

# One Size Doesn't Fit All: The Deployment of Police Body-Worn Cameras to Specialty Units

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## Abstract

Although body-worn cameras (BWCs) have diffused rapidly in law enforcement both in the United States and abroad, questions have emerged regarding the potential utility of BWCs for specialized police units. Given the near-sole focus on patrol during BWC implementation, the role of specialty units in BWC deployment is often overlooked. Further, the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges associated with BWCs may be unique for specialty units compared to patrol, given their differences in mission and operational focus. We explore this issue using qualitative data from 17 focus groups with 72 officers assigned to specialty units in two midsize Western police departments. The findings highlight the importance of carefully considering unit mission when making decisions about BWCs, especially related to policy and procedure.

## Keywords

police, body-worn cameras (BWCs), specialty units, focus groups, randomized-controlled trial (RCT)

Many police agencies have quickly invested in body-worn cameras (BWCs) following a growing number of high-profile police killings since 2014. The rush to adopt BWCs has occurred in part because agencies seek to demonstrate transparency regarding the nature of officers' interactions with the public. Advocates also argue that BWCs will lead to less violence between police and citizens through a hypothesized "civilizing effect" and that the footage from BWCs will facilitate both the investigation of citizen complaints against police and the prosecution of criminal cases (White, 2014). The rapid diffusion of BWCs has been facilitated by two additional factors: (1) the

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Bureau of Justice Assistance's BWC Policy and Implementation Program, which has awarded nearly US\$60 million to 262 agencies, resulting in more than 52,000 BWCs being deployed across the United States (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2017), and (2) a growing body of research that has demonstrated positive outcomes, including reductions in the use of force and citizen complaints (e.g., Ariel, Farrar, & Sutherland, 2015; Hedberg, Katz, & Choate, 2017; Jennings, Lynch, & Fridell, 2015; White, Gaub, & Todak, 2018), enhanced prosecution outcomes (Morrow, Katz, & Choate, 2016; Owens, Mann, & Mckenna, 2014), increased perceptions of procedural justice (White, Todak, & Gaub, 2017), and cost savings (Braga, Coldren, Sousa, Rodriguez, & Alper, 2017).

To date, deployment of BWCs in American policing has occurred almost exclusively with patrol officers. The focus on patrol is reasonable, as patrol officers represent the majority of a department's sworn personnel (typically 60–65%), and they are responsible for the majority of public contacts (Cordner, 1979; Famega, Frank, & Mazerolle, 2005). However, as BWCs are becoming an increasingly well-established component of the patrol function in American policing, many departments are exploring the expansion of cameras to other nonpatrol, specialized units (SUs) such as investigations, canine (K9), gang, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), and anti-crime squads (Gaub, White, Johnson, Leon, & Petti, 2017).

Currently, there is no guidance—either from professional organizations or the academic literature—as to best practices for implementing BWCs with SUs. This is a notable gap in the literature, given the crucial differences in mission and operational focus between patrol and SUs. Research, for example, has shown that patrol officers spend 70–90% of their time responding to calls for service, completing administrative tasks such as writing reports, conducting law enforcement duties (e.g., traffic enforcement), and handling noncrime-related issues (Cordner, 1979; Famega et al., 2005; Frank, Brandl, & Watkins, 1997; Mastrofski, 1983; Wilson, 1968). Conversely, the mission of specialized police units focuses solely on crime detection or suppression, and officers in SUs are more likely to engage in self-initiated citizen contacts, conduct criminal investigations, interact with sensitive or vulnerable populations, and use force to overcome suspect resistance (Kraska, 1999; Menton, 2008; Williams & Westall, 2003). Given the differences in mission, responsibilities, and daily work tasks between patrol and SUs, it is unlikely that BWC programs developed for patrol officers will be equally well-suited for SUs.

The authors address this research gap through a qualitative, exploratory study with 72 officers assigned to 17 SUs in two police departments, both of which had deployed BWCs at the time of data collection. The authors conducted in-depth focus groups that explored three research questions: (1) Are the goals of a BWC program different for patrol and SUs? (2) What unique challenges should agencies anticipate when implementing BWCs in SUs? (3) Based on the experiences of these two agencies, are there discernible lessons learned for implementing BWCs with SUs more broadly? The current study seeks to provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of taking BWCs beyond patrol.

## **Literature Review**

Six decades of research on the police has focused predominantly on patrol, and as a result, we know a great deal about the role and activities of patrol officers. Most of their time is spent engaged in service activities or maintaining order, such as directing traffic or mediating personal disputes. Only a small percentage of their time (10–30%, depending on the study) is spent on crime-related activities (Bayley, 1994; Greene & Klockars, 1991; Manning, 1978; Mastrofski, 1983; Scott, 1981; Wilson, 1968). In fact, these noncrime-related activities are an essential task of the police because, with the authority to use coercive force, they are in a unique position to handle all manner of social problems (Bittner, 1967; Westley, 1970). As a result, the mission of the patrol officer is nebulous, often encompassing tasks that fall to them only because there is no

one else to call (Manning, 1978). Patrol officers are society's peacekeepers, maintaining order "according to the agreed-upon rules of the community by reinforcing informal social controls" (White, 2010, p. 885; see also Banton, 1964; Bittner, 1967). Beyond studies on the mission and activities of patrol, most other research on police strategies also focuses on patrol officers, from problem-oriented policing (Braga et al., 1999) and hot spots (Weisburd, Telep, & Lawton, 2014) to foot patrol (Police Foundation, 1981; Ratcliffe, Taniguchi, Groff, & Wood, 2011), use of force (Fyfe, 1988; Terrill & Paoline, 2017; White, 2003), and stress/danger of the occupation (Bierie, 2017; Kaminski & Sorensen, 1995; Violanti, 1992).

