

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

## Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jarmac](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jarmac)

Empirical article

## Believing is Seeing: Biased Viewing of Body-Worn Camera Footage

Kristyn A. Jones, William E. Crozier and Deryn Strange\*

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY Graduate Center, United States

Body-worn camera (BWC) footage is expected to be objective, thereby improving transparency. But can other information about an incident affect how people perceive BWC footage? In two experiments, we examined the effects of officer-generated misinformation and outcome information on people's memory for an event. Participants viewed BWC footage and/or read an officer's report containing misleading information. Some participants learned the officer was punished, some that the citizen was arrested. Participants then answered questions exploring their memory for the facts, the extent to which they relied on the officer's misinformation in judging who was at fault, and their impressions of the officer and civilian. Even when participants saw the BWC footage, their conclusions were consistent with the officer's misinformation. Moreover, participants' attitudes toward police predicted their interpretation of the footage, suggesting BWC footage is unlikely to be perceived objectively. We explain our results in terms of misinformation effects and confirmation bias.

**General Audience Summary**

Proponents of police body-worn cameras (BWCs) assume that recording police–citizen interactions will be a panacea for heightened tensions between officers and communities. Yet there is limited research on the inferences people draw about a police encounter recorded by a BWC. Importantly, we do not know whether other sources of information impact peoples' perceptions of BWC footage. Participants learned about the outcome of the event and then read the officer's report, watched the BWC footage or both—and if both, we manipulated the order. In his report, the officer justified his use of force by claiming that the civilian struck him and was carrying a knife, although neither of these claims were present in the footage. We found that when people viewed the BWC footage in conjunction with the discrepant officer's report, people viewed the civilian more negatively, the officer more positively, and were more likely to justify the officer's use of force. In addition, we found evidence of bias: (a) people's self-reported identification with police predicted the extent to which they recalled information consistent with the officer's report and (b) people formed conclusions about the police–citizen interaction in ways that were consistent with the outcome of the event.

*Keywords:* Memory, Misinformation, Legal processes, Policy-making

Imagine you are reading the news and learn about an altercation between a police officer and a citizen. The citizen claims the officer used excessive force; the officer claims the force was justified. To find out what really happened, you read the officer's report and view his body-worn camera (BWC) footage.

Surprisingly, there are inconsistencies: the officer reports being attacked by the citizen, but the footage shows no such incident. When you talk about the event later, what will you remember happened? Politicians, law enforcement agencies, and civil rights groups have all trumpeted the implementation of BWCs

**Author Note**

Kristyn A. Jones, William E. Crozier, and Deryn Strange, Department of Psychology, John Jay College, CUNY, United States.

Funding for this research was obtained from CKF: Criminal Justice and Policing Reform Project.

\* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Deryn Strange, Department of Psychology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, New York, NY 10019, United States.  
Contact: [dstrange@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:dstrange@jjay.cuny.edu).

(Miller, Toliver, & PERF, 2014; Stanley, 2015). But understanding whether people use other evidence to make sense of BWC footage—rendering the footage non-objective—is crucial and has not been investigated.

The basic assumption underlying the push for BWCs is that objective—accurate—footage will encourage transparent policing, improving police-community relations. Indeed, ruling the NYPD's "stop and frisk" policy was racially biased, a U.S. District Court ordered the NYPD to trial a BWC program, reasoning that because BWCs provide a contemporaneous record, the footage would substantiate complaints against officers (Remedies Opinion: *Floyd and Ligon v. NYC*, 2013). The NYPD is not alone. In 2015, the Justice Department awarded \$23.2 million to fund BWC pilot programs in 32 states. Moreover, 43 of 68 "major city" US police departments already have BWC policies (BWC Policy Scorecard, 2016). The rhetoric, however, surrounding their implementation—BWCs will reveal what *really* happened—is not supported by empirical evidence (Lum, Koper, Merola, Scherer, & Reioux, 2015).

