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3. Friendly Social Surveillance

Abstract

Chapter 3 seeks to frame Digital Kinship in terms of debates around the effects of media especially in terms of emotion, intimacy and surveillance. Bringing discussions around emotion and media by scholars, along with debates around social surveillance, mobility and transnationalism, this chapter considers the ways that different forms of mobility (chosen and enforced) are recalibrating familial ties.

Keywords: intimacy; surveillance; families; transnationalism

32-year-old Maki and her mother 57-year-old Eriko lived in a town 30 minutes train ride from the center of Tokyo. For Maki and Eriko, setting up Facebook events was a regular part of their jobs. When they organized events, they wrote announcements with pictures and location information, and posted them on Facebook. They read each other's posts and didn't post private information on Facebook. For Maki, Facebook facilitated a type of social surveillance: "Since we started to use Facebook, we know each other's situation without talking." By contrast, they described LINE as "a very private tool. We use Facebook for making announcement to the public."

While much of the surveillance literature has focused upon corporate or governmental dimensions of social media, a range of other kinds of surveillance is apparent in everyday practice. These can be horizontal and vertical, benevolent and malevolent, and reflect long-standing practices of gossip, monitoring and even parenting. As Maki and Eriko described, LINE creates a private and individuated mode of co-presence and social surveillance, while Facebook is for more collective and public social surveillance. These practices reflect new forms of social surveillance (Marwick 2012) within families that are creating an additional—and to date under-researched—layers of complexity (Clark 2012; Sengupta 2012).

Despite the continuity with previous practices of social surveillance, we still know very little about how privacy, intimacy and surveillance are being

played out in everyday family contexts through locative media, or the ways in which these dynamics impact how, when and where locative media are used. We also know little about how place and time shape these experiences. As we have explored in previous chapters, different forms of intimacy and kinship weave their ways through media practices. In these practices it is the social or lateral dimensions of surveillance that best encompass the paradoxes of care in and around technology, and data in the home. Here we see care as a texture, contour and practice, moving in and out of the daily rhythms. Care is a complex layering of emotion and slowness that is often entangled with practices such as surveillance.

Alice Marwick distinguishes “social surveillance” from traditional forms through three axes—power, hierarchy and reciprocity (2012, 378). Utilizing Foucault’s notion of capillaries of power, Marwick argues that social surveillance assumes “power differentials evident in everyday interactions rather than the hierarchical power relationships assumed in much of the surveillance literature.” Marwick identifies some of the common notions of surveillance such as lateral (Andrejevic 2006), participatory (Albrechtslund 2008) and social (Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe 2007; Joinson 2008; Tokunaga 2011). As she notes, social surveillance differs from traditional models insofar as it is focused around micro-level, de-centralized, reciprocal interactions between individuals. Marwick frames her definition in terms of boundary work (Nippert-Eng 2010, 10–14) whereby privacy is not necessarily framed by dichotomies of divisions across spatial, temporal and object-related work (Marwick 2012, 379).

Datafication of everyday life complicates surveillance. With tracking data on devices from phones to wearables, two key camps have emerged. Those that recognize the ways in which the data is used by corporation in ways that users are yet to understand. In recent years, especially through corporate data harvesting such as the Cambridge Analytica debacle, it has become apparent that there is a need for more robust regulation. The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal happened early in 2018 when it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica used millions of Facebook profiles without their consent for political gain. And while in Europe there has been the rollout of the European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in May 2018, there are concerns about companies such as Google and Facebook not being accountable.

Artists and creatives such as Egor Tsvetkov have been making devices or using facial recognition applications like FindFace to demonstrate dystopian realities. In Tsvetkov’s *Your Face is My Data* (2016) photographs of strangers on the Russian subway where identified via their social media profile by the facial recognition app FindFace. Another example can be found in the

Trevor Paglen and Kate Crawford's viral art *#ImageNetRoulette* project which subverted a leading facial recognition database to remove more than half a million images. The project sought to make people aware of the facial recognition biases and to change people's minds about AI (2019). The project resonates with a subgenre of artists working to creatively subvert social and mobile media technology to make more public awareness. Other creatives such as wearable artist Camille Baker are using wearables to bring attention to non-normative bodies (2017). These practices bring to question the interrelationship between privacy, data and trust and how we might gain empowerment beyond corporate exploitation. In the space of digital health and self-tracking, the work of Lupton has been crucial in identifying some of the issues around dataveillance (Lupton 2016). As Albrechtslund (2008) notes, "participatory surveillance" involves active surveillance of self and others in ways that are productive and social.

