

## **A report on The Datafied Family – IAS sponsored workshop**

**Professor Ranjana Das**

From body-trackers, non-human digital support apps, smart home tech, parenting apps, and gadgets, surveillance devices from the womb to the cradle, technologies of intimacy and play in the Internet of Things, and wellbeing and wellness support bots – the textures of family life are changing – at disparate paces across global cultures and economies, with a steady increase in family technologies, which are subtly, and not so subtly, altering the practice of care, intimacy, leisure, learning, play, routine, and more. The Datafied Family – a day-long, international, virtual workshop sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Studies – interrogated these issues and brought international voices across disciplines to meet the University of Surrey's research clusters across its faculties around digital societies, technology and society, family sociology and health, parenthood, and childhood. The Datafied Family raised and responded to a set of key questions – without restricting its topics to these alone.

Overarchingly, we asked:

- In what ways have family dynamics – routines, caring, intimacies, leisure, play, learning, parenting, and more – been interrupted, (re)shaped, or transformed by the steady algorithmizing of everyday family life?
- What material artefacts – toys, apps, smart home tech, educational applications, portals, and meta-portals – punctuate family life and to what effect?
- What inequalities, injustices, and power dynamics are being rehearsed or reshaped through the datafication of family life?
- How is the algorithmic shaping of domestic routines and rapports encountered in practice, resisted, or reshaped through human agency?
- What global perspectives remain less visible and unincorporated in theorizing the datafied family, including the disparities between the global north and south?

### **Event Themes**

The event featured several cross-cutting themes synthesized brilliantly by the four keynote speakers from the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, and India. Usha Raman from the University of Hyderabad in India kicked off the event with her research on the intersections of health data and family decision-making, looking at cultures of resistance, denial, and belief. This was followed by Giovanna Mascheroni from the Catholic University of Milan in Italy, speaking about social digital inequalities and Italian families' lived experiences of datafication. This introduction to the event, by drawing our attention to the critical interstices of technology and families in diverse cultural contexts, laid the groundwork firmly for the first key theme of the event around data in the home. Here, we heard about caring practices in the digital and datafied home from Esther Dermott and her colleagues. We heard about how families are increasingly made into data as they are calibrated in the contexts of data behaviourism and algorithmic logic, as discussed by Val Gillies. Laura Carter's paper picked up similar themes and discussed how the troubled family is developed as a category, looking critically into data sharing, binary classifications, and family role stereotyping in children's social care. Bjorn Nanson and colleagues from the University of Melbourne in Australia looked at family location tracking apps, and the ways in which public discourse debates these

apps. The theme of smart devices continued in Ekaterina Hertog's presentation on smart wives and the intersections between gender roles, domestic care, and data.

A second theme that cut across the event was on data and its relationships to different stages in the life course, starting from the child in the womb right up till tracking and tracing one's ancestors. Rieke Bohling from the University of Bremen in Germany talked about the datafication of genealogical research, which aligned very well with Rivka Riibak and colleagues from the University of Haifa in Israel, who spoke of the datafied family in embryo, covering multiple points in the life course. Caroline Redhead and colleagues from the University of Manchester, UK, looked at datafied DNA and donor conception, which tied in with papers on smart devices which track infant feeding applications, as explored by Katrin Langton from the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. Angelica Ochoa of the University of Texas, USA, looked particularly at digital platforms of milk sharing, drawing out the many points at which data and datafication intersects pregnancies, conception, both maternal and paternal ancestry, and childhood in contemporary societies.

A second keynote session featured Sonia Livingstone from the London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK, speaking about mediated, platformed, and datafied families today as she scoped the challenges ahead for research in this field. This aligned wonderfully with Veronica Barassi's talk from the University of St Gallen in Switzerland as she discussed the implications for family life in the face of generative ethics and AI agents. This led us very nicely into the third theme of the day, which considered parenting in platform societies. Here, Courtney Hagen Ford from Northeastern University London looked at family surveillance products through a critical lens. This tied in with Irida Ntalla from the University of Arts London, whose paper scrutinized apps for single mothers. Tama Leaver from Curtin University Australia spoke about the dashboards and devices of mobile parenting as infancy is datafied, and this tied in excellently with parents' experiences of datafication in terms of their developing algorithm literacies, as discussed by Ranjana Das from the University of Surrey, UK.

A final theme that ran through the day related to the datafication of schools and classrooms in relation to families, tying in with the previous themes as well. Here, Karla Barreda from the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, considered the influence of rankings and algorithm cultures on children's reading apps. This tied in with Karley Beckman and colleagues' paper from the University of Wollongong, Australia, which looked at the datafication of children and families in the context of school social media. Similar themes were echoed by Elizabeth Fetterolf from Microsoft Research New England, USA, as she looked at caring surveillance and surveillant care in Amazon's Alexa, together with Lucci Pangrazio and colleagues' presentation from the University of Melbourne, Australia, which looked at the datafication of Australian childhoods. Emma Head from Keele University, UK, discussed the digitization of schooling and family life and mothers' experiences of parenting primary school-age children in the UK, which had strong dovetails with Francisca Porfirio and colleagues' presentations from the University of Lusofona in Portugal as they presented findings on Portuguese families' engagement with digital technologies in the course of everyday parenting.

### **Next Steps - Outcomes**

A variety of publication plans have been proposed and are being discussed between various groupings of colleagues involved in the workshop. Some colleagues are also intending to

work together for potential future grant applications or joint writing. The virtual format of the meeting worked wonderfully well, and all sessions were held as plenaries, and the groups were not split up, meaning every speaker got a full audience. The chat for the workshop also became a very supportive and collaborative space where numerous links to projects and work in progress were shared, and these links were collected and circulated later. A full recording of the event is available on this [link](#), and the event program is available [here](#).

### **Acknowledgments**

We are very grateful to the Institute of Advanced Studies for funding this event and making such an international event possible, cutting across numerous time zones and bringing together so many speakers from around the world. Thanks to Mirela Dumic and Louise Jones for their prompt and valuable support. Many thanks to Paul Hodgkinson, Ana Jorge, Emma Head and Emily Setty for chairing the sessions across the day. We are particularly grateful also to our excellent student assistant Basudha Guha Khasnobis for helping us prepare and deliver the event brilliantly.