H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Lyon. *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. 192 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7456-4156-0.

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Published on H-German (August, 2011)
Commissioned by Benita Blessing

Identification, Surveillance, and Governance in Contemporary Society

National identification cards are everywhere, and, as David Lyon demonstrates in this timely, well-argued book, a subject in need of careful analysis because of the pervasive ways in which these cards, along with the population databases to which they are tethered, are structuring our everyday existence and, in so doing, raising important questions about personal freedom and the meaning of citizenship in modern societies.

Almost every country has some kind of national ID card program; they are mostly mandatory; many of them require fingerprints; and a small but growing number include additional biometric information. ID cards are also high up on the political agenda of those countries that do not have them. In the United States, the implementation of the Bush administration's Real ID program, which would have made state driver's licenses into a de facto national ID card, has encountered widespread resistance from both the public and the states. Australia's proposed Access Card has similarly run aground, as have ID card schemes in Canada and France, and the Japanese Juki-Net system is leading only a stunted existence. The British, on the other hand, approved the Identity Cards Act in 2006–only to see the program scrapped by the new Conservative government.[1]

A number of different arguments have been advanced over the years in support of such cards. In addition to their obvious (or at least assumed) role in enhancing domestic and international security, proponents argue that national ID cards can make it easier for citizens to interact with government agencies (and sometimes the private sector as well), increase government efficiency by both reducing welfare and tax fraud and facilitating access to public services by qualified individuals, provide the validation needed for e-government, help combat identity theft, and facilitate trans-border travel in a more mobile, liquid modernity. The issue that Lyon addresses in this book is how these national ID cards–and the processes, databases, information systems, and protocols on which the functioning of these identification systems depends–are altering the meaning of citizenship in the modern world.

Over the past decade, Lyon has written widely on various aspects of surveillance and identification. *Identifying Citizens* pulls together many of his ideas on surveillance, security, and identity, and the book needs to be read in particular in conjunction with *Playing the Identity Card*, a companion volume of theoretical explorations and national case studies, which Lyon edited with Colin Bennett.[2] Lyon's main argument in the current book is that the process of identifying citizens necessarily leads to the intensified surveillance of the population, which, he says, happens "when organizations pay close attention, in routine and systematic ways, to personal data" (p. 5). Before the computer age, most identification documents were issued locally, and, in view of the difficulty in maintaining any centralized register, the identification process focused on verifying the authenticity of the documents themselves. What is novel about modern identification systems, especially those using new electronic ID cards, is that the identity of the carrier is now established by querying the personal information contained in networked, searchable databases–above all, computerized national population registries–which encode and disseminate the data that define the administrative identity of the person. Lyon's arguments here about the ways in which ID cards, ID numbers, computers, and population registries are intimately linked in modern population identification systems are spot-on. However, one point where I would disagree with him is his claim (p. 42) that the focus on stop-and-search authority diverts attention away from these linkages because this argument itself overlooks the fact that in most instances it is only through such encounters that the state actively attempts to determine the identity of any given individual.

The more expansive the scope of the social state, the more intense its security concerns, and the greater the desire to leverage this information for commercial purposes, the greater will be the scope of this routinized collection of personal information. Moreover, this active process of "identifying" the individual is by no means a neutral, technical process, Lyon argues, because the finer the granularity of this identifying information collected by the state, the greater will be the potentiality for treating citizens differently according to their respective administrative identities. In fact, the very purpose of querying these databases is to determine whether the individual does or does not possess those particular characteristics that can prove that he or she is a legitimate member of the community, whether he or she is eligible for some specific privilege or service, or whether the person should be selected for further scrutiny as a potential welfare cheat, unregistered worker, criminal, or terrorist. Chapter 1 provides a brief survey of the historical roots of modern concerns with the legibility of the population. Lyon traces these back to the need for more effective government in colonial contexts, efforts to combat crime, and the need to identify and mobilize the nation's resources for war. He is particularly concerned that, despite the not unreasonable claims that modern identification systems can provide greater security and convenience for the holder, these systems will be forever burdened politically by these "negative histories" (pp. 37-38) that are seemingly hardwired into their most elemental structures and that serve to amplify, rather than neutralize, historical patterns of discrimination.

In other words, the process of identification always entails what Lyon has elsewhere called social sorting, which is simply another way of describing the ways in which the politics of difference are built into databases and identification systems.[3] Chapter 2 explores the functioning and politics of computerized social sorting. Here Lyon argues that the subtle exclusionary bias that seems to exist in all identification systems as their most primal raison d'être is becoming more pronounced in conjunction with the broad shift in public mood from the focus on concrete risks to a new concern with "precaution," which requires the open-ended collection of personal information in an effort to forestall the occurrence of precisely those risks that can never be rendered determinate or calculable. This precautionary imperative, which often justifies the integrative function creep that Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson have called the "surveillant assemblage,"[4] poses obvious dangers to civil liberties, and for Lyon the question is "can identification processes which inevitably are 'sorting systems' yet be made compatible with the desires of ordinary citizens not merely for national security but also for human security … which is both more global and more personal" (p. 58)?

In chapter 3, Lyon advances two different sets of arguments. First, he takes over Niklas Rose's idea of the "securitization of identity," i.e., the predication of the enjoyment of certain rights or freedoms–such as rights to vote or social services, the right to cross borders, the right to purchase goods at a distance, use the Internet, or even communicate (as I learned on my last trip to Germany, where I was forced to prove my identity in order to buy a new SIM card for my American cell phone)–upon proof of identity or entitlement. However, he then argues with John Torpey against Rose that, although one should not see this securitization of identity simply as evidence of the expanding of the tentacles of the state, certain actors–such as the state–are much more weighty or important in this process than others (p. 69). In the next chapter, Lyon extends this argument by taking up Louise Amoore's suggestion that this expanding use of identification cards as a means of access can be understood as a novel mode of "governance by identification" (p. 90), and here he rightly suggests that the spread of national ID systems is giving rise to "a particular way of seeing the world–indeed, of *being* in the world" (p. 63).

