

Tracking Norms and Values

How geotracking applications cannot be tools of care

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Abstract: Geotracking applications have gained popularity over the past couple of years. Currently, the popular application Life360 has surpassed 50 million monthly active users globally. This thesis argues that applications like Life360 cannot be categorized as tools of care, despite appearances, due to opposed values that are inherent to the application. Accepting the values these applications bring with them is detrimental to child development.

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Introduction

In December 2021, two employees of the company behind the application Life360 turned to non-profit news organisation The Markup due to their concerns about the privacy and security with which the company handles their user data (Keegan and Ng 2021). These employees, and two other individuals that worked at large location data brokers all confirmed that Life360 is the *biggest* player amongst the collectors and commodifiers of location data. The article reveals that the application Life360 was selling precise location data of its thirty-three million worldwide users. The application, marketed towards families to track each other's location, has sold the collected data about its users to about a dozen data brokers, which have, in return, sold it to "virtually anyone who wants to buy it," the article notes (Keegan and Ng 2021). This news is concerning, especially because the issue pertains to an application used by parents to track their children. Inherent to this parent-child relationship we see a power dynamic in which the child is dependent on the parent and is not in a position to make as many autonomous choices as an adult is equipped to do. This raises several ethical questions about surveillance within the private sphere, big data capitalism and relations of power between companies, parents, children, and the state. This paper will focus on parental surveillance through the use of geotracking applications in a United States context.

It has become increasingly normalised to use tools of surveillance and sous-veillance for the purpose of protecting oneself and loved ones. Life360 is a prominent example of these tools. The application, marketed towards families, promises an up-to-date location of all family members and with that, peace of mind, their website states. Tonya Rooney (2010) argues that this increase in the employment of surveillance tools in parenting is a result of the changing market in which the parent is discovered as a consumer rather than the original consumers of surveillance products e.g. law enforcement and security companies. Rooney notes how this change is significant because it increases the chance of a child finding themselves under surveillance in the locations that they visit daily. She adds to this that surveillance in this context is no longer seen as a tool of discipline and control, but that it is perceived to be a form of care (Rooney 2010, 345). This shift in

perspective is crucial, as it normalises surveillance and changes societal attitudes towards privacy and monitoring.

We see this change in the perception of surveillance in the amount of parents that use surveillance in their care. A report on digital location tracking by Kaitlyn Burnell et al. researched how many parents use digital location tracking in their parenting. Their research shows that “[o]ne third of parents in a representative U.S. sample report using digital software to track their children’s (aged 5-11 years) location” (Auxier et al. 2020 quoted in Burnell et al. 2023). Though not referring only to Life360, this is a dramatic number of families that use geotracking applications in their parenting. Therefore, it is imperative that this matter is investigated and that we ask ourselves as a society if this practice truly aligns with the values of parental care. Looking into the workings of geotracking applications and raising crucial ethical questions concerning the underlying values will allow us to be in a better position to judge surveillance’s contemporary role in parental care. Indeed, applications like Life360, despite (or perhaps due to) their rising popularity, raise ethical questions concerning care and control in surveilling members of the family, especially in parent-child relations. This paper argues that geotracking applications cannot be categorised as tools of care, despite appearances, due to a dissonance between underlying values in the workings of the application and those of parental care.

This argument is based on the reality that companies are pushing for a value shift in parenting, not to further benefit the child’s benefits, but rather because the collection of user data serves as the raw material for generating profit in accordance with the workings of surveillance capitalism (see Zuboff 2019). Companies attempt to replace the meaning of certain values such as safety and security in order to change the way parents care for their children, and to encourage the normalisation of surveillance in the family. This value shift constitutes a dangerous development for children, which this paper will expand on later. Though values are largely personal and therefore have an arbitrary character, it is possible to create an account of general parental values by analysing children’s rights documents. Additionally, the effects of surveillance on children are proven to influence their development in a variety of ways. Surveillance affects children’s autonomy, their

ability to trust and their ability to solve problems that they encounter in life. The question that this paper answers is: Does the use of geotracking applications, such as Life360, reformulate the values of parenting such as replacing care with control?

The values of parental care are a child's best interests, development, freedom, privacy, and protection from harm and exploitation. Although Life360's marketing materials seem to reflect similar values, the application itself promotes transparency, risk-aversion, constraint, and focusses on the parent's well-being rather than the child's. In addition, the company's goal is to exploit both the parent and the child for raw user data in order to generate profit. When confronted with this dissonance, Life360 states that any arising issues lie with the individual rather than with the application. However, there is a clear causal relation between the use of geotracking applications and negative effects on a child's development and parent-child relations (see Burnell et al. 2023; Hasinoff 2017; Simpson 2014). Thus, the application is far from neutral.

This paper will first explain how parental values, as reflected by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), can be described as notions of development, freedom, privacy, protection from harm and exploitation, and putting a child's best interest above anything else. Then, it will explicate Life360's functionalities, providing a general context against which the discussion of values can be held. It will then identify the values put forward by the marketing material of Life360. Though these values, at first glance, align with those in the UNCRC, there are definite tensions between the marketing material and the actual workings and effects of the application. Life360 inhibits children's development, fosters a culture of anxiety and infringes on privacy. Finally, I can draw the conclusion that not only are there discrepancies in the values but that, while focussing on generating profit, applications like Life360 cause a dangerous value shift.

Chapter 1: Parental values and the rights of the child

This paper takes a value-oriented approach, as it provides us with a comprehensive understanding of what is at stake, going beyond short-term and superficial outcomes. Value-oriented analysis helps in identifying and resolving conflicts between competing values. While other approaches like a functional analysis and user experience analysis might be logical choices for assessing this issue, taking a value-oriented approach accounts for a more holistic result by expanding on the functionalities and user experiences to pinpoint tensions with ethical guidelines. Engaging in a value-oriented analysis encourages critical reflection on the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and cultural norms that shape our attitudes towards technologies like Life360. It fosters a deeper understanding of the ethical complexities and trade-offs involved. Another reason for examining values rather than user experiences and perceptions of the application is that Life360 normalises certain behaviours that, on a deeper level, conflict with our accepted values. This implies that user experiences may not necessarily reveal issues, because positive user experiences, despite a dissonance with underlying values, stem from the application's design and marketing. The issue then is that there is a dissonance between how applications like Life360 are perceived and what their real-life effects are (Marx and Steeves 2010, 225).

When assessing this issue from a value-oriented approach, a significant challenge is that parental values are, to a considerable extent, personal. Therefore, it can be difficult to establish an account of what parental values are shared across families, and construct a general account of the values that parents hold. However, there are sources that allow us to extract values that we can reasonably expect the vast majority of parents to subscribe to. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hence UNCRC) from 1989 is one of those documents. The UNCRC is a comprehensive human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. Adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989, the UNCRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, underscoring its global significance and the universal recognition of children's rights (UNICEF n.d.). The roots of the UNCRC can be traced back

to earlier efforts to protect children's rights. In 1924, the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was the first international recognition of children's rights. After World War II, the United Nations took over and expanded these efforts, resulting in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959. However, this declaration was not legally binding, which led to the push for a more comprehensive and enforceable framework (United Nations n.d.). The drafting of the UNCRC began in 1979, designated as the International Year of the Child, under the guidance of the Polish government. The process involved extensive consultation with various stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and children themselves. The final document was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and opened for signature and ratification (United Nations n.d.). Since its adoption the UNCRC has led to significant improvements in the lives of children around the world. Many countries have reformed their laws, policies, and practices to better align with the principles of the Convention. Issues such as child labour, child trafficking, access to education, and juvenile justice have seen considerable attention and action. The United Nations writes annual reports on the implementation of the Convention (United Nations n.d.). This chapter will explicitly outline the values articulated in its articles. Marx and Steeves (2010) concur the issue of children's role in surveillance is best approached from a human rights point of view, as it enables one to go further than questions regarding data protection, and leaves room to consider longer range and social impacts (Marx and Steeves 2010, 224).

1.1 A child's best interests

The paramount value is prioritising the child's best interests above all else. This is explicated in article 3.1, which states that "[i]n all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (UNCRC, art 3.1). Article 9.3 adds that even in matters within the family the child's best interests are most important: "States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests" (UNCRC, art 9.3). In addition, the Convention holds parents responsible for

protecting these interests, as seen in article 18.1, which states that “[...] Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern” (UNCRC, art 18.1). To summarise, actively advocating for a child’s best interests is, according to the UNCRC, an important value in general, but more specifically in the relation between parent and child, as the UNCRC notes that parents are responsible for looking out for their child’s best interests.

1.2 Development

A second value we can derive from the UNCRC is development. In different articles of the UNCRC it becomes apparent that there is an agreement about the fact that children should have ample space to develop and that their development should be actively encouraged and not hindered. This is reflected in article 6.2, which states that “States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child” (UNCRC, art 6.2). This does not merely refer to physical but also to psychological development, as made explicit in article 27.1: “States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” (UNCRC, art 27.1). Once again, we see that parents carry the responsibility of ensuring these conditions: “The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development” (UNCRC, art 27.2). The importance of development is also apparent in the articles that concern education. Article 29.1 (a) states that “[States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to t]he development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”. Subsection (d) adds that education must also be directed to “[t]he preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society [...]” (UNCRC, art 29.1 (a, d)). Converting the articles above to value, it becomes apparent from these articles that we hold the value that parents should encourage and facilitate their children’s development, not only on a physical level, but on a psychological level as well. From the articles concerning education, we can derive that the final result we wish to see,

is that the child grows up to be a responsible, autonomous adult, having developed their abilities to their fullest potential.

