Fortifying the Boundaries: Digital Surveillance and Policing Versus the Lives and Agency of People Living in Poverty

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Abstract

Primarily drawing from the works of Edin and Shaefer (2016) and Eubanks (2017), this essay uses their descriptions of the realities of people living in poverty as well as the structural and technological fortifications that are used to sort and confine them to a status of second-class citizen to show that poverty is a condition that limits the possibility of democratic interactions. While people living in poverty actively exercise their voice and agency in their everyday interactions, such representations of agency often go unnoticed or are unrecognized, are criminalized, and/or are completely disregarded. Instead of being recognized as experts of their own experiences and as sources of valuable knowledge, people living in poverty are spoken for and legislated against to the point where outside of their own respective communities, their voice is virtually non-existent. However, understanding that the elimination of voice limits democratic possibility by enclosing the plurality of possible futures, we can see how silencing a subset of the population forecloses the manifestation of citizenship. Indeed, the authentic experiences of people living in poverty effectively map out structures and outcomes that should be rallied against if we wish to chart a course toward inclusive active citizenship.

Fortifying the Boundaries

Together, Virginia Eubanks' (2017) *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* and Kathryn Edin and H. Luke Shaefer's (2016) *$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* paint a terrifying picture of the realities of people living in poverty and outline how political decisions have affected and still affect them and the wider society. Borrowing from Edin and Shaefer (2016),

> [t]oo often, America has gone down the road of trying to shame those in need. We've put up barriers. We've made people jump through hoop after hoop – all based on the not-so-subtle presumption that they are lazy and immoral, intent on trying to put something over on the system. (p. 172-173)

Furthermore, these "victims of competition are publicly blamed for the resulting social inequality; yet more importantly, they tend to agree with the public verdict and blame themselves – at the cost of their self-esteem and self-confidence" (Bauman, 2013, p. 55). Their everyday lives are reflective of the "type of thinking that believes social problems have individual, biographical solutions," ignoring, of course, the fact that the "polarization of resources would give the winning side the ability to dictate the rules of all further interaction and leave the losers in no position to contest the rules" (Bauman, 2001, p. 71). They are a class of people deemed worthless by the world around them and this prescribed worthlessness materially impacts their interactions with their worlds. What Eubanks (2017) and Edin and Shaefer (2016) do is bring the lives of people living in poverty out from the shadows; through providing a public forum, people in poverty are able to exercise agency through the telling of their stories. In turn, we can feel their shame and we can see how poverty impacts them. We can see the barriers that they encounter daily and get an understanding of the conscious decisions made that further fortify them. What such stories show is that people living in poverty

are not lazy, immoral, or intent on trying to put something over on the system. Instead, they make up a community of people who, like so many others, found themselves one small mistake away from having the total weight of the surrounding punitive economic, social, and political structure collapse on them; what separates them from others is that they found the mistake that relegated them to the refuse bin of the "vehicle of progress" which, by design, "the number of seats and standing places did not as a rule suffice to accommodate all the willing passengers and admission was at all times selective" (Bauman, 2004, p. 15). For everyone else, the inherent lessons told in the stories of the poor is "that we only belong in political community if we are perfect: never leave a 'T' uncrossed, never forget an appointment, never make a mistake" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 197). In failing to do so, individuals will find that their seat is gone or that their standing space is no longer available. And while the lesson for those who have momentarily escaped poverty should be that they have the moral obligation to contribute to the elimination of something as perfectly oppressive as poverty, what has instead become the normative message in the structurally confining society of individuals is that for the vast majority, we are but one small decision or circumstance, whether made by us or others, away from joining the ranks of the poor.

While partially existing as a review essay for Eubanks (2017) and Edin and Shaefer's (2016) respective books, the following uses their material as a locus for discussing the ways that structurally and relationally the poor are reduced to, at best, second-class citizens while at worst, "the waste of order-building," that must be discarded (Bauman, 2004, p. 33). Functionally speaking, such designations frame the possible democratic discourses surrounding poverty (for the purpose of this paper, democratic will denote not only the right to use agency, but the right to have agency acknowledged and respected). Through their works (along with Edelman's (2017) *Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in*

America, which is heavily referenced), we can see how poverty is created through the active decisions of those occupying positions of unequal power. Those who have been able to construct the narrative of poverty, in this sense, have done so in ways that frame it as the result of poor choices on the part of the poor themselves instead of structural decisions made by the non-poor. We can also understand that the criminalization of poverty provides those that do not live in poverty the ability to morally judge those that do from a distance; they need not sully themselves with the proximity necessary to truly understand the impoverished condition. In all, we can see the construction of poverty as a process which actively withholds democratic possibilities and interactions from an entire class of people, those living in poverty, by suppressing and ignoring their voices and, in the off chance that they are heard, by deeming them inauthentic. For if we look at the way that the lived realities of the poor are constructed and defined from the outside including the ways that their own agency is framed and disallowed to materialize, we see a group of people that are acted on instead of allowed to act on their own. And despite the humanity that comes from their unique interactions and responses to their own conditions, the deferred subject status of the poor not only limits the possibilities of their interactions, it also diminishes the strength of our society as a whole. Indeed, it is not the volume and resolution of the voices at the top that create a strong democratic society, but instead, the collection of all voices that can express and further the greatest set of possibilities for the collective democratic state. Borrowing from Barber (1998),

