The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life

Dr. Alice E. Marwick
Microsoft Research New England
1 Memorial Drive, 12th Floor, Cambridge, MA, 02142
amarwick@microsoft.com

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Abstract

People create profiles on social network sites and Twitter accounts against the background of an audience. This paper argues that surveying content created by others and looking at one's own content through other people's eyes, a common part of social media use, should be framed as *social surveillance.* While social surveillance is distinguished from traditional surveillance along three axes (power, hierarchy, and reciprocity), its affect and behavior modification is common to traditional surveillance. Drawing on ethnographic studies of United States populations, I look at social surveillance, how it is practiced, and its impact on people who engage in it. I use Foucault's concept of *capillaries of power* to demonstrate that social surveillance assumes the power differentials evident in everyday interactions rather than the hierarchical power relationships assumed in much of the surveillance literature. Social media involves a collapse of social contexts and social roles, complicating boundary work but facilitating social surveillance. Individuals strategically reveal, disclose and conceal personal information to create connections with others and tend social boundaries. These processes are normal parts of day-to-day life in communities that are highly connected through social media.

Part I: Introduction and Foundation

Introduction: Social surveillance

> **Interviewer ! f ! f f! b -! T -and-so is totally cyberstalking so-and- - ! b !e f ! b ! fb ! b !b f! f !bd b !e**
> Aarti: They're looking at their wall posts and who writes on their wall, and usually looking through their pictures— at least their profile pictures, if not more than that— and just reading comments or commenting on it or something.
> **Interviewer ! f !e ! ! ! b ! f ! ! f! ! f f! ! f e**
> Aarti: If you— well, I don't know. I feel like now, it's not really weird for anyone anymore. (17, North Carolina).

Social surveillance is the use of Web 2.0 sites like Twitter, Facebook and Foursquare to see what friends, family, and acquaintances are "up to" (Joinson, 2008; Tokunaga, 2011). These technologies are designed to let users continually investigate the digital traces left by the people they are connected to through social media. The intended use of Facebook, for example, is to "connect and share with the people in your life" by viewing the News Feed and user profiles (Facebook, 2011). But Facebook is only one part of a larger social media system. In communities where social technology use is prominent, a single person may have a Facebook profile, a Twitter account, a Tumblr blog, a Foursquare account and an Instagram photostream, each transmitting personal information to an audience. This information is broadcast to be looked at, and as such, people can look closely. The constellation of practices framed variously as stalking, watching, reading, gazing or looking are characteristic of social media use. But this social surveillance produces effects akin to the panopticon. People monitor their digital actions with an audience in mind, often tailoring social media content to particular individuals (Gershon, 2010). The overall effect on technically mediated communities is a high awareness of being watched.

Social technology's role in surveillance is well-documented. For instance, social media companies like Facebook aggregate and collect personal data provided by users, sometimes called "dataveillance" or "actuarial surveillance" (Fuchs, 2010; Phillips, 2010). Similarly, marketing firms monitor the digital traces left by web users as they move across websites and advertising networks (Grimmelmann, 2009; Turow, 2006). Legal scholars have documented the use of social media by law enforcement and government to track the activities of suspected or even potential criminals (Strandburg, 2011). In addition to analyzing these traditional modes of surveillance, academics have begun to unpack the ongoing eavesdropping, investigation, gossip and inquiry that constitutes information gathering by people about their peers. These practices are facilitated and extended by the digitization of social information normalized by social media. Theorists have conceptualized this shift as *lateral surveillance* (Andrejevic, 2005), *participatory surveillance* (Albrechtslund, 2008), *social searching* (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006) and the term I use in this paper, *social surveillance* (Joinson, 2008; Tokunaga, 2011).

While multiple types of surveillance take place simultaneously within social media, they differ in their expression and effects. Social surveillance differs from typical surveillance, and its inverse, "sousveillance,"[1] in three key ways. First, it requires conceptualizing power as intrinsic to every social relationship, as micro-level and de-centralized, rather than as dualistic or modernistic (Gerrie, 2007). Second, social surveillance takes place between individuals, rather than entities and individuals (e.g. governments surveilling citizens or corporations surveilling consumers). Third, it is reciprocal: each participant is both broadcasting information that is looked at by others and looking at information broadcast by others. Despite these differences, social surveillance demonstrates how the normalization of traditional surveillance practices has affected day-to-day life and interpersonal relationships. Social media makes surveillance banal. As a result, technologies like Twitter, Facebook and Foursquare complicate how we understand "surveillance," and theorizing social surveillance can inform our understanding of these changes.

