

# Encountering camera surveillance and accountability at work – case study of the Swedish police

*Research-in-progress*

## **Abstract**

*Today's mobile cameras mean that anyone may easily be filmed and exposed to a wider audience meanwhile conducting their daily work. Police officers belong to an occupation that most frequently have to encounter this development. As state representatives, entitled to make use of violence at work, they end up being held accountable by a variety of actors capturing police initiatives on film. Police authorities around the world therefore have started to use body-worn cameras, aiming to enhance trust and transparency, but also as a means to control their work environment. On the one hand, cameras are described as a tool ensuring legal security and public trust in the police, on the other hand cameras are also associated with concern for surveillance and integrity. We intend, in this recently started study, to investigate what consequences this technology have on individual officers organising their own practices, and on the management of patrols wearing these cameras. The study is guided by the following questions: 1) What opportunities and challenges do individual officers associate with the introduction of cameras in their practice? 2) In what way is the use of cameras managed by the organisation, what tensions do they have to address between the individual officer's practice, the management and the public? 3) What opportunities and challenges do the police associate with citizens using cameras to document the police? Theoretically the analysis draws on research on accountability, technological affordances and surveillance. Empirical material is planned to be collected through interviews, focus groups and document studies.*

**Keywords:** *body-worn camera, mobile camera, affordance, accountability, surveillance, police, social media*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Today's widespread use of camera-equipped smart phones has enabled the public to take photos or videos of current events and, through social media, immediately make these available to a very large audience. This is the result of the ubiquitous or pervasive spread of a new digital infrastructure, allowing everyone to document everything and easily share it (Sørensen, 2010). However, this development forces professionals in many parts of the public sector to face and reflect upon specific concerns. While exploring new digital opportunities to enhance transparency and

public trust, they have to tackle risks associated with acting in public. As improvements emerge, an increasing range of considerations associated with this new digital technology is also becoming an integrated part of their daily work. In this study, we set out to investigate police officers as one of the occupational groups that are exposed to this development.

In addition, the police themselves have in a number of countries started to carry cameras placed on their uniforms to be able to film their practice, so called body-worn cameras. The motivation for adopting this technology is more or less the same across all countries: (i) the need to make police more accountable to society; (ii) the need for individual police officers to protect themselves against false accusations, and; (iii) the expected pacifying effect on the interactions between police and citizens (Coudert et al., 2015).

We draw on the police in Sweden as a case allowing us to generate more knowledge about how the police as a profession have started to use body-worn cameras. In this case, the explicit idea has been to use technology to improve transparency in a way that strengthen public trust in the police authority. To make sure that citizens understand the circumstances, the cameras used are placed visible on the police officers' uniform, with the screen turned towards anyone being filmed. It is the individual officer him/herself that have the power to take the decision to turn the camera on or off (Datainspektionen, 2017).

Even if this initiative is described as a way to strengthen legal practices and public trust in police professionalism, there are concerns expressed about extended surveillance and the risk of violating citizens integrity and rights (Lee et al., 2016). Most studies so far have focused on aspects of integrity, whereas we know little about how the individual officers' work is shaped by new demands on considering how to apply their use of cameras. It is this latter topic that is in focus in this study. As implied above, the aim to implement the cameras is to improve transparency and trust. However, before drawing any conclusions it is crucial to investigate what consequences these cameras have on the individual police officers' practice and the organisation of work hosting these practices. We also need more knowledge about how police management approaches the use of these cameras while governing the

officers and their work. In addition, to fully understand the police organisations' perspective, this study will also take in consideration how the public make use of digital cameras to film the police. That is, we will acknowledge the police use of body-worn cameras as a measure within a broader digital context in which they have to consider the fact that citizens also engage in surveying them (with their smartphones etc) as representatives of an authority (Lippert & Newell, 2016; Sandhu, 2016); so-called sousveillance.

The police use of body-worn cameras are thus understood as a response to the ubiquitous potential allowing everyone to watch everyone. We focus on how this ever present potential, and the spread of digital technologies like smartphones provide both opportunities and constraints in officers' work practices and how the police due to these potentials try to manage and organise their practices in a legitimate manner. Legitimacy and accountability in relation to both their own organisation and the citizens are then seen as components that are always relevant to public authorities. However, due to extensive demands on how to represent both their specific authority and societal democratic principles (with violence if necessary) such legitimacy concerns emerge as particularly evident in the case of the police (SOU, 2012:13).

