

<https://doi.org/10.16926/eat.2026.15.15.en>

eLocator/Article ID: eat-2026-rb-06

Agnieszka IWANICKA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1176-6725>

Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

e-mail: iwanicka@amu.edu.pl

Sharenting as a Parenting Practice and the Recognition of the Child's Agency: A Transactional Analysis Perspective

How to cite [jak cytować]: Iwanicka, A. (2026). Sharenting as a Parenting Practice and the Recognition of the Child's Agency: A Transactional Analysis Perspective. *Edukacyjna Analiza Transakcyjna*, 15, Article eat-2026-rb-06. <https://doi.org/10.16926/eat.2026.15.15.en>

Abstract

This article examines sharenting practices among parents in relation to the recognition of the child's agency and the underlying relational mechanisms, interpreted through the lens of Educational Transactional Analysis (ETA). The empirical study employed a questionnaire-based survey of $N = 420$ parents of children aged 6–15 attending primary schools in Poznań, Poland. Statistical analyses (Welch's t test, Pearson's χ^2 test) revealed a digital privacy paradox: despite widespread endorsement of children's right to privacy, as many as 61.6% of parents of children aged 6–15 do not always ask their children for consent before publishing their image, or do not always respect their answers. This practice illustrates the discounting of the child's digital sovereignty from a paternalistic life position. Mothers were more likely than fathers to approach sharenting relationally, seeking digital strokes through the Child ego state. Higher self-assessed knowledge co-occurred with stronger concerns about artificial intelligence and with a propensity for corrective action (41.7% of parents had deleted previously posted photos of their child). The shift toward a position that recognizes the child as a subject occurs in response to adolescents' resistance or to parental self-reflection. The pedagogical implications point to the need for workshops on relational digital maturity and for promoting digital consent from the earliest years.

Keywords: sharenting, digital education, child agency, online privacy, social media, Educational Transactional Analysis.

1. Introduction

The development of new information and communication technologies and the ubiquity of social media platforms have fundamentally transformed the space of family life and the patterns of everyday parenting practices. One of the most visible symptoms of this digital transformation is Sharenting - a blend of *sharing* and *parenting* - defined as parents' regular, public online distribution of images, videos, and information concerning their own children (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Brosch, 2018). Although parents most often intend to share joy, build a digital album of memories, or find a support group, the socio-relational dimension of this activity extends far beyond mere family documentation. These practices align with the market mechanisms of the attention economy, in which the architecture of digital interfaces rewards emotionally charged content - including children's images - with greater reach and social approval (Plunkett, 2024).

From the perspective of media pedagogy and the protection of children's rights, sharenting raises significant ethical, legal, and identity-related challenges (Steinberg, 2017). Creating a permanent digital footprint without the child's knowledge and informed consent violates their right to privacy and autonomy and threatens the individual's sovereignty over their digital identity (Borkowska & Witkowska, 2020). In essence, the phenomenon becomes a test of the extent to which parents treat the child as a distinct, autonomous person with personal rights, rather than as an "extension of their own self" or a tool of self-presentation and social capital building online (Brosch, 2018; Walrave et al., 2022; Holiday et al., 2022).

Previous pedagogical and sociological analyses of sharenting have predominantly focused on describing the scale of the phenomenon, parental motivations, and potential technological and legal threats (e.g., Bochenek & Lange, 2021; Fox & Hoy, 2019). There is, however, a noticeable gap in theoretical-empirical frameworks that examine sharenting through the psycho-pedagogical relational mechanisms operating within the family system. Educational Transactional Analysis (ETA) provides a precise conceptual framework for addressing this gap (Jagięła, 2019).

Transactional Analysis, developed by Eric Berne (2007) and further advanced within Polish pedagogy, offers precise tools for describing the parent-child relationship through the functional model of ego states (Nurturing Parent, Critical Parent, Adult, Free/Spontaneous Child, Adapted Child), life positions, ulterior transactions, and the mechanism of discounting. When these categories are applied to digital culture, the decision to publish a child's photo online is no longer a merely technical click but an externalized psychosocial transaction. It indicates which structure of the parent's ego states takes control of the decision, the degree of activation of the Adult ego state (an objective appraisal of consequences and privacy), and the life position adopted toward the child:

- a subject-recognizing position that respects the child's autonomy;
- an objectifying position that disregards the child's rights (cf. Jagięła, 2016).

