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Body-worn cameras in the post-Ferguson era

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Introduction

There is a movement to implement body-worn cameras (BWCs) in law enforcement agencies across the United States of America (Moriarty, 2017). The impact of this trend on crime, policing strategies, and practices has been the subject of a growing body of research (see e.g., Gaub, Todak, & White, 2017; Yokum, Ravishankar, & Coppock, 2017). The demand for BWCs was shaped by news and social media coverage of unarmed, young, black, males dying at the hands of law enforcement (Doleac, 2017; Hedberg, Katz, & Choate, 2017; Smykla, Crow, Crichlow, & Snyder, 2016;). Nowhere was this more evident than the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson (MO). The officer involved in this shooting did not have a BWC and his account of the incident conflicted with bystanders who reported that Mr. Brown had his hands up, was facing away from the officer, and was cooperating with his commands when shots were fired.[1] In the aftermath of the shooting, the Ferguson community mobilized to publicly display their outrage when the officer implicated in the incident was not indicted or charged with a crime. Protests in Ferguson were followed by similar tragic events throughout the Nation, including the police-involved deaths of John Crawford II in Beavercreek (OH), Tamir Rice in Cleveland (OH), Laquan McDonald in Chicago (IL), Walter Scott in North Charleston (SC), Freddie Gray in Baltimore (MD), and Philandro Castile in St. Anthony's (MN).

With each controversial police use-of-force incident, public sentiments and the national discourse on officer decision-making shifted. In fact, unfavorable attitudes toward police have grown and prompted many citizens to question the institutional order of law enforcement within the context of procedural justice (McLaughlin, 2015). Accordingly and as Tyler (2006) proposed, law enforcement legitimacy has suffered and provoked events like Ferguson to be viewed through a different lens. Much like the Rodney King beating by Los Angeles (CA) Police

Department officers, these occurrences were no longer seen as an anomaly but part of a broader

pattern of events that awakened the Nation's consciousness. The post-Ferguson era, as it has

been discussed in the empirical literature, constitutes the continued crisis of confidence in law

enforcement and a search for innovative policing approaches that foster greater community trust

(Hedberg et al., 2017; La Vigne, Fontaine, & Dwivedi, 2017). The efficacy of BWCs,

particularly in the post-Ferguson era, has been queried as a potential solution to growing

community discord and as an opportunity to prevent similar use-of-force instances (Maskaly,

Donner, Jennings, Ariel, & Sutherland, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the empirical status of BWCs. Though

previously explored in other scholarship (e.g., Gaub et al., 2017; Jennings, Fridell, & Lynch,

2014; Pelrey & Keener, 2016; Smykla et al., 2016), this examination differs by giving direct

voice to officers on this issue. As part of a larger empirical endeavor on law enforcement-

articulated strategies and views on policing gang violence, this subset of analyses presents officer

insights on BWCs in a Southern American State. Personal experiences with and perspectives of

BWCs are illuminated through officer interviews and an ethnographic approach to research that

was conducted against the backdrop of the post-Ferguson era. Accordingly, BWCs were

uniquely at the forefront of officer thoughts and behaviors, which is highlighted in the

forthcoming material. Prior to presenting the data, however, this study is firstly situated within

our existing knowledge of BWCs.

Background

Following Mr. Brown's death, President Barack Obama constituted a Taskforce on 21st

Century Policing (PTF; 2015) that sought to identify police practices that prompt crime

reduction, while simultaneously building public trust. Among the recommendations from the

PTF (2015) was a commitment to purchase 50,000 BWCs for police officers across the Nation.

This signaled a major vote of confidence from the Federal Government for the potential of BWC

technology (Crow, Snyder, Crichlow, & Smykla, 2017). Since then, approximately 4,000-6,000

BWCs have been adopted by the nearly 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the USA (Hedberg

et al., 2017). This estimate is expected to rise considerably in the years to come as more and

more law enforcement agencies are opting to add BWCs to their policing strategies.

Initial Law Enforcement Opposition to BWCs

Despite the growing interest in BWCs, putting them into practice has been accompanied

by law enforcement hesitation. In fact, even where BWCs are available, they may not be used as

intended. Hedberg et al. (2017), for example, in their non-equivalent matched treatment design

of 56 BWC deployments, reported that BWC activation was "relatively limited" and officers

were most likely to initiate filming for violent, property, and traffic offenses (see also Katz,

Choate, Ready, & Nuňo, 2015). Focus groups with specialized units in Tempe (AZ) and Spokane

(WA), according to Gaub et al. (2017), found that some aspects of the law enforcement

profession inhibit BWC use, such as covert operations. Accordingly, continuous filming policies,

where BWCs are available, tend to be inconsistent with law enforcement "occupational culture,"

according to Hedberg et al. (2017, p. 644). On the streets, this translates into officer concerns

that BWCs could inhibit them from using necessary force, which would make them less safe

(Smykla et al., 2016).

