Nothing to Hide – Everyone to Suspect

A case study of Neighbor, Neoliberal Security Governance and Securitization

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ABSTRACT

Security is one of the key justifications for surveillance deployment (Lyon, 2018). Therefore, this dissertation argues that, to understand social practices that depend on surveillance, as is the case for digital neighbourhood watches, the connections between such practices and the construction and management of security must be established and examined. One of the essential societal changes in the perception of crime-related security in the last two decades has been the impact of globalised terrorism, the following securitisation process, and the neoliberal governance approach to security management. Hence, this dissertation explores how these societal changes are reflected in the digital neighbourhood watch platform Neighbor. The reflexive thematic analysis found that the practices on Neighbor reflect the characteristics of these two frameworks. It underlined the importance of the broader societal context that enables digital neighbourhood watches—a, to date, neglected aspect in their critique—and concludes that securitization and neoliberal governance are reflected in and crucial to surveillance practice.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary individuals are 'under levels of surveillance that would make the Stasi[1] seem amateurish' (PEN America, 2015). In the past decades, especially through information and communication technologies, the possibility for surveillance became manifold and introduced practices, intensity, and extensions unimaginable before (Galič *et al.*, 2017). Though this poses serious issues for privacy and freedom (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005), public opposition is sparse today (Schroer, 2018). Different examinations have been proposed as to why this is the case. One such explanation is the concept of non-targets proposed by Duke (2021). Duke posits that those people who consider themselves, as the term suggests, not to be the targets of potential consequences of surveillance and, due to their majoritarian position in society, also think that they could effectively lobby against it if there were negative consequences for them, making surveillance less threatening to them. Following Duke (2021), the idea of non-targets also aids in understanding statements such as 'I have nothing to hide', which captures the conviction that surveillance is not threatening to them.

The phrase 'if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear' is frequently used as governance propaganda to encourage compliance of those subjected to surveillance (Lyon, 2018). Ironically, this phrase and the surrounding arguments heavily play on the anxiety and fear introduced by terrorism and crime to justify surveillance technologies (Lyon, 2018) and the need for civilians to participate in them in the context of generalized suspicion. Indeed, the extent of contemporary surveillance is hardly achievable without some public support (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005; Schroer, 2018).

This circumstance initially sparked my interest in the topic, particularly the case of digital neighbourhood watches (DNW). If individuals invest the amount of money and time into surveillance seen in the case of digital neighbourhood watches, there seems to be more at play

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1 Stasi is the short form for the Ministry of State Security, the secret East German police (Das Bundesarchiv, o. J.)

than a passive, unbothered attitude toward surveillance. Andrejevic (2004) also constated that the proliferation of lateral surveillance needs to be understood in relation to a generalized risk and cannot solely be explained by technological developments.

In particular, I will look at Neighbor by Ring. Ring is a home security system owned by Amazon that started by selling smart doorbells (usually equipped with recording options for video and sound), but today includes various products from cameras and lights to a 'smart' front gate. Neighbor, its accompanying social media platform, allows anyone[2] from the neighbourhood to anonymously post and comment on neighbourhood events within a 5-mile radius of their home address (Morris, 2021). Ring sells products beyond the US; however, Neighbor is currently only available in the US. Therefore, the broad geographical area was predetermined and with it its specific cultural and social context.

Following Balzacq *et al.*'s (2010) reasoning, surveillance, and thus digital neighbourhood watches, need to be understood as a security practice—a means of regulating and thinking about (in)security. Security practices, according to Balzacq *et al.* (2010) manifests in three aspects: first, the social and political environment, second, the creation of a social space within which practices occur, and third, the practice itself' (Binder, 2017, S. 400). Thus, this dissertation inquiries about the rhetoric and argumentation that influences digital neighbourhood watches and why and how individuals are willing or even eager to take over policing work and spy on each other in the contemporary context. I will then explain why and how I used reflexive thematic analysis (TA) to explore the practice of neighbourhood watching to finally answer the research question of how securitization and neoliberal governance might be reflected in the use of digital neighbourhood watches.

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2 There are limits to this. People need, for example, some social and economic capital to participate and need to significantly conform to the rules on which it is established (Kurwa, 2019; Larsen & Piché, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, I will investigate the context created through securitization, lateral surveillance, and neoliberal security governance to establish the (potential) links between them—constructing the social space in which digital neighbourhood watches occur.

Securitization

Attitudes towards surveillance practices, perceptions, and meaning depend, among other factors, on their social, political, and legal context. This means national and regional differences exist (Lyon, 2018; C. Norris et al., 2004; Partin, 2019): Some countries (for example, Germany and Denmark (Hempel & Metelmann, 2018; Lauritsen & Feuerbach, 2015)) give a higher priority to a society based on trust and value privacy more than other countries (such as the UK or the US) (Zurawski, 2004).

When discussing security practices and surveillance in the US, the political and social legacy of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon must be acknowledged. Such significant events can influence security measures taken (Fisher, 2012; G. Norris, 2017), enabling policies that would not pass at regular times (Duke, 2021). In the case of 9/11, the accompanying climate of fear and the war on globalised terror signified an exemplary reasoning for the necessity of extensive surveillance capacity (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005).

However, to sustain a situation of exceptionality and perceived emergency over time, securitization, a concept used in international relations, becomes important (Balzacq et al., 2010; Fisher, 2012; Goold et al., 2013; Schulze, 2015). The concept of securitization is a narrative creation based on fear (Binder, 2017) and on creating an existential threat to the community (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This threat construction tells people what, or who, to fear and relies

heavily on perception (Fisher, 2012). It creates and normalizes situations of insecurity, enabling, in consequence, extraordinary practices to seem necessary and ordinary (Binder, 2017; Fisher, 2012). The construction of the attacked society is not only used to justify big political acts such as the Patriot Act but also in initiatives to engage individuals, for example, through public vigilance campaigns and promoting forms of societal surveillance (Amoore, 2007; Larsen & Piché, 2009).

The polarised, binary identity construction which creates a solid boundary between 'us' and 'them' groups and further alienating marginalized people (Amoore, 2007; Schulze, 2015) has a central role in securitization and the mundanity of insecurity (Buzan & Wæver, 2009). Fisher (2012) gives the example of how, through the securitization of 'the stranger', suspicion of others was justified far beyond the usual extent. Binder (2017) further argues that the securitization of terrorism as a threat affects the whole of society and every aspect of life. This reinforces that surveillance is needed in the fight against terrorism and crime (Binder, 2017) 'for our own good', not only on the (inter)national scale but also in daily life (Andrejevic, 2004: 494; Lyon, 2018).

The context of perpetual threat or state of fear (Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009) that was created by the securitization narratives post 9/11 (Monahan, 2006) understands everything and everyone (the mundane) to be potentially dangerous and thus suspicious (Andrejevic, 2011; Larsen & Piché, 2009). Following Marx (1989), this creates a situation of 'categorical suspicion'. However, Ericson (2007) argues that 9/11 made the concept of categorical suspicion or trust superfluous, as all are suspicious in the contemporary climate (referenced in Chan, 2008). Either way, a special role is given to individuals in securitization – they need to become informants so the 'sheer volume of suspicion' can be managed (Andrejevic, 2004: 488). 'In a world in which those who appear to be civilians become assailants, in which household objects can become weapons, everyone needs to become a spy, for their own safety'(Andrejevic, 2011: 166).

Neoliberal security governance

In Western states, following a logic of responsibilisation after 9/11 (Andrejevic, 2004), individuals are expected to 'become the eyes and ears of our law enforcement agencies' (Andrejevic, 2006a: 449). Surveillance is crucial in counterterrorism strategies (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005) and has thus considerably extended since 9/11 (Galič *et al.*, 2017). A core change took place in this process, supported by new technologies and the internet, in that individuals engage actively with surveillance (Lyon, 2018) and in the capacities civilians have to surveil each other (Humphreys, 2011). By 'being alert', vigilant, and reporting anything unusual or suspicious (Chan, 2008; Mythen & Walklate, 2006), civilians are given a position as "adjuncts to law enforcement by watching others", not just to fight terror but also crime more generally (Marx, 2006: 40; Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019).

This participatory turn in policing and surveillance is clearly connected to a neoliberal ethos, referencing self-reliance and individualism and embodying market values (Andrejevic, 2006a; Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019). Garland (1996) states that this neo-liberal security governance heavily depends on the responsibilisation of citizens. Campaigns and securitization appeal to a sense of civic responsibility as they offload police duties (through participatory policing) onto citizens (Andrejevic, 2006a; Larsen & Piché, 2009), blurring the demarcation between individuals and police (Reeves, 2012). This process includes the expectation towards citizens to stay vigilant, police their neighbourhood and actively safeguard it (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). Consequently, not participating in these participatory projects and not taking an active, vigilant role is considered 'risky and irresponsible' (Larsen & Piché, 2009: 197).