Specialized police units, on the other hand, are created within a police agency to fulfill a specific purpose, with narrowly defined roles that are usually quite different from patrol. Specialization emerged during the early 20th century as one of several efforts to professionalize policing (White, 2007). August Vollmer and other police leaders sought to reform the profession through application of bureaucratic principles, such as clear mission (focus on crime only), autonomy from politics, administrative efficiency, rigorous selection and training standards, and SUs composed of specially trained officers to handle specific crime problems (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

A small body of academic research has investigated SUs in policing. Much of the research has focused on the department level, investigating the organizational rationale for implementing a particular unit or assessing their activity levels relative to patrol units (Clark, Jackson, Schaefer, & Sharpe, 2000; Hepworth & White, 2016; Katz, 2001; Katz, Maguire, & Roncek, 2002; Lemmer, Bensinger, & Lurigio, 2008; Liederbach, Fritsch, & Womack, 2011; Menton, 2008; Williams & Westall, 2003; Willits & Nowacki, 2016). This body of research has tended to focus on gang units and SWAT teams, though a few examined other units such as traffic, bicycle, drug/vice, K9, and cybercrime.

SUs are created for a variety of reasons. In some cases, a unit may be created to meet the pressures of new or emerging crime problems (Clark et al., 2000). In other cases, the creation of an SU may be driven by officer interest. Katz (2001) examined the creation of a gang unit and concluded the unit was created because of external pressure stemming from a perceived gang problem. Katz noted that a cyclical process emerged, whereby the unit's existence fostered the perception of a gang problem, which in turn facilitated the continued need for the unit (see also Lemmer et al., 2008).

Katz, Maguire, and Roncek (2002) assessed the three most common theoretical perspectives that explain the creation of SUs: contingency theory, social threat theory, and resource dependency theory. Respectively, these theories argue that SUs are created to achieve specific goals, to address a perceived threat stemming from a growing marginalized population, or because additional resources were made available to the agency. Using data from 285 large police agencies across the United States, they found support for the social threat and resource dependency theories, highlighting that gang units are sometimes formed in jurisdictions without significant gang problems (Katz et al., 2002). Willits and Nowacki (2016) examined the creation of cybercrime units in police departments, noting that the number of agencies with such units had tripled between 2000 and 2013. Supporting the resource dependency theory, they concluded that cybercrime units were most common in larger agencies, as well as those with more routinized practices and with a greater reliance on technology (Willits & Nowacki, 2016).

Other research on SUs has focused on workload and responses to organizational changes, primarily among investigative units. The landmark study of detective work conducted by RAND in the early 1970s found that "less than half of all reported crimes receive any serious consideration by an investigator, and the great majority of cases that are actively investigated receive less than a day's attention" (Chaiken, Greenwood, & Petersilia, 1976, p. 196). The findings of the RAND study were supported 40 years later; Liederbach, Fritsch, and Womack (2011) found that detectives focus their energy primarily on investigative activities, though a significant amount of time is also spent on administrative tasks (see also Dabney, Copes, Tewksbury, & Hawk-Tourtelot, 2013). Schroeder and White (2009) explored New

York Police Department detectives' use of DNA in homicide investigations, concluding that it is a "tool of last resort" used when "other investigative means have been exhausted" (p. 18).

Hepworth and White (2016) examined traffic citations issued following the creation of a three-person traffic enforcement unit (TEU). They found a department-wide decrease in the number of citations issued over a 22-month study period and that citations issued by both patrol officers and TEU officers had declined at similar rates (Hepworth & White, 2016). Williams and Westall (2003) assessed differences in the use of force between SWAT and non-SWAT officers, hypothesizing that SWAT officers may be more inclined to use force because of the high-intensity nature of their calls. However, they found no difference in either the rate of force or the type of force used by SWAT and non-SWAT officers. Menton (2008) compared activity levels among officers assigned to bicycle patrol squads and general patrol and found that the bicycle officers were significantly more proactive (e.g., issuing arrests and citations).

In sum, available research suggests the mission and purpose of SUs varies based on organizational and community-based needs. This research provides plausible support for the concern that patrol-driven innovations, such as BWCs, may require a different approach when applied to SUs.

### **Police BWCs**

Police BWCs have spread rapidly in the United States since 2014, and departments have typically adopted the technology to demonstrate transparency to the community, enhance accountability, or strengthen citizen trust in police (White, 2014). It is unknown exactly how many police departments have BWC programs; roughly one third of agencies reported having some form of program as of 2013, though it is expected that all large police organizations will have a BWC program within the next few years (Major Cities Chiefs and Major County Sheriffs, 2015; Reaves, 2015). The perceived benefits of BWCs touch upon core issues for the police, and a growing body of research has shown that cameras can generate positive outcomes. The interest in BWCs has persisted in large part due to their potential to bolster police accountability and transparency through reductions in police misconduct and enhanced police legitimacy and citizen trust (President's Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, 2015; White, 2014).

Although a handful of studies were completed in the United Kingdom during the early 2000s, the vast majority of BWC research has been conducted in the last few years (post-2013). The studies documenting reductions in force and complaints have drawn the most attention among academics and practitioners. Generally, these declines are attributed to an improvement in officer behavior, citizen behavior, or both (Braga et al., 2017; White, 2014). Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland (2015) evaluated the impact of BWCs in the Rialto (CA) Police Department and concluded the cameras generated a nearly 90% drop in citizen complaints against police and a 60% decline in use of force—and those declines persisted for several years after the introduction of the technology (Sutherland, Ariel, Farrar, & De Anda, 2017). Likewise, researchers reported declines in force, complaints, or both in Mesa (AZ; Mesa Police Department, 2013), Orlando (FL; Jennings et al., 2015), Phoenix (AZ; Hedberg et al., 2017; Katz, Kurtenbach, Choate, & White, 2015), Spokane (WA; White et al., 2018), and Tampa (FL; Jennings, Fridell, Lynch, Jetelina, & Reingle Gonzalez, 2017). Conversely, some studies have not found significant declines in these outcomes (Ariel et al., 2016; Grossmith et al., 2015; Yokum, Ravishankar, & Coppock, 2017). The mixed results could be due to an imbalance between officer discretion and deterrence; optimal deterrence is most likely achieved when there are strong controls on discretion that written into administrative policy and consistently enforced (Ariel, Sutherland, Henstock, Young, & Sosinski, 2018). Additionally, the lack of clear consensus on the impact of BWCs on these outcomes illustrates the influence of local context and implementation (White, Todak, & Gaub, 2018). Nevertheless, the weight of the evidence suggests