Additionally, many officers are cynical of the transparency offered by BWCs. Young and

Ready (2015), in their quasi-experimental design of BWC implementation in a large

Southwestern police department, observed that rank-and-file officers feared BWCs because they

felt they would lead to greater micromanagement and/or they could be used to punish officers for

minor infractions (see also Katz et al., 2014). In addition to those concerns, the researchers noted that BWC technology left many officers feeling exposed. In this regard, law enforcement leadership, according to Smykla et al. (2016), felt that the media would use BWC footage to embarrass or prosecute otherwise good officers. In the post-Ferguson era, studies find that law enforcement are certainly more aware of the negative publicity surrounding their profession and mindful of the public's and BWCs ability to video record police-citizen interactions. Their new consciousness has been hypothesized to make law enforcement less willing to be proactive to avoid suspicions of racial bigotry

The Ferguson effect, as it has been discussed in the empirical literature, has been the subject of intense debate of late (see Campbell, Nix, & Maguire, 2018; author redacted; Mac Donald, 2016; Maguire, Nix, & Campbell, 2017; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Wolfe and Nix (2016), for example, found that police were less willing to engage community partners in the post-Ferguson era. Pyrooz, Decker, Wolfe, and Shjarback (2016), however, found that this had no effect on the overall, violent, or property crime rate in their evaluation 81 USA cities. Relating to BWCs and in support of a Ferguson effect, Katz et al. (2014), however, found that 63% of officers agreed that BWCs would reduce the number of contacts they had with the public in their analysis of BWC implementation with the Phoenix (AZ) Police Department (see also Ready & Young, 2015). In a lot of ways, then, many officers feel as though BWCs encroach on their discretion (Katz et al., 2014; Smykla et al., 2016).

Additionally, other scholarship finds practical concerns with BWCs. Many officers, for example, were disappointed with how long it took to download BWC footage. This made cases with BWC evidence more difficult to process and increased the time officers needed to complete post-incident report writing (see also Gaub et al., 2017). Furthermore, BWC upkeep, according

to Smykla et al. (2016), was perceived by law enforcement leadership to be time taken away

from normal duties and to cause extra stress making the law enforcement profession more

difficult. For these reasons, many rank-and-file patrol officers were initially resistant to BWCs

(Hedberg et al., 2017; Young & Ready, 2015).

Evolving Perspectives on BWCs

In recent years, however, officer perspectives have evolved on BWCs after discovering

them to be associated with fewer citizen complaints. White, Gaub, and Todak, (2017), in their

randomized controlled trial of BWCs in Spokane (WA), found that officers with a BWC received

28% fewer complaints after BWCs were deployed (see also Braga et al., 2017; Farrar, 2013;

Katz et al., 2014). The greatest decline in complaints, according to White et al. (2017), were for

excessive force, which declined by 40.3% more than a comparison group. A decline in

complaints was even greater when officers were filming, according to Hedberg et al. (2017).

They observed a 62% reduction in complaints when BWCs were activated. Likewise, prior

studies find that BWCs reduced the likelihood that complaints would be sustained, like Katz et

al. (2014), who recognized that complaints were 53.1% less likely to be founded when the officer

had a BWC. This effect occurs, in part, because BWCs capture the extensive efforts of officers to

de-escalate a situation, according to Gaub et al. (2017).

Research also addresses the influences of BWCs on citizens' behavior. This was on

display in the Ariel, Sutherland, Henstock, Young, Drover, Sykes, and Henderson (2016) study,

which comprised the random assignment of BWCs to 2,122 officers in eight police departments

across the USA. The researchers recognized that when an officer had a BWC and citizens were

told that they were being filmed, citizen's prosocially modified their behavior (see also Farrar,

2013). This is consistent with self-report data from residents in Escambia and Palm Beach

County, Florida who agreed (or strongly agreed; n = 633, 79.4%) that BWCs would improve

resident behavior during interactions with police (Crow et al., 2016). Similarly, law enforcement

has taken note of changes in citizen behavior. Law enforcement, in Jenning et al.'s (2014) survey

of 95 officers in Orlando (FL), reported that they believed BWCs improved citizen conduct

during their interactions with police (see also Smykla et al., 2016).[2] With the dynamic of police-

citizen encounters changing – seemingly from the presence and/or filming of BWCs – there may

be some expectation that officer in-the-line-of-duty injuries would concurrently decline.

Unfortunately, White et al. (2017) asserted that BWCs had no effect on officer injuries. In fact,

Ariel et al. (2016) found that officer in-the-line-of-duty injuries increased when they were

wearing a BWC.[3]

The Utility of and Unanswered Questions for BWCs

Unfortunately, our empirical understandings of BWCs to reduce crime and build trust

(i.e., the objective of PTF, 2015) is somewhat limited. Prior empirical inquiries, however, do

suggest that BWCs change officer behaviors. To this point, law enforcement leadership felt that

officers were more productive when they were wearing a BWC (Smykla et al., 2016). Katz et al.

