

**Police Body Camera Footage: Enhancing Officers' Performance
& Clarifying Public Perception**

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National Command & Staff College

Session #015

July 2022

Abstract

In 2005, two counties in England initiated the first trial implementation of body-worn cameras for rank-and-file police officers. Law enforcement leadership primarily intended to use the footage as evidence in cases involving victims reluctant to provide statements or testimony in criminal proceedings. Today, more than half our nation's patrol officers wear body cameras, yet the social impact of footage from these cameras has eclipsed the original intent of implementation. In public perception, images afford immediacy in scrutinizing enforcement action. Footage revealing egregious officer misconduct endures in the public consciousness and can negatively alter community perceptions of officers sworn to protect them. This has negatively affected some officers' perceptions of their relationships with their communities, but in some instances, agencies have been reactive in clarifying public misconceptions of enforcement actions taken. Saturating news media coverage of police misconduct overshadows the range of commendable police behavior. These challenges to maintaining positive community relationships require using the footage for proactive assessment of officer behaviors, and, where applicable, agencies should use the footage to clarify public misconceptions of enforcement actions. Focused leadership is needed to reshape traditional police perspectives, maintain proactive policing, and through humanization, mitigate broad misconceptions about officer behaviors.

Introduction

The earliest known use of body-worn cameras by a Police agency was in the United Kingdom in 2005. Cornwall, with a population of about 515,000, and Devon, with a population of about 722,000, are the police departments credited with being the first to test the technology. By 2006, the program grew nationally to support a domestic violence enforcement initiative. The intent was to secure witness testimony and photographic evidence in cases where victims declined to participate in prosecution. By 2010, forty United Kingdom police agencies had implemented the technology. In addition to aiding in the collection of more substantive evidence, the Paisley and Aberdeen Body-Worn Video Project in 2011 proved the program also worked to increase public reassurance, significantly reduce and resolve complaints against officers, and reduce assaults on officers (American Police Officers Alliance, 2020). This evaluation took place in the Paisley and Aberdeen areas of Glasgow, Scotland.

In 2012, three Arizona police agencies implemented body-worn camera trials. Rialto, Mesa, and Phoenix Police Departments, as well as citizens of these communities, benefitted from up to an 88% decrease in complaints against officers. The trials seemed to be a success; however, the costs of the equipment and software kept the technology out of reach of many interested departments.

In 2015, shortly after the officer-involved shooting that led to the death of Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, President Barack Obama's administration supported adoption of body-worn cameras through funding half the cost of implementing the devices. The event in Ferguson fueled a national demand for transparency and accountability from the nation's law enforcement

agencies. It also began a tendency for many officers to look negatively on the use of body-worn cameras. Many officers felt the camera footage would primarily be used as an administrative tool for discipline. Some believed this jeopardized their careers. Some agencies mandated officers wear cameras but provided little in the way of formal explanation for their purpose, of agency expectations, or discussion surrounding the need for the devices. Many officers felt betrayed by their agencies, governments, and the public. Some felt they were no longer Heroes. They felt they were Villains.

Impediments to Changing Agency Culture

There is a disproportionate growth in negative perceptions of law enforcement as opposed to positive perceptions, which are currently presented to the general public. This is directly related to agencies' limited efforts to disclose all of their actions, both positive and negative.

There has been a visible change in how police are presented in the media. In the past, most movies and television shows depicted police officers as honest, hardworking, and trustworthy servants of the people. The current trend is to show officers as violent, corrupt individuals with no morals who serve only themselves. The past depictions were unrealistic in that they rarely presented any flaws in officers or demonstrated that some officers were not worthy of wearing the badge. The current depictions also are unrealistic in that they fail to shine light on the majority of officers who represent this profession at its highest level. Now is the time for agencies to develop strategies to counter V.U.C.A. and clarify public perceptions. Team Lions believes the proper introduction of police body-camera footage can be used to counter negative perceptions generated to incite anger and discord between law enforcement and the general public (Yoes, 2022).