> if we cannot secure *democratic* communities to express our need for belonging, *undemocratic* communities will quickly offer themselves to us. From the we will get the warm fraternity and membership we look for in community, but at the expense of liberty and equality. Gangs instead of neighborhood associations, blood tribes instead of voluntary associations, misogynist fraternities instead of communities of common interest. (p. 34-35)

Distance from democratic participation is what people in poverty experience and is what we have to look forward to if we allow voice to be chipped away and only be accessible to those nearer to power with common albeit contrary interests to those further away.

It is important to note that the works of both Eubanks (2017) and Edin and Shaefer (2016) examine the structural conditions that contribute to the circumstances of poverty and the ways that the corresponding individual agency presents itself. Indeed, manifestations of agency are pervasive in the pages of these books. People living in poverty not only authentically contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of poverty through their stories, we are able to see examples of the ways that they, borrowing from Lister (2004), get by, get (back) at, get organized, and work to get out of poverty altogether. And while these interactions appropriately complicate and humanize the lives of those living in poverty, adding depth to existences that have traditionally been presented as one-dimensional, analyzing structure similarly complicates understandings of agency as it points to ways that such agency is dissuaded or extinguished altogether. Whereas agency for individuals and families living in poverty might take the form of pooling resources together to get by or holding demonstrations to get organized, structural manifestations such as economic flexploitation, for-profit money bail systems, or restricting or eliminating use of public space seemingly attempts to minimize the impact of agency. While it is important not to downplay the humanizing and liberating role that agency plays, the panoptic and synoptic gazes, as outlined by Bauman (1999), that continually monitor and police structurally and normatively those living in poverty further distances them from positions of power. Recognizing that "[t]he more power that people have, the wider is their range of choices and broader the scope of the outcomes that they may realistically pursue" we can certainly surmise that the policing of individuals living in poverty restricts their access to power which, in turn, limits the ways

that agency can manifest itself (Bauman & May, 2001, p. 62). Indeed, if the ability and quality of exercised agency is related to different and unequal relations to power, then "the more freedom I have the less freedom someone else has," and it is the creating of the classes of the poor or would be poor that allows for the freedoms that the well-off enjoy (Bauman, 2001, p. 25).

Being Poor: More Than Simply Not Having Money

Edin and Shaefer (2016) paint a compelling picture of what the material realities of poverty look like. One such frame in their portrait is that of job insecurity. Contrary to the stereotypical image of the poor as lazy people who do not work because they choose not to, Edin and Shaefer (2016) emphasize the importance of work, saying that "[i]n spite of unreliable shifts, low pay, and often poor working conditions, when the $2-a-day poor find jobs, the routine of work each day can be the single biggest stabilizing force in their otherwise chaotic lives" (p. 56). Their desire, however, is in stark contrast with reality in that work is exceedingly difficult to find, especially work that can sustain themselves and their families. This lack of job possibilities is relayed by Pimpare (2008), who notes that "[i]n November 2006, a new Times Square store advertised that it would be hiring about two hundred positions, one-third of them only part-time. Unexpectedly, not hundreds but thousands of people showed up to apply" (p. 98). In impoverished areas, months of beating the pavement, sending out hundreds of applications, many taking "as long as two hours to complete (probably longer on an iPhone)" can result in no job offers (Edin & Shaefer, 2006, p. 49). And if they are lucky enough to secure an interview, they are subjected to tests and background checks to determine whether, as employees, they are safe bets. With such an enormous pool of desperate candidates, employers are the ones who benefit. Through oppressive employment practices, "wages usually fall relative to what they would have been otherwise. Employers can also demand more of their employees" (Edin & Shafer, 2016, p. 61). Thus, the possibilities of work

for the poor are not only few and far between, the available work entails substandard working conditions that only the most desperate would consider enduring. Such perilous working conditions wreak havoc on the lives of the poor and their dependents, creating a vicious cycle where health concerns lead to absences which, in turn, lead to loss of job. To make matters worse, employers implement "policies that, purposely or not, ensure regular turnover among their low-wage workers, thus cutting the costs that come with a more stable workforce, including guaranteed hours, benefits, raises, promotions, and the like" (Edin & Shaefer, 2016, p. 45). The available work is not designed to get the poor out of poverty. Instead, it is designed to maximize corporate profit while securing a controllable stream of workers. Hidden in the market friendly strategies of flex hours, work-loading, low wages, and lack of benefits are casualties: the manipulated workforce. They must constantly juggle what working provides them with the toll that it takes on their own bodies and minds, the bodies and minds of their families, and dignity of both all while maintaining the simplest set of desires: they seek work that pays a modest wage, has a set schedule, and has decent working conditions.

