

Police Body Worn Camera Policy: Exploration of Features and Effectiveness

Christian Reyes

Graduate M.S.

Advisor: Mike Rossler

Criminal Justice Science



Project Purpose

Body Worn Cameras continue to be a technological tool utilized by law enforcement across the country. As academic inquiry into the effects of this tool are increasing, both positive and negative effects have been associated with their implementation.

With new legislation being passed in Illinois requiring all police officers to have a body worn camera on them during their shifts by 2025, the topic of their effectiveness and utilization continues to grow. Given the mixed findings found in the current literature, academic studies give insight to how law enforcement departments are performing.

The purpose of this project is to identify key points within how the language of body worn camera policy is phrased and the content will distinguish whether the policies are consistent or dissimilar in regards body worn cameras.

Methods

For this Qualitative Content Analysis, a combination of 31 case studies, research articles, department policies and news articles were selected that aligned with the overall purpose and direction of this project.

Articles were found and selected using the Illinois State University Milner Library Catalog and through the use of Google Scholar.

The literature selected was based on elements associated with body worn cameras that involved body worn camera deployment/activation, footage review and storage/maintenance. Phrased searched included:

“Body worn camera policy”

“Body worn camera deployment”

“Body worn camera activation”

“Body worn camera footage review”

“Body worn camera storage”

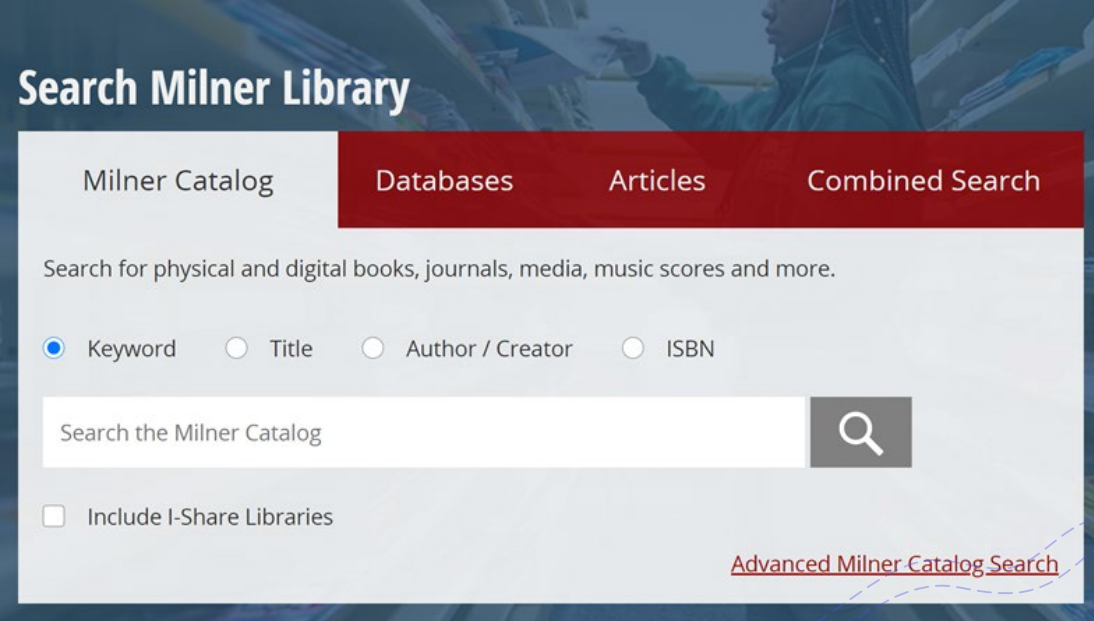
“Body worn camera maintenance”

Content includes:

