The digitisation of parenting

Selected findings

A lot of the information and advice for parents draws on neuroscience and psychology. But this only gives us one - scientific - view on what parenting is. It leaves out a lot of the day to day anxiety or it offers ways to overcome it.

We are developing a philosophical account of raising children that sees parents as grown ups with responsibility for the next generation. It acknowledges that this inevitably involves uncertainty, that we cannot have certainty over what our actions today will lead to in the future, and that our values will shape how we raise children.

The way raising children is presented via apps presents a very narrow view of what being a parent is. Offering a philosophical account is not just giving another point of view but acknowledging aspects of our daily lives that are part of what it means to be human and are often not something that can be managed or overcome.

Q: We are increasingly responsible for our own success, health, and wellbeing, how are parents asked to take up this responsibility?

Q: How do parenting apps change how we understand the role of the parent? What does being a parent look like in an app?
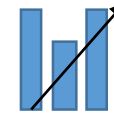
The digitisation of parenting advice introduces significant differences from other media: the ability to provide 'personalised' information; the ability to generate 'real-time' and age-specific information based on the user's inputted data; the ability to present this visually in graphs and charts and set targets.

Personalisation of what is received places the parent in a very different position in relation to the knowledge provided than if reading a book or watching a tv programme.

Personalisation means no agency is required to select relevant or appropriate knowledge and information. A closed feedback loop is formed by the user's interaction with the app and the personalised advice or images this generates.

The scientific focus and presentation in many apps reinforces the idea that difficulty and uncertainty in raising children are a) problems that can be overcome and b) a matter of a lack of learning or skill on the part of the parent.