Another obstacle that Edin and Shaefer (2016) discuss and that the poor continually must navigate is that of housing insecurity. Safe, affordable housing is almost universally desired by the poor, as illustrated by Edin and Shaefer's (2016) vignettes of Rae, who wants more than anything two things: "[f]irst, she wants a job that she can throw herself into, fully and completely. . . . Second, she wants a little place for herself and Azara – a place where they can be together, play together, be a family" (p. 90). However, what families in poverty experience is quite the opposite of this. They often have to stay with relatives to alleviate the overwhelming costs of housing, especially on what little wages or supplemental income they have available. Indeed, "many times the kin the poor families have to rely on are not much better off financially than they are, because poverty is too

often passed from one generation to the next" (Edin and Shaefer, 2016, p. 78). This creates contentious and hostile environments, especially when members are accused, whether rightfully or otherwise, of not pulling their own weight for the betterment of the combined household. Because of the baggage that comes with such living situations, poor families "sometimes find themselves in a perfect storm of risk for sexual, emotional, or physical abuse" (Edin and Shaefer, 2016, p. 79). What makes housing even more difficult to secure, according to Edelman (2017) is the fact that any criminal infractions, whether by them individually or by those they associate with, can disqualify poor applicants from receiving assistance. Furthermore, residents who report crimes can legally be evicted for being nuisances; "these laws victimize the victim twice: the abuse itself and the eviction for reaching out to get help" (Edelman, 2017, p. 140). Even the housing that the poor may be able to get is often run-down and adds to their substandard living conditions. Predatory landlords provide minimal upkeep on units and push tenants out of their homes if they are late on rent, all while still asking for rates that the hard to come by governmental vouchers may not fully cover. The fact that affordable housing, if it can be called that at all, is so rare allows for the housing exploitation of the poor. Edin and Shaefer (2016) report that in Chicago 85,000 people sit on waiting lists for subsidized housing while there are 268,000 people waitlisted in New York City. Such a lack of housing is no accident because, according to Eubanks (2017), the demolition of decaying housing in poor areas comes with no replacement plans and the gentrification of poor areas raises the price of housing to the point that poor residents cannot afford to keep what they have found. Indeed, housing insecurity puts families at risk whether it be through homelessness itself or the many other compromises that are made because of the difficulty in finding housing that influences other aspects of their ability to thrive.

Shredding the Safety Nets

While the two specific realities above document the burden that impoverished families face in their everyday interactions with their own worlds, we can begin to see the insidious nature of the forces driving these realities when we look at welfare reform, the automation of the lives of the poor, the economic and working changes and conditions that people living in poverty are most vulnerable to, and the resulting ways that the poor are portrayed. Welfare, for all intents and purposes, was officially killed in the 1990s. However, a full-on assault was ever present in the decades that preceded it. Eubanks (2017) remarks that "[d]riven by Ronald Reagan and other conservative politicians, a taxpayer revolt against AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] challenged the notion that the poor should have a full complement of rights promised by the Constitution" (p. 33). Eubanks (2017), however, parallels the dismantling of the rights of the poor through welfare reform with the dismantling of the rights of people confined to the poorhouses of the past. Poorhouses were constructed as a means to hide the poor from the surrounding wider society, but also as profiteering ventures for those running them. In fact,

> [p]art of the keeper of the poorhouse's pay was provided by the unlimited use of the grounds and the labor of inmates. Many of the institution's daily operations could thus be turned into side businesses: the keeper could force poorhouse residents to grow extra food for sale, take in laundry and mending for profit, or hire inmates out as domestic farmworkers. (Eubanks, 2017, p. 18-19)

The poorhouse was the vehicle through which the undeserving poor were diverted from assistance; it was how the undeserving poor were kept under surveillance. Indeed, surveillance along with policing reduced the visibility of the poor while keeping them firmly under control – in addition to being inmates, they were all but denied their humanity. However, with the growth of the poor and the poor among the ranks of the working class, it became harder to differentiate between

the deserving and undeserving poor and, therefore, the scientific charity movement replaced the poorhouse. According to Eubanks (2017), "[t]he scientific charity movement relied on a slew of new inventions: the caseworker, the relief investigation, the eugenics record, the data clearinghouse" (p. 24). It was invasive and relied on lengthy questionnaires, photographs, fingerprints, the measuring of heads, the counting of children, and even the plotting of family trees to help differentiate the deserving from the undeserving. In short, it "scientifically" answered the question: who should get help and who should not? If this debate sounds salient today, it is because we are still positioned within the scientific charity movement. However, the tools used are considerably more technical and have been automated in a way in which they "hide poverty from the professional middle-class public and give the nation the ethical distance it needs to make inhuman choices" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 13). Individuals are conditioned primarily through media representations to see all individuals living in poverty as deserving of their respective plights, creating a court of public opinion that marks them as guilty of making poor decisions which disqualifies them from being entitled to assistance. Tools of efficiency not only remove humans from determining the degree of assistance an individual should receive, they also distance and absolve any individual from having to feel the impact of a decision that further deteriorates the living conditions of those experiencing poverty. Coined by Eubanks (2017) as the digital poorhouse, it "deters the poor from accessing public resources; polices their labor, spending, sexuality, and parenting; tries to predict their future behavior; and punishes and criminalizes those who do not comply with its dictates" (p. 16). Indeed, individuals living in poverty are placed under scrutiny that no one – no one outside the desperation that comes with being severely in want – would ever agree to subject themselves to and even after succumbing to invasive outside interference, the aid that they (might) qualify for proves itself to be insufficient.

