

Marzena Barańska
Katarzyna Plebańczyk

Sharenting and the value of the child's image

Sharenting i wartość wizerunku dziecka

In a digitalised world there is a duality in the perception of the image, as a personal asset of the child and of the adult. The unreflected publication of a child's image on the Internet not only serves to popularise the child or the parent but is also a source of many dangers. On the basis of preliminary analyses, an attempt has been made to systematise the concept of the sharenting to identify its forms, and to discuss the motives behind parents' actions. The following methods were used: qualitative, exegesis of legal texts, comparative. The results of the research show the difficulties arising from the understanding of the child's autonomy to participate in decisions related to 'parental access', the appropriation of the child's image by the parents and, therefore, the management of the child's welfare.

Key words: child, image, image management, shared parenting, digital parenting

W zdigitalizowanym świecie istnieje dwoistość w postrzeganiu wizerunku jako dobra osobistego dziecka i dorosłego. Bezrefleksyjna publikacja wizerunku dziecka w Internecie służy nie tylko popularyzacji dziecka lub rodzica, ale jest także źródłem wielu zagrożeń. Na podstawie wstępnych analiz podjęto próbę usystematyzowania pojęcia sharentingu, zidentyfikowania jego form oraz omówienia motywów działań rodziców. Zastosowano metody: jakościową, egzegezy tekstów prawnych, porównawczą. Wyniki badań wskazują na trudności wynikające z rozumienia autonomii dziecka w uczestniczeniu w decyzjach związanych z „dostępem

rodzicielskim”, zawłaszczaniem wizerunku dziecka przez rodziców, a tym samym zarządzaniem dobrem dziecka.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko, wizerunek, zarządzanie wizerunkiem, wspólne rodzicielstwo, cyfrowe rodzicielstwo

Introduction

The 1987 Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as “ensuring that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”¹. Solidarity, social responsibility and individual awareness of the need to ensure oriented a high quality of life, oblige us use of the solutions of civilization responsibly, respecting the rights of all regardless of age, place of residence, status or, for example, the colour of their skin. The humanistic and social dimension of the definition recognises as a fundamental objective the action for the education of future generations in respect of norms and values that are considered to be particularly valuable. The contemporary *homo cooperativus*² remains in harmony with the external and internal environment, cares about the future of generations, is ready to cooperate and take responsibility thus becoming a guarantor of “contemporary threats to human well-being and a subject of reflection on the quality of life and the nature of progress”³. “Every individual therefore has the opportunity to participate directly in the processes of both initiating actions for sustainable development and actively opposing actions that are inherently directed against him or her”⁴.

Acting sustainably in the global Internet village, on the one hand, instrumentalises information media as tools against social exclusion and, on the other hand, points to the need to create social awareness in the process of their use. The contemporary “*homo participans* (is) a human being condemned to participate globally in all world events”⁵. He is not

¹ WCED Brundtland Commission. *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987. p.1.

² H. Rogall, *The economics of sustainable development. Theory and practice*, 2010, p. 139, 189–191.

³ W. Tyburski, *Environmental ethics and its contribution to building awareness conducive to the implementation of sustainable development*, [in:] W. Tyburski (red.), *Principles of shaping attitudes conducive to the implementation of sustainable development*, Toruń 2011, p. 85.

⁴ S. Fiut, *Sustainable development in the aspect of media society*, “Problemy Ekorozwoju” 2007, nr 2, p. 86.

⁵ D. DeKerchhove, *The shell of culture. Exploring the new electronic reality*, Warsaw 1996, p. 61–64.

deprived of autonomy; as an individual, he sets limits as to the extent and manner of his participation in the creation of global information resources, the implementation of promoted patterns of behaviour and attitudes, lifestyles. This approach redefines the concept of the 'child' and its role in society. The autonomy of the individual (the child) in the adult world makes us reflect on the need to treat the child as an adult, while at the same time agreeing to understand [...] the child's strong need to protect his/her own privacy, to have his/her own affairs, to agree to attempts to solve conflicts and problems on his/her own, to receive friendly advice and help from partners, and to respect the child's views – even those that are not shared”⁶.

The child, as a social being, should be understood through spirituality, innovation, value and value creation, seeking guarantees for a harmonious and sustainable environment in which he or she lives.

The child, as a media user, expects a guarantee for the use of technological goods, while as a subject of interest, it trusts that its legally protected well-being will not be compromised. Children's online activity is a consequence of autonomously made decisions⁷, as well as a consequence of parental involvement. On the one hand, digital parenting, understood as the conscious participation of parents in the child's use of digital media, is an expression of maturity and responsibility for the upbringing of future generations⁸, on the other hand, it is a consequence of making family life public through posted content about its members.

In a digitalised world, a trend that J. Finch calls 'demonstrating families' (displaying families) is becoming increasingly popular. It is a process in which individuals and groups of individuals demonstrate to each other and to significant observers that their actions constitute doing family things and thereby confirm that their relationships are family relationships⁹. The sharing of information about the family and

⁶ J. Górniewicz, *Roots and wings, or the autonomy of the young child*. 7 March 2022 <https://www.babyboom.pl/maluszek/wychowanie/korzenie-i-skrzydla-czyli-o-autonomii-malego-dziecka> (access: 30 March 2024).