To date, three empirical studies have examined the influence of BWC footage on peoples' perceptions of police-citizen interactions. These studies suggest that BWC footage does not stand on its own; people's perceptions of what occurred during an incident can be altered by people's policing experiences (Boivin, Gendron, Faubert, & Poulin, 2016), media reports of fraught police-citizen interactions (Culhane, Boman, & Schweitzer, 2016), and the medium by which people learn about the encounter (McCammann & Culhane, 2017). Although troubling, these studies do not test the critical question of BWCs: can people discount discrepant evidence from less objective sources when viewing BWC footage?

Several types of evidence—a statement made by a witness or suspect, cellphone video—could be inconsistent with BWC video. Here, we focus on discrepancies between officers' reports and their corresponding BWC footage. Although officers may intentionally write false reports, it is far more likely they could unintentionally include information they remember incorrectly (see, for example, Hope et al., 2016). Indeed, decades of research reveals memory is both malleable and fallible (Loftus, 2005; Schacter, 2001). Thus, it is simply not plausible that an officer's account will always perfectly match a video recording. Therefore, as a consequence of memory distortion, an officer may accidentally include inaccurate, misleading information in their report—misinformation—that is, by necessity, not depicted in the BWC footage.

On one hand, people should recognize that BWC footage is inherently more objective and accurate than a police report. Research shows people can discount evidence from biased sources in forensic contexts (Cooper & Neuhaus, 2000; Dodd & Bradshaw, 1980; Olson & Wells, 2004). As such, any misinformation embedded in a police report should have little influence on peoples' interpretation of the encounter if they believe the officer is biased. BWC footage may also be more memorable given that it contains visual and verbal information, allowing more memorial cues, and perhaps rendering the misleading report less problematic (Paivio, 1990). In addition, by providing a concrete visual representation of the incident, BWC footage

may constrain viewers' imaginations, making it more difficult for people to elaborate on what they saw (Garry & Wade, 2005). Thus, people should remember more accurate information from BWC footage than from written reports.

On the other hand, an extensive literature describes how easily people integrate misinformation into memory. For example, we know that misinformation introduced *after* an event can alter our memory for what we witnessed or experienced (Loftus, 2005), and misinformation that is later corrected can still exert influence on how we remember and understand an event (Johnson & Seifert, 1994). Importantly, we are all susceptible to the effects of misinformation (Patihis et al., 2013) and the effects are notoriously difficult to correct, even if the error is acknowledged, and especially when the misinformation fits with people's expectations (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012). Our susceptibility to misinformation is typically explained as a failure in source monitoring (Lindsay, 2008). Briefly, according to the source monitoring framework, we do not store the details of our memories with a tag or label specifying the origins of each detail. Thus, without careful monitoring efforts, we can make mistakes, misremembering details we read in a police report, for example, as something we saw in the BWC footage (Johnson, Hashtroudi, & Lindsay, 1993; Lindsay, 2008).

Of course, if people receive additional information prior to viewing the BWC footage, it may alter what they see. Knowing the outcome of the case could lead people to form hypotheses in line with that information, focus on evidence that supports their expectations, and ignore disconfirming evidence. Put differently, confirmation bias, hindsight bias, and anchoring are all likely to play a role in what people remember seeing (Nickerson, 1998; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Moreover, people's beliefs about the criminal justice system and police officers, in particular, may be difficult to set aside, biasing the way people view BWC footage (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). To summarize, we do not know the extent to which people's biases render BWC footage non-objective.

In the present studies, we address two primary research questions: What do people remember about a police-citizen interaction when an officer's report and BWC footage differ, and how do biases influence such memories and conclusions about the event? To address these research questions, we gave some participants an officer's report that described a "use of force" incident with a civilian. The officer justified his use of force by claiming the civilian struck him first and was carrying a knife. The officer's BWC footage, however, did not show either claim. Rather, the BWC footage showed no clear reason for the officer's use of force. We manipulated what evidence people received—the report or BWC footage—and if both, the order they received it. We also measured people's biases in two ways, (a) by providing them with outcome information—either that the officer was fired and charged with assault or the citizen was arrested—before they learned about the incident and (b) by measuring people's attitudes toward police officers, the criminal justice system, and authority. We predicted that the misleading information in the officer's report would influence how participants viewed the corresponding BWC footage, ultimately shaping their perceptions of the officer and civilian. We

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7241818>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7241818>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)