Article

The Ambivalent Subject: Reconciling Contradictory Subjective Experiences of Surveillance

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Abstract

This article discusses the surveillant assemblage operating within the brandscape of two American mega-casinos and the ways in which the mechanisms of this surveillance impact the subjective experiences of older adults who frequent these facilities in retirement. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at these sites from 2015 to 2017, I argue that these immersive and all-inclusive spaces deploy a variety of intensive surveillance methods to ensure profitability but largely avoid many of the negative associations that this level of surveillance engenders in other settings. Older adults present an especially interesting demographic when examining intensive surveillance. While they often benefit from increased oversight and security, they are generally opposed to accessing it through other institutions, such as assisted living or nursing facilities. This apparent contradiction produces *ambivalent subjects* who dislike the notion of intrusive surveillance but simultaneously appreciate the benefits it can convey. This paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue in surveillance studies about the complexities of surveillant subjects, as well as presents a new perspective on the attitudes of senior citizens towards institutionalized surveillance in private and public space.

Introduction

Surveillance of the general public in much of the world has accelerated at a frenetic pace in the past decade, as government, tech, and business interests implement new tools for gathering and analyzing vast quantities of personal information. Some technologies are conspicuous, such as closed-circuit television or traffic cameras, while others work behind the scenes to process online browsing habits into saleable information. In the current stage of late capitalism, however, new spaces have emerged which combine multiple flows of surveillance data with predictive analytics and immersive marketing techniques to shape consumer behavior in the present *and* the future. This article examines the surveillant assemblage of these brandscapes (Wood and Ball 2013) in two American mega-casinos, sites of concentrated consumption that combine visual, algorithmic, and physical surveillance to increase profits and reduce shrink on a massive scale. I argue that many casino guests are *ambivalent subjects* to the surveillance practices of the casinos, a byproduct of the contextual integrity of the setting (Nissenbaum 2004) and the subjective value of the related benefits it bestows. To support this, I present analysis and excerpts from anthropological ethnographic fieldwork I conducted with older adult (sixty-five years and older) gamblers who have come to frequent these institutions in retirement. Surveillance scholars have recently called for more ethnographic studies in the context of institutions, where ethnography is adept at revealing the “performativity—within contexts, normalizing processes, and lived experience—out of which surveillance is constituted, constructed and hence objectified as a focus of research in the first place” (Green and Zurawski 2015: 34). Through extensive participant observation and narrative-based interviews conducted in these two gaming centers, I came to understand the unusual subjective experiences this demographic has with the surveillant assemblage there.

Ciofi, Joy. 2020. The Ambivalent Subject: Reconciling Contradictory Subjective Experiences of Surveillance. *Surveillance & Society* 18(1): 61-73.

<https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index> | ISSN: 1477-7487

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As their ages advance, many retirees find themselves in *need* of some degree of surveillance, but dislike being subjected to it in an age-exclusive institutional setting. Mega-casinos and their vast surveillance systems have inadvertently addressed this need by providing a safe, age-diverse setting for exercise, socialization, and mental stimulation. In the process, this brandscape has effectively fostered a general ambivalence towards some of the most intensive surveillance technologies in use on the public today.

In the first section, I provide a brief description of the facilities themselves and situate them within the larger body of literature in surveillance studies that concentrates on the marketing and profitability implications of surveillance. Next, I outline the various mechanisms of surveillance used by mega-casinos and present ethnographic vignettes that reflect the ambivalence (or even appreciation) of older adult gamblers towards the assemblage. Finally, I contextualize this subjective ambivalence in light of the larger socio-medical attitudes about aging, risk avoidance, and self-surveillance that have come to characterize retirement and late life in much of the West.

The Mega-Casino: Commodifying Uncertainty

In the United States, and indeed many other places, casino gambling has rapidly gone from illegal to mainstream. Once associated with organized crime, sex work, and other social vices, an interplay of marketing strategy and rising public approval of gambling has rebranded this once-deviant setting into a family-friendly vacation destination (Barker and Britz 2000). Of the several hundred casinos operating across the United States, only a handful earn the label of mega-casino by combining vast gaming floors with towering hotels, golf courses, arenas, professional sports teams, shopping, and a plethora of dining options. My fieldwork took place in two such casinos located in a rural, wooded area of Connecticut in the Northeast region of the United States. They are three hours from New York and Boston, the closest major cities, and a full six hours from the nearest gambling hub of Atlantic City. Despite their humble surroundings, they are the two largest casinos in the Northeast, situated on Native American reservations in the state. Foxwoods Resort Casino opened in 1986 and is managed by the Mashantucket Pequot tribe. Until quite recently, it was the largest casino in North America. Only twenty minutes away and founded shortly after, Mohegan Sun Resort and Casino, operated by the Mohegan tribe, is nearly as large. It expanded with a new convention center and second hotel tower in 2018. After several months of polite persistence, I obtained permission from management at Mohegan Sun to carry out this research in their facility. As such, Mohegan Sun was the primary field site for this project, and the majority of my analysis will be drawn from my experiences there unless otherwise noted. However, all mega-casinos are in fierce competition for high-rollers and day-trippers alike, and most of the surveillance systems I describe are in use at similar casinos worldwide (Lee 2011).