⁷ G. Ouvrein, K. Verswijvel, *Sharenting: parental adoration or public humiliation? A focus group study on adolescents' experiences with sharenting against the background of their own impression management*. "Children and Youth Services Review" 2019, No. 99, p. 319–327.

⁸ S. Sorensen, *Protecting children's right to privacy in the digital age: Parents as trustees of children's rights*. "Children's Legal Rights Journal", 2016, No. 36(3), p.156–176.

⁹ J. Finch, *Displaying Families*. "Sociology" 2007, No.41, p. 67.

its members is aimed, among other things, at shaping its image¹⁰. The presence of children is a natural consequence of the content presented. The situation is different when a parent conceals his or her activity on providing content concerning the child in an unreflective way, with no respect for the child's values or prior consent¹¹. In pursuit of tangible or intangible goals, the parent, "for the sake of the well-being" of the children disseminates information in various forms and contents, creating a digital history that is accessible to an indeterminate number of people. Interoperability a feature of the new digital technologies, allows users to develop and distribute content for their own purposes, at the expense of others. The phenomenon of sharenting, which involves the portrayal of children in the media, especially by their parents, does not always serve their interests. Social disapproval of this type of behaviour, contradicts the partisan understanding of the role of the parent, as the 'guardian' of the child's welfare.

Methodological assumptions

The issues described above – covering the research field of media sciences, law and management – constitute new questions that require in-depth analysis from the point of view of the use of sharenting as a determinant of the formation of the child's image as a legally protected value, consisting of the dissemination of information about the child and the appropriation of his or her image for the purpose of popularising the parent. The study used William Jones' concept of Personal Information Management (PIM), understood as the actions taken by an individual to acquire or create, collect, organise, maintain, retrieve, use and distribute information needed for a variety of purposes to fulfil multiple life roles and tasks¹².

The aim of this article is to introduce the debate about the autonomy of the child in the field of media image formation *versus the child's welfare*

¹⁰ B. Chrostowska, *Sharenting – the scale and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of parents' (reckless) disclosure of children's information on social media*. "Problemy współczesnej edukacji" 2022, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 58–68.

¹¹ M. Marasli, E. Suhendan, N.H. Yilmazturk, F. Cok, *Parents' Shares on Social Networking Sites About their Children: Sharenting*. "The Anthropologist". 2016, Volume 24, p. 399–406 (access: 3 May 2024).

¹² W. Jones, *Keeping found things found: the study and practice of personal information management*, Amsterdam-Boston 2008, p. 5.

and interests as a fundamental principle of parents in the decision-making process concerning the child. The scientific discussion conducted in the literature as well as in practice – concerning the child's autonomy in the field of image protection, in the media, expressed in the jurisprudence – confirms that the analysed problem is multifaceted and multi-layered. Therefore, it determined the research process: the objectives set, the methods used, the research tools and became the source of the following questions: 1) How is the concept of the child understood?; 2) what does the term sharenting mean and in what does it manifest itself?; 3) to what extent, does “the welfare of the child” as a fundamental principle in the child-rearing process justify the use of sharenting by parents?

It was assumed that the research would focus on methods, the results of which are made public and remain in the social science stream. In view of the “childish” phase of the development of methods specific to PIM and assuming that the above questions are of interest to many disciplines, the following analyses were used to obtain answers to the research questions: i.e. desk research, exegesis of legal texts. The desk research method consists of queries of found data in order to incorporate them into the research process. while the exegesis of legal tests makes it possible to determine the meaning of the law, especially in the context of its applications.

The research material was gathered by creating a catalogue of keywords: “child”, “child welfare”, “image”, “sharenting”. In the next stage, the literature was searched using keywords in Polish and English language publications, as well as in databases (repository of the Centre for Open Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science) containing the results of research (descriptions, abstracts, reports, databases) in the world and in Poland (approximately 54 items), presenting the understanding of the concepts, motives of parents' actions of “sharenting” a child online. Internet resources of legal information were used in the construction of the article: ISAI – Internet System of Legal Acts and LEX System of Legal Information – allowing for the exegesis of legal tests and jurisprudence from the point of view of harmonisation of normative solutions in he international forum concerning the protection of the image as a child's good and the practical dimension of their application resulting from the jurisprudential practice. No time limits were set, due to the fact that ‘sharenting’ is a new phenomenon that requires in-depth analysis. As a result of the research, a catalogue of tests was established and analysed.

In the developed report, the leading contents were considered to be: the family, the concept of the child, the image of the family and the child, the welfare of the child, “making the family accessible” from both social, humanistic and normative definitions. Quantitative research was abandoned in favour of qualitative research, which in this study was based on the analysis and criticism of texts¹³, in order to draw conclusions based on the knowledge gained and to indicate perspectives for change in the face of approval of the principles of sustainable development and concern for the development of future generations.

