

Community Supervision Officers' Perspectives on The Utilization of Body-Worn Cameras in Community Supervision

Mari-Esther Edwards¹

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA

Kevin F. Steinmetz

Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA

ABSTRACT

Body-worn cameras (BWCs) continue to be examined, primarily within the context of police departments, as a tool to increase community and law enforcement relations across the United States. Unfortunately, little research has examined the possible use of BWCs within community supervision agencies. Thus, the current study examines BWCs within the context of community supervision. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were gathered among CSOs and administrators from a large community supervision agency on the verge of adopting BWC technologies. Results point to five prevailing perceptions of BWCs rooted in the types of accounts BWC footage is said to provide including (1) useful, (2) trustworthy, (3) untrustworthy, (4) intrusive and (5) punitive. Findings are considered in the context of the community supervision occupational culture and organizational context. Lastly, it is imperative that community supervision agencies who have or are considering implementing BWCs have clear policies and procedures regarding the privacy of bystanders and activation and deactivation protocol.

KEYWORDS: Body-Worn Cameras, Community Supervision, Parole, Probation, Surveillance.

Over the past twenty years, criminal justice agencies—primarily police departments—have increasingly adopted body-worn camera (BWC) technologies to promote transparency and accountability as well as mitigate civil liability. Calls for such devices have only increased following controversial killings of Black individuals by police officers since 2014, the victims of which include notable cases like Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, and others. Though BWC adoption has swelled, questions surround their implementation and the effectiveness of these technologies. As a result, scholars have raced to examine the implementation of BWC programs among law enforcement agencies across the United States and beyond (e.g., Cubitt et al., 2017; Gaub et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2019; Malm, 2019; Maskaly et al., 2017).

Amidst the fervor, little research has scrutinized BWCs within other kinds of criminal legal institutions including community corrections, which has been slower to adopt such technologies (American Probation and Parole Association [APPA], 2020). Community corrections is a massive penal institution in the US, with approximately 1 in 71 US adults as of 2022 under probation or parole supervision (Kaeble & Alper, 2024, 4). Given the volume of

¹ Corresponding Author: Mari-Esther Edwards, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, College of Arts and Sciences, New Mexico State University, United States. E-Mail: mer22@nmsu.edu

folks under the gaze of community corrections, any policy and practice changes made within such agencies are worth scrutinizing. Additionally, the dearth of research on BWCs in this domain is concerning, given the unique challenges confronting community correction agencies, officers, and supervisees. Community supervision officers (CSOs) have significant authority and autonomy in the exercise of their duties and are often burdened with significant caseloads; they are often under pressure to make quick assessments regarding their cases. Those under supervision have reduced rights (including privacy rights) and are often under stringent and stressful probation or parole terms. Under these circumstances, there exists a persistent risk of excessive force, abuse of authority, and mistreatment of clients. To date, there are only a few studies that focus on the implementation of BWCs within corrections, specifically researchers surveyed the COs and staff in Queensland, Australia prisons (e.g., Dodd et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2024; Sydes et al., 2022;) adult detention center in Virginia (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2023; Lawrence et al., 2023; Lawrence et al., 2024;) and a case study with the Georgia Department of Community Supervision (e.g., Jannetta et al., 2022).

The current study addresses this gap in the research by examining perceptions of BWCs among CSOs and administrators. Specifically, this study examines participants beliefs regarding the handling of BWC footage by their department, the impact such technologies may have on their day-to-day job activities, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using BWCs within community supervision departments. This study answers the following research questions: (1) what are the different ways CSOs would use BWCs for their work duties, (2) the impact BWCs may have on CSOs everyday work duties, and (3) the advantages and disadvantages of using BWCs within community supervision departments? Qualitative semi-structured interviews were gathered among CSOs and administrators from a large community supervision agency on the verge of adopting BWC technologies. There were five main themes that emerged from the data – useful (value), trustworthy (reliability), untrustworthy (reliability), intrusive (privacy) and punitive (disciplinary). These accounts gesture toward an underlying occupational identity which views such devices as useful to the extent that they support the legitimacy and authority of line-level officers as well as potentially problematic in that BWC footage might be used against them or otherwise undermine their autonomy and authority. The way these technologies are introduced may thus have significant implications for organizational power dynamics, officer autonomy, and related matters. Implications for policy, practice, and future research are considered. The structure of the paper is as follows: (1) literature review which provides an overview of policing and corrections literature regarding BWCs, (2) methodology, (3) results which are split into five main themes, and (4) discussion concerning significant implications for organizational power dynamics, officer autonomy, and related matters. Implications for policy, practice, and future research are considered.