Most social media users are less concerned with governments or corporations watching their online activities than key members of their extended social network such as bosses or parents (Marwick & boyd, 2011). As a result, people self-monitor their online actions to maintain a desired balance between publicity and privacy (boyd & Marwick, 2011; Marwick, 2010). This paper argues that this self-monitoring is related to internalizing the practice of social surveillance. Social surveillance is necessary in order to understand social norms, user actions, and self-presentation strategies within social media contexts. I look at three variations of how power plays out between individuals within social media contexts to flesh out the theoretical model of social surveillance presented in this paper.

First, we look at role shifts and their significance within boundary work (Nippert-Eng, 2010, pp. 10-14). Privacy has historically been built upon a set of dichotomies and divisions, whether they be spatial (workplace, home), temporal ("on" or "off" the clock), or object-related (work BlackBerry or parent's car). The "context collapse" common to much social media means that users must navigate concealing and revealing information to people who blur the boundaries of work and home, school and private life, or friends and family (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In social technologies where relationships are flattened, the re-emergence of clearly hierarchical social roles such as employer or parent demonstrates that power exists and is reinforced even when technologies attempt to achieve egalitarianism. Theories of surveillance that do not incorporate this dynamism fail to explain the problems that befall individuals when these roles are asserted.

Second, we examine "Facebook stalking," the increasingly common practice of digging through digital information on the social network site Facebook to reveal information about others (Kennedy, 2009). I argue that this "stalking" is intimately tied to power relations: it is both a way to compensate for perceived weakness by obtaining social knowledge, and asserting subservience by recognizing the importance of others. A boyfriend scrutinizing his girlfriend's Twitter feed is reacting to a perception of lost control; a teenage girl expecting her friends to pay attention to what she posts on Facebook is asserting her importance. The flux and flow of power relations are ongoing.

Third, the paper examines how people use social media *to be seen.* Social surveillance is consensual partly because people are motivated by social status, attention, and visibility to broadcast personal details about themselves to an audience. In the process of lifestreaming, tracking and disseminating digital personal information, people choose to disclose and reveal as appropriate (Senft, 2008). Beyond Facebook stalking, conceptualizing Web 2.0 as an ecosystem of overlapping and connected sites creates a model of social behavior that is larger than its parts. Individuals broadcast information in multiple places that, when synthesized by curious onlookers, reveals much. Social media has a dual nature in which information is both consumed and produced, which creates a symmetrical model of surveillance in which watchers expect, and desire, to be watched.

Surveillance and Social Media

In *Surveillance Studies: An Overview,* David Lyons defines surveillance as "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction" (Lyon, 2007, p. 14). Typically, *surveillance* refers to an activity which enables the nation state or capitalist entities like corporations to manage a population (Gandy, 1993; Ogura, 2006). This conception of surveillance involves an asymmetry in which individuals are surveilled by entities and the balance of power is overwhelmingly tipped in favor of the surveyor. However, individuals both comply with and resist surveillance, a dynamic referred to by Anthony Giddens as the "dialectic of control" (1982). For instance, accounts of "sousveillance" (Mann et al., 2003) involve the use of equipment typically used in surveillance to watch the watchers, whether by capturing video of police brutality at a Critical Mass event or tweeting about a protest march in Egypt.[2]

Electronic communication technologies are intrinsic to contemporary surveillance activities, such as wiretapping telephone conversations, using heat-seeking cameras to find individuals in hiding, tracking people with biometric data, creating databases to process and aggregate this information, and so forth (Nissenbaum, 2010). Similarly, social media technologies can be used by companies, marketers, and governments to collect great amounts of data about individual users. For example, a photo-sharing site like Flickr aggregates user information with that collected through its parent site Yahoo. Networked banner advertisements track users across websites, creating detailed pictures of their actions and demographics. Third-party Facebook or iPhone applications may collect and disseminate still more personal data to actors outside these networks (Hull, Lipford, & Latulipe, 2010). Helen Nissenbaum isolates three privacy issues surrounding social network sites. First, people use social media to disseminate information about themselves, such as writing intimate blog entries or posting pictures online, with potentially negative effects (limiting future employment, housing, and so forth). Second, people post information about others, whether deliberately or inadvertently, through actions like tagging faces in a photograph or @replying on Twitter. Third, social network site owners

aggregate and distribute information that users provide to the site (2010, pp. 59-64). Social surveillance intrinsically involves the first two issues.