BWCs can generate reductions in these important outcomes (Maskaly, Donner, Jennings, Ariel, & Sutherland, 2017; White, Gaub, & Padilla, 2018a, 2018b).

Research has also examined citizen and officer perceptions of BWCs, with mixed results. The earliest research from the United Kingdom found residents were supportive of BWCs (Ellis, Jenkins, & Smith, 2015; ODS Consulting, 2011). Sousa and colleagues (2018) found widespread support for police BWCs among a nationally representative sample of citizens. White, Todak, and Gaub (2018) found that citizens who had a BWC-recorded encounter with police in Tempe (AZ) had favorable views of both BWCs and their encounter. White, Todak, and Gaub (2017) reported similar results in Spokane and also found enhanced perceptions of procedural justice among citizens who were aware of the BWC during the encounter.<sup>1</sup> Research has also shown that police officers are supportive of BWCs, though the extent of support varies by department and tends to increase after deployment (Jennings, Fridell, & Lynch, 2014; Pelfrey & Keener, 2016; White et al., in press). Gaub, Choate, Todak, Katz, and White (2016) compared officer attitudes over time in three departments (Phoenix, Spokane, and Tempe) and noted:

Each of the departments' officers reported improved perceptions of the ease of use and comfort of BWCs, but they became more skeptical about the impact on citizens. Tempe and Spokane officers, overall, increasingly recognized the positive effects of BWCs, whereas Phoenix did not see this trend. (p. 92)

Generally, officers appear to recognize the benefits of BWCs as they begin to routinely use them on the job. When BWCs in Phoenix led to a noticeable increase in citizen complaint exonerations, officers took notice of the technology's capacity to protect them (Katz et al., 2015). This was especially true when sergeants could handle frivolous complaints informally. A study of command staff also found strong support for BWCs (Smykla, Crow, Crichlow, & Snyder, 2016).

Studies have shown mixed results regarding the impact of BWCs on officer activity. Several studies have linked BWCs to increases in either arrest activity (Braga, Sousa, Coldren, & Rodriguez, 2018; Dillon, 2013; Katz et al., 2015) or self-initiated activity (Braga et al., 2018; Wallace, White, Gaub, & Todak, in press). Braga and colleagues (2018) noted there may be a trade-off with BWCs, as reductions in force and complaints may improve citizen perceptions of the police while increased formal enforcement activity (arrests, citations), especially in minority communities, could undermine those enhanced perceptions. Alternatively, Grossmith et al. (2015, p. 1) reported no impact on "the number or type of stop and searches," self-reported activity, or arrest decisions. Ready and Young (2015) found BWC officers made fewer arrests but issued more citations.

Preliminary evidence also suggests that BWCs might lead to positive prosecutorial and court outcomes (Goodall, 2007; Katz et al., 2015; Morrow et al., 2016; ODS Consulting, 2011; Todak, Gaub, & White, in press). The technology has been linked to quicker case processing time and higher rates of convictions and guilty pleas in several jurisdictions (Katz et al., 2015; Morrow et al., 2016; ODS Consulting, 2011). Attitudinal studies also consistently document officers' perceptions of these benefits. Nearly 80% of Phoenix, Spokane, and Tempe officers believe the footage provides a more nuanced and accurate account of what happened in an encounter (Gaub et al., 2016). Officer surveys in England and Scotland found that most officers believe that BWCs produce increased evidence quality and lead to an increased likelihood of conviction (Ellis et al., 2015; Goodall, 2007; ODS Consulting, 2011; Owens et al., 2014).

The common thread running through the body of BWC research is the emphasis on patrol. The patrol-centric focus in the BWC literature is unsurprising, given that most BWC programs are, at least initially, pilot-tested and then deployed among patrol officers. But as departments look to expand BWCs into SUs, there is little guidance for implementing the technology to officers with nonpatrol functions. Successfully implementing a significant organization-wide innovation, such as

BWCs, can be challenging and multifaceted (White et al., 2018), and given the diversity in roles and activities among SUs, the notion that BWCs will translate seamlessly beyond patrol seems unlikely. Accordingly, there is a need for research to better understand how this technology will play out in SUs. We address this gap in the literature through semistructured focus groups with members of 17 SUs in two police departments, with a focus on exploring their perceptions about BWCs and the impact of the technology on their work processes.

## **Method**

The current study is part of a larger randomized-controlled trial examining BWC deployment with the Spokane (WA) and Tempe (AZ) Police Departments. In the larger study, half of the patrol division from each agency was randomly assigned to receive cameras during Phase 1 (treatment group: Spokane, May 2015; Tempe, November 2015) and the other half received their BWCs during Phase 2 (control group: Spokane, November 2015; Tempe, May 2016). The randomized period lasted 6 months, at which point all patrol officers were equipped with BWCs.

