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Sona Klucarova

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, [sklucarova@unomaha.edu](mailto:sklucarova@unomaha.edu)*

Jonathan Hasford

*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

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# The oversharenting paradox: when frequent parental sharing negatively affects observers' desire to affiliate with parents

Sona Klucarova<sup>1</sup> & Jonathan Hasford<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marketing, Sales and Communication Department, Montpellier Business School and Montpellier Research in Management, University of Montpellier, Montpellier, France

<sup>2</sup> Haslam College of Business, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA

## Abstract

Modern-day parents increasingly engage in sharing of their children's information and photos on social media. However, when parents post about their children on social media with high frequency, the phenomenon of "oversharenting" occurs. This research explores the impact of oversharenting on others' desire to affiliate with parents. While parents post about their children to socialize with others, three experimental studies conducted with U.S. residents recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk demonstrate that parents who oversharent are viewed as less desirable acquaintances than parents who do not. This effect is mediated by observers' perception that oversharenting constitutes a social norm violation (Study 1;  $N = 147$ ). Specifically, observers assume that parents who oversharent try to become the center of attention through their children (Study 2;  $N = 168$ ). The negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation is mitigated in the case of observers who themselves post frequently on social media (Study 3;  $N = 478$ ). In summary, this research contributes to the understanding of parental sharing in social media environments by demonstrating that, paradoxically, parents' oversharenting behavior may negatively affect the very goal that parents attempt to fulfill through social media sharing.

## Keywords

Parenting, Social media, Sharenting, Attention-seeking, Affiliation, Social perception

## Introduction

The online sharing of personal information has become an everyday reality for millions of people. Parents are no exception, especially when it comes to posting photos of and information about their children on social media (Marasli et al., 2016), a phenomenon known as “sharenting” (Brosch, 2016). Despite the myriad potential dangers linked to the frequent posting of a child’s photos and information online (e.g., child pornography, identity theft; Siibak & Traks, 2019), sharenting has become increasingly common, with an average of 195 online photos being posted by parents of children under five each year (Nominet, 2015). The practice of sharenting is especially prevalent in the United States (LaFrance, 2016), motivating the present research’s focus on the U.S. population.

Prior research has explored sharenting from multiple perspectives, including parents who share information about their children (Marasli et al., 2016), the children whose information is shared online (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019), and legal issues surrounding sharenting behaviors (Sorensen, 2016). Existing research has also identified key drivers of sharenting behavior, demonstrating that parents of young children tend to engage in such behavior to socialize with others (Brosch, 2016) and to receive social support (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). Although parents use sharenting primarily for affiliating with others, whether those *others* reciprocate the aforementioned desire to affiliate is unclear. An unfulfilled need for affiliation can lead to an array of negative consequences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), with parents of young children being especially vulnerable to these consequences (Lee et al., 2019). As such, it is important to examine whether engagement in sharenting truly leads to heightened affiliation that motivates sharenting behavior in the first place.

This research proposes that others’ desire to affiliate with parents who post about their children on social media depends on the frequency of these posts and that high posting frequency (i.e., oversharenting) can boomerang. Specifically, we argue that compared with parents who engage in sharenting only occasionally, parents who oversharent are viewed as social norm violators, leading to observers’ reduced desire to affiliate with them. We also identify the perception of oversharenting as attention-seeking, the specific social norm violation that underlies the negative effect of high posting

frequency on affiliation. Finally, we examine the moderating role of observers' own social media posting frequency, such that the predicted effect is attenuated for observers who themselves post frequently. Taken together, this research provides new insights into the implications of sharenting behavior.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Sharenting and Affiliation**