Deployment and use of body-worn cameras without consideration of organizational impact or of training in how officers consider, relate to, and interact with the communities they serve are impediments to changing the culture of police agencies and negative public perceptions of officers. To change officers' negative perceptions of wearing cameras, law enforcement leaders need to change their officers' perceptions of the cameras. Some agency leaders initially deployed these cameras with officers with histories of complaints, believing this would yield positive change in their behavior. Other agency leaders mandated officers wear body cameras because of officers' high number of verified violations. These actions gave weight to the belief that the only function of body-worn cameras was monitoring of officers leading to punishment.

Law enforcement officers need leadership that recognizes the majority of officers' good conduct and communication skills daily can be improved by using a system that holds them accountable for what they say and do. In most cases, those in police leadership positions never wore cameras while on the front lines. That now expresses concern about the minority of officers with poor communication skills or those who disregard the laws officers uphold. This is comparable to cutting down a tree to save a branch. Leaders should encourage officers always to seek self-improvement and have confidence that their actions on camera if justified, will stand up in court just like the reports they write. They need to be held accountable if their actions are not justified. The focus should be on changing bad behavior, not limiting the introduction of new technology that has the potential to improve officer performance and, by extension, improve community relations.

Many have seen footage from body-worn cameras used to create negative perceptions of police actions. Recorded police misconduct represents a fractional percentage of available footage, as one must consider there are thousands of positive interactions police have with

citizens each day in this country. Why do so few agencies release footage showing officers risking their lives daily in service of their communities? Regardless of a department's desire to not have body cameras or release the footage, today's technology allows everyone to record police interaction with the public and distribute edited, biased, uninformed versions of incidents. Leaders must show their agencies are constantly seeking methods to improve service and make their officers better while expressing to their officers how the environments around their organizations are continually evolving. Changes need to occur to meet these challenges. Harrington (2017) states, "change is the only constant." Like sales associates, leaders have to motivate officers to realize positive aspects of body-worn cameras and footage to reveal how officers protect and serve citizens, and this will outweigh negative perceptions distributed by those unreasonably biased against police.

For organizations to remain relevant, there must always be an active change engine to allow them to adapt to the constantly changing landscape. As society continues to change, there must be leadership to compensate and lead the organizations into these new horizons.

Team Lions believes it is time for law enforcement agencies to write their narratives. Many law enforcement leaders know the reasons and justifications for enforcement actions, but many allow others to narrate them, then complain about how the public treated them in its interpretations of the incidents. The authors do not recall participating in any training in which officers were *not trained* to adapt to ever-changing situations. Agencies leaders must stop being reactive and become proactive regarding new technology such as body-worn cameras. They must focus on how their agencies can benefit from this technology and on using it for the betterment of their communities and of the services provided to them.

Cultural Change in the Individual Officer

There are many articles on how officers perceive body-worn cameras. In general, officers have seen the benefits of body-worn cameras, such as exoneration in citizen complaints, documentation of evidence collection, and a reduction in use of force incidents. Some officers are generally supportive of body-worn cameras, and they hold perceptions that these devices can be beneficial in positively affecting relevant outcomes. (Journal of Criminal Justice, 2014). Recently, high-profile incidents across the country have emerged in the media depicting officer misconduct captured on body-worn cameras. In some cases, when use of force is justified and publicized for transparency, public scrutiny can become the focus of attention and overshadow officers' necessity of using it.

Police reform and the use of body-worn cameras have been a hot topic in modern times. As agencies across the country increase the use of body-worn cameras, more officers are exonerated from citizen complaints with their use. In August of 2021, data obtained from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Department in Florida revealed a 60% reduction of internal affairs complaints related to the use of body-worn cameras. There is indication that deployment of the cameras has factored in some officers positively modifying their behavior. More officers employ tact and have healthier interactions. However, Lieutenant Brad Shivers of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office indicated that although the number of citizen complaints is decreasing, the discipline of deputies has increased to unprecedented levels (First Coast News, 2021). This is attributable to increased oversight with review of footage revealing recorded officer misconduct. Understandably, if an officer's perception of body-worn cameras were to change from positive to negative, here would be the mark.