Literature Review

Most research on BWCs has focused on their implementation and use among police departments. This research has generally found that these devices may help with officer training, case management, and accountability (Gramagila & Phillips, 2018; Koen & Willis, 2020; Newell & Greidanus, 2018; Pelfrey & Keener, 2018; Smykla et al., 2016). Studies also suggest that BWCs may not strengthen community relations between police departments and the community, which was the main premise of implementing BWCs according to the 2015 President's Task Force on 21st Policing (Bromberg & Charbonneau, 2018; Crow et al., 2017; Roche, 2019). In short, while BWCs may provide some benefit to law enforcement transparency, accountability, and use of force, they are by no means a silver bullet solution (Ariel et al., 2015; Braga et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2015; Lum et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2017; White et al., 2017).

Outside of policing, correctional agencies have begun adopting BWC technologies as well, a trend that researchers have only recently begun to investigate. Much of this research has focused upon facilities in New Zealand, Australia and Virginia, United States. For instance, Beales and Marsh (2016) examined NZ prisons in which BWCs were implemented selectively among facility personnel. In their study, BWCs appeared to reduce the rate and frequency of assaults, aided in misconduct investigations and evidentiary proceedings, helped officers feel safer, and overall produced a civilizing effect. These facilities, however, ultimately elected to restrict the use of BWCs to high-risk situations rather than everyday use because these technologies were thought to hurt rapport between officers and prisoners.

Another project, consisting of two phases, examined perceptions of BWCs usage among correctional officers (COs) in Queensland, Australia using both survey and interview data after the implementation of the technology in 2017 (Dodd et al., 2020; Sydes et al., 2022). The first phase of the project was exploratory in nature and examined if the COs supported the utilization of BWCs within prisons and implementation challenges of BWCs within the prison (Dodd et al., 2020). The COs “held favorable views on the use of BWCs in corrections” and indicated that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages (Dodd et al., 2020, p. 1196). Further, the COs indicated they would use the BWC footage in conjunction with the CCTV footage to support their accounts of an incident or to counter false accusations (Dodd et al., 2020). The COs reported that they were concerned about facing disciplinary action for failing to activate or deactivate the BWC as instructed by administration, and for the language they used towards inmates or the hesitance to use force – even when permitted under policy; however, this fear dissipated some after the COs noticed they were not being disciplined for these issues (Dodd et al., 2020). The researchers discovered some implementation challenges regarding the utilization of BWCs within the prison. There were mixed results regarding who should have access to view the footage such as all COs or an CO writing a report, or only supervisors and administrators. Further, the COs indicated that the BWC footage would be beneficial for training; however, privacy infringement of the inmate and officer within the footage was a concern. Lastly, the COs indicated that there may be a negative impact on the rapport between them and the inmates if the administration required them to have the BWCs activated throughout their shifts (Dodd et al., 2020).

The second phase of the project examined if the BWCs made the COs “feel safer” while completing their everyday duties within the prison walls (Sydes et al., 2022). These researchers found mixed results, most respondents said they would feel safer or were neutral on the matter. Respondents, however, also indicated they did not believe BWCs would reduce assaults on staff or aggressive behavior from the inmates (Sydes et al., 2022). Overall, the respondents did not believe the BWCs increased their physical safety, but they would aid in protecting them against any false accusations made from the inmates, as well as “improve the accuracy of accounts of officer-prisoner interactions” (Sydes et al., 2022, p. 333).

Lastly, Dodd and colleagues (2024) examined how the COs utilized their discretionary abilities to either activate or de-activate their BWCs, which varied on the situation occurring in the prison; simultaneously, being aware of security and inmate privacy concerns. The researchers utilized a mixed-methods approach by conducting a statewide survey and interviews of COs in Queensland, Australia (Dodd et al., 2024). The COs were given eight different scenarios and were asked if they would activate the BWC. For the most part, the COs would activate their BWC in the scenarios that involved a safety concern or imminent danger; however, most COs indicated that they would not activate their BWC when they perceived that the inmates’ privacy maybe violated (medical and other scenarios outlined in departmental policy). Furthermore, the researchers found mixed results regarding the relationship between COs perceptions of safety and their espoused willingness to follow BWC policies. For instance, the higher the belief in the BWC increasing their safety the more likely the CO would follow

the policy, the lower the belief in the BWC increasing their safety the more likely the CO would exercise their discretion despite the policy (Dodd et al., 2024).

Little research has examined BWCs in US correctional facilities. A set of researchers were able to publish several studies examining various elements of BWC usage within the Loudon County Detention Center (LCADC) in Virginia. One study examined deputies' perceptions towards the utilization of BWC within LCADC, through surveys administered across a 14-month period (pre-, mid-, and post-BWC implementation) (Peterson et al., 2023). The researchers measured deputies' perceptions through four main themes: "efficiency and accuracy", "civilizing effect on incarcerated residents", "work-related disruptions of BWCs" and "overall relationships between deputies and incarcerated residents" (Peterson et al., 2023, pp. 12-13). They used multiple t-tests to evaluate and compare the changes through the three phases (Peterson et al., 2023). Researchers found that the deputies' perceptions were neutral when asked if the BWC increased the "efficiency and accuracy" of completing their everyday job duties. However, the deputies held either neutral or negative perceptions regarding BWCs creating a "civilizing effect" among the inmates – meaning that the BWCs would not make the inmates more cooperative, respectful, or less aggressive towards the deputies (Peterson et al., 2023). Lastly, the deputies held either neutral or negative perceptions regarding the BWC being disruptive to their daily duties such as giving warnings or reducing the number of contacts with inmates, hindering their discretion or being reluctant to use force when needed (Peterson et al., 2023).

