I HAVE A DREAM! ON THE PERCEIVED LIMITS AND MAGINED POSSIBILITIES OF BODY MONITORING

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I have a dream! On the perceived limits and imagined possibilities of body monitoring. There is a growing market for, and use of, digitally mediated body monitoring and self-tracking devices – technologies that measure and report on everything from how fast you run, and what mood you are in, to devices that measure sleep patterns and pulse. The development of new social and digital body monitoring technologies has profound implications for the ways people experience both their bodies and the environments in which they live, and raises practical and ethical questions about how the body can (or should) be monitored/quantified, and how people imagine their futures/ future bodies.

Digital technologies of these sorts are increasingly ubiquitous in everyday life forming part of the the way we live and experience the world. Processes of mediatization involving 'the pervasive spread of media contents and platforms' are integral to our everyday environments (Couldry & Hepp, 2013) and part of the practices through which the everyday is lived (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010). Indeed media participates in everyday worlds beyond its role as a provider of content and for communication. It permeates cultural and societal spheres in ways that enable it to have a coordinating function (Hjarvard, 2013) and generates new types of social and technological presence (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). Yet as advocates of a 'non-media-centric' approach to media stress, media are not the most important things in people's lives, but they are part of everyday life (Morley, 2009; Moores, 2012; Couldry, 2012). This paper approaches the conditions for body monitoring practices by putting the social and cultural framing of software and hardware design under scrutiny. In terms of hardware, body monitoring devices are relatively simple constructions that are controlled by and sometimes even integrated in smart phone devices. The software that fuel these devices and allow them to process, present and share data between devices in a manner that is intelligible and meaningful from a user perspective is of a more complex kind. Bodies and their actions are not only monitored and measured by these devices but in the very code that fuels them, an interpretive process takes place before the information is presented to and interpreted by the users. This is done in multiple ways but most importantly by opening up new forms of mediated spaces in and through which we can observe and feel our bodies. This entails that software works as a 'social intermediary' (Berg, 2012) and thus

structures how we can establish mediated understandings of our past, present and future bodies and selves. The software that allows us to interact reflexively with body monitoring devices springs from complex design processes in which the personal experiences and imaginations of designers and technological developers are highly involved. Drawing on the growing field of software studies (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011; Manovich, 2013), this paper approaches body monitoring practices from the perspective of the designers and developers of software and hardware in order to understand what kinds of assumptions, emotions and expectations that are built into the technologies and their software. This paper is empirically grounded in a netnographic (Berg, 2011, 2015; Kozinets, 2010) study of a number of body monitoring devices, most importantly Withings, RunKeeper, FitBit and Jawbone Up! that to various degrees are interconnected through APIs (Application Programming Interfaces). The paper will focus on how these devices and their related software are framed, described, and discussed from developers' point of view following the research question: How are the technologies and software involved in body monitoring given form by designers and developers in relation to how they perceive and imagine their past, present and future bodies and selves? Focusing on how the practice and outcome of body monitoring are described in textual and graphic communication between developers and designers in online communities and discussion boards along with a study of technical documentation, this paper provides an understanding of how the technological limits and possibilities of body monitoring software and hardware are perceived and imagined.

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