

**Body Worn Cameras, use of force and police-civilian interactions: Capturing complexities,
documenting the unexpected, and learning lessons ¹.**

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This special issue seeks to present a diversity of research and commentary on a promising yet highly controversial issue in policing: the use of police body-worn cameras (BWCs). BWCs are often said to have promise insofar as they may improve the overall quality of police-citizen interactions, reduce levels of force used by officers and subjects, reduce injuries and assaults, provide evidence to support arrest and prosecution, and enhance police transparency, legitimacy and accountability, particularly (although not exclusively) in interactions involving police weaponry, less lethal or otherwise. They may also help generate improvements in officer training, enhance professional development and encourage reflective practice by officers. For those interested in policing research, too, the advent of BWCs may offer not just an interesting topic in their own right, but may offer new possibilities to explore the complexities of police-civilian interactions.

Yet, BWCs are controversial with regard to the privacy rights of those captured on video and the many logistical and practical issues of video storage, retention, and access, whilst conflicting evidence exists about their potential to minimize police use of force and to reduce assaults on officers (Ariel et al 2016), as well as their consequences for policing research. Moreover, the relationship between the introduction of body worn cameras and the outcomes often associated with them seems less straightforward than some might imagine. Indeed, instead of a linear, predictable process, the impact of BWCs seems mitigated by a complex, unpredictable 'dance of agency' (Pickering 2020: 191) between the technology and the policies surrounding them, the officers that wear them, and the subjects that are filmed by them. For example, experiences in Northamptonshire (outlined in this issue) show that the adoption of BWC is not just a simple case of technologies simply being recognized as valuable and hence

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adopted. Instead, interactions between officers, the physical technology and departmental policies (say, for example, early experiences with head-worn cameras that made many officers feel self-conscious) may lead to technology being rejected – at least initially. Similarly, the pieces by Ariel et al and Young and Ready (this issue) highlight the complex ways in which institutional policies may interact with the beliefs, actions and agency of both officer and subject to produce a range of (intended and unintended) outcomes – not all of which may be positive. Thus the acceptance of BWCs as ‘business as usual’, and their ability to generate a range of tangible benefits and public goods, is not necessarily guaranteed.

Nevertheless, whilst there are many complex and largely unanswered questions about BWCs (including what outcomes to reasonably expect, whether and how to deploy them and under what policy conditions, and whether and how to determine if they “work”), one thing is clear: regardless of the evidence base, the BWC train has left the station and is accelerating steadily. For example, in the United States of America, a substantial proportion of police departments, some spurred on by federal funding to support the purchase of BWCs, are experimenting with or have already broadly deployed BWCs. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) data for 2013 (the latest available at the time of writing), about one-third of the local police departments in the U.S. provided at least some of their officers with BWCs in that year (Reaves, 2015). Systematic reviews have tried to identify completed or ongoing studies and synthesize what is currently “known” about BWC as well as to identify model policies and practices (e.g., White 2014; Lum et al. 2015), a challenging but important task in a rapidly evolving area such as this. President Obama’s body worn camera pilot program was announced in 2015, and by September of that year had awarded \$23m to agencies in 32 states to purchase BWCs and train officers, as well as to evaluate their impact in three cities. BJS has since fielded the 2016 LEMAS survey, which included a special BWC supplement; the supplement collected detailed data on BWC deployment, reasons why agencies adopted BWC, the content of policies (for example, regarding the use of BWC, video storage, video retention, etc.), and much more. For those agencies that have not adopted BWC, questions ask the reasons for not adopting BWC as well as the likelihood of adoption within the next year. We eagerly anticipate the findings of the 2016 supplemental BWC data, and will look for them toward the end of 2017.

Nor is take up of BWC restricted to the United States of America. Despite concerns from police agencies in some jurisdictions (such as South Africa), police agencies in a range of countries worldwide—including in more and less developed countries—are also actively engaged in research and experimentation with BWC. In this context, a key task for researchers is to help police agencies and the

public to understand what, if anything, can be learned and applied from the experiences of others in order to inform the adoption of BWC while the evidence base continues to build – and to do so in a manner capable of capturing the rich interactions, unpredictable outcomes and theoretical complexities that may emerge from interactions between officers, subjects and technologies.

Responding to these dynamics, we have selected papers for this edition that are diverse not only in terms of their geography (with papers focusing on experiences in the UK, Norway and South Africa, as well as in the United States of America), but also in their methodology (with a range of approaches from Randomised Controlled Trials to ethnographic studies), target audiences (with articles intended to appeal to academics, policy makers and practitioners alike) and focus. Taken together, however, these papers focus on a number of areas, including; the links and connections between BWC and police use of force; the unintended consequences of BWC that may result from technological-human interactions, and the need for diverse theoretical frameworks and methodologies to enable us to capture this complexity.

In order to do justice to the implications for policy, practice and research that arise from these pieces, and to assist those readers who may wish to look at the collection as a whole, we have structured the papers in this special edition sequentially, looking first at articles focusing on issues to consider when devising policy around BWCs, then turning to issues around training regimes, before looking at articles focused on use in practice and, finally, post-incident and accountability measures.