It is because of such demands on legitimacy that police officers in many countries are encouraged to use body-worn cameras to document incidents and actions both among citizens and officers. There are extensive expectations that the use of these cameras will improve accountability as well as strengthen trust in the police (Lee et al., 2016). Body-worn cameras has emerged as a tool that may contribute in "civilising" the police as well as consolidating their legitimacy. However, concerns are also expressed about what effects the technology may have on the ability to monitor and whether there is a risk that they may violate citizens' integrity (Lippert & Newell, 2016; Mateescu et al., 2016). The fact that these are concerns that to a high extent still awaits investigation, have not prevented authorities in many countries from introducing the technology (Mateescu et al., 2016). Amongst other things, it is both seen as a preventative measure as well as a way to reveal when officers violate their own public assignment, e.g. by using unjustified violence. By filming their own actions, the idea thus is that they improve their accountability, but officers are also said to learn how to adapt their behaviour to any situation where there is a risk of

being filmed. They tend to apply ‘camera friendly work’ (Sandhu, 2016), which take the shape of strategies aiming at controlling how they are perceived by different people and officers filming them or looking at the films.

These are all different expectations, implying that the consequences that these cameras have on officers’ work practices should be understood both on an individual and on an organisational level. In accordance, this study draws on empirical material that will reflect both how the police authority as an organisation and the individual officers tackle different challenges in police work related to the use of body-worn cameras. It is about different challenges to how they maintain public services recognised as accountable and appropriate. In other words, we investigate how legally appropriate and responsible practices for the use of body-worn cameras emerge within the police. In what way do the organisation and/or the individual officer in practice tackle different expectations on legitimacy in action and in relation to more general demands on a robust and legal system for managing big volumes of data.

### **1.1. Purpose and research questions**

Thus, body-worn cameras have become more common in western countries, raising expectations on improved transparency and legitimacy. Nevertheless, a range of questions concerning policy, organisation of work, management of data and integrity remain to be investigated (Mateescu et al., 2016; Datainspektionen, 2017). Drawing on the initiative by the Swedish police to introduce body-worn cameras, this study investigates the consequences these cameras will have both for the individual officers’ daily work practices as well as for the police organisation and how it try to govern these work practices. By doing so we start filling the gap of empirical studies investigating how body-worn technology shapes police work and public trust in the police. The analysis will be guided by the following research questions: 1) How do individual officers tackle different risks and opportunities related to body-worn cameras in their work practice? 2) In what way are the use of body-worn cameras introduced in the police organisation, and to what extent does it foster tensions between work practice, police management and the public? 3) What are the opportunities, challenges and dilemmas that are fostered by the increased use of cameras by the public, documenting and distributing films showing different police actions?

## **2. Accountability, affordance & surveillance as theoretical perspectives**

Organisational accountability, technological affordance, and surveillance are concepts that are central to the analysis to be conducted in this study. To begin with, investigated technology is conceptualised as a socially defined materiality (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008), holding certain features that promotes potential affordances (affordance, see Gibson, 1979). As a concept "affordance" has been developed to understand how a certain technology or digital infrastructure –in this case body-worn cameras-interact with human actions. The aim is to explore how this interaction make technology actionable (Faraj & Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Norman, 2011). In this study that would mean that we direct our interest towards how cameras enable and constrains a set of actions (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 2011), related to different forms of surveillance that in the context of any public authority foster various demands on accountability.

Thus, technological affordance may foster different types of accountability. The meaning of accountability may take different shapes depending on the interaction between human actions and the cameras. Thus, when police officers apply the camera and its ability to document and broadcast short cuts from real situations, they will organise their actions in relation to a set of other actors and their demands on surveillance and accountability. For instance, it may mean that filmed data is turned into evidence in courts, or raises demands that individual officers adhere to formal accountability. Likewise, the public's use of smartphones may generate films that are spread via social media or to journalists (Bekkers & Moody, 2014), films that may also be used in courts.