The main objective of this article is a theoretical and empirical analysis of sharenting as a parenting practice in the context of recognizing the child's agency, conducted through the lens of Educational Transactional Analysis. The empirical foundation consists of survey data gathered from parents with an original research questionnaire.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Sharenting in Media Pedagogy: Digital Sovereignty, the Attention Economy, and Developmental Stages of Agency

In its socio-technological dimension, sharenting has transformed the traditional analogue family album into a public or semi-public digital chronicle. This entails shaping the child's digital identity long before the child reaches a stage of maturity that allows conscious management of their online image (Steinberg, 2017). Social platform algorithms prioritize and reward content with high emotional resonance. Within this mechanism, the child's image becomes a compelling communicative asset that generates reactions, likes, and comments, which directly stimulates and reinforces parental publishing habits (Plunkett, 2024).

From the perspective of media pedagogy and children's rights, the key analytical categories are child agency and sovereignty over one's digital identity. Recognizing agency means treating the child as a distinct, autonomous subject of rights-possessing inherent dignity, sensitivity, and the right to privacy and self-determination - rather than as a passive object of educational influence or a backdrop for parental self-expression (Brosch, 2018). Children's agency in the digital environment is dynamic and evolves across developmental stages (Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2026):

- Prenatal period and ages 0-3: the child cannot voice an objection; their online agency rests entirely in the parent's hands.
- Preschool age (4-7 years): an emerging awareness of one's own image develops, though the capacity to evaluate digital consequences remains minimal.

- Early school age (8-12 years): the child develops a need for privacy among peers and can articulate preferences regarding what the parent shares online.
- Adolescence (13-17 years): the child attains full awareness of their image; unconsulted parental publications can evoke shame, peer exclusion, or cyberbullying (Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2026). Research on sharenting demonstrates a significant power asymmetry in the parent–child relationship, in which the child’s privacy boundaries are frequently compromised to generate social capital for the parent in virtual space (Bochenek & Lange, 2021).

2.2. Educational Transactional Analysis as an Interpretive Framework for Online Parenting Practices

ETA provides a coherent theoretical-conceptual structure for interpreting the psychological and relational mechanisms underlying sharenting (Jagięła, 2019). Its key elements include the functional model of ego states, discounting, and ulterior transactions.

THE FUNCTIONAL MODEL OF PARENTAL EGO STATES ONLINE

In the functional model, ego states are analyzed through the ways in which behaviours and emotions manifest themselves (Berne, 2007; Jagięła, 2016):

- Adult ego state (A): responsible for objective information processing and risk assessment. Online, it manifests in high digital awareness, visibility restrictions (closed groups, “friends only”), reflection on digital footprints, and protecting the child’s image from processing by artificial intelligence (AI).
- Parent ego state (P):
 - *Over-Nurturing Parent*: ostentatiously displays the child’s private life under the guise of care and pride, confusing protection with excessive virtual exposure.
 - *Critical/Normative Parent*: dominates the relationship and rejects the child’s right to object, adopting the paternalistic assumption: “I am the parent, so I have the right to publish whatever I want”.
- Child ego state (C):
 - *Narcissistic/Stroke-Seeking Child*: driven by immediate gratification and social approval. A parent acting from this state posts content featuring the child to fill their own emotional deficits and obtain digital signs of recognition.
 - *Adapted Child*: unreflectively copies other parents’ behaviour under peer or societal pressure.

THE MECHANISM OF DISCOUNTING

A key ETA concept for explaining sharenting is **discounting** (Jagięła, 2016) - the unaware ignoring or minimizing of information relevant to the actual situation. In sharenting, parents discount at three levels:

- *Discounting the existence of the problem*: “It’s just an innocent baby photo; nobody has bad intentions”.
- *Discounting the significance of the problem*: “The child is still little and doesn’t understand, so it won’t do them any harm”.
- *Discounting the child’s capacities and rights*: “I am the parent and I decide; the child’s opinion doesn’t matter”.