While both *surveillance* and *sousveillance* are good starting points with which to think about issues of power and privacy within social networks, they do not help us understand increasingly common situations in which people of relatively equal power are watching each other and acting on the information they find as a result. Several scholars have linked this concept to social media (Albrechtslund, 2008; Andrejevic, 2005; Joinson, 2008; Lampe et al., 2006; Tokunaga, 2011). In the more theoretical tradition of surveillance studies, Andrejevic's relatively early study of "lateral surveillance," though focused primarily on other methods by which individuals could "spy" on their peers such as people search tools, identified Friendster as a way that people could investigate potential dates (2005). Albrechtslund, while concurring with Andrejevic overall, argued that this surveillance could be positive and empowering, framing it as playful and participatory (2008). These concepts have also been investigated by quantitative scholars. In a study of more than two thousand undergraduates, Lampe et al. identified *social searching* as a primary use of Facebook: using the site to learn more about friends, acquaintances, and classmates, distinct from *social browsing* in which the site is used to meet new people. Lampe framed social searching as relationship-building (2006). Joinson continued this approach in two surveys of Facebook users which categorized "keeping in touch" as a major reason for using the site. Joinson concurred with Lampe et al.'s distinction between searching and browsing, and further argued that this category included a sizable amount of surveillance-related activities, or "virtual people watching" (Joinson, 2008). A recent study by Tokunaga examined what he calls "interpersonal electronic surveillance." He identifies four several differences between the "vertical" nature of social surveillance and the "horizontal" structure of traditional surveillance: reasons for gathering information, asymmetrical surveillance, presence of a strong hierarchical power structure, and the "potential for regulatory oversight" (Tokunaga, 2011, p. 706). The rest of the study is focused primarily on the surveillance of romantic partners (see also Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009) and concludes that Facebook can contribute to feelings of jealousy and create a "feedback loop," leading to more time on Facebook.

Social surveillance clearly differs from traditional surveillance, to the point where some might question whether it is surveillance at all. Returning to Lyon's definition, social surveillance certainly involves "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details" that characterizes traditional surveillance. While surveillance is typically undertaken to manage, control, or influence a particular population, social surveillance leads to *self*-management and direction on the part of social media users. The internalization of the surveilled gaze—behavior modification as the result of being watched—can best be understood through the lens of surveillance studies. This paper fleshes out some of the tensions and complications in this perspective.

Method

Current studies of social surveillance focus either on the theoretical or the quantitative. This study explains the concept of social surveillance in greater theoretical depth and uses qualitative data to examine the practice and effects of individuals surveying each other using social media sites. In this paper, we answer Lyon's call to "show the connection between the real lives of ordinary people and the modes of surveillance that serve to watch, record, detail, track and classify them" (2007, p. 46). The next part of this paper examines the theory of social surveillance in depth, particularly along axes of power and participation. In the final section, I draw from ethnographic work and examples of popular discourse to show how social surveillance is carried out in day-to-day life, what motivates people to engage in it, and its effects on participants. Specifically, our qualitative data is drawn from two ethnographic studies of technosocial practices within the United States: an ethnography of workers at San Francisco Web 2.0 companies that took place from 2007-2009, and a study of privacy and teenagers conducted in 2010 in three different metropolitan areas in the Southeast United States, for a total of 106 in-depth interviews. Both groups demonstrate heavy use of social media and integration of technologies like Facebook and Twitter into everyday life. Note that because privacy practices are highly contextual, we cannot assume that the conclusions in this paper apply to users outside the United States. Our goal in this paper is to theorize a new type of surveillance that we believe is increasingly common in social contexts where social media plays a significant role in social interaction.

Part II: Theories

Social Surveillance

Social surveillance is the ongoing eavesdropping, investigation, gossip and inquiry that constitutes information gathering by people about their peers, made salient by the social digitization normalized by social media. It encompasses the dual experience of using social media sites both to survey content created by others and examining one's own content through other people's eyes. It can exist either within a particular social media site (e.g. Facebook) or across a variety of sites (e.g. Twitter, YouTube, and Foursquare). Social surveillance can be distinguished from other types of surveillance by the following characteristics:

- *Power:* Social surveillance assumes a model of power flowing through all social relationships.
- *Hierarchy:* Social surveillance takes place between people of relatively equal power status, rather than between entities and individuals.
- *Reciprocity:* People who engage in social surveillance also produce online content that is surveilled by others.