Welfare reform can be located firmly in the scientific charity movement, and its implementations mirror Eubanks' (2017) concept of the digital poorhouse. Welfare was a natural target because, according to Edin and Shaefer (2016), "although there is little evidence to support such a claim, welfare is widely believed to engender dependency" (p. 14). Pimpare (2008) notes a similar understanding: that "welfare, this argument goes, saps initiative, undermines the work ethic, and leads to dependence, thereby exacerbating poverty rather than relieving it" (p. 144). Edin and Shaefer (2016) continue that "Americans were suspicious of welfare because they feared that it sapped the able-bodied of their desire to raise themselves up by their own bootstraps" (p. 15). And systematically, if we couple this suspicion with scientific charity's quest to sort the deserving from the non-deserving poor and add in neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies that essentially suggest that there is no such thing as a classification of deserving, we get the version of welfare reform that took place in the 1990s. Reform in this iteration "is about ideology, not real people" (Edelman, 2017, p. 99). Welfare reform was and still is justified as necessary so as to stop its abuse, personified by Reagan's welfare woman who "'[has] used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans benefits for four nonexistent, deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free income alone has been running $150,000 a year'" (Edin & Shaefer, 2016, p. 15). Through Reagan's embellished description, we can clearly see that "[c]riminalization is a key component to [the reform] strategy" (Edelman, 2017, p. 94). Through its villainization and the villainization of those receiving benefits, welfare itself became the target; its eradication was needed so as to not leave an entire population destitute through their own vices.

Just as scientific charity was tightly linked to the criminalization of those receiving benefits, attributes of the deserving poor were and still are tied to an individual's ability to obtain work. Indeed, work was an important component to

David Ellwood's welfare reform plan which welfare reform was based on, however, it was not the entirety of its focus. Ellwood and Mary Jo Bane's research led them to a different understanding of what welfare provided families: that "most families used welfare as a temporary hand up during a crisis or transition" (Edin & Shaefer, 2016, p. 18). However, their recommendations for reform were taken and used piecemeal to fit the punitive agenda swirling around reform. Elwood's plan included boosting the minimum wage and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), converting AFDC into a transitional short-term program to provide financial, educational, and social support for those experiencing a temporary setback, and provide a minimum-wage job for those who could not find one. Ellwood "believed that if such a program fit into core American values, the public would pay for it" (Edin & Shaefer, 2016, p. 20). However, even if Elwood's recommendations did fit with core American values, the public was not allowed to see or latch onto the more humanistic elements of his recommendations. The complete vilification of the poor corrupted the program so that mandatory time limits were emphasized and the working poor were the primary people to benefit from the programs through the EITC. As noted by Pimpare (2008), "[t]he EITC, which is available only to those who work, now raises more children out of poverty than any other program," but those who cannot secure work do not have access to it (p. 142). To make matters worse, funds for social programs were distributed to states through block grants, allowing states themselves to funnel the money toward whatever agendas they deemed most deserving. In the end, welfare in the United States was shredded through the reform efforts of the 1980s and early 1990s; what remained was just enough to string the working poor along and entrap them in a system of digital management all while ignoring and victimizing those structurally and politically defined as undeserving.

Digital Policing

The reframing of welfare and its accompanying policing function led to the creation of new and innovative forms of managing the lives of those living in poverty. Eubanks (2017) stresses the intent of programs that reproduce poverty and their use as mechanisms that police the poor. Indeed, she says that "[t]echnologies of poverty management are not neutral. They are shaped by our nation's fear of economic insecurity and hatred of the poor; they in turn shape the politics and experience of poverty" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 9). In her chronicling of the automation of the welfare system in the state of Indiana, Eubanks (2017) shows just how not neutral these technologies are. Indeed, Eubanks (2017) discusses the overt political decision making ever present in the process, noting that Indiana's governor, who was a staunch opponent of welfare, "famously applied a Yellow Pages test to government services. If a product or service is listed in the Yellow Pages, he insisted, the government shouldn't provide it" (p. 45). In converting to the digital automated system, applicants had to face ambiguous "failure to cooperate notices," screeners who were unable to answer questions especially regarding why they were receiving these notices, requests for irrelevant and outdated information, and inopportune timing related to requests for information. Such hurdles, ironically, accompanied a system that was heralded as being more efficient, having less errors, and even potentially saving taxpayers money. The reality of the new system was that it put pressure on the poor themselves, while those with the ability to intervene or help were completely removed from the picture. Furthermore, it added layers by which those with power were able to hide from their obligations in the shadows. In addition, the information requested from the poor applying for support was overzealous and invasive in that it probed too deeply into the lives of applicants. Much of the information requested was not relevant to their cases. Few people not in the plight of the poor would open their lives to such intrusion. Indeed, for many people living in poverty,

