EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

POLICE BODY-WORN CAMERAS

Cops and Cameras

Lights, Camera, Action!

Wesley G. Jennings
Texas State University

Police and citizen interactions have been the source of a considerable amount of scholarly and media attention, particularly in the more recent years after highly publicized cases such as Michael Brown, Philandro Castile, Keith Scott, and Sylville Smith. Although these cases are unfortunately not unique in terms of their resulting in a fatal outcome as the result of a police–citizen encounter, what is unique is that events such as these have helped spark a national debate about how and what could be done policy-wise to reduce the occurrence of (unnecessary) police use of force more generally and the perceived disproportionate (unnecessary) police use of force on minority citizens and suspects more specifically (Hollis and Jennings, 2018). One such suggestion that quickly arose to the forefront of this discussion was police body-worn cameras. This technological innovation was, however, at the time, in its relative infancy in terms of utilization, implementation, and evaluation.

There is nothing inherently novel about cops and cameras. Closed circuit televisions cameras (CCTVs), dashboard/in-car cameras, and so on have been around for a while in policing. Similarly, the recent widespread availability and use of cell phones (with cameras and video-recording capabilities) by bystanders and witnesses have yielded countless hours of footage of police–citizen interactions (positive and negative). Yet, what seemed to be missing from all of this "tape" was often the perspective of the officer and what citizen or suspect characteristics, situational factors, and other event-specific details may have influenced a police officer's decision to escalate the encounter to where force (including deadly force) was used: enter the police body-worn camera (BWC).

BWCs have been a part of policing for some time now, but there was not much utilization of the technology in the early years among police departments and there was generally little public or academic knowledge of their existence in the early years either. All

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Direct correspondence to Wesley G. Jennings, School of Criminal Justice, College of Applied Arts, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, Hines Room 108, San Marcos, TX 78666 (e-mail: jenningswgj@txstate.edu).

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of this changed almost overnight after the events that unfolded in Ferguson, MO. During the media coverage of this tragic event, the one seemingly constant feature of the story was the call for all police officers to wear BWCs. Of notable concern among academics at this time was that there was almost no empirical literature in general or little-to-no evidence at all regarding the effectiveness of BWCs to reduce outcomes such as police use of force and external citizen-generated complaints of police excessive use of force. In fact, at the time of Ferguson (August 9, 2014), there were *zero* peer-reviewed articles in which BWCs were evaluated, and only a handful of evaluations existed with widely varying methodologies in the form of government reports or brief agency reports (for review, see White, 2014). Thankfully, there were two peer-reviewed articles that soon followed in which BWCs were evaluated by researchers relying on randomized controlled experiments that were operational before and/or at the time of the Ferguson incident to contribute to the national debate (e.g., Rialto, CA: Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland, 2015, and Orlando, FL: Jennings, Fridell, and Lynch, 2014; Jennings, Lynch, and Fridell, 2015). Although the unit of analysis for randomization differed (Ariel et al., 2015, randomized police officer shifts, and Jennings et al., 2014, 2015, randomized police officers), the results reported in both of these studies were remarkably similar. Specifically, when comparing police officer use of force and external citizen-generated complaints pre- to postimplementation, there was a 59% and 53% decline in use of force and an 87% and 65% decline in external citizen-generated complaints in Rialto and Orlando, respectively.

Subsequently, there has been a host of high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarship that has further contributed to the BWC evaluation literature. Examples of this research include randomized controlled trials in Tempe, AZ (Gaub, Choate, Todak, Katz, and White, 2016), Spokane, WA (Gaub et al., 2016; White, Gaub, and Todak, 2017), and Las Vegas, NV (Braga, Sousa, Coldren, and Rodriguez, 2018); a host of randomized controlled trials in Europe (Ariel et al., 2016); rigorous quasi-experimental designs in Tampa, FL (Jennings, Fridell, Lynch, Jetelina, and Gonzalez, 2017), Mesa, AZ (Ready and Young, 2015), and Phoenix, AZ (Hedberg, Katz, and Choate, 2017); and several other methodologically sound studies in various jurisdictions (for a review, see Maskaly, Donner, Jennings, Ariel, and Sutherland, 2017).

In this vein, in their article "Examining Body-Worn Camera Integration and Acceptance Among Police Officers, Citizens, and External Stakeholders," Michael White, Natalie Todak, and Janne Gaub (2018, this issue) push the BWC literature forward by exploring BWC integration and acceptance among a host of stakeholders that include police officers, citizens, advocacy groups, community groups, and city leadership. Furthermore, they also extend the BWC evaluation research beyond the typical use of force and citizen-generated complaints outcomes by examining the effect of BWC utilization on case processing.

White et al. (2018) tackle these important research gaps by relying on data that were collected as part of a randomized controlled trial of BWCs in Tempe, AZ. According to White et al. (2018), all of the 200 patrol officers were randomly assigned to either a BWC (treatment) group or to a non-BWC (control) group. Stakeholder perceptions were derived from a series of data sources, including in-person officer surveys, citizen phone interviews, and in-person stakeholder interviews, and case processing data were gathered from official court records.

