

Can Cameras Stop the Killings? Racial Differences in Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Body-Worn Cameras in Police Encounters^{1,2}

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Recent killings of blacks by police have renewed a national discussion about crime, racism, unjust treatment, and implicit bias. Outfitting police officers with body-worn cameras (BWC) is heralded by federal and state lawmakers as one solution to providing more transparency during police encounters. Missing from this discussion is what everyday citizens think about the potential effectiveness of BWC. Using data on residents of Prince George's County, Maryland, this study explores racial differences in views about police treatment and the effectiveness of BWC. We find that nonwhites report more fear of and mistreatment by the police than whites. Regarding BWC, we find that respondents are either supporters or skeptics. On one hand, respondents either believe that BWC will illuminate the difficulties of policing—police supporters—or create more transparency to hold officers more accountable for their actions—citizen supporters. On the other hand, skeptics fall into one of two types—respondents who think that BWC may put police officers more at risks—privacy skeptics—or those who do not see BWC as structurally changing the power dynamics between citizens and police officers—structural skeptics. We conclude by discussing how BWC may operate as a solution to improve interactions between citizens and the police but not necessarily alter power relations.

KEY WORDS: body-worn cameras; police; race; racism; social control; violence.

INTRODUCTION

Recent killings of blacks by police have renewed a national discussion about crime, racism, unjust treatment, and implicit bias. Outfitting police officers with body-worn cameras (BWC) is heralded by federal and state lawmakers as one solution to providing more transparency during police encounters. In fact, President Barack Obama via the Department of Justice allocated over \$20 million in funding for BWC since 2015.¹

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¹ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-awards-over-23-million-funding-body-worn-camera-pilot-program-support-law>

Limited research on BWC shows that they reduce citizen complaints and use of force (Perry 2015; Ready and Young 2015; White 2014). Other research, however, suggests that policing reforms that provide more visibility and transparency do not always provide more accountability. Stuart (2011:327) highlights how the acquittal of the four officers who beat Rodney King, despite condemning video footage, suggests that no amount of evidence is impervious to “reinterpretation and reframing.” This research highlights the complex relationship between accountability, transparent interactions, and power status relations.

Missing from this discussion is what everyday citizens think about the potential effectiveness of BWC. Public attitudes about BWC matter because attitudes reflect power status structures and intergroups relations. Power status analysis is useful for understanding systems of stratification and emotions (Kemper and Collins 1990). Here, attitudes about BWC inform relations between police and various racial groups and illuminate the theoretical distinction between transparency and accountability and their role in intergroup relations. We aim to fill this void in the literature by drawing on data from a large qualitative study with residents of Prince George’s County, Maryland. Respondents were asked to provide details about their perceptions of and experiences with police as well as their views on BWC. Prince George’s County is a unique laboratory because it has the largest number of middle-class blacks of any county in the United States. Middle class can be defined in a myriad of ways including self-identification or having a bachelor’s degree and professional job (Hunt and Ray 2012; Landry and Marsh 2011; Marsh et al. 2007). Yet, Prince George’s County also has a group of lower-class blacks, a growing Latino population, and a sizable immigrant population. It is also fitting because the county police department is in the process of implementing BWC.

Given existing research on racial differences in treatment by police (Gilbert and Ray 2016; Hirschfield 2015; Krieger et al. 2015), we may expect that blacks and Latinos, relative to whites, will report less favorable interactions with police. Accordingly, blacks and Latinos may also be more favorable to BWC because they believe BWC will provide more accountability, protection, and transparency between citizens and police officers. However, some respondents may express skepticism about whether BWC will improve power status relations between citizens and the police. Others may view BWC as violating citizens and police officers’ constitutional right to privacy. We explore these possibilities in this article.

Herein, we provide an overview of existing research on racial differences in police interactions as well as research on the effectiveness of BWC. We draw on literature on power and accountability structures to contextualize racial differences in police interactions and potential findings on views about BWC. We then discuss our methodology, present the findings, and conclude with some directive suggestions for police departments on ways to manufacture transparency beyond BWC.

BACKGROUND

Racial Differences in Police Treatment

Existing literature in sociology, social psychology, public health, criminology, and political science provide evidence of racial bias in policing. More

specifically, research documents that police officers are more likely to use force against blacks and Latinos relative to whites (Gabrielson, Jones, and Sagara 2015). In their analysis of police killings over time, Krieger and colleagues (2015) find that blacks are 3.5 times more likely to be victims of police killings than whites. Gilbert and Ray (2016) argue that existing laws provide liberties to the police to use excessive force. Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation demonstrates that the reason for blacks' higher likelihood of being killed by police is not due to a higher tendency of blacks to commit crime. First, violent crime has significantly decreased since the 1990s despite police killings increasing. Second, data show that blacks, compared to whites, are less likely to be fighting the police or have a gun at the time they are killed by police (Gilbert and Ray 2016).