> [t]he cost can be so high that some choose, as they have in the past, to forego the relief available and opt for the slightly sharper pangs of hunger rather than the pangs associated with the sacrifice to their dignity or independence. (Pimpare, 2008, p. 150)

The new welfare system – the gatekeeper whose purpose was to exclude those in need of aid – served its function well by repeatedly denying applicants seeking assistance. Here, "[c]riminalization [was] not so much a strategy to actually put people in jail for welfare fraud and other infractions as it is a method to scare them away from applying for benefits" (Edelman, 2017, p. 95). On the other hand, the digital system obscured the face of any person behind the scenes who was pulling the strings. With those in charge hiding behind the digital curtain, the poor and sometimes even their caseworkers, had no one to which they could address their grievances. Indeed, "automated decision-making in our current welfare systems acts a lot like older, atavistic forms of punishment and containment. It filters and diverts. It is a gatekeeper, not a facilitator" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 82). Indeed, such technologies were designed to hinder, not help.

Eubanks (2017) further highlights the ways that digital systems are used to police the poor in her assessment of the Coordinated Entry system in Los Angeles, California. Coordinated Entry is:

> an assessment tool that collects vast amounts of information and sifts it for risky behaviors, built a digital registry to store the data, and designed two algorithms to rank the unhoused in order of vulnerability and to match them to housing opportunities. (Eubanks, 2017, p. 93)

The purpose behind the system is to interview and score the homeless of Los Angeles to determine the risk that living on the streets presents to the individual and to the community; such scores "might qualify a Pathways client for a Section

8 voucher. But it can also be an indicator that he is too vulnerable to live on his own" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 107). On the surface finding homes for the most vulnerable is noble, and it almost seems like an appropriate intervention plan considering the vast number of people without homes living in Los Angeles. However, as Eubanks (2017) discusses, the expectation present in taking part in the system is based on an extraordinary degree of invasion to personal privacy as questionnaires were extensive and deeply probing. This assault on privacy is compounded as the information gathered by the Coordinated Entry system is not only used to determine housing needs but is also shared with 168 organizations including city governments, rescue missions, nonprofit housing developers, health-care providers, hospitals, religious organizations, addiction recovery centers, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Police Department. Such a database essentially places individuals under constant surveillance. Furthermore, the placement of those deemed high risk often seems arbitrary especially to those not placed in a home, as there appears to be no real rhyme or reason as to why some are chosen while others are not. Indeed, for the tens of thousands of people "who have not been matched with any services, coordinated entry seems to collect increasingly sensitive, intrusive data to track their movements and behavior, but it doesn't offer anything in return" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 114). While for the few who have been placed in a home through the Coordinated Entry program, such invasiveness is a necessary evil. For the rest, it is just another shred of proof that "[t]he poor, especially poor people of color, are increasingly being treated as broken material or damaged goods to be discarded;" that they are waste being watched until the exact moment that they can be permanently thrown out (Eubanks, 2017, p. 123).

Perhaps, however, Eubanks' (2017) most salient example of the policing of the poor is her reporting of the Allegheny Algorithm, a computer system that predicts risk present in the lives of children. The computer system was programmed to

"create a statistical model to sift information on parents interacting with the public benefits, child protective, and criminal justice systems to predict which children were most likely to be abused or neglected" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 137). The algorithm was originally intended to supplement call screeners and caseworkers in determining the risk present in the lives of children. When a report of neglect or abuse is made to the call center, the information is entered into a computer and a score on a scale of 1-20 is returned with higher numbers representing riskier situations. And while, at the point of the writing, the case worker was still responsible for determining the appropriate action based on their assessment of the call, a score of 20 automatically triggered an investigation. Like Coordinated Entry, on the surface the Allegheny Algorithm could be construed as useful and helpful in protecting children from abuse and neglect. However, as with all programs, "[c]hoices about what goes into them reflects the priorities and preoccupations of their creators" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 143). Herein lies one of the important problems with the system: it is reciprocally linked to other monitoring databases. So, if an individual is already under surveillance and has a call reported on them, their score would automatically be higher than if the outside data were non-existent or not public, regardless of character of the call or the veracity of the information reported. As a matter of fact, such policing information is overtly present in the creation of the program. Additionally, built into the program is the assumption that poverty is synonymous with neglect. In fact, "Nearly all of the indicators of child neglect are also indicators of poverty: lack of food, inadequate housing, unlicensed childcare, unreliable transportation, utility shutoffs, homelessness, lack of healthcare" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 157). Here, a poor parent is seen as neglectful because they are poor. Thus, we see a program in which some segments of society, namely the poor, have a greater chance of having their children taken than others, and they are forced to open up their lives for scrutiny that non-poor individuals would never stand for, and the data follows the children into adulthood, even if the information was initially collected in reference to the

parents/caregivers. To keep their children, parents in poverty must essentially live in glass houses that allow the outside world to freely judge their parenting competencies.