A fundamental reason social media users share personal information is to develop an identity and affiliate with others (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2018; Sung et al., 2016). Need for affiliation is a psychological human need that refers to one's desire for belonging and involvement in social settings (Maslow, 1943). Lack of affiliation can lead to an array of negative consequences, including stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, eating disorders, and higher risk of suicide (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Given the constraints of parenting on one's personal life, parents may post about their children to fulfill their affiliation-based goals. Parents of small children often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness (Lee et al., 2019) and may try to alleviate these feelings in different ways. Given the ever-increasing importance of social media networking in people's lives (Kapoor et al., 2018), many parents may choose to offset their loneliness by socializing with others through such networking. This may be especially true for new parents who often use social media to build their social capital during their transition to parenthood (Bartholomew et al., 2012). In a quest to meet their affiliation-based goals in virtual space, parents often post on social media not about themselves, but about their children (Brosch, 2016). However, too frequent posting about their children on social media can be detrimental to parents' affiliation-based goals. We argue that this negative effect of frequent parental posting on affiliation is mediated by the perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation.

### **Oversharenting as a Social Norm Violation**

Parents consider their children a part of their own identity through their extended self (Belk, 1988). By posting about their children, parents may be trying to meet their affiliation-based goals (Brosch, 2016). Such behavior can be viewed by others as

digital self-representation (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), in which parents represent themselves online through their children. However, parents' frequent use of their children for self-presentation purposes deviates from the good parenting ideal (Magen, 1994; Pynn et al., 2019) and thus might be perceived as violating social norms (i.e., rules pertaining to the appropriateness of a given behavior; Sherif, 1936).

Parents perceived as frequently using their children to fulfill their own goals and ambitions might be viewed by others as attention-seekers who "bask in children's reflected glory" (Brummelman et al., 2013, Discussion section, para. 2). Given the link between children and the extended self of their parents (Belk, 1988), we predict that outside observers will associate parents' oversharenting behavior with their attention-seeking tendencies. Individuals labeled as attention-seekers are considered self-centered and cold (Cannon & Rucker, 2019; Scott et al., 2013), resulting in others' reduced desire to affiliate with them (Fiske et al., 2007). Because posting about one's children is directly linked to one's self-identity (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), we predict that oversharenting will negatively affect affiliation intentions of those who view these posts.

Specifically, we suggest that as parents more frequently post about their children on social media, others will perceive them as attention-seekers and express a reduced desire to affiliate with them. However, this effect is limited to parents who post about their children frequently. For parents who post about their children less frequently, others' inferences about attention-seeking behavior will be less pronounced. Our theoretical model for the focal effect of oversharenting on affiliation is provided in Fig. 1. Formally, we propose:

H1: Observers have a lower desire to affiliate with parents who post frequently about their children on social media (i.e., parents who oversharent) than with parents who post rarely.

H2a: The negative effect of oversharenting on desire to affiliate is mediated by perceptions that oversharenting constitutes a social norm violation.

H2b: The perception that parents seek attention through their children constitutes a specific social norm violation that mediates the negative effect of oversharenting on desire to affiliate.

