The Public Domain: Social Surveillance In Everyday Life
DRAFT VERSION

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Abstract

A profile on a social network site or a Twitter account is created and constructed against the background of an audience—as something *to be looked at.* This paper argues that the dual gaze of *social surveillance*—surveying content created by others and looking at one's own content through other people's eyes—is a normative part of constant ongoing social media use. *Social surveillance* is distinguished from "surveillance" along four axes: power, hierarchy, symmetry, and individuality. Based on ethnographic work in the San Francisco technology scene from 2008-2009 and amongst teenagers in the Southeastern United States in 2010, I look at this 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 protect 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

1.1 Introduction: Social surveillance

> **Alice: When someone says, "So-and-so is totally cyberstalking so-and-so,"**
> **what does that mean? What are they actually doing?**
> 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.
> **Alice: When do you think that gets to the point where it's weird?**
> Aarti: If you— well, I don't know. I feel like now, it's not really weird for anyone
> anymore.
> **Alice: Because everyone does it?**
> Aarti: Yeah. If you don't know someone that well, and you look at maybe their
> 15th profile picture and you comment on it, that would be kind of weird, but so
> many people have done that, and it's not like they like you or they are obsessed
> with you. It's just because everyone does it, and maybe they just want to be your
> friend or something (Aarti, 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). Users of these technologies continually investigate the digital traces left by members of their social graph, or the people they are connected to through social media. This is by design. The intended use of Facebook, for example, is to "connect and share with the people in your life" (Facebook, 2011) through viewing the News Feed and user profiles. But Facebook is only one part of a social media ecology. In communities where social technology use is prominent, a single person may have a Facebook profile, a Twitter account, a Tumblr blog, a Flickr photostream, a Foursquare account and a Formspring account, each of which transmits personal information to an audience. We call this aggregate of digital information the *lifestream*. The lifestream is broadcast to be looked at, and as such, people look closely. This constellation of practices, framed variously as stalking, watching, reading, gazing or looking, is a typical use case of social media, yet its affects are akin to the panopticon. People monitor their digital actions with an audience in mind, sometimes having to make specific choices about who to tailor social media content to (Gershon, 2010). The overall effect on highly technically mediated communities is a high awareness of being watched.

It is well-documented that 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). Recently, scholars have begun to unpack 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. This has been conceptualized as *lateral surveillance* (Andrejevic, 2005)*, participatory surveillance* (Albrechtslund, 2008)*, social searching* (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006) and our preferred term, *social surveillance* (Joinson, 2008; Tokunaga, 2011)*.* Social surveillance differs from typical surveillance, and its inverse, "sousveillance," 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 acting upon individuals (e.g. governments surveilling citizens or corporations surveilling consumers). Third, it is mutual: each participant is both broadcasting information that is surveilled by others and surveilling information broadcast by others.

　　　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 their boss or their parent (Marwick & boyd 2010). As a result, people self-monitor their online actions to maintain a desired balance between publicity and privacy (Marwick, 2010). In this paper, we argue 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. We look at three different 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 these boundaries of work and home, school and private life, friends and family (Marwick & boyd, 2010). In social technologies where relationships are flattened, the re-emergence of clearly hierarchical social roles such as employer or parent, demonstrate that power exists and is reinforced even when technologies attempt to achieve egalitarianism.

　　　Second, we examine "Facebook stalking," the common practice of digging through digital information on the social network site Facebook to reveal information about others (Kennedy, 2009). We 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, we look at 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. I conceptualize this process as *lifestreaming,* tracking and disseminating digital personal information. Lifestreaming requires *social digitization,* or codifying formerly ephemeral social information. People choose to disclose and reveal as appropriate. Beyond simply stalking on Facebook, looking at Web 2.0 as an ecosystem of overlapping and connected sites creates a model of social behavior that is larger than its parts. The dual nature of information production and consumption through social media creates a symmetrical model of surveillance in which watchers expect, and desire, to be watched.

1.2 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 unequal balance of power in which individuals are surveilled by entities and the balance of power is overwhelmingly tipped in favor of the surveyor. However, individuals both comply and resist surveillance, referred to by Anthony Giddens as the "dialectic of control" (1982). For instance, accounts of "sousveillance" (Mann, Nolan, & Wellman, 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 an illegal protest march in Iran.

Electronic communication technologies are intrinsic to contemporary surveillance, including 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 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, creating potential future issues. Second, people post information about others (directly or inadvertently), such as tagging them in a photograph or @replying them 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 the uses and gratifications 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.

