



Welfare, crime and society

Surveillance: perceptions of security

ALLAN COMM

The entanglements between welfare, crime and society also blur the relationship between private and public forms of security.

PETER COOK

The other thing we have as well, we have a police officer on site. This is his beat, he doesn't go anywhere else. And we also have two PCSOs in addition to the police officer. So I think that balance of the soft uniform presence and also the uniform presence, because a shopper will see a police officer probably more in the White Rose Shopping Centre than they do down their own street, and so that gives the perception of, of safety; it gives the perception of security.

ALLAN COMM:

Young people are often viewed as potentially troublesome or disorderly, even potential threats. By contrast, children are perceived as particularly vulnerable in society and the presence of police is felt to provide significant reassurance to parents using the Centre.

PETER COOK

And well what I think is important for kind of kiddies as well, is that a mum can say look, that's a police officer, if you're ever in trouble, then if you see someone who's dressed like that, you can approach them and they will help you. And the police officer will, will speak to people as well. So we find that it gives a real perception, that service gives a real perception of safety and security, but without being overt.

ALLAN COMM

The formal arrangements which are so carefully choreographed through the shopping centre exist alongside more informal ways in which people look out for each other – and it is sometimes argued that they have come to replace them.

ALLAN SYNC

How do you think the ways in which people sort of watch over and watch out for people has changed?

KHADIJA

I know before when I was younger and that, when I used to go shopping with my parents, it was never an issue if I wasn't holding their hands or if I wasn't strapped into my pushchair, 'cause it was almost like there was always a community spirit and there was always somebody else looking out for you as well. But now I think you really, really have to look after your own child and having the surveillance there is almost just like a back-up mechanism and it just gives you that extra safety-net. And I think because of the media and just generally the way things have happened ... in the public, has made surveillance change a great deal. I think it's for the betterment really, more than anything else.

CLAIRE

People don't look out for each other as much as they should do. I mean if they did then there wouldn't be a need for all cameras and everything and it would be a lot better and everyone would be, yeah, probably get on a lot better anyway. I mean there's even cameras on buses now and it's ridiculous. It's just ... you can't even sit on a bus without being watched.

KIRSTIE BALL

A common mistake is to think that surveillance is all about technology. It's not all about technology. Technology doesn't stand alone, technology is a product and it's a product of a production process where something was designed and conceived and funded and resourced and based on a need or a demand. It is clearly part of a long social process, it just so happens that with the introduction of electronics and, and computer systems and databases we've got very, very good at it and we've got very, very efficient at it and now it's having unintended and intended consequences that really need to be thought through from a social point of view.

ALLAN COMM

Modern technology certainly has made it easier to take some forms of surveillance for granted. It's easy to miss or forget about the cameras and the information-gathering that takes place through shopping, whether on the high street, on the internet or in a shopping centre. Information-gathering of all sorts has become easier and more pervasive.

ALLAN SYNC

Thinking about the shopping centre more broadly, I mean there are other ways in which you're being looked out for but also watched over in this space?

RITA

Well I think everywhere ... They say that Big Brother's watching you, don't they? There's always someone trying to get information from whatever you do. You use your card and somebody knows that you have used it and where you used it. You use your mobile phone and people know where you are because they have a signal from it. So I think it's just something that is happening all over the place now and you just accept it.

JOHN BANFORD

We've been fortunate in that ... to the extent we've never perhaps lived in, in times when the state has misused information massively against its population. Now I'm not proposing that that's going to be case here, but clearly as we get more and more information held about us, even though it's ostensibly for goods purposes, to transform public services, to try and perhaps look for vulnerable members of society who may ... be subject to criminal activity or whatever, or to catch perpetrators of crimes, equally the argument can go that we start to interfere with the lives of honest and law-abiding people. And we need to decide where the right balance is struck

ALLAN COMM

The way in which the Centre's boundaries are managed and the form of community created, highlights some of the tensions between the search for security and the delivery of fairness to all.

The way in which forms of surveillance are used to provide support for people, whether through the operation of a loyalty card, the provision of educational support, the opportunity of mall-walking or even the organisation of a community tea dance, highlights some of the ambiguities that are associated with it.

In some respects the shopping centre provides a way of thinking about wider sets of social changes, because of the way in which it offers opportunities to those who are prepared to take advantage of them. But those opportunities also highlight the extent to which people are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own welfare as well that of their families and communities.