Instead, research draws attention to racial profiling and implicit bias as factors for racial differences in police treatment (Eberhardt et al. 2004; Ray 2015). For example, a 2011 study using stop-and-frisk data from New York City found that blacks and Latinos were more likely to be stopped and have force used against them (Krupanski et al. 2009). The study also found that the police were less likely to find weapons or contraband on blacks and Latinos relative to whites. This is why the New York State Supreme Court ruled stop and frisk as unconstitutional (*Floyd v. City of New York* 2013). Studies, including reports by the Department of Justice, conducted in other cities such as Saint Louis, Baltimore, and Nashville show similar patterns and highlight how black and Latino motorists are stopped more frequently than white motorists (U.S. Department of Justice 2016).

Research also shows that a middle-class status does not protect blacks from a higher likelihood of police brutality. Krieger et al.'s (2015) study found that middle-class and working-class blacks had a similar likelihood of being killed by police. The same was true for middle-class and working-class whites. Yet the likelihood of whites being killed was much lower than blacks regardless of social class. Social psychological research points to implicit bias and stereotyping as culprits for this disparity. In his examination of the social relations between whites and blacks in the twenty-first century, Feagin (2010) found that whites have limited social class cues to tell differences among black men (i.e., professor, lawyer, delivery man, criminal). Feagin (2010:108) states, "Many Whites have fearful reactions to a Black man encountered on streets, in public transport, and in elevators." Anderson (2011:255) conceptualizes these types of racialized incidents as "nigger moments [as] the treatment Black people received in public is based on negative assumptions, as strangers they encounter fall back on scripts, roles, and stereotypes that raise doubts about the Black person's claim to decency and middle-class status. . . . A strange Black male can be viewed as a criminal or crime-prone until he can prove he is not, which is difficult to do in the split-second interaction that typically occurs in public spaces."

Some scholars draw attention to the "wages of whiteness" (Bobo 2000; Du Bois 1992 [1935]) as highlighting not just the worse treatment of blacks and Latinos by police, but the better treatment by police afforded to whites. Du Bois (1992 [1935]) noted that whites are given a "psychological wage" in social interactions. Hughey (2010) and Lewis (2004) extend this work by illuminating how whiteness is about hegemony and power. Accordingly, a higher social-class status may not only afford some whites the ability to have favorable interactions with police but also the

psychological wage to disregard the negative treatment bestowed onto minorities. In their analysis of the experiences of black and white fraternity men on predominately white college campuses, Ray and Rosow (2012) found that a white racial identity affords white men certain advantages in public spaces such as the ability to blend into a crowd, interact as individuals, and experience a lack of accountability for the behavior of other white men and the treatment of minorities and women. Black men, on the other hand, experienced a hyperlevel of visibility and more policing in these same spaces (Ray 2013).

Literature on visibility and accountability structures points to interactions and cultural beliefs that make up and sustain the racial status hierarchy. On the micro level, nonwhites are more likely to be perceived as hostile regardless of their expression (Hugenberg and Bodenhausen 2004). On the macro level, whites are compelled to politically organize around symbolic racism in response to racial status threat (Willer, Feinberg, and Wetts 2014). Kemper and Collins (1990) argue that power and status are relational dynamics of social structure that operate at the micro- and macro level. Furthermore, status and power are dimensionally situated in social structure through repetitive microinteractions. Defense of the racial status hierarchy manifests as a motivation for behaviors that “stabilize resource and power” inequalities across social relations (Ridgeway 2014:1). Scant evidence suggests police-citizen relations are no exception. Altogether, this body of research suggests that blacks and Latinos may be less likely than whites to report positive interactions and views of the police.

Police Body-Worn Cameras as Racial Change Agents

Are police BWC the savior of relations between citizens and the police? Millions of dollars have been allocated by federal and local government agencies as well as nonprofits to implement BWC throughout the United States. Scant research suggests that BWC reduce harassment claims of citizens and use of force by police officers (Perry 2015; Ready and Young 2015; White 2014). Other research, however, shows that the intricacies of BWC matter for reducing violent use of force. For example, if police officers have the ability to turn BWC on and off, then the reduction in use of force becomes nonsignificant (Lajka 2015).

BWC is one agent among many for improving civilian-police interactions. The effectiveness of BWC must be understood in the context of the strengths and weaknesses of other efforts including community policing, hot-spot policing, antibias training, and intrapolice department diversity initiatives. Empirical work on community, problem-oriented, and hot-spot policing each demonstrate some positive attitudinal impacts on police-civilian relations (Skogan and Hartnett 1997; Walker and Archbold 2014). Evaluations of these policing reforms show that increased police attention to how community members define accountability and transparency directly correlate with positive relations. Ultimately, some of these reforms empower citizens, and yield positive affective outcomes predicted by power status models (Kemper 1991).

While some research is being established about the effectiveness of BWC, there is little scholarly understanding about how citizens view BWC and how these views

shape and are shaped by relations of status and power between police and citizens. Given research on racial differences in use of force, it is plausible to assume that blacks and Latinos may have positive feelings about BWC as a means to disrupt normative power status relations between police and citizens. Conversely, some skeptics may assert that the killings of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott III, and John Crawford III, along with the arrests of Sandra Bland and Freddie Gray, were video-recorded and did not lead to overwhelming changes in policing policies or the accountability of officers. Some respondents may not only be skeptical about the effectiveness of BWC, but they may also view BWC as a violation of privacy. Considering that blacks and Latinos may be more likely to support BWC to provide more transparency and hold police more accountable, whites may be more likely to view BWC as privacy violations.

