

# [Benefit of body worn cameras for law enforcement](https://assignbuster.com/benefit-of-body-worn-cameras-for-law-enforcement/)

We’ve learned from live, reality, and all types of news, that people act differently when they know they are being filmed. The fatal shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. on August 9, 2014 in the city of Ferguson, Missouri ignited an uproar of protest and lots of questions on the over insensitivity and militarized response of officers in Ferguson. Body cameras should be worn on law enforcement at all times because it encourages security of the public and police, holds officers accountable for inhumane actions and protect officers from false accusations of misconduct, and also prevents excessive brutality in the future by teaching future officers how to compose themselves in controversial situations. Like other new forms of technology, body-worn cameras have the potential to transform the field of policing.

There have been hundreds of cases inwhich the police have unloaded their weapons to suspects of crimes, legally. Witnesses in shock or juries and judges influenced by their emotions injudicial cases can confuse the defense of protocol with excessive brutality, only due to the unfortunate problem of barbarian officers who unapologeticallykill innocent civilians as young as 6 years old. It’s amazing to consider thatonly a two-square-inch economic device is needed to provide the crucialevidence needed to defend the innocence of a genuine police officers who protectsthose in their community.

An applicable example is the event in relationto the Cleveland police officer, David Muniz, who acts heroically in trying tocalm a violent and suicidal man even after the man shot and injured thepoliceman. Michael E. Miller, an enterprise reporter who has won severalnational journalism awards including three Sigma Delta Chi awards from theSociety of Professional Journalists, wrote the article “ A body cam caught aCleveland cop acting heroically. So why are cops afraid of them?” covering thepublicly released footage. At the start of the one-minute video, Officer DavidMuniz’s body camera shows him climbing the stairs of Theodore Johnson’sapartment, because he had been threatening his wife and the owner with a gun. David received two shots from Theodore when he reached the top of the stairsand hit him in the chest (Miller, 2018). Although he was shot, he offersJohnson the opportunity to lower his weapon and surrender (Miller, 2018). Unfortunately, Theodore raised his gun and Muniz is forced to open fire on Johnson. The bodycamera worn by Officer David Muniz effectively justified the open fire. Although it did not stop Theodore Johnson from shooting Muniz, he easily provedMuniz’s innocence.

The protection of the public is just asimportant as our officers regarding the necessity of BWCs. The human brain is aremarkable organ, especially when considering the effect of memories in ourlives today. We can visualize an event through our eyes, encode thatvisualization in our brains and can later retrieve a memory at our own leisure(Acrobatiq, 2018). As fascinating as they may be, our memories are not perfect. They fail sometimes due to our poor encoding and storage of memories, andbecause we are unable to accurately retrieve the stored information in brains(Acrobatiq, 2018).  But memory is alsoinfluenced by our environment and the subsequent events after a traumatizingsituation. Although we as humans can attend, rehearse and organize information, it’s still possible to have distortions and errors in our judgments andbehaviors (Acrobatiq, 2018).  Psychologists have put years of time andresearch into observing cognitive bias, which are the errors in memory orjudgment caused by us using our cognitive biases in an unfitting way.

In 1984, a 22-year-old college studentin North Carolina named Jessica Thompson unquestionably experienced thescariest day of her life. She wrote an article in the New York Times called “ IWas Certain, but I Was Wrong”, reciting what happened on this unimaginable day. A man broke into her apartment, put aknife in her throat and raped her. According to her own account, Jenniferstudied her rapist throughout the incident with great determination to memorizeher face. “ I studied every detail of the rapist’s face, I looked at hishairline, I looked for scars, tattoos, anything that would help me identifyhim, when and if he survived (Thompson, 2000). Thompson identified RonaldCotton as the rapist, and later testified against him at trial. She was sure itwas him, no doubt in her mind. It wasn’t until after Mr. Cotton served 11 yearsin prison for a crime he did not commit, that the conclusive DNA evidenceindicated that Bobby Poole was the real rapist, and Cotton was subsequentlyreleased from jail.

It’s not fair to victims or thoseaccused to have fate of their future decided by a witness’s memory. Occurringonly a couple of months ago, the fatal shooting of Maurice Granton wasrecording using a BWC. Maurice was shot by an officer as he tried to jump overa fence while running from police. The camera footage shows no instance of aweapon, and more importantly, no threat of harm to the police or public. Without the use of the BWC, how would this injustice be proven?