The Importance of Agency

What these surveillance technologies and structural inequalities do is create a system in which the poor circumvent legal channels to help in their surviving. Dubbed the "shadow economy" by Edin and Shaefer (2016), people living in poor communities use what little resources they have to make cash, a resource that is scarce because of their impoverished status as well as the ways that aid manifests itself (aid is seldom given in the form of cash). Therefore, instead of simply being objects onto which gracious charitable aid is bestowed, "[i]ndividuals and groups who experience poverty do so as active agents who will react in different ways and forge their own lives within the structural constraints facing them" (Lister, 2004, p. 51). However, they do so in ways that contrast with the values of the society that surrounds them, making them a feared Other. According to Lister (2004), "[t]his Other may be irresponsible, criminal or inadequate – to be censured, feared or pitied" (p. 122). So, when an individual uses goods they purchase with their SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, sell their SNAP altogether, sell their children's social security numbers, or even sell their own bodies for the infusion of cash that will help them survive, it is not necessarily an amoral decision; it is a decision that must be made to make ends meet. Here, "[t]he point is not to celebrate drug dealing and prostitution, but rather to examine those choices in context and separate out middle-class moralizing from the conditions that constrain choice and limit opportunity among poor men and women" (Pimpare, 2008, p. 38). This, of course, is held in contrast to legitimate forms of commerce that often prey on the vulnerabilities of the poor, such as check cashing businesses, liquor stores, and substandard housing. When comparing the shadow economy to the formal economy, "one might argue that

these activities are more in line with conventional morality that what goes on in many of the town's legal enterprises" (Edin and Shaefer, 2016, p. 144). The irony here is, of course, that the more that poor individuals participate in the shadow economy to survive, the more that welfare programs are brought under scrutiny and are scaled back or subjected to more surveilling technologies. Individually, "[l]ow-income people are also deterred from seeking public benefits by threats of sanctions for made-up allegations of benefits fraud" (Edelman, 2017, p. xvi). The bottom line here is that cash is important for poor families. As reported by Edin and Shaefer (2016), "For many of our families, their downward spiral into $2-a-day poverty might have been reversed by a timely infusion of cash" (p. 168). Unfortunately, access to cash is seldom an officially sanctioned possibility.

What these examples of agency represent is what Lister (2004) would describe as "getting by" (p. 130). She continues that "[t]he cloak of invisibility surrounding getting by tends to be lifted only when it breaks down and the situation becomes classified as a 'problem.' Getting by can all too easily be taken for granted and not recognized as an expression of agency" (Lister, 2004, p. 130). Pervasive in Edin and Shaefer's (2016) accounts are instances of getting by such as pooling resources including those provided by governmental programs, donating plasma or participating in other medical testing protocols, using public locations for heat and entertainment such as libraries, having and using their deep understanding of charitable offerings, scrapping materials for money, and as noted above, selling entitlements or themselves for the infusion of cash that they so desperately need. However, what is noteworthy in these manifestations of agency is that they do not serve as a means of getting out of poverty. Instead, they serve as band aids that temporarily help them get to the next day. And outside of a few fleeting instances of active organization, such as The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC), organization among the poor for the poor is fleeting at best. Eubanks (2017) notes that

> [t]hose organizations genuinely led by the poor and working people face difficulties attracting resources, because foundations rarely trust that the poor can manage money. They are often marginalized in progressive coalitions that include professional middle-class activists because their language and behavior do not always fit prevailing norms of movement culture. Their actions and policy recommendations are rarely reported in the mainstream media. Those organizations led by the professional middle class on behalf of the poor, on the other hand, are more successful in attracting funding, progressive allies, and public attention. But they are often disconnected from the radical analysis and boundless energy of poor and working-class communities. (p. 207-208)

Through this, we can recognize a diminished notion of agency that is associated with poor peoples' citizenship. While much of the energy of the poor is spent getting by, the important moments of democratic action that they do engage in are marginalized and, as noted by Eubanks (2017), "poor and working-class people and their allies may not be able to overcome explicit political resistance from organized elites" (p. 124).

