Police Body Worn Cameras as Surveillance Tool: What Philadelphia has learned about body worn cameras in police work

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Body worn cameras in policing

- Rapid and widespread adoption
- Expectation: Cameras will positively change officer behavior
  - Increase transparency and police accountability
  - Increase citizen’s perception of police legitimacy
- Existing studies focus on:
  - Officer attitudes toward cameras
  - Changes in numbers of use of force and citizen complaints
- Our interest -- how cameras change officer behavior
Cameras as surveillance tool

- How do cameras change officer’s approach to policing?
- How do cameras change police-citizen interactions?
Philadelphia context

- 6th largest city
- 4th largest police department serving ~1.5 residents
- Roughly equal proportion of African American & white residents

- PPD active in national conversation on the future of policing
- Measured approach to BWC implementation
Phased approach

- Formed BWC working group
- 22nd district: all patrol equipped by April 1, 2016
### Study design and data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative data</th>
<th>Quantitative data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Pre-pilot focus groups:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Survey instrument:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish general issues related to usability &amp; acceptance</td>
<td>- Pre-deployment survey of officer attitudes &amp; perceptions (n= 84, 58%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Refine questions &amp; measures on surveys</td>
<td>- Post-deployment survey of officer attitudes &amp; perceptions (n= 107, 74%)</td>
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<td><strong>3 Post-pilot focus groups:</strong></td>
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<td>- Experiences of wearing cameras</td>
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<td>- Perceptions of effects on the nature of police work</td>
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<td><strong>1 Post-1 year focus group:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Experiences and effects on officer behavior</td>
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**QUAL** → **QUAN** → **QUAL**
Findings
Major findings that emerged

- Greater acceptance of cameras once experienced
- Capacity to document police work
- Changes in police officer behavior on the street
- Not a panacea for community relations
Rise in acceptance

Significantly more nonwhite officers support cameras

- BWCs should be expanded
- Advantages outweigh disadvantages
- Comfort with footage being reviewed

Pre vs. Post
Greater capacity to document police work: From ‘monitor’ to ‘tool’

- Cameras as protective of officers
  - In cases of false or exaggerated complaints
  - Concerns with increased IAB investigations allayed
- Create documentaries of arrests
- Gather video and photographic evidence at crime scenes
- Capture conduct of unlawful protesters
- Record standard-setting with citizens
- Enhance quality of written reports
Officers’ behavior and discretion

- Large percentage were more cautious in making decisions (65% agreed)
- Perceived impact on professionalism varied by race
  - Significant reduction in the proportion of all respondents who agreed ‘An officer acts more professionally’
    - About 40% agreed (down from 58%)
    - Significantly more nonwhites (50%) agreed with this statement than whites (27%)
- Almost a third of all respondents (32%) thought officers were ‘less likely to give warnings’
Potential effects on police-community relations

- Chilling effects of less discretion
  - Take more formal vs. informal interventions
    - Prevent second-guessing
  - Avoid interactions with citizens
    - Might uncover drugs or minor criminal behavior requiring an arrest
Not a panacea for police-community relations

- Potential influence on citizen & police behavior during particular encounters
  - Affect on citizen behavior varies based on circumstances
  - To some extent the community is used to surveillance
- However, police-community relations run deep
Limitations

- Findings may not be generalizable to other cities or to other police departments with different:
  - BWC policies for when camera must be turned on – Philly does not use continuous recording
  - Levels of follow-up on footage and tagging
- Our focus groups were assembled from convenience samples
- Our response rate was lower than other surveys done in Mesa (96.5 to 100%) and Orlando (96%)
Implications
Implications for practice

- Widen scope and formalization of camera training
  - Not just technical but also technique
  - Proactive uses
- Control the narrative about cameras
  - Tell stories about benefits and accountability
- Improve monitoring and provide feedback
  - Put systems into place to insure compliance (no ‘cherry-picking’)
  - Videos become part of feedback loop to improve police practice
Implications for research

- Use videos as data source to document police-citizen interactions
- Develop more nuanced survey questions to measure police discretion
- Explore new technology for automated processing of video
- Measure district variation in BWCs’ effects on police-community relations
For further inquiries...

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