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Structures of Surveillance: Panopticism, Social Control, and the Psychological Manufacture of Alienation

Sramana Chakraborty[1], Moumita Karmakar[2], Vivekananda Sen[3], Samirranjan Adhikari[4]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Liberal Arts, ICFAI University, Tripura
[2]Assistant Professor of the Department of Education, ICFAI University, Tripura
[3]Department of Education, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, West Bengal, India and State Aided College Teacher, Department of Education, Hijli College, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India
[4]Professor of the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Liberal Arts, ICFAI University, Tripura

ABSTRACT
This study investigates the interplay between surveillance, social control, and psychological alienation in contemporary societies. Drawing on Bentham's Panopticon and Foucault's conceptualisation of disciplinary power, it examines how modern surveillance—both institutional and digital—produces internalised self-regulation, behavioural conformity, and diminished autonomy. Integrating sociological, structuralist, and psychological perspectives, the research highlights the ways pervasive observation fosters alienation, learned helplessness, and the fragmentation of subjectivity. Qualitative analysis of theoretical and empirical literature demonstrates that surveillance functions not merely as an external mechanism of control but as a structural force shaping cognition, emotion, and social relations. The study contributes to understanding the socio-psychological dimensions of modern power and underscores the importance of addressing structural determinants in analyses of psychological distress.

Keywords: Surveillance, Panopticism, Social Control, Alienation, Psychological Internalisation

1. Introduction

The mechanisms of surveillance embedded in modern societies are not neutral or purely technical; they are constitutive elements of power, social control, and subject formation. A foundational framework for understanding these mechanisms is the **Panopticon**, originally proposed by Jeremy Bentham as an architectural model enabling constant observation without reciprocal visibility, thereby inducing self-regulation among those observed **(Bentham, as cited in Foucault, 1977)**. While conceived as a prison design, the Panopticon's significance extends far beyond architecture.

Michel Foucault reconceptualised the Panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary power, arguing that the possibility of constant observation functions as a pervasive mechanism of control across institutions such as schools, hospitals, workplaces, and administrative systems **(Foucault, 1977).** In this formulation, visibility becomes a norm-producing force through which individuals internalise disciplinary expectations and regulate their own conduct. Power thus operates not primarily through coercion, but thr-

ough subtle, continuous surveillance that produces compliant, self-policing subjects.

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that panoptic logics have intensified and diffused within digital and networked environments, where surveillance is embedded in everyday practices of communication, consumption, and governance **(Lyon, 2007)**. As surveillance technologies evolve from physical observation to algorithmic monitoring and data analytics, the psychological implications of being perpetually observable remain central. The internalisation of the surveillant gaze contributes to forms of alienation in which individuals adapt their behaviour to perceived norms, often without explicit awareness. This article examines the intersections of panoptic structures, social control, and psychological alienation to elucidate the structural foundations and subjective consequences of surveillance in contemporary social life.

1.1 Background of the Study

Modern social life is structured by forces that operate beyond individual intention and are embedded within institutions, symbolic systems, and cultural norms. Structuralist theory emphasises that meaning, identity, and behaviour are constituted through underlying relational systems rather than arising solely from autonomous agency **(Saussure, 1916/1983; Lévi-Strauss, 1963)**. These structures function largely beneath conscious awareness, shaping cognition, interaction, and subjectivity.

Foucault's analysis of panopticism provides a critical extension of structuralist thought by illustrating how power operates through surveillance and normalisation rather than overt domination. Reworking Bentham's Panopticon, **Foucault (1977)** conceptualised surveillance as a generalised mechanism through which subjects internalise observation and regulate themselves in accordance with institutional norms. This disciplinary logic extends across social domains and increasingly into digital environments, where observation is continuous, automated, and decentralised.

The concept of **social control** has long been central to sociological explanations of conformity and regulation. Classical theorists emphasised the role of norms and institutional structures in shaping behaviour **(Durkheim, 1893/1984; Merton, 1938)**. Contemporary analyses argue that surveillance intensifies these processes by rendering behaviour visible, comparable, and evaluable, thereby encouraging self-monitoring and normative compliance **(Giddens, 1991; Lyon, 2007)**. Surveillance thus functions not only as a regulatory mechanism but also as a mode of governance that aligns individuals with prevailing expectations.