This study uses data from semistructured focus groups with selected officers, collected at least 6 months after the conclusion of the randomized periods in each agency. Specifically, the focus groups occurred in October 2016 in Spokane and in October and November 2016 in Tempe. Our sample included 72 police officers assigned to 1 of the 17 SUs across both sites. Table 1 reports a list of units by department and the number of participating officers from each unit. Participants in this study may or may not have been assigned to wear a BWC at the time of the focus group, depending on their agency's policy regarding BWC use in that unit. Focus group questions were slightly modified in units that did not have BWCs (see Table 1 for indication of which units did not wear BWCs). Notably, both study departments had BWC policies that were specifically designed for the use of cameras by patrol officers. The Spokane and Tempe policies both included virtually no information specific to SUs. More generally, the policies were similar in many respects, particularly regarding key issues such as activation, deactivation, officer authority to review footage, and supervisor authority to review footage. One clear difference involves citizen notification of the BWC: The Tempe policy recommends that officers tell citizens the encounter is being recorded, whereas the Spokane policy makes no recommendation.<sup>2</sup>

In Spokane, the focus groups were arranged and scheduled by the police department, but command staff personnel were not present during the focus group sessions. In Tempe, the focus groups were scheduled by the authors directly with unit sergeants, and no command staff were present or involved in recruitment.<sup>3</sup> In both cities, we received written consent from all participants and audio-recorded the focus groups. Focus groups lasted between 30 min and 2 hr depending on the size of the group and their input. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo Version 11. The focus group questions were determined by the research team based on the prominent public rhetoric about police BWCs as well as the existing empirical guidance on the issue (White, 2014). The full list of questions can be found in Table 2. Each unit was asked about the (1) benefits and (2) drawbacks of BWCs for the police generally and their unit specifically, (3) how they incorporate BWCs into their work, and (4) issues that other departments should consider before implementing BWCs in units such as theirs. Focus group transcripts were deductively coded to provide insights into these specific areas of focus.

## **Results**

In this section, we begin by reporting themes from our focus groups with SUs that are consistent with the themes that have been reported by general patrol officers as documented in the literature (Gaub et al., 2016; Jennings et al., 2014; Mesa Police Department, 2013; see also Smykla et al.,

**Table 1.** List of Specialty Units With Number of Participants per Unit.

Spokane (WA) Police Department		Tempe (AZ) Police Department	
Unit Name	Count	Unit Name	Count
Traffic	3	Traffic	8
K9	4	K9	6
Neighborhood Conditions (NCO; downtown)	6	Bicycle (bike; downtown)	9
Tactical (TAC; crowds and special events)	3	Special Events	1
Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) <sup>a</sup>	3	SWAT/Tactical Response Unit (TRU)	3
Crisis Negotiations	1	Gangs	6
Dignitary Protection <sup>a</sup>	3	Mounted	3
Patrol Anti-Crime Team <sup>a</sup> (PACT)	5	Criminal Investigations Bureau <sup>b</sup> (CIB)	5
Neighborhood Resources (NRO)	3		

<sup>a</sup>A unit that did not wear body-worn cameras at the time of the focus group. <sup>b</sup>A plainclothes detective unit.

**Table 2.** List of Questions Used in Semistructured Focus Groups.

1. Do you believe that body-worn cameras (BWCs) are useful for police officers generally (not just for those in your unit)? What about for your unit?
2. What do you think are the most important benefits of BWCs generally? (Ask officers to rank order or identify the Top 3–4)
3. Are the benefits for your unit the same or different than the benefits generally?
4. What do you think are the most important drawbacks of BWCs generally? (Ask officers to rank order or identify the Top 3–4)
5. Are the drawbacks for your unit the same or different than the drawbacks generally?
6. What has been the biggest challenge to integrating BWCs into your daily work?
7. Provide some examples of how you have used BWCs in the field that is unique to your unit (or different from the traditional use in patrol).
8. Do you think the benefits of BWCs outweigh the drawbacks for the police department as a whole? What about for your unit?
9. What are some examples of issues that departments should consider when making decisions about BWC purchasing, policy, training, and implementation that are relevant to your unit?
10. Is there anything else that we have not covered that you would like to mention about how BWCs affect your unit or general patrol or the differences between them?

2016, regarding command personnel). We then highlight benefits and challenges that are unique to SUs. In some cases, the benefits and challenges of implementing BWCs with SUs are not wholly different from general patrol but rather are different perspectives of the same theme. We differentiate between these to best highlight how SUs experience and use this technology. To provide some insight into the representativeness of each theme across these units, Table 3 provides a full list of themes and identifies the units that endorsed each theme.

### *General Benefits and Drawbacks of BWCs*

Many of the benefits and drawbacks noted by the SUs were similar to those cited by general patrol. Specialty unit officers believed BWCs are valuable tools because they offer evidentiary benefits, document citizens' criminal behavior, protect officers against false complaints, assist with more accurate report writing, and a few mentioned that it causes citizens to behave more civilly. Some concerns about BWCs among the sample were also consistent with general patrol, most commonly that upon first wearing the cameras, it is difficult to remember to activate. Additional

**Table 3.** Number of Specialty Units Endorsing Major Themes.

Themes	Frequency
Benefits consistent with patrol	
Evidentiary value for court	15
Protect officers from false complaints	13
Aid report writing	10
Civilizing effect	2
Drawbacks consistent with patrol	
Assimilation issues/remembering to activate	12
Resource burden/added work	11
Saying or doing something wrong on video	7
Bugs with the technology	6
Manage public perceptions/camera doesn't show everything	6
Disciplinary "fishing expeditions"	5
Citizen privacy concerns	4
Minimize value of officer word	4
Compromise officer safety/hesitation	3
Benefits for specialty units	
Investigative tool for closing cases	7
Innovative uses	5
Document de-escalation and lifesaving efforts	5
Training tool	5
Drawbacks for specialty units	
Incompatibility with equipment	9
Call environment or criminal behavior difficult to capture	8
High volume of videos/fast-paced calls	6
Compromise tactics and communications	5
Long wait times pose activation questions	4
Mature/graphic content	4
Long shifts deteriorate battery	4
Perceptions of police tactics/worry about mistakes	3
Special populations being recorded	3
Compromise informants	2

themes were as follows: the public has misguided perceptions about what BWCs can offer, that BWCs might cause officers to hesitate before using force, and that the prevalence of video footage minimizes the value of the police officer's word (i.e., if there is no video, it never happened or the officer is hiding something). In addition, SUs talked about the resource burden that BWCs have on agencies and officers themselves. Specific to investigative units, both the Criminal Investigations Bureau (CIB) and the Neighborhood Resources (NRO) units said that, when building a case, they could not feasibly watch all available video and were forced to balance the desire to know all the facts with the impracticality of watching every minute of footage.