In our fieldwork across the three sites families and intimates created their own types of friendly surveillance. From the locative function on Facebook that allows friends to monitor, to parents ambiently watching their children's relationships through WhatsApp, mobile media is providing creative and playful ways to manage intimate intergenerational relations at a distance. In this chapter we reflect upon the different forms of cross-cultural intergenerational friendly surveillance (care at a distance or co-present care). We begin with a discussion of debates around surveillance before exploring the many ways co-present care plays out in everyday scenarios across Tokyo, Shanghai and Melbourne.

Understanding Contemporary Surveillance: A Familial Model

With the rise of mobile technologies, what constitutes surveillance has diversified. As we noted in Chapter 1, there are some key trajectories for understanding the rise and diversification and localization of surveillance. We pointed to the work of Humphreys (2013) who outlines a specific form of mobile media surveillance as emerging from dominant three kinds of surveillance. In addition to the traditional notion of surveillance, characterized by its non-transparency by an authority such as the government, three other kinds of surveillance have been identified in the literature: voluntary panopticon, lateral surveillance, and self-surveillance.

Voluntary panopticon refers to the voluntary submission to corporate surveillance or what Whitaker calls the "participatory panopticon" (1999). A voluntary or "participatory" panopticon differs from older systems of

surveillance in that it is consensual. The voluntary panopticon is based on a consumer society where information technology allows for the decentered surveillance of consumptive behavior. Participatory panopticon is very similar to participatory surveillance in that people willingly participate in the monitoring of their own behavior because they derive benefit from it (Albrechtslund 2008; Poster 1990).

Lateral surveillance is the asymmetrical, nontransparent monitoring of citizens by one another (Andrejevic 2006). With the advent of the internet and interactive media, people have similar technological capabilities previously held exclusively by corporate and state entities. As such, citizens can monitor other citizens' behavior through nonreciprocal forms of watching. Everyday people can search for information about other citizens without their knowledge or permission. The advent of social media has given rise to other forms of lateral surveillance such as Marwick's (2012) aforementioned "social surveillance," which suggests a mutual surveillance among actors using social media. Like lateral surveillance, social surveillance involves nonhierarchical forms of monitoring (i.e., not involving the state or corporate entities) among everyday people. Unlike lateral surveillance, social surveillance suggests that people engage in permissible and reciprocal forms of watching.

The last kind of surveillance is self-surveillance. Meyrowitz defines self-surveillance as "the ways in which people record themselves (or invite others to do so) for potential replaying in other times and places" (2007, 1). Technologies such as video cameras and cameraphones allow people to capture aspects of their lives to replay later. The ability to record oneself can lead to the scrutiny of mundane behavior, which can fundamentally change one's understanding of that behavior or event. The recorded behavior has power over our lived lives.

An important aspect to understanding the mundane and intimate ways surveillance plays out is acknowledging that it is, as both concept and practice, informed by cultural context. Just as what constitutes participation and power is culturally specific, so too do these nuances need to be identified and appreciated. For example, in China, there are various forms of horizontal and vertical forms of surveillance that happen in and around familial practices. In a Chinese context there are three key notions that inform our definition—*watching* (看护, *Kan Hu*, which means keeping an eye on someone); *overseeing* (监看, *Jian Kan*, is to follow an activity or an entity to make sure that it operates normally and correctly) and *surveillance* (监控, *Jian Kong*, is used where power, authority, and rebellion are often involved). In particular, it is a combination of both *Kan Hu* and *Jian Kan* that play out and through the micro-coordination of care at a distance through mobile media practices.