Mega-casinos are sites of concentrated consumption on an incredible scale. My fieldwork here has revealed much of the inner-workings of these independent micro-economies, complete with internal governance, unique currencies, and even banks that issue credit and collect debts. Despite public perception, the underlying commodity which constitutes the backbone of this economy is not entertainment, but uncertainty. Put another way, it is *chances* that are bought and sold thousands of times a minute, across each slot machine, Roulette wheel, or bingo seat. To accept the pitch that casinos sell entertainment requires ignoring the underlying product that people find *entertaining*. Gamblers *gamble* for the chance to win money beyond their expense. They may be entertained in the process, but that is not the commodity that they are purchasing when they slide chips onto the table. In support of this economy of chances, these complexes rely upon vast surveillance and security systems. Mega-casinos thus constitute *brandsapes* in the truest sense outlined by Murakami Wood and Ball (2013: 49): they are “utopia[s] of neo-liberal capitalism, which bring together hyper-consumption, personalisation, niche marketing, lifestyle choice, just-in-time production processes, the ubiomp revolution and surveillance practices” for the purpose of ensuring customer loyalty, immersion, and maximum profitability. Murakami Wood and Ball (2013: 61) emphasize the “governance of desire” as both a characteristic ideal for a brandscape and an avenue for future research intersecting surveillance and marketing in the context of late capitalism. Mega-casinos are exemplary sites in this respect, as they use surveillance and marketing in a dynamic synergy to foster desire for uncertainty.

Despite the omnipresence of mega-casino surveillance, they are not panoptic institutions in the Foucauldian sense. There is certainly much to be gained from a thoughtful and nuanced consideration of how this system of differentiated visibility can internalize discipline and produce social conformity. Yet the mega-casino environment represents a significant departure from regimented, orderly institutions, where the few observe the many from an obscured vantage point. This fragmented and adaptive nature is another characteristic of the brandscape, distinguishing these settings from panoptic institutions by “co-constructing not some uniform new subjectivity and space but multiple subjectivities and spaces” in an effort to increase desire across a variety of guests with diverse needs and wants (Murakami Wood and Ball 2013: 61). The architecture, interior design, music, lighting, and layout of a mega-casino are all deliberately chosen in an effort to excite guests into spending more money, whether it be on gambling, a Rolex, or an indulgent meal (Venturi et al. 1977). As I often observed, gamblers are supplied alcohol to loosen their inhibitions and promote higher bets. In no disciplinary setting is this level of self-indulgence encouraged. As Natasha Dow Schüll articulates in her ethnography of machine gamers in Las Vegas:

[T]he gently curving passageways, ensconcing nooks, and softly lit machine mazes of casinos are not of a piece with the regimented and discomfiting forms of modernist disciplinary architecture the philosopher Michel Foucault described.... While the structural, decorative, and ambient environment of the casino is certainly geared to influence patrons’ conduct, its *modus operandi* is to coax rather than restrain, reward rather than punish, steer rather than transform. (Schüll 2012: 50)

The multiplicity of surveillance technologies in use at mega-casinos is instead an assemblage, a concept originating in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) but further cultivated by Haggerty and Ericson (2000) to analyze contemporary systems of surveillance as they evolve and interact. It is this multiplicity, the way that numerous, mutable flows of otherwise unrelated streams of information are collected together, “paused” spatially and temporally for observation and collection, and then allowed to continue onward, that is well-suited to theorizing surveillance:

We are only now beginning to appreciate that surveillance is driven by the desire to bring systems together, to combine practices and technologies and integrate them into a larger whole. It is this tendency which allows us to speak of surveillance as an assemblage, with such combinations providing for exponential increases in the degree of surveillance capacity. (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 610)

The surveillant assemblage of the mega-casino supports the overall execution of the goals of the brandscape: it creates a “desiring body” by using predictive analytics to interpret individual player data and customize the casino experience. Once this desire is created, other surveillance mechanisms, such as employee relationships, digital marketing campaigns, and time-sensitive promotions, work together to continuously connect customers with a product for the duration of their visits and extending into future visits. Although this product is often the commodified uncertainty that is exchanged via gambling, the variety of services and goods available in these enormous spaces means that the highly surveillant brandscape of the mega-casino is ever-ready to escort guests fatigued from playing into an expensive dinner, luxurious hotel room, or padded theater seat, extracting more profits and extending the immersive stay.

The Dynamic Surveillant Assemblage: Surveying the Brandscape

The surveillance mechanisms within the mega-casino can be roughly categorized into four flows: camera data, personnel presence, algorithmic surveillance, and self-surveillance. The sources themselves are not inherently separate, but overlap and work together to sustain the functionality of the assemblage. These flows also reflect the myriad interests the casino is serving through data collection. Although these interests are all tied to profitability, profits are achieved by reducing shrink (theft through cheating or other means) as well as encouraging maximum guest spending. The overwhelming majority of casino guests are a means of profit rather than loss, and, as such, they are the target market for the brandscape. In the following

sections, I outline my observations of these surveillance flows in action at Mohegan Sun and elsewhere and provide supporting vignettes from interviews with older adult gamblers¹ that reveal the complex ways subjects react to, and interact with, this magnitude of surveillance.