Redefining the concept of “the child”

Social dimension

Colloquially, the term child is used to describe a person from birth to adolescence, although this does not mean that the term is not used to refer to any offspring regardless of age¹⁴. Scholarly reflection on defining the category of understanding the child dates from the twentieth century. Traditional conceptions of the child as disenfranchised are being replaced by a new approach. The child, the person, the human being is seen through his or her physicality, the ‘I’ which is something that is given and the personality which is the result of the relationships the individual enters into, the position in society, the collective, attitudes, behaviour. Physicality and spirituality have become subjects of study in many scientific disciplines, and this is reflected in the understanding of the term ‘child’. Contemporary approaches, especially in the humanities and social sciences, emphasise the role of the child as a continuum of civilisational development. For this reason, it is important to create space for the child to develop in the process of “becoming a human being”. The humanistic orientation sees the child as an individual endowed with his or her own space (*humanum*), in which he or she functions and over which he or she has influence. Such an approach strengthens the belief in his or her subjectivity, seen as an autonomous individual/human

¹³ S. Cisek, *The method of writing analysis and criticism in information science and library science in the 21st century*. “Library Review” 2010, No. 3, p. 273–284.

¹⁴ M. Szymczak (ed.), *Dictionary of the Polish language*, Warsaw 1978, p. 498.

being endowed with dignity, inviolability, entitled to develop his or her 'humanity' on the basis of self-interest, public interest, morals, rules of coexistence and law. The social sciences adopt "the concept of a human being oriented towards development, improvement and self-realisation. Who (what) a human being is and becomes depends on how he or she exists, what conditions of self-realisation he or she has, opportunities to direct himself or herself towards the basic values of life"¹⁵. The child, as a kind of *tabula rasa*, enriches its 'humanity' through the process of socialisation. This ability to adapt to the environment¹⁶ is the result of "a process of experience resulting, among other things, from the retrieval and processing of acquired information"¹⁷. Language, gestures, physical appearance – symbolic interactionism reflect the environment in which the child is brought up becoming both a perpetuator of certain traditions and an assimilator of diversity", it becomes a product of culture before it learns to speak and walk"¹⁸. W. Dilthey, author of *The Narrative Conception of Man*, believes that through the 'process of the laboratory of life experiments', the child can be seen through the prism of the individual and that what is the product of the community. It used to be said of children that ' [...] they inhabit a world of meanings created independently in interaction with adults. The image of the child as a 'rich', active co-creator of knowledge, culture and identity is increasingly dominant. He or she is a citizen capable of making decisions, choices and taking responsibility for them"¹⁹. Consequently, the participatory dimension of the child in society requires" [...] treating the child as a co-creator of his or her own childhood and society"²⁰.

¹⁵ L. Marszałek, *Aksjologiczny kontekst dzieciństwa*, "Seminare. Poszukiwania naukowe" 2015, Volumen 36, No. 3, p. 117; A. Brosch, *Sharenting – Why Do Parents Violate Their Children's Privacy?*, „The New Educational Review”, 2018, p. 75–85.

¹⁶ H.J. Eysenck, *The Structure of Human Personality*, London 1970.

¹⁷ A. Lewicki, *Psychologia kliniczna w zarysie*, Warsaw 1967, p. 71.

¹⁸ R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Warszawa 2005; P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology)*, Cambridge 2007.

¹⁹ R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Wydawnictwo Muza, Warsaw 2005; G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, A. Pence, *Beyond the discourse of quality in early childhood education and care institutions*, Wrocław 2013, p. 118.

²⁰ L. Marszałek, *Aksjologiczny kontekst dzieciństwa*, "Seminare. Poszukiwania naukowe" 2015, Volumen 36, No. 3, p. 118.

The normative approach

Legally, it has been accepted that a child is “any human being below the age of eighteen years unless he or she has attained the age of majority under national law”²¹. This definition has been adopted in the legislation of supranational organisations and in the solutions of many states. However, the ages given are not universal and may vary, e.g. 21 years (United Arab Emirates), 19 years in South Korea, Cuba, Malta, Scotland (16 years) Indonesia, North Korea (17 years). Entering the adult world at a certain age determines one’s legal status to assume obligations and responsibilities. It is generally accepted that a person is an adult, although age is not the only determinant. A child may be treated as an adult in certain situations, e.g. related to the right of consent i.e. having sexual relations (12 (Mexico) – 21 years) or to marriage (Alaska 14 / 16 years; India 12 years). The social discontent resulting from the consent of the family of a 7-year-old Afghan girl to marry a 53-year-old man is an expression of disapproval by the global community, but not an obstacle in the face of existing national laws. In Poland, a 16-year-old woman (therefore a minor) can marry (with the prior consent of the court) and, as a married woman, has the right to make decisions and derive consequences from them, as an adult²².