### ***BWC Benefits Unique to SUs***

As noted, officers in SUs endorsed many of the benefits also reported by general patrol officers. However, they sometimes went on to describe how these benefits applied in unique ways to assist them in their specialized missions.<sup>4</sup> For example, officers in the Spokane traffic unit talked about how the video can assist with their report writing. They are required to fill out a "race form" every time they make a traffic stop as part of the department's efforts to collect data on traffic enforcement

and minimize bias in stops. These officers said they cite the video on the form in cases where they are unsure of someone's race.

[Drivers] are like "Why are you asking me [for my race]? Are you stopping me because I'm black or Russian?" So sometimes I don't know if I want to go down this road here and get into an argument with somebody over trying to identify them. That's where it's like, if they have a question watch the footage. (Traffic)

Many SUs said they use BWCs to document searches and arrests to show that proper procedure was followed.

I keep it on now during searches of vehicles. I didn't before, but now . . . I keep it on because it's good for them to see where we're finding [evidence] and so they can't claim that we found it somewhere else. (Gang Unit)

Other units similarly thought BWCs were useful for documenting procedures and protecting against false complaints.

You give the command, the dog pops off and comes back to you, and that's captured on camera. I mean that's gold to us. Later down the road if there is any civil litigation, it's there. It's captured for the argument that the dog stayed on too long. (Canine [K9])

I have used them in a couple parades to deal with petition-gatherers who are violating rules . . . All we're asking them to do is move over here, so when they come back later down the road saying that you violated my rights, we can say "No, we clearly asked you to do this." (Tactical [TAC])

Officers in the tactical unit noted that they sometimes interact with people who are trying to make a public statement by being arrested during a protest. In these cases, officers feel it is important to document the full interaction to protect themselves against false complaints.

With a lot of the protests, there's some people that want to get arrested . . . [so we] videotape the arrest so there's no complaint somewhere down the road that any officer used excessive force or anything like that. And we've done that plenty of times with the political protests. (TAC)

Similarly, units discussed how BWCs are useful for documenting criminal behavior and other factors usually only captured in the officer's written report. Traffic units use BWCs to document infractions and accidents, if possible, as well as accident scenes and interviews. Officers in the NRO unit in Spokane use BWCs to record problem or drug properties they are building cases against. Officers who work security at large events will activate their BWC when they feel the crowd might be growing disorderly.

I could see myself at a large event as a TAC officer trying to go through a crowd that I might think would be a problem and I see something coming. It would certainly be advantageous to have that camera and be able to turn it on and walk through that crowd so that when it comes time to explain what led to, maybe it turned bad for that event, you can use the camera to look at it because there are so many variables that it can be difficult to articulate. (TAC)

SUs also reported benefits of BWCs beyond those reported by general patrol officers. To start, specialized officers shared innovative ways they use BWCs to achieve their specific missions or in investigative ways to assist in the closure of criminal cases. The detectives in Tempe both wear cameras themselves and use patrol officers' video footage to further investigations. They sometimes

review video footage before conducting follow-up interviews and have also used footage to identify and locate suspects. Officers from other units, such as the traffic officer quoted below, similarly reported using BWCs as an investigative tool to gather evidence and facilitate prosecution.

They had some construction barricades up and the car that I ended up stopping and arresting the guy for DUI made a wide right turn and . . . he totally didn't need to do that. But I didn't want his argument to be "Well, there were construction barriers." So on my way back to the jail to process him, I drove that same route and . . . I took my camera off, just held it out the window, and captured about 7–10 vehicles making the turn properly with those same barricades. (Traffic)

Crisis negotiators in Spokane reported numerous innovative ways to use their cameras when dealing with people who are suicidal, mentally ill, or in crisis.

I took my smartphone and logged into the camera and set it on a railing. I can't remember if we zip-tied it to a post, but we had gotten close enough to a male, very drugged and disoriented. The closer you got the more he threatened. But we were able to zip tie [the BWC] to the railing on the bridge and then back up. (Crisis negotiations)

Specialty unit officers further appreciated how BWCs document their efforts to de-escalate and gain a citizen's compliance before using force. The video in such cases could refute a suspect's false claims or protect officers from an excessive force or wrongful death lawsuit. The K9 officers noted they usually give the "K9 announcements" (the statement officers are required to make before releasing the dog) a few extra times for the camera, so there is no question the suspect was aware they were police officers, that they had a K9, and that the K9 would be released if verbal commands were not followed. Likewise, crisis negotiators were grateful for BWC footage because they are sometimes sued after they are unable to prevent someone from committing suicide.

Say that person did not [survive] and they jumped [committed suicide]. What it means . . . is showing that in good faith that we spent this much time talking to this person and all the things that we said . . . to try to get this person to not harm themselves or others. (Crisis negotiations)

Finally, a few specialty unit officers described unique BWC training applications. This was more common in Tempe than in Spokane. Many units view videos in training. For example, a few units show footage to recruits and new officers assigned to their units to demonstrate successes and failures, falls, turns, maneuvers, and tactics. They will also review videos as a group or squad to assess and critically review performance.