METHODOLOGY

Setting

We conducted 81 interviews with residents of Prince George's County, Maryland. Prince George's County is viewed as a racially diverse county that borders the eastern part of Washington, DC. Prince George's County has a population of over 900,000 and spans a roughly 500 square mile geographic area. Known for its thriving black middle class, the county is home to five of the ten wealthiest black neighborhoods in the United States. Roughly one-third of county residents have at least a bachelor's degree, and the median household income is nearly \$75,000 a year. However, it also has a lower- and working-class population as roughly 10% of the county's population is classified as living in poverty.

A predominately minority county, the black population is 65% and the Latino population is nearly 18% (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The white population has actually increased from 19% in 2010 to 27% in 2015. Additionally, Prince George's County has a sizable immigrant population (20.7%) mostly including Latinos from South and Central America and African immigrants. Some Latinos identify as Hispanic/white or Hispanic/black. The Asian population is about 5%. As part of the greater Washington, DC area, Prince George's County is viewed as politically liberal and progressive.

The Prince George's Police Department (PGPD) is one of the largest and most racially diverse in the United States. It has over 1,700 officers and seven districts. The county plans to outfit all of its officers with BWC by 2019. Currently, PGPD is in phase I of its BWC implementation, which includes outfitting roughly 100 police officers across its seven districts with BWC. Our study provides a pulse for how citizens view their interactions with police officers and whether they think BWC will improve interactions and relations.

Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted by undergraduate students taking courses on race and class in Prince George's County. Students were trained throughout the

semester by professors and graduate students to conduct in-depth interviews on police interactions. In addition to students completing the Institute Review Board CITI Training to certify researchers, they completed a training consisting of four sessions that included an overview of the research project, a lecture on in-depth interviewing that included critiquing exemplars of qualitative research inquiry, two sessions of peer-to-peer interviews, and mock interviews with graduate students. Students were placed into groups of two to either interview people attending local churches, community centers, or malls, or associates of other students who were born and/or raised in the county. Respondents were solicited via listservs if they attended local churches or community centers. Some students canvassed local malls to solicit interviews. Students who grew up in the county created a database of potential respondents that other students contacted to solicit interviews.

A majority of the face-to-face interviews had a primary and a secondary interviewer. This approach was established for the safety of the students as well as to allow for a check and balance of the interview procedures. Interviews were conducted at restaurants, coffee shops, churches, and respondents' homes. Thirty-two students conducted two interviews with residents of the county, three students conducted four interviews each, and two students conducted three interviews. To increase the number of Latino respondents, a graduate student studying Latin America conducted eight interviews in Spanish and completed a back translation of the interviews into English. Once interviews were completed, the investigators reviewed the transcripts for proficiency and clarity. Nine interviews were excluded from the study because the interviewers did not properly follow the interview guide.

The interview guide includes a total of 32 questions and five main thematic sections: (1) interactions with the police; (2) profiling and attire; (3) knowledge of BWC; (4) privacy and transparency; and (5) demographic background. Each interview lasted roughly 30 minutes, although some went as long as two hours and as short as a few minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the respondents. Following the interviews, the primary interviewer recorded field notes to capture aspects of the interview interactions that may not be evident in the transcripts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995).

Analytic Strategy

The interviews were transcribed by students and then checked by the researchers with the corresponding audio files. The researchers then coded the interviews by race, gender, social class, and prior police contact of the respondents according to theme. We used deductive and inductive reasoning as analytical approaches to "double fit" the data with emergent theory and literature (Ragin 2000). We initially used deductive reasoning to see if our findings by race for each major theme corresponded to existing literature on police interactions and racial profiling. We then used inductive reasoning to allow analytical categories to emerge as we searched for

similarities and differences in how respondents discuss their interactions with police officers and view BWC. After establishing patterns in the data, we searched the interviews thoroughly again looking for examples that both confirmed and contradicted emerging patterns. Our propositions were then refined or eliminated to explain these negative cases (Rizzo, Corsaro, and Bates 1992).

We should also note that considering the dearth of research in this area, a narrative approach is taken to allow respondents more space to elaborate on a topic. Narrative accounts allow not only “individual identity and its systems of meaning but also the teller’s culture and social world” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998:9). Accordingly, some of the quotations are lengthy to allow for the respondents the opportunity to fully explain the complexities of race, policing, and power status relationships in the United States.

Sample

As seen in Table I, the racial demographics of the respondents are similar to those of the county. This was purposeful sampling as the study design aimed to have racial representation that was similar to county demographics. Whites represent 21.5% of the sample, blacks represent 57%, Latinos represent 14%, and Asians represent 8% of the sample. Two respondents did not provide their race/ethnicity and one respondent identified as Native American. We included this respondent in the category with Asians. Our Asian respondents represented an array of nationalities and ethnicities including Korean, Pakistani, and Southeast Asian. Our Asian respondents are also younger than our black and Latino respondents. While whites have a similar mean age as Asians, there are more whites who are 40 years of age or older.