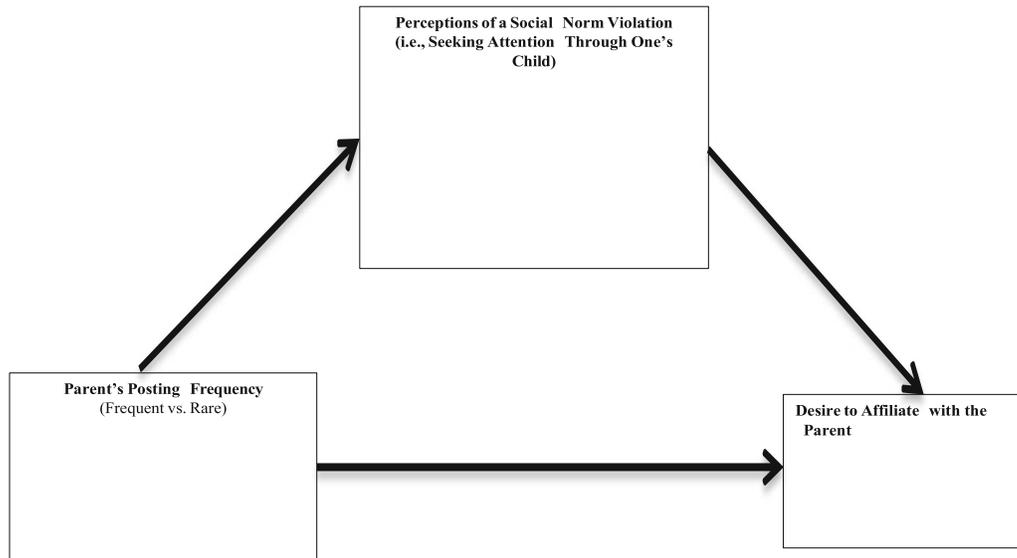


Fig. 1 Theoretical model

We also examine whether the effect of oversharenting on affiliation might be impacted by the gender of the parent posting about their child. According to evolutionary views, mothers are the primary caregivers of their young children (Kenrick et al., 2010). As a result, mothers might be expected to be more involved than fathers in posting about their children on social media. As such, oversharenting by mothers may be viewed as a social norm violation to a lesser extent than oversharenting by fathers, which means that oversharenting could impact affiliation intentions toward fathers more strongly than toward mothers. However, recent cultural changes have prompted fathers (particularly those in the Western world) to become significantly more involved in childcare (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017), potentially leading to relatively equal expectations with respect to parental online sharing behaviors across both genders. If this is the case, then the parent's gender should not impact the effect of oversharenting on affiliation.

Finally, we posit that the effect of oversharenting on desire to affiliate will be attenuated for observers who post frequently themselves on social media. Prior research suggests that people who engage in norm-violating behaviors do not view these behaviors as such (Neighbors et al., 2010). Furthermore, when observers and parents share certain commonalities, such as social media posting frequency, sharing of perceptual experiences between observers and parents is more likely to occur (Hommel, 2018). In this instance, similarity of social media posting frequency will mitigate thoughts related to social norm violation. As such, we predict that people who frequently

post on social media will not view oversharenting as a norm violation, and therefore their desire to affiliate with parents who oversharent will remain unaffected. Put formally:

H3: The negative effect of oversharenting on desire to affiliate is attenuated for observers who themselves post frequently on social media.

## **Overview of the Present Research**

We examine the effect of parental posting frequency on observers' desire to affiliate with parents in three experimental studies. Study 1 establishes that parents who oversharent are viewed as less desirable acquaintances than parents who do not (H1), and this effect is mediated by observers' perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation (H2a). Study 2 examines the specific type of a social norm violation underlying the focal effect (H2b). Finally, Study 3 identifies a boundary condition that influences this effect (H3).

## **Study 1**

### **Method**

**Participants** We recruited 152 U.S. residents from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing platform widely accepted in the field of behavioral decision making (Goodman et al., 2013), to participate in this study in exchange for \$0.25. We excluded 5 people who did not complete all study measures, which left a final sample of 147 participants (42.9% female, 63.3% parents, 96.6% social media users,  $M_{age} = 36.65$  years, median time spent on social media per day = 31–59 min).

**Procedure** The study adopted a single-factor design with two conditions. To begin, participants were presented with a fictitious Facebook post by Jane Smith, a mother of a small child. We used a Facebook post given Facebook's status as the social networking site most often used for sharenting (Nominet, 2015). The fictitious post, which featured a photo of Jane's child (a Caucasian girl), was accompanied by descriptive text through which we manipulated Jane's posting frequency (frequent vs. rare). In the frequent posting condition, the accompanying text stated that Jane frequently posted photos of her child on social media and that she had posted her child's photo on Facebook three times in the

past week. In the rare posting condition, Jane rarely posted photos of her child on social media, having posted her child's photo on Facebook three times in the past year. The Appendix provides all stimuli.

