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*Extended Abstract*

# Surveillance Enabling Technologies and Peer Scrutiny: Impacts on Young People's Interpersonal Relationships

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## Introduction

This research explores young people's uses and perceptions of social media and mobile technologies as a form of surveillance enabling technologies ; i.e. technologies that were not originally designed for surveillance but can be used for these ends. It investigates the place of these technologies within young people's interpersonal relationships, as well as the social impacts of the increased capacities for checking', 'looking up' and 'searching', that these technologies provide, potentially leading to a normalisation of such practices. This paper will give an overview of my first empirical findings as well as focus on theoretical insights within current debates on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), power, and personal relationships.

The project adopts a nuanced approach to surveillance by looking at social media and digital technologies, neither through the framework of empowerment and participation (Albrechtslund, 2008), nor solely through the framework of control and threat (e.g. social control, commercial and state surveillance). Both approaches overlook the duality between agency and wider social structures at play within these technologies. My research focuses on these technologies a means of social sorting and of normalisation of surveillance practices embedded in wider neo-liberal dynamics (e.g. assimilation of work and play (Sennett, 1998, Wittel, 2001), processes of self-responsibility and individualisation). It has been argued that these dynamics lead to more commodified forms of interpersonal relationships (Sennett, 1998, Wittel, 2001, Andrejevic 2007). My research, therefore, investigates surveillance

practices in interpersonal relationships but also importantly looks at the shifting perceptions, discourses and legitimacy of these practices in everyday life (Andrejevic, 2007, Jansson, 2012).

According to Andrejevic (2007), continuous and normalised interactions with surveillance processes and technologies make possible the emergence of a *'culture of peer-to-peer monitoring that mimics and amplifies top–down forms of commercial and political surveillance'* (Ibid. : 213). This culture, according to him, is deeply embedded within a broader neo-liberal governance in everyday life where relationships have become managed, optimised, and risks have been reduced. A peer to peer monitoring culture is said to have emerged as a response to increasing uncertainties and perceived risks and a need to pro-actively anticipate them. Thus '*the perceived need for verification increases'* (Ibid.), alongside a responsibility of not 'being duped', which helps create a culture of suspicion. These dynamics are arguably not new but they are said to be exacerbated and facilitated by the proliferation of technologies of surveillance and verification, as well of uncertainties and wider political and commercial structures of power that seep into everyday life. Thus this research focuses on surveillance as a socially constructed phenomenon that is embedded in young people's lives through these technologies, as well as a reflection of wider political and commercial structures of power that seep into everyday life.

David Lyon (2001) argues that surveillance relates to "the development of new kinds of solidarity, involving less "trust" or at least different kinds of "trust" (109ff). This research aims to explore whether or not digitally mediated practices involve less 'trust' in interpersonal relationships and what the new modalities of 'different kinds of trust' are. Indeed these technologies, that can be used as means of assessment and verification, can have an important impact on gaining and giving trust first in commercial and work settings (e.g. consumers' reviews on commercial websites, targeted advertising, collection of consumers' data, employers looking up future employees, etc.) as well as in permeating into interpersonal relationships. This has been coined as a 'surveillance creep' (Trottier, 2012), i.e. the spread of surveillance practices from one context to another, and as a consequence normalising these practices.

Technologies that enable and enhance surveillance both shape and are shaped by social interactions. Van Dijck argues that sociality becomes technical due to technological capacities to manipulate and manage social connections through social media (2013: 12). However; to avoid the pitfall of techno-determinism, this research looks at how ICTs reinforce and shape social practices as much as how they are shaped by the wider social and economical context within which they have proliferated. Peer scrutiny is not a new phenomenon in interpersonal relationships, but within a specific social and political agenda alongside the widespread of these technologies, interpersonal relationships are said to become more and more commodified. A common argument is that mutual disclosure, and peer scrutiny (understood as a form of care and control) participate in an information exchange upon which social bonds are based (Wittel, 2001). However, this contributes to justifying such practices and rests upon the idea of 'one have nothing to hide', reinforcing surveillance, the pressing need of disclosure and justifications in different contexts. Moreover, these discourses have impacted on normalising surveillance practices as legitimate and even as a responsible conduct to adopt. This therefore reshapes

interpersonal relations and social bonds by means of the introduction of and proliferation of acts such as cross checking and surveillance-like verification.

This research aims to uncover whether such practices are embedded and routinised within young people's interpersonal relationships, and how they reshape social practices. The proliferation of social media and mobile technologies coincides with the extension and individualisation of young people's transitions to adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997), and is embedded within wider social and economical dynamics (e.g. expansion of education, mix of work and study, increasing flexibility in the labour market, desynchronisation of young people's schedules (Woodman, 2012, 2013)), as well as particularities of age, class, nationality and gender. The research uses semi-structured interviews with young people aged 16-25 to examine how these technologies, through social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and mobile devices, are used as a resource or obstacle to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships (e.g. with school peers, work colleagues, flatmates, friends), as well as their contributions to particular forms of socialising in young people's everyday lives.

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