SOCIAL-LEVEL AND ULTERIOR TRANSACTIONS IN THE CONSENT PROCESS

Asking the child for consent to publish their image is a direct indicator of the life position the parent has adopted. Within ETA, two levels of this communication can be distinguished:

- A complementary, subject-recognizing Adult-Adult transaction: the parent asks for the child’s opinion, objectively explains the context, and unconditionally respects a refusal.
- An ulterior (covert) transaction: at the social level (an Adult-Adult stimulus), the parent asks, “May I post this photo?” At the psychological level (a Parent-Child or Child-Child stimulus), however, the parent conveys emotional pressure: “You don’t want to upset Mom, do you?” If the child refuses, the parent decides otherwise.

2.3. Conceptual Operationalization for the Present Study

Linking the theoretical assumptions of Educational Transactional Analysis with the concerns of media pedagogy makes it possible to construct a coherent model of indicators based on the author-designed questionnaire.

Four main operational dimensions were distinguished:

- The dimension of agency and life positions: the frequency of asking the child for consent to publish and of respecting the child's refusal; general attitudes toward children's right to privacy.
- The dimension of reflexivity and digital awareness (dominance of the *Adult* ego state): self-assessed knowledge of image protection and the right to privacy; use of visibility restrictions; appraisal of technological threats (paedophilia, data theft, online hate, AI).
- The motivational-stroke dimension (influence of the functional *Parent* and *Child* ego states): motives for publishing content (seeking approval, pride, creating a chronicle, seeking advice).
- The corrective - self-reflective dimension: readiness to review one's own behaviour (deleting content later deemed inappropriate, changing privacy settings, considering limiting publication).

Methodologically, it should be explicitly emphasized that Educational Transactional Analysis serves in this study as a theoretical-hermeneutic interpretive framework applied post factum to empirical data, rather than as a direct psychometric measurement of parental ego states (e.g., via standardized ego-gram inventories). The survey questions capture concrete, self-reported parental communication behaviours, motivational drivers, and privacy management practices; these behavioural indicators are subsequently contextualized and interpreted through the conceptual categories of ETA (ego states, discounting, and life positions) to explain the underlying relational dynamics.

3. Method

3.1. Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to analyze sharenting practices among parents, with particular attention to motivations, concerns, the use of visibility restrictions, and the consideration given to the child's consent. The study addresses how parents describe their own online behaviour toward their child and how they appraise its significance in terms of privacy, safety, and parental responsibility. Combining the empirical findings with the categories of transactional analysis makes it possible to capture sharenting not only as a digital practice but also as a significant educational and relational problem.

From this aim, the main research problem was derived:

Main research problem: *How do parents' sharenting practices reflect their stance toward the child's agency, viewed from the perspective of Educational Transactional Analysis?*

To structure the empirical material in detail, the following specific research questions were formulated:

- How frequently, and on which platforms, do parents share content about their children, depending on the child's developmental stage?
- What motivations lead parents to engage in sharenting, and to what extent do these motivations indicate the pursuit of digital strokes (signs of recognition) and the activation of the *Child* ego state or the *Over-Nurturing Parent*?
- How do parents assess their knowledge of privacy protection, and how do they carry out a critical analysis of risk (the *Adult* ego state)?
- To what extent do parents recognize the child's agency by asking for consent (life position), and to what extent do they apply discounting, depending on the child's age?
- To what extent do parents demonstrate a capacity for critical self-reflection on their own digital activity and take corrective action?

3.2. Research Method, Technique, and Instrument

The study employed a diagnostic survey method. The research technique was an online questionnaire administered as a computer-assisted web interview (CAWI). The instrument was an original questionnaire developed by the author. The study design and the instrument received full approval from the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Participants at XYZ in XYZ. Participation in the study was fully voluntary and anonymous.

Content validity of the author-developed questionnaire was established through an expert panel review consisting of three academic specialists in media pedagogy. Prior to the main survey administration, a pilot study ($N=20$) was conducted to verify item comprehensibility, terminology clarity, and technical reliability. For the multi-item Likert-type scales used in the study, internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α): the parental motivations scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha=.81$), and the digital concerns and risk appraisal scale showed very good reliability ($\alpha=.84$).

