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Privacy Versus Scrutiny

An interview with Professor Kevin Haggerty
Criminology Sociologist, University of Alberta

What is the state of surveillance in society?

We're really in the midst of a world historical transformation in terms of the dynamics of visibility in surveillance that all of us are open to new types of scrutiny because of new types of technologies and policies and governmental practices from smart phones to the internet to DNA databases, etc. So we're living in a new world of increasing scrutiny. So I try and think about the big picture. I try to think about what this means in terms of peoples' identities, in terms of politics, in terms of privacy and freedom, and that's in a nutshell, what I do.

What questions are you asking in your research?

How does this change the nature in policing? How does it change the nature of our relationship to the state when you are no longer calling a police officer, but reporting crimes on a webpage? These are the big issues in terms of surveillance. And I should stress that we're not people who sort of say everything is bad and everything is kind of horrible, but there's all kinds of pressing issues that people need to know about what are you trading off when you are giving up certain types of information? People are often trading things off, they have no idea. So there's an educational moment there in terms of teaching students, teaching the general public, and then there's all kind of love of knowledge stuff that almost any academic will talk about. So there's that kind of critique or the sort of second assessment of a lot of things that I think myself and a lot of my colleagues do.