Power

In dualistic, judicial, or modernist notions of power, a large entity such as a government or corporation acts on a less-powerful actor. This hierarchical model of power is modeled after the right of the sovereign to impose his will onto his subjects, specifically the right to live or die (Foucault, 1990; Gerrie, 2007). In this concept, power is something possessed by an authority that is "exerted over things" which can "modify, use, consume, or destroy" (Foucault, 1982, p. 786). Michel Foucault proposed an alternate model of power as micro-level, decentralized and present in all human relationships. He theorized "capillaries of power" that flow between networks and individuals. In this model, power is ever-present, fluid, and at work in the mundane day-to-day activities that make up human life (Foucault, 1977, 1982). For example, gender norms are determined not by a patriarchy seated around a table, but through millions of interpersonal moments in which "masculinity" or "femininity" is reinforced, policed, or resisted (Butler, 1990). In this model, the individual is part of a push-pull interaction in which power is negotiated.

In traditional models of surveillance, power flows from the surveyors (government or corporate actors) to the surveyed. For instance, David Lyon writes:

> Whatever the purpose of surveillance, to influence, manage, protect or direct, some kind of power relations are involved. Those who establish surveillance systems generally have access to the means of including the surveilled in their line of vision, whether that vision is literal or metaphorical. It is they who keep the records, hold the tapes, maintain the databases, have the software to do the mining and the capacity to classify and categorize subjects. Whether it is the massive Department of Homeland Security in the USA or some rural school board with cameras in buses, power is generated and expressed by surveillance (2007, p. 23).

Clearly this concept does not wholly capture the dynamic in situations where individuals both have access to the same tools and are able to mutually watch each other, as in two "friends" on Facebook or Foursquare. In social surveillance, social media sites are a type of capillary through which power flows not only from the site to users, but between users and across networks. Thus, while both forms of surveillance are intrinsically dependent on power relations, social surveillance incorporates the power differentials inherent in individual relationships.

Hierarchy

Surveillance in its most commonly used form implies a significant power imbalance between the group gathering information and the group being watched. This notion of extreme asymmetry does not capture the case of social surveillance, between peers of similar social status. However, the model of "capillaries of power" implies that power is constantly in flux between individuals.

For instance, while we may idealize romantic relationships as egalitarian partnerships, at any one time one member of a couple may be wealthier, better looking, more or less jealous, in a bad mood, or far away—which can all affect the balance of power within a relationship. Although the consequences of these ebbs and flows are not the same as those between a corporation and an individual, or the state and an individual, they are no less significant to the individual. Indeed, individuals may care more about their relationships with romantic partners, family members, and close friends than they do about a nebulous corporate entity collecting personal information. Moreover, the use of the term "friends" to define connections on many social network sites flattens what may be very real power differentials such as boss/employee, teacher/student, or parent/child (boyd, 2006).

Social surveillance thus recognizes models of hierarchy that include differentials like social status, race, class, gender, social roles and so forth. In traditional models of surveillance, people are surveilled by entities (such as governments or corporations), or surveilling governments or corporations (to resist hegemonic power). In social surveillance, both sets of actors are conceptualized as individuals. This distinguishes social surveillance from other forms of surveillance that utilize social media. If a marketing agency launches a Farmville-like game to gather information about people who play it, this does not constitute social surveillance, although the data-gathering takes place within Facebook. A government agent impersonating a Twitter user to investigate a drug deal does not constitute social surveillance either, as he is acting as a representative of a bureaucratic entity, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Despite this, there are moments of slippage where a person's social role—as a parent, employee, or romantic partner— comes into unanticipated play. Thus, the division between "individual" and "entity" is not as distinct as traditional models of surveillance might have us believe.

Reciprocity

Social surveillance takes place between members of social media sites. People who use applications like Twitter and Facebook become part of a networked audience where participants both send and receive social information (Marwick & boyd, 2011). For example, as an imaginary user skims her Facebook feed, she may simultaneously read her friends' content, comment on it, and contribute to other people's feeds, using this information to improve her mental model of other people's identities, actions and relationships. Social surveillance thus indicates that those who practice it are simultaneously surveilled by others. This differs from the asymmetry present in social media sites when users are watched by powers that they cannot watch back, such as marketers or data-miners.

Again returning to Foucault's model of *capillaries of power,* social surveillance explains how power is internalized and used for self-discipline. In social media sites, users monitor each other through consuming user-generated content, and in doing so formulate a view of what is normal, accepted, or unaccepted in the community, creating an internalized gaze. Facebook

users, for instance, imagine how readers will view their profile pictures and Wall posts and alter them accordingly. For example, Abigail, a sixteen-year-old girl from North Carolina, says:

> **Interviewer: In terms of some of these dynamics, will your mother ever misunderstand something that you post on Facebook?**
> Abigail: Yeah for example my friend Matt, he's really good in chemistry and we were joking that he was going to secretly make a meth lab. Like we were inside, it was like an inside joke and we were commenting on each other's walls or whatever. I explained it to my mom and my mom is like "What are you talking about, Matt making a meth lab?" He's a really science-y kid. He's not going to— He'd be the least person you'd expect to do drugs or whatever. And I was like, "it's an inside joke," and I would explain it to her. And oh, that's the kind of thing I would delete if it's an inside joke that I think other people wouldn't understand it, it might make me look bad then I would delete it. But if it makes the other person look bad I really don't care because they're obviously okay with it. If they're putting it on my wall they're okay with it.