Of course, when we do contrast the agency and scope of allowable democratic interaction that the poor and working-class people have with the reforms that actually take hold, we gain an even clearer understanding of the value of the voice of the poor as well as the constraints on their democratic possibilities. When discussing the resistance that formed around Indiana's automation of welfare, Eubanks (2017) essentially suggests that resistance was generated by concerned caseworkers who were able to establish press conferences and organize town hall meetings where legislators had to come face to face with their angry constituents. These were venues where the voices of the poor were heard, but the organization that was needed to provide the forum came from outside of the poor and working poor communities. While it is important to not overshadow the importance of the pressure that the stories burdened the legislators with, we are left with the feeling

and/or understanding that without the help of non-poor organizers, such pressure would never have been possible. Edelman (2017) also contributes to the understanding of the unequal balance of agency, describing at length the ways that public defenders brought class action lawsuits, ballot initiatives, and legal reforms to fight against laws that victimize people living in poverty as well as philanthropic programs that have successfully lifted them out of their impoverished conditions. Importantly, the stories of the poor are at the center of these reforms, however, their telling is mediated by people nearer to power who can use their influence to address the problems. While ultimately aimed at providing aid to those living in poverty, the structural inequalities that are pervasive in requiring the voice of those with more power to speak for those with less power further adds to the reality that in the United States' iteration of democracy, some voices are more valuable than others. The discourse surrounding the agency of those living in poverty marginalizes and criminalizes their activities; it suppresses what is allowed to be viewed as advocacy by those living outside of the impoverished condition. At the same time, it increases the separation between the poor and working poor from the non-poor by requiring the possibility of visible organization to be mediated. It further separates those who have value from those deemed valueless. Borrowing from Bauman (2008), "'Belonging' is one side of the coin, and the other side is separation and opposition – which all too often evolve into resentment, antagonism, and open conflict" (p. 23). Democracy and the privileges that come with it are reserved for the subjects who have been sorted and labeled as belonging while others are relegated to the status of objects, whose agency is superficial, whose participation is marginalized, and whose citizenship is non-existent, leaving resentment, antagonism, and open conflict the primary possibilities of their agency.

Conclusions

The pervasiveness of both digital surveillance and structural inequalities deeply impacts the impoverished experience. Indeed, "[t]he digital poor house doesn't just exclude, it sweeps millions of people into a system of control that compromises their humanity and their self-determination" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 181). Importantly, it does this in a way that makes those who have been able to distance themselves feel morally ambivalent; "[t]he obsession with 'personal responsibility' makes our social safety net conditional on being morally blameless" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 176). Indeed, "poor neighborhoods have been so identified with crime, disorder, immorality, and danger to the 'better' classes that we have often chosen to isolate or destroy them rather than engage in the more complicated work of improving them" (Pimpare, 2008, p. 22). Because of this, both historically and today, the "receipt of public assistance meant the forfeit of certain political and/or civil rights" (Lister, 2004, p. 164). The result is an emphasis on creating policing protocols instead of actually eliminating poverty. And the condition of poverty impacts the voice of those living in poverty as well as "[d]iscrimination and prejudice, as well as poverty, can exclude people from full participation in society and from full effective rights of citizenship" (Lister, 2004, p. 90). However, the exact systems that are being used to monitor, regulate, and openly control the poor would in no way, shape, or form be accepted by the middle and upper classes. However, the use of such technologies on the poor serves only as a testing ground for their expanded use on other groups and/or classes of people. According to Eubanks (2017),

> [s]urveillance and digital social sorting drive us apart as smaller and smaller microgroups are targeted for different kinds of aggression and control. When we inhabit an invisible poorhouse, we become more and more isolated, cut off from those around us, even if they share our suffering. (p. 184)

The more distance that we create between ourselves and our fellow people because of perceived differences, the more difficult it will become to create coalitions that combat injustices once such technologies are expanded to envelope more groups. Indeed, such technologies are rooted in obscurity instead of transparency, with transparency being paramount to democratic action. Eubanks (2017) notes the intentionality of this, stating that "all three systems described in this book share the unstated goals of downsizing government and of finding apolitical solutions to the country's problems" (p. 198). She continues that "[a]utomated eligibility, coordinated entry, and the AFST [Allegheny Family Screening Tool] all tell a similar story: once we perfect the algorithms, a free market and free information will guarantee the best results for the greatest number. We won't need government at all" (Eubanks, 2017, p. 198). Troublingly, the digital deletion of democratic interaction is specifically what will guarantee the expansion and permanence of such surveillance and monitoring technologies.

The digital poorhouse has lower barriers for rapid expansion, meaning that once such technologies exist, it is only a matter of time until their uses are expanded and once such an expansion happens, it is and will be much more difficult to turn such technologies off than it was to turn them on. For example, mainstream surveilling technologies like metal detectors and cameras regularly used in the policing industry have found their way into everyday contexts such as the entry areas and halls of school buildings. Not only have such policing tools become so mainstream in everyday life that their use does not elicit the imagery of surveillance, they are actually welcomed with open arms under the auspices of public safety. Expansion is naturalized and mandated through the socialized manufacturing of their usefulness. And just as such physical surveillance technologies become permanent, the data collected by digital surveillance technologies are permanent as well; once collected, there is no expungement of one's digital presence. Permanent surveillance is desired in the name of security.