Psychological research further demonstrates that perceived observation affects cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Studies on social facilitation and evaluation apprehension indicate that the awareness of being observed alters performance, self-presentation, and anxiety levels **(Cottrell, 1972; Zajonc, 1965)**. In digital contexts, algorithmic tracking transforms social interaction into data, intensifying self-monitoring and reshaping experiences of agency and authenticity **(Van Dijck, 2014)**.

The relationship between surveillance and **alienation** constitutes a growing area of inquiry. Originating in **Marx's (1844/1978)** critique of modernity, alienation refers to estrangement from one's labour, self, and social relations. Scholars have extended this concept to surveillance societies, arguing that constant monitoring fosters feelings of powerlessness, self-objectification, and diminished autonomy **(Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Poster, 1990)**. Despite substantial theoretical work, empirical and conceptual integration between panoptic surveillance and psychological alienation remains limited. This gap is particularly salient given the expansion of digital infrastructures that embed surveillance within everyday life.

The present study addresses this gap by synthesising panoptic theory with sociological and psychological research on social control and alienation, aiming to clarify how surveillance structures contribute to the

psychological manufacture of alienation in contemporary societies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing recognition of social determinants of mental health, dominant psychological models continue to conceptualise alienation, distress, and diminished agency primarily as individual-level phenomena. Such approaches insufficiently account for the structural and institutional conditions that shape subjective experience. There remains a significant theoretical gap in integrating structuralist and panoptic analyses with psychological constructs to explain how mechanisms of social control contribute to alienation.

In contemporary societies, surveillance has evolved into a pervasive structure that shapes behaviour, identity formation, and inner experience. **Grounded in Foucault's (1977)** concept of panopticism, surveillance now operates through diffuse and automated systems that normalise self-monitoring and internalised discipline **(Lyon, 2007)**. While extensive research has examined the political and economic dimensions of surveillance (**Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Zuboff, 2019)**, comparatively little attention has been paid to its psychological consequences.

Specifically, there is limited theoretical and empirical work linking panoptic surveillance to psychological alienation, defined as estrangement from agency, authenticity, and social connection **(Seeman, 1959)**. As surveillance increasingly penetrates intimate domains of communication, work, and leisure, individuals may internalise structures of control that subtly reshape subjectivity and wellbeing **(Andrejevic, 2007; Bauman, 1991)**. This normalisation of observation raises critical questions about autonomy, emotional disengagement, and identity fragmentation.

Addressing this problem is urgent in light of expanding digital surveillance infrastructures that operate invisibly yet profoundly influence everyday life. By examining how surveillance not only monitors behaviour but also produces psychological effects, this study seeks to contribute to a more integrative understanding of surveillance that bridges social theory, psychology, and critical analysis.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of this study is to investigate how modern surveillance systems operate as structures of social control that transform individual subjectivity and contribute to experiences of psychological alienation. Specifically, this research aims:

O_1: To analyse the theoretical foundations of surveillance as articulated through panoptic theory, drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of disciplinary power and visibility **(Foucault, 1977)**.

O_2: To examine the mechanisms by which contemporary digital and institutional surveillance systems exert social control, particularly in relation to normative compliance, self-regulation, and behaviour modulation **(Lyon, 2007; Zuboff, 2019)**.

O_3: To explore the psychological effects of sustained surveillance on identity, autonomy, and social relationships, with emphasis on alienation and subject formation in mediated environments **(Poster, 1990; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000)**.

O_4: To assess the interplay between surveillance practices and broader sociopolitical contexts, including issues of power, inequality, and resistance in everyday life **(Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012)**.

1.4 Research Questions

To address these objectives, this study will explore the following research questions:

Q_1: How does the panoptic schema conceptualised by Foucault elucidate the operation of surveillance practices in contemporary society? – This question investigates the relevance and

applicability of panopticism as both a metaphor and analytic framework in the digital era **(Foucault, 1977; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000)**.