2018 began with the trial of a Baltimorepolice officer charged with fabricating physical evidence, a misdemeanor, andcommon law misconduct in office (Gorner, 2018).  Jacey Fortin, a freelance journalist for theNew York Times, and International Business Times, wrote an article about theconviction. A body camera video taken a year ago appeared to show him plantingof a bag of drugs near an arrest scene and staging the discovery. The bodycameras used by the Baltimore Police Department begin recording and store thefirst 30 seconds of video before the camera is manually turned on. Footageshows the officer, Richard A. Pinheiro Jr., placing a bag of white capsulesinside a can in an alley (Gorner, 2018).  Richard can then be seen walking back to thestreet, at which point he appears to switch on his body camera and announcethat he is going to search the alley (Gorner, 2018).  He then surprisingly “ finds” the bag he hadjust placed there. Not only was the use of BWCs imperative to Richard’sconviction, but also the new software being implemented into them. If thecamera didn’t automatically begin recording before it was turned on, how muchvaluable, justifiable information would have been lost? Do you think justicewould still be served?

There has been a dramatic increase inprotest over the use of BWC by the police recently. The use of various mediahas caused the public to vocalize the issues occurring within interactionsbetween law enforcement and the public. Many people think that BWCs have thepotential benefit of a greater amount of reliability and accountability forboth citizens and officers. BWCs are now commercially available with more than60 different cameras, designed specifically for the use of law enforcement.“ A Primer on Body Worn Camera Technologies” is a research report preparedby the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. Sponsored by theNational Institute of Justice, the laboratory was able to conduct a randomizedexperiment with the Orlando police department to study officers’ amount offorce toward citizens. When department officials complied with the experimentalprotocol and did not use their own judgement to turn the camera on or off, theforce use rates were 37% lower (“ A Primer on Body Worn CameraTechnologies”, 2016). On the other hand, when the agents did not complywith the treatment protocol and instead decided when to turn the cameras on andoff, the rates of use of force were 71% higher (“ A Primer on Body WornCamera Technologies”, 2016).  Inboth cases, “ force” was defined as any application of physicalrestraint beyond the handcuffs (“ A Primer on Body Worn CameraTechnologies”, 2016). This amazing experiment suggests that the use offull-body cameras for the police reduces the use of force when the officer hasno control over the duration of activation or deactivation of the camera.

Video footage from police body cameras are already being used to train new and existing officers on how to conduct themselves during difficult encounters with the public. The Miami Police Department has been using body cameras for training since 2012! Revision to the Departmental Manual, New Policy(2016). The Miami-Dade police department issued a new policy effective April 20th, 2016 on the body worn camera systems. In the new policy, one of the supervisory inspection and audit responsibilities regards the review of data contained in the BWC system shall be to assess training needs and to ensure compliance with departmental policy. Instead of conducting arbitrary compliance reviews by word of mouth, supervisors can now conduct a proper review by looking at unbiased video footage of every officer on duty. They have more insight on the daily lives of the officers interacting with the public most.

The Office of Community OrientedPolicing Services (COPS) is the portion of the U. S. Department of Justice incharge of promoting the practice of community policing by nations different lawenforcement agencies. On their government website, they claim that “ Communitypolicing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect betweenpolice and communities. In 2014, they issued a report called “ Implementing aBody-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned” to discuss theperceived benefits of deploying body-worn cameras, privacy implications, andpolicy recommendations. In fact, their report concludes that police agencies arediscovering that body-worn cameras can serve as a useful training tool to helpimprove officer performance. For example, agencies are using footage frombody-worn cameras to provide scenario-based training, to evaluate theperformance of new officers in the field, and to identify new areas in whichtraining is needed (Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendationsand Lessons Learned, 2014). By using body-worn cameras in this way, agencieshave the opportunity to raise standards of performance when it comes totactics, communication, and customer service (Implementing a Body-Worn CameraProgram: Recommendations and Lessons Learned, 2014). This can help increase theamount of reliability and trust citizens have in their officers to followintended protocol on controversial situations, while also eliminating cases ofofficers handling a situation they have never come across or are inept inrectifying the issue without proper training.

In conclusion, the importance of BWCs in today’s law enforcement has proven to increase as the public begins to respond with protest. I continue to press BWCs should be worn at all times by police officers because they encourage security of the public and police, hold officers accountable for inhumane actions and protect officers from false accusations of misconduct, and also prevent excessive brutality in the future by teaching future officers how to compose themselves in controversial situations. It is unfair and unwise to depend on witnesses for justice.

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