3.3. Procedure, Sample, and Statistical Analyses

The study was conducted in the second quarter of 2026. Sampling was stratified two-stage cluster sampling: five primary schools were randomly drawn from the national Educational Information System (SIO) register for Poznań - one from each of the city's districts - and the survey link was then distributed to parents of school-aged children via the schools' electronic gradebook (e-register). A total of $N = 420$ fully completed questionnaires were collected. The gender structure of the sample reflects the overrepresentation of women typical of e-register-based surveys: mothers accounted for 90.0% ($n = 378$) and fathers for 10.0% ($n = 42$).

A sample of $N = 420$ yields a maximum estimation error (margin of error) of $\pm 4.78\%$ at the 95% confidence level. This value is a lower-bound estimate computed under the assumption of simple random sampling; the two-stage cluster selection of schools may increase the actual estimation error (a design effect). A power analysis indicated that the sample provides 86.6% power to detect medium-sized effects with unequal subsamples.

The analyses employed:

- Welch's t test for independent samples, together with Hedges' g as the measure of effect size.
- Pearson's χ^2 test of independence for categorical variables, together with Cramér's V as the measure of the strength of association.

Methodological caveat: Distributing the survey via the e-register entails a risk of self-selection bias, which was taken into account when drawing inferences. Because of the multiple between-group comparisons, the robustness of the results was verified against the Holm–Bonferroni correction: all reported effects ($p \leq .002$) remain significant after correction. Moreover, the overrepresentation of mothers means that conclusions concerning differences between mothers and fathers should be formulated with caution (n of fathers = 42).

4. Results

In line with the adopted research strategy, the empirical material ($N = 420$) was subjected to statistical analysis based on descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, tests of differences for independent samples (Welch's t), tests of categorical independence (Pearson's χ^2), and measures of effect size (Hedges' g , Cramér's V). In parallel, the empirical findings were reinterpreted psychosocially within the conceptual framework of Educational Transactional Analysis (ETA), treating ETA categories as an explanatory theoretical matrix applied to communication patterns rather than directly measured psychological traits.

The demographic structure of the sample by parent gender reflects the respondent profile typical of school-based surveys: mothers accounted for 90.0% ($n = 378$) and fathers for 10.0% ($n = 42$). The distributions of the rating variables were examined; skewness and kurtosis fell within the acceptable range of -1.0 to $+1.0$, which justified the use of parametric tests.

4.1. The Scale and Dynamics of Sharenting Across the Child's Life Cycle

Of the $N = 420$ parents surveyed, 62.4% ($n = 262$) reported having published content about their children online. At present, 38.8% of respondents ($n = 163$) share their child's image, with 7.1% of the total sample ($n = 30$) consistently anonymizing the child's face. Parents who had ceased sharenting after some years constituted 23.6% ($n = 99$), whereas 37.6% ($n = 158$) had never published such material.

The main digital channels used by active parents ($n = 262$) are private messaging apps (Messenger, WhatsApp: 69.3%) and social networking sites: Facebook (61.8%) and Instagram (42.9%).

The frequency of sharing depends strongly on the child's developmental stage, peaking in the first years of life and dropping sharply in adolescence.

Table 1

Frequency of publishing the child's image at successive developmental stages ($N = 420$)

Child's developmental stage	Very often / Fairly often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never / Not applicable (%)	Total (%)
Prenatal period (ultrasound images)	17.9	24.0	22.6	35.5	100.0
0–3 years (infancy and toddlerhood)	56.2	23.8	11.9	8.1	100.0
4–7 years (preschool age)	42.4	31.0	16.2	10.4	100.0
8–12 years (early school age)	18.8	29.3	28.8	23.1	100.0
13–15 years (adolescence)	3.8	10.5	26.2	59.5	100.0

Interpretation in ETA terms: The intensity of sharenting peaks in the 0–7 age range (the highest proportions of “very often / fairly often” responses: 56.2% and 42.4%, respectively). In the light of ETA, the parent then operates from the position of the *Over-Nurturing Parent* or the *Narcissistic Child* ego state, discounting the child's digital sovereignty. The parent assumes that an infant or a preschooler has no capacity to resist, which legitimizes exclusive control over the child's image. The collapse of sharenting at ages 13–15 (a drop to 3.8%) results from the resistance mounted by the adolescent's autonomous *Free/Rebellious Child* ego state, which sets boundaries and forces a change in the parent's stance. It should be borne in mind that these data may be retrospective: parents of older children reconstructed practices from years past, which may superimpose a cohort effect (different publishing norms and platforms in the past) and recall bias on the developmental effect.