As officers see peers disciplined through authority compliance, perceptions of micromanaging could surface unless the agency has a strong, positive culture with fundamentally sound leadership. Like supervisors at Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, supervisors at all agencies should review footage from critical incidents and from randomly-selected incidents as a quality control measure. The footage can be used to identify deficiencies in officers' tactical and technical skills. Reviews can help supervision improve on safety standards, assist in risk management, and counteract VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity). When positive interactions or good skills are observed in review, structured feedback and recognition should be practiced by supervisors to reward officer efforts and performance. Over time, more and more officers will adhere to the culture being created, which in turn should have positive impacts on public perception.

When discussing changing cultural perspectives officers may have regarding wearing cameras, agency leaders should begin with their agencies' missions, visions, and values. Respectively, officer behaviors should be aligned to these. In terms of training, more officers could benefit from the introduction of emotional intelligence or EQ training prior to body-worn camera usage (EQ Help Guide, 2021). The ability to control emotions of oneself and others empathetically would allow officers more options to address daily issues in ways beneficial to them and the communities they serve. EQ promotes a sense of value to people which in turn can contribute to respect, loyalty, and better service. All of these are just as important as tactical skills. Chief Deputy Mike Roberson (2017) reported that a vast majority of complaints from the public are about how the officer made the complainant feel. EQ training deals with the understanding of perspectives and how the use of empathy could have positive impacts during public interactions. Officers who can utilize strong EQ skills contribute to the enhancement of

their effective communication skills. Officers with low EQ skills can at least be provided insight on the effectiveness of its use.

In 1829, Sir Robert Peel introduced nine principles to policing that are still the true basis of police work today, almost two hundred years later. The second principle relates to many issues seen today. It states: "The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behavior and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect (Law Enforcement Action Partnership, 2021). Body-worn cameras are tools designed to assist in restoring public trust through transparency. If police leaders and managers continue to see unreported misconduct during body-camera footage reviews, as has occurred at Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, grounding with the organizational values and training could serve as alternatives to discipline and could effectively assist in a positive culture change.

Role of Leadership in Cultural Change

With expected significant cultural and societal change, police agencies must reexamine values to ensure methods and enforcement actions continue to serve communities appropriately (United States Department of Justice, 1994). Widely publicized failures in policing half a century ago exposed authoritarian values, and years later many police leaders remained inflexible. Police leaders were neither prepared for abrupt social change nor engaged in managing their role in it. Adams and LaPorte (1988) assert, "...the interactions between an organization and its environment are essential considerations for leaders because organizations do not exist in isolation" (p. 350). Contemporary policing requires contemporary perspective. Law enforcement agencies remain an executive arm of government, yet contemporary perspective must not exclude origins of substantive community policing.

In this nation during the 1960s and 1970s, increasing crime, social activism against an unpopular war, and civil rights infringement eventually led to reconsideration of the very nature of policing in America (United States Department of Justice, 1994). Unrestrained civil unrest met authoritarian enforcement. Community relationships with police suffered in part because agencies were ill-equipped to manage open and violent government protests; these relationships suffered more, however, because policing traditionally valued and prioritized authority before community. To many protesters, police personified a government unresponsive and unworthy of trust; to many officers, protesters challenged and dismissed core values—law and order—they brought traditionally to the profession.

Through progressive social and governmental efforts, community relationships with police greatly improved in the intervening years. This would not have occurred without changing societal expectations of police obligations or without police leaders reconsidering traditional policing methods and implementing progressive change. Nonetheless, an indirect line may be drawn from images of police misconduct during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Illinois to body camera footage of police misconduct involving the death of Ronald Greene three years ago in our own state (The Guardian, 2022). Many people across our nation loudly demanded change then just as many do so today.

Availability of body-camera footage intensified community interest in police agency transparency. As with factual basis of details in officers' reports and with the level of care community members expect police to treat emotionally disturbed people, transparency is a touchstone in relationships police agencies have with communities they serve. Fifty years ago, law enforcement inflexibility, lack of foresight, and a reactive approach further deteriorated

strained community relationships. The problems in policing then are similar to those today; widely-broadcast and shared images of police misconduct can become indelible in community consciousness and negatively affect citizens, communities, and policing in general. Leaders must take proactive measures to ensure inflexibility and lack of foresight do not further deteriorate strained community relationships.