Nearly 40% of blacks, compared to 24% of whites, and 18% of Latinos report having a bachelor’s degree or higher. Four of the six Asian respondents report having at least a bachelor’s degree. Nonetheless, only one-third of the Asian respondents identified as middle class compared to roughly 64% of whites, blacks, and Latinos. All of the Asian and Latino respondents are employed, while 88% of whites and 80% of blacks are employed.

Table I. Sociodemographics by Race

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asians
Number of Respondents	17	45	11	6
Percentage of Sample	21.5%	57.0%	13.9%	7.6%
Age	27.5	33.2	34.7	27.7
Age Range	(19–63)	(18–67)	(18–62)	(21–33)
Self-Identify as Middle Class	64.7%	64.4%	63.6%	33.3%
Employed	88.2%	80.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Education				
High School	47.1%	42.2%	45.5%	16.7%
Some College	29.4%	20.0%	27.3%	16.7%
Bachelor’s or Higher	23.5%	37.8%	18.2%	66.7%
Someone Close in or Retired Law Enforcement	41.2%	44.4%	45.5%	16.7%

FINDINGS

Racial Differences in Interactions With the Police

The interviews suggest racial differences in interactions and relations with the police. Although respondents from all racial groups report having some positive or neutral interactions with police officers, nonwhites were more likely than whites to report negative encounters. Social class background was not a protective status marker for minorities in reducing negative police encounters. Below are some representative quotations from respondents by race when asked how positive from 1 to 10 have their interactions with police officers been. Crystal, who is a 63-year-old white woman, reports that her interactions with police have been positive and may be related to her job as a pastor as well as her race and class privilege.

Most of the time when I interact with the police it's because they are coming to see me under... in an emergency. So I've had very positive interactions with them, or I've called them on the phone to say I've got a troubled person I need some help with.... And they've been really, really very helpful as community support, and I always welcome them to come to church if they want to come in their uniforms and stuff. And every time... I have been stopped for speeding every... every interaction that I've had was police has been cordial but also know that I'm a person of privilege and here at church I'm wearing a collar and look like a clergy person.

Some respondents add more nuance to differential experiences with the police by race. Sandra, a 24-year-old white woman, draws even more attention to the role of whiteness. She states, "I'm white, so I'm not targeted by the police. I think that like skin tone is a big part of this." Sandra, who reports previously working for the police department, speaks to a white purchase that whiteness scholars have noted (Feagin 2010; Hughey 2010; Lewis 2004). Ashley, a 33-year-old white woman, provides similar comments to Sandra about whether people are treated differently by the police. She states, "Yeah, so basically anyone who is not white. I do believe that it statistically show[s] that police treat black men or black women differently, meaning negatively—and also Latino men and women. So, yes, I do think that police treat people differently based on their race."

In line with the perspectives of Sandra and Ashley, nonwhite men in the sample were less likely to report positive interactions with the police. Oscar, a 44-year-old black male, states, "For the most part they've been favorable. I've had the typical experience like other African American males where I've had an officer pull a gun on me for no particular reason, so... it's kind a hard for me to put a number on that... you have one experience, but it sticks with you... um, I don't know maybe that'll be a 7 because one experience takes away from the others." Three aspects of Oscar's comments are noteworthy. First, he implies that having a gun pulled on a black male for no reason is normal. Second, he still gives his interactions with police a 7 despite experiencing unjust treatment. Third, Oscar's comments speak to collective memories regarding how a negative experience can be more memorable and trump a series of positive interactions.

Quincy, a 52-year-old black man, describes an incident similar to what Oscar notes regarding having a gun pulled on him:

I think the worst situation I have ever been in was when I was driving from Silver Spring into DC on a first date a few years ago with a girl and I was pulled over by about seven police officers who had their weapons. And I'm wondering what's going on. And it turns out there was a report of a stolen car that matched my car. But the irony of it was that the car that was stolen had DC tags and mine had plates from Maryland. It was kind of interesting first date to have guns drawn on you and of course I cooperated. I put my hands out the window. Gave them everything they were looking for and they apologized and sent me on my merry way.

Frank, a 47-year-old black man and Iraq War veteran, also reports similar racialized experiences. He responded, "Two or three... as a youngster, I was approached by police officers several times... being stretched on the concrete... [for] a robbery... You know we all kind of fit the description, you know, until they can decide it wasn't us they can treat us any kind of way. You know... you're laying on the concrete in the cold in the winter, hands behind your back, told to shut up, be quiet, no response." These racialized experiences that black men encounter may be the reason that blacks are more likely than other groups to report they fear that police violent force against them may be unwarranted. Blacks are also more likely than other groups to report fearing that police violent force may be used against a loved one.

Similar to black men, Latino men also report negative police encounters. Marco, a 19-year-old Latino man, stated:

I just had three or four interactions with the police and most of them were bad experience. Once, I was entering in the mall and an elderly woman wanted to ask something. So she said, "Excuse me [to the police]. He answered to her rudely, "What the fuck you want?" The woman was scared, and she did not ask what she wanted to ask because the cop was really rude and disrespectful to her... They treat us [Hispanics and blacks] as animals.

