



Welfare, crime and society

Surveillance: safe shopping

JOHN BANFORD

The Commissioner has warned about the dangers of sleep-walking into a surveillance society and I think we all have to recognise that as part of the modern world we live in, we have increasing amounts of personal information generated about us as we go about our everyday lives. Click of a mouse here; use of a mobile phone there, visiting an ATM machine, using a credit card; use of a supermarket loyalty card. Every time we do one of those things that enables electronic footprints to be generated about us. Well maybe every one of those when it's on a discrete basis is acceptable, because it's to do with providing us with a service, things that we expect. But it does provide the opportunity for all that information to be joined together and brought together in, in a way which might be used in an unwarranted way which affects individuals

ALLAN COMM

In this introductory film we'll be looking at examples of surveillance in one very everyday location – a shopping centre on the edge of Leeds.

I'm Allan Cochrane. I've come here as member of the Open University course team, to look at how surveillance is understood by those who do the watching, as well as those who are being watched.

And I'll also be reflecting on some of the tensions between being watched out for and protected, and being watched over, so that others may be protected.

Out-of-town shopping centres like The White Rose can seem isolated from the communities which they serve, and one of the tasks faced by managers is to find ways of bringing them in as customers.

ALLAN SYNC

How would you describe the broad ethos, the way in which the shopping centre is thought of and understood?

PETER COOK

Our core shopping public is actually quite a small number of people who come from the local community and as a result of that it is very important that we make friends with the people in the local community, that we put something back into the community from whom we thrive.

ALLAN COMM

One community-focused scheme involves the early opening of the centre to allow older people to walk the internal malls – offering them a safe and warm place to exercise. Mall-walking has become a popular pastime for some.

ALLAN SYNC

I've been watching people walk around, doing the walking in the early morning and I was just wondering what it is, why you have chosen to come here rather than anywhere else?

NASSEM

It's safer, you know, cos we just have a park in front of our house, you know, we don't feel safe and this is more convenient for us you know. We meet other people as well who's doing the mall walking, you know I find it a lot better coming here.

MARGARET

We do it for health reasons, you know, the exercise. I'm a diabetic myself and this is why I started doing it, for the exercise. But the staff and the security people are all so friendly, and that is in itself is an encouragement. And yeah, we do feel safe because of that.

ALLAN

The promise of safety and security is a key issue for the shopping centre and that implies keeping some people out as well as providing a safe space for those who are allowed in.

ALLAN SYNC

You know when you talk about making sure you keep undesirables out, how do you know who they are? Do you have ... ?

JOHN WHITE

We have, we have had past dealings with several people that tend to keep returning to the Centre, and we do have a, what's known to us as our 'Who's in the zoo book'. And it's pretty full now, but we do refresh our minds and we know a lot of them as well cos they keep returning on a regular basis and they're banned from Centre.

RYAN

Some people find the cameras and security guards a bit of an invasion of privacy, even in a public place. But I don't really see it that way. I think if it's making people feel safer and making it a nicer place for all ages, then I think it's all right.

ALLAN COMM

In one sense the experience of surveillance is a universal one – everybody in a shopping centre comes under the view of the cameras. Marketing strategies are developed with the help of widely available personal data. Medical information is held by doctors; tax and benefit data is held by government departments.

But people are affected differently depending on how they are perceived through the surveillance process.

JOHN, SECURITY

You've just got an IC1 male coming through the centre self extension, wearing a white and grey top, blue jeans, trainers and a baseball cap. Can you approach that man? He's gone into Argos.

SECURITY GUARD

Stand him down, John.

JOHN, SECURITY

You just wait there outside. I've got whisky 3 4 outside. He's actually banned from site.

O/S RADIO

Is he still banned for life or not?

JOHN, SECURITY

Yeah, affirmative we believe he is, yeah.

KIRSTIE BALL

The implications of a drift towards a surveillance society really depend upon how this information is used, where it's stored, who gets access to it, what decisions are taken with that information and how people's life courses are steered.

ALLAN COMM

One way in which surveillance and information-gathering can be used, is to identify those who are seen as undesirable and to exclude them from a community.

KIRSTIE BALL

Surveillance is most intensively applied at borders and boundaries, because it seems to create pinch points or places where access is very tightly controlled and tightly negotiated. So the space is safe, so nobody is threatened.

ALLAN COMM

In a way the security staff have the responsibility of protecting the boundaries of the centre, so those inside become a form of community, protected from the threats that are believed to exist outside.

This is also a community based around particular forms of shopping – particular sets of shops. And some of those who remain on the outside do so because the shops are thought to be too expensive, or not for people like them.

PETER COOK

I think if there are any excluded groups, it would be people who perhaps feel they can't afford to shop at the White Rose Shopping Centre. So we do extensive research in terms of our catchment and who shops and who doesn't, and our research indicate that because ... our shops are not really high, highly upmarket, but equally we're not a budget shopping centre. Where we are in south Leeds, we're actually situated in quite a deprived area of Leeds. Some of the poorest wards in the country are located on our doorstep. So I think, I think it's possibly more of an exclusion due to socio-demographic profile rather than an excluded group in terms of, say, troublemakers or anything like that.