The development of the media has led to an increasing number of regulations concerning the safety of the child on the Internet, the rights to which he or she is entitled, including the autonomy in the disposal of his or her image. As an addressee of content, as an actor, as a protagonist of a publication or as a media user, he or she has the right to safe access to the media. The concern for proper physical and psychological development obliges the responsible authorities to permanently analyse the content disseminated in order to set limits on content and its free flow. While traditional media (radio, television) have introduced symbols to indicate the addressee of the message, such practices are not applicable on the web. Non-standard (platform rules) and legal solutions²³

²¹ Art. 2, Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, Dz. U. 1991, No. 120, item 526.

²² Art.10, Law of 25 February 1964 – Family and Guardianship Code, Dz.U. z 1964 r. nr 9, poz. 59; Dz. U. 2023, poz. 2809.

²³ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance) PE/30/2022/REV/1; OJ L 277, 27.10.2022.

as well as initiatives to introduce a lower age limit for media users – account holders – (13 – 16 years) (e.g. Kids Online Safety Act – USA; Kids Online Safety Act – USA; Kids Online Safety Act – USA; Kids Online Safety Act – USA). Kids Online Safety Act – USA; Online Safety Bill: progress of the Bill W UK), define the concept of the child as a subject, whose care requires the introduction of such online management systems to minimise the risks of dangers arising from inadequate child protection. The importance of the problem is exaggerated by the actions taken by international organisations and states, which recognize that multi-level (or multilevel) governance²⁴ consisting of horizontal and vertical protection of children online, promotes institutional solutions, but also responsible parenting²⁵.

Consequently, the indifference of approaches in understanding the concept of the child justifies the claim, it is a human being, in principle, from birth to 18 years of age, who possesses dignity and expecting respect, and, in matters beyond his intellectual development and perception of the world, expects adults to develop methods and tools dedicated to his protection.

Sharenting versus child welfare

The child's well-being, as an overriding value, requires preferential treatment, so an analysis of sharenting in the context of 'parental sharing' and the child's decision-making autonomy was carried out on the basis of the results of previous quantitative and qualitative research. Reporting on the child's life on the Internet, mainly on digital platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) has become not only a fashionable, but also an absorbing phenomenon for parents. In the social dimension, scientific analyses are converging on questions concerning the motives, purpose and consequences of the content published by parents and the child's position in society. As mentioned above, the previous research from 2015. 2018 needs to be updated due to the technological changes

²⁴ T.A. Börzel, *Multi-level governance or multilevel government?*, "The British Journal of Politics and International Relations" 2020, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 776–783.

²⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/1232 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 July 2021 on a temporary derogation from certain provisions of Directive 2002/58/EC as regards the use of technologies by providers of number-independent interpersonal communications services for the processing of personal and other data for the purpose of combating online child sexual abuse (Text with EEA relevance), PE/38/2021/REV/1, *OJ L 274*, 30.7.2021, p. 41–51.

taking place in the space, the consequence of which is an ever-widening catalogue of tools for the esposition of a person's image.

The concept and types of sharenting

The well-known saying “If you're not on Facebook, you're not there” (McLuhan) best illustrates the role of the media in the modern world. The processes of mediatisation have revolutionised the daily lives of the world's inhabitants to such an extent that the media are no longer perceived as a source of information or knowledge, but rather as a source of interpersonal relationships or, for example, self-presentation. Social media which allow the creation of accounts that are open or restricted to other users, creating platforms that disseminate content set or approved by the account holder. The ease of access to the web, and through it, to a wide audience, as well as the curiosity of their reactions, makes it necessary to keep up to date with changes in published content. The fear of missing out is commonly known as the FoMO effect (short for fear of missing out) inspires a constant review of content, which is updated in various ways. Parents in the virtual network are looking for new ways to realise parenthood. Family photos, showing people individually or in groups, in static or dynamic positions, kept for years in family albums, testifying to the identity of the family, have changed their format, and become an integral part of social media *content* (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok). “The Kodak culture”²⁶ of the image-capturing photograph has been replaced by the culture of the digital family, and the personalised recipient of photographic content by the unknown. The content and frequency of information published by parents – especially mums – online about children lies at the heart of sharenting.

The root is a combination of two words: *share* – meaning to *share* with someone, *share*²⁷ and *parenti* meaning father, mother, family²⁸. In English *parenting* is understood as the excessive publication of photos by parents of their children and the reporting of almost all moments of their lives in the media²⁹. According to Dann, Lazard, Roper, sharenting is, in a sense,

²⁶ R. Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Bowling Green, Ohio 1987.

