

Benefit of body worn cameras for law enforcement



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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 in which the police have unloaded their weapons to suspects of crimes, legally. Witnesses in shock or juries and judges influenced by their emotions in judicial cases can confuse the defense of protocol with excessive brutality, only due to the unfortunate problem of barbarian officers who unapologetically kill innocent civilians as young as 6 years old. It's amazing to consider that only a two-square-inch electronic device is needed to provide the crucial evidence needed to defend the innocence of a genuine police officer who protects those in their community.

An applicable example is the event in relation to the Cleveland police officer, David Muniz, who acts heroically in trying to calm a violent and suicidal man even after the man shot and injured the policeman. Michael E. Miller, an enterprise reporter who has won several national journalism awards including three Sigma Delta Chi awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, wrote the article "A body cam caught a Cleveland cop acting heroically. So

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why are cops afraid of them?” covering the publicly released footage. At the start of the one-minute video, Officer David Muniz’s body camera shows him climbing the stairs of Theodore Johnson’s apartment, 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 stairs and hit him in the chest (Miller, 2018). Although he was shot, he offers Johnson 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 body camera worn by Officer David Muniz effectively justified the open fire. Although it did not stop Theodore Johnson from shooting Muniz, he easily proved Muniz’s innocence.

The protection of the public is just as important as our officers regarding the necessity of BWCs. The human brain is a remarkable organ, especially when considering the effect of memories in our lives today. We can visualize an event through our eyes, encode that visualization 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, and because we are unable to accurately retrieve the stored information in brains (Acrobatiq, 2018). But memory is also influenced by our environment and the subsequent events after a traumatizing situation. Although we as humans can attend, rehearse and organize information, it’s still possible to have distortions and errors in our judgments and behaviors (Acrobatiq, 2018). Psychologists have put years of time and research into observing cognitive bias, which are the errors

in memory or judgment caused by us using our cognitive biases in an unfitting way.

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

It’s not fair to victims or those accused to have fate of their future decided by a witness’s memory. Occurring only a couple of months ago, the fatal shooting of Maurice Granton was recording using a BWC. Maurice was shot by an officer as he tried to jump over a fence while running from police. The camera footage shows no instance of a weapon, 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 Baltimore police officer charged with fabricating physical evidence, a misdemeanor, and common law misconduct in office (Gorner, 2018). Jacey Fortin, a freelance journalist for the New York Times, and International Business Times, wrote an article about the conviction. A body camera video taken a year ago appeared to show him planting of a bag of drugs near an arrest scene and staging the discovery. The body cameras used by the Baltimore Police Department begin recording and store the first 30 seconds of video before the camera is manually turned on. Footage shows the officer, Richard A. Pinheiro Jr., placing a bag of white capsules inside a can in an alley (Gorner, 2018). Richard can then be seen walking back to the street, at which point he appears to switch on his body camera and announce that he is going to search the alley (Gorner, 2018). He then surprisingly “ finds” the bag he had just placed there. Not only was the use of BWCs imperative to Richard’s conviction, but also the new software being implemented into them. If the camera didn’t automatically begin recording before it was turned on, how much valuable, justifiable information would have been lost? Do you think justice would still be served?

There has been a dramatic increase in protest over the use of BWC by the police recently. The use of various media has caused the public to vocalize the issues occurring within interactions between law enforcement and the public. Many people think that BWCs have the potential benefit of a greater amount of reliability and accountability for both citizens and officers. BWCs are now commercially available with more than 60 different cameras, designed specifically for the use of law enforcement.” A Primer on Body Worn Camera Technologies” is a research report prepared by the Johns

Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, the laboratory was able to conduct a randomized experiment with the Orlando police department to study officers' amount of force toward citizens. When department officials complied with the experimental protocol and did not use their own judgement to turn the camera on or off, the force use rates were 37% lower ("A Primer on Body Worn Camera Technologies", 2016). On the other hand, when the agents did not comply with the treatment protocol and instead decided when to turn the cameras on and off, the rates of use of force were 71% higher ("A Primer on Body Worn Camera Technologies", 2016). In both cases, "force" was defined as any application of physical restraint beyond the handcuffs ("A Primer on Body Worn Camera Technologies", 2016). This amazing experiment suggests that the use of full-body cameras for the police reduces the use of force when the officer has no 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 Oriented Policing Services (COPS) is the portion of the U. S. Department of Justice in charge of promoting the practice of community policing by nations different law enforcement agencies. On their government website, they claim that “ Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. In 2014, they issued a report called “ Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned” to discuss the perceived benefits of deploying body-worn cameras, privacy implications, and policy recommendations. In fact, their report concludes that police agencies are discovering that body-worn cameras can serve as a useful training tool to help improve officer performance. For example, agencies are using footage from body-worn cameras to provide scenario-based training, to evaluate the performance of new officers in the field, and to identify new areas in which training is needed (Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned, 2014). By using body-worn cameras in this way, agencies have the opportunity to raise standards of performance when it comes to tactics, communication, and customer service (Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned, 2014). This can help increase the amount of reliability and trust citizens have in their officers to follow intended protocol on controversial situations, while also eliminating cases of officers handling a situation they

have never come across or are inept in rectifying 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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