At LCADC the researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial in a 364-day period, resulting in two studies (Lawrence et al., 2023, 2024). The first study examined if BWCs impacted the prevalence of resident resistance levels and the deputy's response to resistance control methods within the response to resistance events that occurred within LCADC (Lawrence et al., 2024). The resident resistance levels were coded into categories of passive, active, and aggressive (Lawrence et al., 2024). The deputy's control methods were coded into categories of physical, restraint, and weapon. The researchers concluded that there was an overall reduction of response to resistance events with the presence of BWCs. Further, there was a decrease in active resistance by the inmates as well as physical control used by deputies within these events (Lawrence et al., 2024). There was no change in inmate aggressive resistance and use of weapons by the deputies. The second study examined if the presence of the BWC impacted the inmates' response to resistance related injuries using the same data (Lawrence et al., 2023). The researchers concluded that the presence of BWCs was associated with a significant reduction in resident injuries (Lawrence et al., 2023).

Despite a small but growing body of research on the use of BWCs in correctional settings, only one study to date (to our knowledge) utilized BWC footage to examine procedural justice within community supervision. The Georgia Department of Community Supervision (2016) (GDSCS)² allowed the Urban Institute to conduct a case study to evaluate procedural justice within their department. They were tasked to create, deliver, and evaluate a curriculum that incorporated procedural justice within GDSCS to "determine whether such an intervention would increase procedurally just treatment by supervision officers, thereby improving supervision outcomes" (Jannetta et al., 2022, pp. V-VI). Drawing from both surveys and reviews of client interactions through BWC footage, researchers measured procedural justice through five components: voice, respect, understanding, neutral decision-making, and helpfulness (Jannetta et al., 2022). The only statistically significant result of the analysis derived from the "understanding" component specifically with the CSOs summarizing and verifying the client's understanding of the interaction, when comparing pre- and post-procedural justice training of the CSOs (Jannetta et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there is minimal research conducted regarding the utilization of BWCs within community supervision and correctional

² GDSCS implemented BWCs in 2016 in the hopes of enhancing the "agency's training, operational efficiency, and supervision quality" (GDSCS Press Release, 2016).

facilities. Thus, this study seeks to address this gap by examining CSOs and administrators' perceptions of how utilizing BWCs would affect their day-to-day work duties.³

Methods

This research involves interviews with CSOs and administrators employed within a large community corrections agency (~500 employees) in the Southeastern United States during the Fall of 2021⁴. This organization, at the time, was considering adopting BWC technologies and allowed the researcher access to examine CSO and administrator perceptions of such technologies prior to implementation. This study answers the following research questions: (1) what are the different ways CSOs would use BWCs for their work duties, (2) the impact BWCs may have on CSOs everyday work duties, and (3) the advantages and disadvantages of using BWCs within community supervision departments.

Before research began, the lead researcher acquired the necessary legal and administrative clearances with the organization in addition to approval from the university's ethics board. The Kansas State University Research Compliance Office approved the IRB application (#10724) on June 6, 2021, for three years. To recruit participants, administrators distributed the researcher's request for research participants to organizational members. This request included instructions for volunteers to contact the primary researcher directly. Administrators and supervisors were never informed about which employees chose to participate in the study. Organizational members who responded to this request were then sent additional information about the research project and a copy of the consent form. Before the scheduled interview began, the IRB consent form was reviewed and verbal agreements to participate from the volunteers were received. Each participant was instructed that they could end the interview at any time and that their personal information would remain confidential (each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of data analysis and reporting).

The analytical approach used in this study involved active interviewing strategies which examined the construction of meaning among participants and within the interview process, allowing "the interviewer to encourage the respondent to shift positions in the interview to explore alternative perspectives within stocks of knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, pp. 9, 37). Thus, the participant was asked how they think someone else may answer the same question (from a supervisor's position and/or from a client's viewpoint). Active interviewing provides a way for participants to respond differently than what is considered a standard interview, with the added ability to provide diverse and possible contradictory answers (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). For instance, the participants were asked what they considered the advantages and disadvantages of implementing BWCs within community supervision agencies from the perspective of a CSO, probationer/parolee, and supervisor. Some of the answers they provided varied based on the viewpoint of another individual. Further, participants discovered the primary researchers background as a former CSO which provided flexibility in terminology utilized which is considered 'code-switching' at times (e.g., see Jones, 2023). Each interview was coded using numbers and later given pseudonyms, creating anonymity for each participant. To minimize bias, memo writing was utilized after each interview to aid in separating any personal thoughts that occurred during and after the interview.