1.3 Freedom

To ensure this development a child needs the freedom to explore themselves and the world around them. As Oostveen et al. put it, freedom is a prerequisite for development (Oostveen et al. 2014, 586). This view is reflected in article 12.1, which states that “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UNCRC, art 12.1). The sentiment returns in article 13.1, which states that “[t]he child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice” (UNCRC, art 13.1). Article 15.1 of the UNCRC mentions that “States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly” (UNCRC, art. 15.1). In the second section of the article the Convention says that “[n]o restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others” (UNCRC, art. 15.2). Essentially, the UNCRC states that children should have the freedom to figure out who they are as a person, seek information and media that aligns with their personality, and associate with whomever they wish, as long as it does not threaten their own well-being or that of others. This gives a child the freedom they need to flourish into an autonomous adult.

1.4 Privacy

In order to safeguard a person’s well-being and allow for development, privacy is an important right to protect. The UNCRC reflects that, just like adults, children have a right to privacy. Article 16.1 states that “[n]o child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful

attacks on his or her honour and reputation” (UNCRC, art 16.1). Additionally, section 2 adds that “[t]he child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks” (UNCRC, art 16.2). Privacy within the realms of family plays a crucial role in nurturing trust, autonomy and healthy relationships. It allows children to develop a sense of individuality and personal space, which is essential for their emotional and psychological development. In addition, privacy within the family encourages open communication. Members of the family are more likely to share their thoughts and feelings when they feel that their personal boundaries are respected. If the goal for the family is to be a safe and supportive environment, their respect for each other’s personal privacy and an absence of intrusive behaviours that lead to anxiety and stress, is crucial. Additionally, children deserve privacy in relation to the public world. It is for this reason that frameworks such as the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (hence COPPA) were instated. These frameworks aim to protect children’s privacy in their direct relation to the outside world as people who are not yet equipped to properly consent to certain practises. COPPA is especially important in the case of Life360. This Act protects children up until thirteen years old by prohibiting companies like Life360 to process their data for marketing purposes. This will return in later chapters.

1.5 Protection from harm and exploitation

In addition to all values that contribute to a child’s best interests, the UNCRC also reflects that children should be protected from harm and exploitation. Article 19.1 states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child” (UNCRC, art 19.1). These protections are not exclusive to external threats. When the family is harmful to the child, residing there would be against the child’s best interests. Therefore, the UNCRC states, according to article 20.1, that “[a] child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State” (UNCRC, art 20.1). In addition to

being protected from direct harm, the UNCRC also holds that a child should not be exploited. As stated by article 32, “States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development” (UNCRC, art 32). Article 36 adds that “States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare” (UNCRC, art 36). This does not only apply to what States Parties must do, parents also have duties in making children aware of their rights as stated in article 14.2 “States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child” (UNCRC, art 14.2).

Protection from harm and exploitation, privacy, freedom, develop, and a child's best interests are all values we can derive from the UNCRC, creating a characterisation of what contemporary parental values are held by our society. By assessing the issue of Life360 as a form of care through this value-oriented framework, a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the ethical dimensions involved can be put together. Through this lens, we can critically examine how technologies align or conflict with societal and familial values. By creating an account of the values that Life360 holds and putting them next to the established parental values, similarities and differences will become apparent, explicating where the tensions lie when companies say that geotracking can be used as a form of parental care.

Chapter 2: Life360: Background and functionalities

To fully grasp the issue at hand and understand how the established values can be reflected in the application, it is important to delve deeper into Life360's functionalities and inner workings to create a clear context against which the values can be evaluated. Life360 is one of the most popular applications that has the purpose of tracking the location within family context. On March 23th 2023 Life360 announced that they have surpassed fifty million monthly users (Life360 2023a). They state that the application is now used by one in nine U.S. families and is amongst the top fifty of daily downloaded iOS and Android applications, illustrating the immense growth the application has undergone since its initial launch in 2008. It was first released on Android, but in August of 2010, an iOS version was made available (Schildt et al. 2016). Life360 once started out as an application to find loved ones after hurricane Katrina hit (Aagaard et al. 2022, 2666). Since then, it has grown immensely in its user base as well as in its functionalities. Founded by Chris Hulls and Alex Haro, the application aims to connect family members by tracking their movements and sharing that information with the other members of the family. This chapter will further expand on the application's main location and driving safety features, their additional products, and the way that Life360 is able to prosper financially, despite the fact that its main functionalities are free.

2.1 Location safety

The application's main feature is location safety. Users can follow other members of their 'circle', be it family members or a group of friends, on a small map, which gives a precise location of the other users. It is possible to share a less precise version of one's location for a temporary period. This functionality is referred to as 'bubbles'. "Instead of showing the exact address, the app displays a generalised area," Life360 clarifies (Life360 2023b). Life360 also retains a history of a user's location, the length of which depending on the user's subscription plan. Along with being able to follow others live on a map, Life360 offers a functionality which can best be described as 'geofencing'. By setting a digital 'fence' around an area, users get a notification when someone in their circle has entered or left a certain location. This means that parents can get a notification whenever their

child has arrived at or returned from school. Another functionality regarding location safety is having access to crime report in the area. Users can see what crimes have occurred where and when, allowing them to “make safe decisions” (see figure 1). It, however, remains mute what these safe decisions would look like. Hasinoff (2017) shares confusion about this feature and notes that the crimes that are shown in the application have already been reported to the police. Therefore, she wonders what the real benefit is to having this functionality and how it actually contributes to safety (Hasinoff 2017, 500). Life360 does not give us an answer to this question. However, we can speculate that a possible user’s response would be to avoid the location in question, even though such decision has no real effect on their safety. Related to dangerous situations, Life360 has incorporated a ‘panic button’ in their application. Especially targeting children, the panic button allows the user to send their current location to all other members of the circle, along with the message that they need assistance.



Figure 1: Location safety features on Life360’s website (source: <https://www.life360.com/location-sharing/>). Accessed on May 9th 2024.

2.2 Driving safety

Since the majority of teenagers in the U.S. are in possession of a driver’s licence, Life360 also offers a wide array of safety features aimed at young drivers’ parents. This includes tracking their child’s current speed, crash detection, roadside assistance and free towing (see figure 3). The services, once again, depend on the subscription plan that the users have selected. Using the data Life360 collects of their users, the application creates individual and family reports on their driving behaviour. According to testimonies published on Life360’s website, all these features help families navigate driving related

issues. A mother stated: “My daughter hit a large pothole and overcorrected, which put her car into the other lane where she was hit by an oncoming truck. The car was totaled, but thankfully she wasn’t badly injured. I was able to keep a calm, clear head through the entire ordeal because Life360 notified me of the accident from the beginning” (see figure 2). Life360 has collaborated with the German car manufacturer BMW group in accordance with their aim to integrate their application with cars. (Simpson 2014, 279).

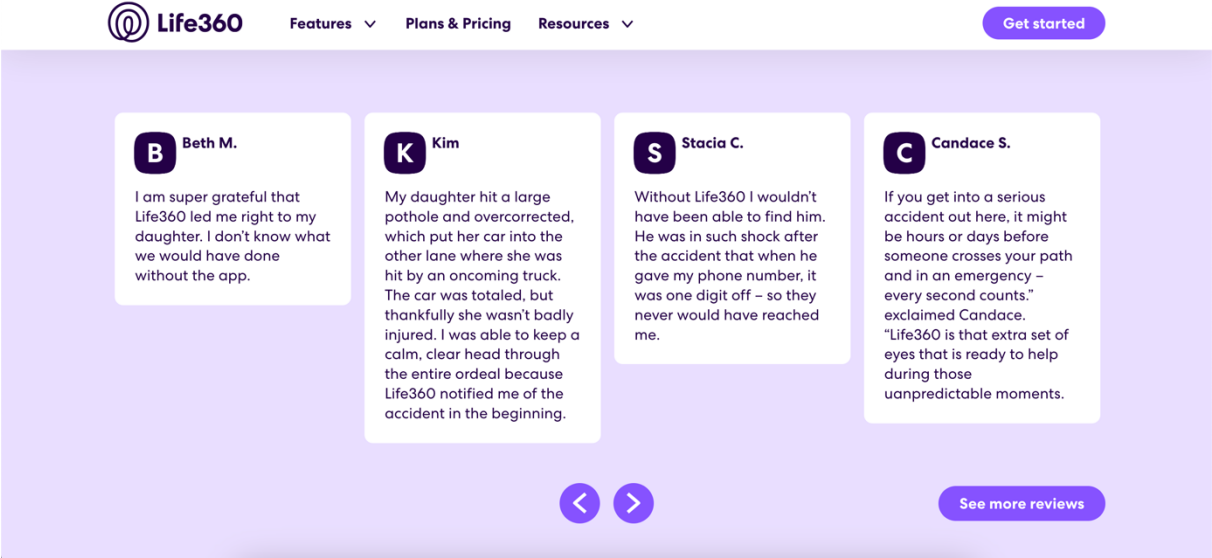


Figure 2: Review about the driving safety features by a mother named Kim on the Life360 website (source: <https://www.life360.com/driving-safety/>). Accessed on May 9th 2024.