After viewing the post, participants rated their desire to affiliate with Jane by indicating their level of agreement with four statements ("I would like to be friends with Jane," "I would like to affiliate with Jane," "I would like to meet Jane," and "I would prefer to stay away from Jane" [reverse-coded];  $\alpha = .76$ ). This measure was self-constructed and constituted our dependent variable. Next, participants indicated the extent to which they viewed Jane's posting frequency as a social norm violation by expressing their level of agreement with two statements ("Jane's frequency of posting information about her child on social media is out of line" and "Jane's frequency of posting information about her child on social media is not socially appropriate";  $r = .83$ ). This measure captured our proposed mediator. We also measured several alternative explanations, including perceived lack of time spent with a child ("Jane spends too little time with her child" and "Jane does not spend enough time with her child";  $r = .86$ ), personality disorder ("Jane has a personality disorder," "Jane suffers from a mental illness," "Jane needs to meet with a psychiatrist immediately," and "Jane is mentally ill";  $\alpha = .96$ ), and unhappiness ("Jane seems like a person who is dissatisfied with her life," "Jane is unhappy," and "Jane seems like she struggles to be happy";  $\alpha = .92$ ). All the measures employed 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

As a manipulation check, participants indicated how often Jane posted her child's photos on social media (three 7-point bipolar scales: infrequently/frequently, rarely/often, hardly ever/all the time;  $\alpha = .97$ ). Next, we measured several covariates. Participants specified whether they were a parent (yes/ no), whether they used social media (yes/no), and also indicated their daily time spent on social media (1 = less than 10 min, 2 = 10–30 min, 3 = 31–59 min, 4 = 1–2 h, 5 = more than 2 h). Finally, we recorded participants' gender and age.

## Results

To check our manipulation of posting frequency, we ran an independent samples t-test. Participants in the frequent (vs. rare) posting condition indicated significantly greater frequency of Jane's engagement in sharenting,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ;  $M_{\text{rare}} = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 2.22$ ;  $t(145) = 6.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.08$ . We conducted a similar analysis to explore our main effect of posting frequency on participants' desire to affiliate with Jane. As predicted in H1, participants expressed a lower desire to affiliate with Jane when she posted frequently rather than rarely,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ;  $M_{\text{rare}} = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ;  $t(145) = -2.80$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $d = -0.47$ .

Next, we employed a two-step analysis to explore the mechanism underlying the effect of Jane's posting frequency on participants' desire to affiliate with her. First, we conducted several t-tests to examine the extent to which participants considered Jane's frequent (vs. rare) posting to represent a social norm violation, a lack of time spent with her child, a personality disorder, and unhappiness. The results indicated that participants viewed Jane's frequent posting behavior as a social norm violation to a greater extent than her rare posting behavior,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ;  $M_{\text{rare}} = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ;  $t(145) = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ,  $d = 0.35$ . By contrast, participants did not believe that Jane's frequent (vs. rare) posting behavior was related to her not spending enough time with her child, having a personality disorder, or being unhappy,  $ps \geq .94$ . Second, to explore the mediating role of participants' perception of social norm violation, we ran PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. We included posting frequency as the predictor, desire to affiliate as the outcome variable, and perception of social norm violation as the mediator in the model. The remaining

five variables capturing participants' individual differences (i.e., parental status, social media use, time spent on social media, gender, and age) were included as covariates. The results of the total effect model revealed that participants' social media use, time spent on social media, and gender did not significantly impact their desire to affiliate with Jane,  $p_s \geq .13$ . Parental status had a significant effect on affiliation, such that participants who were parents expressed greater desire to affiliate with Jane,  $B = 0.67$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $t = 2.79$ ,  $p = .006$ . The effect of age was also significant, such that older participants had lower desire to affiliate with Jane,  $B = -0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = -2.29$ ,  $p = .023$ . Importantly, the indirect effect of Jane's posting frequency on participants' affiliation intentions through perception of a social norm violation was significant,  $B = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% CI = [-0.34, -0.02], providing support for H2a. In sum, the perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation mediated the negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation.

## Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for our predictions regarding sharenting and affiliation. Participants perceived a mother who shared photos of her child on social media frequently as a less desirable acquaintance than a mother who shared them rarely. This effect was due to the perception of the oversharenting mother's behavior as a social norm violation. We also ruled out alternative explanations based on the mother's perceived lack of time, personality disorder, and unhappiness. Next, Study 2 examines the specific social norm that oversharenting violates.

## Study 2

### Method

**Participants** In total, 179 U.S. residents were recruited via MTurk to take part in this study in exchange for \$0.25. We excluded 11 people who did not complete all study measures, leaving a final sample of 168 participants (47% female, 53.6% parents, 90.5% social media users,  $M_{\text{age}} = 40.94$  years, median time spent on social media per day = 31–59 min).

**Procedure** Study 2 was similar in design to Study 1, adopting a single-factor

design with two conditions. All participants were presented with a fictitious Facebook post by Jane Smith, a mother of a small child who either frequently or rarely posted photos of her child on social media. Unlike the post in Study 1, which featured a photo of a Caucasian girl, the post in Study 2 featured a photo of an Asian boy. The Appendix provides the stimuli.

To capture our dependent variable, we instructed participants to indicate their desire to affiliate with Jane in the same way as in Study 1 (four items;  $\alpha = .86$ ). Next, we sought to measure the extent to which participants believed Jane was seeking attention through her child. To do so, we asked participants to express their level of agreement with three self-constructed statements (“Jane wants to be the center of attention by posting about her child,” “Jane tries to get other people’s attention through posting about her child,” and “Jane is an attention-seeking parent”;  $\alpha = .97$ ). This measure of attention-seeking constituted our proposed mediator. We also captured two potential alternative explanations, including perceived child neglect (“Jane neglects her child,” “Jane is indifferent with respect to her child’s well-being,” and “Jane is an uninvolved parent”;  $\alpha = .91$ ) and child abuse (“Jane abuses her child,” “Jane maltreats her child,” and “Jane is causing serious harm to her child”;  $\alpha = .92$ ). All the measures employed 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

We employed the measures from Study 1 for our manipulation check (three items;  $\alpha = .98$ ) and covariates including parental status, social media use, and time spent on social media. To conclude the study, we recorded participants’ gender and age.

## Results

To conduct a manipulation check of posting frequency, we performed an independent samples t-test, with the results revealing greater perceived frequency of Jane’s engagement in sharenting in the frequent than in the rare posting condition,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ;  $M_{\text{rare}} = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ;  $t(166) = 15.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.39$ . We conducted a similar analysis to explore the effect of Jane’s posting frequency on participants’ desire to affiliate with Jane. In line with H1, participants indicated a lower desire to affiliate with Jane when she posted frequently rather than rarely,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ;  $M_{\text{rare}} = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ;

$t(166) = -2.05, p = .042, d = -0.31$ .

Next, we carried out a two-step analysis to explore the underlying mechanism responsible for the effect of Jane's posting frequency on participants' desire to affiliate with Jane. As the first step, we performed several t- tests to examine the extent to which participants viewed Jane's posting behavior as attention-seeking, child neglect, and child abuse. According to the results, participants interpreted Jane's frequent (vs. rare) posting behavior as attention-seeking,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 4.55, SD = 1.82; M_{\text{rare}} = 2.90, SD = 1.82; t(166) = 5.89, p < .001, d = 0.91$ .

By contrast, participants did not view Jane's frequent (vs. rare) posting behavior as either child neglect or child abuse,  $ps \geq .14$ . As the second step, we explored the mediating role of perceived attention-seeking by conducting PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. We included posting frequency as the predictor, desire to affiliate as the outcome variable, and perception of Jane's behavior as attention-seeking as the mediator in the model. As in Study 1, the variables capturing participants' individual differences (i.e., parental status, social media use, time spent on social media, gender, and age) served as co- variates in the model. Inspection of the total effect model indicated that participants' social media use, time spent on social media, gender, and age did not affect their desire to affiliate with Jane,  $ps \geq .07$ . Similar to Study 1, parental status of the participants significantly impacted their affiliation tendencies, such that participants who were parents had greater desire to affiliate with Jane,  $B = 0.81, SE = 0.22, t = 3.62, p < .001$ . In line with H2b, the indirect effect of Jane's posting frequency on participants' affiliation through perceived attention- seeking was significant,  $B = -0.44, SE = 0.14, 95\% CI = [-0.77, -0.22]$ . Stated differently, participants' perceptions that Jane was seeking attention through her child mediated the negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation intentions.