"I Feel Very Safe Here": The Reassurance of Cameras

Visual surveillance of casino guests begins even before one enters the building. Mohegan Sun provides free and secure parking, but, despite this, accidents happen. Cameras are numerous and visible in the parking garages to catch everything from drunk drivers to fender-benders. Yet the density of these cameras is low in comparison to the thousands that dangle from the high ceilings inside the casino like Christmas baubles (see Figure 1); the black, shiny spheres conceal the movements of the cameras inside, giving them a sort of comforting omnipresence that reassures non-criminal guests that their possessions are safe. More cameras hang over banks of slot machines, surround table games, sit strategically over bars, and even guard restroom entrances. Indeed, the only area of Mohegan Sun in which a camera is not immediately visible is from within the restrooms. While this vast camera network may truly see all, it does not target with equal interest. Cheaters and criminals are the primary focus, but employees are also highly surveilled by management (Chandler and Jones 2007).

In many other consumption settings, such as a shopping mall or amusement park, the quantity and conspicuousness of the camera arrays seen in Mohegan Sun might make patrons uneasy. A high density of security cameras connotes risk, such as in banks or at busy urban intersections dotted with CCTV. However, for my senior participants, these cameras were appreciated. Rose,² an eighty-one-year-old slots player, found that they facilitated her independence and gave her a greater sense of security. We met one afternoon for coffee in a casino café, and I inquired about the potentially-intrusive level of surveillance. She dismissed that perspective with a wave of her hand: "They make me feel safe. A lot of people say to me, 'You go up there all by yourself?' But I've never had a problem. Sometimes I go up to the [hotel] room at two or three o'clock in the morning by myself. I have no qualms about going to the elevator or something like that; never had an issue at all." Rose also took advantage of the camera coverage to get some exercise. "We like to walk, and we do more of it down in Florida. There's no place to do it up here. But I'll do it in the casino, I'll walk, without being afraid. If you walk on a bad road... where I live, there's a lot of bad roads, I'd be a little nervous by myself. I feel safe inside here, I wouldn't do it by myself outside." Indeed, several of my participants reported using the wide, well-lit walkways of Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods for exercise. In the event of a fall, the surveillance system ensures that an elderly or disabled guest would not be on the floor for long. I often joked with friends and family, curious about my research topic, that mega-casinos had to be the only place where a frail centenarian could clutch armfuls of cash in a crowded space and not worry about being robbed. As the project unfolded, the truth in this joke became altogether more serious. Any notions of Orwellian encroachment or protection of privacy were replaced with the tangible benefits brought by the extensive camera systems. It is important to note that this reflects the *contextual integrity* of the site: the gaming floors and connecting walkways are clearly public settings in which no reasonable expectation of privacy could be assumed and therefore violated (Nissenbaum 2004). Yet there is a critical distinction between being unbothered by the cameras and appreciating them; it is this subjective assessment that can create ambivalence in casino guests towards the surveillance systems as a whole. This perspective emerges further when examining other applications of the surveillant assemblage and their impacts on senior casino-goers.

¹ Participants were recruited with a variety of methods, including screening surveys, convenience sampling at local senior centers, and snowball sampling when applicable. The methodology was qualitative and ethnographic in nature and consisted of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, including shadowing seniors as they gambled and utilized the amenities of the facility. I also formally interviewed casino employees in various positions and had several informal interviews with casino management, security, and marketing staff. A total of thirteen seniors and five casino employees were interviewed for this project, and over three hundred hours of observation in six different mega-casinos provided supporting data.

² Participant names were changed to protect privacy.

Figure 1: A view of camera arrays at Mohegan Sun Casino & Resort. Photo taken by author with permission.

"Who Knows How It Would've Turned Out": Personnel and Medical Emergencies

Mohegan Sun employs ten thousand people in a wide variety of fields, including an independent surveillance department and a separate security team for floor operations. I was able to interview several staff members in these positions, and, although corporate confidentiality restricted some of their answers, they generally emphasized that guest safety was a main priority. While these employees clearly represent one element of the personnel surveillance of guests, a variety of employees find themselves engaged in surveillance in some capacity. Dealers and other table game workers are required to report suspicious behaviors to security for follow-up. Cocktail waitresses surveil the gaming floors to identify both customers who need a drink and guests who may have been over-served and need to be "cut off." My interviews and observations revealed that Mohegan Sun uses an advanced TV network specifically for this purpose. If a guest does find himself "cut off," an image of the guest discreetly captured by security cameras will be submitted to an in-house database that is updated live and circulated to all alcohol-serving establishments on the property. Should a guest behave boorishly, staff can check the TV monitor in the back of the house and see if the individual has found themselves on the list. Further antics can result in the guest being temporarily or permanently banned from the casino; enforcement of this determination is also dependent on camera and personnel surveillance.