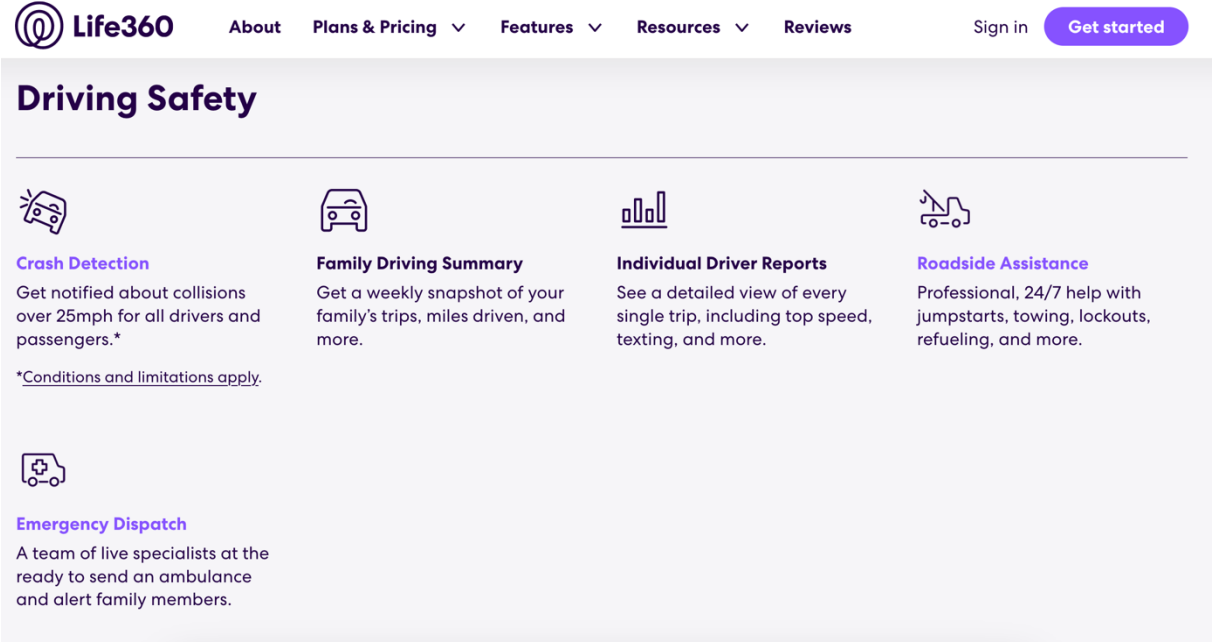
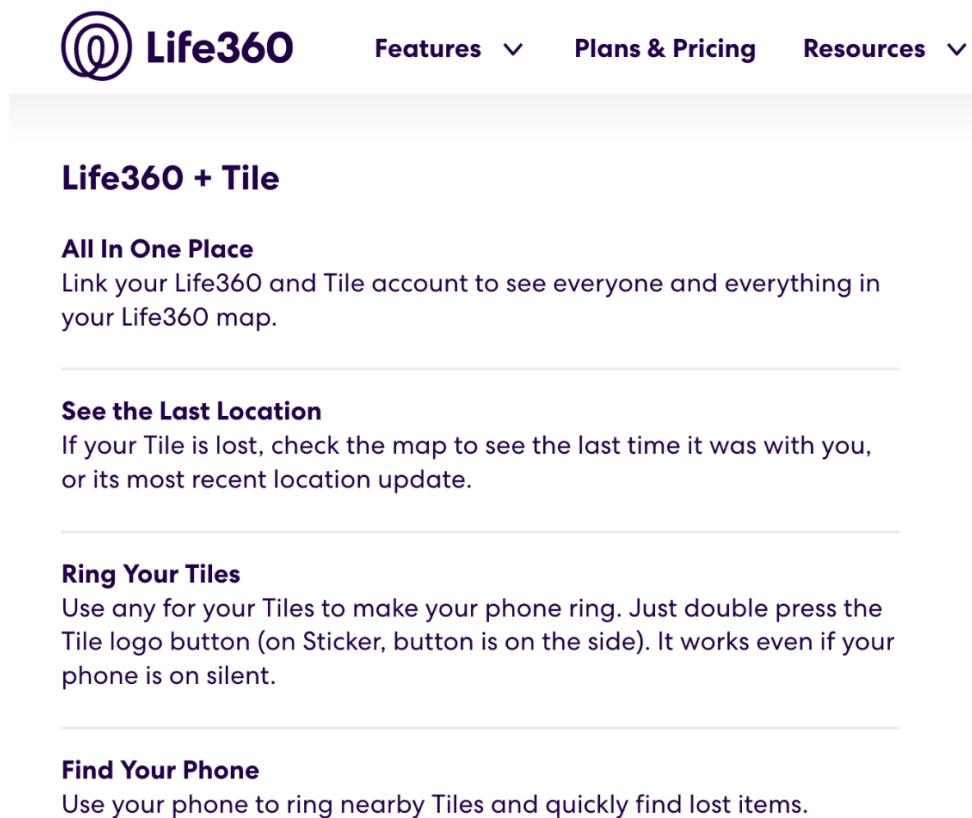


Figure 3: Driving safety features as described on Life360’s website (source: <https://www.life360.com/driving-safety/>). Accessed on May 9th 2024.

2.3 Tile and Jibit

The company behind Life360 offers more than just its application. It has also acquired the companies Tile and Jibit (Life360 2021a). Tile makes physical tracking devices that clip onto objects, like a school bag or valuable items, allowing one to find them when lost. Jibit is a company similar to Tile whose products are used to track small children without mobile phone, as well as pets. Life360 has acquired Tile for 205 million dollars as announced on their website in November 2021 (Life360 2021a). Combining Life360's existing network, which consisted of 33 million smartphones at the time, with Tile's, resulted in an expansion by roughly ten times (Pace et al. 2023, 1). Both these additional products can be synced with the application (see figure 4).



The screenshot shows the Life360 website header with the logo and navigation links: Features, Plans & Pricing, and Resources. Below the header is a section titled "Life360 + Tile" with four sub-sections, each separated by a horizontal line:

- All In One Place**: Link your Life360 and Tile account to see everyone and everything in your Life360 map.
- See the Last Location**: If your Tile is lost, check the map to see the last time it was with you, or its most recent location update.
- Ring Your Tiles**: Use any for your Tiles to make your phone ring. Just double press the Tile logo button (on Sticker, button is on the side). It works even if your phone is on silent.
- Find Your Phone**: Use your phone to ring nearby Tiles and quickly find lost items.

Figure 4: Tile's functionalities as described on Life360's website (source: <https://www.life360.com/tile/>). Accessed on May 9th 2024.

2.4 How does Life360 make profit?

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the main functionalities of Life360 are free to use. However, in order to maintain an application with such a wide user base, financial means are a necessity. The question then is, how does Life360 raise the funds to provide

their services? For Life360 the mechanisms of surveillance take place on two different levels. Not only is the application meant for surveillance practises in the family, in the contemporary digital landscape, companies like Life360 utilise surveillance on a bigger scale, as they operate within the framework of surveillance capitalism. Surveillance capitalism is an economic system in which user data is commodified and monetised without the user's explicit consent. Despite offering seemingly free services, these companies leverage collected data to target advertisements, shape consumer behaviour, and generate revenue.

Life360 explains how they utilise user data in a blog on their website called "Respecting Your Privacy Choices" from March 29th, 2024 (Life360 2024a). In this text they claim that they have strict policies in place for internal use of data as well as that they invest in security to prevent unauthorised access to user data. The first way Life360 uses the data they collect is by displaying advertisements in their application, for which they use Google's AdMob which they have "selected for its commitment to transparency and user choice in advertising" (Life360 2024a). It is possible to not have advertisements in the application by paying for a membership. However, that does not mean that your data is no longer used or collected by Life360, as it is still used in their collaborations with Placer.ai and Arity. Placer is a data analytics company which Life360 uses to aggregate the data they collect, which no longer makes it possible to connect the data to the individual. "Placer uses this aggregated data to build models and sells these models to customers like city planners, developers, and retail businesses to help them make decisions (such as where to add a stop sign or open a new location)," Life360 states (Life360 2024a). Arity is a similar company, but as opposed to Life360 their main focus is on traffic related information. In addition, the company feeds Life360's driving related features such as drive and crash detection. "[...] and we allow Arity to use location data from our app to derive traffic and transportation insights. Importantly, these insights never include personally identifiable information. Arity sells these aggregated and anonymized insights to organizations" (Life360 2024a). In addition, Life360 also partners with Arity for targeted advertisements and offers personal deals for insurance.

Though Life360 is seemingly open about their practises in this statement, the transparency and ethical implications of such practices remain complex and often opaque, as illustrated in Life360's statement. Though the company underscores its commitment to data security and user privacy, the intricate web of data sharing and utilisation still exists. While users may opt for paid subscriptions to mitigate advertisements, the practice of data collection and its utilisation persist through partnerships with companies like Placer.ai and Arity, who shape markets and influence consumer behaviour. Consequently, in the relation between the user and the company, Life360 strives to maintain opacity, utilising complex legal jargon and documents to obscure their practices. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that surveillance capitalism frequently operates in regulatory grey areas. For instance, Life360 does not disclose a comprehensive list of third-party data recipients because current U.S. legislation does not mandate such transparency. This lack of disclosure is alarming, as it implies that users remain uninformed about the specific uses of their data. The difficulty in tracing data flows and understanding their utilisation is a significant problem in performing research in this domain. The information that is available is typically provided by the company itself, raising concerns about its completeness and accuracy. There are several plausible reasons for a company to withhold certain information, like the fact that they often operate in regulatory grey areas. Additionally, given that Life360 is the sole proprietor of this knowledge, it has the discretion to control the dissemination of information. These dynamics highlight the bigger structural challenges inherent in the intersection of technology, capitalism, and ethics, underscoring the significance of these debates within the field of the Philosophy of Technology.

Chapter 3: Life360: Values in marketing

The last chapter examined the functionalities of Life360 as well as their inner workings. Against this background, an account of Life360’s values in marketing can be constructed. These values are important, since marketing and promotion of geotracking applications communicates a wide variety of message about family life (Simpson 2014, 275). The prominent values that are put forward by Life360 in their marketing are safety, efficiency and convenience, freedom and independence, family, and privacy. This chapter will delve deeper into how the values are communicated to (potential) users and how they are used as a crucial marketing strategy. Communicating certain values and using those to connect with families is important to Life360. This is affirmed by their Chief Marketing Officer Mike Zeman, who states that “I was also struck by one of the company’s core values of ‘Be a Good Person’. While simple, I firmly believe that companies founded on integrity and trust are the ones that ultimately win” (Life360 2024b).

