Interview Transcript

Interviewee	Liz Swan - Assistant Professor & Researcher, University of Colorado Boulder, USA
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Research Question

What are the socio-ethical implications of body worn video camera recorders on society?

Research Focus / Outcomes

This research examines the historical developments and contemporaneous challenges that location enabled body worn camera technologies pose for humanity. The potential benefits, risks or harm on society from body worn camera technologies will inform the development of a socio-ethical framework to provide context, inform and address these issues where gaps in the literature have been identified.

Hayes: Yes I will be and I will explain. So my name is Alexander Hayes and I am studying at the University of Wollongong through the Faculty of Informatics, School of Information Systems and Technology. My supervisor is Associate Professor Katina Michael who is in the room who you saw earlier and I am also co-supervised through Associate Professor Teemu Leinonen who is with the Aalto Media Lab in Finland and also under Professor Michael Keppel who is at the Queensland University of Technology. The nature of the Phd…(interruption) the research question I have is what are the social implications of location enabled body worn technology.

Swan: Please say that again.

Hayes: What are the the socio-ethical implications of location enabled body worn technologies?

Swan: Ok.

Hayes: Particularly in a socio-ethical context. What I would like to do is record the conversation with your permission so that I can publish this as part of my PhD output, as a thesis which will be transcribed and provided back to you and then you can make amendments to that particular transcription if you wish to do so…

Swan: Ok.

Hayes: If that's possible.

Swan: I just hope it is interesting enough to be recorded.

Hayes: Oh ok so what we are doing is, I have just come from a conference here in Toronto that looked at wearable technologies from a range of different perspectives, body worn cameras head worn video camera systems, sensor networks, body sensor environments, brain computer interfaces, chipping, human chipping and various RFID technologies and so on so a range of those for personable very very close technologies but also a range of sousveillance technologies so we are here at the UAV's Pros Cons Symposium here in Toronto and I am seated with…

Swan: Liz Swan, PhD, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Mercyhurst University in Pennsylvania.

Hayes: and Liz…sorry…yes. Liz, are you a smartphone user?

Swan: No, I am not as a matter of fact.

Hayes…but a great majority of people that you work with are.

Swan: Hmm hmmm

Hayes: …and is there a reason why you don't use smartphone technology?

Swan: The reason I don't use smart phone technology is because until a few months ago I was a poor and unemployed philosophy Phd, so my phone is the free model from Verizon Wireless.

Hayes: Right.

Swan: and so I could see myself upgrading soon but the reason is financial.

Hayes: Sure and is that particular mobile technology that you own, does it…do you use it…is it pretty much on you all the time or is it on you a lot of the time?

Swan: It is and I have it pretty much at all times, my phone, my Kindle, my laptop.

Hayes: So would you consider it to be a wearable technology or is it just a handheld technology?

Swan: The cell phone?

Hayes: Hmm.

Swan: Um…I guess that is all just a matter of semantics. You could certainly call it wearable technology if you have it in your pocket or in your bag or purse on your person, yes.

Hayes: Ok. Have you heard of recent innovations by Google that people are wearing an augmented reality mobile location enabled connected device called Google Glass?

Swan: Google Glass? No I haven't heard of Google Glass. But I know that you are wearing one of those.

Hayes: I am not wearing a Google Glass device.

Swan: A Google camera?

Hayes: I am not wearing a Google camera.

Swan: Oh.

Hayes: I am wearing a Memoto camera which is a small bootstrapped company in Sweden.

Swan: Oh.

Hayes: That has developed technology that takes a photo every thirty seconds or so, that the data is not made public. It is my own private data.

Swan: I see.

Hayes: It's part of my own lifelog {word missing here}.

Swan: Hmm hmm.

Hayes: The nature of my interactions and I wear this particular device for my own memory. I don't wear this to distribute your image to anybody. I don't load it to cloud based services.

Swan: Right.

