

Privacy Concerns and Emergent Norms of Parental Sharing of Information About Children  
Online

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Abstract

As part of the first “born digital” generation, today’s children exist online before their bodies enter the physical world. Parents now post sonogram images and baby pictures online, track pregnancies through mobile apps, and register email addresses, social media accounts, and web domains in their children’s names (Leaver, 2015; Lupton, Pedersen, Thomas, 2016). These children won’t decide whether to create a digital footprint; they will face the novel task of inheriting the digital identities that their parents – wittingly or not – steward for them (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015).

When deciding what information to share about their children online, parents must not only weigh the potential benefits and risks, but also their own interests against those of their children. This balancing is, of course, nothing new; it reflects the essence of parenthood. But today’s parents inhabit the unique position of being the first to grapple with these questions as they relate to the development of a child’s digital footprint.

In this paper, I explore how parental sharing of children’s information online can implicate children’s privacy. I also examine what norms are emerging about what parents should or should not share online about their children. I answer the first question by performing a contextual integrity analysis of parental sharing of children’s information on Facebook in the

context of home and family life (Nissenbaum, 2010). The analysis demonstrates how this type of parental sharing raises privacy concerns.

To answer the second question, I conduct a qualitative analysis of a sample of posts on the popular blog STFU Parents. The irreverent blog is a well-known site focused on parental sharing, or as the blog's author calls it, "overshare." Intended as entertainment, the blog now represents a repository of examples of parental oversharing. While one author curates the blog, users submit and comment on posts, suggesting that the blog resonates with people. Its explicit focus on value judgments makes it a particularly appropriate venue to study emerging norms. Taken together, these analyses offer conceptual clarity about what constitutes parental sharing of children's information online and why it raises privacy concerns for children.

*Keywords:* parents, children, oversharing, social media, contextual integrity, privacy,

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