The idea of participation in surveillance for national security is illustrated in the CIA's campaign that 'invited residents to participate in a species of 'neighborhood watch program against terrorism'' (Andrejevic, 2006a: 449). Andrejevic (2004: 486) argues that 'the threat of a pervasive and indiscriminate risk underwrites the invitation (…) – a strategy that enlists the appeal of participation as a form of shared responsibility'. The Homeland defence, in this way,

transfers its functions onto the population (Andrejevic, 2006a). This transfer implies an unsettling confession by governmental institutions, in particular the police and defence agencies, that they are not apt to deal with the kind of dispersed threat that has become important (Andrejevic, 2006a; Chan, 2008; Kanashiro, 2008; Lyon, 2018). Individuals are 'encouraged to protect themselves and those close to them, because the government can't (or won't)' (Marx, 2006: 49). Monahan (2006) describes a type of citizen-subject who 'is afraid, but can effectively sublimate these fears by engaging in preparedness activities' (cited in Larsen & Piché, 2009: 197). 'Public vigilance campaigns… are the perfect example of this: they simultaneously remind the public of terrifying uncertainties and suggest responsible precautionary activities' (Larsen & Piché, 2009: 197). Thus, taking action for one's own safety is a reassuring process for many (Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019).

This dynamic is obviously profitable for companies that sell 'do-it-yourself' defence and surveillance technology such as surveillance cameras for private use (Andrejevic, 2006a). They 'understood that the feeling of scare and anxiety that so many are feeling is rooted in the feeling of helplessness' and that there is a market for selling people tools such as Ring to counter those feelings (Andrejevic, 2006a: 455). For example, in the case of Ring: 'The Neighbors app is free. But the more unsafe the app makes you feel the more inclined you would feel to dole out money for a Ring home security system' (Haskins, 2019a). This incorporates the commodification and privatisation of security, characteristic of neoliberal security governance and crime control (Kanashiro, 2008; Monahan, 2009). One form through which individuals assume their role in participative policing is thus Neighbourhood watches where they share information, partake in lateral surveillance and crime prevention practices, often with the help of private security equipment such as cameras and lights.

Surveillance

Surveillance can broadly be understood as ''any collecting or processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purposes of influencing or managing those whose data

have been gathered'' (Lyon, 2001: 2). In this, asymmetry and power have a crucial role as it differentiates between watching and surveilling and between those being surveilled and those doing the surveillance (Humphreys, 2011). Following Binder (2017), surveillance is used for social control, social sorting and to achieve security, making it a manifestation of power (Huey, 2009).

Many theories can contribute to the understanding of surveillance among peers in the securitization of the post-9/11 context, such as natural surveillance (Larsen & Piché, 2009; Parnaby & Reed, 2009), and Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) concept of the 'surveillant assemblages'. In the following, I will contrast the panopticon (as developed by Bentham and further theorised by Foucault (Galič *et al.*, 2017)) and lateral surveillance (Andrejevic, 2004) to explain why the latter is better apt to understand the surveillance practices in digital neighbourhood watches.

The panopticon, to this day, is important in surveillance studies (Galič *et al.*, 2017). It gives a crucial role to the asymmetric gaze wherein the watcher cannot be seen and those surveilled are uncertain as to when they are being watched (Galič et al., 2017). Several authors have successfully applied this to CCTV systems (Apelt & Möllers, 2011; Galič *et al.*, 2017; Koskela, 2003; Muller & Boos, 2004; C. Norris, 2018). Indeed, this asymmetry also seems fitting in describing people watching out for criminals (or terrorists) in DNW, with the watched never sure if they are under surveillance (Morris, 2021). However, what disqualifies this theory for this dissertation, is that 'the panoptic model provides no sustained account of the role or importance of the watchers' (Haggerty, 2006: 33), who are the focus of this dissertation. This focus on individuals and the 'watchers' perspective has also been identified as an under-researched area of surveillance studies which more often concentrate on the 'machine' or the 'disciplined individual' (Hier & Greenberg, 2009) and more vertical power hierarchies (Chan, 2008).

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Conversely, Andrejevic proposed lateral surveillance, also called peer-to-peer surveillance, to describe the non-transparent and asymmetrical way civilians watch one another (Andrejevic, 2006b). As stated by Galič *et al.* (2017), lateral surveillance is well suited for understanding the role of civilians in order to 'fight' crime in DNW as it is apt to describe the mixture of spatial and remote surveillance.

Andrejevic (2004) used lateral surveillance to describe social media interactions among peers, which differ significantly from the DNW interactions in that they are reciprocal, voluntary and of somewhat equal power. Nevertheless, he later applied it to the context of anti-terror, public vigilance campaigns and (digital) neighbourhood watches that urge civilians to report anything suspicious (cf. Andrejevic, 2006b; Chan, 2008; Mols & Pridmore, 2019). The US government, for instance, actively encourages its population to partake in lateral surveillance practices in their war against terrorism and crime (Chan, 2008) and assist law enforcement in this way (Mols & Pridmore, 2019).

This participation is, following Andrejevic (2004: 479; 2006b: 397), aligned 'with an ideology of 'responsibilization' associated with the risk society' and 'neo-liberal forms of governance' discussed in the previous section. Lateral surveillance—advertised by the government in the war against terror, disorder and crime—lives on 'in the subconscious of the public, sustaining a culture of suspicion and a positive support for extreme precautionary and pre-emptive strategies', stirring up fear and paranoia and destroying social capital (Chan, 2008: 225).

Neighbourhood Watches and (Private) Surveillance Cameras

Several digital neighbourhood watches currently exist, such as Nextdoor or Facebook and WhatsApp-based groups. One of the most popular, however, is Neighbor. These groups and platforms are advertised as promoting security through public vigilance, lateral surveillance and participatory policing, but they can easily produce negative social consequences (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). They are prone to increase the in/out-group dichotomy, forms of social distrust and dis-integration, contribute to discrimination, hate, and social exclusion, as well as

normalise suspicion, anxiety, and a challenged relationship between the police and citizens (Chan, 2008; Larsen & Piché, 2009; Mols & Pridmore, 2019; Saetnan *et al.*, 2004). They unavoidably increase participants' awareness of possible security threats or criminal activity in their surroundings (Mols & Pridmore, 2019; Reeves, 2012)

Much of the participatory policing work the public is doing is directed at anticipating crime, where the surveillor needs to make a judgement before the act. This brings up the problem of interpretative ambiguity. Actions are rarely recognisable as unambiguously suspicious before the fact, too idiosyncratic is human behaviour (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005; C. Norris, 2018). Moreover, while the theme of universal suspicion and generalized fear is recurring and crucial, it is hardly ever specified what is to be feared or suspected (Andrejevic, 2006a). Instead, citizens are expected to 'rely on commonsense understandings of what constitutes suspicious behaviour and to engage in processes of sorting and categorization based on deviations from the norm' (Larsen & Piché, 2009: 198). Securitization, however, makes clear that group belonging is central.

As has been established in scholarly literature, in most cases, the categorisation into the group of 'suspicious' relies on risk indicators that rarely seem to be more than appearance-based, ethnic or racial indicators, heavily influenced by prejudices (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005; Heath-Kelly & Strausz, 2019; C. Norris, 2018; C. Norris & Armstrong, 1999; Saetnan *et al.*, 2004). Hence, societally marginalised groups are disproportionately targeted (Parnaby & Reed, 2009; Partin, 2019) and excluded or pushed out of a neighbourhood (Apelt & Möllers, 2011; Galič et al., 2017; Kurwa, 2019; C. Norris & Armstrong, 1999; Walby, 2005). This has already been established to hold for digital neighbourhood watches (Kurwa, 2019; Mols & Pridmore, 2019) and for Ring in particular (Haskins, 2019a).

Ring is frequently criticised for reinforcing a racist bias and supporting segregationist practices as well as for several of its other practices (for instance, its untransparent data practices and not protecting its users' privacy or the privacy of those filmed (Dell, 2019; Haskins, 2019c; Kari,

2022; Morris, 2021). These problems are also present on other (digital) neighbourhood platforms. Neighbor, however, is distinct due to their partnership with law enforcement (Haskins, 2019b; Morris, 2021). The police, for example, receives incentives for promoting Ring products (Morris, 2021), Amazon has the oversight over how the police communicate about Amazon products (Frascella, 2021), and has access to Ring recordings and information about Ring users. This has already been misused by the police using these options to collect recordings of protestors or seek out in person Ring users who declined to share their footage online (Morris, 2021).