(2014) was supportive of this sentiment when they observed that officers with BWCs made 6%

more arrests and domestic violence case processing increased by 80% when there was BWC

footage (see also Kurtenbach, Katz, & Elliott, 2015). Similarly, Braga et al. (2017), during a

yearlong randomized BWC deployment study in Las Vegas (NV), determined that officers with a

BWC issued 7.9% more citations and made 6.3% more arrests. Scholarship has also found that

officers with BWCs are less likely to use force during their interactions with the public. Farrar

(2013), for example, discovered that officers with BWCs had 2.5 times fewer use-of-force

incidents in his field experiment with BWCs in Rialto (CA). Similarly Ariel et al. (2015), in their

randomized-controlled research of BWC recordings during police-public encounters, reported

that use-of-force incidents declined by 37% when a BWC was filming (see also Braga et al.,

2017). In spite of these findings, self-report data of law enforcement leadership finds only one in

five officers believed that BWCs would impact officer behavior (Smykla et al., 2016).

Actual changes in citizen and officer behavior, however, have occurred because of how

BWCs are being used. Much like commercial security film, vehicle dash camera recordings, and

cell phone videos, BWCs provide visual and auditory evidence of police-citizen interactions

(Owens, Mann, & McKenna, 2014). BWCs, according to Boivin et al. (2014) in their analysis of

perspective bias, provide a "general deterrence stimulus" that likely affects the behavior of those

being recorded (p. 127; see also Ariel, Sutherland, Henstock, Young, & Sosinski, 2018). Citizen

and officer compliance with the law, in the presence of a BWC, results from self-awareness and

a willingness to embrace socially desirable behaviors. In many ways, BWCs promote citizen and

officer accountability (Boivin et al., 2017; Farrar, 2013; Hedberg et al., 2017; Smykla et al.,

2016). Even when other recording devices are available, BWCs can complement existing footage

by providing a fuller understanding of an incident (Smykla et al., 2016).

Additionally, BWCs may enhance investigations and officer training (Boivin et al.,

2017). Relating to the latter, Gaub et al. (2017) and Young and Ready (2015) suggested using

BWC footage in cases with victims and witnesses that are reluctant to come forward and/or

testify. Similarly, Smykla et al. (2016) found that the majority of law enforcement leadership

believed that BWCs would have a positive impact on evidentiary issues. Gaub et al. (2017), for

example, noted that officers with BWCs often produce more accurate report writing (see also

Katz et al., 2014). Relating to transparency, BWCs may assuage citizen fears of racial profiling,

according to PTF (2015). BWCs are, therefore, a law enforcement effort to build trust with the

communities they serve, thus increasing their institutional legitimacy (Farrar, 2013; Hedberg et al., 2017; Maskaly et al., 2017; Smykla et al., 2016). Substantively, leaders in law enforcement and citizens favor outfitting law enforcement with BWCs and law enforcement are growing more comfortable with BWCs (Jennings et al., 2017; Katz et al., 2014; Pew Research Center, 2017; Smykla et al., 2016).

In spite of the somewhat positive momentum behind BWCs, many empirical questions remain. More specifically, prior empirical research is generally inconclusive regarding whether the introduction of BWCs is truly a difference-maker in contemporary policing. Yokum et al. (2017), for example, determined that BWCs had no effect on citizen complaints, arrests, or use-of-force when they were present. Similarly, Hedberg et al. (2017) found a null effect among arrests and citizen resistance when there was a BWC filming. Although numerous claims about the perceived benefits and drawbacks of BWCs exist, there remains an absence of exploration to support or refute the rather robust quantitative empirical work on BWCs (Smykla et al., 2016; Crow et al., 2017; Hedberg et al., 2017). There has been, in particular, a dearth of qualitative efforts that gives priority to the voices of officers and seek to explore their personal experiences and attitudes towards the use of BWC technology to date. In fact, most of the reporting on this issue stems from the media and opinions from the general public and politicians. Furthermore, majorities from prior survey research could be losing important officer contingencies on BWCs that are often masked by aggregate responses. Our knowledge gap in this area is surprising given the potential BWCs could have on policing and law enforcement legitimacy.

To that end, ethnographic research methods open up opportunities for policing scholars to become immersed in a law enforcement context for an extended time period and thus develop an in-depth understanding of police culture, behaviors, and perspectives (Bryman, 2016;

Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Van Maanen, 2011). As such, the ability to not only explore and examine officers' practices but also their thoughts, theories, and world-views while in the field opens up opportunities to provide a more nuanced illumination of complex phenomena (Van Maanen, 2011). Accordingly, the use of participant observation that includes recordings of informal conversations and dialogues among officers, in combination with in-depth semi-structured interviewing has the potential to shed light on law enforcement perspectives on new and emerging tools such as BWCs within the somewhat sensitive and volatile post-Ferguson landscape (author redacted).