Several key findings emerged from White et al.'s (2018) comprehensive and careful descriptive analysis. First, the results from the officer perception surveys indicated that the officers were mostly supportive of BWCs prior to their implementation, and after BWC implementation, the officers' perceptions generally remained supportive or became increasingly more positive when judging from the percent changes in the officers' perceptions from wave 1 to wave 6. Second, through a trend analysis of self-initiated calls per month (per 1,000 calls), there was no statistically significant evidence (or really any substantive evidence) that officer proactivity was positively or negatively affected by BWC implementation. Third, regarding citizen perceptions, the citizens were considerably positive when reflecting back on their recent police–citizen encounter, and 80% or more of the citizens agreed/strongly agreed that BWCs should be worn by all Tempe officers, that BWCs would make the officers behave more professionally and citizens more respectfully, and that the BWC benefits outweigh the BWC costs. Fourth, some of the central themes that emerged from the in-person external stakeholder interviews surrounded the Tempe police department's commitment to the openness and transparency of their BWC adoption and implementation. The external stakeholders also commented on a range of BWC benefits, including enhanced police–community relations, improved citizen and officer behavior, and the evidentiary value of BWC footage. Finally, and although caution is noted by White et al. (2018) when interpreting the evidence gleaned from the official court data, the descriptive analysis yielded some preliminary evidence that there may be a BWC benefit for case processing in terms of increasing the mean rate of guilty case outcomes and of reducing the time in days to case disposition.

In extrapolating from these robust findings, White et al. (2018) conclude by offering a series of policy recommendations. For example, they stress the importance of having early "buy-in" and acceptance from the various stakeholders pre-BWC implementation to maintain the continuous engagement of stakeholders while the full BWC rollout is occurring. They also suggest that their results point toward the importance of police departments having and adhering to the *Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Checklist* (2015) for planning and implementing a BWC initiative. This Checklist offers both a roadmap for BWC implementation and a firm ground to justify the timeline and process for the BWC implementation when forces outside the department (e.g., city officials, media, and stakeholders) may be pushing for an "overnight" BWC implementation. In addition, White et al. (2018) emphasize the relevance of BWC integration for the prosecutor's office.

A policy response essay, authored by Geoffrey Alpert and Kyle McLean (2018, this issue), provides a well-constructed assessment of the state of the evaluation literature for

BWCs, and they make an important observation when they suggest that the effectiveness and success (or lack thereof) of any BWC program depends on "where the goal line is." Specifically, Alpert and McLean (2018) argue that other policing initiatives such as hot-spots policing and community policing have clearly defined goals to evaluate their effectiveness as policing strategies but that the goals of BWC programs are more elusive and vary depending on whom you ask. For example, the public, politicians, and activists generally point toward the goals of police accountability and increased transparency, whereas police administrations might also be interested in reductions in officer injuries and citizen complaints, better evidence collection, and so on.

In light of this difficulty in defining the goal line for BWC programs, Alpert and McLean (2018) suggest that perhaps one of the best methods for evaluating the success of a BWC program lies in the benefit of BWCs for evidentiary purposes and case processing. In this vein, they further argue that regardless of the outcome that is being evaluated, compliance with the BWC program and BWC policy such as turning the camera on at the right time is crucial for determining whether the BWC program is effective. Low rates of support for the BWC program (among officers and/or administrators), low levels of officer compliance with activation requirements, vague or limited activation policies, and so on all can compromise the ability to evaluate a BWC program properly. Alpert and McLean (2018) conclude their policy response essay by reiterating the importance of establishing the goal line to evaluate BWC programs, ensuring that all parties (i.e., police, public, politicians, activists, and academics) understand that, like NFL officiating and "sideline" reviewing of film by trained experts, the video footage does not always result in a 100% agreed-on and accurate determination of what the proper call may be.

Ultimately, BWCs are not a panacea to solve all of the issues in policing (Jennings et al., 2015, 2017) nor will they prevent all of the negative (and fatal) police–citizen encounters. Having said that, there is an increasing amount of empirical evidence that they are generally effective in making significant and substantive reductions in use of force and external citizen-generated complaints (see Maskaly et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has been widely documented that patrol officers, police leadership, citizens, and external stakeholders are mainly in support of this technology and its implementation (Gaub et al., 2016; Jennings et al., 2014; Smykla, Crow, Crichlow, and Snyder, 2015; White et al., 2018). Therefore, to best inform police departments, policy makers, and the public regarding the utility of BWCs, it is imperative that we as academics continue to conduct rigorous *process and outcome* evaluations of BWCs, and that we do so with experimental methods, in multiple sites, and using pre- and postimplementation data. More importantly, these efforts should also be done in conjunction with expanding the list of outcomes to include not just use of force and external citizen-generated complaints but also by incorporating relevant outcomes that have had somewhat limited empirical attention thus far, such as officer injury, suspect injury, officer productivity, officer proactivity, officer job satisfaction, citizen perceptions of police legitimacy, citizen perceptions of procedural justice in police–citizen encounters, evidence collection, case processing, and so on: lights, camera, action!

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Wesley G. Jennings is a professor and doctoral program coordinator in the School of Criminal Justice at Texas State University. In addition, he has a courtesy appointment in the Department of Health Outcomes & Biomedical Informatics and is a faculty affiliate of the Institute for Child Health Policy in the College of Medicine at the University of Florida. He received his Ph.D. in criminology from the University of Florida. He has 225+ publications, his *h*-index is 41 (*i*-index of 122), and he has nearly 6,000 citations to his published work. He was recognized as the #1 criminologist in the world (at his previous rank of assistant professor: *JCJE*, 2013); the #1 criminologist in the world at his previous rank of associate professor (*JCJE*, 2017); and the #3 criminologist in the world *across all ranks* in terms of his peer-reviewed scholarly publication productivity in the top criminology and criminal justice journals (*JCJE*, 2014). He is a member of the American Society of Criminology, a lifetime member of both the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and the Southern Criminal Justice Association, and a member of the Midwestern Criminal Justice Association. Finally, he is currently the 2nd Vice President of the Southern Criminal Justice Association.