

Goodman and Genesee Section Officers' Perception of Body-Worn Cameras in Policing Before Implementation: Full Report



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Abstract

This study evaluates the impact of body-worn cameras (BWC) on police work, police-citizen encounters, and internal administrative procedures of the Rochester Police Department. In order to understand and measure the impact of BWC, researchers use a series of quantitative data including, but not limited to, crime occurrence, complaints against police, and criminal justice processes (criminal and internal investigations) before and after the camera deployment. This ride-along report is designed as a qualitative study for researchers to understand the nature of contemporary police patrol work. The purpose of the ride-along study is to collect qualitative data on officers' attitudes and expectations of how the body-worn cameras' will affect their work. After analyzing the result of each ride-along interview, researchers extracted several major aspects that were essential in understanding officers' current thoughts related to policing and the BWC. By comparing the pre-study results from different sections, researchers also hope to find out whether or not officers' attitudes were different between the sections of RPD.

Key words: *body-worn camera, ride-along, policing, perception*

Research Purpose

Expectations for body-worn cameras (BWC) are extremely high in the public's opinion (Mitchell, 2017), as well as that of policy makers and police administrators (21st Century Policing Task Force, 2015). The complexity of police work, in terms of the exercise of discretion, the engagement of the public in sensitive encounters, and the management of day-to-day operations is likely to yield unanticipated changes in workflow, amendments to policy (e.g., LAPD video release policy: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-lapd-video-policy-20170131-story.html>), and perhaps even changes in patrol officers' and citizens' behaviors (Ariel and colleagues, 2016). It is imperative to have a baseline understanding of workflow, decision-processes, and routines to understand where, why, and how changes occurred subsequent to BWC implementation. This motivates the current research report which details patrol work and the current nature of police-citizen contact within the Goodman and Genesee sections. First, the methodology is introduced, outlining the sample of shifts and interview protocol. Next information gleaned from ride-along sessions via debriefings at encounters with citizens and a semi-structured interview of officers is distilled to establish a sketch of current patrol practice and to probe expectations for change that might be expected to accompany the implementation of BWC.

Methodology

Sample Selection

The Operation Bureau of RPD consists of five patrol sections: Lake, Genesee, Goodman, Clinton, and Central. Each section is divided into different car beats (See Appendix A for additional information detailing car beats in subsequently mentioned patrol sections). Within Lake, Genesee, Goodman, and Clinton Sections there are three platoons (1st Platoon: 23:00-7:00; 2nd Platoon: 7:00- 15:00; 3rd Platoon: 15:00-23:00); for Central Section there are five platoons (1st Platoon: 23:00-7:00; 2nd Platoon: 7:00- 15:00; 3rd Platoon: 15:00-23:00; 4th Platoon: 19:00-3:00; 5th Platoon: 11:00-19:00). Central Section's staffing is different from the other sections due to its unique combination of foot posts and walking beats in the downtown business district between its 5th platoon and detail personnel (See Appendix B for the staffing detail of each platoon).

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There are seven police beats in Goodman Section: 205, 215, 225, 235, 245, 255, and 265; and seven police beats in Genesee Section: 203, 213, 223, 233, 243, 253, and 263 (See Appendix A). For the ride-along sessions with patrol officers, researchers first randomly selected platoons and patrol beats, then randomly assigned them to four researchers. Each ride-along entailed four hours of observation and questions by researchers. Thus, each eight-hour Platoon was divided into two four-hour periods for each researcher to choose. For example: Researcher A was randomly assigned to the assortment of the 2nd Platoon of Beat 215, since 2nd Platoon includes the whole eight hours from 7:00 to 15:00, the researcher could choose to do the ride along either from 7:00 to 11:00 or from 11:00 to 15:00 on a week-day based on his/her schedule. A CPSI Research Assistant contacted the RPD BWC research coordinator in advance to schedule the ride-along sessions. Overall, it took researchers one week to finish all four ride-along sessions in Goodman Section and five days to finish all four ride-along sessions in Genesee Section.