1.3 Method

Current studies of social surveillance focus either on the theoretical or the quantitative. This study fleshes out 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). In the next part of this paper, we examine the theory of social surveillance in depth, particularly along axes of power and participation. In the final section, we 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 how it affects its 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 social surveillance that we believe is increasingly common in social contexts where social media plays a significant role in social interaction.

Part II: Theories

2.1 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.
- *Symmetry:* People who engage in social surveillance also produce online content that is surveilled by others.
- *Individuals:* Social surveillance takes place between individuals rather than between individuals and entities.

2.2 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 stern patriarchy seated around a table, but through millions of interpersonal moments in which "masculinity" or "femininity" are 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 apply 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.

2.3 Hierarchy

Surveillance in its most commonly used form implies a significant power imbalance between the group gathering information and the group being watched. By definition, then, social surveillance cannot be "surveillance" because much of it takes place between peers who are of similar social power. 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, one member of a couple may be wealthier, better looking, more or less jealous, in a bad mood, or far away—all of which can affect the balance of power within a relationship. Although the consequences of power imbalances in a relationship 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, parent/child (boyd, 2006). We explore these roles in section 3.2.

2.4 Symmetry

Social surveillance takes place between members of social media sites. Users of sites like Twitter and Facebook are as part of a *networked audience* in which participants both send and receive social information (Marwick & boyd, 2010). As a user skims her Facebook feed, for example, she simultaneously reads her friends' content, comments on it, contributes to other people's feeds, using all this information to improve her mental model of other people's identities, actions and relationships. As such, those who practice social surveillance are simultaneously surveilled by others. Thus, the typical asymmetry of surveillance, in which you are watched by a power who you cannot watch back, is absent.

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:

> **Danah: 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 sciencey 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 it is appropriate. 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.

2.5 Individuals

Following Foucault's conception of sovereign vs. capillary power, in social surveillance actors are conceptualized as individuals rather than entities. This distinguishes social surveillance from other forms of surveillance that utilize social media, as discussed previously. If a marketing

agency launches a Farmville-like game to gather information about people who play it, this does not constitute social surveillance, although it is within Facebook. A government agent impersonating a Twitter user in order to learn about a drug deal does not constitute social surveillance either as he is acting as a representative of a social entity, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Despite this, there are moments of slippage where the role of an individual comes into play in a way in which participants had not anticipated. See Section 3.2 for a detailed account.

Part III: Case Studies

<u>3.1 Social Surveillance as Social Practice</u>

Social surveillance is the typical way that most people use social media. The Facebook News Feed or Twitter stream consists 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 your 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 easy enough to browse the pages and walls of people you do not know, as long as their privacy settings allow for it. This use case has become normal in many social contexts, to the point where it is expected to look at each your friends' digital content: it is produced *to be seen*. A teen might ask another, "did you see what I posted on Facebook last night?" or "did you see my Twitter post?" Many people use social media as an easy way to 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. An application like Foursquare is good only for coupons and specials if the user has no "Friends."

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.

<u>3.2 Case Study: Social Roles</u>

Although we distinguish *social* surveillance as existing between people of equal power relations, there are circumstances in which users are observed on social media by people who are connected to them through the network, but have some sort of legitimate social power over them, such as a boss, parent or college admissions officer. In order to understand such situations, we must look at how social media creates a flat hierarchy, or sense of egalitarianism, across users.

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." Although in face-to-face interaction, people vary how they present themselves based on context and audience, this 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; Marwick & boyd, 2010). Despite this, in many social groups there is pressure to "friend" any acquaintance. As a result, one's list of "friends" may include people with wildly varying social norms, with a range of ages, occupations, and expectations.

There are typically social or temporal boundaries between different social contexts. Consider the workplace. Perhaps employees are "at work" once they clock in, enter a building, or fill out a time sheet. An employee may know they are on call once the clock shows 9 AM. There may be a closed-circuit television camera monitoring the employee's cash register, or internet tracking software installed on her work laptop which functions even when she brings it home. In these situations, the boundary between "work" and "not work" is clear.

However, technologies have blurred the boundaries between such formerly strict categories. Christena Nippert-Eng writes that cellular phones, pagers, and email have blurred boundaries 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 your 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, which 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. 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.