Other employees also engage in surveillance for a variety of reasons. Mohegan Sun uses restroom attendants to hand out mints and paper towels, but also to identify guests who may be ill, using illicit drugs, or otherwise needing assistance and are out of sight of the ubiquitous cameras. Despite the restriction of gambling to guests over twenty-one years of age in Connecticut, Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods are full of children, who may be there to see a concert or sporting event or are simply brought with their parents and left to play in the staff-supervised arcade and childcare center while parents gamble. This means there are casino

employees that surveil children, and the casinos can thus collect data on which guests have children, their ages, and how frequently they use the service.

For senior guests, the attentive eyes of floor staff are there not only to monitor their grandchildren's safety but also their own. Given that advancing age often brings a reduction in physical mobility, many older casino customers use walkers and wheelchairs during their visits, and may require special assistance. Judy, age ninety, had advanced kidney disease and became easily fatigued. She used a special walker with a fold-down seat and remarked several times that the floor staff and valet parking attendants were very accommodating and helpful if she needed them. Other senior guests experienced health issues that were more serious, and the hovering floor staff proved invaluable. In the event of a medical emergency, EMT response times inside the casino are considerably faster than the surrounding areas. Employees are also trained to use defibrillators when a heart attack is suspected (Valenzuela et al. 2000), making them important "partners in prehospital care" in instances of cardiac arrest (Fedoruk et al. 2002: 103).

This was certainly the case for Hank, ninety-two, who came to Mohegan Sun every Monday with his wife Jeannie, ninety. One morning, while seated at a slot machine, Hank suffered a heart attack. "We were lucky to be at the casino that day," Jeannie recalled. "The floor person rushed over immediately to help. He was on the way to the hospital in just a few minutes. If we were home, who knows how it would've turned out." Hank may owe his life to the casino surveillant assemblage. Though the floor staff and camera systems exist first to ensure maximum profits, they are so extensive that their applications in a crowded space are more far-reaching than the corporate bottom line. They can reunite a child separated from his parents, help a disabled customer with her walker, or lead to lifesaving defibrillation for cardiac arrest victims. This facet of the surveillant assemblage reflects the importance of considering unique subjectivities in the systems of observation and monitoring that may simultaneously benefit *and* target.

"You're crazy not to have a card!": Predictive analytics in play

The conspicuous visual surveillance described above may be extensive, but the type of data collected from these streams is generalized and relies on individual interpretation. These data also flow one way: those being watched are, for the most part, passive subjects. The recent incorporation of algorithms into slot machines, coupled with the data double of each individual's digital profile, has led to a much more immersive and invisible form of surveillance. Not dissimilar to the predictive analytics of Google and Facebook, mega-casinos shape gamblers' behavior by collecting and rapidly processing individual player data in real time and customizing the play experience accordingly. This is done through the use of loyalty programs known as player's clubs, originally modeled after credit card point or mileage systems designed to increase spending with small, non-monetary rewards (Schüll 2012). The player's club cards of today have evolved into something quite different. Cardholders' demographic information is combined with a detailed history of betting style, payout format, bet amounts, and other highly specific, personalized data about their movements, preferences, and finances.³ Harrah's, one of the world's largest casino corporations, has even developed software that analyzes player data to generate an estimated "predicted lifetime value" which they can use to reward those players who are likely to lose the most (Schüll 2012: 154). These rewards can range from free meals to entire vacations, depending on the level of play, and act as "consolation prizes" when monetary losses may otherwise deter players from continuing to gamble.

The use of predictive analytics to promote consumption has become rather normalized in the era of Amazon, Instagram, and Google. Murakami Wood and Ball note that these brandscapes are hugely successful in part because they have "created intermediaries between the subject and their desires, which both facilitate those desires and, in their facilitation, make it too difficult or inconvenient to pursue those desires in other ways" (2013: 56). Player's clubs do exactly this by customizing the experiences of gamblers to reflect their preferences while also accumulating currency (points) and perks (giveaways, coupons, etc.) that satisfy the customer when they are not actively gambling. The application of this kind of anticipatory marketing

³ See Chapter 5 of *Addiction by Design* (Schüll 2012) for a more detailed discussion of the scope and development of algorithmic surveillance in Las Vegas casinos.

technology to a potentially addictive behavior is often perceived as highly problematic and in need of regulation, as articulated by Schüll (2012) in her ethnography. While I do not necessarily disagree with her conclusion, it is critical to differentiate our participants and their use of casinos. Schüll focuses exclusively on those with disordered gambling, which has a profound impact on their subjective experiences of this form of surveillance marketing. My participants were regular casino-goers, but none had ever sought treatment for, or been diagnosed with, a gambling problem. Although my position as ethnographer precludes me from offering formal diagnoses, this group is far more representative of the majority of casino customers who gamble recreationally. It is also important to note that gambling is a socially stigmatized behavior, even in the liberalized environment in which it exists today. Even though the predictive analytics used in online shopping and social media can and do create complex social problems, these services have become essential for much of society and are highly normalized (Ball, DiDomenico, and Nunan 2016; Murakami Wood and Ball 2013). My goal in presenting the following vignettes is not to trivialize the potentially addictive consequences of this technology but instead to align the experiences of algorithmic surveillance in casinos with the more normalized experiences of this surveillance in other applications. In doing so, the surveilled casino subject becomes less a *victim* of these practices and instead an ambivalent interlocutor of sorts, aware of the power differential but also a willing consumer of the benefits it bestows. In the absence of catastrophic consequences, and with the contextual integrity of the space intact, intrusive surveillance in the brandscape can be shrugged off; it lives in a grey area, neither all positive nor negative. This reality has led me to use the term *ambivalent* when characterizing my participants' attitudes and subjectivities in the context of the space.