3.1 Safety

According to Life360, their primary goal is for their application to keep children safe from harm. Since this goal is central to the application, ‘safety’ is a clear core value that comes to the fore when analysing their material. When navigating to information on functionality on their website, the first three submenu’s are “location safety”, “driving safety”, and “digital safety”. These are the names for the main features that Life360 offers, accompanied by “emergency assistance”, “phone tracking”, and “roadside services”. Life360 stresses the importance of safety by including the word in three of their main functionalities. Additionally, the importance of the value of safety is concurred by testimonials and reviews that Life360 shares on their website. A user of the application says that “emergency dispatch makes you feel like there is an angel watching over your family” in one of Life360 promotional videos (Life360 Inc. 2021a).

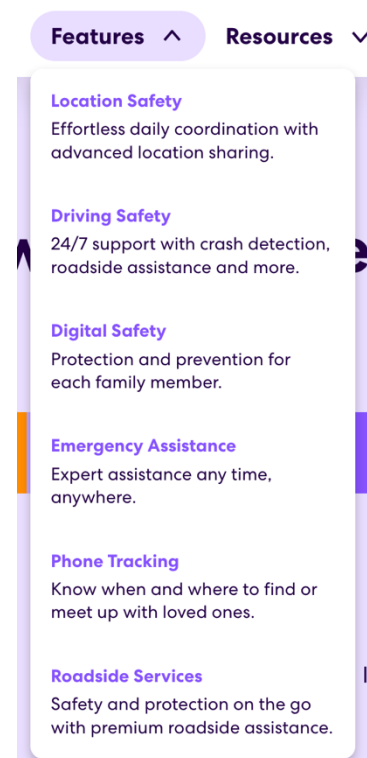


Figure 5: Functionalities of Life360 in the dropdown menu (source: <https://www.life360.com/>) Accessed on May 8th 2024.

The values do indeed seem to resonate with users. Basile et al. (2022) researched the influence of digital parenting on the work-life balance, and one participant, who is a mother of a 16 and an 18-year-old daughter, notes that using a location tracking application for her children impacts her feeling of a safety net. She states that “[i]t impacts the safety net that I feel, that I can be in Boston and I can check on my kids, whereas without technology I wouldn’t be able to do that. I guess the impact is a feeling of reassurance that my kids are fine” (Basile et al. 2022, 182). The value of safety is a vital part of the application and a big reason that parents opt for using Life360. The effect of this strategy is compounded by a high degree of perceived unsafety by parents. This is contradicted by the dropping rates of violent crime. This dissonance is something that will return in more detail in later chapters. However, for now, it serves my point to note that this experience of parental anxiety is what makes the value of safety such a potent marketing device.

3.2 Efficiency and convenience

A second value that has a prominent place in Life360’s image is one of efficiency and convenience. The challenge that the application recognises is that different family members have different busy schedules and must be at different locations throughout the day. Actively staying in touch with the other members of the family can be challenging, especially if at least half of them are minors. Children, even when they reach their teenager years, still need to learn to communicate effectively and due to the fact that their brains are still developing, thinking through logistic situations can be challenging. Life360 aims to take this inconvenience of challenging communication away by being an alternative for calling and texting about these practical issues. One of the parents in a promotional video states that “[w]e don’t have to constantly check in and they know where we are” (Life360 Inc. 2021b). Another said “[w]e don’t have text and call like we used to. It has really changed our lives” (Life360 Inc. 2021b). It can indeed be challenging for a parent to keep track of the schedules and responsibilities of their children. The ‘about’ page of Life360 explains that “Life360 gives parents a break”. They argue that their application makes parenting more efficient and convenient due to the sharing of location and other information concerning wellbeing and whereabouts, which takes away the

need to constantly be in active communication. This, just as we saw with the value of safety, resonates with Life360's audience. One of the mothers interviewed in Basile et al. (2022) stated that "[j]ust being able to click on that button and see, okay, Ashley's still at school for volleyball and the boys are still at school for soccer. And just knowing where everyone is can be very helpful" (Basile et al. 2022, 182). Essentially, working parents are aided in their struggle to combine childcare with their jobs by employing surveillance technologies in the care for their children. They no longer have to be physically present to know what is going on around their child. This new way of monitoring can allow for greater flexibility in the parents' work, and therefore makes being a parent more convenient and efficient.

3.3 Freedom and independence

Though one's initial intuition might signal that geotracking restricts freedom, Life360 argues it does the opposite. The company asserts that their application grants children greater freedom by alleviating parental fears, as parents are more willing to allow their children to engage in independent activities and visit various locations knowing they can monitor their whereabouts. Essentially, Life360 argues that the element of risk in children gaining independence is both trivial and unnecessary. They maintain that independence and safety can coexist, advocating for greater freedom for children on the condition that their location is trackable. On Life360's 'about' page it says: "[w]e believe safety and independence can go hand-in-hand". Below this, they differentiate between "independence for families," "independence for parents" and "independence for teens" (see figure 6). This is confirmed by a child user in a promotional video saying, "I like how it kind of gives you your distance, so I can kind of manage *my* time" (Life360 Inc. 2021b).

We believe safety and independence can go hand-in-hand.

Independence for families

Because we offer such a comprehensive range of safety features, families can feel free of daily worry. Free to explore, adventure, try new things, and trust themselves and one another.



Independence for parents

Every parent has an idea of who they want to be for their kids, and then reality sets in. Life360 gives parents a break. Because when all their safety bases are covered, they can reclaim their parenting style, and even free up some time in the day.

Independence for teens

Teens want space to experiment and figure out what life's all about. They care about their friends and want to feel connected. Life360 gives them a way to stay close to all their Circles—family, friends, teams, etc—but with room to roam safely.



Figure 6: Life360 describing on their website how their application advocates for independence (source: <https://www.life360.com/about/>). Accessed on May 8th 2024.

3.4 Family and connectivity

Life360 is a geotracking application specifically marketed to families. Consequently, it is not surprising that their promotional materials emphasise the importance of family and connectivity within the family unit. An informational blog post on their website, for instance, features the subheading, “Why It Is Important to Share Location With Family”. The post asserts that “[...] being able to stay in the loop is a great way to keep families connected” (Life360 2024c). Similar blog posts recount family stories, reinforcing the application’s primary focus on parents who wish to foster a close relationship with their children. The fact that the application is marketed towards families and is dedicated to connecting them underscores the significance of these values within Life360’s marketing strategy.

3.5 Privacy

In the case of Life360, privacy is a value that is relevant on two different levels. Firstly, it is relevant in the relation between the company and the user. Secondly, privacy has a role within the family, specifically between parent and child. Life360 addresses both of these levels. When handling personal, sensitive information such as location data, privacy is a crucial value, Life360 argues. The earlier statement, which outlined their economic inner workings and collaborations with Placer.ai and Arity, reflects the company's aim to show that they wish to be transparent about their actions related to user privacy. However, when it comes to privacy within the family, Life360 gives less weight to the value of privacy. Context is important for a value like privacy. People respond differently to the same technology, based on the context in which it is used. Where geotracking in parenting is widely accepted, people would respond much more negatively to a government doing the same (Mavoa, Coglán and Nansen 2023, 47). Similarly, privacy within the family is seen as much less important than privacy in relation to a company and the outside world.

Let us take a look at the role of privacy in the relation between user and company first. It is important to note that just because Life360 aims to communicate that they value privacy, this does not mean that the company is really transparent. The earlier mentioned challenges regarding the opaque position of the company still stand. However, they do

want to make users believe that they are transparent about their practises. Visitors of the website can navigate to the privacy policy on the website through the 'resources' menu. The policy states, “[w]e take your privacy as seriously as you do, and we are committed to protecting it. This Privacy Policy explains our practices regarding the collection, use, disclosure, transfer, storage, and protection of personal information that is collected through our products and services, as well as your choices regarding the same” (Life360 2024d).

When we look at the role of privacy in the domain of the family, Life360 places less importance on privacy, as they feel privacy makes ensuring a child’s safety more difficult. Life360 shares their thoughts on children and privacy in the blog “What is The Deal With Privacy for Kids?” This post takes a more value-laden approach to the topic of privacy in relation to children. The post is written by Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, who has joined Life360 as a Family Expert in March 2019. She writes about how she views privacy for children and how she sees the role of geotracking applications. She starts the blog by saying that she thinks the conversation about privacy is much different than it used to be when she was young herself. She describes how her only real private sphere was her diary: “My parents knew not to mess with the diary. And that right there was where the conversation of my right to privacy began and ended” (Life360 2023c). She goes on to say that children nowadays have more privacy than she had, because her social life played out in her parent’s living room and on the kitchen landline. In contrast to this, children nowadays have taken their social lives online, where parents have much less access to who they are talking to and about what. From this she concludes; “I wonder if the fervour around privacy for kids these days has gone a little too far” (Life360 2023c). What children really need, she argues, is involved parents that are on top of the lives of their kids. “And something like location sharing using Life360 is an ideal opportunity to make technology work for you and your child,” Lapointe adds (Life360 2023c). She shares how she announced to her own children, who were 12- and 15-year-old at the time, that they would be starting to use Life360. She states that “[n]either one of them wondered about privacy. It wasn’t an issue for me and so, it wasn’t an issue for them” (Life360 2023c). She expands on this by saying that Life360 researched that 86% of teens in a study performed by Life360 were comfortable using location sharing applications. Because children want

their parents to be part of their lives, geotracking applications are becoming increasingly normalised, Lapointe argues. From the fact that the average user interacts with the application fourteen times a day, Lapointe deduces that more families share the enthusiasm about the application. Using an application like Life360 shows your children that you are in charge, Lapointe argues, and allows you to keep track of how your child is developing. This passage reiterates the notion that prioritising privacy can compromise a child's safety. Lapointe suggests that the growing emphasis on children's privacy is in conflict with parental involvement and guidance essential for ensuring a child's safety. Not only the values promoted by Life360 are important, but their hierarchy is crucial as well. Life360 appears to acknowledge the importance of privacy, but not at the expense of safety.