We're able to take incidents that happened on the street, good or bad, and then use them when we're teaching our bike schools . . . good examples of what we're trying to teach, and then examples of where-bike cops have messed up on stuff, and then to learn from that . . . we probably have 20 videos now that we'll rotate through that we can show the bike schools. (Bike squad)

What would come to your mind that you would do in this situation? How would you approach this? Would you come in this direction? Would you avoid these barriers? Did you think about the ground that's over here that is going to be slick and slippery? Would you go up on that sidewalk? Would you not? (Mounted)

The gang unit in Tempe said they have hung a BWC on the wall during training to allow officers to review their performance afterward. One officer reported being shocked after seeing how long it took for her to draw her gun. In addition to unit training, officers said they view their own footage recorded on the job for personal improvement.

Over the weekend I reviewed it so I could hear my own voice, my own tone, to see if there were things I could've done different. It's a great way to reflect on some of the ways you lure things and say things. [I ask myself], how could I tweak that just a little bit? (Crisis negotiations)

### ***BWC Concerns Unique to SUs***

SUs experience unique challenges related to the practical use of BWCs in their daily work. Officers who work in plainclothes (or riot gear, as with the special events units) said they had trouble mounting the camera on their uniforms. Officers with take-home vehicles had numerous issues related to BWCs, particularly in terms of charging the device and uploading videos. While there are options for downloading and charging in the field, several officers noted the process has drained the battery in their old Crown Victoria patrol cars.

I actually tried downloading [my videos in the car] the other day . . . I let it download, went back and my car was dead. So we get a page, get a call out and hey I got to throw on this gear, get your dog geared up, jump in the car. Shit [car's dead] . . . Opposite of that is a huge problem. So if we have to go to the station to pump our camera in there, okay great, it downloads every time. Alright, that problem is solved. But now we're at home and we get called out for a SWAT call and we gotta go there. I'm not going to take the time to go from home to the station, grab my camera, and go to the call because everybody is waiting on us to search the building. (K9)

Other units, such as the bike unit and the mounted unit, said it was difficult to upload and label videos because their workspace did not come equipped with a mobile computer. Another logistical issue is that officers in SUs may not work standard shift lengths, and the BWC battery life may not be adequate. "There's a special event coming up November 20th, Iron Man. I will report to work at 5 in the morning and I will go home at 1:00 the next morning. And that's the reality of our job here" (Special events).

Officers in certain SUs have more fast-paced and dynamic work shifts (such as the Tempe bike squad that works bar patrol or the traffic units). To capture every encounter from start to finish, they would either need a "5-min buffer" on their camera or have to maintain continuous recording during the majority of the shift. Officers also expressed concern that the BWC simply adds another task to the growing number of things they must remember to do. This problem can be compounded for SUs, who sometimes perform dual roles, fill in for patrol officers between tasks or face a higher volume of calls for service.

I charged it like I was supposed to. I tried to label the calls when I'm supposed to. But sometimes you get sent on another call and then you have to try to listen to the computer system find a report number to put it on the next one and there's so much stuff to do. It's like, "Oh my gosh, you have to remember to da da da da da [clicking buttons]" before you even clear. But no, radio wants you on another call and they need help somewhere else, this is more patrol role, and it's like, "Okay, so I have to go back," and then you forget, and you don't label it right, and then you get a nasty email, "Why didn't you do this right?" (NRO)

Units with a higher volume of calls for service also find it difficult to keep up with the video tagging, particularly when one call overlaps with another. This can lead to multiple calls being recorded on one video, and they must figure out how to properly tag several different calls on a single video. Traffic units said they already complete a packet of paperwork after each traffic stop, which can include race contact forms, citations, DUI field sobriety test results, and arrest paperwork. Labeling a video simply adds yet another task to complete after a traffic stop. Finally, the Tempe

mounted unit said that since they do not have access to laptop computers while they work, they have to call on the radio and wait for dispatch to verbally give them a report number in order to tag the video. This process gets even more complicated when they record several videos in a row or when they move quickly from one call to the next.

The responsibilities of SUs also pose unique policy issues that are different from patrol. For example, some units such as dignitary, K9, SWAT, and TAC have assignments that include prolonged periods of inactivity interrupted by a problem or threat, which can raise questions about activation and deactivation. Officers said they activate the BWC whenever they initiate a contact or when they perceive a potential problem, but in the heat of the moment, they may not have the chance to turn the camera on (or they may forget).

It's usually a lot easier to determine when you're going to turn [the BWC] on or not in patrol because you show up to a call and you're there. As opposed to, you know, especially mounted or bikes, you have a lot of things that happen right in front of you because you're out there. There's lots of people moving back and forth, and things just happen . . . . So, determining when to actually turn your camera on, and remembering to turn your camera on before you just grab onto somebody that happens to be right in front of you [is difficult]. (Mounted)

My last contact was on a SWAT call and I didn't have my camera on . . . at no point would I have been able to turn that camera on, make that conscious decision to turn it on, take my focus away from what was going on. The guy had already shot at us, he came out of the house holding a four-foot sword and I mean, this thing is rapidly evolving. There's no time to cognitively think, "Okay, now I'm going to turn my camera on." (K9)

In Tempe, the CIB detectives are given more discretion on when to activate than patrol officers due to the investigatory nature of their work. The department leadership recognized that some citizens, witnesses, and victims may be reluctant to cooperate with detectives if they are being recorded. Crisis negotiators sometimes interact with mentally ill individuals who may grow agitated when faced with a recording device. Negotiators said the BWC sometimes damages the rapport they develop with citizens in crisis. However, turning off the BWC presents its own problems for the officer. For example, department policy allows the NRO unit in Spokane to deactivate the camera if a citizen refuses to provide information because of the recording. Officers appreciate the need for discretion but are also concerned about the consequences of turning off the BWC.