Hayes: I don't share it with anybody. It's for my own research purposes to have a connection out of that but it is interesting that you have noted this amongst our conversation because it is very important. As I see it as the diffusion of of this type of innovation is rapidly happening and will happen particularly next year, we will notice a lot of people start to engage in this space.

Swan: Why next year?

Hayes: Well…(interruption) the Google Glass product allows somebody who is wearing what looks like a set of glasses, in fact it only has one arm that has a small cube or prism that allows data to be displayed to the wearer.

Swan: I have seen marketing videos of this yes, now that you describe it. I know exactly what you are talking about.

Hayes: What I would like to drill down on is fast forward through ten questions I had and get to the crux of the questions.

Swan: Ok.

Hayes: Are you in a teaching position?

Swan: A teaching what?

Hayes: A teaching role?

Swan: Yes, definitely.

Hayes: So when you step into that environment are you under a surveillance camera at all?

Swan: I do not know because I haven't taught there yet, however, I haven't heard of anything like that taking place at Mercyhurst so I just don't know.

Hayes: Picture this, you arrive at Mercyhurst and the Dean of the university, your faculty, approaches you and says as a condition of your employment in this environment, you will be recorded, there will be video and auditory material recorded through your sessions and it will be reused for other activities to take place which we can monetise. How does that strike you?

Swan: Well, as a philosopher, I would need to know a lot more information. So, as part of my graduate training at the University of South Carolina they used to have this policy of video recording the graduate students teaching when they were new to teaching and these videos were used for training purposes basically, they were viewed by your professors, maybe the chair of the department and yourself, and you know, that can be very useful. I would need to know more like, such as the reason why it is being recorded, will it be published on the web, or will it be kept internal to the department and what would happen if I said no I don't want to be recorded, can I decline? So I'd need a lot more information.

Hayes: Sure sure. Well let's just take one step closer then. Do you have any or have you ever experienced or can you picture experiencing heading off into the lecture theatre, with a range of students in that environment who for any number of reasons that they might declare, bring out their mobile phone and take photos of you, record videos of your session from their own perspective and even audio record you in that environment. Can you imagine that? So yesterday I spoke to another professor and won't reveal who it was who is in exactly the same position you're in, is subject to surveillance based in their teaching situation and when I asked her the question would you be prepared to wear Google Glass if it was ok with your students and she replied "…in a heartbeat". #00:13:33-6#

Swan: Meaning, you would be wearing Google Glass so you could tap into information about your students?

Hayes: Scan the room, receive information about students.

Swan: Ewhh…I would have no interest in doing that (laughing) whatsoever.

Hayes: What if the students themselves were happy for you to do that?

Swan: I still wouldn't be the least bit interested. It comes down to a personal preference. When my students have to miss class I tell them that I don't want to know the reason and that it is their own personal business and half of the time they are lying

anyway and the other half of the time it might be too personal for them to disclose to me and to project myself into their situation (interruption). I may have a personal reason that I don't want to share with my professor so I kind of give them that same respect or space and as far as ubiquitous random information about my students I couldn't care less.

Hayes: I only have one last question, if I may.

Swan: Yes.

Hayes: Can you picture a scenario where quite a number of people are wearing these particular devices which you know take photos and you know are connected to the internet and you know perhaps they are actually a next generation phone..they are a wearable device that connects to the grid and and you can connect conversations and stream live and so on. Can you ever picture as a lecturer saying to those particular students that you would prefer that they didn't wear that or I forbid you from wearing that technology in this particular setting.

Swan: Hmmm.

Hayes: Can you ever picture yourself actually saying that to them? #00:15:32-1#

Swan: Hmmm…no, because I don't think that would ever come to pass. I think that the University administration would forbid the wearing and the usage of those types of devices and the students would hopefully comply or it's not in the jurisdiction of the university administration to decide and it's a personal decision then I would have no power over my students to say, and you know that's tricky with technology in the classroom. I, for a long time, did have a policy of no laptops in the classroom because most of the time students are just on Facebook, they are not actually typing notes, but then last year I had a few students who had different learning disabilities and had to have a laptop and had to have a notetaker and had to have it in a particular location in the classroom so then it kind of falls apart. So I'm making exception for these people and then I have to make exceptions for these other people too, so it is really difficult to legislate that kind of stuff and at least in the US it isn't up to the professor to. In the case of students having laptops in the classroom it is up to the office of student disabilities or it could be a university wide thing, like no eating in the classroom just something like that.