Chapter 4: Tensions in values

Taken at face value, the values that the UNCRC reflects and the ones that Life360 puts forward in their materials might seem to have a lot in common. Do both not strive for child development, freedom and independence, amongst other things? Though this seems to be the case, there are definite tensions between the values of the UNCRC and the values that Life360 truly propagates. The values put forward in marketing material are meant to connect to the parental values that are held. However, the values embedded in marketing are not necessarily the same values that are inherent to the actions that the application promotes with their functionalities. However, these values are more silent. To uncover these true values, we must take a closer look at what the effects of these functionalities are and how they steer its users' behaviour. This is why this paper's main argument states that the values do not align, *despite appearances*. This chapter will assess the values put forward in the marketing material closer and show how the values that are embedded in the application's functionality do not match the messages Life360 distributes.

4.1 Family

First, we must address a presumption that Life360 holds at the basis of their most basic idea for the application. This presumption is that the family is always a safe space. However, this view is rather naïve, as harm done to children often takes place within families. In all homicide cases with known perpetrators, 21,9% did not have a relation to their victim. When we focus on cases where the victim was under five years old, only 3% of those victims were killed by strangers. Most of these victims were killed by a parent. (Cooper and Smith 2011 in Hasinoff 2017). However, for Life360, familiar spaces such as the home are portrayed as safe, while unfamiliar places are associated with danger or a lack of safety for children (Hasinoff 2017, 500). The company draws a connection between unknown public spaces and potential hazards, contrasting these with the perceived security of the home environment. By portraying the home environment and the family as a safe space, Life360 not only fails to assess true sources of harm and danger, but they also allow and enhance the existing behaviours of abusive family members. They enable and magnify problems like parents being overbearing, restricting free movement and breaching their children's privacy.

A disturbing example for abuse can be found in Garg et al. (2023). In this paper, a user of Life360 talks about their mother's abusive use of the application. The user states that due to an unequal power dynamic between their mother and them, the user is forced to install applications that violate their privacy (Garg et al. 2023). A different user in the same paper complains that the application has negative effects on their family, i.e. on their mother. She "freaks out" when the application has technical difficulties or when the location's accuracy is even slightly off. The user states that it makes their parents paranoid and makes them want to know where they are at all times, though the user states explicitly that they do not have a record of defiant behaviour at all. Therefore, the paranoia is unwarranted. The user states that they feel years of building trust within the family were ruined by the introduction of Life360 (Garg et al. 2023). Another example that illustrates the potentially harmful ways in which Life360 can be used is given by Tilley (2014). A telecom company in Saudia-Arabia requested a functionality which allowed male users to stay invisible while still being able to closely follow other female users. Life360 turned down this request. However, as we see in the other examples, even if the functionality is not build-in, power relations between parents and children make it very easy for the parent to request that the child shares their location, while turning off their own (Hasinoff 2017, 504).

The first tension that arises between protecting a child's safety and their well-being, two important values put forward by the UNCRC, is that Life360 presumes that the family is a safe space and thereby ignores the reality that a lot of harm and abuse takes place within the home. This simplified view of equating the unfamiliar space with danger and the familiar space with safety has put serious strain on users' relationships with other family members. Reviewers state that the application has negative effects on their families, exacerbating problems of their parents being overbearing, not trusting their children and experiencing paranoia and anxiety when they are unable to locate their child in the application.

4.2 The illusion of safety

As noted earlier, parents experience a high level of perceived unsafety that does not match with the reality of decreasing crime levels. The disparity between parents' perception of safety and the declining rates of violent crimes has been a longstanding issue. Oostveen et al. (2014) note that abduction, murder or road accidents are seen as the main concerns to parents when thinking about the dangers their children could face. Though there has been a 34% decline in traffic accidents between 1994 and 2007 (Oostveen et al. 2014, 581), the fear is still heavily present in the functionalities that Life360 offers that focus on road safety. A similar principle goes for kidnappings orchestrated by strangers, where numbers are much lower than commonly thought. However, this type of kidnapping is always reported broadly in the media, skewing the view on the severity of the issue (Oostveen et al. 2014, 581).

Life360 plays into the perceived fear of parents by offering a solution to a problem that does not really exist. In addition to the problem not being rooted in reality, the solution that Life360 offers would not help secure the safety of children either. Hasinoff (2017) notes that knowing a child's location does not provide any information about the child's condition or safety. Life360 merely offers location data, which does not indicate whether a child is in danger or not (Hasinoff 2017, 498-501), but rather relies on the parent's interpretation of the possible dangers in that place. Simpson (2014) notes something similar, stating that “[t]o some extent such outcomes based on a safer family are illusory for clearly such an app cannot actually protect a person beyond enabling the parent, for example, notifying law enforcement agencies if the child is not able to be located or is observed to be in danger” (Simpson 2014, 276). Equating knowledge of whereabouts with knowledge of well-being is a simplification similar to the assumption that the family is inherently safe while unknown spaces signify danger, which Life360 in its perception of the family as a safe space. Thus, the idea that having access to a child's location information is the same as ensuring their safety is illusory. As previously mentioned, the majority of abuse takes place in familiar locations such as the home, after-school activities, or the school itself. It would be more accurate to say that Life360 values knowledge or transparency. Marx and Steeves (2010), Oostveen et al. (2014), Shade

(2011), Simpson (2014), and Hasinoff (2017) have all noted that companies like Life360 exaggerate risks and that they offer a solution to this problem that is merely an illusion.

Life360's choice for the word safety is understandable, however. Because parents experience significant anxiety regarding their child's well-being, and this anxiety serves as an effective marketing tool, promising to alleviate concerns about their child's well-being effectively addresses a critical parental concern. Because even though the perception of danger does not accurately reflect reality, what *is* genuine is parents' anxiety regarding the potential danger to their children. Life360, despite not providing any actual safety guarantees, does alleviate this anxiety. Life360's marketing material notes how it is supposed to give you peace of mind. This sentiment is reflected in the reviews, as seen above. Therefore, it is possible that parents do feel peace of mind being able to follow their children. However, this is not without risks. Firstly, the misguided sense of safety can mislead parents about their child's well-being. The child might be at a location that makes the parent believe they are well. If they had relied on texting or calling, a different judgement might have been made. Secondly, although the anxiety is temporarily alleviated, it returns even more intensely when the application is unavailable or removed for any reason. We have seen this reflected in user reviews mentioned earlier, where parents became obsessed with knowing their child's location after the introduction of Life360. The introduction of the application has created a new artificial need. This need to know a child's location was not prevalent before it became technologically possible (Hasinoff 2017, 508). While a few parents might have had this specific concern before, many did not. Now that the possibility exists, some parents have become reliant on it. When this artificial need is satisfied, parents feel reassured. However, when the application is no longer available, the artificial need persists, leaving a sense of longing that was previously non-existent.

In addition, Simpson (2014) notes that the marketing material of applications like Life360 indeed has serious consequences concerning the expectations of how children respond to dangerous situations. These applications propagate relying on a panic button instead of promoting resilience and independence to deal with dangerous situations a child might find themselves in. "Resort to the panic button does not promote a safer childhood, but it

promotes a dependent, even dangerous childhood” (Simpson 2014, 277). It becomes clear that the well-being of children is not the application’s main concern. What the application does, is exacerbate parental fears in order to market their product. Rooney (2010) observes that real-time location surveillance has increasingly been marketed to individual consumers rather than to companies focused on surveillance. This trend indicates that companies identified an opportunity in a new market by exploiting parental fears about their children's well-being. In summary, the fears underpinning the demand for applications like Life360 are exaggerated, and the solution provided by Life360 offers no real insight into a child's well-being. Values of knowledge and transparency are wrongfully labelled as safety, which has crucial consequences in assessing real dangerous situations for the parent as well as for the child.

4.3 Privacy

Perhaps the clearest dissonance between Life360 and the UNCRC can be seen in the value of privacy. While Life360 emphasises the importance of personal data privacy for its users, it does not attach the same level of importance to privacy within the family sphere. Where the parental values argue that children need privacy both to develop and for their general well-being, Life360 argues that more privacy for children compromises their safety. Life360's perspective suggests that privacy and safety are in opposition. While they acknowledge the importance of privacy, they do not consider it more important than safety (Hasinoff 2017, 502). However, this perceived tension between privacy and safety is contested. Daniel Solove, a well-known legal scholar who focuses on the relation between privacy and information technology, argues that the idea that privacy and security are mutually exclusive is a fallacy. According to Solove, the perceived tension implies matters of privacy and safety are all or nothing situations. He notes that “[s]acrificing privacy doesn’t automatically make us more secure. Not all security measures are invasive of privacy. Moreover, no correlation has been established between the effectiveness of a security measure and a corresponding decrease in liberty. In other words, the most effective security measures need not be the most detrimental to liberty” (Solove 2011, 34). The idea that giving children privacy makes them less safe is following the same logic that Solove here describes.