In the analysis of the type of accountability that is associated with body-worn cameras, this study draws on the fact that the police is forced to consider that this is a technology that can be used everywhere and in very different ways (Sørensen, 2010). Demands for accountable digital work are not only evident in situations when the police officer sits down at his or her office to conduct computer based administration. Instead, they have to reflect upon how to apply a more ubiquitous technology in a

correct manner (Castells, 1998). To be in accordance with public directives, they have to acknowledge that this is a technology that Adam Greenfield (2006) has described as “everywares”, demanding awareness of the fact that they bring it with them into continuously new contexts. Hence, they have to reflect upon the fact that these cameras will be applied under different circumstances, where a variety of affordances and consequences are possible. By investigating how police officers relate to such circumstances, this study contributes with knowledge about how affordances associated with a mobile and pervasive digital technology for surveillance, shapes the form of digital accountability that will emerge as an organising principle within the police authority.

By analysing different forms of accountability we draw on an extensive international field of research. It is a field of research providing us with perspectives and ideas about how a variety of demands on accountable actions condition how organisations and practices of work emerge within the public sector (Mulgan, 2000; Millen & Stephens, 2012). Two different types of accountability is of specific interest to our analysis. To begin with we will therefore engage in identifying and scrutinising how police officers adjust themselves to demands on actions that meet certain norms and regulations (laws); i.e. normative accountability. Furthermore, we will bring attention to how to approach demands on accountability justified by goals and references to powerful or efficient applications of the technology; i.e. instrumental accountability (Roberts, 1991). In cases when the police watch or are being watched by citizens, they often have to consider how to manage complex combinations of these two different forms of accountability.

The study aims at examining how these two forms of accountability emerge as meaningful to police officers that constantly have to approach complex networks of digital relations with different implications for how they should approach public demands on accountable police work. By being an investigation into how digital technology enables different forms of surveillance, embedded and sometimes taken for granted in daily settings (Lyon, 2015), the study will then also bring attention to the field of studies that sometimes is referred to as research about panopticon (Foucault, 2003). More precise, the study recognises how surveillance, being distributed and organised, also can be explained by understanding the police as

modern center for societal power (Lyon, 2006). Within this theoretical context, instrumental and normative demands on accountability will be investigated as conditions shaping the way police organise their work practices while applying these new digital opportunities to strengthen their capacity to watch; for instance, by considering how to organise their use of cameras without violating citizens integrity (Lyon, 2015).

Our application of panopticon as a concept by which we may analyse potential top-down surveillance, can be useful to provide opportunities to identify and understand meaning of different surveillances systems pervasively embedded in our daily lives (Bauman & Lyon, 2013; Eneman, 2009: 2010). The fact that some researchers point out that this ubiquitous development counteract established power centers' ability to control society, have meant that the study also draws on the concept of 'synopticon', referring to the distributed digital capacity in society to watch established authorities (Mathieson, 1997; Bauman & Lyon, 2013). By also scrutinising how citizens use digital technology to film and document how individual officers act, we will be aware of such situations. We will thus apply the concept of synopticon as a way to study how digital demands on police practices and accountability also may be associated with bottom-up surveillance.

## **2.1 Related research**

Our focus to examine different types of affordance associated with different forms of demands of responsibility in exercise of public authority, could be seen as unique compared to the majority of research with a focus upon the technology within the growing areas of "ubiquitous computing" and "everywearables" (Sørensen, 2010). Our study will contribute with knowledge regarding how the interaction between digitalisation and other more organisational processes affect the ways to organise work within an authority as the police. With the use of body-worn cameras, the police now have access to new forms of powerful surveillance. Even though surveillance is not a new phenomenon in society, digitalisation has changed the surveillance capabilities radically. One of the most significant changes is that digital technology enables surveillance system to become more powerful, further automated and can be used for large-scale collection and storage of data. Additionally, surveillance systems are today often concealed and embedded in the environment (ubiquitous) and are thus

invisible (Lyon, 2015). A consequence of this is that individuals are not always aware of when being exposed to surveillance, which could be seen as a serious threat to individuals' privacy (Bauman & Lyon, 2013). Murray (2016) argues that digital technology enables even more powerful surveillance and control of citizens than what George Orwell predicted in his dystopian classic "1984". Despite that the concept of panopticon (Foucault, 2003) has been subject for certain critique for its limitations to adequately understand contemporary surveillance systems where many watches many, it is still central and valuable in the discourse regarding surveillance, since panopticon is such a multifaceted concept that could be used for interpretation in a number of ways and in different contexts (Lyon, 2006).

