

Baby apps leave parents feeling guilty and pressured, research says

10 April 2018, by Tony Trueman

Some new parents are deleting phone apps that give advice on looking after their babies because they make them feel guilty and inferior, new research says.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in Newcastle heard today [Tuesday 10 April 2018] that parents' "early and enthusiastic use of a range of apps to monitor and track the care and development of their new baby" led eventually to "guilt, pressure and [social comparison](#)".

Dr. Kate Orton-Johnson, of the University of Edinburgh, spoke to 20 parents who had been heavy users of mobile [phone apps](#) to record their new baby's feeding and sleeping patterns but had now stopped using them.

Dr. Orton-Johnson told the conference that though the parents found the apps useful at first, they came to feel that recording their baby's development put pressure on them.

A father told her: "I went from being all about the gadgets to just wanting to escape the routines and not worry if milestones were being met or the right amount of weight was being gained or whatever."

A mother told her: "The switch for me was just realising that she [the baby] wasn't something I could control or monitor and as a mother I shouldn't want to. Stopping using them [apps] helped me let go of the idea that if something, sleep or weaning, was going wrong I could solve it. I've let myself go with the flow and let things happen much more, it's a relief."

Another mother told her that she was guilty about the time she spent on the apps: "I feel like I've done a complete turn around. I loved the apps but somehow this doesn't fit with how I was imagining myself as a mother. We're so bombarded with ideals of motherhood and it's hard enough without

adding in guilt that I'm not present enough because I'm Instagramming everything."

One mother said: "I had to stop when I found myself actually going back and filling in entries for naps or feeds that I'd forgotten to fill in at the time. Who does that? Why was I bothering? It was about me and not at all about [the baby]"

Dr. Orton-Johnson said: "The use of apps seemed to exacerbate feelings of guilt, pressure and social comparison that shaped how they experienced parenting in ways that felt uncomfortable and undesirable.

"The respondents felt strongly that their use of technology was intruding into a domain – parenthood and motherhood in particular – where surveillance and monitoring was inappropriate and undesirable.

"The parents faced a 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 respondents described feelings of liberation and freedom following their rejection of baby tracking apps. They described being released from a techno anxiety about their activities as parents and felt positive about no longer inhabiting parenthood through digital media."

The findings come at a time when parenting apps are taking off. "Parenting apps for smartphones and other mobile devices are an increasingly popular source of information and advice for new [parents](#)," Dr. Orton-Johnson told the conference.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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