26 academic articles

3 news articles

2 Police Department official BWC Policy's

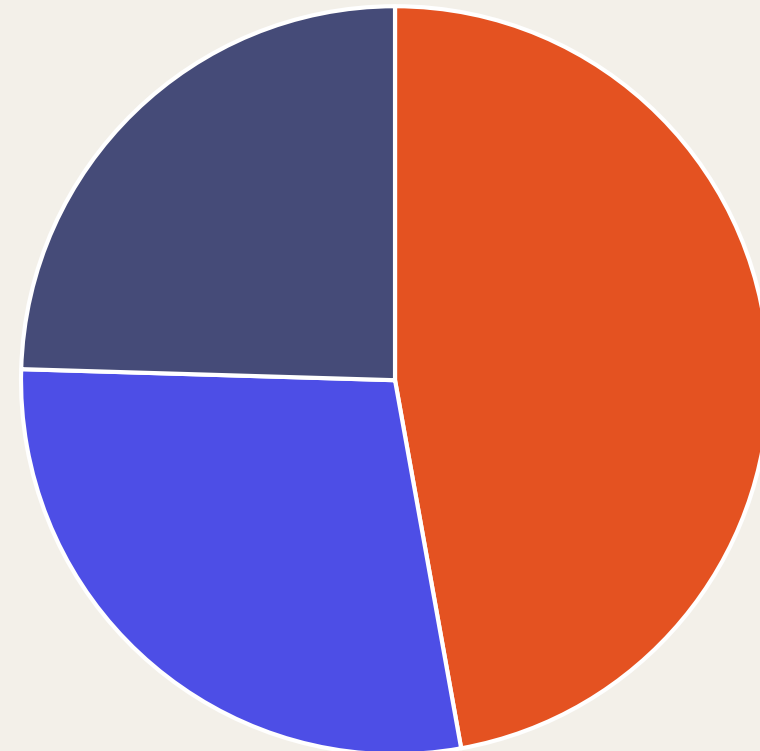


The screenshot shows the 'Search Milner Library' interface. At the top, there are four tabs: 'Milner Catalog', 'Databases', 'Articles', and 'Combined Search'. Below the tabs, there is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search the Milner Catalog' and a magnifying glass icon. To the left of the search bar, there are four radio buttons for search criteria: 'Keyword' (selected), 'Title', 'Author / Creator', and 'ISBN'. Below the search bar, there is a checkbox labeled 'Include I-Share Libraries'. In the bottom right corner, there is a link for 'Advanced Milner Catalog Search'.

Element Findings: Academic Only

Out of 26 Academic Articles analyzed:

- Activation was mentioned in 25 articles
- Footage Review was mentioned in 15 articles
- Maintenance was mentioned in 13 articles



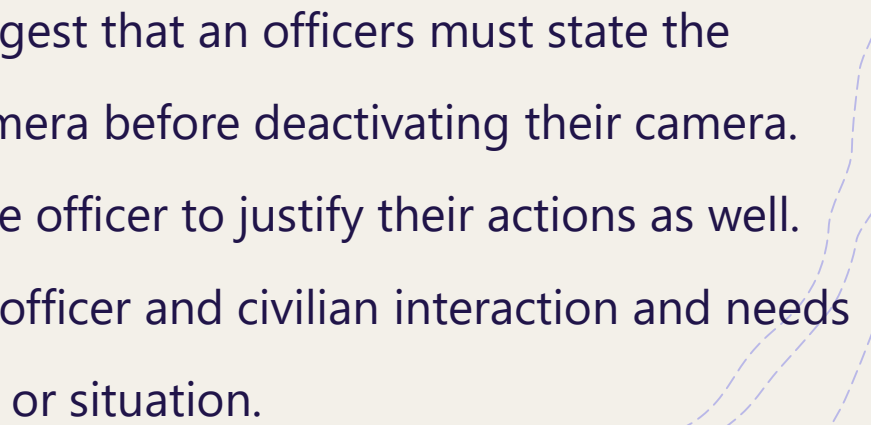
■ Activation ■ Footage Review ■ Maintenance