Initially developed for convenience, ring doorbells have become advertised as a way to prevent package thefts and promoted by claiming that they would reduce crime and increase public safety (Haskins, 2019b; Morris, 2021). However, Amazon seems unable to prove these claims. On the contrary, a meta-study by MIT found a higher likelihood of break-ins on homes with Ring doorbells than on those without them (Frascella, 2021). This lack of efficacy is reflected in the broader research on surveillance technologies (Neighbourhood watches and CCTV): research consistently demonstrates, at best, minor effectiveness in reducing crime that only works for small offences and for a short amount of time (until they get counteracted by habituation) or simply displace the behaviour to an area with less surveillance (Apelt & Möllers, 2011; Goold et al., 2013; Hempel & Metelmann, 2018; Wihbey, 2012). Furthermore, in many cases, no effects or even adverse effects have been found (C. Norris et al., 2004; Wihbey, 2012), such as a heightened fear of crime (Chan, 2008; Morris, 2021; Wood, 2004). Despite these essential doubts about their effectiveness, the perception prevails that surveillance (in particular security cameras) is an integral tool for crime prevention and prosecution in public and private contexts (Dubbeld, 2004; Saetnan et al., 2004). Their failure to achieve the aimed for goals is conversely attributed to a lack of coverage, consequently favouring more surveillance (Wang et al., 2011).

Conceptual Framework and Statement

Digital neighbourhood watches and lateral surveillance encouraged through vigilance campaigns are, following Binder (2017), a security practice. Thus, to understand their function in society and the practices they enable, Larsen and Piché (2009) argue that they should be considered a neoliberal practice. I argue that to this, securitization, understood as an intersubjective/relational practice, should be added. This is because, as Heath-Kelly and Strausz (2019) state, to this day, there has been no return to 'normal' after 9/11, and the 'pervasive and indiscriminate risk underwrites the invitation to participate in the policing function by providing for the capillary extension of surveillance' (Andrejevic, 2011, p.168). As seen in the section on securitization, this has penetrated every aspect of society and is thus impactful both on the fear and suspicion present in society as well as on the willingness to surveil each other and the perceived need to do so. The securitization narratives are thus reflected and influential in the individual responsibilisation of citizens (cf. vigilance campaigns), and the neoliberal security governance approaches favour further insecurity. Hence, both these dynamics changed what people 'know', consequently shaping how individuals act (Madill *et al.*, 2000) and make them essential to consider in this dissertation. This aligns with the epistemological position of contextualism which understands the context in which something is analysed to be of great importance as, among others, intersubjective meaning systems inform interpretations and practices (Madill *et al.*, 2000).

Literature covering the proliferating surveillance in the wake of globalized terrorism and the 9/11 attacks is extensive and covers concerns from many academic fields (Andrejevic, 2011; Larsen & Piché, 2009). However, participatory and policing practices are less established, especially at a lower level than at the national level (Larsen & Piché, 2009). Moreover, government or law-initiated campaigns have predominantly been the focus of the literature (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). For the discussion of the practices in DNW and horizontal surveillance more broadly in the fight against 'crime', I will use the term "lateral surveillance".

With this choice, I follow other authors who discussed (digital) neighbourhood watches through this lens (cf. Chan, 2008; Kurwa, 2019; Mols & Pridmore, 2019).

Because surveillance is an expression of power, one needs to consider how people are situated toward this power to understand the 'politics of surveillance and (…) the beliefs and values' of those opposing and supporting it (Huey, 2009). Lutz (2018) also compellingly argued for the inclusion of technological, political, cultural, commercial, private, and public, as well as mass and individual psychological factors when analysing surveillance. Furthermore, as agreed upon by Lyon (2018) and Wood (2004), every day, human involvement and interaction with surveillance is a research gap that needs more attention to understand how people act and are shaped by power. These accounts thus stress the importance of context when analysing surveillance practices. Thus, to do justice to both the social context that will help to understand DNW and the interpersonal context in the actual practice, I chose contextualism as the epistemology guiding my research.

I decided to explore digital neighbourhood watch practices as they represent a fascinating intersection between private and public (the security of oneself and the neighbourhood), and between vigilant citizens and law enforcement. Further, they are exemplary for technology-enabled surveillance that seemed excessive and paranoid just a few years back. I focused on Neighbor because it is in a unique position due to the many partnerships with the police and its strong focus on security-related issues, in contrast to other, more community-oriented platforms. It is therefore engaging in the context of threat construction and security governance. Moreover, Neighbor's connection to Ring introduces an interesting aspect to this dissertation, as this might well connect to the commodification of security, thus suggesting that Neighbor might not actually aim to make crime disappear or people feel safer.

The importance of securitization narratives on perceived threat and insecurity is well established in scholarly discussion. So is the connection between a neoliberal approach to security governance and lateral surveillance. The description of DNW through lateral

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surveillance has also been proven fruitful by several authors. (Digital) Neighbourhood watches have been researched in the large majority of cases to illustrate exclusionary, racist, and segregationist practices. While this is an important topic that deserves attention, it leaves out the role broader political and social dynamics play in favouring these practices that potentially damage social cohesion.

The intersection between these theories and dynamics is where this dissertation is situated. With a case study of one city, I attempt an exploratory situation of digital neighbourhood watches in the context of these theories, focused in contrast to most other research on the watchers instead of the watched (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). Thus, this research seeks to answer the following question:

> In what ways can the influence of neoliberal security governance and securitization be observed in the lateral surveillance of digital neighbourhood watches?

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The following chapter will outline the data collection, research rationale, and strategy used to answer the research question set out in the previous section. It will end with addressing limitations, reflexivity, and ethical concerns.

Data Collection

I use a passive data collection method to collect the content produced by Neighbor users on the platform to explore the above-stated research question (in contrast to previous research on neighbourhood watches, using predominantly interviews). While this imposes some limitations on the available information, this approach allows examination of how the platform is effectively used and not just how it is presented or perceived (Barthel *et al*., 2020). As

demonstrated in the Literature Review, the feeling of group belonging, power relations, and discrimination based on factors such as race play an essential role in the practice of lateral surveillance and digital neighbourhood watches.

Because this dissertation is interested in the general dynamics on this platform, and not in the consequences of these practices for any group of people, I chose parameters to reflect the 'average US' neighbourhood. This acknowledged the dependence of neighbourhood relations on social factors without introducing a focus on one specific. To find a location that satisfied this aim, I chose the parameters as follows:

Narrowing Down States

1. I only considered Swing States as political orientation, precisely authoritarian tendencies, are linked to increased support of surveillance practices (G. Norris, 2017). Thus, either firmly left- or right-leaning populations might potentially have very different attitudes towards surveillance.

2. Out of these states, I only selected those with an average overall crime and homicide rate. As demonstrated in the Literature Review, there is a strong feeling of generalised suspicion and fear present due to the securitization in the post-9/11 context. However, by choosing a place with an average overall crime rate (FBI, o. J.-a, o. J.-b, o. J.-c), I tried to minimise the influence of the real, acute danger.

Narrowing Down Cities

3. From the resulting states (Florida and Michigan), I identified the most average urban areas in the US regarding demographic factors such as racial and economic diversity, age distribution, household composition and employment structures. This is important because demographics influence many factors playing into DNW practices. As established in the literature review, the binary created through the securitization process and identifying suspiciousness relies heavily on appearance and,

thus, on demographic factors. They influence discrimination and exclusion (Kurwa, 2019; Mols & Pridmore, 2019), social trust and perceived insecurity (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Graafland & Lous, 2019; Jordahl, 2007). Moreover, Mols and Pridmore (2019) demonstrated that participation in (digital) neighbourhood watches depends on people's appearance, and more homogenous neighbourhoods participate more in Neighbourhood watches. Additionally, demographic factors influence the likelihood of falling victim to a crime (Gramlich, 2020), tying back into criteria 2.

4. I chose an urban area, as I tried to avoid areas where Neighbours knew each other 'face-to-face' as this would introduce other dynamics regarding trust, suspicion and social control (C. Norris *et al.*, 2004) unrelated to those of interest in this dissertation.

5. For the resulting cities, steps 1 and 2 were repeated, leading to the selection of Jacksonville (FL), place 5 of the most average cities (Bernardo, 2016). Cities usually have particular areas with higher crime rates (Crime Grade, o. J.). Again, tying back to criteria 2, I tried to mitigate this by covering the majority of the city by choosing a random, central location on the Neighbor platform and setting the radius from which posts were displayed to the maximum (5miles).

The data collection was limited to data from April to July 2022 as posts on Neighbor are only available for 60 days, preventing a more longitudinal analysis. Because the time frame was limited, I was able to code all posts made during this time belonging to the 'Crime' and 'Safety' category. I did not consider the other categories available on Neighbor (Animals, Environmental, Community, Request for Assistance) as they are less directly relevant to the research question. In this way, I created a corpus of n=246 posts.