Abigail evaluates both what she and others post on her wall to ensure its appropriateness. She may delete a comment if "it makes her look bad" or hide it from her mother if she suspects she will overreact. Monitoring one's friends is an expected and normative part of social media use, but people also use this information to edit their own self-presentation accordingly.

Part III: Case Studies

Social Surveillance as Social Practice

Social surveillance is an essential part of social media use. The Facebook News Feed or Twitter stream is comprised of information about what friends and contacts are doing. Music-sharing sites like Rdio and Last.fm work from the premise that it is interesting and useful to see what friends are listening to. Colors, which aggregates photographs from all users based on location, does not even presume a pre-defined social network; "everyone using the service" is limited enough. Within Facebook, it is simple to browse the pages and walls of people you do not know, provided their privacy settings allow. These practices have become normal in many social contexts, to the point where it is expected to view your friends' digital content: after all, it is produced *to be seen*. Alicia, 17, from North Carolina, explains:

> I've grown up with technology so I don't know how it was before this boom of social networking. But it just seems like instead of spending all of our time talking to other individual people and sharing things that would seem private, we

> just spend all of our time putting it in one module of communication where people can go and access it if they want to. So it's just more convenient.

A teen might ask, "did you see what I posted on Facebook last night?" or "did you see my Twitter post?" Many people use social media to easily announce significant events like births or engagements to a broad audience. In some social contexts, people will post content targeted to another with the goal of eliciting a certain reaction. Moreover, social media sites work on a network effect—they have greater utility the more people the user connects to. Taking full advantage of an application like Foursquare requires having a social network that also participates on the site.

In the following case studies, we explore the interplay of users, social software, and power through three different case studies: social roles on Facebook, Facebook stalking, and lifestreaming.

Case Study: Social Roles

Although we distinguish social surveillance (between individuals) from traditional models of surveillance (between entities and individuals), power and hierarchy exist between people and they are always in flux. One way to understand this is by examining social roles (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Role theory argues that people behave in different, but predictable ways, depending on their social identities and situations (Biddle, 1986). For example, I play a role as an academic and as a daughter: the obligations, social expectations, and accepted script, or language and etiquette, differs for each. Users frequently "friend" people in social networks that retain legitimate social power over them in certain social roles such as boss or parent. While much social media creates a flat hierarchy, or sense of egalitarianism, across users, the dynamism of social roles creates problems when these roles are re-asserted. Social surveillance explains both the self-management that takes place in order to prevent these conflicts and the careful monitoring of others which facilitates them.

Many social media sites exhibit a phenomenon known as "context collapse," in which contacts from different facets of a person's life, such as friends, family members, and co-workers, are lumped together under the rubric of "friends." In face-to-face interaction, people vary how they present themselves based on context and audience, a function that is complicated in social media sites like Twitter and Facebook when the context is unclear and the audience contains a wide variety of people (boyd, 2008). Despite this, on many social sites there is pressure to "friend" any acquaintance (boyd, 2006; Fono & Raynes-Goldie, 2005). As a result, one's social media friends may have wildly variant social norms and a range of ages, occupations, and expectations. Social surveillance brings these differences into sharp relief when content is differently interpreted or a reveals a side of a person that was previously hidden.

Different social contexts are typically socially or temporally bounded, making the expected social role quite obvious. Consider the workplace. Perhaps employees are at work once

they clock in, enter a building, or fill out a time sheet. Perhaps work starts for the telecommuter once the clock strikes 9 AM. A work laptop that can be taken home, but is still equipped with internet tracking software, indicates that when using it, a person is expected to adhere to her role as an employee. When socializing with one's boss, one is still careful about his or her language. In these situations, the boundary between "work" and "not work" is clear.

However, technology blurs the boundaries between formerly strict categories. Christena Nippert-Eng writes that cellular phones, pagers, and email have muddled contexts so that people may find themselves "required to instantly transform [their] current frame of mind in order to accommodate whatever mentality is mandated by a newly appearing request" (2010, p. 175). Getting a call from one's boss while on a date, for example, requires a quick switch of self-presentation and social role to suit the occasion. This requires sophisticated abilities to prioritize, code-switch, segment, and compartmentalize, and is not always easy to anticipate in advance.

