

Police Body Cameras and Personal Privacy - What You Need to Know

February 17, 2017 - You may have noticed that over the past few years there has been a nationwide push to get street cops wearing body cameras. And there is good reason for that push. It protects both police and civilians from false accusations. But those cameras are now being joined with artificial intelligence. And the videos they shoot are being databased. That makes the cameras a lot smarter than any that we have ever seen before and it creates a privacy issue that the vast majority of Americans are unaware of.

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Police body cams are changing police work. Various studies show that the police that wear them are less likely to use force and more responsive in their personal interactions. They also protect police from false accusations of brutality when the use of force is justified. But up until recently, police body cam videos weren't much different technologically than a video that you might take using your smart phone. That's changing.

Police cameras are now being integrated with AI (artificial intelligence). And the videos they are taking are being tagged and databased. What that means to you and I is that the videos are becoming searchable and they can be used in combination with facial recognition.

From the perspective of law enforcement, that's good. Giving the camera's facial recognition capability means that a cop walking through a mall with his camera on can be given an immediate warning when a known criminal is viewed on camera. These intelligent cameras - which are not in widespread use yet - make hiding from the police a lot more difficult for criminals.

But from a privacy perspective, AI enabled cameras are a real threat to personal privacy. They make it possible for the government to track the movements of individuals who are simply minding their own business. And just as importantly, they create a target for hackers who may want information on an individual's comings and goings. Just think about how easy it would be to case your house for a robbery if someone was able to know when you wouldn't be there. Large databases of this type are always a tempting target for hackers.

Unfortunately there are few laws to protect you from this type of abuse. Once your picture winds up in this type of database, there is almost nothing that you can do to be removed and there are few restrictions on database owners as to what they can use the picture for. Even if the picture is taken by someone who doesn't know who you are, it may be a very simple matter to find out. There are already programs that can search social media profiles and match pictures with names.

From this point forward, just about everyone should figure that they are being tracked from the time they leave their front door in the morning to the time they come home at night. It truly is a brave new world.

by Jim Malmberg

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