Design of research tools

The design of the research tools is constituted of the methodological rationale, the coding framework and the approach to the analysis, which in the following will be discussed in this order.

Methodological Rationale

For the data analysis, I followed a critical reflexive thematic analysis (TA), as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. TA lends itself to exploratory research in that it is a flexible method for recognizing, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning across passively collected datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2017, 2019). As my research question was relatively open and interested in whether the themes established in the literature would come up as a rationale for the use of Neighbor, a method that generates themes from a dataset (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) was a good fit. Critical reflexive TA allowed me to critically interrogate the practices, views and patterns of social meaning regarding a specific topic (Braun & Clarke, 2017, 2022). These characteristics make reflexive TA valuable for this dissertation, as a preliminary pilot research conducted in April showed that a more quantitative approach to data collection and analysis lost important nuances and context of the data, necessary to make sense of these practices.

Moreover, I followed a contextualist epistemology as it recognizes how individuals provide meaning to their experiences and how the broader social context affects those meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Contextualism understands humans and their actions as context contingent, ambiguous and situated (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Madill et al., 2000). This aligns well with my research's aim, which is to situate a social and individual practice within its broader context.

Coding framework and analysis

For the coding process, I followed the popular guidelines of reflexive TA proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). My approach to the coding phase tended towards an inductive mode. However, I was to some degree influenced by theory in how I approached the dataset and made a direct link to theory in the fourth and penultimate phase of grouping and labelling the themes. I chose an inductive approach as my research question aimed to extract Neighbor users' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making and ground the analysis in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This aligned well with my exploratory research aim and left room for

unexpected concepts. I predominantly concentrated on the latent level for the analysis, identifying and examining 'the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, S. 84). I made this choice because the research question aimed at understanding the meanings and the implicit reasonings, and not just the practices. The latter were, however, nonetheless considered for a more well-rounded analysis.

I coded posts and their associated comments on the app[3] manually using NVivo, at the level of sentences or larger sentence fragments, keeping the interactions on the post in mind while coding. This created an initial 163 Codes, which I then merged and grouped to create initial themes around how people (inter)act on Neighbor and how they make sense of their practices. I reviewed those codes and themes several times until the themes coherently captured a concept and the data substantially supported them, as was given as a criterion by Braun and Clarke (2022) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

The definite codebook, organised into themes and subthemes, can be found in appendix 2 and their interpretation in the analysis hereafter, including quotes and extracts of raw data 'to aid in the understanding of specific points of interpretation' (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

Reflexivity and Ethics

Both the role of the researcher in research and the potential impacts this research might have, need to be considered and are thus discussed here in the following.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and contextualism (Madill et al., 2000) as this type of research strongly depends on the researcher, their subjectivity and assumptions, and the analysis requires the researcher to question those assumptions. Nowell et al. (2017) thus argued that a lack of (explicit) reflexivity hurts the credibility of TA, a point

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[3] An example of such a post can be seen in Appendices 1.

that has also been made extensively by Braun and Clarke (2019). Thus, to continuously reflect on my assumptions and maintain reliability and consistency, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the analysis process with impressions and observations about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

Due to the passive data collection, I did not influence participants. However, my values, assumptions, and the literature and research I read before the analysis will have influenced my perception of the data. This might have led me to be more perceptive of the negative aspects of Neighbor pointed out by earlier research. Throughout the analysis, I tried to counteract this by continually questioning my initial judgements and actively keeping room for other codes or themes I might identify but did not expect. However, this prior knowledge also helped me notice some codes I might not have otherwise coded. It also influenced the labelling of the themes, simplifying later analysis and connecting to the literature.

I do not have any personal connection to the US nor to Jacksonville, and all my knowledge is from a secondary source. While this allows for a certain distance and reduced prejudice, the lack of on-the-ground knowledge might lead to missing some nuances due to a lack of local understanding.

Limitations

Kurwa (2019) argued that the interactions on Neighbourhood platforms predominantly stem from a small number of highly engaged users. Thus, relying on (passive) data collection from such platforms means that I am only able to capture the practices of this subset of active users, and the more passive users that might use the platform solely for information are missed. Within more extensive research, it could have been interesting to extend the sample to other 'average' cities, or on the contrary, very different cities, to see if there is much similarity or difference in the representation of the concepts in question and why this might be the case.

Ethics

Regarding ethical considerations for the users and the data collected about them, this dissertation profits from Rings' practice to anonymise its users completely: they are shown as NeighborX (x being a random number), only a broad indication of their location is indicated, and posts are deleted on the publicly accessible platform after 60 days. Therefore, there is minimal risk of negative impacts on individual Neighbor users. Furthermore, only those people documented (with videos or pictures) by Neighbor users were potentially identifiable, but none of that content will be reproduced in this dissertation. Further, regarding the access to data for which no explicit consent could be asked, this dissertation followed the reasoning of Ahmed et al. (2017). They argued in the case of Twitter that publicly accessible online content was produced with the intent of being publicly seen and can therefore be reproduced without explicit consent. Nonetheless, it cannot be assumed that Neighbor users considered their posts would make part of a research project, creating an ethical grey area. Nevertheless, and still following Ahmed et al. (2017), as posts and comments are not linkable to any individual, legitimate academic interest prevails here.

ANALYSIS

I will start the presentation of the results with some observations of the themes and codes generated to contextualise those and allow for a more coherent picture and a better understanding of the coding and themes generated.

Very broadly, posts can be separated into two categories: those made by a "Neighbor", meaning an individual user, and those made by the "Neighbors Team", mostly reporting on crime and safety issues in the area and sometimes publishing instructions about behavioural environmental dangers. Those posts are often left uncommented or have less than five comments. Posts made by Neighbors usually have between five to fifteen comments and are

sometimes accompanied by either a video or picture of the situation they are posting about. In general, posts made by the Team discuss more dramatic and violent events (burglaries, heavy accidents) than Neighbor's posts (unknown person at the door, trespassing and similar incidents). What also stood out in the practices analysed was that 'minor' incidents, such as a stolen flowerpot, did provoke more and stronger reactions than more severe incidents, such as, in my opinion, the most extreme post where a video was posted of a person running away from a drive-by shooting. Potentially, this is linked with how likely Neighbors consider themselves to be subjected to this type of incident and the in/out-group dichotomy. However, I can make no definitive judgement from this initial observation.

There is also a liking option for the post and liking and disliking for comments. I will not consider those further, as the dataset contained no comment that was either liked or disliked, and likes on posts generally correlate with the amount of comment interaction. In some cases, the number of views was indicated, usually between 1000 and 2000. This means that only a tiny percentage of those who use Neighbour interact on the app.