Similarly, social media creates a false sense of equality between users through flattening social relationships and eliminating context. This resembles modern theories like critical pedagogy, non-hierarchical office design, and attachment parenting which seek to eliminate hierarchies of power based on social roles (Bernstein & Triger, 2011). Despite these ideals, roles such as employer/employee and teacher/student reassert themselves at moments of rupture, often to the detriment of the person in the less powerful role. Facebook can label all contacts as "friends," but they clearly are not all the same.

Web 2.0 strategist Ariel Waldman strongly believes in the egalitarianism of social media, but ran into trouble with a client who did not understand why her Twitter stream mixed personal and professional content:

> In their world, like you have, you know, your professional presence and then if you do anything personal, it's purely personal and you wouldn't ever mix them and they could not understand that I would have like my title on my Twitter page, like I'm, you know, so and so for NASA and do this for Pownce [*a social networking site]*, you know, I write for [*gadget blog*] Engadget or something. They could not understand why you would have, why you would list your professional title but then be Twittering about I don't know, a cute cat on the street, and then say oh there's awesome robots at NASA.

Waldman's ethic is shared by many Twitter users, who share personal opinions and experiences to appear authentic (Marwick & boyd, 2011). She viewed her client as simply another Twitter connection. The client, though, saw Waldman's mixing of social roles as unprofessional, and asked her to restrict her Twitter account to work-related content. She refused, and severed the professional relationship.

On the other hand, Abigail is deeply aware of the power differentials made invisible by the umbrella term "friends":

> I'm friends with my mom. Occasionally I'll hide things from her like if my friend if somebody comments on something that I feel like she would be “That's inappropriate” or something or like making a joke but my mom wouldn't understand that that's an inside joke, I would hide that or delete so my mom doesn't be like "What are you doing?" or something.

Moments of rupture when social roles collide demonstrate that power flows not only top-down from authoritarian entities, but between individuals. Despite pressure to erase power differentials between individuals, buttressed by social software, hierarchies represented by social roles are constantly re-established and reinforced through social interaction. The nature of “surveillance” dynamically changes based on the social role played by observer and observant.

Case Study: Facebook Stalking

Facebook stalking is a slang term, defined on Urbandictionary.com with the following example:

> Person A: I was Facebook stalking Jennifer for two hours last night.
> Person B: Oh really?
> Person A: Yeah, Amber added photos from her birthday party and Jennifer was tagged in one of them. However two weeks ago Jennifer RSVPed 'attending' on the guest list for Jack's birthday party which was the same night as Amber's. Then she updated her status to: "Jennifer is going on a date tonight" but according to her relationship status, she's not single! (Urban Dictionary, 2011).

In this hypothetical account, Person A is trying to put together a picture of Jennifer’s actions based on bits of information that Jennifer posted to Facebook. Facebook stalking, more generally, is simply *using Facebook* – browsing other people’s walls, pictures, and status updates to learn about them. But it also functions as social surveillance. In using social software to systematically learn information about others, Facebook stalking enables users both to assert power over others by gaining a greater picture of their actions and identities—even if this information is inaccurate. On the other hand, by paying attention to people’s social media contributions, users acknowledge the importance of their peers.

In some cases, people react to feelings of weakness or loss of power by attempting to gather information about others. This leveling up through possessing information allows the stalker to maintain a feeling of power. For instance, Serena, 17, says:

> Serena: I generally, I always look at Ashley’s page, that’s the person that my ex-boyfriend’s dating, I don’t know why, I don’t know why I always do, I’m just interested.
> **Interviewer: Just curious?**

Serena: Yeah, I'm just curious.
Interviewer: How does it make you feel to look at her page?
Serena: It makes me feel good because I don't think she's very pretty. That's why I look at her pictures and I'm like, that's okay.

Serena was deeply hurt when her boyfriend cheated on her with Ashley and the two began dating. She "stalks" Ashley on Facebook to reassure herself that she is better looking. While Serena finds it so painful to see Ashley and her ex interact on Facebook that she briefly de-friended both of them, she says, "I still want to know what she's saying." The ability to monitor Ashley's actions is important enough to Serena that she will put up with momentarily painful moments in order to continue doing it. Serena relies on the information gathered through social surveillance to regain a sense of agency over a disempowering situation. She reacts to the changes in power between her and Ashley by using Facebook to reassure herself that she is better looking, thus reasserting her value on the high school dating market.

Similarly, Madison, a sophomore, uses Facebook to "stalk" the popular senior girls:

Interviewer: What do you think about stalking people over Facebook?
Madison: I don't know, that group of really pretty senior girls, me and my friends, we always talk about their pictures and how pretty they are and all that and being jealous of them, but--
Interviewer: You kind of look up to them a little bit?
Madison: Yeah, yeah. But it's kind of weird because none of us are really good friends with them (15, North Carolina).