Hayes: Ok so no Google Glass in the classroom essentially would be a policy across the organisation.

Swan: I think so yes. I mean I can't see myself trying to enforce that.

Hayes: No. So I'll just give you some facts and how you react to that. If Google Glass which I've painted a very basic picture for you to and believe me I am not in anyway

representative of any of those organisations but from what I understand if Google Glass was made available to the domestic public, the general public and say the supply chain was there and it was available and the deployment of that product was available there have been indications from Gartner studies that have been conducted over a long period of time that 12.5 million people would buy Google Glass immediately at around about a $750 mark buy-in. Essentially Google Glass would replace their phones so, the second question that they had across that 12.5 million people were that almost 60 percent of them said that they would wear that particular device continuously even in private situations and they would transmit from those environments through Google service soother environments.

Swan: Yes. I believe it. That does not surprise me. Keep going (laughing).

Hayes: So it might also not surprise you that a large number of secondary and tertiary environments as indoor universities and similar systems are now looking at how they are going to deal with the fact that students who come into this environment wearing this technology will state that if they are told that they are not to come onto campus wearing that technology, that it is for their own personal safety and under the constitutions, particularly American law, that individual has every right, including the right to wear the wear the device on their passport. In fact it may be preferred that they are wearing that particular device in relation to their own personal identifier. So how do you feel about that being part of your educational experience in the next decade or so?

Swan: If my students start coming to class wearing this device and thus have access to information about the other students and about me, you know, I'm not much of a technological alarmist. I think that if that becomes a reality we will as a society adjust to it.

Hayes: ..and the organisation itself will be faced with the fact that they can't outlaw that?

Swan: Yes, yes because I mean this is how technology works. Generally technology is first created for military purposes and then some version of it gets leaked out to the general public and it gets used and abused in different ways.

Hayes: Generally it's military, then pornography, then industry?

Swan: Yes..I don't know about the pornography part. I am talking about like cell phones, computers, all of those initially started in military development right?…and that sort of leaked out and all of these things at first seem incredible and shocking and how are we ever going to catch up with that and that the technology is way outpacing me, but I think that the reality is that when these things become ubiquitous in society we are already sort of used to them.

Hayes: Good answer, great answers.

Swan: Well I don't know if you agree or not.

Hayes: It's not about whether I agree or not. I have been conducting many many interviews and it's fantastic to get people's differing perspectives.

Swan: Yes, I think, I mean, I remember thinking this at the NanoCenter at South Carolina. There was so much talk from philosophers, people in the humanities saying that we need to reign in all this technology as it's getting out of control and ethics can't keep up with it. I think that this is a fallacy because you can't think about the ethical implications of a technology until it is actually ubiquitous in society and it does cause problems and it does raise new issues. Only then we can think about how do we legislate this and how do we in public places and in private places legislate it, does the government have the ability to legislate it and all of that stuff.

Hayes: Well, you will be happy to know that that the same position concurs with some of the world's leading researchers and also engineers who also indicate that as an engineer their best friends are the science fiction writers and on the other side are the social computing engineers.

Swan: Interesting.

Hayes: So the notions of privacy and ethics can be applied in a post host regulatory framework and not in a pre-host environment.

Swan: I think so, yes.

Hayes: So thank you very much for your contribution to my PhD research and I really appreciate that.

Swan: No problem. Good luck with your fascinating research.

Hayes: Well it's a long term one I think.

Swan: Yes.

Hayes: and what I will do is return this transcription to you in a written transcription format and I'll ask of you to make any amendments that you would like in that transcription and it will be published as part of my PhD research identifying you in early 2015.

Swan: Cool, thank you and good luck.

Hayes: Thank you.