Under observation, we act less free, which means we effectively are less free

-Edward Snowden

Becoming Big Brother: Consumer Wearable Health Technology, Surveillance, & Biopolitics

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Wearable Health Technology

- Refers to a broad array of technology used to monitor various health data through technologies that are worn by an individual.
- These technologies can vary significantly in size and design.¹
- More sophisticated technologies are being implemented in the clinical setting.²
- Reliability, Accuracy, Consistency, & Objectivity are questionable.³
- Companies own your personal health data provided by their products.⁴

¹ Lin et al 2016; Pellanda & Pellanda 2016; Piwek 2016
⁴ Kostkova et al 2016
Wearable Health Technology

- Consumers wearables are quickly entering the market as a trend for self-surveillance to improve physical health and develop new habits.  
- Consumer options also vary widely in terms of use and design, but include such items as smartwatches or wristbands, headbands, badges, camera clips, and sensor-embedded clothing.
- Functionality also varies including sleep tracking, pedometer, thermometer, accelerometer, heart rate monitor, altimeter, GPS, oximeter.
- Users also receive other metrics and analysis depending on the technologies.
- It’s important to recognize that institutionalized metrics and indicators are constructed within power relations to create quantities that are useful to the state.

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5 Bravata 2007; Rosser 2009; Carter 2015; Piwek et al 2016, Rosser et al

6 Piwek et al 2016

7 Prince 2014, Merry 2016
Popularized by Michel Foucault, biopolitics refers to the disciplinary practices targeting governed bodies that control the modes of life.

Expounding on Foucauldian biopolitics, Susan Stryker explains biopolitics as “the calculus of costs and benefits through which the biological capacities of a population are optimally managed for state or state-like ends”\(^8\)

Medical-Industrial Complex (MIC) refers to corporate control of health care for profit and the network of these industries to reproduce wealth\(^9\)

MIC represents the harms of global capitalism, becomes a state-like institution, and is an important installment in the neoliberal carceral archipelago—the network of institutions that mutually reinforce the state’s ability to maintain social control through surveillance\(^10\)

\(^{8}\) Stryker 2014

\(^{9}\) Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich 1969, 1971; Relman 1980; Chowkwanyun 2011; Iriart, Franco, & Merhy 2011

\(^{10}\) Foucault 1995
How can the personal health data that we develop ourselves through self-surveillance be used against us?\(^{11}\)

Focus of interventions on obesity and diabetes\(^{12}\)

Dissolving separation between public & private & learned expectations of control\(^{13}\)

Legal issues and the sharing of personal health data\(^{14}\)

\(^{11}\) French & Smith 2013


\(^{13}\) Rich & Miah 2017

Surveillance: Possibilities for Life & Death

- Medical data and the consumerization of health
- Control of the worker in the neoliberal workplace
- Fitbit data used against a women in rape case
- Fitbit data used in personal injury lawsuit

15 Iriart et al 2011, Rich & Miah 2017
17 Hill 2015, Moon 2015
Future Questions

- What impacts of this data have not yet been imagined?
- What are the implications for public & global health interventions?
  - Trackers are likely ineffective for these interventions and changing behavior\(^\text{19}\)
- What are the implications in corporate interest, such as insurance?
- Within the biopolitical frame, what divergent modes of life will be deemed unlivable? How will the "unhealthy" body be targeted for life and death?

\(^{19}\) Patel, Asch, & Volpp 2015; Omura 2017; Yingling 2017


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Bibliography