Seventeen (17) semi-structured interviews were completed among CSOs and CSO supervisors. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the participants. Fifteen (15) participants identified as males and two (2) identified as females. Ages ranged from 31-54 years old. Most

⁴ The primary researcher gained interest in this topic due to being a probation/parole officer in two different states in the US and was employed during the rollout of BWCs within one of the departments. Additionally, both authors noticed a lack of academic research regarding community supervision agencies and BWCs; however, there continues to be a mass influx of research focusing on law enforcement agencies and BWCs.

of the participants identified as white, while one participant identified as black. Departmental tenure ranged from one and a half (1.5) years to twenty-three (23) years. Participants held a diverse array of ranks and roles in the department including CSO I, CSO II, CSO III/Specialist (includes high profile cases, sex offender caseloads, violent charges, intensive supervision, Drug Court), Supervisor (includes program managers as well as CSO supervisors), Assistant Director, and District Manager. Sixteen (16) of the participants hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Table 1

Descriptive Demographics of Sample Population (n=17)

Employed (yrs)	Age	Sex	Race	Education	Major	Position
1.5	36	Male	White	Master's	Criminal Justice	CSO II
4	37	Male	White	Bachelor's	Animal Science	CSO II
5	49	Male	White	Some college	N/A	CSO Specialist
5	31	Male	White	Bachelor's	Criminal Justice	CSO Specialist
7	31	Male	White	Bachelor's	Sociology	CSO Specialist
10.5	40	Male	White	Bachelor's	History	CSO Specialist
13.5	54	Male	White	Bachelor's	Business Management	CSO Specialist
14	43	Male	White	Bachelor's	Animal Science	CSO Specialist
15	37	Male	White	Bachelor's	Criminal Justice	Supervisor
15	47	Male	White	Bachelor's	Health/ Exercise Science	Assistant Director
15	39	Female	White	Bachelor's	Sociology-Biology	Supervisor
17	41	Male	White	Bachelor's	Industrial Design	CSO Specialist
21	45	Male	White	Bachelor's	Criminal Justice	CSO Specialist
22	54	Male	Black	Bachelor's	Political Science/ Public Policy	District Manager
23	46	Male	White	Bachelor's	Anthropology & Sociology & Criminal Justice	Supervisor
23	50	Male	White	Master's	Organizational Leadership	CSO Specialist
25	52	Female	White	Bachelor's	Sociology	CSO III

A general inductive approach was used to explore the participants' responses. The design of the interview scheduled allowed open-ended responses to questions about the CSOs perceived used of BWC within community supervision. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and ATLAS ti version 22 software was utilized to analyze the data. The analysis was separated into different themes and categories that were most relevant to the research questions (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Thomas, 2006). Thematic coding was utilized to analyze the interviews. For instance, each interview was read line by line and summed up the participants' answer in a few words, linked directly to a research question. Some codes were created based on the specific research questions asked, while other codes were created based on the main message the participant stated, which created a summative code. The first three interviews provided most of the codes used as a guide in coding the rest of the interviews. After coding each interview, the codes were reviewed to collapse into another code or expanded to encompass another perspective. If new codes emerged, then the interviews were reread based on the new codes. Then, the codes were placed under a general theme which then was placed within a category. Lastly, an outline was created based on the categories, themes, and quotes utilized as supporting evidence. The researchers met and discussed the outline several times during the analytical process. For instance, the researchers discussed the main findings and when a question came about, the transcripts were reviewed again. This process was done until no other questions regarding the data arose. Versions of the outline were kept providing an audit trail of the coding process. Due to the primary researcher's experience as a former CSO, discussions among the researchers were crucial in limiting bias and increasing conformability of the analysis. Further, reflexive journaling occurred after each interview and during the coding process, which aided in reducing bias as well as increasing awareness of personal assumptions of the data.

Results

During this analysis, participants were asked to ruminate on their hopes and concerns regarding what BWCs might do for or against them, their clients, and community bystanders. Their perceptions are largely oriented around the kinds of accounts that might be provided by BWC footage and how such footage might be used. Five such accounts emerged over the course of this analysis, that BWC footage could be (1) *useful*, (2) *trustworthy*, (3) *untrustworthy*, (4) *intrusive* and (5) *punitive*. The *useful* account speaks to the perceived value that BWC footage might offer CSOs in the everyday aspects of their jobs. BWCs were also thought to provide both *trustworthy* and *untrustworthy* accounts, in that they may or may not convey events and situations accurately and adequately. The *intrusive* account reflects upon participants' concerns that BWC footage may infringe on privacy rights as well as used to overly scrutinize and micromanage CSOs. Lastly, participants expressed concerns that footage could provide accounts used for *punitive* purposes by the administration—that they may be used to justify disciplinary action against the CSOs and produce various collateral consequences as a result. This analysis explores these accounts in depth.