## **Discussion**

Study 2 provided further support for the negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation, while establishing perceived attention-seeking through one's child as the specific social norm violation underlying this effect. Furthermore, this study did not find

empirical support for alternative explanations based on perceived child neglect and child abuse. Next, Study 3 examines a boundary condition that attenuates the negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation. It also establishes the applicability of our focal effect to both mothers and fathers who oversharent.

### Study 3

#### Method

**Participants** We recruited 500 U.S. residents via MTurk to participate in this study in return for \$0.25. We excluded 22 people who did not complete all study measures, which left a final sample of 478 participants (56.5% female, 51% parents, 91.2% social media users,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.74$  years, median time spent on social media per day = 31–59 min).

**Procedure** The study used a 2 (parent's posting frequency: frequent vs. rare)  $\times$  2 (parent's gender: male vs. female) between-subjects design. To begin, we presented participants with a fictitious Facebook post by either a mother or a father of a small child (a Caucasian boy). We included both a mother's and father's post to examine whether our focal effect was affected by the gender of the parent. In addition to manipulating the parent's gender, we manipulated posting frequency in the same way as in the previous studies (see Appendix for complete stimuli).

To measure our dependent variable, the desire to affiliate, participants indicated on a 7-point scale their level of agreement with four statements ( $\alpha = .84$ ) about the parent whose Facebook post they viewed. These statements were the same as in Study 1, except we replaced *Jane* with *this person*. The manipulation check (three items;  $\alpha = .98$ ) and covariates (i.e., parental status, social media use, and time spent on social media) were recorded in the same way as in Study 1. Next, to capture the proposed moderator, we asked participants to specify their own frequency of posting photos on social media (7-point bipolar scale; never/daily). Finally, participants indicated their gender and age.

#### Results

To check our manipulation of posting frequency, we ran an analysis of variance

(ANOVA) using parent's posting frequency, parent's gender, and their interaction to predict perceptions of the parent's posting frequency. The results revealed a significant main effect of the parent's posting frequency,  $F(1, 474) = 732.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .61$ . Specifically, participants in the frequent (vs. rare) posting condition indicated significantly greater frequency of the parent's engagement in sharenting,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 5.69, SD = 1.04; M_{\text{rare}} = 2.25, SD = 1.67; d = 2.47$ , confirming the success of the posting frequency manipulation. The main effect of the parent's gender and the posting frequency  $\times$  parent's gender interaction were both non-significant,  $F_s < 1$ .

Next, we ran a similar ANOVA to predict participants' desire to affiliate with the parent. In line with H1, the results indicated a significant main effect of the parent's posting frequency,  $F(1, 474) = 21.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ . That is, participants expressed a lower desire to affiliate with the parent who posted frequently rather than rarely,  $M_{\text{frequent}} = 4.24, SD = 1.32; M_{\text{rare}} = 4.78, SD = 1.18; d = -0.43$ . Furthermore, there was a non-significant main effect of the parent's gender,  $F < 1$ , and a non-significant interaction between the parent's posting frequency and the parent's gender,  $F(1, 474) = 2.47, p = .12$ . These results indicate that the effect of oversharenting on the desire to affiliate is robust to differences in the parent's gender. As a result, we collapsed the data across the parent's gender for the remaining analyses.