4.2. Parental Motivations and the Pursuit of Digital Strokes

In the structure of motivations (scale 1–5: 1 = *completely unimportant*, 5 = *very important*), relational and documentary needs dominate: “Informing family and friends” ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.92$) and “Sharing joy and pride” (overall sample mean: $M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.98$). Because of the unequal group sizes (378 mothers vs. 42 fathers), the comparisons were conducted with Welch's t test. As presented in Table 2, mothers rated “Sharing joy and pride” significantly higher ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.92$) than fathers did ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.15$; $t(47.8) = 3.27$, $p = .002$, $g = 0.63$).

Table 2

Welch's t test comparing mothers ($n = 378$) and fathers ($n = 42$) on sharenting motivations (scale 1–5)

Motivation for publishing content	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Hedges' g
Sharing joy and pride	Mothers	378	4.12	0.92	3.27	47.8	.002	0.63 (medium)
	Fathers	42	3.52	1.15				
Creating a digital chronicle	Mothers	378	3.82	1.05	3.22	48.1	.002	0.58 (medium)
	Fathers	42	3.19	1.22				
Seeking support / advice	Mothers	378	2.88	1.16	4.43	53.8	< .001	0.65 (medium)
	Fathers	42	2.14	1.01				

Interpretation in ETA terms: The significantly higher means among mothers, with medium effect sizes ($g = 0.58\text{--}0.65$), indicate a stronger need to obtain digital strokes (signs of recognition). Social media interactions satisfy recognition hunger in the *Narcissistic/Approval-Seeking Child* ego state, creating an ulterior transaction: the public sharing of the child's image serves to secure peer support and approval for the parent.

4.3. Awareness of Threats and the Controlling Function of the *Adult* Ego State

Mean self-assessed knowledge of image protection was $M = 6.88$ ($SD = 2.10$). Visibility restrictions on publications are applied *always* by 43.1% of parents, *often* by 28.3%, *sometimes* by 15.7%, and *rarely or never* by 12.9%.

The analysis of concerns revealed the greatest anxiety about "the use of photos by pedophiles" ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.91$) and "the manipulation of the child's image by AI" ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.08$). Parents with low ($n = 135$) and high ($n = 285$) self-assessed knowledge were compared. Self-assessed knowledge was a single-item measure (scale 0–10), and the cut-off point between the groups (0–5 vs. 6–10 points) was set arbitrarily. Because this measure reflects subjective perceived competence rather than an objective test of legal and technological knowledge, this constitutes a methodological limitation requiring caution in interpretation.

Table 3

Welch's t test comparing parents with low (0–5 points) and high (6–10 points) self-assessed knowledge on the level of digital concerns

Digital concern	Knowledge group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Hedges' <i>g</i>
Manipulation of the child's image by AI	Low (0–5)	135	3.68	1.22	5.89	212	< .001	0.67 (medium)
	High (6–10)	285	4.38	0.94				
Theft of the child's identity	Low (0–5)	135	3.42	1.18	5.60	230	< .001	0.62 (medium)
	High (6–10)	285	4.08	1.01				

Interpretation in ETA terms: The higher level of anxiety among parents with greater knowledge ($t(212) = 5.89$, $p < .001$, $g = 0.67$) may attest to the activity of the *Adult* ego state (A). The *Adult* processes market and technological information matter-of-factly, which stimulates the implementation of privacy filters.