In January 2009, James Andrews, an employee of the Ketchum PR agency, flew to Memphis for a speaking gig at FedEx. En route to his hotel, he tweeted from his @keyinfluencer Twitter account, "True confession but I'm in one of those towns where I scratch my head and say, 'I would die if I had to live here.'" A FedEx employee saw the tweet, took offense, and told a higher-up about it; within hours, the FedEx corporate communications team wrote a public response castigating Andrews for his poor judgment:

> Mr. Andrews, If I interpret your post correctly, these are your comments about
> Memphis a few hours after arriving in the global headquarters city of one of your
> key and lucrative clients, and the home of arguably one of the most important
> entrepreneurs in the history of business, FedEx founder Fred Smith. Many of my
> peers and I feel this is inappropriate. We do not know the total millions of dollars
> FedEx Corporation pays Ketchum annually for the valuable and important work

your company does for us around the globe. We are confident however, it is enough to expect a greater level of respect and awareness from someone in your position as a vice president at a major global player in your industry (Henderson, 2009).

Andrews' handle positioned him as a professional, but on Twitter it is normal for even high-up executives to share personal opinions and experiences to appear authentic, to try to make power differentials disappear and instead reinforce connections with others (Marwick, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2010). But Andrews and the FedEx employee following him were not equal; the FedEx employee was a client, and as such clearly held power over Andrews. Rather than just another Twitter user, at that moment Andrews was an employee with no ability to retroactively censor his comment.

Similarly, the following post appeared on the humor site Lamebook. Jake, Sam and Tom are teenagers, and Andrea is Sam's mother.

Jake uses Facebook to ask Sam whether he is having a party. Even after a warning from Tom, Jake, viewing Facebook as a social space, persists on asking about the party until Sam's mother, in no uncertain terms, shuts down the idea. Jake has clearly caused trouble for Sam by assuming that any members of the Facebook audience would be "friends," rather than authority figures. 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 are constantly re-established and reinforced through social interaction.

3.3 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—who is she dating, is she cheating on her boyfriend—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 by enabling users both to assert power over others and recognize the importance of their peers.

In some cases, Facebook stalking is engaged in by people who react to feelings of weakness or loss of power by attempting to gather information about others. This "leveling up" by 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.
>
> **Danah: Just curious?**
>
> Serena: Yeah, I'm just curious.
>
> **Danah: 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 prettier. While Serena finds it so painful to see Ashley and her ex interact on Facebook that she has contemplated hiding all of Ashley's posts (and briefly de-friended her), 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. Similarly, Madison, a sophomore, uses Facebook to "stalk" the popular senior girls:

> **Alice: 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--
> **Alice: 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 lets the younger group participate vicariously in their lives, thereby reasserting a measure of power.

Because Facebook stalking is so widely practiced, it creates a set of expectations. Among Web 2.0 workers in San Francisco, there was an unvoiced assumption that friends and acquaintances would read each other's blogs and Twitter streams. For instance, I had dinner with three female informants. The women spent most of the dinner chatting about Twitter interactions Tumblr posts. Without having read their tweets or blog posts, I was locked out of the conversation. The presumption that I would pay attention to what they had written online hung in the air. I was expected to take an interest in my informant's lives by doing a bit of research, being informed and caring enough to delve in and learn something about them. One informant loudly berated me at a party for unfriending him on Twitter, for instance, presumably making him feel rejected. Stalking goes beyond voyeurism into a reciprocal social practice.

3.4 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, looking 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.

I conceptualize this "donating" of information from the individual to the network 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.

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:

> **Alice: Do you feel like people put stuff on Facebook trying to elicit a type of reaction from other people?**
> Josh: Definitely.
> **Alice: 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.
> **Alice: Do you think it has to do with getting attention?**
> Josh: Uh-huh.

With teens, attention-getting content may include risqué or revealing pictures, gossip, trash-talking or performative relationship information.

Among Web 2.0 workers in San Francisco, people tried 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.

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 process of social surveillance, therefore, includes both disclosure and concealment.

4.0 Conclusion

Social surveillance is the process by which social technologies like Facebook, Foursquare and Twitter let users gather social information about their friends and acquaintants. This is a very human impulse. 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.
> **Alice: 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). Tech writer Steven Johnson agrees, stating in *Time* magazine that "certain kinds of sharing can, in fact, advance a wider public good, as well as satisfy our own needs for compassion and counsel" (Johnson, 2010). These ideas are backed up by academic studies. 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 our problems with work or our kids 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). In this paper, we have updated the model of *social surveillance* to account for different forms of social power and how they can be expressed through social media technologies. We 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 four axes, power, hierarchy, symmetry, and individuality, 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. 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 protect social boundaries. These processes become normal parts of day-to-day life in communities that are highly connected through social media.

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