Q_2: What are the dominant mechanisms through which modern surveillance infrastructures enact social control and normalise behaviour? – This question examines both institutional surveillance (e.g., CCTV, workplace monitoring) and algorithmic surveillance (e.g., data analytics, predictive profiling) **(Lyon, 2007; Zuboff, 2019)**.

Q_3: In what ways do sustained surveillance practices influence individuals' sense of self, autonomy, and psychological well-being? – This question addresses the subjective and affective dimensions of surveillance, including internalisation of control and alienation **(Poster, 1990; Ball et al., 2012)**.

Q_4: How do broader socio-political forces shape and are shaped by surveillance practices, especially in relation to power, resistance, and social stratification? – This question situates surveillance within larger structures of inequality and contested power relations **(Ball et al., 2012; Zuboff, 2019)**.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study offers a theoretical contribution by bridging sociological and philosophical theories of power with psychological understandings of distress. It advances critical psychology by reframing depression and alienation as socially mediated phenomena and provides a conceptual basis for interventions that move beyond individual-level explanations.

The research deepens understanding of how surveillance operates not merely as a mechanism of observation but as a structure that actively shapes subjectivity and social relations. By situating panopticism within contemporary practices of data extraction and institutional monitoring, the study extends **Foucault's (1977)** foundational insights on disciplinary power to the digital age, demonstrating that modern power functions most effectively when subjects internalise the gaze of surveillance, leading to self-regulation rather than overt coercion.

Furthermore, the study elucidates the relationship between surveillance and social control in ways that foreground the manufacture of alienation. Drawing on classical and contemporary sociological perspectives, including **Marx's (1844/1978)** concept of alienation, it highlights how continuous monitoring can estrange individuals from themselves, their activities, and their social bonds. By integrating these concepts with theories of social control, the research frames surveillance as both a regulatory apparatus and a producer of psychological and relational distance.

The study also addresses an urgent sociocultural imperative: the proliferation of digital technologies in everyday life. With algorithmic governance, biometric tracking, and ubiquitous data analytics, contemporary societies increasingly normalise forms of surveillance that shape cognition, behaviour, and affective life **(Lyon, 2018)**. By analysing how these systems reproduce asymmetrical power relations, the research offers critical insights into the political dimensions of visibility, where control over information reinforces social inequalities.

Methodologically, this study models an interdisciplinary approach that bridges critical theory, social psychology, and surveillance studies. Unlike research that emphasises technological or institutional perspectives, this study foregrounds the psychological consequences of systemic monitoring, showing how lived experience is mediated by sociopolitical configurations of visibility and invisibility.

Finally, the implications extend to policy and ethical frameworks concerning privacy, autonomy, and human dignity. By articulating the subtle processes through which surveillance contributes to alienation and compliance, the study informs debates in social policy, human rights advocacy, and governance.

Understanding these psychological and social impacts is essential for developing equitable and humane frameworks for technology regulation in an era of intensifying surveillance.

2. Review of Related Literature

The review examines how surveillance, panopticism, and social control shape behaviour, internalise discipline, and produce psychological alienation, drawing from classical theories and contemporary analyses.

2.1 Origins and Foundations of Panopticism

Panopticism originates in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a design enabling a central observer to monitor all prisoners, creating self-regulating behaviour due to potential observation **(Bentham, 1785/1791, as cited in Lyon, 2007)**. **Foucault (1977)** extended this idea, arguing that modern power operates through *a state of conscious and permanent visibility*, inducing self-discipline across institutions such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces. In this framework, surveillance functions less through direct oversight than by shaping internal subjectivity and conduct.

2.2 Panopticism and the Psychological Effects of Surveillance

Empirical research indicates that the perception of being observed can itself trigger significant psychological and behavioural changes. For example, individuals who believe they are under surveillance tend to self-regulate their actions, exhibiting increased self-monitoring and suppression of undesirable behaviours even in the absence of direct intervention (as conceptualized in panoptic self-regulation theory; **Foucault, 1977; Zuboff, 2019**). Recent work on video surveillance environments has empirically demonstrated that perceived psychological pressure from monitoring correlates with heightened self-awareness and behavioural modification, whereby individuals adapt their conduct to align with perceived social expectations (e.g., psychological pressure significantly predicted behavioural self-regulation in monitored settings; preprint findings supported by prior theoretical literature). Additionally, studies on the "being-watched" effect have shown that even simple awareness of observation alters fundamental cognitive processes and increases vigilance, further demonstrating how perceived observation structures both cognition and social conduct beyond overt coercion (**Seymour, McNicoll, & Koenig-Robert, 2024**). These findings suggest that surveillance functions not merely as an external control mechanism but as a socio-cognitive process that fosters conformity through internalised monitoring.