The four officers selected for the ride-along in Goodman Section were all males with eight to ten years of policing experience. For Genesee Section, the four officers assigned for the ride-along interview were also male, with an average length of experience of six years ranging from three years to eleven years of experience. It should be acknowledged here that although researchers randomly assigned ride-along platoons, the officers were directly assigned by their supervisors. The result is limited in generalizability due to the absence of female officers and less experienced officers in the samples.

Researchers used a previously developed interview protocol as a guideline during ride-along sessions (See Appendix C for General Interview Questions for BWC Ride-along Research). During the interviews, researchers engaged in conversation with patrol officers, and improvised follow-ups depending on the circumstances. For example, after a call-for-service, researchers are expected to ask officers question like: "Could anything have been changed if you had a body-worn camera?" The purpose of this type of question is to help officers relate specific calls-for-service types to the BWC. This semi-structured interview format allowed researchers to explore beyond the framework of prepared questions and expand the scope of research topics as appropriate. Before each ride-along session, researchers explained to officers the purpose of the ride-along and provided an oral statement of confidentiality.

Officers' Perception of Policing and Police Work in Goodman and Genesee Sections

Researchers started the interview by asking officers about the structure of policing and the nature of police work in their respective section. Subsequent interview questions inquired whether officers believed the body-worn camera could affect the nature of police work as well as officers' expectations of the BWC. Additionally, researchers observed officers' interactions with citizens during calls-for-service and other encounters. Therefore additional questions could be asked based on the specific situation without changing the overall structure of the interview framework. Officers provided their experience with calls for service and nature of the crimes in the section.

Goodman Section Ride-Along Findings

Officers' Understanding of Goodman Section

Goodman Section is located at the south-east side of the City of Rochester, neighboring Clinton Section, Central Section and Genesee Section. With Irondequoit bordering the northern side and Brighton bordering the southern side, Goodman section shares some suburban features. Overall, this section is a combination of business areas, residential areas and suburban areas.

Goodman Section's crime distribution is largely dependent on its geographical location. During one ride-along, an officer described Goodman Section as "two different animals." Based on the officers' experience, crimes related to drugs (both drug usage and drug dealing), shootings, and gang violence occur more frequently in the northern side of this section as opposed to the southern side. One officer compared Goodman Section to Clinton Section and commented: "Goodman (Section) has its problematic areas, but I believe it's the nicest section in the city."

Officers' Understanding of Current Police-Citizen Interaction

Officers' thoughts on police-citizen interaction in Goodman Section generally appear to be positive. Officers believe that most people in their beats trust the police, and usually do not experience many issues during calls for service. However, they sometimes have to deal with individuals who "hate the police."

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Despite the fact that officers remain positive in regards to community trust, one officer mentioned that he noticed a decrease in recent years. He supported this thought by describing current public trust of police as the “lowest in his career” and expressed his view that the national media has brought a “detrimental effect” on this. During some interactions with citizens, he has been told: “You cops are just out here killing black people!”

Officers’ opinions on the national trends of community trust for the police are consistent: they think the national trend is negative. Social media was cited by officers as the major factor that leads to the detriment of community trust for police. One officer stated: “the media, especially social media, has tried to make law enforcement look bad, and as a result of that, citizens have changed their perspectives of the police.” Officers mentioned that many videos of police-citizen interaction on the internet don’t show the entire incident, and people would start forming opinions based upon these “snippets.” One officer commented that there has been an increase in people who want to argue with the police “for the sake of arguing.”

Officers’ View on BWC and Its Change

□ Officers’ Understanding of BWC’s Benefits

In general, the officers of Goodman Section are comfortable with the idea of using the BWC in policing and believe that it will bring positive changes. Officers are generally comfortable with the idea of using BWC. With some experience of changes in RPD (both organizational and operational), the officers consider the BWC as a new policing “tool in the toolbox” or “another part of the uniform” that will not affect their role as police officers, and that they will eventually get used to. One officer assured that within five years from now, officers will get used to the BWC just as they did when the computer system was installed in the car.

Officers believe that the BWC can provide evidence to defend their discretionary decisions and behaviors. “Now the police can show their side of things,” one officer commented. Another officer described that he hoped that the body-worn camera could be used to show the public “what really happens” when facing the accusations caused by social media. Officers hope that the transparency of the BWC could help the public understand the “real police jobs on a day-to-day basis” instead of basing their judgement on social media.