In Japan, 監視 (*kanshi*) refers to vertical surveillance whereby something or someone can prevent problems from happening. 観察 (*Kansatsu*) refers to watching which is viewed as more neutral. 監督 (*Kantoku*) signifies careful overseeing whereby someone like director or manager who is in charge of organization supervises his or her members. However, when it comes to family, 見守る (*mimamoru*) is more appropriate and often used by parents when they care for their children—it means to follow or to watch out for one's safety. This notion resonates with the earlier discussion of “careful surveillance” (Hjorth, Richardson and Balmford 2016).

These culturally different notions of watching, surveillance and care need to be taken into consideration. Western ideas about surveillance are not necessarily relevant in many cases where culturally specific notions of care are at play. In the next section we discuss some of the many ways friendly informal surveillance can manifest within familial care at a distance.

Care at a Distance: Examples of Families and Friendly Surveillance

Melbourne

Within family relationships, surveillance takes many forms and often involves different textures of care. In Melbourne we find 53-year-old Nancy and her daughter 30-year-old Jessica. Nancy discussed a type of surveillance with monitoring her daughter Jessica's Facebook activities, where she didn't actively monitor, but rather, being one of Jessica's contacts allowed her to be a constant benign presence. As Nancy explained:

I remember when my daughter asked me for Facebook, I said fine, but I need to be your friend. That's the condition and then I explained to her why, it's not that I want to check on you, it's that in case anything happens, I have the access and I know.

Nancy had never asked for Jessica's passwords and they had never discussed monitoring Jessica's whereabouts apart from discussion. In a discussion on tracking apps, Jessica said:

If it makes her (Nancy) feel better yeah, yeah. But I wouldn't be too happy about it. I mean, I've got nothing to hide, you just want your own privacy. And you don't want that kind of tension to be there. Or misunderstandings

to occur. So, I'd probably like try to talk her out of it, but I guess if that's how she feels, yeah. I don't know how I'd feel about that.

Nancy and Jessica did not feel the need to talk about surveillance mechanisms specifically in relationship to devices as they had established clear expectations generally. From Nancy's perspective:

I suppose I give her that trust, we've discussed it before and I've said to her once that line is crossed once, that's it. If we can maintain that, that will be good on both sides ... thankfully so far, we have built up that trust. I think it's important that at the beginning you set the boundaries and it's easy to manage both sides where we stand. So she knows that she can go out once she gets that permission but I request that she informs me more so for safety and she's done that, so far, we had a good understanding.

Nancy and Jessica's situation illustrates how expectations are integral to maintaining a positive mother-daughter relationship. Nancy expressed several times what she could have done in terms of monitoring Jessica's activities, but she didn't. She constantly used Jessica's laptop and knew it was not password protected, but never checked Jessica's email if open. As we discuss in Chapter 7, Mason (1996, 15) draws an important distinction between the ideas of caring about, which comprises the experience of the feeling and caring for, involving active care directed towards another person. Digital devices and social media in particular have played a role in navigating both expressions of emotion, particularly for transnational families.

Baldassar (2007, 391) explores the exchange of emotional and moral support between transnational families and she likens "staying in touch" to reciprocal gift exchange. Drawing on di Leonardo's (1987, 440) notion of kinwork—which recognizes the multiple efforts invested in maintaining familial relationships—Baldassar (2007, 394) explores types of care as routine, ritual and crisis and their consequences. The frequent contact and sense of co-presence afforded by social media also means that transnational families can be integrated into each other's lives at a distance. Yet, as Wilding (2006) observes, the capacity for increased communication can also create obligation, where transnational family members come to expect frequent and regular contact and for some, increased burden to visit.

Four of the participants from three different households explained how WhatsApp groups with family members and old friends overseas facilitated closer relationships, yet also caused different levels of intrusion throughout the day. For the middle aged and elderly participants, WhatsApp groups

were seen as an extended form of socializing when they would otherwise remain at home throughout the week when not working, and for the younger participant, the constant “ping” of the WhatsApp group (which she chose to mute) was also a constant distraction.

Esther described how being in a WhatsApp group with her former classmates from primary and secondary school—who she had known for nearly 50 years—inspired her to organize trips with small groups of friends. She received photos and updates when members of the group in Malaysia met together. Throughout the period of research, Esther hosted visitors from two separate small groups of friends who visited Melbourne and even stayed with her and her family. In Esther’s case, more frequent communication enhanced these relationships and she did not see those connections as a burden, in part because she was moving towards her retirement and felt she would have time to enjoy the connections.

