

My Fellow Wildcat and Watcher:

The Relationship Between Surveillance and Community at Davidson College

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Abstract

Davidson College surveils its students, and as students not only are we surveilled, but we participate in surveillance as well. David Lyon, a prominent scholar in surveillance studies, defines surveillance as the “...focused, systematic, routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.”¹ Using this definition, I have identified three surveillance practices at Davidson: CatCard tracking, the Honor Code, and Campus Police. Of these, the first is actually surveillance, the Honor Code encourages it, and Campus Police use it. Through interviews, I aim to uncover how Davidson students understand these practices in relation to the Davidson community and vice versa. My findings were that students’ understanding of Davidson surveillance practices can be influenced by their experience of the Davidson community and its benefits. Students’ understanding of the Davidson community can also be potentially influenced by the consequences of Davidson surveillance.

Background

- Took the class DIG211: Surveillance Culture my sophomore year
- Read the article “Smash All Phones: How to Protect Yourself from the Snitch in Your Pocket”² during Summer 2020 amidst the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd
- Found out the Core COVID Response Team used CatCard swipes to help determine how many students left campus during a mini-break in Spring 2021³
- Also found Dean Snipes emailed students that RLO had a record of their failed card swipe into a residence hall they did not live in during Spring 2021 as well⁴

Works Cited



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Research Question

How do Davidson students understand Davidson surveillance practices in relation to the Davidson community and vice versa?

Findings

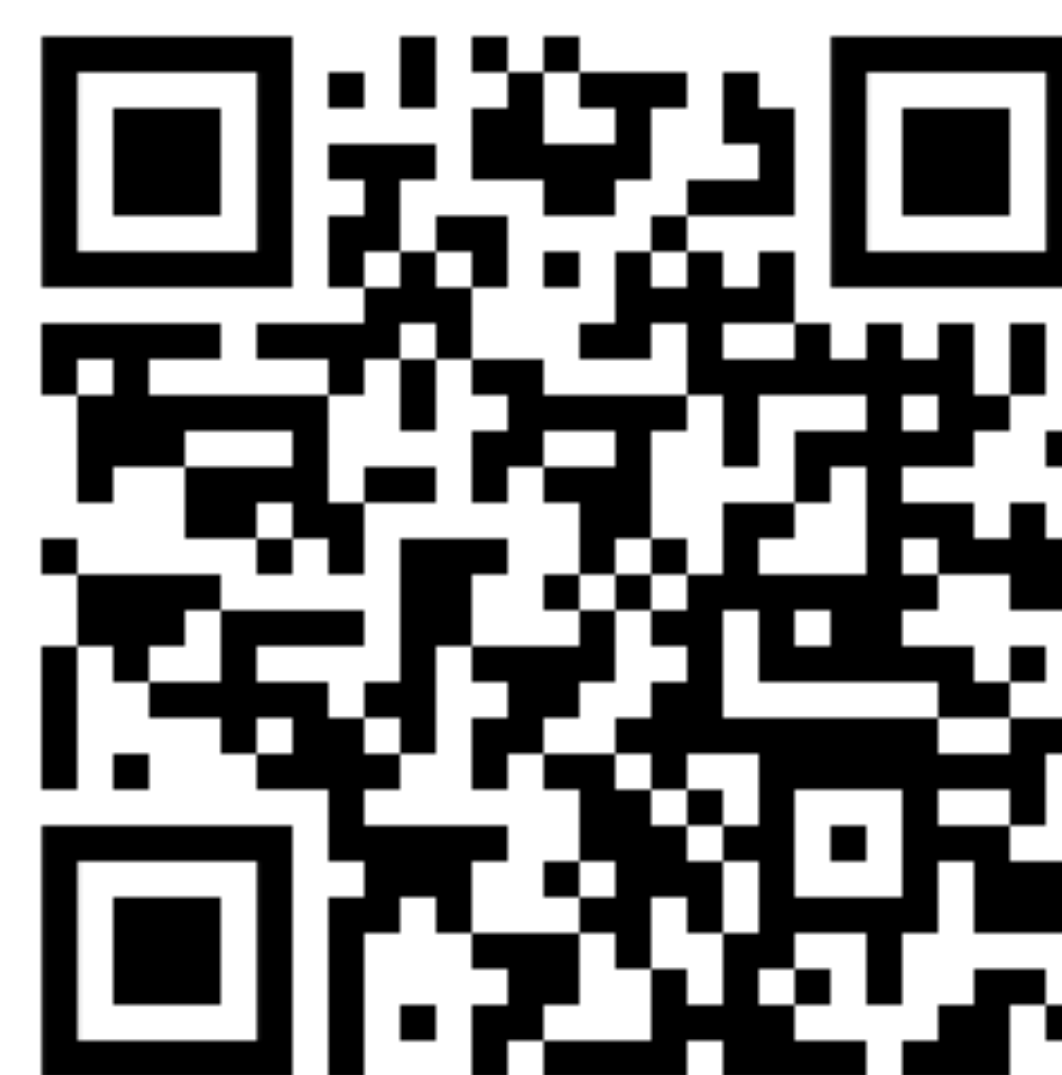
- Students simultaneously experience community and surveillance at Davidson, thus the understandings of the two are typically shared.
- Students’ experience of the Davidson community and its benefits, including whether the student experiences these benefits or not, can influence their understanding of Davidson surveillance practices
- The consequences of Davidson surveillance practices (exacerbated for minority students) have the potential to influence students’ understanding of the Davidson community
- General trend with students of color feeling less of a sense of community and more susceptible to surveillance and White students feeling a greater sense of community and fewer concerns about surveillance

Future Directions

- Interview more students with a variety of participant demographics
- Create a “Choose Your Own Adventure”-style Honor Code simulator that places the user in a situation where the Honor Code encourages surveillance to raise student awareness of this practice through a game
- Research Moodle, Davidson’s learning management system, as a surveillance practice at Davidson
- Analyze effectiveness of Davidson’s Campus Police
- Investigate the effect of the (ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic on perceptions of surveillance and how that may affect perceptions of community

Methods

- Interviewed 8 Davidson students with some variety in demographics such as race, class year, socioeconomic status, region, and sexual orientation
- Recruited through college-wide email that explained my research and asked for those who would be interested in participating. Also encouraged students who have had experiences with surveillance to participate
- Asked participants questions about their background, their experience of community at Davidson, their experience of surveillance at Davidson, and their perceptions of community relations at Davidson.
- Aliases are used to refer to participants



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