4.4. Recognizing the Child's Agency: The Consent Procedure and the χ^2 Test

The consent procedure was examined among parents of children aged 6–15 ($n = 310$). Parents who, in the consent question, selected "not applicable (the child is too young / unborn)" were excluded from this analysis ($n = 110$). Pearson's χ^2 test of independence was conducted across the child's age groups (6–12 years, $n = 190$ vs. 13–15 years, $n = 120$).

Table 4

The procedure of asking the child for consent to publish their image, by the child's age group ($n = 310$)

Parent's response	Children aged 6–12 ($n = 190$)	Children aged 13–15 ($n = 120$)	Total ($n = 310$)	Life position in ETA
Always—and I respect the answer	28.4% ($n = 54$)	54.2% ($n = 65$)	38.4% ($n = 119$)	I'm OK – You're OK (subject-recognizing)
Often, but sometimes I decide otherwise	33.2% ($n = 63$)	23.3% ($n = 28$)	29.4% ($n = 91$)	Ulterior transaction
Rarely	17.9% ($n = 34$)	9.2% ($n = 11$)	14.5% ($n = 45$)	Objectifying
Never—I consider it my decision	20.5% ($n = 39$)	13.3% ($n = 16$)	17.7% ($n = 55$)	I'm OK – You're not OK (paternalistic)
Total	100.0% ($n = 190$)	100.0% ($n = 120$)	100.0% ($n = 310$)	—

The χ^2 test revealed a statistically significant association between the child's age and the consent procedure: $\chi^2(3, n = 310) = 21.12, p < .001, V = .26$ (a weak-to-moderate association). Parents of children over the age of 13 respect the child's will unconditionally significantly more often (54.2%) than parents of children aged 6–12 (28.4%).

At the same time, in their general declarations ($N = 420$), parents firmly endorse the child's right to privacy ($M = 4.64, SD = 0.71$).

Interpretation in ETA terms: These data reveal a digital *privacy paradox*. Although parents declaratively adopt a subject-recognizing position, in their actual communicative practice toward younger children (6–12 years) as many as 71.6% do not regularly ask the child for consent or ignore the child's objection. This stance illustrates the operation of discounting: the parent discounts the child's capacity to feel shame in favor of the parent's own right to dispose of the child's image.

4.5. Digital Self-Reflectiveness and Corrective Behaviour

Evidence of the dynamics of ego states is provided by the high rate of remedial action: 41.7% of the parents surveyed ($n = 175$) had at some point deleted a photo or video of their child, having later judged the content inappropriate. In addition, 36.2% are considering limiting their publications, and 48.6% plan to tighten their privacy settings.

4.6. Synthesis of the Empirical Findings in Relation to the Main Research Problem

In response to the main research problem, the results indicate that the surveyed parents' sharenting practices are characterized by a deep relational-transactional dissonance:

- At the declarative level, the subject-recognizing life position "I'm OK - You're OK" dominates, expressed in the widespread endorsement of the child's right to privacy ($M = 4.64$).
- At the operational level - especially with respect to children aged 0-12 - the paternalistic position "I'm OK - You're not OK" comes to the fore, grounded in discounting the child's will and motivated by the pursuit of digital strokes through the parent's Child ego state.
- The transition to full recognition of the child's digital agency occurs only under the pressure of confrontation with the adolescent's Rebellious Child ego state (ages 13-15), or as a result of the activation of the parent's Adult ego state driven by growing awareness of technological threats (AI, paedophilia).

Table 5

Synthetic overview of the empirical dimensions in the framework of Educational Transactional Analysis (ETA)