Indeed, Bauman (2013) remarks that "the choice is between security and freedom: you need both, but you cannot have one without sacrificing a part at least of the other; and the more you have of one, the less you'll have of the other" (Bauman & Lyon, p. 39). In short, Eubanks (2017) remarks that "[h]igh-tech tools that protect human rights and strengthen human capacity are more difficult to build than those that do not," and it is the ease in which these digital surveillance tools are being constructed that should give us pause (p. 212). They are created in ways that restrict freedom and equality instead of expanding them. Understanding that "[p]olicing is broader than law enforcement: it includes all the processes by which we maintain order, regulate lives, and press people into boxes so they will fit our unjust society," we can see that we are all potential objects waiting to be funneled under the umbrella of surveillance once its regulatory eye falls on us (Eubanks, 2017, p. 215).

What Eubanks (2017) and Edin and Shaefer (2016) ultimately provide in their respective books is vivid imagery that shows our world for what it is: a collection of violence and oppression targeted directly at those that do not fit within a neat yet unattainable utopic vision of society. It seeks to bury them under a pile of conditions that are suffocating, and for those who can survive being crushed by dismal job prospects, poor wages, and a lack of adequate to housing, what awaits them is a relentless course consisting of hoops that must be jumped through all while enduring an undignified existence that comes with having every inch of their lives opened up to scrutiny; scrutiny that all but the most desperate would not even consider standing for. Being crushed is a slow death best exemplified by the toxic stress that the poor themselves and their families regularly experience which results in sickness, abuse, and further despair. Even instances of personal agency are met with judgement. And instead of receiving help, people in poverty as political pawns become test subjects for the latest and greatest tools of surveillance and control. However, as Edin and Shaefer (2016) note, there are

understandings that we must come to if we are ever going to be able to imagine a better existence for people living in poverty. All people deserve the opportunity to work and by work, they mean that transportation, childcare, wages, and schedules must be addressed in ways that enhance life rather than confine it; the ability to work is not the ability to be exploited. Another of their points of emphasis is that all parents should be able to raise their children in a place of their own. Finally, they stress the importance that for all people, there is the possibility that they will need help, and that we need to have an appropriate and comprehensive safety net to catch them before the fall too far; revamping the social welfare system should not be done under the guise of shrinking it or making it go away altogether. Indeed, Edin and Shaefer (2016) note that "[t]he ultimate test we endorse for any reform is whether it will serve to integrate the poor" (p. 158). In that light, tending to those less fortunate is in the best interest of all people not only because we should be morally obligated to do so, but because we, ourselves, are members of the same ever expanding surveillance structure and there is not guarantee that anyone's seats or standing spots are safe.

Afterward: We, the Watchers of the Watched

Zygmunt Bauman (2013) notes that "panopticon-like practices are limited to sites for humans booked to the debit side, declared useless and fully and truly 'excluded' – and where the incapacitation of bodies, rather than their harnessing of useful work, is the sole purpose behind the setting's logic" (Bauman & Lyon, p. 56). This certainly describes the poor in Edin and Shaefer's (2016) and Eubanks' (2017) books. They speak at great lengths about the structural forces that make the digital poorhouse a reality and describe the impact that structural forces have on the poor as well. However, what is especially important is the role of the non-poor in policing those in poverty. Indeed, they are "groomed to the role of self-watchers as to render redundant the watchtowers in the Bentham/Foucault scheme" (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 59). Indeed, it is the job of the non-poor to render obsolete the expensive, top-down structures of human management. And while such structures will likely never go away, the reality of the construction of human surveillance is that it has become our jobs to police our fellow humans. Indeed, in this system, every person we encounter is the feared Other. As if in a competitive rat race, we are the judges, juries, and executioners of everyone we encounter, and practice our roles as quickly and ruthlessly as we can so as to not run the risk of being found guilty by the very target set squarely in our sights. In this respect, our cultural capital is the evidence against which all decisions of Others are based and our distance from the locus of that capital determines the strength of our judgements. Borrowing again from Bauman (2013), "[t]he principal purpose of the ban-opticon is to make sure that the waste is separated from decent product and earmarked for transportation to a refuse trip" (Bauman & Lyon, p. 66). Contemporary life, whether structurally regulated or regulated through judgements levied on one another, is an exercise in waste. It is because of this dismal future that authors like Edin and Shaefer (2016) and Eubanks (2017) are so important. They provide an outlet for the voice of those who structurally and relationally have had it stripped from them. Through

providing witness to and chronicling and documenting the interactions of the poor with society, they further the understanding that those living in poverty indeed do have agency; these writings represent a backdrop against which inclusive pedagogies can and should be developed or expanded and such lessons should be carried into various different public spheres. They help us understand that the poor are, indeed, people. Through their stories we can recognize commonalities in our human agencies and hopefully find that such commonalities challenge presumptions that otherwise would drive our socialized need to be executioners. Agency is contagious, and despite the dismal and humble locations of the poor, their voice can snap us out of our digitally medicated comas and help us understand that the human experience should be about creating, not discarding.

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