She was basically giving up her ex about how he's doing drugs, you know, and I was out there, I did have the camera on and he did end up doing some federal time. But he knew I had video of everything she said about him . . . I like it that we have more leeway when we turn it off and on but there's always—did you choose to turn it off at that time because you did something bad? (NRO)

Officers also expressed concern about the nature of their jobs, particularly how it sometimes involves the most controversial, brutal aspects of police work. Officers were worried that videos of truly dangerous people, K9 bites, or violent suicides (among other situations) would wind up as public record or viral on the Internet.

I went in on a guy who shot himself in the head . . . So now I've got this guy, shot himself in the head, he's bleeding. It's not one of those great big, you know, instantly dead. He's sitting there laboring to breathe. And if I have my body camera on, all that is on a body camera, and do you really want a family looking at that? The guy's last moments alive? Not probably what the average person wants to have out there. So, do we clean that out before the public records request comes? You have a brother of this dude who says you know, "I think this guy was killed." So now he does a public records request to see the body camera. Now he has that. (PACT)

SUs also pointed out that sometimes effective police tactics may not appear humane to the untrained eye, particularly when they do not portray the full context of the situation.

We use some techniques that could be very alarming to the public. For example, we have a personality that we're trying to tire out, we're trying to take them on an emotional rollercoaster because it's exhausting and they can no longer function well . . . . So if we're taking someone down that road, we say things, we call them "jacking them up." So what we'll do, we try to create an anger response, way up there, and then you draw them back down . . . . So you could see somebody getting ahold of that making a complete deal [out of it], you know, or only showing one side of it. (Crisis negotiations)

One of the things that I tend to struggle with the camera being on is . . . this isn't like train your golden retriever, I mean it's a physical job, and it's a physically demanding job on the dog and some people just don't understand how these dogs have to be trained . . . . I mean it hasn't come up, but there's times where you have to have a heart to heart with your dog about him not performing because if he doesn't perform at the peak, it's not just, "Oh well, the cover is blown" . . . I mean it's putting people's safety in jeopardy. So they have to perform at that peak ability . . . but in court . . . somebody brings up that it looks like I'm beating my dog just giving them physical corrections that we use for training. (K9)

In a few cases, SUs said having cameras would have an overall adverse effect on their unit by either rendering them less effective or putting officer and public safety unjustifiably at risk. These were teams that worked with confidential informants (PACT), used advanced tactics (K9, PACT, Dignitary, and SWAT), or worked undercover (Dignitary).

A lot of times they will start to accuse people of snitching on things like Facebook and if they already have that feeling they can go back and recall all the body camera videos and they'll see that if they got stopped and had dope and didn't go to jail it won't be very hard for them to connect the dots. They obviously committed a crime and didn't go to jail. These people are savvy and they will put it together quick. Obviously, we are dealing with the worst of the worst and it's only going to take once and it'll get somebody killed and we are going to be on the hook for it. (PACT)

A few of the units interviewed in Spokane did not wear BWCs. The SWAT team and dignitary protection unit were not equipped with BWCs to protect their tactics from becoming public; the PACT team did not have cameras at the time of the focus group but were scheduled to have them soon after.

If somebody were to want to do counter-surveillance on us and try and learn our tactics, [BWC video is] obviously an avenue for them to explore . . . . We try and keep ourselves somewhat mysterious so that we have an advantage, or at least not a disadvantage. We don't have very many advantages when doing this anyways. We're kind of waiting for something bad to happen, so any advantage we can have of trying to be mysterious and elusive is to our advantage. (Dignitary)

Officers in the K9 unit (which had BWCs) expressed a similar concern.

There are things that people can do to defeat the dog or get away from the dog and bad guys are getting more and more in tune to that and they do a lot of research on how they can beat dogs or how they can get away from the police. Anything they can do to try and get an advantage from us they do . . . . I mean if once these videos get released they're watching that, and they're watching it as "How can I beat that, how can I have that dog not figure me out" . . . . it is the most vulnerable spot that we can be in. (K9)

Officers who work undercover assignments, such as the dignitary protection unit in Spokane, said BWCs would short-circuit their mission by allowing them to be identified as law enforcement: "If

they had a body camera on, I mean it's obvious that they're police officers at that point so it just really negates the whole point of having them there . . . it would just be counterproductive." The dignitary unit also raised concerns about how BWCs could affect their working relationship with federal agencies, which do not use BWCs and likely would not want their activities recorded.

## **Discussion**

As more police agencies move to implement BWCs, it is increasingly apparent that BWC programs and policies are not one-size-fits-all (White et al., in press). The same can be said for different units within a single agency, as a BWC program and policy devised for patrol officers may not be well suited for SUs. The mission, operational focus, and activities can vary significantly across patrol and nonpatrol units. SUs are created for specific purposes—handling gang-related criminal activity; facilitating K9 searches for drugs, explosives, and/or people; or providing specialized protection for dignitaries—and their work tasks may have nuanced needs (e.g., a requirement of anonymity or an exceptional concern for the safety of their clientele). Each SU's unique mission means that their experiences with BWCs vary from the experience of the average patrol officer.

The results from the current study highlight these differences and underscore the importance of carefully considering the implications of BWCs for each unit's mission. For example, the stakes of police–citizen interactions for certain SUs may be much higher than for general patrol. SUs are called out during difficult, potentially violent situations—hostage-taking scenarios, suicides, and escaping dangerous felons. Officers in these units are trained in tactics designed to quickly and efficiently handle these types of crises. Many officers expressed concern that video footage would be taken out of context, either by specific individuals motivated to catch the police in wrongdoing or by the public unequipped to understand footage of a graphic nature. Furthermore, the unique mission of these units means officers may be more likely to use force (e.g., K9s, rubber bullets, high-powered rifles, and tear gas). These levels of force, according to participating officers, can be misinterpreted by the uneducated observer as excessive.

