

Parenting apps for smartphones and other mobile devices are an increasingly popular source of information and advice for new parents. They enable parents to monitor feeding and sleeping schedules and to measure these against normal patterns for their infant's age and stage. They provide medical advice, function as baby monitors and sleep aids and act as social platforms where parents can track and share essential milestones and memories. A growing body of research has focused on the ways parenting apps provide support and reassurance for parents learning to care for a new baby. At the same time the use of these apps is raising concerns around issues of data security, surveillance and privacy, the idealisation of the post natal experience and the digital footprints and shadows created by data tracking.

This paper contributes to these debates by focusing on parents who have made an active decision to reject these kinds of digital mediations. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with 10 sets of parents the paper explores their decisions to stop using parenting apps. While the monitoring and measurement of infant milestones has long been a part of parenthood, these parents found the use of apps shaped their parenting practices, and their relationship with each other as parents, in ways that were problematic and undesirable. The paper discusses the conflict that the parents faced in their love/hate relationship with the apps they used; feeling that they gave a sense of structure and security when tired, frazzled and vulnerable, but also that they exacerbated feelings of pressure, comparison and guilt. The paper argues that in using digital objects and spaces to help navigate parenting, apps do not simply mediate but can actively shape the experience of parenting. Through the datafication of the infant body and in its representation in digital form, apps create a digital double, a collection of data points, which frame the infant and parent in ways that can feel precarious.