The expression of care as self-expression but also as directed actions more broadly relates to expression of emotions as a more general mode of communication. A cultural approach to emotions argues that experiences of emotions are culturally embedded, that is, people from different cultures experience different emotions in different ways (Lutz and White 1986). Social media, as one example, constitutes a framework for the expression of emotions but also for the reciprocal recognition of the experiences of others.

As we explore in Chapter 8, withholding from posting certain content on Facebook avoids attracting unwanted attention but reflects an acknowledgement of how others feel about postings. Yet, the same participants who refrain from posting things that might be perceived as showing off still “like” the posts of others that they see as posts intended to “show off.” Between family members, it was generally seen as more favorable to acknowledge the posts of others rather than to ignore or dismiss them, even though the person “liking” reserved some judgment about the post.

Yet, as much as the experience of emotions around devices might be influenced by factors such as cultural embeddedness or the state of relationships, devices are also influencing the cues in the expression and experience of emotions. Vincent and Fortunati (2009, 13) describe mobile emotions as “mediated emotion,” that is, “emotion that is felt, narrated or shown, produced or consumed that is mediated by a computational electronic device.” Lasén (2004, 1) describes mobile phones as having become affective technologies, or objects that mediate the expression, display, experience and communication of feelings and emotions.

Yet, as Lasén, Vincent and Fortunati also observe, as much as mobile media users have an emotional relationship with their devices and are

attached to them, mobile media have become technologies that mean multiple forms of intimacy (Lasén 2004; Vincent 2005; Fortunati 2002). Smartphones as devices that converge technologies for communication, information and entertainment also means that the range of emotional experience with the phone is much wider. The following cases illustrate some of these complexities, where emotions were not only about connectedness with others and maintaining relationships, but were also experienced around addiction, attention, boredom, self-consciousness and triggering. If one form of surveillance within relationships with others is based on care, its adversary is self-surveillance which results in self-monitoring and self-judgment around one's usage of the phone and one's emotional attachment to it.

Tokyo

As noted earlier, Japan has various perceptions that related to different forms of horizontal and vertical, social and organizational forms of surveillance. In particular, it is 見守る (*mimamoru*) that is more appropriate to familial forms of surveillance and often used by parents when they care for their children.

In Tokyo, LINE was viewed as a way to keep a friendly, non-invasive co-present eye on family and friends. A key example was Haruko, a 22-year-old undergraduate student, who lived with her parents and used LINE as a form of *mimamoru* with her family. Her family consisted of her parents and younger brother who had been studying abroad for some years. When the big earthquake occurred in the northern part of Japan in 2011, Facebook was the only functioning communication line which every member of her family could access and communicate with each other, while phone, SMS, and email were not. Since then, Haruko had not used Facebook to connect with her family. From 2013, when all the family members started to use smartphones, communication with her family shifted to LINE.

Haruko made three groups on LINE for communicating with her family members: an "official" group of family, a group of family members who lived together (excluding her brother), and a group with her mother. In the official group of family, they told one another what was going on in their life. As Haruko notes:

For sharing information with family, Facebook is not convenient. LINE is very useful in sending messages, pictures, videos, etc. When our family members' lifestyles started to change, we became LINE users. LINE's

design is very nice. It feels like we are talking. It's not like e-mail. When my brother graduated from a college abroad, he sent us a warm message and pictures on LINE for telling his graduation and appreciation to the family. At that time, I was also away from Japan for studying and my father was also on a business trip. All the family members were in different places. It was very moving to see my brother's message on LINE. I also sent them a message from abroad. It was very warm moment. I was really relieved.

The group of family members who lived together coordinated life and meals daily, but in the group with only her mother their practices differed. As Haruko described:

After my brother and I grew up, my parents spend more time together. I always worry about them if they are nice to each other. Because they are so different, they often fight. When they were traveling to Hokkaido, my father sent pictures with their smile to the official group of family. But my mother sent me a message to the group of us referring to feeling tired and bored. So, I sent a message for asking her if she is ok. I often send my mother stamps, too.

