Chapter 2
From Video Surveillance to Video Narratives:
Three Black Male Stories on Safety

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the experience of young black males with video surveillance as a technology of oppression and video narratives as a technology of liberation. Foucault's work on power relations and Baudrillard's works on media simulation are used as a framework of analysis to examine (1) the "truths" that characterize the sphere of discourse that favors the use of security surveillance technology to control school violence; (2) the ways such regimes of power act to shape the consciousness and identity of poor, urban, young black male students; and (3) the ways the technology, as an expression of a panopticon technique, acts to shape the phenomenological experience of place for students. In addition, media and the portrayal of Black males are explored through classical Western literature.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

This project explores young black males' experiences with technology in urban settings in Haiti and the United States. It was drawn from the personal account of three black males interactions with surveillance technology, media, and power/control. Moreover, the project discussed the role technology has played in the shaping of their identities. The project's focus was the means by which the same technology (surveillance, media, written language) that oppresses through shame can be utilized to liberate through expression (video production, new media, public speaking).

This discussion of young black males' experiences with surveillance technology, media, and power/control emerged from the participant's description of their lives as Black youth growing up in Haiti and later in the United States. The intention of the project is to inform scholars and community leaders of the nature of technology as it relates to young black males as an oppressive agent and the possibilities of technology as a liberating agent. The discussion section of the paper illustrates the participants' lives

in Haiti and the United States. It explains the participants' experience with power, control, and authority in their school and communities. It also illustrates their interactions with technology as both a liberator and oppressor in their school and in their communities.

SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGIES

One could argue that all students are being surveilled– white male/female, Chicano/a, black male/female, wealthy and poor. But what story is particular to the young black male experience regarding this phenomenon? What does it mean for a young black male to be watched? What is the nature of this experience? In this section of the paper, I have elected to use Michel Foucault's (1986) hermeneutic approach of conformity analysis along with black experience to understand surveillance technology in urban schools. Throughout the project, I hope to provide a voice to young black males such as myself to articulate their experience living with surveillance technology.

Surveillance has always been a part of human life. The word surveillance derives from the French word *surveille,* meaning, "to watch from above". According to Staples (1997), surveillance video is an "exercise of disciplinary power that is often continuous, automatic, and anonymous" (p. 25).

In the production of the perfect map (simulacra), electronic surveillance has increased significantly in various spheres of society in recent years. It has influenced a set of practices and developed a new set of meanings. There is no doubt that these practices and meanings have come to represent the technologically advanced hyperreality settings that we live in today.

The Panopticon, designed by Jeremy Bentham (1791, 1995), an English utilitarian philosopher, jurist, and social reformer, is the specific technology to which Michel Foucault (1984) and Jean Baudrillard (2007) are referring. Schools have been forced in a sense to create a panoptic space in which students are monitored by security technologies. Foucault (1977) declared: "a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency" (p.176).

In the school, the means (process or technology) of control have become new security devices and computer technologies that school administrators are placing inside and outside the school space to monitor students. In addition to simply monitoring, the role of this technology is:

To make the spread of power efficient; to make possible the exercise of power with limited manpower at the least cost; to discipline individuals with the least exertion of overt force by operating on their souls; to increase to a maximum the visibility of those subjected; to involve in its functioning all those who come in contact with the apparatus…the final connection component in Panopticism is the connection between bodies, space, power, and knowledge. (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p. 192)

In his 1982 essay in *Critical Inquiry*, Foucault notes that "the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 219). Power in general and specifically disciplinary power are strategic game. Foucault uses the pedagogical institution to express the strategic game of power as the game of truth (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Foucault explains, "power is not a function of consent. In itself it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few" (p.220). In other words, power does not need resistance to be manifest. Power "is a mode of action which does not

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