In the case of Life360, it is clear where the tension stems from. Earlier, when the tensions in the value of safety were discussed, it was stated that multiple authors concluded how safety is not the best description of what Life360 chases. Instead, Life360's value of safety could better be described as knowledge or transparency. When we put transparency next to privacy, it is clear how the two values are seen as mutually exclusive by Life360. Not only does the application advocate for openness and transparency, the way that the application's features are designed also encourage a specific way of obtaining information. Burnell et al. (2023) distinguishes between different approaches parents can use to obtain information about their children. They differentiate between child disclosure and parental solicitation (Stattin and Kerr 2000 quoted in Burnell et al. 2023). Child disclosure refers to situations where the child voluntarily provides information, whereas parental solicitation involves parents actively seeking out information about their child. The report by Burnell et al. focuses on problematic behaviours in adolescents, such as drug and alcohol use, and other forms of defiant behaviour. According to the researchers, child disclosure leads to a decrease in these types of problems, whereas parental solicitation exacerbates them.

This example demonstrates that child disclosure yields many positive effects, whereas parental solicitation does not ameliorate the issues faced by the child. Extending this to the case study of communication about whereabouts, Life360 exemplifies parental solicitation. In this context, child disclosure would involve the child independently texting or calling about their plans, whereas Life360 allows for parents to actively seek out information about their child. This means that a child is unable to make their own active decisions about what information they want to share and when they want to share it. Through Life360, their role becomes passive and they are aware of the fact that their parents can check their location and any given moment. This means they no longer have their privacy in their own hands. Privacy is a crucial right for children, essential for their development and peace of mind. Life360 threatens this right, as evidenced by a review from a Life360 user: "It's selfish of parents to not take into consideration how the teen may feel about always having this app and the parent giving them a very stalkish feeling; it's very uncomfortable" (Garg et al. 2023, 7).

Returning to privacy in the relation between user and company, the marketing places more importance on advocating for privacy. Here, it seems the values are aligning better again. However, upon closer inspection, this is not the case. In practice, the value of privacy does not consistently align with Life360's actions. The introduction of this thesis already showed that privacy issues between the company and their users are central to the current ethical debate about Life360. After all, it is difficult to believe that a company cares about protecting their user's privacy when they illegally sell their data. However, even when no ill intention is involved, Life360 lacks in taking the proper precautions to ensure the protection of their user data. In December of 2023, Life360 posted a news item on their website called "Protecting Your Life360 Account: An Update", saying that "[w]e recently identified suspicious activity, similar to what we saw in August, in which an unauthorized person used credentials (email address and password) obtained from outside sources to attempt to access a limited number of Life360 accounts. As with the previous occurrence, we have no evidence of unauthorized access to Life360 user location information, payment card information, or physical addresses" (Life360 2023d). Part of this is applicable to any application or service, as attacks on websites and applications are a common threat. It is inevitable that, sometimes, data leaks happen.

However, Life360 could definitely also undertake more action as to prevent these issues. A report by Ali et al. (2020) shows that Life360 does not encrypt their data that is stored on external storage, which is accessible to any other application accessing the SD-card. The report argues that "[d]ata leakages and lack of authentication in such applications are more severe and exposed due to the nature of the data". The report also states that while investigating a vulnerability analysis of Life360, they concluded that the application "should be upgraded in terms of applied technologies and permissions when managing data from children below 13" (Gnanasekaran and De Moor 2023). In summary, along with the fact that Life360 has illegally sold data before, the possibility of sensitive information leaking is exacerbated by the lack of protective measures taken by the company. As a parent, one bears responsibility for the companies to which one exposes their children. If Life360 misuses the data it collects from your child, the parent holds a moral responsibility for that outcome. Therefore, using an application that shows no regard for the sensitive data of one's child contradicts the values of parental care.

4.4 Development and freedom

Let us first look at the claim that Life360 gives children more freedom. Related to a child's right to develop to their fullest potential, the UNCRC argues that children should also have the freedom to do so. However, this becomes difficult when parents become overbearing through applications like Life360. Marciano (2022) argues that there is an assumption by scholars of surveillance and technology that freedom for children to deal with situations themselves is necessary in their development of these relevant skills:

“Surveillance and technology scholars assume that children need their own free and unsupervised spaces (Steeves & Jones, 2010) that allow for heightened mobility (Fotel & Thomsen, 2004) and spontaneous interactions with others to develop independence and autonomy (Livingstone, 2002). Close monitoring, on the other hand, hinders resilience (Livingstone, 2009) and discourages pro-social behavior (Kerr et al., 1999)”
(Marciano 2022, 43).

The key element here is “their own free and unsupervised spaces”. Life360 does not allow for these, as location tracking is aimed to always be on. Simpson (2014) notes that if a child was walking home and chose to take a different route than usual, going through a neighbourhood that the parent would not deem safe, they would be using the functionalities of the application to ensure that their child would change their route by calling them (Simpson 2014, 276). In more extreme cases, this direct involvement in a child's walk home could already be triggered by the fact that the parent is alarmed by the child taking a different route than they usually take. This is caused by the application's connection of unfamiliar spaces with potential danger. The awareness of being monitored can lead to a constrained behaviour pattern, where children might avoid certain activities or social interactions for fear of parental judgment. This constant oversight may hinder the development of critical decision-making skills and self-reliance, as children are less likely to experience situations that require independent problem-solving.

Oostveen et al. (2014) note how childhood experts doubt that children will properly understand the concept of risk if society is too overbearing, taking away the opportunity

to experience risk and understand how to properly use risk to grow but at the same time not underestimate its effects. Risk is needed for children to develop an understanding of the world. However, shielding children from all risk keeps children from developing this understanding. Gill (2007) therefore notes that we must move from a philosophy of protection to adopt a philosophy of resilience (Gill 2007 in Oostveen et al. 2014, 586). Ultimately, while the intention behind geotracking is often protective, it can inadvertently stifle the natural growth of personal freedom and responsibility in young individuals. In comparing their childhood with that of their children, one parent notes that “[c]hildren need freedom to make mistakes/do things their parents don’t know about—it fosters independence. Regular checking would hamper this. I travelled all around Europe as a 20 year old before internet existed and it was really good for my independence—I know my kids won’t have this but I’d like to preserve of it what I can” (Mavoa, Coglan and Nansen 2023, 54).

Second, when using Life360, children lack the opportunity to develop a notion of trust. In examining the concept of 'trust', initially, Rooney (2010) contemplates how children place their trust in others, relying on their good intentions, whether it be parents, caregivers, friends, or even strangers, for various forms of care and protection (Rooney 2010, 346). This extends to considering how children are entrusted with responsibilities, empowering them to take charge and expand their skills. Trusting children not only benefits them but also fosters trustworthiness, as we become more trustworthy when entrusted by others. Through this mutual trust, we cultivate an understanding and appreciation of the value of trust. Therefore, when discussing trust, especially concerning children, Rooney (2010) argues that it is vital to acknowledge confidence in the individual being trusted, emphasising their benefit over that of the one extending trust (Rooney 2010, 346).

While it is natural to recognise life's inherent risks, the prevalent use of surveillance technologies, particularly on children, seems geared toward creating a risk-free environment, prioritising risk avoidance. However, an excessive reliance on such methods can impede children's ability to navigate a balanced relationship between trust and risk effectively (Rooney 2010, 349). The growing prevalence of surveillance technologies also alters children's experience of trust, limiting their autonomy in trusting

others and shaping their understanding of society, crucial for their self-development. This raises the question: If we only trust children or others in their vicinity due to the presence of surveillance technologies, can we genuinely claim to trust them? (Rooney 2010, 353). Using a geotracking application on a child can indicate that they are not considered capable of being independent, which can adversely affect their confidence and self-trust. Additionally, it suggests that the parent does not trust the child to be proactive in their communication or that the parent suspects the child might lie about their whereabouts. This signals a lack of trust in the child, as found by parents in a report on geotracking applications in parenting: “Indeed, some parents identified a risk that children subject to these socio-technological activities may “feel monitored” or “untrusted” (Mavoa, Coglán and Nansen 2023, 54). Crucially, a child needs to feel trusted by adults to develop into a trusting person and to trust those around them. The use of geotracking applications undermines this development of trust and confidence. Though the intentions behind using Life360 might be positive and come from a place of love, not distrust, it cannot be denied that surveillance technologies take away the opportunity for children to further their self-reliance, trust in themselves and others, and problem-solving skills (Marx and Steeves 2010; Rooney 2010; Oostveen et al. 2014).

4.5 A child’s best interests

All values that are reflected in the UNCRC’s articles have the child’s best interests in common. Though parents might have intentions that align with this when they opt for using Life360, we can see that all the other values extracted from the UNCRC are at odds with the effects that Life360 has on the relevant issues of privacy, development and safety. In reality, the company’s interests lie with the accumulation of data and growing their user base, first. This does not mean that Life360 is completely indifferent to child safety. However, it is difficult to argue it is their primary value, as many actions taken by the company and encouraged by the application do not have children’s best interests at heart.

The way that Life360 does not question intentions of family members potentially exposes children to harm by abusive family members instead of protecting them from harm. Privacy, a fundamental issue in the UNCRC, is compromised by the application’s

normalisation and encouragement of surveillance, which undermines a child's autonomy and development. The illusion of safety that Life360 offers actually fosters parental anxiety rather than providing genuine security and exploiting exaggerated fears. The promise of enhancing children's freedom and autonomy remains unfulfilled due to the constant monitoring of Life360, which inhibits their growth and self-discipline. The application's promise of safety, privacy and protection actually overrides the child's right to independence and self-development. Privacy, a fundamental issue in the UNCRC, is compromised by the application's normalisation and encouragement of surveillance, which undermines a child's autonomy and development. Studies have shown that constant surveillance can lead to increased anxiety and stress in children, who feel they are always being watched and judged. This constant monitoring inhibits their ability to take risks and make independent decisions, crucial elements of the development of self-discipline and problem-solving skills. The application's promise of safety, privacy, and protection actually overrides the child's right to independence and self-development. Furthermore, the long-term psychological effects of such surveillance can include decreased self-esteem and a lack of confidence in one's own abilities, as children may come to believe they are incapable of handling situations without parental oversight. Real-world examples, such as cases in which children have expressed feeling mistrusted and micromanaged, further illustrate the negative impact of Life360's pervasive surveillance. Ultimately, while Life360 purports to align with parental values and the best interests of children, its practices reveal a fundamental conflict with the principles in the UNCRC.