She never performed this kind of one to one communication with her father on LINE; instead she used the Facebook "check-in" function to communicate with her father. Haruko discussed the motivation for this practice as follows:

My father told me to check-in on Facebook at all the places that I go to when I travel. He gets angry if I don't. He said that I don't have to call him, he can make sure that I am safe when I check-in. That's why I check-in at least once a day at the hotel or at the station when I travel.

In contrast to Haruko's family, Maki and her mother Eriko primarily used LINE for familial sharing and co-present intimacy because "it's easy" to communicate. Eriko explained, "e-mails have to be opened one by one. But on LINE, we can smoothly go back to previous messages." Maki believed that communication between the two had increased since they started using LINE because "it's much easier to use LINE than to send e-mails from mobile phones." In this family of only a mother and daughter, friendly unidirectional surveillance in the form of *mimamoru* operated as a form of care.

Often Eriko and Maki only sent a word or two with photos and stamps to each other on LINE. The conversation was usually about everyday topics like "what time do you go home?" or "Shall I fix your skirt?" They used



Figure 3.1: Maki and Eriko exchanged messages and photos on LINE for confirming the safety while travelling abroad

LINE not only for everyday communication but also for confirming the safety while traveling abroad. Sometimes when Eriko didn't notice Maki's messages, "Maki makes a single-ring-and-hang-up call. Then I notice that I got the red flag." A single-ring-and-hang-up call was a sign of "Check the message on LINE." While this had been the pattern in recent years, Maki would soon marry her boyfriend and leave her home. At the time of our last interview, they were not sure if and how communication between them might change in the future.

Our examples demonstrate how social surveillance is realized and practiced in Japanese families. One of the key incentives for mutual monitoring is the issue of safety. For example, within the context of daughter-father communication, sharing locational information by "checking in" was a way of developing care at a distance and maintaining relationships. Particularly, after the experiences of the severe earthquake in March 2011, Japanese family understandings and uses of social media changed, and mutual monitoring emerged as a basic condition through which peaceful relationships with family members are maintained.

It is also not uncommon to have multiple channels of social surveillance. For example, Haruko communicated with her parents through one LINE group whilst at the same time connected to her mother alone in another

one. Interestingly, those two channels were active simultaneously. In each group Haruko and her mother were enacting different roles, shifting their mode of communication depending on the group to talk to.

Shanghai

In Shanghai there were informal and formal ways in which surveillance plays out in horizontal and vertical ways. Watching (看护, *Kan Hu*) means keeping an eye on someone, or paying attention to them. When children are little, parents watch them in case they fall down; when they are far away from home, parents may watch them by following their updates closely in WeChat Friends' Circle, or by seeing who they are interacting with in QZone (a website where QQ users can write microblogs and tweets). Overseeing (监看, *Jian Kan*) is to follow an activity or an entity to make sure that it operates normally and correctly. Parents ask about children's daily activities via instant messages like WeChat, where topics range from their academic performance to their employment. Parents oversee not only to have an idea of children's daily life, but also to ensure that their children are doing well.

Surveillance (监控, *Jian Kong*) is used in careful watching where power, authority, and rebellion are often involved. For example, some parents download software compulsorily to surveil their children's using of internet, like LvBa. These apps can block pornographic websites, limit children's using time and restrict online chatting. Surveillance is also used for situations where institutions conduct supervision and controlling behaviour—like the Great Firewall of China, which is integral to internet surveillance.

Due to the strong pervasion of mobile internet and rapid development of various location-based services, online “check-ins” have become a trend, especially among the young. Ai, a 24-year-old graduate student noted that, “I used to keep the habit of online check-in on Jiebang.com (the Chinese version of Foursquare). Not for special reasons, just find it interesting to be the ‘landlord’ (the one who has the most check-in record in certain area).” As Ai described in more detail:

There's one benefit of using Jiebang.com to check-in—that is, I do not have many friends on Jiebang.com, so I can have a secret room for myself. I can say anything I want there without concerning for my parents or others.