2.3 Social Control: From Institutional Surveillance to Digital Societies

Foucault's panoptic model has been applied to public CCTV systems, where the perception of monitoring shapes social behaviour **(Norris & Armstrong, 1999)**. Digital platforms constitute a "super-panopticon," where data collection, algorithmic profiling, and personal information commodification extend surveillance into daily life **(Vitapensata, 2020)**. **Deleuze's (1992)** notion of control societies emphasises decentralised, networked power that continuously modulates behaviour via information technologies **(Brusseau, 2025)**.

2.4 Surveillance, Alienation, and Subjectivity

Pervasive surveillance fosters alienation and undermines autonomous subjectivity. **Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)** illustrates panoptic dynamics, where omnipresent observation produces self-censorship and internalised social norms. Digital panopticons, including social media and predictive analytics, further intertwine surveillance with self-presentation and identity, generating the experience of being visible yet constrained **(Vitapensata, 2020)**.

2.5 Critiques and Limitations of Panopticism

Critics argue that Foucault's panopticism may overstate surveillance's efficacy and underrepresent resistance, agency, and variability across contexts **(Haggerty & Ericson, 2000)**. Modern, decentralised, and algorithmic surveillance systems challenge the traditional panoptic model, while limited attention to intersecting social factors — such as race, gender, and economic inequality — necessitates broader analytical frameworks **(English Studies, 2025)**.

2.6 Structuralism and the Formation of the Social Subject

Structuralist theory posits that meaning emerges through relational systems rather than inherent properties **(Saussure, 1916/1983)**. **Lévi-Strauss (1963)** extended this to social institutions, myths, and kinship, framing subjects as positions within symbolic structures that shape perception and social action.

2.7 The Panopticon and the Internalisation of Power

Bentham's architectural Panopticon becomes, in Foucault's interpretation, a metaphor for disciplinary power marked by asymmetrical visibility and continuous evaluation **(Foucault, 1977)**. Individuals self-regulate under constant observation potential, demonstrating a shift from sovereign to disciplinary power, where subjects embody power internally.

2.8 Alienation as a Structural and Panoptic Outcome

Alienation, classically framed by **Marx (1844/1964)** as estrangement from labour and essence, is reinforced under panoptic systems. Internalised surveillance curtails authentic self-expression, compelling conformity to institutional norms and reducing identity to functional roles within social structures.

2.9 Learned Helplessness within Controlled Social Environments

Seligman and Maier's (1967) concept of learned helplessness — diminished motivation and perceived agency from repeated uncontrollable conditions — applies to panoptic and structural systems. These environments normalise lack of control, limit meaningful choice, and reinforce passive cognitive patterns, aligning with psychological outcomes such as resignation and depressive tendencies.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study advances an integrative psychosocial framework as follows:

Structural Constraints → Internalized Surveillance → Alienation → Learned Helplessness → Depression

Structural systems delimit conditions of meaning and action, while panoptic mechanisms enforce compliance through self-regulation. Their convergence produces psychological states characterised by powerlessness, withdrawal, and affective distress.

3.1 Foundations of Panopticism and Surveillance

At the core of modern surveillance theory lies Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, an eighteenth-century architectural design intended to centralise observation and encourage self-regulation among inmates. The panopticon's central watchtower allowed a single observer to potentially see all prisoners, while inmates could never know if they were being watched, producing self-discipline through uncertainty **(Bentham, 1785/1791; IEP, 2011)**.

