

Andrew Daniels

Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

Be Careful: I Am Recording

At 11:30 p.m. on a Friday night in the middle of October on a deserted, dusty, and dark country road, a police officer with bright blue lights shining in his eyes walks up to a filthy car that he just pulled over for failure to signal, and he hears a loud bang through the quiet murmur of radio traffic. The next thing he knows he is lying on the ground severely bleeding and in pain so horrible it could have caused only by a .45 caliber bullet. After he suffers a slow and excruciating death, he is found, but because that officer had no body camera to record this incident, nobody will ever know what really happened. Events like that are one of the many reasons that most law enforcement agencies either require their officers to wear body cameras or encourage them to wear one. Police departments should require every police officer to wear a body camera because body cameras give police officers a sense of accountability, police officers are more proactive when wearing a body camera, officer safety will increase with the use of body cameras, the use of force rate goes down when officers wear a body camera, and wearing body cameras drastically impacts courtroom trials and testimonies.

Many police officers who have not had experience with body cameras might believe that the cameras are more trouble than they are worth. The officers might believe that the cameras are too expensive, are complicated, or would be uncomfortable. The cost of body cameras can vary drastically, but the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant is a grant provided by the United States Department of Justice that any law enforcement agency can apply for and use

to supply its police officers with body cameras (James 2). In most cases, body cameras are not difficult to use. In order to operate a body camera, all the police officer has to do is press a button to turn it on and off. In some cases, the body cameras will wirelessly transmit the body camera footage to a storage unit at the police officer's headquarters. Originally, body cameras were enormous, bulky, and heavy, but the newer models are small enough and light enough that the police officer can attach them to a pocket, or they can be attached to a pair of glasses.

The body camera gives the police officer a sense of accountability that is similar to the feeling that a person gets when somebody is watching his or her every movement. The body camera acts like an all-seeing eye because it sees everything the police officer does. For example, if a police officer sees a person driving at a speed of eight-five miles per hour down a street that has a speed limit of thirty-five miles per hour and chooses not to stop the driver because the driver is his best friend's cousin, then the body camera will see that the officer neglected his duty, and the police officer can be reprimanded. A great example of body cameras making police officers accountable for their actions is in the study performed by Justin Ready and Jacob Young. Ready and Young found that when police officers wear body cameras, they issue more citations than when they do not wear the body cameras (454). Another way that body cameras make a police officer accountable is if he or she is engaged in some sort of misconduct. Barak Ariel found that after six different police departments equipped their officers with body cameras for six months, the number of misconduct complaints declined (750).

Wearing a body camera will also help a police officer be more proactive. Ideally, police officers will take a proactive attitude toward law enforcement, especially with minor things such as a motorist not stopping all the way at a stop sign, because if people see that they can get away with the little things, then they will keep trying bigger things. One of the major concerns about

body cameras is that they will make police officers afraid to be proactive. Ready and Young discovered the opposite in their study. They discovered that police officers who wear body cameras have many more officer-initiated contacts than police officers who do not wear body cameras (454). When police officers take a proactive attitude toward law enforcement, it helps to make everyone, including the officer, safer.

Any police officer will say that an important aspect of his or her job is officer safety. Officer safety is also one of the most overlooked aspects of being a police officer. One of the best and simplest ways to improve officer safety is to make police officers wear body cameras. Max Goetschel and Jon Peha surveyed officers of the Pittsburgh Police Department and found that 50% of police officers who use or have used body cameras believe that body cameras increase officer safety (706). In another study, John Oriz Smykla found that when a police department requires police officers to wear body cameras, the number of violent crimes decreases, which increases officer safety (428).

Use of force is when a police officer has to use some sort of force to make an unwilling subject do what the police officer is ordering. For example, if a police officer used pepper spray on an individual who was resisting arrest, that would be considered use of force. When an officer has to use force, a news outlet will fill out a Freedom of Information Act request to get all information on this situation, which includes body camera footage if the police officer was wearing a camera. Because of this media coverage, police officers will hesitate about the use of force even if it is justified because they do not want to be the next big news story. This hesitation helps make police officers carefully analyze situations that may require use of force. Barak Ariel and William Farrar found that out of twenty-five instances in which use of force was used, seventeen instances came from police officers who did not wear body cameras, but only

eight came from those who wore body cameras (523).

One of the main reasons most police officers agree to wear body cameras is that the camera footage can be used in the courtroom setting. As long as the police officer who is testifying is honest and writes in his or her report exactly what the body camera shows happened, it is almost an open-and-shut case. Due to the nature of the evidence, courts have formulated two different methods of viewing the evidence. The first method is when higher courts remain indifferent to what lower courts ruled because the lower courts did not have the body camera footage, and the second method is allowing the lower courts to rely on the footage (Bufford 449-50). Another way the body camera footage can be used is if an officer is accused of misconduct. Mindy Lawrence explains the benefits of being able to use body camera footage in court best: “Prior to the implementation of body cameras, disagreements regarding events that transpired between officers and citizens became a battle of he said, she said. Body cameras offer parties the chance to get an unbiased look into exactly what occurred during a given interaction” (624). Allowing body camera footage in court can also benefit police officers by removing a lot of the stress of having to testify in front of a defense attorney who is listening to every single word that the police officer says and is waiting for the one slip up that can tear a twenty-year career to pieces.

In conclusion, every police officer in the United States of America should be required to wear a body camera due to all of the many benefits that the cameras offer. Body cameras are the future for police officers and should be embraced with open arms.

Works Cited

- Ariel, Barak. "Police Body Cameras in Large Departments." *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, vol. 106, no. 4, Fall 2016, pp. 729-68. *ProQuest*, libcatalog.atu.edu:443/login?url=https://libcatalog.atu.edu:2409/docview/1902638002?accountid-8364.
- Ariel, Barak, and William Farrar. "The Effect of Police-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial" *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, vol. 31, no. 3, Sept. 2015, pp. 509-35. *ProQuest*, doi:10.1007/s10940-014-9236-3.
- Bufford, Kevin W. "The Split on the Proper Standard of Review for Police Video Evidence." *American Journal of Trial Advocacy*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2015, pp. 447-53. *Academic Search Complete*, libcatalog.atu.edu:443/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=118287581&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Goetschel, Max, and Jon M. Peha. "Police Perceptions of Body-Worn Cameras." *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 42, no. 4, Aug. 2017, pp. 698-28. *ProQuest*, doi:10.1007/s12103-017-9415-5.
- James, Nathan. "Can Body Worn Cameras Serve as a Deterrent to Police Misconduct?" *Library of Congress Congressional Research Service*, 28 Aug. 2014, www.hsdl.org/?view&did=757626.
- Lawrence, Mindy. "Lights, Camera, Action: The Age of Body Cameras in Law Enforcement and the Effects of Implementing Body Camera Programs in Rural Communities." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 91, no. 3, Apr. 2015, pp. 611-32. *Academic Search Complete*, libcatalog.atu.edu:443/login?url=http://serach.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a2h&AN=118802970&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Ready, Justin, and Jacob Young. "The Impact of On-Officer Video Cameras on Police-Citizen

Contacts: Findings from a Controlled Experiment in Mesa, AZ." *Journal of*

Experimental Criminology, vol. 11, no. 3, Sept. 2015, pp. 445-58. *ProQuest*,

libcatalog.atu.edu:2097/10.1007/s11292-015-9237-8.

Smykla, John Ortiz, et al. "Police Body-Worn Cameras: Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Leadership." *American Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 41, no. 3, Sept. 2016,

pp. 424-43. *ProQuest*, doi:10.1007/s12103-015-9316-4.