Chapter 5: Life360's response

Hasinoff (2017) notes: “Although so-called “helicopter parenting” is widely criticized, digital surveillance tools used for child safety do not seem to face the same level of scrutiny” (Hasinoff 2017, 502). However, since 2017, there has been an increase of criticism of these practices, and Life360 has faced numerous accusations that their application contributes to helicopter parenting. The term ‘helicopter parenting’ refers to a style of parenting in which the parent is overbearing, ‘hovering’ above the child at all times, much like a helicopter. In the blogpost titled “Tips for Family Tracking Without Becoming a Helicopter Parent” published on March 30, 2024, Life360 stresses that these practises do not align with their values and that it is up to the parent to use the application in a way that does not evolve into helicopter parenting. The company notes that “[d]espite industry messaging, using beacons doesn’t mean giving up your freedom; instead, it promotes independence” (Life360 2024e). To guide parents in making proper use of their application, Life360 offers advice on how parents can avoid being overbearing. After all, they state, the application is made to strike a balance, “demonstrating how families can remain in touch while fostering independence and respect for privacy” (Life360 2024e). However, I argue that their response does not suffice as a counterargument to the critical observations made so far regarding their practises and their misalignment to parental values.

First, Life360 acknowledges that helicopter parenting has multiple negative effects on children as well as their parents, naming almost identical objections as the chapter on the tensions between values above has done. For children, the blog post notes reduced confidence and self-esteem (“Children of helicopter parents may struggle to develop confidence in their abilities because they are not given the chance to face challenges independently. Constant intervention can signal to a child that they cannot handle situations independently.”), increased anxiety and depression (“Several studies have linked helicopter parenting with higher levels of anxiety and depression in children and young adults. This may be due to their high expectations and the lack of coping skills developed when facing failure or challenges.”), lack of coping skills (“Overprotection

prevents children from facing natural consequences and learning from their mistakes. This can lead to a lack of essential coping skills and resilience in adversity.”), dependence on parents (“Children may become overly dependent on their parents for decision-making and problem-solving, leading to difficulties in making independent choices and managing their lives as they grow older.”), poor problem-solving skills (“With parents always ready to swoop in and fix their problems, these children might not develop the ability to solve problems independently, a critical skill for personal and professional success.”), and social challenges (“Helicopter parenting can interfere with a child’s social development. Peers may view them as less competent or autonomous, leading to social isolation or difficulty forming and maintaining friendships.”) For parents, the blog notes negative consequences such as increased stress and anxiety (“The constant worry about their child’s well-being and future can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety among helicopter parents themselves.”), strained relationships (“This parenting style can strain the parent-child relationship, especially as the child grows older and seeks more independence. It can lead to conflict, resentment, and a lack of emotional closeness.”), loss of personal identity (“Parents may become so invested in their role as protectors and providers that they lose sight of their own needs and personal growth, leading to feelings of emptiness or loss when their children eventually leave home.”), and financial strain (“Helicopter parenting can also have financial implications, as parents may overspend on their child’s education, extracurricular activities, and other areas to ensure success, sometimes at the cost of their financial security.”).

Then, Life360 gives advice as to how to prevent helicopter parenting. However, I argue that the advice is at odds with what the application is designed to do. For example, the blogpost recommends also relying on calling and texting when communicating about whereabouts: “Instead of relying solely on the app, encourage regular communication through calls or messages to share updates about one’s day, fostering a culture of openness” (Life360 2024e). This is completely in opposition to the value of efficiency and convenience that is heavily present in their marketing material. There, Life360 proudly exclaims how their application makes parents’ lives easier by eliminating the need to text and call. Related to this, the blog recommends to not use geotracking constantly: “Agree on specific situations when location sharing is expected (e.g., during trips, after school,

or late at night) and when it's unnecessary" (Life360 2024e). Again, we find this advice to be completely in contrast with what the application is designed to do. The goal of Life360 is to be able to display your family members' locations at any given moment. The fact that this vision is inherent to the application is attested by the fact that if you turn off your location, the application sends aggressive reminders to turn it back on (see figure 7). Apart from design choices, I have to wonder why any family would use Life360 if their goal was to only use location sharing in specific scenarios. Most standard messaging applications have the functionality of sharing your location, either live for a set amount of time, or merely your current location. If the idea is to only use location sharing during specific moments in the day or during trips, why would one download an application that is made to track location all day, every day?



Can you turn the reminder for location services off? Us parents don't want it on, so we have it 'active when app is in use' but that means every time you load the app you get the big full page reminder..

Figure 7: Review that shows it is not possible to have location services off as a standard, as the application aggressively reminds you to turn your location on (source: <https://www.life360.com/life360-reviews/>). Accessed on May 11th, 2024.

Next, the blog refers to its earlier statement that helicopter parenting leads to stress and anxiety for the parent, and notes that increased anxiety is not desirable for parents. Life360's advice is to refrain from practises like helicopter parenting: However, as concluded earlier, parental fear is crucial to Life360's business model and the reason why parents are convinced to download the application. The parental anxiety that Life360 exacerbates by naming the different forms of danger their application should protect children from, is crucial to creating the demand for Life360. If parents took this advice to heart and refrained from spending excessive energy and time worrying about their child,

trusting in their upbringing to adequately prepare them to resolve any issues that may arise, the application would likely have a significantly smaller user base.

Then, specifically noting the values of autonomy and privacy, the blog tells parents that if their children have any questions about the application, they should show them that they value their children's privacy and autonomy: "Encourage your family members, especially children, to express their thoughts and concerns. Address these concerns sincerely, showing that you value their privacy and autonomy" (Life360 2024e) However, it is challenging to understand how a parent could convince their child of their commitment to privacy while using an application that employs experts who argue that children receive excessive privacy, as Vanessa Lapointe did, and profits from collected data by sharing personal information with numerous companies. At the family level, it appears contradictory to claim to care about a child's privacy while announcing intentions to track their movement. The same contradiction applies to autonomy. If the parent genuinely valued their child's autonomy, they would not feel the need to monitor their movements incessantly.

Additionally, Life360 addresses privacy concerns both within the family, and between companies and families. They address privacy concerns in the family by saying: "Frame the use of location sharing as a tool for independence, allowing family members to go about their day with the assurance that help is available if needed" (Life360 2024e). However, this is simply not the way privacy works. Privacy is about autonomy and about allowing one to define themselves in relation to others by setting boundaries (Dowty 2008, 397). To this, Oostveen et al. (2014) add that location tracking applications try to obscure the limits they put on child development by saying that monitoring will actually foster independence (Oostveen et al. 2014, 568). Clark (2013/2014) observed this to be a simple contradiction as well, noting that children that grew up with access to their parents via a mobile phone very regularly contacted their parents for help and support instead of taking care of issues that arose themselves (Clark 2013/2014, 205). When addressing the role of privacy in the relation between company and users. Life360 notes that it is important to opt for an application that respects and protects your privacy. Despite offering

recommendations on selecting apps that prioritise privacy, Life360's own track record raises pertinent questions about its adherence to these principles of privacy and security. In no way does Life360 take responsibility for the fact that their application is made to encourage practises like helicopter parenting, despite their marketing material trying to conceal this. The technology is marketed as a neutral or even a positive tool, whereas the potential issues lie completely within the parent's (ir)responsible use of said technology. However, an instrumentalist view on technology has been widely contested. Seeing technology as a mere tool ignores the complex ways in which technology shapes and is shaped by society, and the values that are embedded in technology. Clark (2013/2014) discovered parents were increasingly involved in their children's lives and leaned towards helicopter parenting because of the technology that makes this possible (Clark 2013/2014, 205). Clark found that helicopter parenting was not necessarily something that parents developed on their own. Instead, parents noticed that they had a difficult time not to engage in hovering activities because technology gave them the opportunity to do so (Clark 2013/2014, 41). Simpson (2014) refers to a statement from Life360 that notes that their intention is not for parents to sneakily monitor their children. To this, Simpson responds that "[w]hile there is an acknowledgement within this statement that the aim is not to track one's children, this does not remove the reality that this is precisely what occurs" (Simpson 2014, 276). He states that inherent to the application's programming an urging for the parents to make sure their children are safe is present and that the application's 'solution' for the problem of not being able to verify this at all times is geotracking.

In their response to the helicopter parenting accusations, Life360 often falls back on the issue of framing. They argue that their concern is safety and not control: they want to give parents a way of 'checking in' on their children, not surveil them. Both Hasinoff (2017) and Simpson (2014) hold the idea that marketing language helps shape the values we hold in relation to what we see as acceptable parenting behaviour and what we do not. Parents have noted that they feel uncomfortable using "tracking" or "surveillance" to describe their behaviour when they are geotracking a child. Instead, they prefer descriptions like "checking up on" members of the family (Mavoa, Cogan and Nansen 2023, 54).