Methodology

To provide deeper insight into law enforcement officers' personal experiences with and perspectives on BWCs, the current study builds on a Fulbright scholar experience on policing gang violence. A subset of analyses were conducted to understand the role of BWCs. As perhaps the most overt strategic change in modern American policing, our core objective sought to illuminate officer personal experiences of and perspectives on BWCs. In doing so, this examination drew upon ethnographic methods that adopted the 'participant as observer' role and were followed-up with in-depth interviews (Gold, 1958; Hammersley, 2006). This qualitative approach was conducted against the backdrop of the post-Ferguson era, uniquely positioning the officers' behaviors and responses to BWCs.

During a four month period (January-April, 2017), one of the authors shadowed specialized teams of frontline officers from separate counties within a Southern American State (hereafter referred to as Sunshine City). Both counties began the implementation phases of their BWC programs in 2015, and by early 2016 had accomplished full BWC deployment. Field observations included ride-alongs, covert surveillance work, pre-deployment briefings, and rest

breaks with officers and sheriff's deputies of various ranks and responsibilities. Access to these experiences was granted through the gatekeeper tradition, whereby contact was made with a senior officer who had a longstanding collaborative relationship with the Fulbright's host academic institution. Through initial contact, trust was established that produced referrals to additional officers in their network of contacts to participate in the study. Snowball sampling elicited a greater number of observations, which allowed for multiple perspectives of BWCs to be seen and heard. Throughout this endeavor, there was transparency with the participants about the intent of these analyses and the information officers provided was freely given.

In fact, the author was welcomed among the officers and quickly took on the marginal native role where a balance between being a stranger and colleague was achieved (author redacted; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Being accepted by the participants, in many ways, prompted the formal and informal dialogues with officers and allowed the officers to share their BWC-insights without repercussion. The 'participant' element of the participant observation approach came in the form of the author shadowing officers while they undertook the variety of duties they often engage in during average, routine deployments. Although the researcher had never been a serving law enforcement officer and did not, at any time, undertake any official, legalistic duties associated with policing during these deployments, the researcher participated in many of the same types of activity as the officers (Van Maanen, 2011; Bryman, 2016). For instance, the researcher routinely observed citizen behavior through car windows, engaged in informal dialogue with local people on the streets, visited people's homes to respond to local reported crime issues, (on occasions) wore a police ballistic vest and also took rest breaks in police offices, local cafes and restaurants alongside officers. All the while, the author also

routinely observed officer behavior and listened to officer dialogue with other officers and with

citizens.

During deployments, fragments of behaviors and conversations were routinely jotted

down for the purpose of later recall and more detailed observational accounting (Emerson, Fretz,

& Shaw, 1995). To compliment these recollections, personal impressions and feelings were also

noted.[4] This task drew upon the author's extensive experiences of working with and alongside

law enforcement in the USA and throughout Europe (see author redacted; author redacted). In

recording observations, the author's stance (as is customary among ethnographers) was opposed

to the power of positivist thinking; the researcher recognized that there is "no way of seeing,

hearing or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct" (Van

Maanen, 2011, p. 35). Indeed, as joint authors, we reject the notion of 'validity' as a positivist

phenomenon. We acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of ethnographic data, while also

recognize the need to ensure richness and authenticity of emerging data through thick textural

description (Geertz, 1973).

To build on the researchers field notes (i.e., the core of these analyses), observational data

were paired with 20 semi-structured interviews with officers. Background information about the

participants can be found in Table 1. Interviews, unlike focus groups (see Pelfrey & Keener,

2016) explored individual officer perceptual understandings of BWCs and clarify insights

garnered from field observations. The interview participants were approached to be interviewed

after a rapport had been built during field observations. Officers were under no obligation to

participate in the study and could – without penalty – withdraw their consent to be included in

these analyses at any time. This, and additional information about the research, was expressed in

a consent form, which each interviewee signed. Participants were sought until data saturation

was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The interviews, themselves, were individualized[5] and

typically occurred in the officers' or author's working environment, though somewhat secluded

from co-workers. To guide the interviews, a protocol was developed. Questions focused on the

impact of officer confidence, morale, and policing strategies in the post-Ferguson era. Officers

often offered commentary on BWCs in these interviews and, sometimes when they didn't, were

asked about them.