Table II provides more context to the quotations above. When respondents were asked how positive their interactions with police have been, blacks and Asians relative to whites and Latinos viewed their interactions with police more negatively. Blacks and Asians were also more likely to fear that police use of force was unwarranted. The responses from Asian participants are not unusual considering that some of the respondents are perceived as Middle Eastern. Whites are less likely than other racial groups to say that the police treat racial/ethnic groups differently, although 7 of the 17 white respondents said that the police do treat people differently by race. Below, we examine respondents' views about the implementation of BWC.

Table II. Relations With and Perceptions of Police by Race

	Whites (N = 17)	Blacks (N = 45)	Latinos (N = 11)	Asians (N = 6)
Positive interactions with police (1–10)	7.6	5.8	8.2	5.4
Feared police violent force that was unwarranted	47.1%	53.3%	36.4%	50.0%
Feared police violent force against loved one	41.2%	48.9%	36.4%	33.3%
Police treat people differently by race	41.2%	66.7%	63.6%	83.3%
Police target a specific type of person	41.2%	51.1%	54.5%	66.7%

Body-Worn Cameras as Racial Change Agents: Supporters and Skeptics

Our analysis indicates that respondents fall into two groups—supporters and skeptics—regarding their views about BWC. Supporters are classified into two main types—police supporters and citizen supporters. Police supporters are respondents who think that BWC will highlight how difficult it is to be a police officer. Citizen supporters are respondents who believe that BWC will provide more citizen protections by improving transparency and trust. White respondents were more likely to be police supporters, while nonwhites were more likely to be citizen supporters. Skeptics also are classified into two main types—privacy skeptics and structural skeptics. Privacy skeptics are respondents who believe that BWC may violate the privacy of citizens as well as police officers. Structural skeptics are respondents who think that BWC will not change policies that systemically disenfranchise racial/ethnic minorities and maintain power status relations between citizens and the police. Below, we provide quotations that align with these typologies regarding views about BWC as a solution to improving police-citizen relations.

Supporters

Police Supporters Bobby, a 19-year-old white man, believes that BWC will help citizens see how dangerous the job of a police officer is in society. He states, “Citizens will be able to look and see how the police get treated and won’t give them as much stuff. [Police] are good and I see them every single day on a good note.” Jack, a 45-year-old black man, supports BWC. He states:

In this climate, it’s a step in the right direction toward being able to monitor the police presence and their interactions and even as—I guess as—I feel like it’s a positive on both ends. It should be something the police can use to even maybe improve their service and use it as a tool instead of feeling like it’s kind of an invasion of what they do day to day. I think also maybe it could shed light on how hard the job of being a police officer is. So I see it both ways. The police being able to use it as a tool and then oversight as protection for the community.

Jim, a 54-year-old white man, agrees and states, “(pause) (exhale) I guess they could. Um, I think what it does more so it gives you the visual proof of what happens in an incident so if it has to be reviewed and all that, I think that’s the major benefit. That could improve community relations.” Barbara, a 52-year-old Latina woman, says that BWC will create more transparency. She states, “There will be more accuracy between what the police is doing and what the person being arrested is doing.”

Citizen Supporters Another group of supporters believe that BWC will improve transparency, trust, and accountability. Mya, a 24-year-old black Latina woman, believes that BWC will improve trust in police. She states, “I think they will improve relations between the citizens and police because a lot of the distrust that is between the community and police is because of adverse actions of either corrupt or bad police officers in general. What they do because they know they have authority and they feel like they can get away with ‘small things’ which only aggravates the

situation more.” Mya represents individuals who believe that police brutality and police corruption is mostly committed by a few “bad apples.”

Andrew, a 19-year-old black Caribbean man, believes BWC will reduce stop and frisk. He says, “I think it helps stop people being stopped and frisked for no reason for the fact that they’re black or something like that. Because if they have on cameras and it shows that they’re stopping people that are of color more than they’re stopping white people or like Asians or something I guess it might help a little bit.”

Ahmad, a 22-year-old Pakistani man, believes that BWC will hold police officers more accountable for their actions. He states:

My experience hasn’t been a positive only because I’ve dealt with bad cops. Cops that overuse their power and stuff. I’m not sure if it’s because of my race or I’m just a young adult and they’re trying to do whatever they want to do. My experience wasn’t all that good, but if I had the body image camera, that would definitely help because then the cop... wouldn’t ask stuff like he had did before.

Ahmad had an experience with a police officer with a BWC. He believes that it made a difference in how he was treated compared to his other interactions with police.

Ahmad states:

For example, the Baltimore cops who did have the camera on. He was such nicer, such more pleasant, than the cop over here in Prince George’s county. Maybe because it was late night, maybe because he was tired, but he was pretty rude. He wasn’t nice at all. He just told me to get out of the car and he put me in handcuffs. That was a little odd for me. And the thing is, I’m actually a pre-law student myself, so me knowing my rights kind of ticked him off. I don’t understand why. Society’s very clear on our rights, but for this incident, this cop told me that I was overcocky and smart. All I did was say my own rights to him. Now I don’t know if it’s because I’m a pre-law student that’s what was on top of my mind, but he dealt with me in a very different way. Now if he had the camera on, I assure you that it would have been dealt a very opposite way.

