Journal of Transport Geography 70 (2018) 277–278

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

Book review

Self-Tracking, Health and Medicine:Sociological Perspectives, byLupton, D. (Ed.), 2017. Taylor and Francis.(£115 (hardback); £20 (e-book). ISBN: 9781138091085)

This book is an interesting read with potential for applicability to transport geography research. The book itself covers a range of self-tracking topics but with a focus primarily on health and medicine. It is well structured and organised around the central theme of self-tracking. Self-tracking can be variously defined, but in essence, it is the practice of collecting information on oneself, whether, diet, weight or exercise, bodily functions or sensations, drug or medication use. The book is organised into seven chapters on various aspects of self-tracking, health and medicine that were originally published as a series of articles in *Health Sociology Review* with the editorial as an introductory chapter that neatly sets the scene for what follows. A second key theme running through the book is the role of new digital technology and the ability of this technology to facilitate self-tracking. This could be of interest to those from a Transport Geography background who see the applicability of such self-tracking methods, for example in supplementing or replacing travel activity diaries, recording active travel or better understanding the physical activity of individuals. The seven chapters then each examine aspects of self-tracking as related to health and medicine in a specific application area. There is a focus on methodological and theoretical approaches that are primarily qualitative methodologies, which add a deeper, richer and more critical discussion of self-tracking methods compared with quantitative approaches.

The introduction sets the scene well, posing several key questions and describing five ‘modes’ (or typologies) of self-tracking. It could be argued, that the most salient observation, is self-tracking can either promote health and well-being or conversely, could further contribute to marginalisation and socio-economic disadvantage. For example, smartphones or wearables can be relatively expensive; therefore, certain groups of the population may be excluded from their use, those with lower incomes in particular. This is a theme that is recurring through the various contributions in the book. It is also a key consideration when similar approaches are applied more broadly in any field, including transport applications.

The first chapter is entitled “Health by numbers? Exploring the practice and experience of datafied health” written by Gavin J. D. Smith and Ben Vonthethoff. The key theme of the chapter is how the data from self-trackers, the Quantified Self (QS) community movement, ascribes meaning and contextualises the data collected as part of the tracking process. The second chapter is about tracking stress based on heart rate monitoring, or heart rate variability. As such it has less direct relevance to a transport geography audience, though still a rigorous piece of research. In a similar vein, chapter three is focused on the patient-provider relationship with a more clinical focus that again has perhaps less of a direct transport link. That being said, there is the recurring theme of exacerbating social disadvantage as related to new (health) technologies which does have a much wider relevance. The fourth chapter is entitled “Training to self-care: fitness tracking, biopedagogy and the healthy consumer”. The authors, Aristea Fotopoulou and Kate O'Riordan, discuss the use of Fitbit, a wearable sensor that monitors steps walked, floors climbed and calories burned. What is perhaps interesting here is the use of badges or motivational prompts for activity or mobility. Could this provide a useful, albeit controversial tool for promoting active travel? Chapter 5, which is entitled, “Harm reduction and the ethics of drug use: contemporary techniques of self-governance” again is not directly related to transport. The penultimate chapter “Mobile, wearable and ingestible health technologies: towards a critical research agenda” by Emma Rich and Andy Miah is a good discussion of some of the lesser known concerns about these new(er) technologies as they relate to issue of social justice, inclusion and ownership of data. Also of interest is the increasing use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS), of particular relevance to mobility. A note of caution is struck in the conclusion of this chapter about the increasing level of automation and invasion that comes with self-tracking. The final chapter is about English adolescent girls' experiences of health and fitness apps. Perhaps the most interesting message emerging from this chapter is the importance of social interaction, which may disappear with the use of mobile applications. In other words, one must be cognisant that technology, in certain circumstances, may not be a substitute for human interaction(s).

Overall, some interesting questions emerge; that self-tracking can indeed be very useful and beneficial and not only in a health or a medical context, but also to Transport Geography. Key considerations in any application area are that such approaches may further exacerbate existing social and economic disadvantage as these approaches typically capture a specific subset of the population. The extent to which this is the case is perhaps only beginning to emerge. The use of geo-location data on cyclists as collected by a mobile application like Strava illustrates this (Jestico et al., 2016; Musakwa and Selala, 2016). That is to say, users of particular smartphone applications or technology tend to be a particular subset of the population with distinct socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Moreover, in health, but also in transport, if such self-tracking approaches become commonplace, questions relating to privacy and ethics and the importance of the personal perspective (Marek et al., 2017), particularly if people are ‘pushed’ or coerced to self-track, are rather more important and central to address. It could be argued that there is the clear potential here for applicability of such methods to transport geography; indeed, studies have already been undertaken with such methodologies, as highlighted above. This book therefore has some interesting ethical and theoretical

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2018.06.013

Available online 28 June 2018
0966-6923

lessons to be learned before, or perhaps even after, embarking on such a research methodology.

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