In order to receive any benefits from the assemblage, casino guests at Mohegan Sun must voluntarily sign up for player's club cards. Each entrance is flanked by reception desks with smiling staff and brochures outlining the program. If a guest does not have a card, other players will frequently endorse them, saying, "you may as well get something for your money," or "you're missing out on all those points." Comments like these, which I often overheard, reiterate that guests see the cards as adding value to the casino experience, *not* as oppressive tools of surveillance. The level of interaction between customers and the rewards program is greatly impacted by the type of game one plays. Slots players are the most vulnerable to negative consequences from the algorithmic surveillance conducted via the cards, as slot machines are just large networked computers interpreting lines of code and making future predictions in a fraction of a second. The outcome of a bet on a slot machine is not dependent on anything other than the computer's decision; it does not need to wait on input from the dealer or bets from other players. This means that slot play (and money wagered) moves very quickly, and as such, slots players are better compensated through the player's club than other types of gamblers.

For one of my participants, Lynn, engagement with the nebulous and opaque digital "mind" of the machine proved an exciting challenge. As I shadowed her on a casino visit, she regaled me with little stories about certain machines. "Oh, this one!" She pointed to a bank of *Titanic*-themed machines, some of her favorites. "You know, for me, the problem is, I love a lot of the mini-games that come up. I love all the challenging little games. Tough as can be! But you know, I never seem to pick the right one." This comment is highly revealing on multiple fronts. First, it reflects the belief that a game very obviously programmed for the House's gain could present itself as a challenge, something to be overcome with a level of skill. Second, it indicates that Lynn believes the onus is on her to "pick the right one" during the mini-games that accompany bonus rounds. Both of these beliefs are effectively superstitions, or a mistaken understanding of cause-and-effect (Guttentag and Havitz 2010). The algorithmic interpretation of Lynn's bets and selections is the cause of her loss, *not* her lack of skill. In other words, her understanding of the outcomes of play has been directly manipulated by the active digital surveillance of the machine. Her enjoyment of the mini-games is digitally represented in the number of minutes she remains at a machine after accepting her less-than-satisfying return. This information then goes with her to the next machine, which uses her data double to tailor the experience to her preferences (and the casino's profitability). Occasionally, Lynn would assert herself against this pattern to "shake up the system," or present the machine with an unanticipated change in behavior. "Usually I bet only a little, but sometimes I get disgusted and I'll up my bet to \$4. But when you get there, you get risky... but that's when I make more money. My boyfriend has taught me to play a little

bit more risky—the word is risky, and I have had the plus of that and the minus of that, because the more you play, the more you can lose. But overall I think it works.” Unfortunately for Lynn, this too is a superstition. The adaptive nature of the algorithm means that the machine can adjust its payout schedule to reflect this change and maintain the House’s edge. But that does not mean that her engagement with these surveillance systems is wholly passive. The entire time she gambles, Lynn is accruing points, or internal casino currency, which can be used to purchase non-gambling goods and services throughout the facility. In addition to their practical utility, which I will demonstrate in the following paragraph, my fieldwork revealed that these points and related promotions provide gamblers with greater access to non-gambling activities within the facility. These activities serve to break up costly periods of gambling with free or discounted entertainment, dining, shopping, and rest. Lynn and her boyfriend would often abandon their play to take advantage of these promotions by socializing, shopping, or sharing a meal.

For older adults with mobility issues and other health problems, the convenience afforded by the rewards from the player’s club program can facilitate independence and social engagement. This was especially true for Judy, the ninety-year-old slots player who used a walker to assist her during her visits. After being put on dialysis three times a week for her kidney disease, she found that errands were increasingly difficult to fit in. The wide variety of stores and services at the casino meant that she could complete these errands without having to make another stop. “I’m already here,” she said to me over coffee one afternoon. “Why not use my points? A lot of people say, ‘I’m not bothering with the card.’ You’re crazy! If you come with any regularity at all, you’re stupid not to use your card. Because the points add up, and they don’t go away if you don’t spend them.” Judy used her accumulated points to buy herself an iPad, update her wardrobe, and even grocery shop. “Don’t forget the gas!” she reminded me. “I haven’t bought gas at a gas station in almost five years now. Since they put the [convenience] store in there, I buy meat and stuff too. They have beef, milk, butter, you name it—it’s unbelievable. I got \$60 in perks the other day, and I didn’t even gamble. I just came up to the store and got some shrimp. Everything is twice the price of course, but when you’re not actually laying out money, it’s worth it. Plus, I get 15% off because of the status of my card.” The customized promotions and coupons that Judy received in exchange for money lost at the slots were determined by the intensive algorithmic surveillance of her preferences, spending, and habits while at the casino. Yet Judy had not developed a gambling addiction, nor had she spent beyond her limited means. This feat was accomplished through another, more internalized, form of surveillance occurring at the casinos.

