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INTERACT

Body-Worn Video as an actant: How police-citizen encounters are shaped by cameras

Dr Megan O'Neill (Dundee): m.oneill@dundee.ac.uk

Prof Liz Aston & Dr Estelle Clayton (Edinburgh Napier University),
Dr Helen Wells & Dr Will Andrews (Keele), Prof Ben Bradford (UCL)

@INTERACTpolice 

<https://www.sipr.ac.uk/interact/>



Background

- Body-Worn Video/Body-Worn Cameras (BWV/BWC) have been in use in policing since 2000s, with rapid adoption in recent years. All UK police forces use BWV to some degree (Webster et al, 2022)
- BWV has been the subject of extensive research over the past 10 years (Lum et al., 2020)
 - Instances of police misconduct in the US were a particular motivation
 - Much of this research has been focused on: effectiveness, impact on behaviour (police and citizen) and attitudes towards BWV (Miranda, 2021)
 - Methods used are largely experimental and survey-based (Miranda, 2021)
 - Mixed findings in terms of impact on minoritised communities (Webster et al, 2022)
 - Mixed findings in terms of impact on police and citizen behaviour (Lum et al., 2020)
- Qualitative research in encounters between police and citizens where BWV is used are lacking
- How are cameras negotiated in an encounter? What impact do they have in interaction?



Theoretical Framework

- **Actor Network Theory** (Latour, 2005)
- People and *objects* are ‘actants’ in a social network. Objects cannot be separated out. They will impact experiences and meanings derived from those experiences. Social relations and *things* are interwoven.
- The significance/power that a person or object will have in a network is not predetermined but emerges from within the network
- Much criminological research on this focussed on prisons. Skinns et al. (2023) considered ‘materiality’ in police custody – how objects and soundscapes shape power dynamics
- This presentation will examine how BWV is an actant in police/public networks:
 - It is assigned power in a network to protect
 - It is assigned power in a network to alter mundane behaviour
 - This power is recognised but the ownership is contested



Methods -phase 3

Online panel survey experiments

- Experiment comparing live chat with human and AI operators ([Kryprianides et al. submission 2024](#))
- Second experiment exploring PJ (politeness & respect) in human versus AI live chat
- *Further experiments/surveys in progress*

Public contact observations

Rural and urban site observation complete

- Case studies 1 & 2 (250 hours)
- Case study 3 (153 hours), case study 4 (96 hours)

Public focus groups in case study areas (4 complete, n=25, *more planned*), interviews

Communities of interest

Deaf community

- BSL Focus Groups (2, n=10)
- Interviews (n=2)

Autistic community

- Interviews (n=9)

Oct 22 – May 24



Methods: Phase 3

- Observational research in three police forces:
 - Scotland (Dr Clayton urban site, rural site)
 - England 1 (Dr Andrews) – urban site
 - England 2 (Dr Andrews) – rural site
- Approximately 500hrs observation.
- Observations of response policing, local policing and traffic policing
 - Focus on the use of technology in encounters with the public, how technology influences officers' choices, how the public use technology in the encounter
- Focus groups with the public and communities of interest, online experiments and interviews are in progress...
 - These will give us a clearer sense of the public's perceptions





BWV: power to protect

- Officers record encounters to have a 'record' in case of complaints
- Recordings are seen as more reliable in court than officers' notes
- Used as a means of reducing violence in an encounter

On the way, conversation turns to BWV and both officers explain that they like it because it helps to back them up if complaints are received and that it can, but not always, calm aggressive people down when they know they're being recorded. Both also mention that judges prefer to see BWV footage in court now than to refer to witness statements alone. (Force 2, Rural)

As she drives, we talk about BWV, which she says she always uses because it gives her a sense of protection and safety, particularly when it helps to de-escalate situations. (Force 1, Rural)



BWV: Power to guide mundane behaviour

- Officer turn their bodies to get the best view of a situation
- Officers aware that a camera can make people uncomfortable
 - Will say out loud what they are doing, turn the camera off to reassure
 - Will allow people to assume it is on when it isn't
- This applies to other technologies, e.g, mobile data terminals
 - Put device face down when speaking in a community setting
 - Deliberately look up from the screen to make eye contact

During the exchange with the people at the disabled parking job outlined above, P1 talks to the MoPs and retains eye contact, whilst P2 adds notes to the log on the MDT. This would not work as well if it were a single crew. (Force 3, Urban)

P1 and P2 are now both busy using their MDTs to log the details and to confirm identity of the female – this means that they are not able to keep eye contact much and I note that both officers do look up every now and then and nod, to show the MoPs that they're listening. (Force 3, Urban).



BWV: ownership of power is contested

- Members of the public (MoP) will use their own camera phones to record police
- MoP ask for something to be recorded for their own records/protection
- Officers do not always follow official guidance on when to announce BWV is active

P2 did note that one MoP asked for it to be switched on, following an attempted robbery, so that there would be a recording of how frightened his children were, rather than this just being written down by officers [...] P2 and P1 do also note that MoPs sometimes respond to the BWV being announced by saying that they'll record the police too and then getting their smartphones out to film them. (Force 3, Urban).

P1 checks driver's license against details on MDT and asks for an explanation. The MoP says that they sent off the new keeper slip of the V5 but hadn't received the new V5 in the post yet. I notice that P1's BWV is on but hasn't been announced. The driver is let go with 'words of advice'. (Force 2, RPU)



Conclusion

- BWV and other technologies are not 'neutral' elements in an encounter between the police and the public
 - The 'network' encompasses the police, the public, and any entities (human or otherwise) that have a role in how they relate to each other
 - 'Power' in this situation emerges – the public acknowledge the authority of the police and defer to them in an encounter...to a degree!
 - Technologies can be an expression of that power or a site of power contestation
 - Technologies alter behaviour of the other actors, and are thus actors themselves
- But this is not always the case – BWV can also be ignored. Thus, status as an actor is variable