--- Insert Table 1 Approximately Here ---

The officers who were interviewed came from a variety of ranks (ranging from patrol

officers to Chiefs) and years of experience ($\bar{x} = 20.1$). Most of the participants were white (n =

16, 80.0%) and male (n = 18, 90.0%). This is somewhat consistent with the composition of most

police departments in the USA (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013). The bulk of the officers were

law enforcement in the same county (n = 17, 85.0%) and assigned to specialized units (n = 16,

80.0%) or to leadership positions (n = 9, 45.0%).

To aid our analyses of these interviews, they were audio recorded and transcribed. We

avoided the use of qualitative software to aid data analysis but instead used the commonly

recognized approach of manual thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In

particular, text using the phrases "cam" and "video" were evaluated in this manuscript. Most of

these references were overt discussions without vailed meanings and, therefore, the officer's

words are presented here with little interpretation. The material, however, was arranged based on

a grounded theory of our understanding of the existing empirical landscape (Charmaz, 2006).

This inductive approach was aided by a multinational team of researchers who sequenced the

material within the broader empirical literature. This analytical strategy is consistent with the

interpretive paradigm of privileged participant perspectives on common themes that emerged

from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, the field observations and interviews were

anonymized utilizing pseudonyms as part of the agreed upon informed consent.[6] Collectively, the

ethnographic and interview data employed in these analyses sought to answer the question 'What

is the nature of officer personal experiences of and perspectives on BWC's?' and observed in

five content subsections.

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

A New Consciousness of Accountability

From these data, the overwhelming conclusion was that BWCs had prompted a new

consciousness in law enforcement that, according to Officer Johnathan, had compelled "changes

in officer behaviors." Things were different, to him, because "everyone knows, if you come in

contact with Sunshine City Police Department you most likely are being recorded." The outgoing

Chief of Sunshine City, Luke, indicated that this new consciousness pre-dated the events in

Ferguson and "since Rodney King [officers have been told to…] act like you're always being

videotaped." He went on to warn that, "You don't want to be on the six o'clock news. So, always

act like you're being watched and this kind of ensures it." As a result, officers were constantly

thinking about their BWC and indicated that their peers often communicated to them that a BWC

was filming. To this point, Detective John commented "I think about it all the time" and "I'll be

on scenes and guys will say, 'Hey, the cameras on' and stuff like that." According to Senior

Special Agent Tyler, BWCs have encouraged police to do a better job because they cannot "get

away with what they were getting away with before." With regards to the use-of-force, Officer

Johnathan concluded that Taser use had declined since BWCs had been deployed. He said that,

> *We've also seen changes in officers' behaviors, cause, you know, I'll always say*
> *this, a lot of times we [police] have used our Tasers. We may have been the*
> *aggressors, you know, and, maybe because of the way we approach individuals. A*
> *lot of times we don't necessarily think about it. But now when the cameras are on,*

we are a little bit more aware of our surrounds and, you know, the way we deal with people.

Some of these changes were perceived negatively by the interviewed officers. Senior Special Agent Tyler, for example, told the interviewer that BWCs gave "a bigger megaphone" to criminals. This was most problematic, to him, in the more subjective parts of policing. He continued by saying that "there's certain gray areas that they [officers] don't want recorded." Detective John expanded on this belief by describing policing as "a dirty job […] and when you show it to the public, you know, they aren't used to that. They [the public] don't understand that." Officers were particularly critical of the media's use of BWC footage. Detective John illustrated this position when he asserted that "they [news outlets] give the benefit of the doubt to the bad guy most of the time. So, that's making it [police work] a lot tougher." Senior Special Agent Tyler went further to report that the media manipulates BWC footage:

> *'They'll [The media will] give you little snippets of what looks like an officer beating the hell out of someone but they [the media] don't post the whole video. They [the media] don't show maybe the officer had been attacked beforehand. […Consequently, there is] a lot less critical and truthful analysis of what happened [but] people [in the media are] just putting things out there.'*

Sargent Noah felt that regardless of what appears on BWC footage, unfortunately, many people's minds were not going to change. To this, he stated that,

> *'If you [citizens] live with the perception that we do nothing wrong, and the cops are the bad guys, that reality, first of all, it won't be believed. [Citizens believe that] "Oh, they [the police] doctored it". But until they [citizens] understand that bad things are happening, there are some people [citizens], just like Democrats or Republicans, they're not going to change their mind on anything.'*

Sargent Noah went on to share his belief that BWC footage unsuccessfully challenges people's preconceived notions about police. He asked, "who are you going to believe, me or your lying eyes?" Then answered, somewhat critically, "they're going to believe their lying eyes."