To examine whether the observer's own posting frequency moderated our focal effect, as predicted in H3, we ran PROCESS model 1 (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. We specified the parent's posting frequency as the predictor, the desire to affiliate as the outcome variable, and each participant's own posting frequency as a moderator in the model. The results revealed significant effects of both the parent's posting frequency,  $B = -0.93, SE = 0.23, t = -4.07, p < .001$ , and each participant's posting frequency,  $B = 0.12, SE = 0.04, t = 2.75, p = .006$ . Namely, participants indicated a reduced desire to affiliate with the parent who posted frequently rather than rarely. At the same time, each participant's posting frequency had a positive effect on desire to affiliate with the parent. There was also a marginally significant interaction between the two posting frequencies,  $B = 0.12, SE = 0.06, t = 1.84, p = .066$ . To further explore this interaction, we performed the Johnson–Neyman analysis (Hayes & Matthes, 2009; Johnson & Neyman, 1936). Through this analysis, we identified a point of 5.19, such that

the parent's posting frequency did not affect the desire to affiliate with the parent for participants who rated their own posting frequency at or above this on the 7-point scale. These results support H3.

Finally, we examined whether the parent's posting frequency might have interacted with other measures we recorded (i.e., parental status, social media use, time spent on social media, gender, and age) to predict the desire to affiliate with the parent. To do so, we ran a series of analyses examining interactions between the parent's posting frequency and each of the aforementioned variables, with desire to affiliate as an outcome variable. The results revealed that none of these interactions were statistically significant,  $ps \geq .42$ .

## **Discussion**

Study 3 demonstrated the applicability of the effect predicted in H1 to both mothers and fathers who oversharent. Furthermore, this study provided empirical support for our prediction regarding the interactive effect of sharenting and observers' posting frequency on the desire to affiliate with the parent. Specifically, observers evaluated parents who shared photos of their children on social media frequently (vs. rarely) as less desirable acquaintances, and this effect was attenuated for observers who themselves posted frequently on social media. Together, these findings provide additional evidence of the implications of oversharenting.

## **General Discussion**

A common practice among modern-day parents is to post photos of and information about their children on social media. This research examines how such parents are evaluated by others. Although parents post about their children on social media primarily to socialize with others (Brosch, 2016), this research demonstrates that parents who post too frequently (i.e., parents who engage in oversharenting) are viewed as less desirable acquaintances than parents who post sparingly. As a result, oversharenting may negatively affect the very goal that parents are attempting to fulfill through social media sharing.

Our research contributes to the literature on parenting in three ways. First, we

extend research on parenting behavior in social media environments. While prior research has focused primarily on exploring sharenting from the perspective of parents, including their motives for sharenting and the kinds of photos they share online (Brosch, 2016; Fox & Hoy, 2019; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Marasli et al., 2016), the present research examines how sharenting influences others' intentions toward parents. We find a consistent effect such that parents are viewed as less desirable acquaintances when they oversharent, which is especially paradoxical considering that the desire for affiliation motivates sharenting behavior (Brosch, 2016).

Second, our research shows that external observers might view oversharenting as a social norm violation. Whereas earlier societies viewed children as cheap labor, contemporary society views children as protected, emotionally priceless individuals and attaches sacred value to them (Zelizer, 1985). In other words, social norms suggest that children should not be exploited for the benefit of others so as to preserve that sacred value. Our research suggests that the frequent posting about one's children as a means to benefit the parent conflicts with that value.

Third, we explore the moderating role of observers' own social media posting behavior, such that those who post more frequently on social media are less likely to view oversharenting behavior as a social norm violation. This finding is also consistent with that of Hommel (2018), who suggests that similarity between observers and actors leads to observers' greater ability to share certain perceptual experiences with those actors.

While our research provides insights into how others view parents who share information about their children on social media, some limitations should be noted. We used fictitious Facebook posts by unknown people rather than participants' friends or family members. However, there is a possibility that the closeness of the relationship between the observer and the poster could either positively or negatively affect our findings. Future research should examine how the relationship between the parent and the person viewing the post might influence the desire to affiliate with parents who oversharent.