Javier, a 28-year-old Latino man, had a similar incident to Ahmad that was recorded. As a result, his case was thrown out in court. Javier states:

My friends and I were riding in a car at the beach and we got pulled over for an expired registration and the officer smelled marijuana and unfortunately I got arrested. Well, at the time I didn’t know he was wearing a body camera, but in the end, it did end up helping me. There was actually a camera in the police car and the officer was wearing an audio recording, but the camera in the police car showed that the um police officer did not get consent from my friend before entering the car, so I got off... some of the charges.

In sum, supporters are in favor of BWC but for different reasons. Some believe that the difficulties of policing will become more transparent, while others believe that BWC will create more trust between citizens and police officers. Interestingly, both groups value accountability and transparency. However, they have different groups in mind when thinking about those concepts.

Skeptics

We found two types of skeptics. The first type—privacy skeptics—believes that BWC will make policing more difficult and increase privacy violations. The second

type—structural skeptics—does not think that BWC will change the relationship between police officers and racial/ethnic minorities. In particular, they note that BWC may not equalize power relations or alter policies that disadvantage marginalized groups.

Privacy Skeptics Mark is an example of a privacy skeptic. He is definitely worried about privacy violations for citizens and police officers. He responds, “It’s going to violate people’s privacy beyond what’s ever been used up to this point and it very well could break some constitutional rights, but it’s definitely cracking privacy and especially for the cops because they’re being watched constantly. I’m not sure how they would feel about that. It’s not really my issue because I don’t plan on having any altercations with a cop anytime soon (laughs).”

Mark also believes that BWC will make police officers more cautious, which he believes can have negative implications for protecting citizens. Mark says, “I would probably have mixed feelings because there will be some positive and some big negatives. Positive will be, a lot of the disputes about who did what will be taken care of, because what you see is not a lie; whatever happened happened. Negative is that the police officers can feel very apprehensive about doing their jobs or even respond to a serious issue.” Mark then proceeds to note that BWC still may not create the level of transparency that citizen’s desire.

No, not improve relations. It would make the police officers feel not trusted, but as a whole not so much. It wouldn’t cause terrible issues, but it wouldn’t fix the problem. I feel like it would irritate the officers than make them happy, but then again it could be to their benefit; when something happens the truth is told. But if you want to be really straightforward, not everything will be caught on camera. The police officer could be hit from behind. It will not fix everything because everything will not get caught on camera and even make things more divisive. It depends.

Mark proceeds to discuss how some individuals may use BWC to take advantage of police officers during social interactions.

I think it might cause more issues. The citizens will feel like they have leverage and prove their point that things they didn’t do or did do. It’s gonna give them a way to probably manipulate even more regarding the way they go about their interactions with a police officer. I have mixed feelings, and I haven’t had a lot of time to think it completely through. I do think police officers should be held accountable, but it puts them in a tougher spot than they’ve ever been in before and they have to respond quickly and now they’re being watched in every aspect of their performance, which is what keeps us safe. If we didn’t have cops or no safety, then our world would be in absolute chaos. Do I think we need to do due diligence in responding to the people who are misusing their authority? Absolutely, but it doesn’t mean that they’re all like that.

Structural Skeptics Unlike privacy skeptics, structural skeptics are reluctant to view BWC as the savior of community-police relations. These respondents highlight how BWC do not alter existing policies regarding use of force or power dynamics between citizens and police officers. Ashley notes that police officers’ interactions with citizens are already being recorded and reports of police brutality have not decreased. She states:

I think that citizens may feel that they are protected. I don't really want to say protected, but I guess protected in some way knowing that their interaction with the police is being videoed, but I don't think it changes anything because you still have, for instance, like dash cams on police cars and that hasn't changed anything.

Pauline was a bit more positive than Ashley, but she was still unsure. She says:

I don't know that it will necessarily improve relations as much as it will make. . . um, I think it will make police officers that may otherwise do something that's inappropriate, be more. . . um, accountable or cautious and I think that for citizens who, perhaps fear or have been the victim of inappropriate interaction from police officers, I feel that it would make them feel more comfortable.

Tony, a 22-year-old black man, interacted with a university police officer who had a BWC and he does not think that it affected his interaction. He stated, "The officer had the body-worn camera on, but I do not believe that it affected the situation at all. I felt safe and I believe that I would have felt safe even if he did not have the body-worn camera. So no." Sandra speaks to the broader structural factors that shape police-community relations beyond interactions. When asked whether BWC will improve relations, she responds:

I don't know. I want there to be more accountability, but I honestly feel kind of like disappointed, or like sad, about them almost, because I just don't actually believe that they will do anything because I think that there's already countless videos out there across the country of you know, police, of police brutality against, you know, black and brown people, and it doesn't do anything. Courts don't admit that or they don't consider it for an indictment. There was video of police arresting Sandra Bland and you even have the audio, like you can hear her saying, "I don't think I did anything wrong, like I don't know what's happening." There are tons of spectators in what happened to Freddie Gray, you know. The communities that are actually being targeted are gonna be able to see through you know, if it's artificial, if it's an effort just for show. I think they're gonna be able to tell that. If it is actually followed up by, um, real structural change, or if they really do take the videos more seriously. . . if police you know, take the footage seriously, then obviously communities would respond well.