In total, I constructed five themes. Subsequently, I will discuss the main themes, some of their sub-themes and codes, and the relation among them to theories and concepts raised by the literature on securitization, lateral surveillance, and neoliberal security approaches. A simplified representation of the themes and some subthemes can be seen in Figure 1.
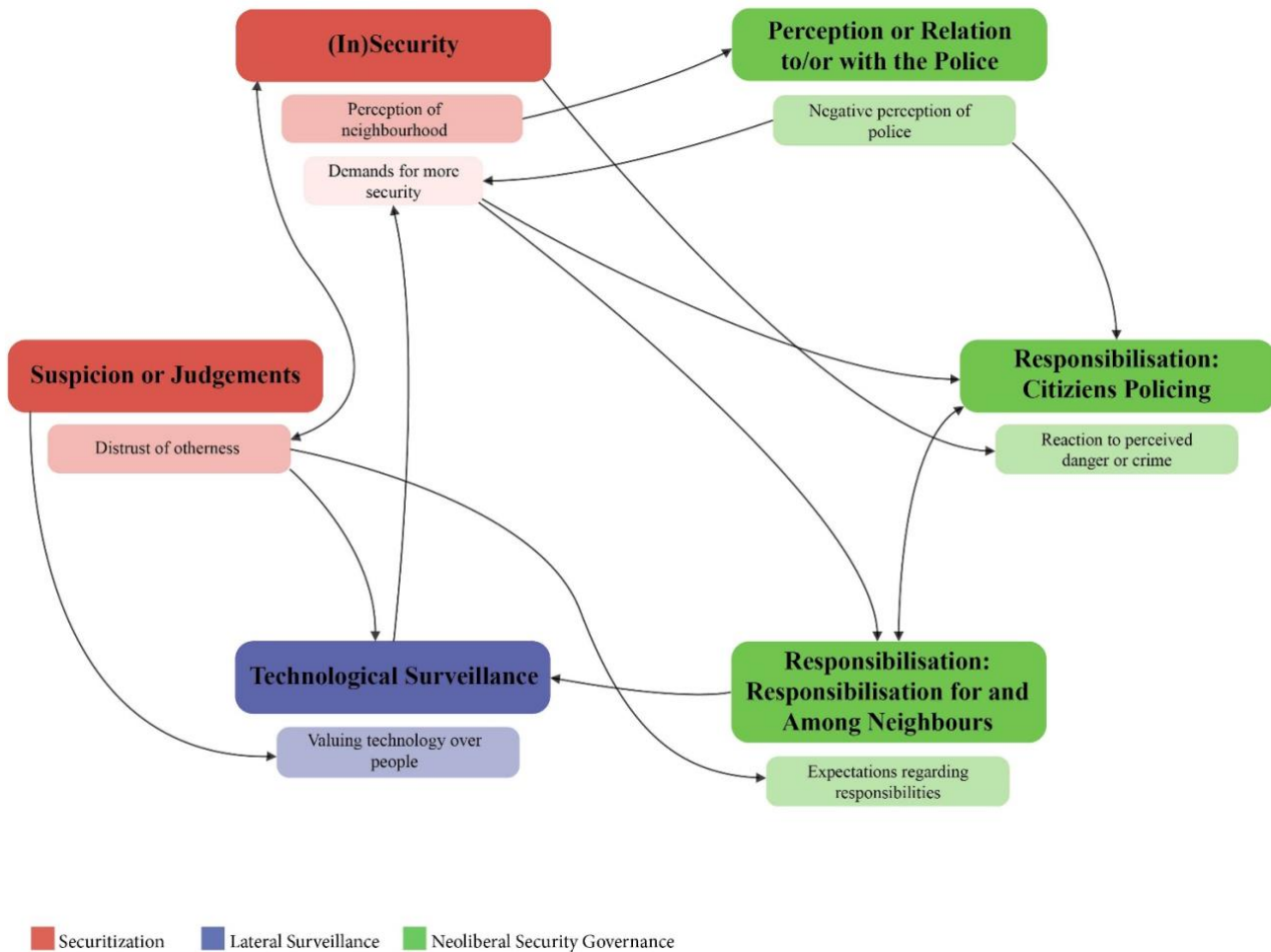
Figure 1: Illustration of the relations between themes. Darker colours represent themes, lighter sub-themes, and the lightest colour stands for a code. The arrows indicate how these (sub)themes and codes influence other aspects of the dynamics in DNW.

Securitization and neoliberal security governance cannot be distinctly separated from one another in this context as they interact and feed upon each other, both also influenced by and

influencing lateral surveillance. Nevertheless, I attempted an, albeit imperfect, separation of the themes that I constructed from my thematic analysis to these respective concepts. The discussion of the themes and codes resulting from my analysis will broadly follow this separation for clarity, but I will reference the intersections that were considered helpful for answering the research question.

(In)Security

In the theme of (in)security, I grouped perceptions of security or lack thereof on how people think potential crime affects them. These codes address measures to potentially increase security and codes that address neighbourhood concerns, positively or negatively.

Throughout the theme, codes reference a feeling of insecurity and apprehension. So did people frequently make statements about how dangerous they perceive (their area of) Jacksonville, or the amount of criminality, to be. For example, one person, in response to a destroyed window, wrote:

> Neighbor71: 'It is a horrible world out here now.'[4]

Another wrote in response to a stolen car:

> Neighbor33: 'Okay!! So this area in particular has had its share of crime lately!! . I wonder where's the police ?!?!'

This is although property crime, the type of crime most referenced on these posts, has consistently decreased[5] (FBI, o. J.-a). Despite the contrary being true, the perception that there is an increasing crime rate has been documented statistically (Gramlich, 2020). In that case,

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4 All posts and comments cited here are verbatim to not confound meanings through an additional layer of interpretation. The bolded parts were the title of the posts. Further, all citations can be found in my data compilation but are not otherwise cited as they are no longer accessible online.

5 Data was available only until 2020 so it could be that this changed over the one and a half years preceding this dissertation, but a radical change seems unlikely.

however, local crime did not suffer from this perception distortion (Gramlich, 2020). That this distorted perception is present on Neighbor might be explained through the normalisation of suspicion and increased awareness of perceived potential criminal activity and threats to neighbourhood security that creates a 'sense of paranoia', as was also argued by (Mols & Pridmore, 2019; Morris, 2021; Wood, 2004). By constantly being confronted with potentially threatening situations in one's direct circumference and being alarmed by the push messages the Ring app sends out for new posts, a similar dynamic might be at play as when constantly confronted with negative and traumatic news (Holman et al., 2014).

Following the same line of argument, the Neighbor's Team's frequent posts referencing the news but not having a verified source[6] can also be potentially harmful to the feeling of security. Similarly, Neighbors frequently speculate[7], in the case of this theme, most often about what might have happened (cf. codes such as non-harmless explanations or speculations). However, I identified more potentially harmless explanations than 'non-harmless' explanations. While this seems to indicate a differentiated perception of danger, context is crucial here. Many of these 'harmless explanations' were made in response to someone claiming to have heard gunshots and others responding that it was likely only fireworks[8].

A typical such interaction can be found under a post called '**Gun shots?** We're those gunshots just now? Heard about 10 or 12 off in the distance…' comments reached from

> Neighbor19: 'Think it was a dog barking'
> Neighbor29: 'Fireworks'

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[6] The lack of verification is indicated by a note at the end of the post.

[7] Speculations have been attributed to several different codes depending on the content of the speculation (for example 'judgment about how dangerous something is or might be').

[8] The period of analysis included the 4th of July (the American Independence Day) and Jacksonville's 200th anniversary (15th of June), which were celebrated with fireworks.

> to   Neighbor23 'Yes, about 15 rounds.'
> and   Neighbor23: 'I was at wall street and had to duck behind a car.'

Under a different post, titled '**Explosion** I heard an explosion around 840 Bert Rd. My son was scared. Anyone else?'

> Neighbor41: '(…) Hope it wasn't a meth lab explosion'
> Neighbor31: 'Gang violence likely'

After this, no further reasoning for why either explanation was proposed, or even if the explosion happened to begin with, was given.

This theme can be clearly linked to the securitization theory in that the threat seems ubiquitous (also reflected in the many statements about the perception of the area and criminality). Perception has a central role in securitization, as securitization does not define or depend on the realness of the constructed threats (Fisher, 2012). Moreover, as Frantz (2000) showed for the deployment of neighbourhood watches, the perception of an area as being dangerous makes the fear real enough to justify security measures for the population. As Binder (2017: 399) argued, Insecurity 'is a construct of individual fears that create a mutual understanding of risks and threats'. Neighbor seems to offer a perfect platform to create this mutual understanding as individual fears and concerns are published and, in this way, might contribute to the securitization of the neighbourhood. In this way, situations of insecurity become increasingly normalized, and the practices to deal with them are constructed to be understood as necessary (and thus unquestionable) (Fisher, 2012), something that is also reflected in the surveillance theme.

Perception or Relation to or with the Police

This theme includes codes that are directly linked to interactions, relations, or perceptions of the police. For example, Neighbors work with law enforcement, extending the surveillance capillaries instead of 'taking over' police duties. I considered this important to include

separately from the 'responsibilisation' and the 'citizens policing' sub-theme because citizens taking over parts of police work is a considerable, often criticised, part of neoliberal security practices. Arguably, what is demonstrated in large parts of this theme, is what was envisioned by the authorities when responsibilising residents for crime control—often through the use of terms such as 'partnership' and 'cooperation'—but only insofar as that they report; The assessment of the reports and further activities should be left to the police (Garland, 1996; Larsen & Piché, 2009; Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019).

A large number of the Neighbors Team posts ended with the sentence:

'Please stay alert and share any relevant information with the police'

perpetuating the active role citizens must take, but also that they are to work with the police. Not only the Neighbors team asked Neighbors to stay alert and report or cooperate with the police, but other Neighbors did also. For example, under a post including a video of a person sitting on someone's porch, some of the interactions looked as follows:

(…)

Neighbor57: 'In my aunt's words " people done gone crazy'
Neighbor38: 'Call the police'
Neighbor52: 'Call the police'
Neighbor25: 'Call the police'

(…)

The code 'demanding police involvement' demonstrates the expectations citizens project on the police, but also that Neighbors attribute policing activities (such as capturing suspects or 'delivering justice') still to law enforcement. For instance, in the case of a post titled '**Suspicious'**, where a man is shown walking over someone's lawn:

> Neighbor54: 'If he's doing it around the same time tell the police so they can come and be waiting in the yard since he jumping the fence'

While this Neighbor seems to understand the role of active neighbours as simply reporting to the police, citizens' judgements often do not align with the judgment of law enforcement which might lead to discontentment. The demand for police involvement thus connects with the subtheme of 'negative perception of police', where Neighbors were disappointed and lost their trust in the police, most often because they expected the police to do more than they did.