Madison and her friends admire the popular, pretty older girls, although they are not friends outside of Facebook. Facebook creates a space for Madison and her friends to maintain an (imaginary) relationship with the popular, older girls, demonstrating the power differential between the groups. Madison's attention validates the popular girls as high-status and interesting, and the fact that this interest is not reciprocated implies that Madison's group is relatively lower-status. While the girls are seemingly peers, the difference in power relations creates different expectations of content consumption. Madison and her friends, on the other hand, are very close. She responds quickly to their text messages, looks through their Facebook photographs, and comments on status updates. Through this attention, Madison demonstrates the importance of these friendships.

While neither Serena nor Madison's actions could be explained through traditional models of surveillance, their eagerness to watch demonstrates the integration of surveillance practices into every day practice. Social surveillance both reinforces and compensates for the ebb and flow of power between individuals.

Case Study: Lifestreaming and Social Digitization

In pre-digital eras, it was normal to snoop, eavesdrop, gossip, and otherwise furtively gather information about people one was interested in. In John Locke's *Eavesdropping: An Intimate History,* he chronicles countless examples of people overhearing others, peering through keyholes or over ladders, and snapping photographs on the street, all part of what he calls "the lifelong quest for all humans to know what is going on in the personal and private lives of others" (Locke, 2010, p. 6). But he also says:

> Eavesdropping is communication, and it has two features that make it unusually interesting. The first is that it feeds on activity that is inherently *intimate*, and is so because the actors are unaware of the receiver, therefore feel free to be 'themselves.' The second feature that makes eavesdropping so interesting relates to the way the information travels. It is not *donated* by the sender. It is *stolen* by the receiver (2010, p. 3).

In social network sites, microblogging services, and so forth the information *is* 'donated' by the sender. There is an explicit decision to make a piece of information available to friends, even if it is done in a passive sense (every piece of music I stream on my computer, no matter how embarrassing, is logged and made public on http://www.last.fm/user/alicetiara). This information is provided to others *to be seen*, with the hope that people will pay attention.

This "donating" of information from the individual to the network can be conceptualized as *lifestreaming* (Marwick, 2010; Mullen, 2010). Lifestreaming is comprised of two processes: tracking personal information and broadcasting it to a network. While self-tracking is not new, digital tools make measuring, quantifying and recording personal information much easier. For example, the Withings scale tweets its user's weight once a week, while the FitBit uses a sensor to track a person's caloric burn, sleep cycle and steps walked. The broadcasting element is enabled by internet technologies which give individuals potential access to an audience of millions. The combination of both tracking and broadcasting that characterizes social media use produces a stream of information about the individual. Thus, the term "lifestream" refers to the aggregation of information produced from the totality of social media technologies across the ecosystem. It is at this lifestream that would-be eavesdroppers often look when attempting to discern social information. The lifestream is the subject of social surveillance.

People expose themselves to this type of social surveillance so that people will look. For many, attention and visibility is a goal in itself, especially when it is connected to social status. For instance, Matthew, 16, from North Carolina, describes girls who post controversial statements on the question-and-answer site Formspring:

> The people who do it, it's the attention crave, for sure… So it's like those girls who love a little drama in their life or something. I don't know it also kind of-- it's a good way for things to get around too. So if there's a rumor they can

> confirm or deny it on there. And depending on that how they answer it you have yourself— there's this big new piece of news about so-and-so that you can spread around which, I think, is kind of cool.

Josh, 17, from Nashville identifies a number of things teens might do on Facebook to make someone look:

> **Interviewer: Do you feel like people put stuff on Facebook trying to elicit a type of reaction from other people?**
> Josh: Definitely.
> **Interviewer: Like what?**
> Josh: Like insulting other people. Posting pictures that they've taken of themselves. Just trying to get other people angry or trying to get other people to like them.

With teens, attention-getting content may include risqué or revealing pictures, gossip, trash-talking or overtly performing relationships.

Among Web 2.0 workers in San Francisco, people aimed to create content that they thought their audience would read, often informative, witty, or intelligent. Adam Jackson, a young technology worker, told me:

> There is a reason why I can post 150 times a day and still have 2, 000 followers. People seem really interested in what I am saying. I get more replies than most of the tech experts, because my things are very, they make you want to stick to them and reply. I happen to have a knack for it I guess. I spent a year and a half changing the way I tweet, on a monthly basis, to find that algorithm of success.

