

Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Dr. Cynthia Lum

Dominique Burton: Welcome to part 2 of our podcast with Dr. Cynthia Lum, Associate Professor and Director for the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University

Todd Maxwell: Papers discussed research opportunities and you brought it up recently in this discussion two since BJ encourages collaboration and research for evidence based practices, can you give us an overview of some of the most pressing research needs in your opinion?

Cynthia Lum: Absolutely. I would say there a few research needs that really have to be tackled that we mentioned in both of the reports. The first really encompasses a much larger research agenda. And in particular we – in my view we need to continue to figure out what efforts can reduce crime and at the same time do not lead to noxious community or citizen actions or the collateral consequences that are costly both for society, for the police and for individual citizens.

I think sometimes because of the current environment we find ourselves in the political environment that we find ourselves in we tend to – the pendulum tends to swing either folks are very much interested in security and crime reduction or they are very much interested in police accountability and legitimacy.

I cannot emphasize enough that these things go hand-in-hand. The answer to achieving crime reduction and citizen trust and confidence can't be disentangled and they can't simply be resolved by focusing either on crackdowns or on procedural justice, right? So policing is much more complicated than that. It's much more complex and so are the communities in which police operate within and so I would hate for some of the good research progress that we've made in the area of crime prevention fall by the wayside because for example police are – or folks are might be interested in other areas.

We really need to balance these very large arenas of research and find ways to look at both crime reduction of facts and also reactions that citizens have

towards this crime prevention activities. For me in particular I'm interested in how police can prevent crime through different types of productivity, productivity measures but also understanding exactly what types of productivity can reduce crime with minimal negative consequences to people and to communities.

Also I think it's central BJA's interest is that it's absolutely important to have a better understanding of arenas of policing areas of policing that we invest a great deal of money in because we believe it leads to some outcome but in fact we don't know too much about. So for example, it isn't really clear how training either training and technical assistance or training within police departments leads to officer behavior or changes in officer behavior. That's one area of research that I think we need much more investment in.

Secondly, mediating between training and behavior is another area – a big area of investment and resources for police agencies and that is like all your supervision and accountability structures. These things take up time and energy in police agencies but we actually know not so much about what types of supervision and what sorts of accountability structures can strengthen officers abilities to achieve the outcomes that they seek with regard to body-worn cameras is a very good example.

We definitely need more research on understanding the role that supervisors will play with regards to their use of body-worn cameras for things like mentorship or supervision et cetera. Another area that suffers from little research but in which there's a large amount of money being spent is police technology itself. So we really need to know much more about whether technologies actually lead to the effects that we hope that they will lead to with body-worn cameras, will they strengthen accountability structures, will they lead citizens to not want to call the police more, will they cause increase legitimacy between the citizens of the police or decreased legitimacy between the citizens and police.

So these are really important questions in the area of technology that we still don't really have much information on with regards to the variety of police technologies that are out there.

Todd Maxwell: Also that lead this up to our final question and based on this recent work and some of the other work and comparing all the existing research on body-worn cameras up there that makes your advice on this especially important but what advice could you give to agency, law enforcement agencies or prosecutors. They are looking to implement a body-worn camera program.

Cynthia Lum: Well, this is definitely a much longer conversation for this particular question. But I would say just to keep things short, recently Chris Koper, James Willis and I we finished a very large technology project in which at the very end of that project your listeners might be interested in it because we provide a set of about 10 recommendations for law enforcement agencies who are adopting any type of new technology.

So whether they are body-worn cameras licensing meters, new RMS systems crime analysis, been shot detection systems whatever and very briefly what we found in that report was that technology is filtered through an agency's existing structures systems, cultures and approaches to policing including how they define their role in policing the function of policing itself. So to optimize the use of technologies like body-worn cameras in policing we suggest that agencies have to consider adjusting and building those organizational norms and systems that are trying to achieve the goals that they want body-worn cameras to achieve before they actually adopt the technology. In hopes that that technology would be able to achieve this goal.

So in other words without the proper infrastructure in place to maximize the benefit of any innovation, technology or otherwise a great deal of time and energy really has to be spent on making sure the infrastructure of the police department is receptive to the outcomes that an agency seeks with regards to technology.

Todd Maxwell: When you say infrastructure sorry...you're referring to leadership or you talking about the technology infrastructure?