A Useful Account

Some participants anticipated that BWCs recordings may help them perform their day-to-day job duties. In other words, they act as *useful accounts* of field interactions. For instance, BWC footage may be used as a “memory helper” or a “second pair of eyes,” as one participant claimed, when writing case reports. Having a record of “exactly what happens” during a field interaction could be useful for CSOs who are busy—perhaps they worked warrant roundups or saw many clients that day—and thus may need help to recall relevant particulars when completing their written reports. As one CSO elaborated:

It was not unusual that I would go out and make 25 or 30 stops in a night seeing these cases, and they were all over the place. And, so it would have helped to be able to go back and, at least to some degree, review some of the footage if I had a body worn camera, so I could accurately recall what they told me if they changed employment, or if there was a change in something that they wanted me to get them some more information on, or whatever it may have been.

In this manner, the footage may be beneficial in providing details that may otherwise be forgotten, especially in high-stress situations or when a CSO is managing numerous tasks simultaneously.

From an organizational standpoint, participants believed that recordings would be used for practical—if relatively bureaucratic—matters such as training CSOs. Henry, one CSO, explained, “I think you could definitely use it for training improvement ... to show real world footage to new officers of what it’s like to actually be in the field, make field contacts, and things to look for when they’re in the field.” For him, then, footage could become a training aid to show new CSOs different situations that they may encounter in the field, allowing trainers and trainees to consider the officers featured in the footage did well, how they could improve, and how trainees might handle the same situation.

Similarly, participants argued that footage could be used for performance assessments. For instance, the department utilizes an evidence-based program titled Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)⁵ which consists of both in-class instruction and practical field exercises. Students are required to record several CSO-client interactions and send them back to the EPICS instructors for review. Arthur stated:

...they would audio record their sessions with the offender...like ‘hey I’m taping this conversation.’ Then our department would use it as, okay, you know, you did well in this discussion. You used all the tactics of what we taught you... You steered the conversation this way or you didn’t do anything that we taught you. So, you could use [BWC footage] in that sense.

In sum, BWCs were thought to potentially provide utility for officers or the organization—making their jobs easier and making them better at their jobs simultaneously.

As previously noted, the theme of *usefulness* emphasizes that an important element of participant perceptions is the use-value that BWCs are thought to provide. The remaining accounts included in this analysis highlight how footage is used, by whom, and against whom. In other words, this analysis turns toward participants’ perceptions of how these technologies may support, protect, or harm themselves or others.

A Trustworthy Account

Many participants in this study expressed faith in BWCs to the extent that recorded footage would provide an accurate and incontrovertible account of their interactions in the field. For instance, the perceived trustworthiness of these technologies was considered especially beneficial for some to the extent that recordings could validate or invalidate a complaint made against officers. In fact, some participants believed that the only time supervisors would view BWC footage was to investigate a citizen or client complaint. While recognizing some complaints are legitimate, Leo noted that their job often involves frequent complaints against officers, given the populations they are dealing with and the stakes involved if a CSO decides to sanction a supervisee or start revocation proceedings. Leo stated, “We, uh, piss people off and they retaliate. Sometimes they embellish. You know, you’re stern with somebody and they

⁵ EPICS was created specifically with community supervision in mind to aid in “effective intervention” to address criminogenic ways of thinking and behaving (Office of Justice Programs, 2016).

say you're rude... You grab them to put them in handcuffs and they say you rough them up." For him, BWCs could be used to "squash complaints." He further stated, "I like the idea that it's recorded. 'No, that's not how it happened,' you know? You're trying to shift blame away from you, and I hope it would be used in such a way to... vet and verify." Multiple participants indicated that the BWC footage would help protect them against possible allegations over extensive use of force in civil and criminal cases when executing arrest warrants and/or taking a person into custody.

Participants also mentioned that BWC footage could be used to support officer testimony during evidentiary proceedings such as probation revocation hearings and/or administrative parole violations. This might involve supporting the CSOs recommendations in the circumstances of revocation or new criminal charges, especially if there is an issue between the accounts provided by the CSO and the client, or if their defense attorney were to argue about a "discrepancy" regarding what was said by either the officer and/or client:

So, you wind up in court and you're in a revocation hearing and they say, "Well, you know, that wasn't mine." Or, "That wasn't there." Well, you start playin' the bodycam footage and ... you see it... straightforward from beginning to end. It's hard to argue with footage. It's hard for that judge to watch it and go, "Well, well, yeah, it's there because we see it from beginning to end. We see nobody messed with it and it's there" (Logan).

In this scenario, BWC footage is thought to be a nigh-irrefutable buttress for a CSO's testimony and/or violation report.