> Neighbor42: '(…) if someone knows where these criminals are at why won't the police arrest them if a positive identification is made . That's simply wrong. (…)'

> Neighbor(posted this alert): 'The problem is the fact that if you call the police station the phone rings for 5 minutes and no one answers because JSO[9] is completely useless'

> Neighbor40: 'Police ♟ need to get out of their cars and patrol communities with incidents like this .'

> Neighbor56: 'what with these cops they have his pictures on camera what's more to do they need (…).'

Neighbors seem to feel left alone and not protected by the police and are disappointed or angry at their absence. This dynamic has arguably been supported by public vigilance campaigns stressing the 'local knowledge' of citizens and that they are best apt to decide if something in their neighbourhood appears out of place (Andrejevic, 2006a; Chan, 2008). They get frustrated if nothing happens after they have fulfilled their 'part'.

The sub-theme of a negative perception of the police also seems to nuance (Lyon, 2018) statement that North Americans mostly use surveillance systems out of self-interest. It seems

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[9] Jacksonville Sheriff Office

that the extent citizen responsibilisation takes is, at least in Jacksonville, also caused by a distrust of how public authorities fulfil their duties. This is also illustrative of the neoliberal confession that the state cannot protect its population. Potentially as a consequence of these dynamics, neighbours take over even more of the law enforcement responsibilities and police duties (as was demonstrated in (Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019) study), which can be seen in the subtheme 'citizens policing' below.

Responsibilisation

The responsibilisation I documented here closely relates to the individual responsibilisation described in the literature regarding neoliberal security governance. It referred to individuals as active citizens and their need to follow specific behaviours and act as policing agents, a distinct form of responsibilisation. Thus, I constructed responsibilisation as a prominent and overarching theme, covering these two significant subthemes. Therefore, I will discuss them separately as they both present many vital aspects worth closer examination.

Responsibilisation for and among Neighbors

Codes within this theme capture the internalisation of the neoliberal ethos of individual responsibility. For example, Neighbors voiced their expectations of the responsibilities their neighbours should and need to take. They frequently asked other Neighbors to get involved or told others what the right way to behave is, often in terms of security measures they would need to take. For instance, under a post about a **'Hovering Helicopter'**, where the OP said:

> 'Well everybody keep their eyes open and your doors locked you never know what's going on out there be safe'

Or regarding a 'Package stolen off of porch'

> Neighbor42: 'All asks a neighbor who you trust to lookout for your packages or have the delivery person to put somewhere else out of sight'

> Neighbor66: 'Make sure you have all your camera setting to max...And set to away…check the motions setting'

Furthermore, I documented a frequent responsibilisation of the 'victim', where the Neighbor who posted about an alleged crime or safety issue was lectured about what they need to do better. For example, in the case of a '**stolen leaf blower**' where no pictures were available because, as the original poster (OP) said, the camera was not working:

> Neighbor40: 'You don't know what day? Were the cameras 'not working' or not charged? And it happened almost a week ago and you are just now posting something about it?'

Neighbor40 seems to imply that the OP should have taken their responsibilities more seriously and done more (such as post earlier and charge their camera) to safeguard their leaf blower. Often, those comments give the impression of looking down on those failing to upkeep the vigilantly expected. This not only directly references individual responsibilisation but also the broader narrative that those who are not actively playing a part in lateral surveillance and safeguarding, by not maximising their personal responsibility, are irresponsible and harm the neighbourhood (Mols & Pridmore, 2019) as can be inferred from the somewhat accusatory tone. This expectation towards other Neighbors and them fulfilling their role as responsible and active citizens can also be seen in comments such as:

> Neighbor30: 'people in these Areas are very much Responsible for preventing and reporting Crimes . But people have this Attitude ' If It's Not Me I'm Not Really Concerned ' that's unfortunate also.'

Larsen & Piché (2009) likewise argue that those who do not fulfil the expectations placed on a responsibilised citizen constitute the Achilles heel of the neoliberal security architecture and thus fail as citizens. Thus, potentially to distinguish themselves from this, other Neighbors are eager to demonstrate that they are fulfilling their role as active and involved citizens:

> Neighbor10: 'Got my cameras rolling ! I'm also awake'

One post, titled '**Package stolen'**, illustrated not only the responsibilisation for safeguarding one's belongings and territory but also the commodification of security that accompanies the neoliberal security strategies:

> Neighbor22: '(…) I always recommend to anyone who have problems with thieves in their areas to utilize and use the AMAZON HUB LOCKERS . They are safe and convent, and they are located all over the city in every side of town. (…)'

> Neighbor54: 'I have Amazon packages delivered directly into the garage to avoid this. I wish all vendors could use Amazon key access.'

> Neighbor16: 'I'd invest in a package holder with a code. I order online way to much to deal with the thieves. When I'm expecting a package I place the holder in front of my door clear as day.'

> Neighbor33: 'Look into Amazon Key service'

> Neighbor13: 'So sorry that happen to you, please invest in an Amazon key box or USPS box for safe keepings'

While these comments responsiblise individuals to take charge, some (cf. Neighbor 16) also implicitly blame the OP for the stolen package. The aspect that stands out here, however, is the frequent mention of (Amazon) security products. These comments make it seem, that if neighbours spent more money on their security equipment, they would no longer be affected by criminality. It appears reminiscent of an advertisement for Amazon security products. This provides a clear example of security as a commodity, typical for neoliberal security governance (Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019).

Citizens policing

The 'citizens policing' theme captures behaviour beyond assisting law enforcement as citizens take over specific police tasks. They, for instance, identify 'suspects', 'investigate' (ask for

further information), decide which situations are 'criminal', and generally watch over the neighbourhood.

I documented this dynamic in comments such as:

> Neighbor79: 'He needs to go to jail'

> Neighbor51: '(…) There was a really good picture of his face for the police. Hope they catch him because we know he'll do it again!'

> Or   Neighbor35: 'Wow! What a piece of S@&! Everybody should look outside and if you see him call the police! This video would be all the proof they need!'

Both Frascella (2021) and Mols and Pridmore (2019) reported that neighbours who participate in neighbourhood watch groups, as they are asked to do by vigilance campaigns, risk bypassing the police. This is here described and contrasted with the above-seen theme of working with the police. While this is obviously also individual responsibilisation and taking care of one's security and thus a symptom of neoliberalism, these Neighbors take it a step further than was discussed in the other codes. This dynamic can lead to dangerous vigilante behaviour (Mols & Pridmore, 2019) and threatens to further dissolve the border between the private policing activities and the police (Frascella, 2021). An example demonstrating the connection between vigilantism and the absence of police would be:

> Neighbor71: 'Its time WE did something about it. I'm so tired of this, normal hard working people ordering things and being ripped-off. Nothing is being done.'

The comments and posts I coded into the subtheme of 'Reaction to perceived danger or crime' often reference direct, potentially violent action towards alleged criminals:

> Neighbor23: 'Can we have land mines?'

Or   Neighbor45: 'www.scorchdearthfireamstraining.com'[10]

Or   Neighbor42: 'I see where u at . Me and my guy going to catch him one day .
He always around in the neighborhood .'

These Neighbors seem willing to resort to violent vigilantism, something that was identified by Hermer *et al*. (2005) (referenced in Larsen & Piché, 2009: 190) as a manifestation of 'responsibilized autonomous citizenship', and thus can be understood as a neoliberal security governance consequence. However, this behaviour should prick one's ear in that 'the impacts of neoliberalism may be more perverse than previously expected' in that citizens act increasingly on their own, and not in conjunction with public authorities (Spiller & L'Hoiry, 2019: 299)

Following   Mols and Pridmore (2019), these individual actions to 'safeguard' the neighbourhood might go unnoticed by the police and endanger, intentionally or not, both those taking the role of the police and the alleged suspects. In the case of Neighbor, however, comments need to be approved before they can be posted (and the police are also active on the platform). Thus, there exists at least some oversight of the interactions, shining a light on what type of interaction Amazon considers appropriate.

Surveillance

This theme captures all statements regarding surveillance, whether positive or negative. First, it is crucial to note that the negative statements were not against the practices of (lateral) surveillance but related to the impression that there was not enough surveillance or that the surveillance is supposed to work better. So, for instance, in response to a video of someone stealing a bicycle:

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[10] This is a link to a firearm training website.