The use of body-worn cameras enables the individual police officer to monitor the surrounding of both citizens and colleagues (and at the same time being monitored by other colleagues), which could be understood by the concept of governmentality (Rieken, 2013) to capture aspects connected to that everyone can collect information and monitor and control their surrounding/environment. In addition, the individual police officers' use of body-worn camera could be understood as a form of self regulation since their own behaviour is monitored. By wearing a camera, regardless if it is on or off, the potential risk or possibility of control is visible and constitutes in itself a form of disciplinary power (Foucault, 2003). Another effect of the camera use is that large volume of information about individuals' behaviour is collected, which means that material consisting of personal information must be managed and stored within the organisation. Joh (2016) argues that the use of body-worn cameras within the police must be regulated and that the regulation should focus both on the actual use of the cameras and the control of the data, for example during what circumstances data is allowed to be collected, how it should be analysed, stored and who should have access to the data.

A further dimension connected to surveillance is the public's use of mobile surveillance technology, such as smartphones with built-in cameras, to document police officers in the field, which means that technology also enables for citizens to monitor and control the police's government work and can be understood through the concept of counterveillance (Monahan, 2006) and sousveillance (Mann et al., 2003; Mann & Ferenbook, 2013). Sousveillance, surveillance of the observer, relates partly



to the network society and the possibilities to rapidly access many users and partly to the expansion of mobile technology (Mann et al., 2003). Sousveillance is closely connected to the development of mobile technology, and the convergence between phones and cameras. Finally, It should be emphasised that powerful surveillance systems cause/provoke active resistance where different strategies are developed by individuals to avoid or disrupt the surveillance mechanisms (Eneman, 2009; Ball, 2006), which indicates that it is a mistake to believe that surveillance result in total disciplinary power (Lyon, 2015). The project will also contribute to the established research field regarding Surveillance, where our specific contribution problematises surveillance (as both risk and possibility) in relation to work practices within the context of public authorities.

### **3. Planned research design**

#### **3.1 The Police as a case**

The project will be designed as a case study (Walsham, 1995) of the Swedish Police, and examine relevant work practices in relation to the ambition to monitor and claim responsibility using new technology. The police is a public authority with a broad societal mission aimed at reducing crime and increasing security in society through preventive, interventive, and investigative activities (Manning, 2008). This implies that the police constitutes a concrete case of government work that must relate to a variety of requirements for a responsible and lawful work. As a case, this will provide access to a rich material of different aspects of technological affordances and accountability.

By building the study on a qualitative analysis of different types of empirical material collected through approximately 40 interviews, three focus groups, and document studies, we generate new knowledge regarding the introduction and use of body-worn cameras. The combination of these three data collection techniques is motivated by our ambition to provide a rich and diversified material that reveals different aspects of our studied phenomenon. It will also strengthen the ability to test and - when applicable - verify the credibility of different interpretations.

#### **3.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The project will carry out individual interviews with approximately 40 police officers in order to document how different parts of the police organisation understand, describe, and relate to responsible handling and organising of body-worn cameras. We choose to conduct interviews as it is a useful technique for gaining good insight into the perceptions, experiences, values, feelings and understanding of individuals, and an understanding how they construct, make sense of and give meaning to their worldviews. The selection of interviewees will reflect different positions and responsibilities, and cover different levels within the police force, operational as well as strategical. We will strive for a number of interviewees evenly distributed between the different activities included in the study, as well as taking into account ethnicity and gender issues.

### **3.3. Focus groups**

Through the individual interviews, 6-8 respondents will be recruited to three focus groups (Silverman, 2014). This type of data collection fills an explorative function and serves as a basis for the project's continued empirical collection. The focus groups will focus on the overall theme, i.e., how the individual police officers relate to responsible management and organising of body-worn cameras in service and how they relate to the public being able to use, for example, mobile phone cameras to document their actions. Focus groups are useful for gaining insight into the norms, tensions, and dynamics that exist within a group in relation to the studied phenomenon. Lee (1993) emphasises that the focus group technique is valuable for initiating discussion about sensitive subjects that can usually be difficult to approach such as, for example, mistrust or conflicts. An additional advantage that is usually emphasised with focus groups compared to e.g. individual interviews is that they reduce the interviewer's controlling role in the conversation, thus helping to initiate conversations between respondents where they can formulate different questions and statements to each other and clarify different dynamics in perceptions and values (Silverman, 2014). A broader and more explorative examination is made possible by the fact that several respondents together form and talk about different themes.