Self-Surveillance, Risk, and Rewards

The legalization of casinos has been accompanied by increased public and academic concern around problem gambling (Barker and Britz 2000; Grinols and Mustard 2001; Griswold and Nichols 2006; Humphreys 2010; Munro et al. 2003). In his analysis of legalized gaming in the Netherlands, Sytze Kingma (2011) characterizes this concern by reflecting on the notion of risk society, or the desire of public and private sectors to work together to balance perceived benefits with the potential negative outcomes. Prior to the widespread access brought by legalization, gambling pathology was a private matter rather than a public concern. Once casinos became more abundant, a dialogue emerged around mitigating the “risks” associated with gambling, specifically problem or pathological gambling. Crucially, he points out the “paradoxical” relationship between legalized gaming and social perceptions of risk:

In this new social condition of the risk society, gambling organisations have come to depend on the scientific analyses of the external effects of their games. Gambling practices have to be accounted for constantly in terms of possible consequences. This is how governments and gambling enterprises legitimate their proposals for expansion (or curtailment) of the market. (Kingma 2011: 64)

In the United States, this process has had similar effects. Casinos are required by law to dispense information about problem gambling, including support groups and treatment programs. In all of the mega-casinos I studied, small but visible displays in bathrooms and other private areas provided information about self-

bans and access to the gambler's helpline, a telephone service which helps those struggling with compulsive gambling connect with a support group or treatment program. But, as Kingma points out, governmental regulation is only one facet of risk mitigation; there is still a significant level of personal responsibility on the individual to identify his or her own behaviors as problematic and take subsequent actions to self-correct. During my fieldwork, I frequently shadowed my participants as they gambled, and I observed numerous forms of self-surveillance deployed in an effort to control or restrict their gambling spending. One slots player would keep a ledger of her expenditures, wins, and losses and would stop playing as soon as the cash she brought with her ran out. Several players reported to me that they refused to use casino ATMs as a way both to avoid the exorbitant fees (\$5 at Mohegan Sun) and to stick to a preset budget. One couple maintained a "casino fund"—they would deposit all cash won into the account and then only use those winnings to play, reducing the risk of dipping into other accounts to continue gambling.

These tactics are not dissimilar to the self-surveillance described by Vaz and Bruno (2003) in their analysis of risk reduction rhetoric in modern medicine. By presenting certain behaviors as "risky" and encouraging self-surveillance as a means of restriction, the medical system becomes an internalized Other that exerts power over daily choices without actually being present. This is especially interesting when considering so-called "lifestyle" choices, which are often framed as leading to potential disorders characterized by the substance-abuse model, a model frequently used to describe gambling addiction.

[A]s risk works upon the distance between momentary pleasures and the possibility that these pleasures may threaten the continuity of a pleasurable life, 'sacrifice' is aimed at keeping oneself alive and consuming. It is a compromise of sorts, between the instant logic of hedonism and the continuity of consumption, for the only possible reward for moderating pleasure at any given moment is its continued renewal multiplied by an extension of life's duration. (Vaz and Bruno 2003: 285)

This attitude of compromise is easily seen in gamblers' tactics to reduce or restrict spending, but it is important to note that not one, but two internalized Others are at play here. The authoritative, medicalized narrative of risk reduction acts to guide individuals towards social norms, namely the disapproval of pathological gambling. Yet there is also an element of the casino's surveillant assemblage here, urging continued spending in order to achieve rewards, and this "voice" may be easily mistaken for one's own. Because the algorithmic surveillance of player habits allows for the customization of the play experience, including adjusting payouts to reinforce superstitious beliefs about a "primed machine" (gamblers' lingo for a machine that is due to pay out due to substantial player losses), the surveillant assemblage may become somewhat internalized. One's own beliefs and emotions about the supposed inevitability of a jackpot may thus be the product of the assemblage working to suppress the risk-avoidance narrative and lead to "just one more spin."

The Ambivalent Subject: Seniors, Slots, and Security

The multiplicity of surveillance flows and the massive quantities of data generated on individuals produce an extremely complex landscape in which myriad subjectivities differentially engage with, and are affected by, the assemblage itself. It would be reductionist to attempt to describe "the" surveilled subject in this context, given the diversity of experiences individuals have while under the purvey of the assemblage. Such generalizations would also fail to acknowledge the existing subjectivities developed *outside* the casinos, which are subjectivities that have a direct effect on how the assemblage is perceived and, potentially, internalized. As Kleinman and Fitz-Henry (2007: 55) argue, by "[r]ecognizing the multiplicity of human conditions, we affirm that our subjectivities and the moral processes in which we engage are forever in flux—not static, abstract, biologically fixed or divorced from political, social, and economic processes, but fluid, contingent, and open to transformation." In perceiving this capacity for transformation, we must also examine how the surveilled subject changes *along with* the rapid technological and social developments that characterize surveillance today.