> Neighbor40: 'If you have alexa you can set routines so it announces motion… mines max volume on my nightstand'
>
> Or   Neighbour51: '(…) did you report this to the police. And do you have video. (…)'
>
> Neighbor26: 'Too bad there's no video'

These imply trust in the technology, general support for these practices, and adherence to the narrative that cameras are working. As seen in the literature review, a belief has already been well established. As Spiller and L'Hoiry (2019) stated, people overestimate the effectiveness of surveillance in preventing crime. As I conclude from this dataset, this is even the case when directly confronted with evidence of surveillance failing. Further, surveillance actually generates caution and even fear (Lyon, 2018). This can be connected to securitization narratives that make surveillance seem necessary and thus unquestionable (Fisher, 2012).

For instance, in this post showing pictures and a video of a person walking around a house and checking windows:

> Neighbor58: 'Oh wow glad you had a clear photo of the assailant'
> Neighbor (posted this alert): 'Unfortunately the police did come out but not take a report or any of the pictures   It was very disappointing…. (…)'
> Neighbor56: '(…) I praying he be caught soon as possible thankful for camera and ring'
> Neighbor34: 'excellent cameras , he will be captured [emoji but unclear]'
>
> Or   Neighbor2: 'Wow I hope that they catch that person because people work too hard to buy nice stuff that's why I love my ring'
>
> Or   Post: '**why everyone needs cameras and to secure their belongings.**'

The last post referred to a potentially homeless and disabled person (based on the comments underneath the post that seemed to recognise the person) trespassing behind a house.

Neighbors have also reported several cases where one of their security measures deterred 'criminal' activity. While this might be true in some cases, for example, in a post showing a video of someone seemingly trying to break into a car that goes:

> '**Car thief** Someone tried to go into my car goof thing Ring scared him off'

Or the post stating:

> '**Trespasser being house!** (…) Floodlight did its job 2:02am trespassing, alexa alerts woke me up in time to set off the sirens and spook them away.'

In other cases, this might also be a confirmation bias, where surveillance, potentially due to securitization narratives, appears necessary. As Goold et al. (2013: 987) put it: it is 'surrounded by unquestioned consensualism (it is plainly a good idea, so what is there to talk about?)' which 'means that it escapes social reflection and scrutiny.' This can also be seen in the case of a post saying:

> '**Suspicous Activity** Person appears to be searching our front porch. Ring light most likely stopped further activity.'

The video, however, shows a person that only seems to check for the house number and thus most likely was not influenced by surveillance. As was demonstrated in the literature review, the effectiveness of deterrence is contested. What seems clear and logical, conversely, is that surveillance can only work if the surveilled fear prosecution, meaning that they need to have 'something to lose' (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005) and believe it to be likely that there will be prosecution (Krasmann, 2018). In the dataset, there have also been several examples of cameras that did not deter:

> Neighbor21: 'The fact they see the camera and still take it. These children haven't a care in the world.'

> Neighbor12: 'She looked right at it and still took it…smh'

> Or: Neighbor61: '(…) They were very aware of the ring doorbell and came with a ski mask on. (…)'

In the last case, one could already talk of habituation, as those with criminal intentions hide their faces.

In this theme, therefore, the literature is reflected repeatedly. The surveillance theme is connected to the discussion of lateral surveillance and, thus also, neoliberal responsibilisation. It is however also reflective of the securitization narratives as those also reference the need for surveillance in the 'war' on crime and terror. Furthermore, this theme reflects the neoliberal security approaches as the safeguarding of the era is outsourced to technology (C. Norris *et al*., 2004). This theme also ties into the subsequent theme, 'Suspicion or Judgements', in that, through the constant monitoring, many acts that would otherwise go unnoticed (such as someone crossing one's lawn) are now documented, analysed, and in the context of generalised threat, categorised as suspicious. As Haggerty and Gazso (2005, p.183) argue this lack of effectiveness and 'the way in which domestic security has been commodified' might increase surveillance capacities.

Another concept I noticed, especially throughout the surveillance theme, is the high importance given to technology and recordings, in many instances over lived, human experience or account (Humphreys, 2011). While surveillance recordings are a social product, creating knowledge rather than finding it (Allen (1994) referenced Koskela, 2003), they nonetheless exude an atmosphere of realness which is not granted to people (Koskela, 2003; Rammert, 2018).

Suspicion or judgements

I called this theme 'suspicion or judgements' because these two processes are connected intricately in this data set and within this dissertation's theoretical setting. As I demonstrated

in the literature review, the distinction between who is suspicious and who is not depends on appearance-based factors. This categorisation into a binary 'us' versus 'them' is very present in securitization narratives. It was clearly illustrated under a post with a video showing a man walking up to a porch, looking at packages and leaving again. The Post was called '**Potential package thief**', and people were arguing both that the person filmed was a package thief and that he was not, basing this judgement on their personal behaviour:

> Neighbor 23: 'I've done that before. I do it when I know I have had my package sent to the wrong address. I look at it an if it's mine I'm going to take it 😂'

> Neighbor52: 'Or they're looking for their misplaced package? Because if it was a thief they would've took it. No questions asked'

> Neighbor31 responded: '@Neighbor52 I've had packages misplaced many times. I've never once ran around checking other peoples packages on their property for mine. Ever. Lol'

> Neighbor (posted this alert) responded with: '@Neighbor31 agree, I'm too scared of getting shot or dog sent after me.'

Neighbors 23 and 31 based their judgement on whether the 'potential thief' was actually a potential thief or was just looking for a lost package on what they would do, and thus took themselves as the hallmark of normal and acceptable behaviour for members of the 'us group'. This also references the interpretative ambiguity that complicates verdicts on suspiciousness before the fact. Neighbor52 similarly decided that the person was not suspicious because their behaviour did not fit their preconceived notion of a criminal. Neighbor (posted this alert) illustrated with their comment that they are afraid to be perceived as not belonging to the 'us' group. This awareness of the role of the social norm was also demonstrated in a post titled '**Wondering Lady**'

> Neighbor60 stating that: 'She seems to be dressed OK matching shoes with her shirt
> …..'

Here, the judgement that the woman was dressed 'appropriately', and thus not immediately out of the norm, enabled her to receive the benefit of the doubt on whether she had any ill intentions, as was implied by the OP.

Another big subtheme is 'Sense of community', in which I grouped codes that describe how and what type of interaction I could observe among Neighbors. Then, in a more detailed review, I separated them into negative interactions—characterized by a 'hostile', riled conversation tone—as opposed to the positive interactions characterized by concern and appreciation for other Neighbors:

> Neighbor63: 'Thanks for letting us know I. Keeps everyone in the area safe. Lock
> doors'

Surprisingly to me, positive interactions have been the most common, followed by neutral interactions in which Neighbors were mostly sharing additional information to posts, and only then negative interactions. This initially seems to contradict the literature that established that this kind of lateral surveillance favours the disintegration of a community, and their social cohesion and, on the contrary, favours in-group distrust as well as suspicion of strangers (Chan, 2008; Mols & Pridmore, 2019). However, a closer look at the data and the codes show that the positive interactions were still set in the 'negative' context of fear and insecurity (for example seen in the codes 'concern' and 'appreciation'), and only a tiny minority were actually positive interactions in the sense that it changed something about the threat dominated situation. In most cases, 'Neighbors' were commenting to express their anger or satisfy their curiosity. Moreover, in the cases of antagonistic interactions among Neighbors, there was a sense of distrust (for instance, suspicion towards the poster), aligning with the before-stated theory. Therefore, I do not understand this dataset as clearly demonstrating a negative sense

of community or disintegration of social cohesion, but neither should it be understood as denying its existence.

Concluding Remarks

The inductively constructed codes and themes can be clearly linked to securitization and responsibilisation. Most of the theoretically established symptoms of the concepts and theories of securitization and neoliberal governance strategies are present in this case study. By the way they are present, I understand them to illustrate that securitization and neoliberal security practices have a central role in justifying, encouraging, and shaping digital neighbourhood watches.

My analysis has further shown that the taking over of police work and the participation in public vigilance, which is intended by neoliberal security policies and seems to rely heavily on securitization, can be understood as the result of securitization narratives. This is illustrated by the ubiquitous feeling of insecurity and the general climate of suspicion that appears to constitute the setting of all analysed posts and interactions. While the analysis was not consistently negative, I showed that suspicion and a feeling of insecurity were pervasive and normalised. The relationship between the police and Neighbors is marked by a complicated and assumed, division of responsibilities, unmet expectations, and tension.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to highlight the context of 'everyday' practices which would have been considered dystopian and paranoid just a few years ago. Coming back to the three aspects of security proposed by Balzacq *et al.* (2010) (referenced in Binder, 2017), it offered a distinct perspective by connecting the new, not yet well researched form of surveillance practice that are digital Neighbourhood watches with the broader political and social context of the last 20

years. Reflexive thematic analysis and the passive data collection method proved fruitful and allowed for the exploration of practices and context dependance. I understood the posts and comments on Neighbor as reflecting behaviours, statements and interactions that reflect both securitization narratives and the neoliberal security governance in several ways.

