeping their own commitment to the blog and readership among the wider blogging community. Knowing that others read the blog was a source of motivation but also of stress as bloggers struggled to produce content, find time to read and comment on others’ blogs, or deal with controversies.
- Two-thirds of interviewed bloggers were attempting to ‘monetise’ their blog in some way through sponsored posts, affiliate links or blog giveaways. The greater the blog readership, the more money a blogger can make, but if a blog is too full of sponsored posts then readers may stop engaging, so bloggers must avoid the appearance of ‘selling out.’
- The fact that children are, themselves, contested subjects of social media—often younger than the age of consent for companies’ terms and conditions, and potentially vulnerable through their immaturity or special needs—exacerbates the difficulty of representing the relational self for parent bloggers. It can even encourage ‘parent bashing,’ although all those who ‘sharent’ experience some of these difficulties. As a result, it is sometimes difficult for them to participate in supportive parenting communities online.
- Emergent cultures of parent blogging are governed by overlapping ‘spheres of obligation’ that shape everyday decisions about where and how much to share including the parent’s responsibility to her-or himself, to her or his child(ren) in the present and the imagined future, to others in the child’s social circle, and to the parenting communities that the blogger helps bring into being.

https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis
Policy Context
We and the bloggers have yet to find an approach to representing relational identities in ways that deal fairly with both parents and their children, not only in academic terms but also in the public sphere.

Methodology
Drawing on interviews with 17 parent bloggers, 13 identified as White and the remaining four as Asian, British Asian, or mixed race. Most had young children from toddlers through primary school age, and four had children with special educational needs and disabilities. Five of the 17 bloggers were fathers. Income levels ranged from over £100,000 per year to below £15,000, though most were fairly well-off with an average household income of £62,000 per year. What they called their ‘day job’ included media-related positions (such as social media managers or digital copywriters) to small businesses, teaching, or civil service, and their work often had implications for their approach to blogging.

Background
‘Sharenting’ is decried in the mass media as exploitative, narcissistic, or plain naïve. Some warn that posting images and video online may expose children to paedophiles or online grooming, and new fears of data mining, marketing, and facial recognition are growing. Yet the popularity of parent bloggers and vloggers continues to rise, as sharing and blogging about one’s children proves a widely enjoyed form of user-generated content creation and consumption. But is sharing a child’s image publicly a violation of that child’s privacy? For parents, these ‘digital’ dilemmas are intensified by the twin truths that to represent one’s own identity as a parent means making public aspects of a (potentially vulnerable) child’s life and yet because they are the parent, they are precisely the person primarily responsible for protecting that child’s privacy. This poses more than just practical dilemmas about social media use, for it forces comparison—for researchers but also for society—of relational versus individualistic conceptions of identity, ethics, privacy, and responsibility. Currently there is a wide spectrum of blogging practices regarding children’s privacy, with some parent bloggers openly disclosing their own and their children’s full names, images, and locations, while others use pseudonyms or avoid images of faces.


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