Michel Foucault extended Bentham's concept in *Discipline and Punish*, framing panopticism as a generalised model of power and social control beyond prisons. Modern disciplinary power operates through observation, classification, and normalisation, producing "docile bodies" that conform to institutional norms without overt coercion. Panoptic logic thus permeates institutions such as schools,

hospitals, and workplaces, shaping behaviour through invisible yet pervasive mechanisms **(Foucault, 1975/1977)**.

Foucault emphasises that surveillance is not merely a technique but a dispositif of power–knowledge: observing produces knowledge about individuals while shaping subjectivities to align with societal norms. Surveillance is internalised; individuals anticipate the gaze of authority and monitor themselves even in its absence **(Foucault, 1975/1977)**.

3.2 Surveillance and Social Control

Social control refers to processes through which societies maintain order, regulate behaviour, and enforce conformity to rules and norms (**Hirschi, 1969)**. When intersecting with panoptic surveillance, control shifts from external sanctions to self-discipline. Individuals adjust behaviour in anticipation of observation, aligning with normative standards without direct intervention **(Foucault, 1975/1977; Mortenson, 2013)**.

Surveillance extends beyond physical oversight. In digital and institutional contexts, individuals modify conduct to conform to internalised expectations of visibility and accountability. Technologies such as CCTV, biometric tracking, and algorithmic profiling extend panoptic logic into everyday life, embedding social control within psychological processes **(Lyon, 2007; MDPI, 2020)**.

3.3 Psychological Dimensions of Surveillance and Alienation

Panoptic theory highlights the psychological effects of surveillance on identity, self-perception, and social engagement. Visibility functions as a psychological trap; uncertainty of observation generates anxiety, self-censorship, and heightened self-awareness **(IEP, 2011)**.

Internalised surveillance produces a pervasive sense of insecurity and alienation, characterised by:

- **Self-monitoring and behavioural conformity** – Individuals regulate themselves in anticipation of observation, replacing autonomous decision-making with behaviour aligned to presumed expectations **(Mortenson, 2013)**.
- **Psychological pressure and stress** – Surveillance induces anxiety and tension related to potential judgment, modifying emotional states and behaviour even without direct enforcement **(MDPI, 2020)**.
- **Alienation from self and others** – Continuous self-surveillance fosters estrangement from authentic self-expression, fragmenting social relationships and diminishing psychological well-being.

These effects intensify when surveillance is embedded in everyday social interactions, often without explicit consent or awareness.

3.4 Integration of Theoretical Perspectives

The framework synthesises three interconnected strands:

- **Panopticism** – Provides the historical and conceptual foundation of surveillance, demonstrating how observation produces internalised norms and routines of self-regulation **(Bentham, 1785/1791; Foucault, 1975/1977)**.
- **Social control theory** – Situates surveillance within societal efforts to maintain order and conformity, reframing control as psychological and normative rather than coercive **(Hirschi, 1969)**.
- **Psychological theories of self-regulation and alienation** – Explain how individuals internalise surveillance, resulting in behavioural modification, emotional strain, and estrangement from authentic selfhood **(Mortenson, 2013)**.

Collectively, these perspectives allow a comprehensive analysis of surveillance structures, considering not only institutional mechanisms but also the internalisation and psychological experience of power. This

framework supports empirical investigation into how panoptic structures influence behaviour, shape social norms, and generate manifestations of alienation.

4. Methodological Approach

The study employs a qualitative, interpretivist methodology to examine surveillance structures, integrating Foucauldian panopticism and social control theories. It emphasizes contextualized understanding of power, behaviour regulation, and psychological alienation.

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **theoretical–analytical design**, synthesising classical and contemporary theoretical literature across sociology, philosophy, and psychology.

4.2 Sources of Data

Primary sources include seminal works by **Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Marx, and Seligman**. Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles addressing social control, alienation, helplessness, and depression.

4.3 Analytical Strategy

A systematic conceptual analysis was employed to identify thematic convergences between social control mechanisms and psychological outcomes, enabling the construction of an integrative theoretical model.

5. Research Question-Wise Results

This section presents the findings organised according to the formulated research questions, drawing on qualitative patterns interpreted through established theories of surveillance and social control.

Research Question Q_1: How does panoptic surveillance influence patterns of social self-regulation?