For securitization, this has best been demonstrated by the many statements about the perception of danger, fear and suspicion and their exaggerated nature. Moreover, just the downloading and checking of such a platform can be connected to the feeling that the threat is real and mundane and that insecurity constant—and hence strongly reminiscent of securitization narratives. Neoliberal governance, on the other hand, was most clearly seen in the responsibilisation theme. The relation to and perception of the police are also associated with the neoliberal ethos in differing ways (cooperation with or taking over from the police), which have also been reflected in the literature. Here as well, the attempt to protect oneself, especially if combined with buying security equipment, can already be understood as a demonstration of individual responsibility, individualization, and commodification of security. I identified the last one as one of the central issues in the analysis of Neighbor and Ring.

Furthermore, as I discussed in the sampling section, it is well established in the literature and has an essential place in contextualism that many societal factors can potentially influence the practices and stances of people on and about Neighbor and surveillance. Thus, other results might be identified in different locations with differing social and political contexts. Expanding the research focus, interest could be taken in the analysis of the prevalence of the securitization narrative and the neoliberal governance strategy for neighbourhood watch practices in countries that were to a lesser extent impacted by terror attacks or privatisation, that have better-developed welfare structures, a less polarised population or a less conflict-laden relation with the police. Additionally, the understanding of the here discussed dynamics could benefit from insights on those who decide not to use Neighbor or similar products and on 'watchers'

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from marginalised groups. Contextualist, reflexive TA with a passive data collection proved fruitful and could be expanded upon for further insights on the practices of Neighbor users. However, it did not allow me to conclude on user's motivations or learn about users who reject such surveillance practices. Both these limitations could potentially be resolved by adding interviews to the data collection method.

By design, Neighbor is not favouring a community. People are not able to know whom they are talking to, and they would not be able to know if they are talking with the same person repeatedly. On the contrary, the app favours a feeling of insecurity and deterioration of the area because people are constantly confronted with messages that perpetuate suspicion and a feeling of threat, not only making the surveillant agents suspicious of strangers but also of Neighbors. This has also been illustrated by the lack of belief in the word of other Neighbors, increasing forms of social distrust (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). These dynamics might reinforce the neoliberal ideology and securitization, as, when trust is absent, people feel they need more surveillance (Offe, 1999, cited and referenced in Chan, 2008). Expanding the research focus, considering the app design, as a particular form of interaction is encouraged through 'the subtle ways in which the platforms are created' (Lyon, 2018, p.6) and potentially comparing different DNW platforms and how they play into feelings of insecurity and the commodification of security, might offer valuable insights on how to favour feelings of security and vertical trust instead of impairing them.

Another aspect that I perceived to be resonating throughout the data set, but also in Neighbor and Ring as products, which is linked in particular to a neoliberal, market-oriented logic and the need to take individual responsibility for one's safety, is the commodification of security. It has been shown that in practice, Neighbor does not work in deterring or solving crime, and thus does not make areas safer. This seems logical, as Hortonéda (2005, referencing Foucault (Dites et Écrits II)) reminds us that crime is at the utmost interior of society and cannot simply be eliminated. Hence, the aim of 'getting rid' of crime through surveillance measures is at best

misguided and not practical, as it would need a focus on the reasons for criminality (Lauritsen & Feuerbach, 2015) and an emphasis on relationships, as those are central to the regulation of deviance (Wang et al., 2011). Neighbor, however, seems to support a heightened perception of risk and suspicion towards in-group members and strangers, thus potentially lessening social cohesion and trust.

Along the same line, it supports and encourages discriminatory and exclusionist practices and, in extreme cases, even produces calls for violence against 'the other'. Those consequences have been established for the social and political dynamics seen in the literature. That these dynamics are so clearly reflected in this case study might not be surprising considering the positioning of DNW practices in this context, but it is nonetheless concerning. As an amazon worker stated: Ring is 'not compatible with a free society'(Greene, 2020), yet, the legitimacy of participating in such practices comes from the societal context. My dissertation makes a case for the need to consider the broader context when analysing and critiquing practices such as lateral surveillance and policing on Neighbor.

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APPENDIX 1: EXAMPLES OF POSTS ON NEIGHBOR
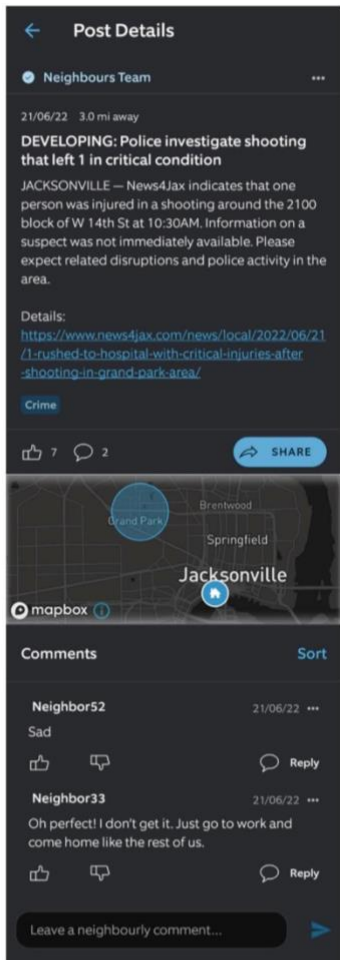
APPENDIX 2: THEMES AND CODES

Key: ▢ Theme ▢ Sub-theme 1 ▢ Sub-theme 2 ▢ Sub-theme 3
▢ Codes

Theme	Topics (Sub-themes and Codes)	
(In)Security		
	Addressing neighbourhood concerns	
		Harmless, alternative explanation
		Informing adequate organisation
		Non-harmless potential explanation or speculations
		Resolved
	Closeness to incident	
		Close to home
		Personally affected
	Demands for more security	
	Neighbours team unconfirmed incidents	
	Perception of neighbourhood	
		Area perceived as unsafe
		Expressions of fear
		Nostalgia for order
		Perception of increased crime
Perception or Relation to/or with the Police		
	Appreciation for police	
	Demanding police involvement	
	Negative perception of police	
		Absence of police, lack of police action
		Critique of police
	Partnering with the police, the police as allies	
		Imperative to cooperate with police
		Imperative to report incident to police
		Personal cooperation with police
		Police is or was informed
	Police presence mentioned	

Responsibilisa-tion			
	Citizens policing		
		(Potential) Identification of person in video or picture	
		Investigation	
		Judgement that criminal offense was committed	
		Reaction to perceived danger or crime	Revenge or demand for justice
			Taking action for one's safety
			Threatening vigilantism
		Staying or stay alert (idea or exact phrase)	
	Responsibilisa-tion for and among neighbours		
		Asking for neighbourhood awareness and information sharing	
		Expectations regarding responsibilities or neighbourhood norms	Blaming the victim
			Calls for taking responsibility (personal or for neighbourhood)
			Characteristics of active residents
			Responsibilities satisfied
		Instructions on how to behave or proceeded (exclusion of police related thing)	
Suspicion or judging			
	Distrust of otherness		
		Commenting on weird behaviours	
		Judgement on what suspicious behaviour is and what not	
	Emotional response to surveiled individual		
		Aghast	
		Angry, disgusted, mad etc	
		Disappointment	
		Insult of (potential) criminal	

Interactions			
	Critique of authority (excluding police)		
	Neighbors interacting		
		Agreement with judgement	
		Negative interaction	
			Critique or correction, unfriendly
			Initial poster defends themselves or their post
			Questioning usefulness of post
			Suspicion towards poster
		Neutral interactions, information focused	
			Added gruesome information
			Added information and observations
			Connecting events
			Nuancing
		Positive interaction	
			Compassion for person in post
			Concern
			Defending initial poster

				Grateful for information, appreciative
				Offering help
				Praise for poster
				Relief and trust
			Warning	
		Judgment about how dangerous something is or might be	Judgement of situation documented	
			Talking about intentions of the person filmed – assumptions/ assessments	
		Value judgements of situations or individuals		
Technological surveillance				
	Camera does not live up to its potential	Camera did not deter		
		Criminals adapted to camera		
		Problems with camera		
	Positive perception of camera and surveillance	Happy over surveillance		
		Importance of cameras, videos etc		
		Need for surveillance or surveillance upgrade		
		Surveillance or security measures did deter		
	Valuing technology over people	Demanding video proof		
		Human error not technology		

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