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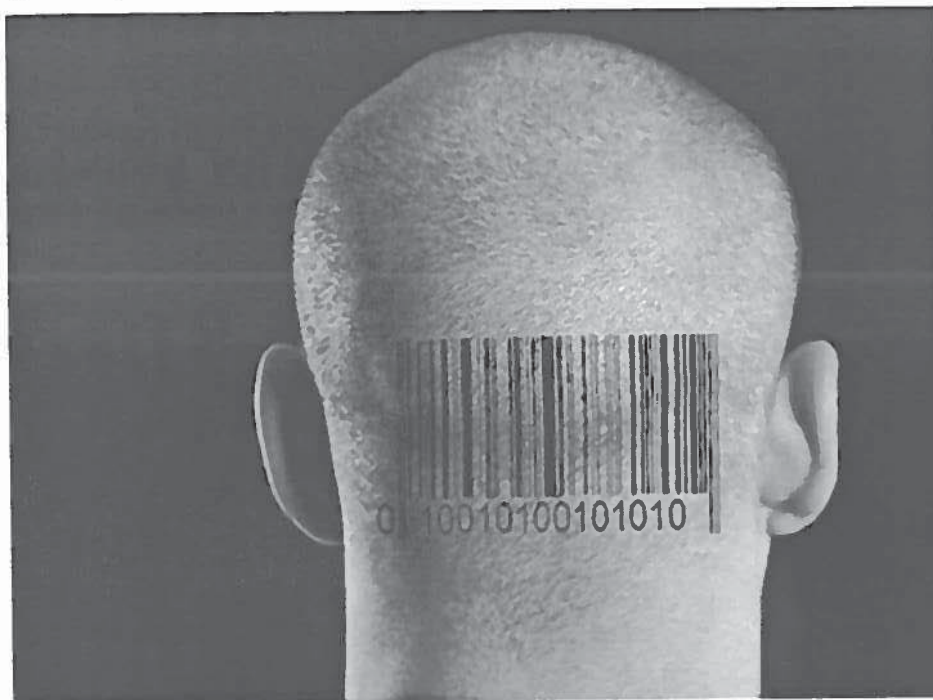
'Human barcode' could make society more organized, but invades privacy, civil liberties

As tech companies work to develop ID chips, how long until we're no longer anonymous?

BY MEGHAN NEAL / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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UNIQUELY INDAGETTY IMAGES

The U.S. continues to flirt with the idea of a 'human barcode,' an electronic ID chip assigned to every person at birth.

Would you barcode your baby?

Microchip implants have become standard practice for our pets, but have been a tougher sell when it comes to the idea of putting them in people.

Science fiction author Elizabeth Moon last week rekindled the debate on whether it's a good idea to "barcode" infants at birth in an interview on a BBC radio program.

"I would insist on every individual having a unique ID permanently attached — a barcode if you will — an implanted chip to provide an easy, fast inexpensive way to identify individuals," she said on The Forum, a weekly show that features "a global thinking" discussing a "radical, inspiring or controversial idea" for 60 seconds.

Moon believes the tools most commonly used for surveillance and identification — like video cameras and DNA testing — are slow, costly and often ineffective.

In her opinion, human barcoding would save a lot of time and money.

The proposal isn't too far-fetched - it is already technically possible to



ANAL GRAFSTRA

Advocates say electronic verification could help parents or caregivers keep track of children and the elderly.



ANAL GRAFSTRA

A built-in identification chip for humans could invade privacy, civil liberties, opponents say.

"barcode" a human - but does it violate our rights to privacy?

Opponents argue that giving up anonymity would cultivate an "Orwellian" society where all citizens can be tracked.

"To have a record of everywhere you go and everything you do would be a frightening thing," Stanley, senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union, told the Daily News.

He warned of a "check-point society" where everyone carries an internal passport and has to show their papers at every turn, he said.

"Once we let the government and businesses go down the road of nosing around in our lives...we're going to quickly lose all our privacy," said Stanley.

There are already, and increasingly, ways to electronically track people. Since 2006, new U.S. passports include radio frequency identification tags (RFID) that store all the information in the passport, plus a digital picture of the owner.

In 2002, an implantable ID chip called VeriChip was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The chip could be implanted in a person's arm, and when scanned, could pull up a 16 digit ID number containing information about the user.

It was discontinued in 2010 amid concerns about privacy and safety.

Still scientists and engineers have not given up on the idea.

A handful of enterprising companies have stepped into the void left by VeriChip, and are developing ways to integrate technology and man.

Biotech company MicroCHIPS has developed an implantable chip to deliver medicine to people on schedule and without injection. And technology company BIOPTid has patented a noninvasive method of identification called the "human barcode."

Advocates say electronic verification could help parents or caregivers keep track of children and the elderly. Chips could be used to easily access medical information, and would make going through security points more convenient, reports say.

But there are also concerns about security breaches by hackers. If computers and social networks are already vulnerable to hacking and identify theft, imagine if someone could get access to your personal ID chip?

Stanley cautioned against throwing the baby out with the bathwater each time someone invents a new gadget.

"We can have security, we can have convenience, and we can have privacy," he said. "We can have our cake and eat it too."

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