Jackson tailored his content to appeal to his audience with the goal of increasing his numbers of Twitter followers. But appealing to a specific audience often requires self-censorship. Caroline McCarthy, a New York-based tech journalist, opened a Twitter account to chat with peers. But with 6,000 followers, she is careful to post tweets only that she finds appropriate for a work audience.

> But, I think about two years ago, shortly after I first started using Twitter, I live-Twittered the aftermath of a wild party at my apartment, like, "OMG! Guess who we found in the bathtub!" Now I would not do that. I would not do that because first - it would be image-bad. Second - how many of those 6000 people actually want to know that I found my drunk friend in my bathtub? No, none of them.

For McCarthy, attention-seeking content is not appropriate if it is not professional. She crafts tweets that are in keeping with her professional persona and that she thinks her followers will find interesting.

Social surveillance is symmetrical. People create content with the expectation that other people will view it, whether that means editing their own self-presentation to appeal to an audience, or doing something controversial to gain attention. The reciprocity of social surveillance, therefore, engenders both disclosure and concealment.

Conclusion

Social surveillance is the process by which social technologies like Facebook, Foursquare and Twitter let users gather social information about their friends and acquaintances. As Nippert-Eng writes, "Humans are constantly scanning, constantly receptive to and looking for whatever they can perceive about each other, for whatever is put out there" (2010, p. 8). People are very resourceful at combining information from disparate digital sources to create a "bigger picture" of social activities. The human impulse to eavesdrop or overhear is augmented by information provided by those they survey on Twitter or Flickr.

There are some positive effects of social surveillance. One of the most important is ambient awareness of others or the development of "digital intimacy" (Thompson 2008). While Twitter is frequently characterized as irrelevant prattle, these pieces of information, like gossip, small talk, and trivia, serve to create and maintain emotional connections between members of the community, who make up the networked audience. Similarly, Mei Xing (female, 18, Nashville) says:

> Mei Xing: I guess we just get really happy when we talk about Facebook because it is probably the greatest invention ever.
> **Interviewer: Yeah.**
> Mei Xing: Yeah, because before Facebook when we would go home everyone would be— you don't know what other kids are doing at their houses. It's just basically you're like in your own little world and you don't know what's happening in other people's households and stuff. But with Facebook you know that at that moment that at least a portion of your friends are doing the same thing that you are.

To Mei Xing, seeing her friends on Facebook chat or looking at their Wall conversations makes her feel connected to a larger community of friends.

Making information public can also have positive, supportive social effects. Jeff Jarvis argues that using the internet publically affords "meeting people, collaborating with them, gathering the wisdom of our crowd, and holding the powerful to public account" (Jarvis, 2010). Nicole Ellison and Cliff Lampe's work on social capital shows that increased use of Facebook

correlates to stronger, more supportive relational ties (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Beyond simply asking for help from our friends and family, blogging about problems with work or children can open up a world of helpful advice and support. Furthermore, making information public increases one's attention and visibility, which correlates with higher social status in many social contexts (Marwick, 2010). This can be helpful for people in career paths like journalism or entrepreneurship that depend on networking and publicity for success. It can also be stifling for people who feel that they must publicize themselves in order to be noticed.

Foucault advocated that people focus on "the media through which power is generated and transmitted" (Gerrie, 2007). This paper has updated the model of *social surveillance* to account for different forms of social power and how they can be expressed through social media technologies. I use Foucault's concept of "capillaries of power," in which power flows through all interpersonal relationships, to demonstrate that social surveillance explains how power differentials are evident in everyday interactions, rather than the hierarchical models of power in traditional understandings of surveillance. Social surveillance exists along three axes, power, hierarchy, and reciprocity, which are constantly shifting and changing. The case studies demonstrate how our understandings of social roles, disclosure, and publicity are altered through the lens of social surveillance. Individuals strategically reveal, disclose and conceal personal information to create connections with others and protect social boundaries. These processes become normal parts of day-to-day life in communities that are highly connected through social media.

Endnotes

[1] Sousveillance, or "inverse surveillance," is the use of monitoring and tracking technologies to watch powerful entities. For example, filming police actions using digital video in order to document potential abuses. See Mann, Nolan, & Wellman, 2003.

[2] Critical Mass is a monthly event held in cities around the world where bicyclists ride en mass in an attempt to reclaim streets from automobiles. In 2008, a police officer was convicted of assaulting a Critical Mass rider in New York based partially on a YouTube video of the incident which contradicted the officer's claims (Dwyer, 2008). For a discussion of Twitter's use in the Arab Spring political movements in Egypt and Tunisia, see Lotan et al., in press.

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