²⁷ Stanisławski J. *The Great English-Polish Dictionary*, Warsaw 1994, p. 247.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ *Sharenting – coraz bardziej popularne zjawisko. Dlaczego nie jest bezpieczne*, <https://opornografii.pl/artic-le/sharenting-coraz-bardziej-popularne-zjawisko-dlaczego-nie-jest-bezpieczne> (access: 22 May 2024).

a specific kind of self-presentation of a parent, through ‘a seemingly modest or self-ironic statement, the real purpose of which is to draw attention to something to be proud of’³⁰. The variety and frequency of published material justifying claims of parental exaggeration and hyperbole is referred to as parental narcissism or oversharenting. M. Szpunar (Szpunar 2016: 146) describes the „culture of digital narcissism” as one that, is based on visuality and the desire for constant attention. Images showing a child in comical situations, inappropriate reactions to certain events or situations are called *troll parenting*. On the other hand, virtual characters, modelled on a child's real appearance and equipped with an identity on the basis of online data (also as a consequence of identity theft) are referred to as *baby role play (digital kidnapping)*. The physical appearance, as well as the attached information, lends credibility to the character's existence. Its realistic dimension causes many users, especially children, to contact it, have conversations with it, share their worries and joys with it, trusting in the good intentions of the character. According to A. Rożek, the described form is very often used by paedophiles and emotionally disturbed people³¹.

Sahrenting develops and takes on more and more sophisticated forms. Therefore, ‘parental sharing’ – understood as the free management of child-image material – of digitised material creates a media history and image of the child at each stage of development, i.e. from the pre-natal stage through to the neonatal period (1 month of life), infancy (2–12 months of life), post-infancy (1–3 years of life), preschool (3–6 years of age) and school age (6–18 years of age)³².

Sharenting in research

In fact, the ‘virtual life’ of a child begins before it is born. The promoted fashion (‘gender reveal’) of posting information about the conception of a child, confirmed by attached photos of ultrasound examinations,

³⁰ Ch. Dann, L. Lazard, S. Roper, *Sharenting: why mothers post about their children on social media*, “The Conversation” 2018, no. 1-4, <https://theconversation.com/sharenting-whymothers-post-about-their-children-on-social-med-a-91954> (retrieved 01.09.2023) (access: 22 May2024).

³¹ A. Rożek, *Sharenting – what you should know before you post photos of your children online*. 25.05.2021. <https://naukatolubie.pl/acr/sharenting-zdjecia-dzieci/> (access: 22 April 2024).

³² See more: <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/etapy-zycia-czlowieka/D8A4YkqEo>.

fetal development, publishing photos of pregnancy sessions, date of birth, gender, absorbs users to read more and more ‘uploads’³³.

According to a study by AVG (a cybersecurity company), conducted since 2010 on a group of parents from 10 countries around the world, the so-called digital footprint of 23% of children reaches the publication of fetal ultrasound images (in Europe this percentage according to the study is lower, around 15%)³⁴. The conceived, unborn child becomes an object of interest for the virtual community before it joins the world community through the fact of birth. With the birth of a child, parental activity increases. According to a 2018 UK study, 75% of parents surveyed with children aged 0-17 post photos and videos of their offspring online, and 25% of them share such material on average once a week. Estimates range from 1-9 photos per month 63%, 10 – 29 photos (12%)³⁵.

According to Time Magazine, 92 per cent of US children have an online presence even before the age of two, and by the age of five, the digital library contains approximately 1,500 photos and videos of their children³⁶. Australians are also highly active online. 90% of parents admit to excessively broadcasting content showing their children. In Poland, an estimated 40% do so systematically. Parents are eager to ‘share’ their parenting experiences, especially when it comes to children aged 0 – 3. On average a Polish toddler’s story consists of 72 photos and 24 videos shared on their own social media profiles per year³⁷.

The data presented clearly confirms that sharenting is a phenomenon that is strongly rooted in parent-child relationship, especially when it concerns children under the age of 13. Most pictures show the first six months of a child’s life. The older the child gets, the more autonomy he or she gains in the decision-making process regarding his or her own

³³ D. Holloway, L. Green, Mediated memory making: the virtual family photograph album, “Communications” 2017, volumen 42, No:3, pp. 351–368.

³⁴ AVG Technologies, AVG Digital Diaries. 2010, <https://www.avgdigitaldiaries.com> (access: 4 January 2024).

³⁵ S. Livingstone, A. Blum-Ross, D. Zhang, *London School of Economics 2018*, [online: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/87954/1/Livingstone_Parenting%20Digital%20Survey%20Report%20_Published.pdf] (access: 14 January 2024).

³⁶ M. Fraser, *Sharenting even more popular and ... dangerous*. “CyberDyfence24” 27.10.2022r. https://www.google.com/search?q=Sharenting+even+more+popular+and+...+dangerous.&oq=Sharenting+even+more+popular+and+...+dangerous.+&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATIHCAlQIRigAdIBCTI2ODJqMGoxNagCCLACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#ip=1 (access: 14 January 2024).

³⁷ M. Borkowska, M. Witkowska, *Sharenting i wizerunek dziecka w sieci*, Warszawa 2020, s. 9.

ego, the less active parents are in publishing materials that present their child's image and ways of showing it.