Multiple participants indicated that the BWC footage would help protect them against possible allegations over extensive use of force in civil and criminal cases when executing arrest warrants and/or taking a person into custody, working with inebriated people, or other high-risk situations. As Jack stated, "obviously you know any time an arrest, or any type of hands-on contact is expected... I would definitely want to have a camera." In this context, the footage may provide another way for the CSO to explain escalation and de-escalation techniques used within a use-of force situation.

An Untrustworthy Account

While many participants argued that BWC footage could provide trustworthy records of field interactions, others were more cautious, asserting that BWC footage may provide an incomplete account of an event or situation. "Like I said, you might not have seen what led up to when that situation started," explained Arthur, "If you clip a shot... you can make anything look like anything... Once it gets into the world it takes on its own being." BWC footage were thought to provide accounts that might be incomplete because of: (1) how the camera is placed on the officer, (2) the type and quality of the BWC device, (3) possible BWC malfunctions or equipment limitations, (4) the device might be damaged in a physical altercation, and (5) the timing of when the BWC is activated or deactivated. For instance, Lincoln explained that,

The context of body cameras, you're not, it's not always there. The lead up... if it wasn't activated far enough in advance or if ...[you're] in a tussle it turns off whatever... [I] think sometimes the context of the situation is not always fully available in just a screenshot of... what's going on correctly... It also doesn't take into account what the officer sees off to the side of the peripheral. They turn their head, the body camera's not turning with them. It's only seeing what's directly in front of them... I think that kind of narrows the scope of what, when it's released, what the public or the media sees...

Thus, BWC recordings may also be considered untrustworthy to the extent that they fail to capture vital context or record sufficiently clear and accurate information.

The results thus point toward an impasse—recordings are simultaneously viewed as trustworthy records useful for protecting officers *and* potentially flawed accounts of a situation. Participants seemed keen to highlight potential flaws when considering how BWC footage might be used to undermine their own written or verbal accounts. Oliver stated:

My word's gonna not be taken... the same way as, as a recording, you know? A recording is very... subjective... It's not always an objective tool to use... The video's not great to begin with. The audio sometimes cuts in and out. And it [BWC] only sees what its pointing at... If it's covered or obscured, or there's something happening off, out of the camera's ... line of sight that actually affected the event... I can see too much weight being given to a video recording over... an officer's... perspective or a testimony on [how] the way the situation happened or went down; what was actually goin' on.

In this sense, the CSO's viewed their word as generally iron clad—BWCs are useful to the extent that they buttress their legitimacy and to be regarded with skepticism to the extent that they might undermine it within the organization, in court, or with the public.

An Intrusive Account

Not only were recordings thought to produce potentially untrustworthy accounts of situations, they might also be intrusive, as well. As noted previously, some participants explained that footage might be used to assess job performance, serving as a kind “quality control for contact with offenders, collateral contacts, and regular citizens while on duty” (Lincoln). While assessments were not necessarily viewed as problematic in and of themselves, one participant lamented that management might use footage to engage in “armchair quarterbacking” or micromanaging their subordinates, saying things like, “You’ve done too much. You’ve not done enough. You spent too much time at their house. You didn’t spend enough time at that house. You...didn’t, basically, supervise that person like I wanted you to.”

Beyond the potential for micro-managing, participants raised concerns that BWC footage may result in privacy violations, specifically during field visits (when medical or sensitive information is disclosed about a client) or urinary drug tests. One scenario described by a participant involves an officer conducting field visits or excursions to a supervisee’s place of residence to verify that they live there, are complying with their supervision terms, and are taking steps to integrate into the community. Unfortunately, because the client is bound to the terms of their probation or parole, these conditions may impact others who share their residence. For instance, Ryan indicated that they would use the BWC when speaking with an “offender,” but grappled with the idea of leaving the BWC on when walking through a parent’s house. Ryan stated:

I would see it bein’ turned on any time you’re talking to an offender. And that’s, you know, that’s a question, I don’t know, is if you go to a house and it’s just mom and dad there, do you have to turn your camera on or is it only when you’re dealin’ with an offender? I know I worked with city police, here, a lot and they have body worn cameras now, and it’s any time they get out of the car now, they’re turnin’ their camera on. But we’re a little different ‘cause we’re actually goin’ into people’s homes without search warrants and stuff, so I don’t, I don’t really know the answer to that. I would say every time you’re talkin’ to an offender, it would be on, but I don’t know, you know, with family and stuff if it should be on or not.

As Ryan indicates, traditional law enforcement officers may turn their cameras on for all police-citizen interactions, but there is more ambiguity concerning when it might be appropriate for CSOs to turn on these technologies given the differing privacy expectations of those who may be involved. In fact, most of the participants expressed reservations about the legality of capturing individuals who are not on probation or parole on BWCs. A few even worried about the implications of recording minors on their devices when meeting with their clients.