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Another benefit of BWC footage as evidence, according to officers, is that it helps to disentangle complicated situations. During domestic disputes, a lot of “he said, she said” can be resolved easily through BWC footage. Some officers believe that the BWC’s footage could also help to enhance the accuracy of their police reports. Standard police reports may not document the entirety of an incident, but details like a citizen’s attitude, body posture, actions, and language can be seen clearly through BWC footage. During a court testimony, the BWC footage could be used as evidence to help officers recall a specific moment accurately.

Officers think overall that the BWC is likely to have no impact on interactions during calls-for-service but may help to deescalate certain situations depending on the individual and the officer. The BWC may bring a positive behavioral change to “both sides of the camera”: the presence of the BWC may cause some people change their behavior instantly; at the same time, officers themselves are likely to change their behavior, especially their language, during the interaction. One officer gave an example of police-citizen interactions benefiting from the BWC in a bar setting, where people often yell at the police in order to cause a reaction from the officers. The officer believes interactions like this will decrease once the BWC is used as a visible policing tool.

□ **Officers’ Concerns about BWC**

Despite the variety of benefits mentioned during the ride-along sessions, officers revealed various concerns about the BWC. Researchers summarized these concerns into four general aspects: BWC functions/operation, BWC hardware, capturing capability, and citizen input.

First, police officers talked about their concerns about the technical functions of the BWC. Researchers noticed that Goodman Section officers often used their knowledge of Clinton Section officers’ experiences, as a result, the answers they gave were combinations of their own perceptions and second-hand knowledge of what Clinton Section officers had experienced. This was also very common when officers’ mentioned their concerns about BWC function/operation and potential user experience.

Officers’ concerns pertained to the hardware and technological design of the BWC itself. Based on their knowledge of the current implementation in Clinton Section, officers expressed concerns about BWC size, weight, battery life, and docking procedures. Additionally, officers showed concern with the security of the physical attachment of the camera. One officer stated

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that “it easily falls off,” and may lead to some further concerns with officer safety, especially during foot-chases. Even though officers were generally optimistic about using BWC in future policing, there was some concern about adapting to the BWC. One officer mentioned there could be an increase in response time for calls-for-services as a result of officers spending more time on BWC-related operations.

Second, officers were not sure whether the BWC is capable of capturing everything occurring during an incident. Officers knew that the BWC is going to be located on the chest; therefore, it has a different angle from officers’ vision. An officer elaborated by stating “they often don’t record what they should, they only get the mid-section of people because that’s where they are located on the body.” One officer even suggested body-worn cameras that are designed to be worn like glasses for a better recording angle. Officers also discussed their experience of using other forms of footage to resolve false accusations. An officer talked about his previous experience of using blue light camera footage to defend himself against an accusation. The officer had made an arrest of someone for drug possession, and the whole process was captured by a nearby blue light camera.

“...this guy called in a complaint and said that we stole his watch – he didn’t even have a watch – and he also said that we used excessive force on him... I looked at the video and it did look like I was pushing him down, but I told them I just had my hand on him for monitoring...sometimes videos are misleading... it’s not like there are gonna be drones flying around catching every angle and they aren’t in high definition either. I think they are only in 480p and it’s hard to see everything at that resolution. About the watch, they pointed out this little white speck and said ‘you see that’s his watch, he said it was white’. I couldn’t believe it, there are tons of white specs all over the screen. It honestly looked like a piece of trash, you know, there is so much trash in the street, those little Huggies containers everywhere. But the good thing about the video was that it showed him drop the dope. You could see in the video he pulled it out of his pocket and dropped it on the ground. And honestly I didn’t see that when it happened so that was good. I don’t know if a body camera would have helped or not here. It might have been able to show that I wasn’t using force, but again it depends on the camera and like

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I said before, it only captures a small area because of where it is located on the body.”

Third, officers unanimously think that the appearance of the BWC is likely to decrease the quality and quantity of information from citizens. Although officers generally think that the appearance of the BWC may help deescalate certain people in certain situations, it may bring other issues that affect the efficiency of field investigation: witnesses and people with knowledge may be reluctant to talk because of privacy concerns. Despite the fact that getting information from citizens is not a typical issue in Goodman Section, during regular foot-patrol, citizens may still be “skeptical” of the camera and may want to avoid being recorded.