Discussing the role of organizational leadership amid impactful change, Hemerling (2016) notes that broad change is increasingly difficult when leaders hesitate and allow urgency to dictate short-term results. Decades ago, routine but ineffective response with little regard for police de-escalation exacerbated public relations. Some aspects of recent incidents bear resemblance. Carlos High of Grand Prairie, Texas was killed in 2018 during an encounter with police, hours before a scheduled mental health appointment he had made. On the same day, the chief of police informed news media that High fired a weapon at police officers, but he retracted this two days later. Despite requests from High's family to see body-camera footage, two years would pass before its release. Police leadership must recognize changing dynamics in community relationships and how changes affect communities and officers (Tobia, 2017).

In some instances, investigative integrity will supersede agency leaders' responsibility to release body-camera footage, as premature release could potentially impede efforts to locate additional suspects and evidence. Where there is public speculation of officer misconduct, however, leadership cautiously must weigh transparency and community obligation against delaying release of footage. Untenable delay can foment public mistrust. Publicly clarifying enforcement action with simultaneous release of footage can mitigate unwarranted mistrust of officers and declining faith in police leaders. Law enforcement must facilitate communities

reaching informed conclusions related to enforcement action. This is actually an aspect of community policing yet to be fully integrated into contemporary policing perspective.

Traditional *us versus them* police perspectives might ebb and flow with changing cultural and social dynamics, but they remain incongruous with community service.

The availability of body-camera footage added significant dimension to community and police relations. This was cultural change in a profession generally resistant to cultural change. The authors look to the past. Efforts of progressive police leaders during the 1960s and 1970s were impeded by narrowly focused management practices and traditional operating assumptions incongruent with evolving societal expectations (United States Department of Justice, 1994). The challenge to police leadership then was meeting new expectations of police service with effective strategies borne of new perspectives. How do law enforcement leaders manage this change while heightening values of community service, particularly in light of volatile protests recently and widely seen in the wake of enforcement action and police misconduct?

Police leaders must prioritize understanding that law enforcement is a service to their communities and not an end in itself. Recognizing that research is vital to the success of change implementation (Anderson, 2017), agencies should survey community members for their perspectives on policing in their community. This will allow leaders to identify problems and focus specifically on resolutions. Survey results can be used to broaden officers' understanding of community perceptions of them; where appropriate, they can inform reshaping perspectives traditionally held by officers, and where necessary they can be instrumental in realigning behavior with agency goals. Results of surveying officers for their perspectives on their

obligations to communities they serve and on agency culture would further inform leadership decisions in meeting agency goals.

Some officers' regard for wearing body cameras includes privacy intrusion and potential unmerited public scrutiny after release of footage. The Theory of Expectancy allows that officers who negatively interact with their communities will not change their behavior or perspectives if their leaders' approaches and perceptions do not change to meet merited societal expectations (Dodson, 1988). Leaders must instill broader, community-based perspectives in officers to yield better service to communities, and these perspectives should be made explicit to veteran officers and to those new to the profession. Transformational leadership is necessary to give rise to deeper and enduring change. This will empower officers to work to higher standards, give sharper definition to their roles, and help attract the right people to the profession.

Conclusion

Volatile community relationships create stressors for police officers which may negatively shape interactions long after incipient incidents. This stress, at times stemming from hyperawareness and expectation of negative interactions, can narrow officers' approaches to conflict and further harm community relations. To this end, agency transparency is part of officer safety and well-being. Integrating this profession's human factors allows for public understanding of use of force polices, enforcement practices, and perspectives (Harrington, 2017). Agency leaders must take initiative to provide communities with more specific understanding of what policing their communities entails. A police leader may explain to news media what laws a suspect violated during a violent encounter with police, but rarely will this leader convey human factors involved in police removing the suspect from the community.

Communities can more readily value their officers if they perceive them as community servants instead of as authoritarian enforcers. Actions of the few officers who dishonor this profession should never loom larger than actions of the many officers who demonstrate their adherence to duty. This requires humanization of officers who choose the right path daily, and leaders can implement this through transparency and relating to their communities the varied, dynamic, and stressful roles required of officers. Leaders already have means to humanize this profession and those called to it. Perhaps the most recent is first-person camera footage of officers doing the right things.

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