Participants also expressed concerns about the privacy implications of BWCs being used during urinary drug tests. Generally, CSOs are required to visually verify during urinary drug screenings that urine is leaving a client's genitals and entering the designated receptacle. Blake described their perspective on drug tests and BWC privacy issues. Blake stated:

Obviously, it's another situation, too, that... can potentially open officers up to some liability as to somebody making a claim of some sort of inappropriate contact or something. But, again, I don't think it would be appropriate for most people to have a body camera on when they're doing those too.

For these reasons, they indicated that they would seek approval to conduct the drug test in the field with the BWC activated if they "felt it was necessary." Henry, on the other hand, had fewer reservations so long as the camera did not capture any "intimate areas" or when viewing the results.

A Punitive Account

Just as participants lamented that BWC footage may be used to undermine their legitimacy or integrity, so too did they worry that BWC footage could be used for disciplinary purposes. For instance, a couple of participants described GPS equipment recently installed into department vehicles which allow for speed, location, and other automotive details to be recorded and accessed by management. Three participants were concerned that if the CSO is under review for disciplinary issues or their whereabouts are questioned, then a supervisor can pull up the GPS report connected to the vehicle you were assigned to drive during the time in question. Some participants worried that BWC footage would be used for similar purposes.

Some participants explained that the fear of punishment stemming from BWC footage (e.g., internal disciplinary actions, lawsuits, or even criminal charges) might induce discomfort or anxiety among CSOs which, in turn, might detrimentally impact their decision-making during complex and/or high-risk situations. Henry explained that "I be so paranoid that I'm gonna be crucified for a bad decision that I wouldn't act in time, you know?" With the added stress of additional micromanaging and BWC footage, some participants indicated they would feel pressured to act more punitively. CSOs often use their discretion when family or associates of clients confide in them regarding concerning behavior from a client who may be in violation of their conditions of supervision (e.g., using drugs, curfew violations). Daniel stated when they were advised that: "he's doing something wrong...now I have to make a decision as to whether or not I'm...helping them or arresting them. That creates...some problems too because...if it's recorded, I'm gonna probably arrest them." Instead of focusing on the rehabilitative ideal of community supervision, some participants indicated that they may act in a more punitive manner when handling a violation of supervision.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study focused on the implications and potential consequences of BWC implementation from the view of CSOs and administrators. Participants in this study described BWC footage as potentially *useful*, *trustworthy*, *untrustworthy*, *intrusive*, and *punitive*, largely depending on the situational and organizational circumstances of use. The participants found

that BWC footage would be *useful* for training, recruitment, performance assessments, and reduce burnout as the footage can aid in case management tasks. They also held that BWC footage could be a *trustworthy* tool for countering frivolous complaints and within the context of evidentiary proceedings. On the other hand, the participants indicated that the BWCs footage could be *untrustworthy* as well, arguing that such footage may provide a narrow and incomplete picture of a situation due to the limitations of the camera itself. Further, some participants worried that BWC could be used in an *intrusive* manner by allowing management to micromanage their subordinates or because the use of such devices might violate privacy rights. Lastly, the participants indicated that the BWC could be viewed as a *punitive* measure for CSOs as they may be subjected to more disciplinary actions or that the looming threat of punishment might cause them to second guess their decisions in the field, leading to more stringent and less accommodating handling of their clients.

Some of these themes parallel research on the use of BWCs among law enforcement personnel. For instance, research indicates that BWCs may be useful in report writing (Braga et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2015; Koen et al., 2018; Lum et al., 2019; Rowe et al., 2018) reducing frivolous complaints against officers and support officer testimony in court (Ariel et al., 2015; Katz et al., 2014; Ready & Young, 2015; Sutherland et al., 2017)⁶ while other studies have indicated concerns that BWCs may lead to micro-managing of line-level employees and increase turn-over rates (Dodd et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2023).

While the results of this study highlight the views held by participants toward the potential implementation of BWCs, they also reveal some underlying characteristics of participant's working personality and occupational culture (Skolnick, 2011). The themes presented herein exist in tension—participants are both (1) optimistic about BWCs to the extent that they may provide useful and trustworthy accounts of field interactions and (2) cynical that such footage could be used against them in administrative, civil, or criminal proceedings, invade the privacy of bystanders, or otherwise provide incomplete accounts. This tension likely represents the general anxiety experienced by workers in the face of technological changes that disrupts their status quo (Chan, 2001; Van Maanen, 2015). These concerns may also stem from a view among line-level employees that administrators and supervisors are out-of-touch with the realities of the job or otherwise untrustworthy (Benson, 1993; Chan, 2001; Van Maanen, 2015). Thus, there may exist a general skepticism that, despite the promises made regarding the benefits of new technologies, such changes will potentially shift the balance of power within an organization in favor of management (Van Maanen, 2015). For instance, in the realm of policing, officers may oppose technologies of administrative surveillance to the extent that such technologies are seen as restricting officer autonomy (e.g., Benson, 1993; Manning, 1992a, 1992b; Meehan, 1998).