Starting with policy, and calling for more theoretically informed work on BWCs, Ariel et al extend deterrence theory to help explain inter-connections between BWCs and police use of force, and to help make sense of mixed findings showing that BWCs are associated with decreased use of force in some forces, and increased force in other areas. Ariel et al introduce the concept of a deterrence spectrum to argue that the more discretion officers have over when to use BWC, the less chance there is of them being apprehended for misconduct. Conversely, the less discretion officers have over when to use BWCs— as in situations where camera use is mandatory—the odds of apprehension for misconduct increase and officers are driven to use less force (see also Rowe et al, in this issue, for a complementary point). Whilst this might be positive, highly mandatory policies can result in ‘over-deterrence’, reducing officer discretion and leniency in situations where this might be advisable, leading officers to refuse to use force in situations where this is necessary and, in extreme cases, reducing officer willingness to engage with members of the public altogether.

Similarly, Young and Ready's work examines the impact of mandatory and discretionary use policies on camera activation rates, finding that, whilst mandatory activation policies are most effective in ensuring device utilization, this approach is not without trade-offs. The finding that discretionary policies result in lower levels of camera utilization amongst certain officers also provides a useful reminder that the benefits of BWCs may not be automatic. As such, their work helpfully reminds us that the 'effectiveness' of a given technology is closely linked both to the overarching policy framework and to officer preferences.

Articles by Richards et al and Phelps et al then examine the benefits and broader implications BWCs may have for police training. Richards et al explore the ways in which reviewing pre-existing camera footage may impact and accelerate the development of officer decision-making skills, whilst Phelps et al's study of the Norwegian police found that using BWCs to film student responses to training scenarios encouraged reflection and enhanced learning outcomes amongst students. Nevertheless, as both pieces underscore, the advantages accrued by including BWC in training should not be seen as automatic, but are closely connected to broader police culture, training curriculum, and individual level characteristics, including the presence of a skilled, appropriately trained expert facilitators and the degree of openness displayed by the students.

Turning to use in practice, and the outcomes of such use, White et al's randomized controlled trial, conducted in the United States of America, finds decreased levels of complaints and police use of force following the introduction of BWCs, but notes that these decreases were only temporary--possibly because 'BWC-generated restraint dissipated over time'--and finds no association between BWCs and levels of officer injuries. Owens et al, in reporting findings from their RCT in London, explore how context can affect the impact of BWCs, and the myriad ways in which cameras may affect behavior, including the intriguing possibility that the presence of cameras may reduce complaints by resulting in behavior (such as providing clear explanations, or explicitly narrating subject and officer behaviour in order to justify the application of force) that may lead to a more procedurally just interaction. They also explore how stated rationales for the introduction of BWC may effect officer responses to the technology and how, in turn, the effects of BWV may vary in nature and extent, dependent upon individuals, settings, and context. Aiming to complement experimental work with a more ethnographic approach, Rowe et al similarly highlight the unintended consequences following the deployment of the technology. These include a range of novel ways in which the technology can be used, as well as how it

may act to limit officer discretion around use of force incidents, constrain interactions with the public and provide a form of accountability that puts the subject, not the officer, centre stage.

Finally, turning to issues around accountability, Phillips explores the psychological reasons—such as perceptual distortions, misinformation, and false memories—that might help us understand why officer recall may differ from that which is relayed by BWC documentation. He argues that the availability of BWC footage after the fact may not eliminate inaccurate observations and mistaken beliefs genuinely made by officers in the heat of the moment, and the need to account for such processes may mean that BWCS are not the accountability remedy and ‘final word’ some may hope for. Souza et al look at public attitudes towards the technology and find that, whilst respondents are mostly positive in terms of their belief in the ability of BWCs to improve policing in numerous ways (although there is some difference by race), they have varying degrees of confidence in the various BWC advertised positive consequences. While people believe strongly in the ability of BWCs to increase transparency and reduce force, there is more scepticism that the technology will lead to improved trust in the police, enhance police–community relationships and reduce racial tensions. In the South African context, Stone’s paper explores the extent to which, if at all, BWC’s will be able to enhance accountability for acts of misconduct or criminality by police officers, looking at linkages between the cameras and the institutional policies and legislative frameworks at play in the jurisdiction.

Finally, the special issue concludes with a series of book reviews and commentaries. Spencer and Cheshire’s piece provides a first-hand opportunity to reflect on the introduction of BWC in Northamptonshire police, illustrating lessons that may be useful for advocates of the technology in other police forces, and a case study example of officer level resistance identified by Young and Ready, as well as how this may be overcome. The commentary piece by Perkins provides an opportunity to explore the implications of Body Worn Cameras in the South African context, providing a useful contrast to experiences with body worn cameras in North America and Europe whilst further probing the implications that BWCs may have for researcher’s access to the police – echoing concerns previously identified by Rowe et al about the continuing need for ethnographic research and high levels of access by researchers.

Taken together, this collection highlights the need for further research on the broader context and networks in which body worn cameras sit, on interactions between human and non-human and how these may influence perceptions of success and failure, and on the complexities around body worn

cameras, police use of force and other forms of civilian interaction. Such a body of work is likely to be as necessary as it is challenging for, in the final analysis, 'the dynamics at play may be considerably more complex than originally described by advocates of the technology' (White et al, this issue).

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