



midweSTS Graduate Workshop keynote/Informatics
Colloquium co-sponsored talk



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Data Driven: Truckers and The New Workplace Surveillance

Abstract: This talk examines how electronic monitoring systems in the U.S. trucking industry are used to compel truckers' compliance with legal and organizational rules. For decades, truckers have kept track of their work time using easily falsified paper logbooks, and performed their work without too much regard for legal worktime limits. But new regulations will require truckers' time to be monitored by digital systems, hard-wired into the trucks themselves, which remove much of the flexibility on which truckers have historically relied.

I focus on how digital monitoring reshapes truckers' social relations in two spheres. First, I examine how the systems reshape organizational information flows in trucking firms. Electronic monitoring systems accrue real-time aggregated data in remote dispatchers, allowing firms to construct alternative narratives to truckers' accounts of local and biophysical conditions. Data are then reembedded in drivers' social networks—fleets and even families—as firms attach economic incentives to them to create new performance pressures. These dynamics facilitate firms' control over truckers' work in new ways. I then consider challenges created by human/machine hybridity in inspection interactions, in which law enforcement officers seek to verify truckers' time logs. Digital monitors destabilize traditional power dynamics by making officers' technical troubles newly visible to truckers, undermining their authority. Truckers exploit officers' anxiety by misleadingly signaling the presence of monitors (through a process of “decoy compliance”) in hopes of avoiding inspection. These interactions demonstrate how human discretion and the performance of authority remain fundamental to enforcement regimes, even when they rely in part on digital technology.

Biography: Karen Levy is an assistant professor in the [Department of Information Science](#) at Cornell University, associated faculty at [Cornell Law School](#), and field faculty in Cornell's [Department of Science and Technology Studies](#). She researches how rules and technologies interact to regulate behavior, with emphasis on legal, organizational, and social aspects of surveillance and monitoring.

She has a PhD in [Sociology from Princeton University](#), where her dissertation work examined the development of legal and organizational surveillance in the United States trucking industry. She has a JD from [Indiana University's Maurer School of Law](#). Before joining Cornell, she was a postdoctoral fellow at New York University School of Law's [Information Law Institute](#), NYU's [Department of Media, Culture, and Communication](#), and the [Data and Society Research Institute](#).