After an officer responded to a man reporting a domestic incident, a researcher asked “Would anything be changed if you had a BWC on you? Why?” The officer was sure that the interaction would have been changed. He went on and explained that the man looked “very apprehensive” and didn’t want to be seen as he was “snitching”, so the officer thought that the man would not have been “so forth coming with info” if he had noticed a camera.

Last, but not least, officers raised concerns with the policy of the BWC. Researchers found that officers’ knowledge about the BWC policy was limited, and this corresponded with their uncertainty about the general implementation plan. As a result, officers described their concerns in the form of “if the policy... that might be a problem.” Mandatory recording situations, whether or not minors and victims can be recorded, as well as BWC data storage were mentioned during the ride-along interview as areas where policy may create issues for patrol work.

Genesee Section Ride-Along Results

Officers’ Understanding of Genesee Section

Genesee Section is located in the south-western corner of the City of Rochester, bordering Lake Section, Central Section, and Goodman Section. Divided by the Genesee River, the southern side of Genesee Section includes the University of Rochester campus, residential areas, and some business areas, while the northern side is primarily industrial and residential area. Officers mentioned drugs, specifically marijuana and heroin, as a major problem within the

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Section and one officer expressed that many homicides within the Section were drug or alcohol related.

Officers' Understanding on Current Police-Citizen Interaction

Officers in Genesee Section generally hold positive views of the citizens within their section. Consistently, each of the officers described the people of Genesee as generally good and willing to help the police, but there is also a small part of the population that regularly engages in illegal behavior and distrusts the police. As one officer put it: "The people [who are] not breaking the law are very cooperative. The ones that do not obey the law have no respect whatsoever." The officers tend to deal primarily with citizens who break the law and some of the officers feel as though these individuals have helped to shape more negative public opinions of the police; "... many people trust the police, but we don't deal with them, often, but [the] part of the population who don't trust us will always call and they tend to mislead the public and media."

Officers' View on BWC and Its Change

□ Officers' Understanding of BWC's Benefits

The Genesee Section officers interviewed were mostly uncertain in regards to how the BWC could benefit their work. Officers expressed their belief that the BWC might be useful for providing evidence to support the claims of officers. Two of the officers discussed how suspects often deny their involvement in criminal actions after being arrested. The BWC footage would show suspects engaging in the same activity as observed by officers. One officer believed that the footage might be useful in this way for dealing with drug-dealers, as police will "be able to prove these individuals are at the same place, day after day, even when they shouldn't be in those areas."

The officers were generally comfortable with the idea of using the BWC. One officer who had previously worked with a police department which used dash cams stated that the dash cam "helped me more than it bothered me," and that being given a camera did not bother him either. It is also worth noting, however, that one of the officers expressed that while he did not

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mind being given a camera, he “absolutely disagree[s] with it,” and is uncomfortable with operating the technology.

□ **Officers’ Concerns about BWC**

The officers of Genesee Section discussed various concerns they had about the BWC. One concern held by each of the officers is that the BWC would make it more difficult to get information from witnesses or concerned citizens. According to the officers, many people are uncomfortable giving a written statement or appearing in court; it is unlikely that they will be more willing to give a recorded statement. One officer related his view that “people are going to be less likely to talk because they are so afraid to be [seen as] a snitch,” and that “the level of intelligence we [police officers] can gain will go down dramatically” after the BWC implementation.

Most of the officers interviewed shared a concern with the reliability of the camera’s attachment clip. The officers mentioned that they had heard of problems with the BWC remaining secured from other officers, and one of the officers had personally tried wearing the BWC and noticed that the BWC was not securely attached to his uniform. The officers were concerned that this may become problematic as the BWC may fall off in more heated incidents, where the footage would be most important. One of the officers interviewed actively engages in proactive policing and expressed worry towards the BWC in this regard, as proactive policing practices tend to involve more physical responses and may be under higher scrutiny for the public for ‘profiling’. Officers may therefore be placed in difficult circumstances if the camera should commonly fall off while engaging in proactive policing.