This study also highlights a general anxiety among participants regarding matters of authority and legitimacy. For instance, CSOs seemed to view BWCs as trustworthy or not based on the degree to which such technologies would bolster or undermine the credibility of the officer. There appears to be the tacit assumption that the CSOs, except for some “bad apples,” are generally legitimate and credible authorities whose field decisions are generally unimpeachable, at least within the immediate context in which they are made. It is not uncommon to see such views among police officers as well, who often regard the knowledge, skill, and decision-making to be authoritative—that any effort to undermine such accounts be viewed with skepticism at best or outright hostility at worst (Skolnick, 2011; Van Maanen, 2015). From this vantage point, the trust that CSOs are willing to impart to BWC footage seems dependent—at least in part—on how such technologies comport with this rigid view of the CSO as the primary source of authority in day-to-day field operations.

⁶ The study by Dodd et al., (2020) had findings which countered these results. They observed in their study that Correctional Officers had mixed perceptions regarding the usefulness of the BWC footage for investigative and evidentiary purposes due to them questioning if they would have access to the footage.

Of course, none of this is to say that the concerns of CSOs are unfounded. It is not unreasonable, for example, for CSOs to think that BWCs might be used to discipline officers. While this may be a positive for advocates of community corrections reform and accountability, it could also understandably produce anxiety and discomfort among line-level workers. BWCs may affect CSO decision-making in the field. For example, making CSOs act more punitively in situations where they may otherwise use their discretion, as some participants lamented. This is in-line with the research conducted within Austria's prisons with COs and staff (e.g., Lawrence et al., 2023, 2024). It may also create situations whereby CSOs may question their decision-making and hesitate, potentially resulting in harm to CSOs, supervisees, and bystanders. While concerning, these are ultimately empirical matters meriting future research regarding the potential impact of BWCs and CSO decision-making.

All of this is to say that BWCs are not entering a void and will be implemented within a potentially oppositional occupational context. From this view, the question both researchers and policy makers should consider is whether technology changes a department's culture or does the culture dictate the implementation and use of technology? The answer is likely a mixture of both. In other words, the use of technology to produce organizational and occupational change is seldom straight forward and any changes are likely be incremental rather than transformative (Manning, 1992a, 1992b, 2003).

This study also highlighted a relatively novel concern regarding the implementation of BWCs, one that seems relatively specific to their use within the context of community corrections: The privacy of bystanders. While police BWCs record interactions with the public, this is considered expected as police generally interface with this population. CSOs, on the other hand, are charged with supervising those under correctional jurisdiction. Yet, they also regularly interact with members of the public. For instance, while probationers and parolees have a diminished expectation of privacy in their homes and thus can be subjected to video recording, do these diminished expectations also apply to people who share a residence with the probationer/parolee who might also be captured on camera? BWC recordings may therefore constitute a privacy violation of some sort. In addition, it is unlikely that other occupations using BWCs would use these devices for recording client genitalia during drug screenings, presenting potentially novel legal and ethical issues for CSOs. Due to the above unanswered questions, it is imperative that a departmental policy and procedure be put in place that provide the CSO with some level of discretion regarding the activation and deactivation of the BWC during any type of encounter based on the circumstances of the situation. This is consistent with the growing body of research which indicates officers' discretion to activate their BWC affects how they will use it and their perceptions of it (Newell & Greidanus, 2018; Smykla et al., 2016; Wooditch et al., 2020). Further, correctional facilities studies recommend a higher level of discretion being provided for officers working in correctional facilities than law enforcement due to the carceral setting and the negative impact the BWC may have on the rapport between staff and clients (Dodd et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2023; Sydes et al., 2022).

As with any study, this analysis is confronted with certain limitations that need to be recognized. For instance, the lead researcher prepared the study and negotiated access to the field site during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic forced some studies to change methodologically due to social distancing and remote working (e.g., Corr & Davidson, 2023); however, this study did not have the same issues as the interviews were conducted virtually. In addition, this agency was also impacted by major tropical storms during the research process. These events reduced CSOs' ability to participate, as some were both personally and professionally affected. Further, despite assurances provided by the interviewer, some participants appeared hesitant in their responses out of concern that their responses might be communicated back to their superiors or otherwise provided answers that can be construed as unoffensive to the organization. In this sense, our study may underrepresent feelings of anxiety of concern regarding potential abuses of BWC footage by organizational

administration. Relatedly, responses may also overrepresent the perceived benefits of BWCs for the organization.

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Notes on Contributors

Mari-Esther Edwards is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at New Mexico State University. The research was conducted while she was a doctoral student at Kansas State University. Her primary areas of research include juvenile and adult community supervision populations (both practitioner and client) with emphasis in mental health, ethics and legality of policies.

Kevin F. Steinmetz is a professor of criminology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at Kansas State University. He maintains multiple research interests, but his primary area of study is cybercrime and control.

ORCID

Mari-Esther Edwards, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3885-0282>

Kevin F. Steinmetz, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1297-078X>