The second set of arguments that Lyon makes in chapter 3 relate to what he calls the "card cartel." As I noted above, a number of different arguments have been advanced on behalf of national ID card systems, and commentators have often noted the opportunism with which these arguments have been employed in different contexts. In this chapter Lyon argues that, in addition to the long-standing interest of the state in identifying and controlling its citizens, the spread of national ID card systems has been influenced by a number of high-tech corporations (with technology protocols and, increasingly, biometrics conditioning the operation of these systems). But rather than explaining the spread of these systems in terms of either economic or technological determinism, Lyon argues that the bases on which identification systems engage in social sorting always reflect the political culture or the political unconscious of the societies in which they operate: "New ID schemes tend to create citizens in the image of the leading motifs of the societies that give them birth. In societies dominated by consumption, it is unsurprising that citizenship is subtly recreated in terms of consuming.… Equally, if the leading motifs informing 'citizenship' are ones designed to root out and outlaw certain specified groups, then identification processes will reflect this" (p. 81). And here, as well as else-

where in the book, Lyon's arguments reflect his belief that, whatever the specific context and motive advanced, such systems are valued precisely because of their intrinsic function of sorting and discriminating among the individual members of the population.

External borders are one of the chief points at which citizen identities are administratively verified. In addition to governance by identification, chapter 4 also discusses the interoperability of identification systems and their relation to mobility, modernity, and the need for identification at a distance in response to the intensification of movement across national borders. Here, Lyon argues that the International Civil Aviation Organization in particular has played a pivotal role in promoting the globalization of interoperable identification systems and standardized, machine-readable ID cards and in "policy laundering" by permitting national politicians to present domestically unpalatable ID card policies as an unavoidable response to requirements imposed by a politically unaccountable international authority.

Chapter 5 addresses the role of biometrics in identification systems. According to Lyon, the very availability of biometric technologies tends to increase the frequency with which vulnerable groups are required to identify themselves. In this way, they tend to reinforce the preexisting negative stereotypes of such persons. But Lyon also makes a set of more intriguing arguments about the relationship between the human body and biometric information about the body. The purpose of biometrics is to establish a perfect connection between an individual body and the set of personal information associated with an individual identity, that is, to definitively attach this information to a specific living person. Lyon argues that the particular intimacy of such biometric data will require a rethinking of the meaning of bodily integrity, although he shies away from using the word "privacy" to describe this intimacy. This attempt to privilege certain kinds of information runs contrary to the privacy concept that informed the major pieces of privacy legislation from the 1970s. These laws, which were passed in response to the advent of precisely the networked databases that Lyon is describing here, were an attempt to respond to the growing realization that the real danger to personal privacy came not from the *misuse* of privileged data, but rather from the everyday collection, processing, and electronic dissemination of personal information that enjoyed no special protection. Since any piece of personal information could–depending on the context and the way it was combined with other pieces of information–be used to the disadvantage of the individual, privacy advocates argued that the individual had the right to control the initial collection and subsequent use of personal information. Despite the fact that Lyon has always preferred to emphasize the importance of political control over surveillance systems rather than the defense of privacy rights, his argument here appears to pivot incongruously on the belief that bodily, biometric information ought to be privileged in some way or another.

Lyon concludes his discussion of biometrics by suggesting that the biometricization of identity can never reach its holy grail and provide a definitive verification of an individual identity, because biometrics are caught in a vicious circle: The same categories of biometric information (fingerprint or facial recognition algorithms, for example) that are gained by abstracting certain characteristics from the body are, in the process of identification, simply projected back upon the body as they define or construct the corporeal self (p. 125). There is no privileged access to the reality of the body outside of the biometric language through which it is constructed.

The greatest strengths of the book are, first, Lyon's analysis of the relation between ID cards and the databases on which ID cards systems depend for their functioning; second, his multifaceted account of the intrinsic and apparently inescapable exclusionary or discriminatory effects of such surveillance technologies; and, third, his description of the role of identification systems as a mechanism of governance and the ways in which they are shaping our being-in-the-world. In the concluding chapter on cybercitizenship, Lyon restates many of the arguments that were advanced in previous chapters and asks whether it might be possible to conceive of an ID card system that would not have the negative consequences that he has analyzed in such detail. The answer, Lyon suggests, may be found in an ethics of care, whose basic thrust would be to explicitly compensate for the stigmatizing, disciplinary effects inherent in governance through identification. However, while an ethics of care may make us more conscious of these problems, in his next work Lyon's task will be to more fully explain the status and functioning of this ethic of care. That is, Lyon must reconcile the question of how one can at the same time categorize and classify people, without incurring the discriminatory consequences that, as he argued throughout this volume, may well be intrinsic to the identification process itself.

Notes

[1]. "ID card compensation ruled out as MPs approve abolition," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11319766.

[2]. David Lyon and Colin Bennett, eds., *Playing the Identity Card: Surveillance, Security, and Identification in Global Perspective* (New Brunswick: Routledge, 2008).

[3]. David Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Automated Discrimination* (New Brunswick: Routledge, 2002).

[4]. Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 4 (December 2000): 605-622.

[5]. Louise Amoore, "Governing by Identity," in Bennett and Lyon, eds., *Playing the Identity Card,* 21-36.

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Citation: Larry Frohman. Review of Lyon, David, *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. August, 2011.
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