Finally, most of the officers interviewed were concerned that the BWC could be a burden to their work. The officers have heard that the BWC “requires more work and more time,” citing the need to dock the camera prior to responding to the next job and the need to spend time uploading and downloading videos. One officer even referred to the BWC as ultimately “pointless,” as he felt that the BWC would require a large amount of additional work and force officers to spend less time patrolling the streets.

□ **Officers' Expectations on Possible Changes in Policing**

The officers interviewed appeared to be skeptical and uncertain about the BWC's potential impact on policing overall. The officers shared doubts that the BWC would notably affect their own behavior on the job. The officers tend to handle each situation based upon its context and their own best judgment, therefore they are unlikely to alter their behavior due to the presence of a camera. As one officer said, "It is not going to change daily interaction. If I am going to stop someone, I am going to stop him no matter if I have a camera or not."

Similarly, the officers did not feel as though the BWC would increase their need to contact a supervisor. Each of the officers stated that they only rarely contact a supervisor, generally in respect to serious incidents, in which they are mandated to do so. The officers expressed that they are unlikely to contact supervisors outside of these required circumstances, even with the BWC. One officer noted that the footage may provide useful information to supervisors in addressing complaints, but otherwise it would not affect their interactions with supervisors.

Summary

"In the perfect circumstance, if the camera is in the right place, is on entire time, doesn't fall off, and captures [the] entire incident from the officer going to talk to the citizen to end of use of force incident, then yes they would be great, because it would take away all the questions."

---- A Patrol Officer from Goodman Section

Goodman Section is the third section to implement BWC after Clinton and Central Sections. By the time researchers conducted ride-along sessions in this section, officers had gained some knowledge from the other two sites. Like Goodman Section, Genesee Section officers' opinions were inevitably affected by their knowledge of the on-going BWC implementation in other sections. Despite their mutual experience, officers in these two sections share extremely similar understandings of current police-community trust: both sections' officers think that people who often interact with the police have less trust in them, while people who don't interact with police show more respect and trust for officers. Researchers noticed that officers in Goodman and Genesee Section generally had more things to say during the interview

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relative to Clinton Section, especially on their concerns about BWC operation and user experience. As noted, the homogeneity of office sex and experience among the sample limits generalizability, however, the general picture of work in these two sections is not sharply divergent from that observed in Clinton.

