

Turning Babies Into Big Data--And How to Stop It

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New parents, in both the months before the birth of a child and the early years of life, routinely invest huge amounts of time, energy and money in sourcing as much information as they can about good parenting practices. Increasingly, this investment includes a range of apps, from pregnancy apps which provide normalized information about what to expect on a day to day basis during pregnancy, through to various apps links to monitoring devices, both manual and digital, during pregnancy and infancy. Far from just providing information, many of these apps now encourage parents to undertake specific monitoring and surveillance practices to capture large amount of data about their child. This data is often then aggregated by the corporations behind these reassuring apps – corporations which are driven by profit, and often see the aggregated data about the unborn or infants as a resource which can be aggregated, analysed and the outcomes eventually monetized. The commercial imperatives are often masked or overlooked by parents, who undertake this intimate surveillance with the very best intentions. While the argument here is not against the value of data and observation in specific circumstances, as part of considered practice to combat a specific illness or issue. Rather, I argue against the widespread and indiscriminate push to track, survey, encode, aggregate and analyse a wide range of activities from conception to the early years of childhood. In effect, the issue raised here is why so much data being collected about the unborn, babies and infants; how is this aggregated big data being used; and in which circumstances new parents should be better informed to allow them to decide on appropriate limits on their babies being turned into big data.