Furthermore, this research focused only on parents who posted about children in the early stages of development (i.e., infants through preschoolers). Future re- search

might examine inferences made about parents who post about older children, such as teenagers or adults. For example, while young children are often unaware that their photos are being shared online by their parents, older children can be consulted or asked for consent before posting (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). It is therefore possible that external observers will be less harsh when judging older children's parents who oversharent, given the observers' possible assumption that the photos were posted with the child's consent.

Moreover, this research employed a measurement approach to establish the mediating role of the perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation in the negative effect of oversharenting on affiliation. To provide more conclusive evidence of causality, future research might employ the process-by-moderation approach by manipulating instead of measuring participants' perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation (Spencer et al., 2005).

Finally, future research might investigate the generalizability of our findings to populations other than U.S. adults. Given the significant impact of cultural contexts on human psychology (Henrich et al., 2010), people with different cultural backgrounds might view the extent to which oversharenting constitutes a social norm violation differently. As such, we encourage scholars to explore whether the effect of oversharenting on affiliation emerges in other populations, as well as to further probe underlying mechanisms other than the perception of oversharenting as a social norm violation (Kirmani, 2015).

Overall, this research constitutes an initial step toward greater understanding of parental sharing in social media environments. Given that most people will become parents at some point in their lives, future research should continue exploring how parenting behaviors are viewed by others in various contexts.

# Appendix

## Study 1 Stimuli:

Frequent Posting	Rare Posting
<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 3-year-old child. She frequently posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past week</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p>  <p>The image shows a Facebook post interface. At the top, it says 'Jane Smith Just now'. Below that is the text 'My little cutie 😊'. The main content is a photograph of a young girl with blonde hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and blue pants, sitting inside a white rectangular box. Below the photo are 'Like' and 'Comment' buttons, and a text input field that says 'Write a comment...'. There are also icons for sharing and other actions.</p>	<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 3-year-old child. She rarely posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past year</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p>  <p>This is an identical copy of the Facebook post shown in the 'Frequent Posting' column, featuring the same text and image of the 3-year-old girl in the white box.</p>

## Study 2 Stimuli:

Frequent Posting	Rare Posting
<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 2-year-old child. She frequently posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past week</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p>  <p>The image shows a Facebook post interface. At the top, it says 'Jane Smith Just now'. Below that is the text 'My little cutie 😊'. The main content is a photograph of a young boy with dark hair, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt, smiling and holding his hands up near his face. Below the photo are 'Like' and 'Comment' buttons, and a text input field that says 'Write a comment...'. There are also icons for sharing and other actions.</p>	<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 2-year-old child. She rarely posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past year</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p>  <p>This is an identical copy of the Facebook post shown in the 'Frequent Posting' column, featuring the same text and image of the 2-year-old boy in the checkered shirt.</p>

### Study 3 Stimuli:

	Frequent Posting	Rare Posting
<b>Mother</b>	<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 3-year-old child. She frequently posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past week</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p> 	<p>Jane Smith is a mother of a 3-year-old child. She rarely posts photos of her child on social media. For instance, she posted her child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past year</u>.</p> <p>Here is Jane's latest Facebook post concerning her child:</p> 
<b>Father</b>	<p>John Smith is a father of a 3-year-old child. He frequently posts photos of his child on social media. For instance, he posted his child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past week</u>.</p> <p>Here is John's latest Facebook post concerning his child:</p> 	<p>John Smith is a father of a 3-year-old child. He rarely posts photos of his child on social media. For instance, he posted his child's photo on Facebook <u>three times in the past year</u>.</p> <p>Here is John's latest Facebook post concerning his child:</p> 

### Code Availability

Not applicable.

### Data Availability

The datasets are available from the corresponding author upon request.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethics Approval** This project was reviewed and approved by the Montpellier Business School Scientific Integrity Committee. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee determined this project to be human participant research that is exempt from regulation.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants who took part in the three experimental studies.

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