Cynthia Lum: I'm talking about the – everything about the organization of the police agencies. So for example the supervisory structures of the police agency, the

accountability structures the deployment itself on the systems of reward that officers – that incentivize officers to use technologies in ways that leadership wants from the leadership structure is one part of that infrastructure the – there’s technical infrastructure like the technologies available to the police and able to use body-worn cameras effectively and efficiently in the ways that are supposed be used for.

But that that’s just one thing. I mean, police agencies tend to focus on that type of infrastructure when they are asking themselves how do we adopt body-worn cameras for example. But they rarely focus inward and say, OK, if we do adopt body-worn cameras then how our systems a supervision, how will our organizational culture, how does our deployment strategies and our police – and the way the police officers define their function how will that shape the way this technology is going to be used?

Because technology is – that doesn’t change police agencies. Police agencies shape the technology and the way that technology is going to be used. And so if the agency itself is for example reactive if it’s not transparent if it is very close minded to innovation if it does not – if it has an organizational culture that is skeptical of research or that is skeptical of new accountability structures then you’re going to have a hard time using body-worn cameras to improve legitimacy and accountability of the police to readjust the way the police deploy themselves.

You’ll have a difficult time convincing sergeants to use body-worn cameras to – as an informal mentoring approach but to use them to do informal mentoring of police officers. For example you can train police on how to use technologies all day but if police are not expected to be innovative to use the technologies in the first place then no matter how much you invest in training them, when they’re on the street, they might fall back to the ways that they normally operate, right.

So this mentality about preparing the agency for not only body-worn cameras but other types of technologies – and I also lump in other kinds of innovations – evidence-based policing is an innovation. And whether or not agencies are

receptive to that innovation really depends on its infrastructure that I'm speaking about right now, the totality of its infrastructure.

So in this in this report that we did for the National Institute of Justice, we really tried to focus in on making recommendations for police agencies to be better prepared, not only to receive a new technology like body-worn cameras, but also to be open enough to evaluate it, to pilot it, to be flexible and dynamic enough to make adjustments if for some reason the way that they're using it in the first year was not – did not come – did not turn out to be as great as they thought it would be.

These are the things we would suggest when folks are making a technology – when they are adopting technologies. Agencies also have to be able to anticipate unintended consequences of technology or negative consequences of technology given the way that they currently are. So police chief will have to ask themselves OK, given how I know my agency is, if I bring in this new innovation, what might be some unintended consequences to my organization, to my community, to the citizens that live in my jurisdiction.

And this really requires officers from the people in the police department from the officers, to the civilians, to all the way up to the chief to have a much more sophisticated understanding and also have a deeper conversation with each other about the nature of their organization and about the relationship between the police and technologies and their communities.

For body-worn cameras specifically I would strongly encourage law enforcement personnel to get up to speed on what we already know about them. And this can help shape the development of well-informed policies. Our common sense and our – what we might consider best practices because we hear about them from other folks they're not always the best things to do. And often our common sense can backfire on us with regards to what we think might happen if we implemented technology like body-worn cameras.

So I think keeping up with the research and also supporting research projects through partnerships is really I would say absolutely essential for the police chief that's trying to implement body-worn cameras.

Todd Maxwell: Yes, we see this today with agencies implementing and having a new technology like body-worn cameras and facing the issue of whether officers should be able to review a video before writing reports especially in use-of-force cases where before this technology came about, it wasn't an issue but now it is.

And then now you have this technology, when can you release it, when should you release it. So those are some big issues that tie back to what you're talking about and looking back at how your infrastructure will handle that. So thank you for that perspective.

Cynthia Lum: Yes, I agree. And I think having the ability to look at videos is really important. It might also have an effect of allowing folks to be more on introspective about their activities. They can see the activity. It's often people who are professional sports teams look at their videos constantly to see how they perform on the field. And I think it could be helpful to officers to see their own performance and to make those adjustments that make them better police officers.

Todd Maxwell: That's a good point. Well, thank you for taking time to speak with us, Dr. Lum.

Cynthia Lum: Sure.

Todd Maxwell: We are grateful you could share this knowledge of on these reports and give us some feedback and some overview and some of the highlights of them. I know there's a lot more, so people should actually check out and read the reports. But we encourage law enforcement justice and public safety leaders who agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.bj.gov/bwc.

The toolkit offers a variety of resources agencies can use to help with the adoption, for use of community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes. We also encourage our listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff.

All these resources and special toolkit have been designed as your resource.
Please submit new ideas through the BWC support link on the homepage.
This is Todd Maxwell, from the Bureau of Justice assisting body-worn camera
teams, signing off and thank you for joining us again.

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