Results: Activation

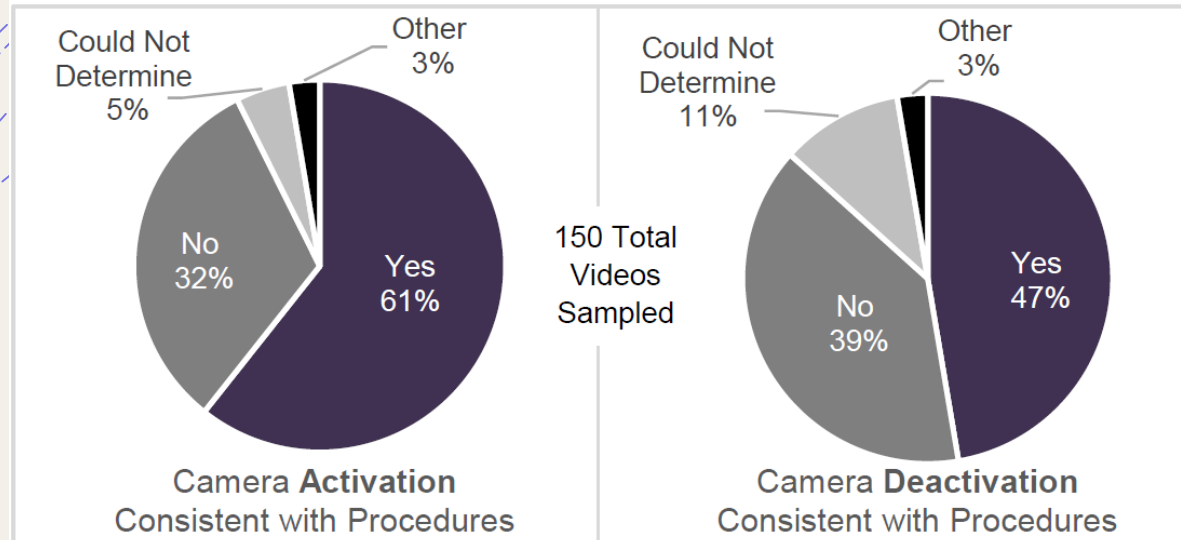
The overall research points to the direction that an effective body worn camera policy requires a clear list of situations to describe when officers must record and requires officers to provide reasonable justifications for failing to record required events.

Additionally, the findings suggest that an officers must state the reason for deactivation on camera before deactivating their camera. Failure to do so will require the officer to justify their actions as well. Activation is a crucial part for officer and civilian interaction and needs to be accounted for every call or situation.



Results: Activation Study Examples

Exhibit 6: Officers Failed to Activate and Deactivate Cameras According to Policy



Source: Auditor's analysis of sample of 150 videos in the from the video management system from November 2016 to May 2018

ATLANTA POLICE DEPARTMENT BODY-WORN CAMERAS 2018
<http://www.atlaudit.org/atlanta-police-department-body-worn-cameras---december-2018.html>

Ex. Chicago Police Department Body Worn Camera Policy 2017
<https://www.bwcorescorecard.org/static/policies/2017-06-09%20Chicago%20BWC%20Policy.pdf>

- a. calls for service;
- b. investigatory stops;
- c. traffic stops;
- d. traffic control;
- e. foot and vehicle pursuits;
- f. arrests;
- g. use of force incidents;
- h. seizure of evidence;
- i. interrogations;
- j. searches, including searches of people, items, vehicles, buildings, and places;
- k. statements made by individuals in the course of an investigation;
- l. requests for consent to search;
- m. emergency driving situations;
- n. emergency vehicle responses where fleeing suspects or vehicles may be captured on video leaving the crime scene;
- o. high-risk situations;
- p. any encounter with the public that becomes adversarial after the initial contact;
- q. arrestee transports;
- r. any other instance when enforcing the law.

Results:

Footage Review

Literature suggest that body camera policy regarding footage review should require officers to write and submit an initial written report or statement before their own or any footage is reviewed, for all events recorded.

A strong policy would contain language that makes it mandatory for a supervisory officer to review footage and reports together to assure that both account to the same events of the footage.

Effective body worn camera policy would allow individuals who are filing police misconduct complaints to view all relevant footage. Footage should also become public to allow for positive feedback and community transparency



Results: Maintenance

The policy should state that any footage altering and unauthorized usage is prohibited assuring that all access to any recorded footage will be logged or audited.

The policy should require that the given police department should immediately delete unflagged footage within six months.

The policy should also include limiting the use of biometric technologies such as facial recognition that identify individuals in footage because it would allow for potential privacy violations.



Conclusion

With the societal push for police departments to have their officers carry body worn cameras, recommended body worn camera policy according to the literature is only proven effective if it is put into practice. Although some departments may have positive responses from their implemented policies, different departments may need to adjust to fit their departments needs. Police departments should require that their stated policies are to be followed and any type of violations must be dealt with appropriately. With new studies and literature continuing to detail new methods, policies should be updated frequently to assure the best quality of police work and body camera footage.