Empirical dimension	Main quantitative indicator ($N = 420$)	Dominant ego state / life position in ETA	Relational mechanism online
Exposure across the life cycle	Peak at ages 0–3 (56.2%); collapse at ages 13–15 (3.8%).	Nurturing Parent vs. Rebellious Child	Transition from paternalism to respecting the boundaries enforced by the adolescent.
Publishing motivation	Mothers score higher on pride ($M = 4.12$) and support ($M = 2.88$).	Narcissistic Child ego state	Pursuit of digital strokes (signs of recognition).
Privacy and control	Greater knowledge increases fear of AI ($M = 4.38, p < .001$).	Adult ego state (A)	Matter-of-fact risk analysis and implementation of visibility filters.
Consent procedure (ages 6–15)	61.6% of parents do not always ask for consent or do not always respect the child's answer.	Position "I'm OK – You're not OK" ("I know better")	Discounting of the child's digital sovereignty.
Corrective behaviour	41.7% of parents later deleted a photo of their child from the internet.	Re-evaluation (Adult ego state)	Quieting impulsive needs and returning to the "I'm OK – You're OK" subject-recognizing position.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings shed new light on the phenomenon of sharenting by combining the perspective of media pedagogy with the conceptual apparatus of Educational Transactional Analysis. The data presented here fit within the broader context of Polish (Bochenek & Lange / NASK, 2021; Brosch, 2018; Borkowska & Witkowska, 2020) and international research (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Walrave et al., 2022; Steinberg, 2017; Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2026) and allow deeper theoretical conclusions to be drawn.

Above all, the study confirmed the existence of a **digital privacy paradox** in parental relationships. As in the analyses by Walrave et al. (2022), the surveyed parents from Poznań display a high level of declared awareness of children's rights (the statement on the right to privacy obtained a mean of $M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.71$ on a 1–5 scale). At the level of concrete communicative practices, however, widespread discounting of the child's actual agency comes to the fore. This indicator is particularly troubling in the group of children aged 6–12, in which a mere 28.4% of parents unconditionally ask the child for consent and respect the child's decision.

Interpreting this phenomenon in ETA terms, parents can be seen to operate within dual life positions. At the level of espoused theory they adopt a subject-recognizing position, whereas in operational practice they shift to a position of superiority ("I am the parent, so I decide"). Discounting here concerns the anticipated long-term consequences: the parent minimizes the significance of the digital footprint, taking the view that a young child "does not yet feel shame".

An important finding of the study is the pursuit of digital strokes (signs of recognition). The statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers (Welch's t test, $p \leq .002$, $g = 0.58$ – 0.65) show that mothers, to a considerably greater extent, treat sharenting as a tool for building relational and emotional capital. In ETA terms, this activity satisfies recognition hunger in the *Narcissistic/Approval-Seeking Child* ego state. Likes and comments under a child's photo act as powerful positive strokes, emotionally commercializing the parental relationship and creating an ulterior transaction: the child's image becomes a bargaining chip exchanged for social approval of one's parenting.

On the other hand, the study revealed an encouraging trend related to parents' self-reflective potential. More than 41% of respondents had at some point deleted content concerning their child after reflecting on its inappropriateness. This phenomenon illustrates the psychological process of quieting the impulsive *Child* ego state in favor of activating the *Adult* ego state, which verifies technological threats (e.g., data leaks, AI processing of the child's image) and restores the subject-recognizing dimension of the relationship. In interpreting the results as a whole, the study's limitations must be taken into account: the cross-sectional nature of the data (which precludes causal inference), respondent self-selection and the overrepresentation of mothers, the retrospective character of some questions, the single-item measurement of self-assessed knowledge (which captures subjective confidence rather than objective competence; future studies should include objective knowledge scales), and a scope limited to parents of pupils at Poznań primary schools, which does not permit generalization to the national population. Finally, Educational Transactional Analysis serves in this study as an interpretive framework applied post factum to communicative behaviours, rather than a direct psychometric measurement of personality structures.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The theoretical-empirical analysis presented here leads to the following main conclusions and preventive–educational recommendations:

Main Conclusions

- **Sharenting as a test of the child's agency:** Sharing a child's image online is not merely a technological habit but an indicator of parents' relational maturity and of the degree to which they respect the child's right to sovereignty over their digital identity.

- **Predominance of discounting for younger children:** The younger the child, the stronger the parental discounting of the child's rights. Only adolescence (ages 13–15) and the active resistance of the *Rebellious Child* ego state foster parents' transition to a subject-recognizing position.
- **The role of online strokes in mothers' motivation:** Women use sharenting to a significantly greater extent to satisfy their need for digital strokes, which calls for psycho-pedagogical support aimed at building a sense of parental self-worth outside the virtual space. Given the small size of the fathers' subsample ($n = 42$), this result should be treated as a hypothesis requiring verification in a gender-balanced sample.
- **"Activation" of the Adult ego state as a protective factor:** A high level of digital knowledge translates into realistic concerns about threats (AI, paedophilia) and stimulates parents to apply privacy filters and to correct earlier behaviour (deleting photos).