From the officers interviewed, there was also little expectation that BWCs would fix all police-community problems. This issue is perhaps best expressed in this passage of the investigator's field notes. It reads,

> *Officer Daniel then brings up the subject of body cameras. 'In Sunshine City we are now trying to take accountability for police actions through issuing body cameras with the various issues across the country like Ferguson etc.,' he [the officer] comments; [however,…] 'the community needs to get together and unite. There is only so much we can do – the residents need to take the community back.'*

Officer Productivity

Another issue discussed in these interviews was a feeling that BWCs exposed law enforcement, which, according to Senior Special Agent Tyler, "restrained" him in his work. Officer Calvin confirmed this feeling when he was asked if he felt hindered by BWCs. He stated, "Yeah, definitely, because the thought is you're always on camera." Within this context, Detective John affirmed that "people [officers] just aren't doing it [working] anymore. It's affected everything you do." Proactivity, in the BWC era, was perceived as having consequences for Officer Calvin. He declared that if "you're the type of person that likes to maybe push the envelope a little too much, then yeah, the camera will get you in trouble." This prompted the outgoing Chief, Luke, to suggest that BWC can "eventually just become an excuse not to work." He, however, was optimistic that officer fears were an aberration of the times when he professed that "with the introduction to body cameras […] people [officers] eventually get used to things and they [officers] go back to what they should be doing." This may be occurring already, as several officers noted their indifference toward BWCs. Officer Calvin, for example, told the interviewer that "whether I have it [or] whether I don't, it doesn't bother me." Senior Special Agent Tyler pronounced, "I mean every self-respecting officer that I know doesn't mind wearing one," and

Sargent Kevin stated "in all reality, how does it affect you as a law enforcement officer if you do your job correctly? It doesn't."

Reflections on Themselves, Peers, and the Profession in the BWC Era

An interesting thing that many of the officers did in these interviews was to go out of their way to report that most law enforcement officers are good or are doing the right thing, such as Senior Special Agent Tyler, who concluded that "most people [officers] I know don't try to get away with anything. They try to do things honorably, the right way [and] for the right reasons." Most quantified this sentiment like Sargent Kevin and the outgoing Chief (Luke) when they estimated that "99% of the people that are policemen do it for the right reason and don't break the rules" and "98% of the time they're [officers are] doing the right thing," respectfully. Others chose to only speak for themselves as Officer Calvin did: "I know I'm not doing anything wrong." Detective Joshua put things in a different framework. He believed that "no good cop should fear a camera. Whether it's one you're wearing or one someone's using to record you with. If you're a good cop and you do your job right, you have nothing to fear." Officers in these interviews tended to be critical of poor officers, like Sargent Noah when he emphasized that Officer Michael Slager "should be in prison forever." Officer Slager was convicted of killing Walter Scott in North Charleston (SC). In this regard, officers purported that they "welcome bodycams" and that they are "a true believer in them [BWC]" (i.e., Officer Johnathan and Sargent Noah, respectively).

Benefits of BWCs

Officers favored BWCs because they give a better idea of what really happens in their encounters with the public. To this point, Detective John explained that "now everything's on video" and Officer Johnathan and Senior Special Agent Tyler felt that BWCs provided an "extra

set of eyes." Likewise, the outgoing Chief Luke believed BWC footage provided better evidence.

He stated that "you would rather get things from their [an officer's] perspective, the whole

perspective, rather than a snippet of somebody with a video camera on their phone." The

investigator's field notes also took notice of the evidentiary value of BWCs: "Ahead of our shift,

Sargent Daniel stops off at the muster room and puts his body camera on. He explains that this a

precaution – just in case any evidence of interactions on the street is needed." Detective Owen

asserted that BWCs often dictated evidentiary reality when he said, "if it wasn't on video and

you're saying it happened and you don't have it on video, then it didn't." Two additional officers

identified a practical concern for BWC footage: identifying what is kept for evidentiary

purposes. Detective Joshua articulated the issue as "You can't just say, 'Alright, I have two

arrests today on my body camera. So, we'll save that and delete everything else'". Everything

that's on that body camera has to be stored." Similarly, Detective Owen asked us to,

> *… imagine having, an agency of two-hundred people [officers] that wear body cameras and imagine the amount of data just in a twenty-four hour period that would be gathered by those cameras and what it takes for storage. The cost of storage is why most agencies can't keep up with it. They [police departments] can get the cameras easy, the storage is the issue. […] You can't say, 'Okay, I'm going to keep this and get rid of this' because then they're going to have gaps in your timeline and [some will ask] 'what are you hiding?'*

Summary Thoughts

In summation, most of the officers that were interviewed saw BWCs as a way to protect

themselves. Sargent Noah, for example, noted that "they're [BWC are] going to catch what you

did." Officer Johnathan found that "most people realize they're being recorded and that recording

will and can be used against them in a court of law." This, according to him, had prompted

"changes in people [citizens'] behaviors." The investigator's field notes capture this

phenomenon:

> *I ask Officer Jennifer about the body camera she is wearing. She says, "I only turn it on to record when I have an engagement – we [officers] have to be able to explain ourselves more; to support what you do with evidence and [the] body cameras help with this. You know, people [citizens] can be rude and say nasty things to you and then say 'I'm going to sue you [or] call the news!' I now just let them talk and then tell them at the end, 'just to let you know, that everything has been audio and video recorded. If you would like to call my sergeant, he will be happy to review your film with you.' I usually see their eyes widen. I find I get more done if I stay calm."*

BWCs had, thus, reduced the number of complaints levied against the police, as Officer Johnathan stated: "I think even complaints have gone down, as well, because now that people know that we have bodycams, there was a lot of false complaints that were coming in." Taken together, Officer Calvin and other officers came to see BWCs as protecting the police *and* public: "So, it [BWC] can protect officers to a certain extent and the public to a certain extent."