Sandra proceeds to discuss how BWC is only one part of policing and that other structural changes must accompany their implementation that alter policing polices, the criminal justice system, and power relations between citizens and police officers.

I just don't believe that if there aren't more structural institutional changes, you know, to how police departments conduct themselves and how they understand their relationship to citizens as well as their power and just fundamentally how they understand blackness, and race and criminality, and constructs like that. If they don't—if there's not changes, you know, to how people who are wielding weapons against our country's citizens. If there's not changes to how they understand what constitutes criminality, I don't think that anything will change. Because police are already in control of that type of footage and things like that. Um, so, yeah, I feel kind of discouraged about them.

Richard, a 58-year-old retired, black police officer, builds on Sandra's statements and believes that BWC will not lead to more accountability of police. This is his response when asked whether BWC will change relations:

No. The reason is you know throughout the U.S. we have several major cases, the case in New York City where uh I forgot his name right now uh after so much time. They got put in a chokehold. There was someone doing a video. I can't breathe the situation and they let the police tell it, they didn't choke this guy [Eric Gardner]. They were only grabbing him around the neck. This guy said he couldn't breathe so there was a video right there looking at this whole

thing, but the government and/or the police system chooses to believe we did not see what we saw and as you go, those officers didn't get disbarred. They got disciplined and they killed this man. They got a call of this guy laying down on the highway, and the guy just got out and shot, shot the kid. And we all saw a situation in South Carolina where... well both two cases I just mentioned. We all saw with our own eyes what happened, but the police in a cover-up that happens throughout the U.S. They trying to make people not believe what they have seen.

Jennifer, a 36-year-old black woman, echoes Richard and Sandra.

With something objective as just recording, your behavior on duty is good and I do like that idea. My only qualm is that I feel like the main issue why me and a lot of people in my community because I am African, African American... um... it's because there is a very apparent like strong correlation between police brutality and the African American community. I feel like because the system itself like [is] already systematically racist, regardless if there is cameras on or not, there is still going to be a huge issue with police brutality against black bodies. And they are just gonna find another loophole or another reason to continue to subjugate us because Eric Garner's situation, God rest his soul, um he was... the police... That was recorded... his assault was recorded and we've all seen it, but you know the police like it wasn't truly justified how they dealt with [it]. The policeman who did that to him who literally strangled him to death on camera. It's good that we are gonna have body cameras, but the fact I'm paying tax money for something that is good, but people are just gonna ignore it. The problem arises is probably why I am having mixed feelings about it.

Jennifer is a structural skeptic, but she takes a much broader and longer-term perspective regarding the potential importance of BWC. She believes that BWC will allow for a precedence to be established in the court system regarding the unjust treatment performed by the police.

I think that in the short run, no, but perhaps in the long run maybe because like I said earlier we've had recordings of police being brutal towards bodies, to particular bodies of color. But that doesn't change the fact that often times they still get away with it regardless if we record them or not. But if we have more and more footage of you know the bad cops as people like to put it, being bad towards citizens, and until there is no reason not to investigate being bad towards citizens, if that occurs then that would be good, so yeah.

Sandra believes that BWC increase the level of transparency for police officers, which is critical for society but do not address existing power relations that lead to a lack of accountability. When asked whether BWC violate privacy, this was Sandra's response:

Um, no. I think that if we're interpreting it in terms of officers, no, because they should be accountable for their actions. I think that like police have to be accountable for the amount of power that they wield and I think that they are not, in any capacity, due to the power imbalance, and just due to the fact that there's not that many, um, what's it called, like um requirements or loopholes you have to jump through to actually be an officer. Um, which is insane to me. You know, like, they can take all these implicit bias tests and figure out that they're much more likely to shoot African Americans, but then as far as I know, don't do anything about that. You know, it's like officers can take these tests, and figure that out, and then still go out into the world and anyway... So I don't think that's a violation on their privacy. I think it's like a very, very, very, small mark against the immense amount of power that they have. Violation of privacy should be something that they hold you know, commensurate with the amount of power that they have. And I don't think that, you know in terms of citizens, I don't think that anybody who is being surveilled by the police would feel like it's a violation. I mean, I'm sure they could. But my guess would be if the objective in theory is to protect them, I don't think they would feel like their privacy is being violated.