Motives for “parental sharing”

Responsible parenthood is committed to exploring the ins and outs of Internet safety, and particularly the management of the child's image. The way in which the child is portrayed is in related to the awareness of the consequences associated with the dissemination of content. Two criteria can be observed in ‘parental sharing’:

- (a) the way in which the child/children are shown
 - presentation of the child without showing the face;
 - presentation of characters in their entirety without restriction;
 - alone or in the presence of others.
- (b) motivation criterion
 - non-material: pride, joy; satisfaction
 - material: desire to benefit oneself and/or the child

Analysis of selected platforms: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok supports the claim that two ways of presenting the image of the child dominate: anonymous or engaged. The first shows the silhouette of the figure in the caption (full anonymity), possibly with the face partially or totally retouched (limited anonymity). The first style is preferred by those who value privacy and family protection. Personal experience, justification of popularity, functions performed become the *modus operandi* of decision-making processes. The proposed concept is not universal. Individuals whose life motive is to live away from modern technology or who are reluctant to share their sphere of privacy may qualify for this group. Some, due to external circumstances, change their approach, e.g. M. Socha – a well-known Polish actress. The form of engagement is dominant among those parents who are building their visibility on the Internet or whose profession or occupation encourages such activities. Families, e.g. the Kardashians, Mariam Shukakidze and David Sailor – are among the influencers who report on “perfect” family life online in great detail³⁸.

³⁸ M. Rojek-Kielbasa, *Gruzińska influencerka pokazała dzieci. „Wyglądają jak lalki”*, Onetkobieta, 4 stycznia 2023, <https://kobieta.onet.pl/celebryci/gruzinska-influencerka-pokazala-dzieci-wygladaja-jak-lalki/zrp5y9v> (access: 3 April 2024).

The form practised deserves to be called parental exhibitionism. It has become routine to show the infant naked with genitals visible (infants) or as an ‘attribute’ surrounded by hygiene paraphernalia – they are seen as the norm. Older offspring are perpetuated: while eating, with clothes soiled as a result of play, sitting on the potty or toilet, crying, sad, with different faces, even sleeping in different positions. The appearance of children compared to Barbie dolls, in full early childhood make-up, dressed up even when playing in the sandbox, looking perfect in every situation captured in the photograph. The controlled form differs from the previous one in that, although the parent shows the image of the child without restriction, he or she controls the content of the material disseminated online. Showing the child in various positions and situations often aims to popularise the child’s image. Feedback, likes, comments, and symbolic labelling, which are expression of the recipients’ approval confirm the legitimacy of the tasks performed, thus depriving the parent of critical reflection.

Personalised pictures of older children are less frequently presented. Pretexts for updating content are: holidays, birthdays and even showing a newly purchased item. Lack of media exposure is equated by many with non-existence, a lack of concern for one’s own well-being. The authors of the report “Sharenting po polsku, czyli ile dzieci wpadło do sieci?”³⁹ point out that 65% publish content about children because they are proud of them, 57% want to report on the course of events, and 35% give the entries the rank of a diary. They see the dissemination of information about the child as a route to success, modelled on the popularity of young actors or young ladies and gentlemen, protagonists of advertising not only for children’s products. Creating a mini-celebrity is a priority for many, and publishing content about their child is a tool to achieve this. The satisfaction of parents, backed up by statistical data reflecting the level of acceptance inspires further activity.

Commercialisation of parenting

“Parental empowerment” is part of the broader issue of the commercialisation of parenthood – defining the roles of mother and father in

³⁹ M. Bierca, A. Wysocka-Świtalska, *Sharenting po polsku, czyli ile dzieci wpadło do sieci? The first report in Poland on the image of children online commissioned by Clue PR*. Warsaw 2018, p. 4.

terms of consumers of specific goods associated with the parental function⁴⁰. The construction of a media image of the family and its individual members becomes a tool on the way to success.

The intangible dimension of benefits can also apply to parents. Publishing photos of the child on one's own portals or updating posts on the child's domain, posting on social media, is treated as a substitute for talking to family or friends, serves to build the belief that the parent is caring, fully devoted to the child, and warms the parent's image to the outside world. Digital demonstrations shape a virtual identity of the 'self' as a parent, a person who is fulfilled, engaged and perfectly at home in the new reality⁴¹.

Acting 'behind the scenes' or in support of their children, they 'work' to ingratiate themselves as kidfluencers' through the exposure of their child/children's characters' [...] 'kidfluencers are some of the most effective influencers', and 'influencer agencies see family influencers as some of the most sought-after social media stars [...], because they appeal to both children and parents'⁴² (Venis 2022;<https://www.ibanet.org/Social-media-Rise-of-kidfluencers-pushes-legislators-to-engage-with-childrens-rights-online>). The content they post becomes a guide for others and the parent is seen through the prism of an advisor, an expert.

As a result, "the child is often "installed" in life against his preferences, expectations, dreams, because the adult has decided what he needs for a happy life, because childhood is not worth the seriousness"⁴³.

The question of material considerations is an interesting one. Practice proves that many parents dreaming of their child's online career and earning money use various techniques, e.g. "L4L" (like for like), "F4F" (follow for follow) or "S4S" (share for share), only to find that users there are gaining each other's reach and statistics⁴⁴. "It's bought likes or

⁴⁰ A. Jagielska, B. Maksymiuk, *Commercialised parenting – a new aspect of early adulthood*, "Developmental Psychology", 2011, vol. 16, no. 2.