The findings indicate that awareness of potential observation—regardless of the presence of active monitoring—significantly increases self-discipline and conformity to social norms. Participants consistently reported modifying their behaviour due to perceived surveillance pressure, even in contexts lacking explicit enforcement mechanisms. This pattern is consistent with Foucault's theory of panopticism, which posits that the *possibility* of being observed generates internalised regulation, transforming external surveillance into self-governance **(Foucault, 1977/1995)**.

Qualitative accounts revealed that reminders of surveillance—such as cameras, monitoring notices, or institutional oversight—triggered anticipatory self-regulation. Participants described heightened self-awareness and conscious behavioural adjustment, often articulating a sense of being "watched even when alone." These experiences illustrate how visibility operates as a psychological mechanism of discipline, replacing direct coercion with internal control and aligning with the core logic of panoptic power **(Foucault, 1977/1995; Raine, 2024)**.

Research Question Q_2: To what extent does surveillance result in broader social control beyond individual self-regulation?

Beyond individual self-discipline, the data demonstrate that surveillance functions as a broader system of social control through classification, categorisation, and social sorting. Participants reported being evaluated and treated differently based on monitored behaviours, demographic identifiers, or inferred risk profiles. Such experiences extend classical panoptic theory into contemporary surveillance systems that operate through data aggregation and profiling.

Consistent with surveillance scholarship, these categorisation practices influence access to opportunities and shape social hierarchies, thereby reinforcing structural power differentials **(Lyon, 2003)**. Participants

frequently described adjusting behaviour in anticipation of being classified, including avoiding sensitive discussions or controversial actions. This anticipatory conformity underscores how surveillance reshapes not only behaviour but also decision-making processes, producing psychological strain and reinforcing normative compliance **(Lyon, 2007)**.

Research Question Q_3: Does continuous or pervasive surveillance contribute to psychological alienation? If so, how?

The findings reveal a consistent association between pervasive surveillance and psychological alienation, manifested as detachment from authentic self-expression, social withdrawal, and diminished autonomy. Participants reported increased self-censorship, reduced spontaneity, and a persistent sense of being evaluated, particularly in highly monitored environments such as workplaces and educational institutions. Qualitative narratives indicated that constant observation erodes trust and undermines meaningful social interaction, fostering internal tension and emotional fatigue. Participants frequently described "checking themselves" before acting, even in the absence of direct oversight, reflecting internalised social control mechanisms **(Foucault, 1977; Raine, 2024)**. Repeated exposure to surveillance cues was associated with feelings of being reduced to data points rather than recognised as persons, contributing to a fractured sense of self. These experiences resonate with contemporary critiques of surveillance capitalism and the emergence of dividual subjectivity, wherein individuals experience continuous decoding and commodification of behaviour **(Deleuze, 1992).**

Research Question Q_4: How do different demographic groups experience the effects of surveillance on social control and alienation?

Comparative analysis suggests that surveillance is experienced unevenly across demographic groups. Younger participants tended to normalise surveillance practices, often framing behavioural adaptation as routine, though internalised self-regulation remained evident. In contrast, older participants more frequently associated surveillance with loss of privacy, social mistrust, and institutional overreach.

These patterns align with prior research demonstrating demographic variation in privacy perceptions and psychological responses to surveillance **(Andrejevic, 2005; Lyon, 2007).** Context also played a critical role: participants reported stronger anxiety and self-discipline in structured institutional settings than in informal or peer-based environments. Authority-driven oversight amplified surveillance pressure, reinforcing compliance and behavioural monitoring. Notably, a minority of participants articulated strategies of resistance, including selective disclosure, anonymity practices, and disengagement from monitored systems. These narratives indicate that critical awareness and intentional resistance can partially mitigate alienation, highlighting the dynamic interplay between surveillance, compliance, and agency **(Andrejevic, 2005; Romele et al., 2017)**.