Altogether, respondents grappled with the complex relationships between transparency, protection, and privacy. While some respondents felt that their

privacy was already being violated on a regular basis, others viewed the violation of privacy by BWC to be a necessary end to protect citizens and create more transparency. Table III provides a descriptive layer to the data presented above. It shows that a majority of respondents have positive feelings about BWC. This is why one group is labeled as skeptics and not dissenters. As a whole, most respondents believe that BWC are a step in the right direction. Because blacks and Asians report more negative interactions with police, they are less likely than whites and Latinos to think that BWCs will improve relations between the police and citizens. This actually goes against our hypotheses. Whites, compared to nonwhites, were more likely to view BWC as violations of privacy. Some minority respondents noted that the structure of their lives is already surveilled, so an additional layer aimed to create transparency might be a positive. Comparatively, some whites may not feel that their lives are surveilled to the same extent as nonwhites. As a result, BWC may be more of a personal privacy violation for them. Whites are also more likely to report that BWC violate the privacy of police officers and may actually lead to officers being more apprehensive when doing their jobs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article explored racial differences in police interactions and views of BWC. Using interviews from 81 respondents in a racially diverse county, we found that racial differences in perceptions of and interactions with police vary. Whites, compared to nonwhites, are more likely to report positive experiences with police. Nonwhites are more likely to fear the use of unwarranted police violent force. Latinos reported the most positive experiences with police, though some report negative experiences related to perceived unlawful searches. These findings are in line with previous research on police interactions with citizens (Gilbert and Ray 2016; Krieger et al. 2015; Ray 2015).

Regarding the implementation of BWC, results show that respondents fall into two primary groups—supporters and skeptics. Supporters of BWC are either police supporters or citizen supporters. Interestingly, both types of supporters desire accountability. However, they desire accountability for different groups. Our two types of supporters highlight why BWC receive bipartisan support. Besides

Table III. Views About Body-Worn Cameras (BWC) by Race

	Whites (N = 17)	Blacks (N = 45)	Latinos (N = 11)	Asians (N = 6)
Familiar with BWC	64.7%	80.0%	54.5%	100.0%
Know county officers will have BWC	47.1%	48.9%	18.2%	16.7%
Positive feelings about BWC	58.8%	68.9%	72.7%	66.7%
BWC improve relations between citizens and police	52.9%	42.2%	54.5%	33.3%
BWC create transparency between police and citizens	23.5%	60.0%	63.6%	83.3%
BWC allow for more citizen protection to hold police accountable	47.1%	55.6%	63.6%	83.3%
BWC violate privacy	58.8%	37.8%	18.2%	50.0%

supporters, respondents were classified as two types of skeptics—privacy skeptics or structural skeptics. On one hand, privacy skeptics believe that BWC violate citizen privacy as well as the privacy of police officers. On the other hand, structural skeptics are more reluctant that BWC will drastically improve relations between citizens and police officers.

The views of structural skeptics draw attention to research on power status relations (Kemper and Collins 1990). Their comments also highlight the complex relationship between transparency and accountability. BWC could create more transparency and simultaneously not change the current accountability structure of police. Research documents how visibility without accountable can actually continue to disadvantage marginalized groups (Ray and Rosow 2012; Stuart 2011).

In addition to supporters and skeptics, our analysis revealed some racial differences in views about BWC. Whites report less positive feelings about BWC than other racial groups. Blacks and Asians are more skeptical than whites and Latinos that BWC will improve relations. However, it should be noted that no group hit 55% confidence that BWC will improve relations. Whites are more likely to believe that BWC violate privacy.

Besides race, we also examined how social class and prior police contact impact views of BWC. Concerning social class, many of the black male respondents identified as middle class, and this self-identification did not alter their negative interactions with police. Concerning prior police contact, individuals who had negative police contact, or witnessed unjust treatment of racial/ethnic minorities by police officers, were more likely to be structural skeptics. Police contact alone was not a predictor of a person being a skeptic. For example, several white respondents reported high levels of police contact. Yet, they overwhelmingly viewed their interactions as positive, respectful, and cordial. Witnessing unjust treatment by police increased whites' alignment with structural skeptics.

Respondents also complicated the meaning of transparency. For some respondents, they not only desire BWC to hold police officers more accountable, but they also want more transparency about the selection process of officers and their training. Several respondents noted that their taxes pay for police officers, so citizens should know where that money is going and how it is used. Transparency not only means the ability to see what transpired during a traffic stop. It also means police departments training officers to have better social skills to provide essential information to citizens during encounters. It also means that police departments may need public relations staff who are skilled at providing nuanced information to the public. Citizen-police academies are a good step, but more general awareness is important. Less than 50% of our sample knew that the county was implementing BWC.

Although this study extends existing research, it is not without limitations. While Prince George's County is racially diverse, the area is one of the most liberal places in the United States. This may shape the more positive, though at times skeptical, perspective on BWC. It is important for future research to replicate this study in areas that may be more racially homogeneous with varying types of political ideologies.

In sum, it is clear that individuals, regardless of race, believe that BWC are a step in the right direction. However, some are more skeptical that transparent interactions will translate into accountable relations. Deescalation tactics, implementing a use of force continuum, banning chokeholds, mandating officers to exhaust all other means before discharging a lethal weapon, and comprehensive reporting are all shown to be positive changes that reduce deadly encounters with police (Campaign Zero 2016). Police departments should also have officers undergo regular workshops about implicit bias, diversity, and community policing in order to build better relations with the citizens they serve.

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