### **3.3. Document studies**

In order to understand the relevant practices from several different views and further capture the broader organisational context, we will also collect and analyse both

formal and informal documentation that are relevant to the project. This can include everything from strategic policy and control documents to more operational meeting documentation, education literature and preliminary research material. Document studies will begin early and take place in parallel with the individual interviews. Through the document studies, we will have the opportunity to investigate the formalities surrounding the practices that characterise the police's handling of body-worn cameras, and how these practices have been developed and are being developed in a wider historical, societal, economical, and political context. We think it is important to study the documents in their broader organisational context, as organisational systems should be understood on the basis that they do not occur naturally in society but always have a historical and political origin and benefit certain interests at the expense of others.

### **3.4 Analysis of the empirical material**

We see the analysis as an integral part of the research process and not as an isolated part performed at a specific time in the project (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). We therefore approach the material with an approach that leaves room for ongoing reflection on the empirical material collected. Our attention will be directed to both patterns and variations and we are well aware of the risk of focusing the analysis on identifying patterns can suppress identification of variations. Since we have a new phenomenon in the forefront, we are interested in a more exploratory understanding of the meaning that the interviewees assign to their work and their daily routines. Our attention will be directed to the possibilities of visualising values, tensions, dynamics, and disagreements. The analysis of the three different types of empirical material (interviews, focus groups, and document studies) will be designed in accordance with a qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2014). This means that we start with careful reading of the material to obtain an overall picture, then we proceed to identify relevant phrases and sentences to be taken into account in order to create categories relevant to the project's questions. By identifying common features in an empirical material that is characterised by variation regarding the conditions and experiences that are expressed, the project has good opportunities for theoretically relevant generalisations. The project also intends to use appropriate digital tools for the analysis, such as nVivo and/or ATLAS.Ti.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Our project described in this research-in-progress paper was granted research funding in October 2017 and will formally start 1 January 2018 and run to 31 December 2020. We are now in the process of applying for ethical approval according to Swedish law concerning research relating to people at the Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg. The reason for applying for approval is that we focus on police activities that can be surrounded by confidential or otherwise sensitive information, in the form of internal routines and procedures for conducting the business. In order to ensure that the project works in a responsible and research ethically correct manner regarding the retrieval, storing, and processing of empirical material, we will apply for such an approval. An approved ethics review will hopefully also have positive effects in making the respondents feel safer and more relaxed and thus facilitate access to information they would otherwise hesitate to share.

### **4. Expected contribution and conclusion**

There is strong belief that the introduction of modern technology within the police will lead both to more transparent and to more efficient work methods. Studies show, however, that new technology also entails unforeseen consequences that risk limiting the efficiency sought (Manning, 2008). Now that body-worn cameras systematically begin to be used by Swedish police, we want to investigate the implications for individual police officers and their practice as well as for the organisation. There are also relatively few empirical studies on how the body-worn cameras affect the work of the police and the public's confidence in the police as an organisation. The police constitutes a clear example of an organisation that is exposed to the requirement to develop skills and practices that ensure responsible and lawful enforcement in a continuous manner. They constitute a case that can teach us a lot about how the logic that governs the requirements of a public sector also affects how public sector actors are organising themselves as a legal authority. Studying the emergence and organisation of new work practices in relation to the increased digitalisation in society is an example of a wider societal change strongly linked to technology development, which is of great importance for the organising of today's government work. The study also improves our understanding of how individual police officers are forced to handle different dilemmas related to the use of and exposure to technology, which

purpose is to control socially both citizens and the individual police in the field. Our results will be relevant to a variety of different functions within the police organisation, identifying the need for competence development as well as the ability to organise and adapt activities and occupational roles associated with society's digitisation. The lack of digital competence within the police is a top-priority issue emphasised in the societal debate (Riksrevisionen, 2015; BRÅ, 2016). From a scientific perspective, the study is expected to contribute to a theoretical frame of reference better adapted for analysing organisational changes in public authorities in general and within the police in particular, by identifying opportunities as well as challenges associated with digitisation.

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