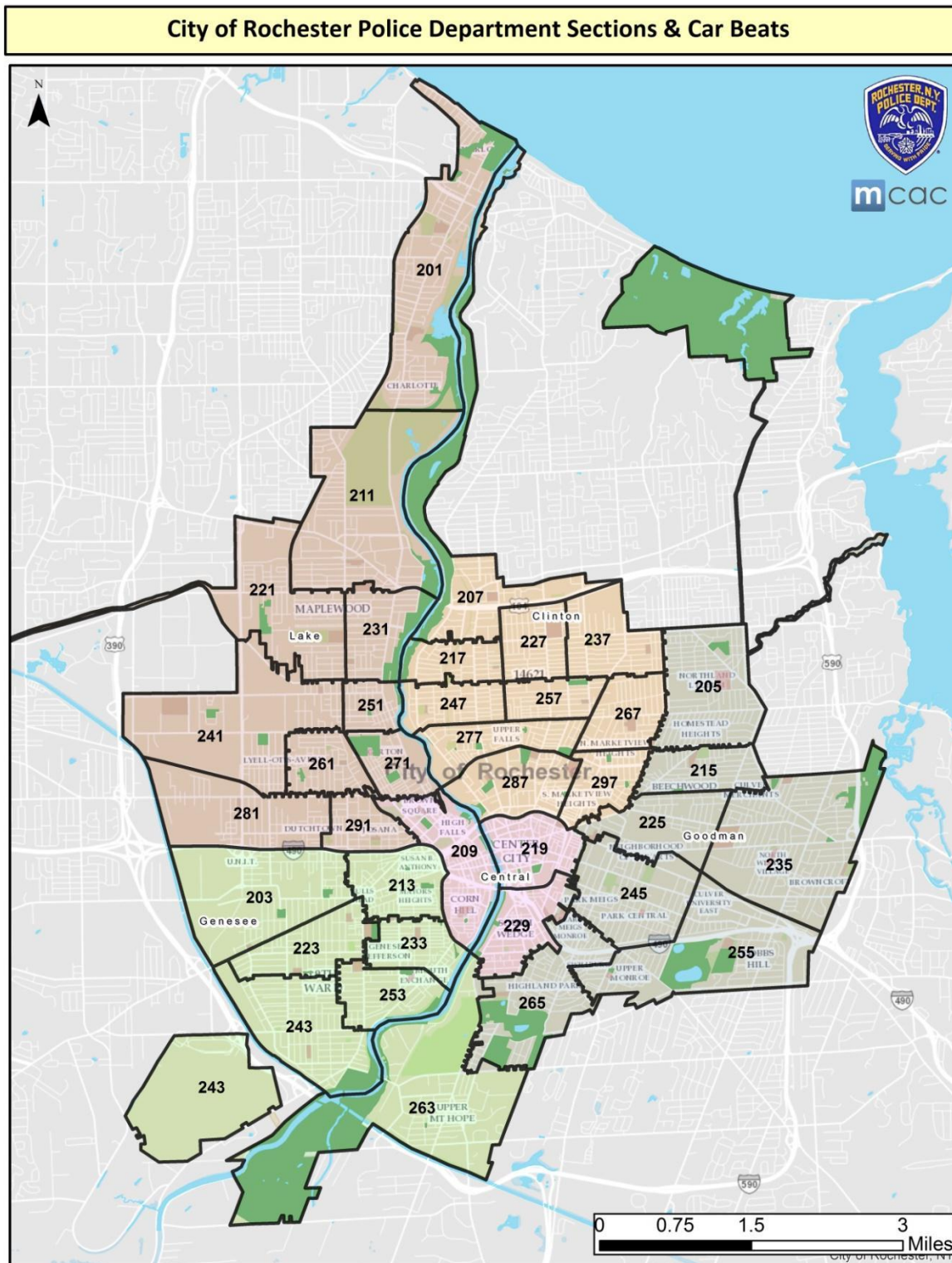
In both Goodman Section and Genesee Section, officers generally agreed that the BWC would not cause a big change in policing in terms of impacting officers' discretion. They consider the BWC as a new change in policing to which they will eventually adapt. However, based on their knowledge of the implementation going on in Clinton and Central Sections, officers had specific concerns about the hardware, technology, and captioning capability of the BWC.

Although the officers in Goodman and Genesee Section believed the BWC would provide only minor benefits, research conducted on the impact of BWCs has been proven to be much more substantial. Recent research on BWCs has shown that they have great potential to decrease citizen complaints and usage of force (Ariel et al., 2015) and increase perceived police legitimacy, leading to more crime reporting (Ariel, 2016). These two changes may be indicative of behavioral transformations in both police and citizens. Capturing officers' internal acceptance and presumed impact of the BWC is important as police ultimately play a role in its effectiveness (Gaub et al., 2016). Research capturing these perceptions prior to and after BWC deployment show that the internal acceptance of BWCs can be enhanced as it becomes a more universally accepted technology (Gaub et al, 2016). Future ride-along sessions will provide additional insight into the relationship of Rochester's BWC initiative as it relates to the current research trend.

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Appendix A:



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Appendix B:

Rochester Police Department Patrol Staffing

		Officers					Sergeants	Lieutenants	Investigators	
		4x2 Work Week*			5x2*	Total				
Section	Platoon	Wheel A	Wheel B	Wheel C						
Lake	1st	7	7	7		21	3	1	0	
	2nd	8	8	8		24	4	1	2	
	3rd	10	10	10		30	5	1	3	
	4th					10	10	1	0	2
	Total	25	25	25		10	85	13	3	7
Genesee	1st	5	5	5		15	2	1	0	
	2nd	7	7	7		21	4	1	2	
	3rd	8	8	8		24	4	1	3	
	4th					8	8	1	0	2
	Total	20	20	20		8	68	11	3	7
Goodman	1st	5	5	5		15	2	1	0	
	2nd	7	7	7		21	4	1	2	
	3rd	8	8	8		24	4	1	3	
	4th					8	8	1	0	2
	Total	20	20	20		8	68	11	3	7
Clinton	1st	7	7	7		21	3	1	0	
	2nd	8	8	8		24	4	1	2	
	3rd	10	10	10		30	5	1	3	
	4th					10	10	1	0	2
	Total	25	25	25		10	85	13	3	7
Central	1st	3	3	3		9	1	1	0	
	2nd	3	3	3		9	2	1	1	
	3rd	3	3	3		9	1	1	1	
	4th					4	4	1	0	1
	5th					10	10	1	0	0
	Detail**					10	10	0	0	0
Total	9	9	9	24	51	6	3	3		
Patrol Total		99	99	99	60	357	54	15	31	