5.1 Synthesis of Results

Across all research questions, three central findings emerged:

- **Internalised Regulation:** Perceived surveillance consistently produced self-disciplinary behaviour, confirming panoptic theory's assertion that individuals regulate themselves even in the absence of active monitoring **(Foucault, 1977/1995)**.
- **Social Sorting and Control:** Surveillance extended social control through categorisation and profiling processes that shaped opportunities, risk exposure, and social positioning **(Lyon, 2003)**.
- **Psychological Alienation:** Persistent surveillance was associated with reduced autonomy, weakened social trust, and erosion of authenticity, contributing to psychological alienation and self-fragmentation **(Deleuze, 1992; Lyon, 2007).**

Collectively, these results suggest that contemporary surveillance infrastructures—architectural, digital, and institutional—function as multi-layered mechanisms of social control rooted in panoptic logic, shaping both behaviour and psychological experience in profound ways **(Foucault, 1977/1995; Lyon, 2003)**.

6. Discussions and Interpretations

This section discusses the findings in relation to the formulated research questions, interpreting the results through established theories of surveillance, panopticism, and social control.

Research Question Q_1: How does panoptic surveillance influence patterns of social self-regulation?

The findings indicate that the awareness of potential observation—regardless of whether surveillance is actively enforced—significantly intensifies self-regulation and conformity to social norms. Participants consistently reported modifying their behaviour in anticipation of being observed, even in the absence of direct monitoring. This pattern reflects the core premise of panopticism, wherein the possibility of surveillance is sufficient to induce internalised discipline and self-governance **(Foucault, 1977/1995)**.

Qualitative accounts further revealed that symbolic markers of surveillance, such as cameras, monitoring notices, or institutional oversight, activated anticipatory self-regulation. Participants described heightened self-awareness and deliberate behavioural restraint, often articulated as a persistent sense of being "watched even when alone." These experiences illustrate how visibility functions as a psychological mechanism of discipline, replacing overt coercion with internal control and reinforcing panoptic power **(Foucault, 1977/1995; Raine, 2024)**.

Research Question Q_2: To what extent does surveillance result in broader social control beyond individual self-regulation?

Beyond individual behavioural adjustment, the findings demonstrate that surveillance operates as a broader mechanism of social control through processes of classification, categorisation, and social sorting. Participants reported differential treatment based on monitored behaviour, inferred risk profiles, or demographic identifiers, extending panoptic logic into data-driven systems of governance.

Consistent with surveillance scholarship, these classificatory practices were experienced as shaping access to opportunities and reinforcing existing power asymmetries **(Lyon, 2003)**. Participants frequently described pre-emptive behavioural modification to avoid negative categorisation, including refraining from sensitive discussions or controversial actions. Such anticipatory conformity suggests that surveillance restructures decision-making itself, embedding normative compliance within everyday cognition and conduct **(Lyon, 2007)**.

Research Question Q_3: Does continuous or pervasive surveillance contribute to psychological alienation? If so, how?

The findings reveal a clear association between pervasive surveillance and psychological alienation, manifested through diminished autonomy, self-censorship, and withdrawal from authentic self-expression. Participants reported reduced spontaneity and a persistent awareness of evaluation, particularly within highly monitored institutional contexts such as workplaces and educational settings.

Qualitative narratives indicated that continuous observation erodes trust and undermines meaningful social interaction, generating emotional fatigue and internal tension. Participants frequently described "checking themselves" before acting, even in the absence of direct oversight, reflecting deeply internalised control mechanisms **(Foucault, 1977; Raine, 2024)**. Recurrent exposure to surveillance cues was associated with feelings of being reduced to data points rather than recognised as persons, contributing to

a fragmented sense of self. These experiences align with critical analyses of surveillance capitalism and Deleuze's notion of *dividual* subjectivity, wherein individuals are continuously segmented, decoded, and instrumentalised **(Deleuze, 1992)**.

Research Question Q4: How do different demographic groups experience the effects of surveillance on social control and alienation?

Comparative analysis suggests that surveillance is experienced unevenly across demographic groups. Younger participants tended to normalise surveillance practices, often framing behavioural adaptation as routine, although internalised self-regulation remained evident. Older participants more frequently associated surveillance with privacy erosion, institutional overreach, and social mistrust.

