

## **YOUTH FORUM: SURVEILLANCE IN PUBLIC PLACES**

**Participants:** 21 young people from Melbourne, aged 16-25

**Date:** 14 July 2009, 12 – 2 pm.

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### **CONSULTATION NOTES**

#### **What public spaces do you spend time in?**

- Public transport (particular emphasis was put on this)
- skate park, recreation areas
- school
- skate ramps
- banks
- malls
- Crown Casino, other workplaces
- gyms
- university
- shops
- hotels and pubs.

#### **What surveillance have you noticed in public places?**

- Cameras
- listening devices on buses. There is some discussion of which bus routes. The participant was aware of the listening devices because of signs in the buses and because the devices are obvious.
- security guards
- mobile phones. Some participants comment that the use of mobile phones to take footage or images does not bother them very much. There are some comments that police have been seen using their mobile phones to film incidents, and have been seen using them in clubs, possibly to catch drug use or deals.
- participants were surprised that mobile phones can be used as tracking devices, they were compared to stalking.

#### **Can you have ‘privacy’ in public?**

One participant said that it seems like you can't go anywhere without being watched, so there is no privacy in public. Another mentioned that a place like a swimming pool is somewhere where you should have privacy in public. Some participants noted there should be some privacy in some places, for example parks. Another participant said that whether anything happens to the footage, and what kinds of actions are taken, depends on who is watching it and what they think about what they are seeing.

One participant noted that it's pretty bad there is no privacy even when you are not doing anything wrong, it doesn't matter what age group you're part of. Another participant said it all depends on whether you think there should be privacy in public.

Another participant asked why you would do anything in public that you're ashamed of or you don't want people to see? One participant noted that because there's no privacy in public, people will only do things in private, for example domestic violence.

The group discussed the police and their control of CCTV footage. One participant noted police only use footage for their own purposes or advantage—other people can't access footage, say for a police complaint, even if they appear in the footage. One participant told a story about being present when a friend was involved in a violent incident with police at Flinders St station. He asked for the footage so a complaint could be made against police. He was refused. Others stated that in terms of police, no one watches the watchers, and there should be another way to make sure police are doing the right thing with footage. Someone else mentioned that it might sometimes be a good thing that other organisations, like security firms, own the footage, not the police.

### **What are some of the benefits of public place surveillance? Do CCTV cameras make you feel safer?**

Some participants said that there's nothing wrong with cameras being there all the time because they are there for people's safety. Others agreed and said you need to know where they are so that if you're by yourself you can use that route or area. If you're by yourself and something happens it might be the only thing there to prove what happened. Others comment that it would be good to have more information about where cameras are, and when they are operating.

There were a few comments about Google applications: it can make finding places a lot more convenient but it probably has too much detail, and Google Earth might go too far. Some said there shouldn't be specific detail on Google Earth or Streetview. It was suggested that people's faces, and what they're doing, should be blurred out on Google Streetview. One participant commented that not knowing where cameras are or when they're on might actually enhance safety.

Participants were not worried about the day-to-day use of mobile phones for surveillance. But it was suggested that if you are a celebrity it's a bigger problem. It was also suggested that if people are vulnerable (eg, drunk) people might film them and the person might not be able to give their permission or consent. Consent to use images is reinforced as a major issue. A few participants agree that you want to know what happens after you're image is taken, and if you don't like how it's used you should be able to do something about it. Being able to instruct people to take images of you of the internet is cited as a power that there's a need for.

Some participants questioned whether surveillance is in fact an effective deterrent, if it's 'only going to help you once you've been beaten'. It was also questioned whether it actually deters graffiti, or whether it just gives it more of a thrill. One participant noted it 'gives you more of a rush' to graffiti within camera view.

In response to the question of whether participants felt safer with cameras about 6 participants said that they feel safer and 10 said that they did not feel safer. One participant noted that the use of cameras doesn't mean the police will respond any

faster. Most said it wouldn't change their behaviour, or only change their behaviour in small ways.

**Do you have any experiences of security guards 'moving you on' out of public places?**

One participant explained that wherever he is skateboarding, within half an hour, a security guard will be there to move skaters on. He suggested that the security guards tell him it's a public safety concern. He thinks CCTV surveillance helps the security guards locate people skating.

One participant said being moved on can lead to an escalation of a situation, because 'you feel bad once you have been moved on'.

**Do you feel like you are targeted by surveillance or security guards?**

One participant said he felt targeted when a security guard at JB HiFi accused him of shoplifting when he was *entering* the store. He thought this was done because of the way he looked.

One participant disagreed and said that this kind of targeting isn't so much to do with how people look but how they behave. Some said it might be a combination. Others pointed out that operators must assume people who dress well aren't doing anything wrong, but that you would automatically get targeted if you're wearing baggy clothes. It was suggested that a similar thing happened with ticket inspectors. One participant noted that ticket inspectors go for young crowds, not older people.

One participant told a story about being approached by police with a sniffer dog at St Albans station. It was suggested that the police didn't say anything. They used a sniffer dog without explaining what they were doing. The participant said he felt like he was suspected of carrying drugs because he was young and wearing a hoodie.

**Would you change your behaviour if you knew there was a CCTV camera on you?**

Some participants noted they would change their behaviour, others wouldn't. One participant noted it would make you sneakier. One participant said people play up to the cameras.

**Should there be laws or guidelines about when and where surveillance is used?**

One participant suggested that when cameras are turned on is an issue. For example, on Swanston Street it was suggested that cameras do not need to be on during the day because violent crime and other problems generally occur at night. Another participant said that there shouldn't be laws about not wearing hoods, and that cameras encourage people to wear hoods and you should be allowed to.

Another participant raised the issue of airports, saying that perhaps they may have greater security considerations than other places and that everyone at airports *should* be identifiable. Another person said that the laws are good at the moment, but they need to be future proofed.

It was reiterated that if you could replace cameras with people it would be a more visible and effective deterrent, but others said that security guards aren't effective either. Another participant suggested that if all footage was government controlled access could be centralised and standardised.

### **Do you have concerns about use of images?**

The concern about police accessing footage when they need it but denying it to others was repeated. It was noted that this is a common complaint at Youthlaw. It was suggested that there should be another body you can go to for access to footage, and that there should be better police protocols and more information and education for the public about surveillance and freedom of information. There was general agreement that you should be able to access footage you appear in. Another person said that there should be regulation about the sharing of footage between police and councils etc. This kind of data can be shared in a way that's negative for young people, and cause negative behaviour when people are moved on. One participant said police should be given guidance about when to share footage.

One participant said that perhaps we shouldn't be so sensitive about our image being on the internet because really you are anonymous because there's so much information out there.

One participant suggested there should be a surveillance ombudsman, someone to complain to, and that more laws would actually help people because they would know where they stand. Most people agreed that there should be some kind of punishment if your image is used without your permission or in a way you don't like—like the power to take people to court or fines. Another participant said that people need to know there is something you can do when you don't like how the footage or images are used.

One participant said that at Rushall train station they have experienced the PA system being used to threaten people if they're acting up, which they guess must be based on people watching the CCTV footage.

### **Options for reform**

One participant said there should be fines if surveillance is used incorrectly or court proceedings. Others suggested there should be some kind of public apology, similar to those that Consumer Affairs requires. Others said there should be compensation. Others said something like the office of police integrity would be useful, where you someone can investigate how police are using footage and if anything is going wrong. It was also suggested that guidelines would be good. Others thought that it should be illegal to look into other people's backyards with a camera on your property.