Discussion

Police perceptions of BWCs have garnered a lot of attention among criminal justice scholars due to the public's concerns for police-community relations. Yet, there is hardly any ethnographic or qualitative research on the experiences and/or attitudes of law enforcement officers in response to the growing demand for this type of technology. The current study makes a modest but meaningful contribution in this area by presenting results from an ethnographic approach to research in Sunshine City. In doing so, the result are based on long and deep immersion in the field as a means of generating insider knowledge (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Neves & Malafaia, 2016). In addition to adopting the 'participant as observer' role, field experiences were probed with in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012; Gold, 1958; Hammersley, 2006). These complimentary data sources were found to illustrate officer perspectives on one of the most overt strategic changes to modern American policing.

Based on our findings, it appeared that perceptions among our sample of officers regarding the deployment of BWCs were generally positive. Some participants expressed concerns that BWCs would not overcome unfavorable public attitudes towards the police. This sentiment was often fueled by officer perceptions of biased news media reporting (see, for example, author redacted). Public bias against police officers was also a concern for officers. Most of the officers felt that focusing on a few rogue cops and playing negative images across multiple news cycles would do little to improve citizen perceptions of the police. Although BWCs do not prevent this from happening, many officers believed that BWC footage would provide a more complete narrative of what actually transpired when the facts of an incident are contested.

Collectively, the officers talked about the ability of BWCs to foster a culture of accountability for law enforcement and citizens. Officers, for example, reported that they frequently reminded citizens that recordings are in progress, which helped de-escalate potentially contentious and violent encounters. Related to this theme of accountability is the notion that the BWCs help to reduce nuisance complaints from the public. Most participants believed that complaints had gone down and that BWCs provided evidentiary support that enhanced police investigations. These perspectives are similar to the findings in prior analyses on officer perceptions where police welcomed BWCs regardless of rank and years of experience (Jennings et al., 2015; Smykla et al., 2016). While some participants were happy to note that the deployment of BWCs led to a reduction in use-of-force decisions, accountability, according to a few officers, came at a cost. Some officers, for example, reported that BWCs could restrain police work in a way that could impact officer safety. Nevertheless, participants suggested that most police officers have and will not be negatively affected by the presence of BWCs, given

that there are an overwhelming number of "good cops" on the streets who "have nothing to fear." Substantively, most respondents affirmed the benefits of BWCs to police *and* citizens.

Limitations and Broader Implications

Utilizing a qualitative approach, these analyses increase our knowledge on how BWCs affect policing; however, the one thing that is illuminated from these findings is that more research is needed. More specifically, alternative methodologies or approaches that do not reflect a positivist paradigm are needed in order to explore complex phenomena such as policing in multi-cultural and potentially volatile post-Ferguson locales. Still, there are limitations to the generalizability of these findings. The small sample size and the absence of a comparison group prevents us from making strong inferences about officer opinions of BWCs. Likewise, we are unable to present data on use-of-force decisions and citizen complaints in Sunshine City that could confirm or deny officer claims about a reduction in complaints or contentious police-citizen incidents due to the use of BWCs. These data were also limited in their ability to distinguish these results among differing direct experiences with BWCs, which could have important implications for these analyses given the short period of time the observed officers had BWCs, strong internal culture that may exist with the observed law enforcement agencies, and overrepresentation of administrators and officers with specialized assignments. Setting confidentiality, in this regard, was necessary to foster an open and trusting environment for participants (i.e., a critical component of rich ethnographic data).

In spite of the limitations, there are broader implications of these empirical analyses. The post-Ferguson era is characterized by increasing public scrutiny of police officers. Technological inventions, despite their promise, will not ameliorate social problems that are deeply rooted in a history of racial tension and distrust. Favorable police perceptions towards BWCs may be an

encouraging sign for the future of smart policing but the continued disjuncture between police and the communities that they serve is concerning. We should not lose sight of the somewhat universal and international discord between police and citizens. If there is a crisis of confidence in law enforcement, the efficiency of police work will continue to be impacted, regardless of the best intentions of BWCs (Louis, 2018).

