

By: Kaitlin Christensen

On December 1st 2014, President Obama offered \$263 million dollars to police agencies for the purchasing of body-worn cameras. Since then, several states across the US, including Washington State, has begun requiring their police officers to wear body cameras in hopes of improving officer moral, providing more concrete evidence, and improving police training. However, there are still many issues concerning the daily use of body-worn cameras that the people and governing organizations are slow to address. The distribution of body cameras has simply been too quick and needs further testing, clear policy limitations and proposals, and extended contemplation on all the possible effects or consequences before they become standard use.

In an article published by the Harvard Law Review Association, they noted that “widespread galvanization over body cameras exemplifies the human tendency, in times of tragedy, to latch on to the most readily available solution to a complex problem”. As the quote states, it would be irresponsible to assume that just because the use of body cameras seems like a quick and effective solution, it would be best for the community as a whole. The problem of continuous police misconduct, desire for more substantial proof, and lack of public trust cannot be solved by simply implementing a constant watchful monitor. There still lies several issues and setbacks that make video footage less than an effective solution.

This is not to say that body cameras and their standard use on the police force is in itself a bad idea. There are many benefits that mobile cameras can offer to society. They can improve officer training, increase accountability between police officers and civilians, provide more substantial evidence, and lower officer misconduct. However, before body cameras are liberally assigned to every officer, there needs to be more specific regulations and policies concerning when, where, and how the camera and its data should be used and what to do if rising opposition or concerns should appear.

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The first thing to consider is that cameras do not eliminate biased reviews or even give the full picture of any situation. Although the videos will show the same footage, multiple interpretations based on the viewer's purposes is still possible. Also, given that the camera's angle is limited to that of the officer's first person point of view, those who watch the footage will also see the situation in the officer's perspective and find it harder to comply with other's viewpoints (Mnookin). This could result in a biased conclusion for those watching it. This could be a major concern considering that reliance on video recordings for evidence will greatly increase as body cameras become more standard use in Washington's police force. Personal testimonials in court could be disregarded because of video footage that can only display in one point of view. Great caution should be implemented when using the film as concrete evidence.

Another obvious concern is privacy. Although the Washington Legislator is recently starting to set more specific regulations concerning public footage releases, these policies should have already been discussed and established before the cameras were in use (Camden). By using the cameras first and then placing specific regulations afterwards, the probability of problematic incidences or complaints concerning privacy violations occurring is very high. Because there was a delay in setting proper regulations "some police departments that use body cameras either do not have policies in place or do not release them" (Feeney). Washington should consider all possible effects and circumstances that could occur before they make police body-cameras a more standard use among the police force.

Nevertheless, the everyday use of body-cameras could bring a lot of good to the police force if the videos are used correctly. The benefits of extended surveillance in providing evidence and building trust between civilians and officers could increase the police force's abilities and authenticity. However, video cameras cannot be the only solution. There are still several flaws and limits on body cameras and their uses in everyday or even dire situations. More measures concerning specific applications need to be taken in order to help protect the civil rights and concerns of the people the police serve.

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