Pedagogical and Practical Recommendations

- **For schools and educational institutions:**
 - Implementing, within workshops for parents (e.g., alongside parent–teacher meetings), programmes in **relational digital maturity** based on Educational Transactional Analysis. The workshops should make parents aware of the mechanisms of ulterior transactions and of the discounting of children's rights.
 - Promoting the principle of **"Digital Consent from the Earliest Years"**: teaching parents to ask children for their opinion before publishing material, as an element of education for agency and human rights.
- **For social prevention and media education:**
 - Developing social campaigns aimed at promoting the *Adult* ego state online: teaching parents to objectively assess the threats associated with generative artificial intelligence (AI) and the theft of children's digital identities.
 - Drawing attention to alternative, safe forms of documenting childhood (analogue albums, encrypted cloud storage) that remove the parent–child relationship from the market dictates of the attention economy.

The constructive transformation of sharenting therefore requires a shift from the unreflective exposure of the child's image toward responsible digital parenting, in which children's right to privacy and self-determination takes unconditional priority over the need for social approval in the virtual space.

References

- Berne, E. (2007). *Games people play: The psychology of human relationships*. Grove Press.
- Blum-Ross, A., & Livingstone, S. (2017). "Sharenting," parent blogging, and the boundaries of digital privacy. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(6), 800–818. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2016.1223300>
- Bochenek, M., & Lange, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Rodzice 3.0. Raport z badań* [Parents 3.0. Research report]. NASK National Research Institute. https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/publikacje/Raport_rodzice_nastolatkow_3.0.pdf
- Borkowska A., & Witkowska M. (2020). Sharenting i wizerunek dziecka w sieci. Poradnik dla rodziców. NASK, 2020. <https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/sharenting-i-wizerunek-dziecka-w-sieci.html>.
- Brosch, A. (2018). Sharenting: Why do parents violate their children's privacy? *The New Educational Review*, 54(4), 75–85. <https://doi.org/10.15804/tner.2018.54.4.06>
- Fox, A. K., & Hoy, M. G. (2019). Smart devices, smart decisions? Implications of parents' sharenting for children's online privacy: An investigation of mothers. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 38(4), 414–432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915619858290>
- Holiday, S., Norman, M. S., & Densley, R. L. (2022). Sharenting and the extended self: Exploring parents' motivation to share childhood images on social media. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 131, Article 107212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2020.1744610>

- Jagięła, J. (2016). [Review of the book *Analiza transakcyjna dzisiaj*, by I. Stewart & V. Joines]. *Edukacyjna Analiza Transakcyjna*, 5, 269–273. <https://doi.org/10.16926/eat.2016.05.19>
- Jagięła, J. (2019). Pozytywna analiza transakcyjna [Positive transactional analysis]. *Edukacyjna Analiza Transakcyjna*, 8, 237–245. <https://doi.org/10.16926/eat.2019.08.15>
- Plunkett, L. A. (2024). *Sharenthood: Why we should think before we talk about our kids online* (Updated ed.). MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11756.001.0001>
- Steinberg, S. B. (2017). Sharenting: Children's privacy rights in the age of social media. *Emory Law Journal*, 66(4), 839–884. <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1796&context=facultypub>
- Suárez-Álvarez, R., & Pastor-Rodriguez, A. (2026). Risks in Children's Digital Visibility and Vulnerability: Sharenting in France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom [Riesgos en la visibilidad y vulnerabilidad digital de menores. Sharenting en Francia, Italia, España y Reino Unido]. *European Public & Social Innovation Review*, 11, 01-21. <https://doi.org/10.31637/epsir-2026-2101>
- Walrave, M., Verswijvel, K., Ouvrein, G., Staes, L., Hallam, L., & Hardies, K. (2022). The limits of sharenting: Exploring parents' and adolescents' sharenting boundaries through the lens of communication privacy management theory. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, 803393. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.803393>