Surveillance scholars across disciplines often focus on the negative consequences of surveillance for its subjects. In my own field, anthropologists have described how the burgeoning state security apparatus has rendered migrants invisible (Barenboim 2016), reduced equitable access to public space (Low 2006), and eroded community trust and freedom of expression for Muslims living in post-9/11 America (Ali 2016). In these moving ethnographic accounts, the characteristic power dynamics of a surveillant state are evident—individual and group behaviors are modified and constrained as a result of the gaze of the assemblage. There is little room for ambivalence here. The effects of an oppressive surveillant regime are internalized in the subject, reflecting the desires of the state, as Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish* (1995). But what about subjects of surveillance within the brandscape? Brandscapes like Google, Facebook, and Amazon now have access to consumer data that are as massive in scope as they are in value. Shoshana Zuboff (2015) describes this system of big data extraction, analysis, and exchange as an emergent logic of accumulation she terms “surveillance capitalism.” Consumers are passively monitored through their online activities, and billions of individual data points are repackaged and sold to interested third parties, usually advertisers, to enable more targeted and efficient product marketing. The use of the word *extraction* establishes a power dynamic from the outset. Zuboff notes:

extraction is a one-way process, not a relationship. Extraction connotes a ‘taking from’ rather than either a ‘giving to,’ or a reciprocity of ‘give and take.’ The extractive processes that make big data possible typically occur in the absence of dialogue or consent, despite the fact that they signal both facts and subjectivities of individual lives. (2015: 79)

The extraction of these data render the subjectivities of users into “merely bits,” but bits that are highly valuable precisely because they reflect specific, individualized tastes and experiences (2015: 79). This aligns with Haggerty and Ericson’s (2000: 611) concept of the data double—a disembodied, digital representation of a person that can be known, divided, and, most importantly, sold. The reduction of the subject from a human being to a few lines of code certainly carries profound implications for scholars of both subjectivity and surveillance, but what of the perspective of the subjects themselves? Despite growing public awareness of big data collection and a steady stream of leaks about the quantity and personal content of these data, consumers continue to Google embarrassing questions, share falsified “news” on Facebook, and click on targeted ads in their Instagram feeds. In other words, users still check the “I agree to the Terms of Service” box without reading the fine print. They are willing, even if only through willful ignorance, to accept this surveillance because of the benefits it conveys, reflecting the normalization of big data in daily life (Ball, DiDomenico, and Nunan 2016).

The contradiction between the supposed desire for privacy and the convenience of the internet warrants a closer look. In his influential article on datafication, José van Dijck (2014) unpacks some of the key mechanisms of big data collection, analysis, and use and highlights the importance of trust in the consumer–corporation data exchange. Rather than characterizing this relationship as exploitative, as Zuboff has argued, van Dijck (2014: 200) asserts that dataveillance is essentially a form of barter in which consumers trade personal information for the use of services, as “few people appear willing to pay for more privacy.” Indeed, it would seem that privacy is not nearly as important to consumers as many assume. Nissenbaum’s (2004) work on contextual integrity adds a critical element to this observation. She argues that “[a] central tenet of contextual integrity is that there are no arenas of life *not* governed by *norms of information flow*, no information or spheres of life for which “anything goes.” Almost everything—things that we do, events that occur, transactions that take place—happens in a context not only of place but of politics, convention, and cultural expectation” (Nissenbaum 2004: 137; italics in the original). The gaming floor of a mega-casino is steeped in contextual specificities, rooted in sociocultural, economic, and political norms. Yet these specificities also mean that subjects’ notions of privacy are, too, contextual—and that the grandiosity and immersive nature of these brandscapes has succeeded in internalizing an ambivalence towards the scope of the surveillance executed there. This type of context-specific ambivalence or acceptance has been documented by other surveillance scholars elsewhere. Whitson notes that by using gamification to enhance the appeal of social media platforms or fitness apps, consumers can derive pleasure in “willing self-

surveillance” (2013: 170; *italics in the original*). Other technologies have emerged that *require* user participation in their own surveillance, such as “smart buildings” that use an array of sensors integrated into a network to allow occupants to customize lighting, temperature, music, security systems, and more in an effort to make the building more efficient and secure (Albrechtslund and Ryberg 2011). *Surveillance & Society* even released a special issue addressing the notion of empowerment through surveillance, in which contributing authors pushed beyond the traditional binary of “surveillance is inherently negative and opposition to it is inherently positive” (Monahan et al. 2010: 107). Older adults present an especially interesting case when investigating this assertion, as changes in physical mobility and mental acuity often prompt an intensifying of the surveillant gaze from medical professionals and other caregivers. Their unique subjectivities represent a novel perspective on engagement with surveillance, especially in regards to the practical implications of combining recreation and supervision in an accessible, age-diverse setting.

