



Ideas from Jason's latest book, [4Four Big Ideas for the Future](#), intro by Yong Zhao. Issue 1 March 2016.

**BIG  
IDEA**

*"GoPro" Anthropology- paying THEM to learn from US?*

**CONSUMER AND STUDENT RESEARCH BECOME INDISTINGUISHABLE,  
AS BOTH BECOME WEARABLE, PORTABLE, REAL TIME AND VERY PERSONAL**

*What's the big idea?* Consumer research and individual learning assessment techniques will merge, using wearable technology that observes and records life from the wearer's point of view. The recording technology will be invisible to the consumer and student, as well as to the public. Video feeds will be beamed to analysts, real time. Recordings will be analyzed and extrapolated by powerful big data driven analytics. For both consumers and students, research will be conducted for the same purpose: to provide highly individualized approaches to learning and sales. Mass customized learning and consumerism will take a huge step forward. So will being embedded in the surveillance culture.

Why would we submit to this? Because we are paid to? Perhaps. But we may well pay them to watch us, to tell us about ourselves, to help us and our children learn better and faster in a high stakes testing culture, and to help us make smarter choices as consumers. Call it "keeping up with data-enhanced neighbors." Numerous issues of privacy and security will be weighed against personal opportunity, as learners, consumers and citizens.

**That's the idea. And the future is just getting started. More about this below if you are inspired.**

*Do you have a big idea of your own? [Let me know](#) so I can feature it.*

### "GoPro" Anthropology- The Details

Today's glossary addition:

**Secording:** Secretly recording someone or something.

**Consumer research suffers from the Heisenberg effect:** the process of observing something actually changes whatever you are observing. Researchers bring test subjects (they are no longer consumers) into a lab, wire them up, and then tell them to act naturally as they are shown pictures of smart phones, soft drinks and political brands. Reality? Gone. What do we expect?

Those seeking the truth need to get as close to the anthropological reality as possible. That is, they need to observe people in the process of being their unfiltered selves. Researchers want the \*Candid Camera reality.



New video recording technology will make this possible, but with a twist. Instead of researchers recording subjects, we will be the videographers, recording the world as we see it from our point of view. Imagine GoPro-like cameras that are so discrete - perhaps built into shirts or a contact lenses or both - that neither you nor others notice them. Note that I am not referring to the eyeglasses that are already available that can track eye movement. I am talking about something much more discrete, that records "this is your life" on a continual basis.

In this scenario, everything is recorded as you go about your business, and relayed wirelessly to the research office. Using sophisticated software, researchers visually parse the data and present it in terms like: *Spent over a minute in the coffee section before buying Columbia Supreme. Eyes lingered on the Sumatra blend. Picked up the French Roast, smelled it, checked the price, put it down.* Data like this is the Holy Grail for product developers because it represents not what we say we want, or how we respond to stimuli in fabricated research environments. Instead, it depicts how we actually behave.

We have moved into a recording society, in which we can secretly record anything. I call this particular expression of recording "**GoPro**" **Anthropology**. The process of collecting the data further embeds all of us in a surveillance society, in which we never really know who is recording whom, and who will see the data. Do we really want to know all of this about ourselves? Perhaps we don't. But *they* do.

**Is the future of consumer research the same as the future of learning research? We certainly will have the tech to make it so.**

Now imagine students wearing "record everything" gear, going about their school day, showing on a real-time basis where they succeed and where they stumble; where they linger and where they move ahead quickly; where they enjoy the experience and where they don't. Software will synthesize the highlights of the experience and produce a customized "learner facilitation report." Imagine a video readout like: *"Student struggled with the quadratic equation for several minutes, fidgeting, tapping pencil, then clicked on the video option. After watching the movie, student moved quickly to the solution."* Customized learning approaches would flow naturally from that synthesis.

**This could change our current obsession with standardized testing.** Instead of taking tests, students would just go about their business. Their activities would be deconstructed and analyzed for progress. They might never have to use a #2 pencil - or its digital equivalent - again. The doing becomes the test.

**Imagine reversing the big data machine.** Instead of Google and Facebook following us around, picking up clues about who we are, what we like and how we learn, we could actually go to them and say *tell me about myself*. At that point we would no longer be anthropological subjects but conscious consumers who have decided to learn more about themselves with personal goals in mind.

## **New Frontiers in Digital Citizenship**

**Do you teach media ethics or digital citizenship? Or simply want to ask the right questions?**

Does GoPro anthropology make you think "ah, finally we will have individualized learning like never before, with remediation so customized that students can't help but reach their fullest potentials!" Or does it make you say "ewww" as you see the ghost of George Orwell rise up behind your screen? The data collected on us, if it is steered by us, might be the feedback we have always wanted. But the reality

is that our data is a precious commodity that will be used, traded and sold, often without our knowing. Also bear in mind that anything that is networked can be hacked. The concept of a “secure line” has become an oxymoron. And a question for all of us is simply this: Will we have access to the recordings? We may have to start actually reading the User Agreements we mindlessly accept whenever we sign up for new services.

**Why would we willingly be part of this?** Maybe because consumer research companies pay us. But I think it is more likely we will pay them. We may take the philosophical high ground at first, refusing to embed ourselves and our children in a surveillance culture. But as we watch others advance because they use data enhancement services, we will begin to question our decision. After all, the mantra is “no child left behind.” The lite version of the software will be free. But the pro version, for \$99 a year, will give you detailed information about your child’s learning style, along with customized remediation and learning strategies. Should you get it? After all, other parents bought it. And I hear their kids did very well on their standardized tests.

**A big idea question for all of us is simply this: Are we willing to live with some imperfection in order to be less embedded in a surveillance society?** Or are we just so afraid of failure, or so enamored of technical possibility, that we are willing to be, and actually insist on being, part of a surveillance culture? If you are in education, then you need to ask what policies you will put into place to encourage and discourage using such technology. If you are in business, you no doubt can't get this technology fast enough. But if you are in the world of corporate social responsibility, what might your questions be about the ethical uses of this approach to research? And if we are teaching digital citizenship, then the questions for our students are: Is this the life you want, and if so under what conditions? Unfortunately, we don't really have time to talk about issues like these in school. Too busy testing.

**New technology will allow us to hack ourselves.** It will allow us to steer the course of human evolution by deliberately creating our next phase through our technological extensions (McLuhan). The question is, where do we want to our evolution to take us?

*The future is just getting started. And technology like this is on its way.*

---- References

CANDID CAMERA was a TV program back in the day that used hidden video cameras to observe people in the act of being themselves. It was hilarious, sometimes embarrassing and painful, but always enlightening and anthropologically sound.

The photo: [THUGLAS has released this image to the public domain.](#)

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