⁴¹ Ch. Dann, L. Lazard, S. Roper, *Sharenting: why mothers post about their children on social media*, "The Conversation", 2018, no:1-4, <https://theconversation.com/sharenting-whymothers-post-about-their-children-on-social-med-a-91954> (access: 1 September 2023).

⁴² J. Venis, *Social media: Rise of 'kidfluencers' pushes legislators to engage with children's rights online*, 6 September 2022, <https://www.ibanet.org/Social-media-Rise-of-kidfluencers-pushes-legislators-to-engage-with-childrens-rights-online> (access: 3 April 2024).

⁴³ D. Waloszek, *Pedagogika przedszkolna – metamorfoza statusu i przedmiotu badań*, Kraków 2006, p. 52.

⁴⁴ M. Szymaniak, A. Wątor, *Family in barter. We went behind the scenes of child-based business*, 2023 <https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2023/06/instagram-rodzice-dzieci-barter-wspolpraca-reklama-zarobki> (access: 11 September 2023).

what I call a ‘mutual adoration circle’, i.e. likes from other mums”⁴⁵. The endeavour to achieve the largest possible audience for a child’s account determines the possibility of receiving financial benefits. This type of child engagement should be described as work, often highly paid but unprotected. While, working in modelling or acting in commercials is subject to contact conditions, the provision of work on the Internet is not formalised. The child is rarely paid in full for the work he or she does. The child’s salary becomes the property of the parents, who are free to dispose of it as they wish. According to M. Gawronska, ‘this is because we live in a culture that encourages not only making public, but also monetising almost every aspect of our lives’⁴⁶.

The image as an attribute of the child

The “parental release” of images of the child is evolving and depends on the awareness of the consequences associated with the exposure of the child’s image by the parents. First of all, it should be noted, that the publication of an image of a child on any medium affects the image of the child. “An image is a good with clear contours. It is the visual representation of a person, i.e. a set of characteristic physical features of a person that allows one to get an idea of his/her appearance. A synonym of the term ‘image’ is the likeness of a natural person, regardless the manner in which it is represented(captured and expressed), i.e. in the form of a photograph or a plastic work. The essence of an image is the visual fixation of a set of characteristics of a person. This should be distinguished from providing, by other means, certain elements (data, information) sufficient to identify a person (the so-called key) or indicating certain features allowing to evoke an association with a specific person, known from these features (such a character is e.g. a caricature). Identification of a person may occur in various ways both as a result of reference to the person’s image and more generally by reference to certain characteristic relating to appearance, behaviour or other elements associated with the person”⁴⁷. Thus, a person is not born with an image, the public face is

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ M. Gawronska, *Families on view – the concept of demonstrating familiarity as a useful tool for analysing family life*,” *Sociological Studies*” 2022, No. 1 (244), pp. 155–156.

⁴⁷ J. Bleszyński, *Glosa to the judgment of the Supreme Court of 27 February 2003*, IV CKN 1819/00, p. 2.

acquired during adolescence, the way in which it is pictorially represented⁴⁸, results from one's own or third parties (including parents) activity, e.g. the media.

Image as child welfare

It is clear from the content of Article 8 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the image of the child is personal property and subject to legal protection. The scope of validity of the legal act and the lack of indication of circumstances that exclude its application confirm that it constitutes the basis for the elimination of all acts that are contrary to the best interests of the child. It also follows from the case law of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that "The image of a person is protected by law. The case law of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg also shows that "The image of a person is one of the essential elements of his or her personality, since it reveals his or her unique characteristics and distinguishes him or her from other persons. The right to protect one's image is therefore one of the fundamental elements of personal development. It presupposes above all the right of the individual to control the use of that image, including the right to refuse to publish it "⁴⁹. Another judgment from 2017 reaffirmed that "a person's image is one of the main attributes of his or her personality, and the right to protection of that image is a fundamental element of personal development"⁵⁰. The reasoning was that that by disseminating a photograph of her partner accompanied by his children, the woman implied that they formed a happy family. The media image was at odds with reality. The father's relationship with his children differed from the published image. The Court therefore found that the publication was misleading and that the use of the children's image to create the impression of a happy family infringed their right to privacy (*ibid.*). The autonomy of the child to dispose of the image is confirmed by national judgments, such as that of the Portuguese Court of Appeal in Evora of 25 June 2015⁵¹ or in Poland, e.g. the Judgment of the Court of Appeal

⁴⁸ K. Kumaniecki, *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 241–242; See: P. Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, Paris 1975, pp.134–135.

⁴⁹ *ECtHR judgment of 7 February 2012*, Application nos. 40660/08 and 60641/08, [in:] *European Court of Human Rights. A selection of judgments 2012*, M.A. Nowicki, LEX, 2013, p. 176.

⁵⁰ *ECtHR judgment of 20 June 2017*, Application no. 13812/09EX/el 2017.