Likewise, there are several areas of future research with BWCs that need to be explored. Several researchers (e.g., Katz et al., 2014; Smykla et al., 2016), for example, have expressed concerns for citizen and officer privacy. This is particularly problematic for departments that adopt continuous filming policies. Where BWCs must be manually triggered, departments must develop clear policies for their activation (Katz et al., 2015; Pelfrey & Keener, 2016; Young & Ready, 2018). Unfortunately, best practices, in this regard, have yet to be empirically explored, which could discourage hesitant officers from filming (Katz, Choate, Ready, & Nuňo, 2015). Additionally, the investigative efficacy of BWCs is still somewhat unknown, especially as it relates to court outcomes (Boivin, Gendron, Faubert, & Poulin, 2017; Yokum et al., 2017; Young & Ready, 2015). Katz et al. (2014), for example, reported that the working relationship between police and prosecutors was improved when BWC evidence was submitted but the real impact BWC footage has on case outcomes remains unexplored. Finally, researchers should look to employ cost-benefit analyses of BWCs. Agencies can generally anticipate financial costs of BWCs and their upkeep/maintenance (see, for example, Braga et al., 2017; Katz et al., 2014), however, more socially derived costs and benefits are still somewhat unknown. Essentially, this area intrigue asks if BWCs are really worth the trouble and what are the risks agencies accept by opting in or out of this policing strategy.

Conclusion

The mandate of the PTF (2015) was to reduce crime and build trust between law enforcement and the communities that they serve. Towards this end, one of the key recommendations was to equip police departments with BWC technology. Most agree that BWCs could yield a range of benefits; however, some core aspects of effective policing, such as the morally and legally appropriate use-of-force, may have little effect on unfavorable public sentiment. Police and citizens, in this regard, have been fragmented for many decades. Advocates for community-oriented policing highlight the need for a curriculum on procedurally just policing and argue that reducing crime is only one part of the puzzle when it comes to understanding why people trust the police (Rosenbaum, Lurigio & Davis, 1998; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2005, 2006; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Solutions for healing the rift between police and residents should not solely be the responsibility of police. Indeed, other public and private community partners should favor efforts to overcome growing discord. With this in mind, we would recommend that any attempt to adopt BWCs be done with tempered expectations and police agencies should exercise wisdom by avoiding the mistake of making promises that BWC technology cannot deliver (Louis, 2018). It is not fair or true to state, for example, that if the officer in Ferguson had a BWC we would not have a post-Ferguson era or Ferguson Effect on law enforcement. Though BWCs seem to present an opportunity for greater citizen and law enforcement accountability, discontent predated the events in Ferguson and continues even today. In any case, rigorous evaluation of the impact of BWCs using a range of methodological approaches should inform the future of police practice in the USA.

Notes

1. A Department of Justice (2015) report would later discredit many bystander claims after an investigation found that they did not view the incident firsthand or lied about being at the scene during the shooting.

2. Officers in Katz et al.'s (2014) study were less enthusiastic about the impact of BWCs on citizen behavior. Few believed it would lead to more cooperative (25.7%), respectful (28.6%), compliant (11.8%), and less aggressive (25.75) citizens.

3. BWCs evaluations on officer in-the-line-of-duty deaths have not been empirically explored due to their infrequency and the relatively low deployment rate of BWCs throughout the Nation.

4. Together these writings are discussed as the investigator's field notes.

5. On one occasion, two officers opted to be interviewed simultaneous due to work related restraints.

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Table

Table 1. Interview participant description

Name	Gender	Race	Service Length	Rank	Location
Jacob	Male	White	46	Deputy Chief Sheriff	County Division (A)
Samuel	Male	Black	20	Lieutenant	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
Michael	Male	White	37	Detective	Firearms Unit – County Division (A)
Logan	Male	White	6	Detective	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
Andrew	Male	White	26	Detective	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
Jack	Male	White	15	Detective	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
John	Male	White	25	Detective	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
Noah	Male	White	31	Sargent	Violent Crimes Unit – County Division (A)
Tyler	Male	White	29	Senior Special Agent	County Division (A)
Gabriel	Male	Black	10	Special Agent	Gangs Task Force – County Division (A)
Kevin	Male	White	19	Sergeant	Intelligence Unit – County Division (A)
Daniel	Male	White	12	Sergeant	Juvenile Unit – County Division (A)
Emily	Female	White	22	Chief	County Division (A)
Johnathan	Male	Black	10	Officer	Juvenile Unit – County Division (A)
Jennifer	Female	White	4	Officer	Juvenile Unit – County Division (A)
Calvin	Male	Black	5	Officer	Juvenile Unit – County Division (A)
Luke	Male	White	30	Outgoing Chief	County Division (A)
Ryan	Male	White	19	Sergeant	Gang Unit – County Division (B)
Joshua	Male	White	17	Detective	Gang Unit – County Division (B)
Owen	Male	White	18	Detective	Gang Unit – County Division (B)