Platoon	Hours			* Patrol personnel work either a 4 days on 2 days off rotating schedule or a fixed 5 days on 2 days off schedule.
1st	23:00-07:00			
2nd	07:00-15:00			
3rd	15:00-23:00			** Central sections staffs a unique combination of foot posts and walking beats in the downtown business district between its 5th platoon and detail personnel.
4th	19:00-03:00			
5th	11:00-19:00			
Times may vary slightly by Section				

Appendix C:

A Framework of Interview for Ride-along

1. What does a typical work day look like?
 - a. How long have you been a police officer?
 - b. How long have you been patrolling this area?
 - c. How long have you been working on this shift?
 - d. What's your patrol area?
 - e. What are the major crime concerns of this area based on your experience working here?
 - f. What time of your shift and what days of the week do you tend to have a larger workload (Calls for service etc.)?
 - g. How often do you have to call your supervisor? (Use of force report, major crime scene or other issues)
 - h. Overall, what do you think the police-citizen interactions are like right now? Are citizens cooperative? How much trust do you think you receive from the community you are patrolling (not trusted vs. trusted)?
 - i. What are the types of crimes in this area that need citizen input the most?
 - j. How often do you have to use force to solve a problem?
 - k. How comfortable are you with the idea of using BWC in policing? (Based on your personal experience and the national trend)
 - l. What issues do you want the BWC study to address?
 - m. Was there any situation where you thought having a BWC could have helped?
2. In what ways do you think the BWC is going to affect the nature of police work and why?
 - a. Do you think there would be a detectable change in policing with the addition of BWC? (Example: Police-citizen encounter,
 - (1) What are the common crimes in this patrol section? In what ways do you think BWC will change your job in this particular patrol area?
 - Do you think BWC will change the likelihood of proactive encounters?
 - Do you think BWC will change the response to reactive encounters?
 - Do you think BWC will bring more reliance on supervisor consultation?
 - (2) Possible changes in different kinds of encounters/calls?
 - Mentally ill
 - Family disturbance/domestic dispute
 - Any early investigative activities
 - Dealing with juveniles
 - Drug dealing
 - Gang
 - (3) How's BWC going to change citizen's view of/cooperation with police work?
 - Do you think BWC will help increase the public's trust of the police? (Justify certain cases?)
 - Do you think that the BWC will affect the quality of police-citizen encounters?

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- Do you think that citizens might question how the camera and its footage is used? Why?
 - How do you think the appearance of the BWC will affect the quality/quantity of informational communication between police and concerned citizens?
 - How will the BWC affect police interaction with witnesses?
 - How will the BWC affect evidentiary usage?
 - How will the BWC affect the possibility of follow-up investigative interviews?
- (4) In what ways do you think the BWC will affect domestic violence cases? (Victim cooperation, criminal charge, etc.)
3. Police perception of the BWC (Positive, Neutral or Negative)
- (1) Do you think the BWC is going to be an extra burden or do you tend to perceive it as an improvement that will make your job easier? Why do you think so?
- If Concern > Benefit:
- What's your major concern with using/implementing the BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how BWC could cause a problem in your work?
- If Benefit > Concern:
- What is your expected benefit of using/implementing the BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how the BWC could solve a problem in your work?
- (2) How comfortable are you with the BWC as a new policing technology?
- (3) Would the amount of time you will have to spend on BWC related work affect your role as an officer?
- (4) Are there locations/situations/encounters where you believe the camera may present issues, regardless of policy? (e.g., in homes, schools, with minors, in extreme weathers, particular kinds of events/witnesses)
- (5) What is your thought on BWC footage vs. officer vision/reaction?