In order to situate the ambivalent attitudes of my participants towards the surveillance of the mega-casinos they frequented, it is important to contextualize their experiences within larger socio-medical frameworks about aging and retirement, specifically with risk mitigation and cultural aging paradigms that emphasize activity and engagement. In the United States, the generation that was born in the post-WWII period (labeled “Baby Boomers”) presently constitutes the largest wave of retirements in history, at a rate of about ten thousand per day. Here and around the world, the “greying” of the population has generated significant public concern about economic and social policies in place to facilitate the transition out of work and support older adults as age advances. Broadly, a socio-medical paradigm known as “active aging” combines the values of capitalism (namely productivity, youth, and consumption) with emerging medical technologies to encourage older adults to preserve the defining characteristics of their younger years into late life (Lamb et al. 2017). Interpretation of this paradigm is, of course, subjective, but it generally entails physical and mental exercises, development of hobbies and personal interests, and a degree of independence and self-sufficiency. Quite by accident, the mega-casino brandscape has managed to meet these criteria and more. In fact, these institutions adhere to many of the characteristics of elder-friendly communities outlined in environmental gerontology literature. They are accessible to people with physical disabilities, provide an age-diverse environment, are safe and secure, and promote physical and mental stimulation (Peace 2013). In designing the spaces themselves, the engineers of these brandscapes were certainly not aiming to attract disproportionate numbers of senior gamblers—who have the lowest rates of problem gambling of any age bracket and tend to choose non-gambling activities more frequently than others (Munro et al. 2003; Zaranek and Lichtenberg 2008). However, as Murakami Wood and Ball (2013) emphasize, brandscapes must attend to multiple, often competing, interests, and nothing about the setting itself can be exclusive or undermine the goal of creating “desiring bodies” from each subject. Through its very design, which necessarily includes the operation of the surveillant assemblage, a brandscape such as a mega-casino can offer something for everyone, and, increasingly, this includes a rising percentage of gamblers over sixty-five (AGA 2013).

Readers would be right to point out that there are other facilities where older adults and seniors with disabilities can go that offer security and medical assistance if needed without the risk of gambling pathology. Assisted living centers, retirement communities, and nursing homes all rely on surveillance systems of their own to ensure residents’ safety. Increasingly, these surveillance systems are incorporating sensor arrays that can indicate a resident’s status in a less invasive way than CCTV or round-the-clock staff presence (Mitabe and Shinomiya 2017; Mortenson et al. 2015). Institutional care, however, is not viewed favorably by the majority of older adults. This is evinced by both the literature in aging studies on “aging-in-place” (Buch 2017; Stafford 2009) as well as my own ethnographic engagement with seniors across a wide range of ages and physical abilities. Some of my participants had extensive social support systems through family and friends in the area, while others were not as fortunate and sometimes struggled to maintain their independence as health problems developed. However, all of my participants expressed distaste at the thought of moving in to an institutional setting, regardless of the supposed benefits and security they might attain there. Even temporary settings for elder care and recreation were shunned, including area senior centers. “I could never get into Zumba or whatever it is they do over there,” Tim, a frequent poker player, told me one afternoon on a break between games. “I’m old, but I’m not *old-old*,” he chuckled. These comments are indicative of the general tone I encountered in discussing senior-specific

care with older gamblers. All my participants were relieved to still occupy their homes and maintain their independence and most of them felt that the casinos, in part, facilitated this in some way.

Conclusions

It is hardly surprising that older adults are hesitant to resign themselves to institutional care. The surveillance conducted in these settings intrudes into the living space, where expectations of privacy are contextually violated. What is surprising is the way that the surveillance of the mega-casino is ignored, or even *embraced*, by this demographic. The technologies used by casinos to monitor guests are more pervasive and advanced than those of even the most high-tech eldercare institutions. Yet because of the context and the element of choice (versus unwilling relegation), surveillance becomes simultaneously utilitarian and unobtrusive, producing *ambivalent* subjects. My participants did not want to *need* surveilling, but if changes in their physical ability, social support systems, or other external factors meant surveillance became beneficial, they appreciated the ways the mega-casino provided it. For this reason, I chose to emphasize their collective ambivalence, rather than whole-hearted acceptance, of surveillance in this context. This ambivalence indicates that it is not always the surveillance itself that produces feelings of invaded privacy; it is not the intensity or multiplicity of monitoring systems, or even what is done with the vast quantities of collected user data. Instead, the experiences of the ambivalent subject as he or she engages with the surveillant assemblage are shaped by a dynamic interplay of personal and external factors, tied to perceived benefits, emotional responses, and tangible losses as a result of the assemblage within a particular setting.

It is not my aim here to downplay negative consequences of the assemblage for those who have been profoundly affected, especially by algorithmic surveillance resulting in gambling pathology. Nor am I attempting to paint the experiences of older adult recreational gamblers as representative of the majority of consumers engaging with corporate surveillance on a daily basis through things like social media, credit monitoring, or fitness apps. Rather, I am presenting this example to illustrate the importance of considering individual subjectivities when analyzing emergent surveillance technologies. Within the setting of the brandscape, the sheer volume of distinct subjectivities (represented as thousands or even millions of data doubles engaging with surveillance in real time) complicates our understanding of the surveilled. For some mega-casino guests, the benefits of this surveillance are too insignificant to outweigh feelings of invasiveness associated with the constant monitoring of the player's club cards. Those with no physical limitations and no intrinsic need for heightened security may bristle at the numerous cameras and attentive floor staff. Players who gamble from compulsion rather than free choice do deeply resent the calculated efficiency with which the algorithmic surveillance of the club cards can feed their addiction (Schüll 2012). Yet, for some players, the "right" balance of benefits and risks has been achieved through this assemblage, producing more positive experiences and facilitating enjoyment, socialization, and safety that guests feel they cannot get anywhere else.

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