

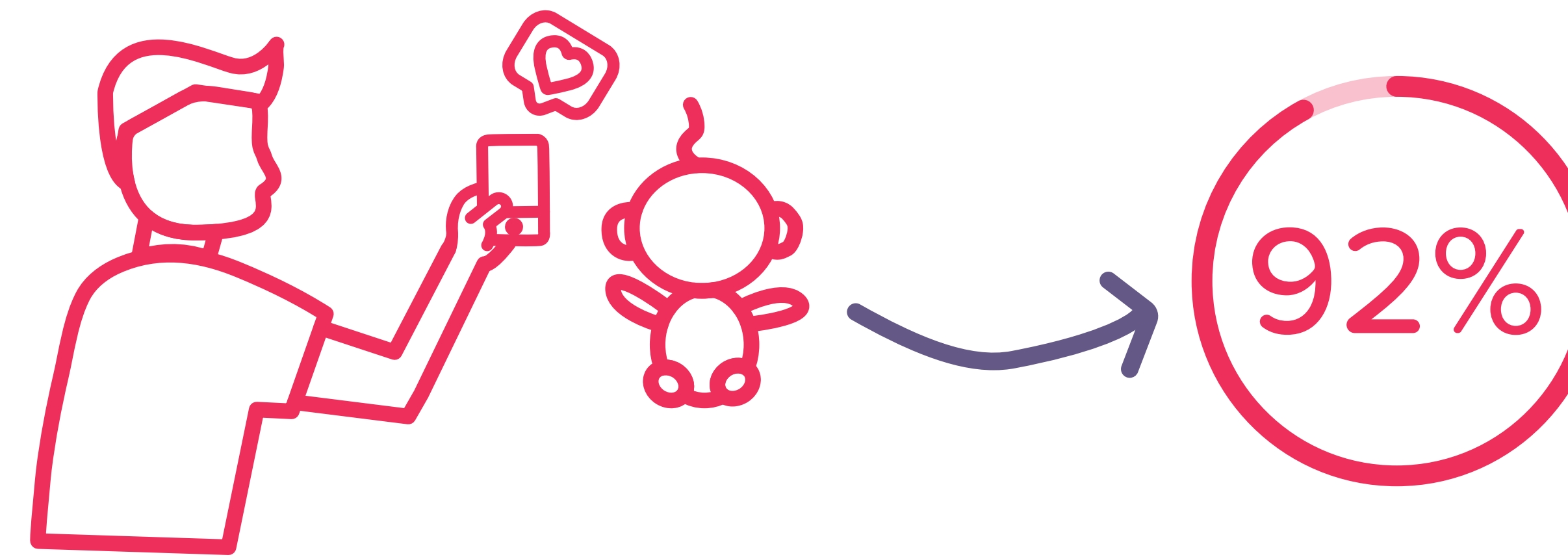
Exploring the Ethics of “Sharenting”

by brooke baker



what is “sharenting?”

“Sharenting” is the practice of parents sharing pictures and videos of their children on social media. This has become a popular thing to do in the digital age and, according to a 2010 study commissioned by security company AVG, “92 percent of U.S. children have some type of online presence by the time they are 2 years old.”



the case

how it started

- There was a movement to take down pictures and videos of children that was unknowingly started by Wren Eleanor, a 3-year-old child and TikTok star with over 17 million followers.
- Her mother, Jacquelyn, started the shared TikTok account (@wrenelenor) to document her daughter’s life but the content she posted in late July 2022 was very controversial.



the controversy

- Jacquelyn posted a (now-deleted) video of Wren playing with a tampon and another of Wren taking a bath in a bathing suit.
- Videos on the TikTok account were being saved and downloaded by users (two features that can be turned off). One video in particular of Wren was saved more than 45,000 times.
- Users found inappropriate comments on Wren’s videos like “there is no way that baby doesn’t have a boyfriend” or, “ZAYM, SHES 3?”
- Some TikTok users have also accused Jacquelyn of exploiting her child on TikTok for financial gain as Jacquelyn makes an estimated \$14,790 a month from TikTok.

the response

- Jacquelyn has not addressed that her daughter’s videos have been saved by users on TikTok.
- Jacquelyn responded to users who believe she is exploiting her daughter by saying that “in addition to preserving precious memories, this account has allowed me to raise and provide for my daughter as a stay-at-home mom, along with being able to set aside money for Wren and her future.”
- Jacquelyn has continued to post videos with Wren as of April 2023 and has no plans to change that.



what the law says

- In the legal sphere, there are still many questions in regard to “kidfluencers” like Wren and whether parents making money from children in this way should be considered abuse.
- Federal and state laws protect child entertainers, but the law has not yet caught up to apps like TikTok, for example.
- Ultimately, there is unregulated child labor on some social media apps.

ethical theory

The Utilitarian Perspective

- John Stuart Mill would feel that even though TikTok is a great opportunity for Jacquelyn to make money, she’s putting Wren in harm’s way by doing this because of the pedophiles that have been watching her videos.
- He also might say that even though parents cannot protect their children from everything, they can minimize harm by choosing to not post their children’s pictures and videos on social media.

The Theory of Distributive Justice

- Rawls’s theory of “distributive justice” holds that justice should be equated with fairness and to achieve fairness we should implore the “veil of ignorance.”
- The “veil of ignorance” would reveal that one person should not post pictures or videos of another without consent. His theory aims to protect weaker parties, and this instance would be a time when that is the case. His take would be that Jacqueline shouldn’t post Wren’s pictures or videos on social media.

ethical questions

Should parents post their young children’s pictures and videos online eventhough they aren’t old enough to fully give consent and understand the impacts of it?

Parents are distributing their children’s personal information when they post their pictures and videos online but are also acting as a writer of their child’s stories. These stories, in turn, shape the identity formation of the children often in negative ways.

Should parents monetize their children’s shared accounts?

Another ethical issue that is presented in this case is the economics of the Tik Tok account. Jacqueline makes money to raise her daughter through the videos she posts and not having this source of income could mean that her and Wren would be living a completely different lifestyle.