Ai was not the only interviewee who expressed a desire for privacy on digital media. As WeChat has gained increasing popularity in China, friendly surveillance emerged as the key expression of intergenerational relationships

on WeChat. Due to the special 4-2-1 family structure in the wake of China's one-child policy, children have undoubtedly become *the* focus of the family. When children were old enough to move away for study, parents used social media to provide a constant care at a distance. Because WeChat also allows online check-in through Moments, parents now had a new way to learn about their children's safety and engage in online caring. However, such friendly surveillance could become a burden for some kids.

Whereas parents emphasized how they benefited from knowing about their children's immediate status and detailed daily lives via the WeChat, children held conflicting attitudes about adding parents as "friends" on social media, and on the value of locative sharing. On the one hand, the young people agreed that the locative social media and information sharing facilitated their communication and intimacy with their parents; on the other hand, the constant monitoring from the parents felt like "over-care." 25-year-old Chen was such a typical case. She described her mother as crazily concerned for her safety. Her mother tracked her "footprint" on WeChat. "My mom wants to know every motion of mine," Chen complained. Almost every time she updated new moments or pictures, her parents vigilantly asked details about them.

One time, Chen went to a friend's house and posted some photos on her WeChat. Her mother immediately asked her on their WeChat family chatting group, "Where did you go? Where is the place in the photos? Did you go there alone?" Chen was then obligated to respond to her parents with details. If she did not report her activities in time, her mother would keep asking her questions on WeChat, or might even call her.

It should be noticed that it is not the locative media, per se, that is the source of over-caring for Chen; her mother has engaged in this kind of "over-care" since Chen was a little girl. The difference was the media. In the past, her mother called her at night almost every day to check if she was staying at her dormitory, the "safe area." Chen remembered her mother even called the police when Chen got back to campus half an hour later than usual and her mobile phone was unfortunately powered-off. To some extent Chen had adjusted to this situation, "I have to report my 'doing list' to my parents if I don't use WeChat." The over-care online with WeChat is an extension of existing offline daily over-care from the parents.

23-year-old Ti, on the other hand, described herself as quite an independent girl. She lived in Beijing for four years before she began her Masters study in Shanghai, and had become used to managing her personal life by herself and didn't want to explain the details to her parents. As she explained, "my parents only need to know that I'm healthy and happy." Luckily in the past her parents had no channels to monitor her mobility and life trivia, but things

started to change. When Ti uploaded a photo, her father often commented and asked, “Where are you? Where is it?” She felt bothered, “What’s the use of that! They don’t know much about my school things; they don’t understand and can’t help.” Ti said that she would like to share things with her parents if she went somewhere interesting, but she didn’t want to be interrogated.

Unlike Chen’s mother, 28-year-old Ke’s parents encouraged her to go out. So Ke did not care that her parents could see her location on locative social media, but she preferred not to share other things. There were times when Ke complained on social media and her parents read the post and asked her what happened. When she posted photos late at night, her mother chided her and went on about how this could be detrimental to her health. In these situations, Ke felt the over-care from her parents. To her, they were just “negative emotions that everybody can have” and “I don’t want them to worry about that.” For this reason, she blocked her parents a few times on WeChat. This case illustrates another common phenomenon caused by parents’ friendly surveillance on digital media: “worry about worries.” That is, the “over-care” from the parents makes their children recognize the worries of their parents, which conversely becomes the worries of the children.

Cultural Understandings of Friendly Surveillance

As this chapter has demonstrated, there is a need to understand friendly notions of surveillance in ways that are culturally specific. The entanglement of watching and friendly surveillance takes various textures across individual, social and organizational layers. These layers are specific to the cultural context and what Herzfeld (1997) calls “cultural intimacy.” In China, for example, with high horizontal state and organization surveillance (and introduction of social credit), watching by parents of children takes on a different dimension.

Just as mobile media has diversified the horizontal and vertical ways in how surveillance plays out, it is also important to understand how culturally specific notions of watching, power and surveillance inform the practices. Careful surveillance is a significant part of maintaining Digital Kinship. It is about the affective labor of doing intimacy and its attendant boundary work.

In this practice of careful surveillance, Playful Kinship is crucial. In the next chapter we move into the second section of the book—Playful Kinship. Here we argue, in keeping with Sicart (2014), that the playful is a key mode for digital media engagement. From paralinguistics to camera phone images, play operates as the logic for modes of sharing.

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