Our study suggests that SUs present challenges for agencies in terms of policy and procedure. For units that work longer-than-average shifts, policies developed for general patrol may not translate well. Specific policy positions on activation, video-tagging, and downloading may have to be altered for SUs. For other units, such as those working with dignitaries or confidential informants, BWCs may be altogether inappropriate for their mission. For some SUs, then, our findings suggest that a completely different policy and program may be warranted.

The findings presented here should be considered in the context of several study limitations. This study solicited the perceptions of 72 officers in 17 SUs in two cities. Department culture and ecological context vary tremendously and the results from Spokane and Tempe may not be applicable to other jurisdictions. Additionally, the challenges faced by SUs could vary also significantly by jurisdiction. Other agencies may have SUs that the two study departments do not have. Moreover, smaller/larger departments, departments in a different geographical region, or those with a more difficult path toward integrating BWCs into their workflow may have different experiences when equipping SUs with BWCs. Also, the results presented here represent the self-reported attitudes of officers. The traditional limitations of methods which rely on self-report apply to this study. That said, the authors were well-integrated into each of the study police departments for several years. They conducted dozens of hours of ride-alongs with both patrol officers and officers in the SUs examined here, and they interacted informally with officers in each department over a period of several years. The themes reported in the current study are consistent with the observations of the authors during their work on the larger project. Finally, both sites used the same vendor, Axon (formerly Taser International), and both primarily use the Axon Body or Body2 chest-mounted camera model. With more than 60 vendors in the BWC market, the technical considerations may

vary considerably by vendor. Additional research with SUs in other departments will inform our understanding of the challenges of implementing BWCs in SUs.

## Conclusion

Our findings suggest that SUs require an equally specialized approach to the implementation of BWCs. Thus, we propose several recommendations for police departments considering BWCs for SUs. First, departments should seek the input of the officers in each unit and have an open dialogue before deploying cameras. Agencies should also pilot-test cameras with members of each unit and incorporate their perspectives into both the planning process and policy development. There are likely many similarities between standard patrol units and SUs as noted by the focus groups. Like patrol, officers in SUs believe BWCs are beneficial for investigating complaints, provide valuable evidence, but they also have the potential to be used for “fishing expeditions” by supervisors looking to “jam-up” officers under their command. They also, however, view BWCs through the lens of their assignments, seeing both benefits and challenges that are not as relevant for general patrol. SUs are concerned about how their videos, which often display more (and sometimes more graphic) use of force than average, will be interpreted by a public not used to seeing the extremes of police work. These unique viewpoints reflect differences in the needs of—and hurdles experienced by—SUs when using BWCs. Moreover, the results presented in Table 3 show that officers assigned to SUs also vary considerably in terms of their attitudes on the benefits and drawbacks of BWCs. In simple terms, not all SUs are the same when it comes to BWCs. Departments considering deployment of BWCs to SUs should proactively assess these differences within their own department by collaborating with officers in each SU from the beginning.

Second, BWCs may not be appropriate for all SUs. BWC policies and programs that work well in patrol divisions may not translate seamlessly to all SUs. Modifications to policy may be required. Technical needs, such as mobile charging stations or camera-mounting options, could vary widely by unit. Technical problems have technical solutions, so long as agencies seek them out and plan for them. As noted in the focus groups, officers with take-home vehicles or who spend long shifts away from the station (such as surveillance details) may need flexibility in the ability to charge their cameras and download video; the Fayetteville (NC) Police Department, for example, developed their own mobile charging stations for SWAT vehicles (Gaub et al., 2017). Similarly, some units such as tactical and investigations may need wider latitude in matters of policy. Departments could make accommodations for the specific needs of SUs; permitting traffic and K9 officers to charge their cameras at home, for example, provides greater latitude for the officer and could reduce overtime costs by not requiring officers to return to a station at the end of every shift. Additionally, allowing tactical officers and those working surveillance details to “modify” their cameras (so long as it does not inhibit operation of the camera and is not permanent) could reduce anxiety associated with the tactical disadvantages of flashing/bright lights.

Third, departments should also be prepared to educate the public (including juries) about the limits of BWCs, particularly for SUs. Some situations are not conducive to BWCs, such as close-quarter and nighttime engagements, undercover work, surveillance operations, and operations in which SUs work cooperatively with other agencies such as federal law enforcement. Additionally, the strategies and tactics used by some units may limit what is captured on video. While department leadership will need to manage public expectations regarding BWCs generally, it is especially important for incidents involving SUs.

Our study echoes the existing research on officer perceptions of BWCs: Officers in SUs are generally supportive of BWCs. However, they experience mission-specific challenges that are not always easily addressed by patrol-driven BWC policy and practice. For some units, only minor modifications to policy and practice may be required. For other units, wholesale changes may be

needed. And for still others, BWCs may simply be inappropriate. Given the results presented here, agency leadership should proceed cautiously and collaboratively when considering expansion of BWCs beyond patrol.

### Authors' Note

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### Notes

1. White, Todak, and Gaub (2017, 2018) reported relatively low levels of awareness of the body-worn camera (BWC) among citizens, 28.5% in Spokane and 23.6% in Tempe.
2. A more comprehensive comparison of the Spokane and Tempe BWC policies exceeds the scope of the current study. For a discussion of variation in BWC policies more generally, see White, Flippin, and Katz (2017).
3. In Tempe, the detectives in the Criminal Investigations Bureau were assigned cameras approximately 6 months following Phase 2, and detectives assigned to the Special Investigations Bureau received their cameras at an even later date (those assigned to undercover details did not receive cameras for those assignments). In Spokane, the Dignitary Team does not wear BWCs, but we met with that unit to understand why the department chose not to use cameras for that detail.
4. One anonymous manuscript reviewer called these “different flavors” of the same themes.

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