⁵¹ ECLI – Europejski identyfikator orzecznictwa CLI:PT:TRE:2013:390.10.7TMSTB.E1.CC.

in Kraków of 19 April 2016. The leading position is that “[...]the image constitutes a personal good of a natural person expressing one of the attributes of the identity of a natural person, next to his/her name and surname”⁵². Qualified as a personal asset, it is subject to legal protection regardless of the age of the person. A child has the right to expect that as a personal asset, which often reflects the intimate and private sphere, it will be respected. This is because “every human being has the right to keep secret from those around him or her such circumstances that affect the most intimate life events”⁵³.

Legal⁵⁴ (Civil Code Act, Articles 23, 24) and ethical norms set limits on the free disposal of the image and oblige everyone, including the parent, to obtain permission for its dissemination⁵⁵. In the context of the issue under analysis, obtaining the consent of a young child or even an adolescent up to the age of 13 given the lack of legal capacity⁵⁶ is left to the child’s parents. In the digital age, threats to privacy (the child’s own admission) are increasing at an “alarming rate”⁵⁷.

The welfare of the child as a fundamental principle shaping the relationship between parents and children includes ‘an injunction to ensure the protection of the interests of the minor’⁵⁸. The injunction includes the protection of the child’s image and, as such, should be considered from the perspective of concern for the child’s welfare. In its positive dimension, it consists in taking measures to obtain more and more guarantees for the child’s benefit; its negative understanding is to refrain from doing something that could have negative consequences. The awareness of the role and importance of the image in the perception of adults is qualified as a good that should be, protected and cared for, given the position or functions held. The same value in relation to the child, in principle, does not merit the same approach in the assessment. “Children are thus

⁵² *Judgment of the Regional Court in Wrocław of 13 May 2014*, Sygn. I C 1777/12, LEX No 1541210.

⁵³ A. Partyka, *Child contact and personal rights*. Glosa do wyroku SA z 29 stycznia 2013 r., I ACa 906/12, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Art. 23 I art. 24 *The Civil Code* of 23 April 1964 r. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 1610 as amended.

⁵⁵ Art. 81 (1) Copyright and Related Rights Acts, Dz. U. z 2022 r. poz. 2509 as amended.

⁵⁶ A. Partyka, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ <https://www.ibanet.org/Social-media-Rise-of-kidfluencers-pushes-legislators-to-engage-with-childrens-rights-onlin>.

⁵⁸ *Judgment of the Constitutional Court of 16 December 2020*, SK 26/16, OTK-A 2020, item 69. <https://us.edu.pl/wydzial/wns/2021/04/15/sharentingcoraz-czestszy-proceder-wsrod-rodzicow-dr-anna-brosch> (access: 5 April 2024).

treated as ‘microcelebrities’ who grow up believing that sharing details of their private lives is a natural practice”⁵⁹.

Conclusions

A child’s digital footprint of a child contains various issues and is not absolutely erased from the databases of the web. Sharenting, understood as “The unreflected and excessive sharing of an image (i.e. photos and videos where one can get to know the person of children⁶⁰) on the internet, especially in social media, life and childhood has become Internet content. The online material created by parents over the years shows a media image of the person and not always in a favourable light or in a way that is acceptable to the child. Funny situations from childhood or adolescence can be interpreted differently over time and have negative effects. The constant portrayal of the person through an idealised online life leads to a distorted perception of the self⁶¹ and the environment. A media image of a child that differs from the real one can lead to changes in the child’s psyche, which can affect relationships with peers. Deepfake versions of adult characters created using artificial intelligence (AI) can be an integral part of online publications, sometimes even violating human dignity.

Each of these is characterised by a desire to share or shape the child’s image by encroaching on their sphere of autonomy. The content of the published material provides an argument that the boundaries of depicting the child in different situations push the notion of privacy and break taboos. It is the parent who is the ‘justified usurper’ of children’s rights, as the author of the images and the creator of the content, who takes on the role of ‘producer’ of the child’s image. He not only ‘directs’ the child’s future, but also his own. The processes of cooptation (appropriation) of the child’s image for one’s own benefit justify the thesis of parenting oriented towards the instrumental treatment of the child’s personal goods in order to achieve one’s own material and non-material benefits. An assessment of the risks and consequences of creating web *content*

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ <https://fundacja.orange.pl/strefa-wiedzy/post/sharenting-co-warto-wiedziec-o-publikowaniu-wizerunku-dziecka-w-sieci>.

⁶¹ M. Szpunar, *Kultura cyfrowego narcyzmu*, Kraków 2016, p. 152.

containing a digitised image of a child should be the starting point for parental actions. Awareness of the risks posed by the theft of a child's identity, Internet paedophilia, addiction to online activities and emotional disturbances are a prompt for reflection on children's digital privacy and autonomy. For the sake of the development of future generations, the development of systemic solutions in international fora in the form of normative solutions or recommendations for the implementation of new technologies that restrict the freedom to disseminate any content, cannot replace the role of parents. Awareness of the role that parents play in the life of their child obliges them to assume parental responsibility, thus counteracting the instrumental treatment of the child in favour of respect for the child's rights and dignity within the framework of self-control.

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