Mavoa, Coglan and Nansen (2023) state that “[i]n our opinion, the language people use here is far from irrelevant because it bears on the social implications and ethical meaning of these emerging technologies and practises” (Mavoa, Coglan and Nansen 2023, 56). While I acknowledge the significance of language in this discussion, I maintain that it doesn't alter the essence of the practice. The authors argue that surveillance is a concept shaped by state-citizen relationships and cannot be directly applied to the family dynamic due to its unique nature (Mavoa, Coglan and Nansen 2023, 56). However, I disagree with this concern and reject the notion that surveillance is exclusively tied to state-state or state-citizen relationships. They encourage future researchers to consider parents' intentions behind their use of surveillance, often stemming from a place of care rather than control (Mavoa, Coglan and Nansen 2023, 56). My aim isn't to vilify parents using geotracking applications, nor do I have the impression that other authors in this field have attempted to do so. My intention is to highlight how companies exploit parents' genuine intentions for profit by exploiting their fears, leveraging personal data and that of their children. My analysis of the issue is that parents avoid using terms like "surveillance" not because it inaccurately describes their actions, as it does describe the practise accurately, but because they perceive the tension between surveillance and their parental values. By using alternative language, they can frame and justify surveillance in a way that appears to resolve this tension. Life360 exemplifies this approach in their marketing, emphasizing care over control, giving parents the tools they need to alter the framing of the practise. However, changing the language doesn't change the nature of the actions.

The negative effects that the blog refers to when addressing the problems of helicopter parenting are perhaps not necessarily issues stemming from a parenting style. Instead, they are issues caused by normalised surveillance, to which Life360 contributes greatly themselves. By creating a digital panopticon, parents use the application as a disciplinary mechanism (Hasinoff 2017, 504). This means that, like the workings of the panopticon, through constant tracking and monitoring of family members' location and activities, Life360 induces a state of conscious visibility, wherein individuals are aware of being observed and internalise the norms of surveillance. This visibility, reminiscent of Bentham's panopticon, causes family members to adapt their behaviour to align with the

perceived expectations. By making surveillance an integral aspect of familial relationships and safety practices, Life360 reinforces the normalisation of surveillance in everyday life.

Chapter 6: The dangers of a value shift and the normalisation of surveillance

In the introduction, we examined the outrage provoked by the privacy breach caused by Life360 when they illegally sold their users' data. This outrage is justified, and it is reasonable that there is a strong response when privacy is not respected. However, Hasinoff notes an intriguing bias in these matters. She observes that the privacy of children is primarily discussed within the commercial realm, specifically concerning the family-company relationship. In contrast, the role and value of privacy within the family sphere itself are much less investigated (Hasinoff 2017, 503). Hasinoff refers to Rachel Dubrofsky and Shoshana Magnet (2015), who note this extreme focus on privacy in the commercial sphere, as opposed to privacy within the family, makes it possible to obscure the ways that surveillance is normalised and how it maintains systems of power (Hasinoff 2017, 503). This normalisation of surveillance within the family is heavily encouraged by applications like Life360.

Life360 is contributing to a greater value shift, as described by Gabriels (2016), who states that the values of what it means to be a good parent are shifting. Parents are increasingly under the impression that they must employ surveillance in their parenting in order to be a good parent, who is involved enough with their children. Gabriels notes that we must pay good attention to these rising feelings of parents, as the effects of this helicopter parenting influence both children and parents negatively (Gabriels 2016, 180). These negative effects are the reason why we must be concerned about this value shift. A value shift is not inherently problematic. In a scenario in which new values would improve aspects of childhood and parenting, there would be no real objection. However, the tension lies in what is driving this shift in values.

The motivations for applications like Life360 are not grounded in empirically proven positive effects on families. Instead, the true motivation of a company operating within the structures of surveillance capitalism is the increased collection of data, which generates greater profit for companies like Life360. The most effective way to expand their

user base and accumulate more data, thereby increasing profit, is by normalising the surveillance technology they offer. By exploiting parental fears and suggesting that the only way to genuinely care for their child is through surveillance, Life360 is normalising surveillance and altering the meaning of the values associated with care. Life360 is transforming the notion of care into a notion of control, without changing its name. Parents might feel pressured to opt into the application because they fear being perceived as bad parents if they do not (Simpson 2014, 275). Simpson argues that using Life360 is being equated with being a good parent. He notes that marketing strategies exploit not only the fear for a child's well-being but also the fear of social consequences if one does not use the application. Parents worry about being judged if something happens to their child and they did not use the application to prevent it. Simpson identifies this response as a form of victim blaming (Simpson 2014, 279).

This social pressure is problematic in itself, but it becomes even more concerning if this new set of values permeates our legal system. Our legal system is based on the societal values we uphold. When these values change, laws eventually become outdated, prompting calls for legal reforms. If this shift in values results in merely social consequences, the problem, while significant, is less severe. In such a scenario, the worst-case outcome might be that parents are judged by other parents or feel pressured to incorporate surveillance into their parenting. However, if these forms of care become embedded in legal frameworks, such as the UNCRC, the repercussions could be far more serious. Parents who choose not to use surveillance in their parental care due to the recognised negative effects might face legal accusations of child negligence. This shift in values presents a slippery slope, where the drive for profit could lead to severe, long-term consequences for parents and children in the future. These potential legal ramifications are more severe than the immediate social pressures and could fundamentally alter the landscape of parental responsibility and child welfare.

The shifting of values as encouraged by Life360 is merely a symptom of the bigger issue that contemporary society is facing: the datafication of the human person and the commodification of personal data are both inherent crucial parts to the economic system of surveillance capitalism, as popularised by Shoshanna Zuboff in her 2019 book *The Age*

of Surveillance Capitalism. The book explores how companies exploit personal data for profit, creating a new form of capitalism. Zuboff argues that this practice undermines individual autonomy, democracy, and privacy, fundamentally reshaping society and power dynamics. We can see the role of surveillance capitalism in society as a parallel to the role of Life360 in the family. Both surveillance capitalism and Life360 push for the undermining of autonomy, privacy and democracy. In the family, the concept of democracy needs a minor translation as it does not translate as directly to the family sphere as privacy and autonomy do, but with parents' newfound knowledge and surveillance, power relations within the family shift. Simpson (2014) notes how the family meetings Life360 urges parents to have in order to set ground rules, "has the appearance of a kind of democratic decision-making process" but that in reality, there is a power imbalance between the parents and children (Simpson 2014, 279). Indeed, in the research done by Mavao, Coglan and Nansen (2023), the vast majority of parents admitted that even if they did explain the benefits of geotracking to the child, many of them do not give them a real choice in whether they would consent to tracking or not (Mavao, Coglan and Nansen 2023, 57). This power imbalance is in the nature of the parent-child relationship. Parents tell children what to do, and often, children have no real way of objecting or even forming their own opinion on the matter. Both society and the family find themselves reshaped due to the introduction of surveillance capitalism and Life360. Marx and Steeves (2010) worry that if surveillance marketers succeed, children's lives will be increasingly influenced by numerous surveillance tools targeting them and being used by them. Marx and Steeves raise the question of whether deeper concepts of childhood—seen as a blend of innocence and savviness, protection and exploration, nurture and autonomy—will be shaped by wider discussions about the interplay between fear, risk, and resilience, alongside the role of surveillance in parenting and governance (Marx and Steeves 2010, 225).

The normalisation of surveillance does not only pertain to the realm of the family. It will also shape how children view government surveillance. This is illustrated by an article in the Washington Post about surveillance technologies in family lives: "Roberts said that if she is going to use technology to keep her family safe, it is reasonable for the government to do the same to protect the nation. "I don't care if somebody in the government listens

to my phone calls,” she said. “I don’t mind being tracked. And our children will care even less, because they’re growing up with all this, always connected. It’s just who we are” (Fisher and Timberg 2013, 5).

Conclusion

The emergence of surveillance technologies like Life360 has ignited debates surrounding privacy, parental values, and societal norms. Through an exploration of Life360's practices and their implications, it becomes evident that the normalisation of surveillance within families poses significant risks to values of privacy, autonomy, and democracy. This thesis has delved into the interplay between commercial interests, parental fears, and societal pressures, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of the issue. It assessed the question of whether the values of geotracking applications like Life360 are compatible with the values of parental care and concluded that this was, despite initial appearances in marketing material, not the case. Not only do the values of parental care not align with those of Life360, the practises of Life360 actively halt and harm the development of the child as well as the well-being of both child and parent. Therefore, the conclusion is that geotracking application cannot be used with the argument that they are a form of care. Life360's marketing strategies exploit parental anxieties, framing surveillance as care and positioning opting out as neglectful parenting. This narrative not only perpetuates power imbalances within families but also contributes to the normalisation of surveillance in wider society. The commercialisation of personal data under surveillance capitalism further exacerbates these issues, reshaping societal values and undermining individual autonomy. Moreover, the potential legal ramifications of this value shift raise concerns about the erosion of privacy rights and the entrenchment of surveillance within legal frameworks. New laws based on this the set of values applications like Life360 advocate for, may penalise parents who choose not to surveil their children, further perpetuating power imbalances and limiting individual freedoms.

In confronting these challenges, it is essential to reassess parental values, legal frameworks, and societal norms to safeguard privacy and autonomy. This requires a nuanced understanding of the motivations driving surveillance technologies and a commitment to upholding fundamental rights and values. Understanding the inner workings of surveillance capitalism has proven to be challenging, as companies refuse to be truly transparent and often operate in regulatory grey areas. Additionally, fostering open dialogue and critical reflection on the implications of surveillance within families

and society at large is crucial in navigating the complexities of this issue. Ultimately, addressing the dangers posed by the normalisation of surveillance requires collective action and effort in order to prioritise individual rights and freedoms over commercial interests. By challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for greater transparency, accountability, and ethical considerations, we can work towards a future where privacy and autonomy are upheld as fundamental principles in both familial and societal contexts.

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