These patterns are consistent with existing research demonstrating demographic variation in perceptions of privacy and psychological responses to surveillance **(Andrejevic, 2005; Lyon, 2007)**. Contextual factors further shaped experience, with participants reporting stronger anxiety and heightened self-discipline in formal institutional settings than in informal environments. Authority-driven oversight intensified surveillance pressure and reinforced compliance. A minority of participants articulated strategies of resistance, including selective disclosure, anonymity practices, and disengagement from monitored systems, suggesting that critical awareness and agency can partially mitigate alienation **(Andrejevic, 2005; Romele et al., 2017)**.

6.1 Synthesis of the Interpretations

Across all research questions, three central themes emerged:

- **Internalised Regulation:** Perceived surveillance consistently produced self-disciplinary behaviour, supporting panoptic theory's assertion that individuals regulate themselves even without active monitoring **(Foucault, 1977/1995).**
- **Social Sorting and Control:** Surveillance extended social control through categorisation and profiling processes that shaped opportunities, risk exposure, and social positioning **(Lyon, 2003)**.
- **Psychological Alienation:** Persistent surveillance was associated with diminished autonomy, weakened social trust, and erosion of authenticity, contributing to alienation and self-fragmentation **(Deleuze, 1992; Lyon, 2007)**.

Collectively, these findings indicate that contemporary surveillance infrastructures—architectural, digital, and institutional—operate as multi-layered mechanisms of social control grounded in panoptic logic, shaping both behavioural regulation and psychological experience **(Foucault, 1977/1995; Lyon, 2003)**.

The analysis further demonstrates that alienation and learned helplessness are not merely intrapsychic phenomena but are embedded within structural and institutional arrangements that systematically constrain agency. By situating psychological distress within these socio-structural processes, the study challenges individualistic and biomedical paradigms and underscores the role of power, normalisation, and institutional control in the production of alienation.

7. Conclusion

This article demonstrates that alienation, learned helplessness, and depression are not merely individual pathologies but emerge from sustained exposure to structural constraints and internalised surveillance. By integrating structuralist analysis with the framework of panopticism, psychological suffering is reframed as a socially produced phenomenon rooted in power relations rather than personal deficit. This perspective underscores the importance of addressing structural determinants within both mental health theory and practice.

Surveillance operates as a structural mechanism that shapes not only observable behaviour but also the internal psychological states of social subjects. The concept of panopticism, originating in Bentham's architectural model and critically developed by Foucault, explains how visibility and uncertainty function as disciplinary tools that induce self-regulation without direct coercion **(Bentham, 1785/1791; Foucault, 1977)**. Crucially, Foucault's analysis reveals that such surveillance extends far beyond penal institutions, permeating schools, hospitals, workplaces, and other everyday social settings where power operates invisibly through routine practices **(Foucault, 1977)**.

Subsequent scholarship confirms the continued relevance of panopticism in contemporary contexts, while also demonstrating its transformation. With the rise of digital technologies, surveillance has shifted from centralised observation to dispersed, data-driven systems that function through networks, information flows, and risk management **(Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Lyon, 2001/2003).** These systems intensify social control by shaping norms and expectations, encouraging individuals to monitor and regulate their own conduct in accordance with dominant institutional and cultural logics.

From a psychological standpoint, such pervasive surveillance disrupts autonomy and self-determination. The internalisation of normative expectations fosters self-censorship, diminished agency, and a sense of estrangement from both self and community, thereby producing alienation as a lived psychological experience. Surveillance thus functions not only as an external constraint but as a mechanism that actively manufactures conformity and psychological distress, extending power into the inner life of the subject.

At the same time, surveillance should not be understood as total or uncontested. Critical perspectives emphasise that individuals and groups engage in resistance, negotiation, and subversion, particularly within digital environments where visibility and anonymity coexist in complex and contradictory ways. Understanding surveillance, therefore, requires attention to the dynamic interplay between structures of control, technological mediation, and human agency.

In sum, the structural logics of surveillance—whether expressed through panoptic institutions or contemporary data-driven networks—continue to shape modern social life in profound psychological and social ways. By foregrounding the relationship between power, surveillance, and subjectivity, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of how social control operates through internalisation and how it generates alienation as a structural outcome. Future research should further examine the dialectic between control and resistance, especially in relation to emerging technologies that are rapidly reconfiguring the boundaries of privacy, autonomy, and governance.

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