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A Class and A Camera that is it

In today's society, police are the safe keepers, the protectors, the people we look to when we need help, or at least that is the hope. As of today, a majority of people of color see police as power hungry, brutal, and racist people. People of color have a reason to be scared of police officers (Mapping Police Violence)(Police Violence Report). But let's take a step back, it is not entirely the police officers fault. Not all police shootings are unwarranted, and those that are could be cured with more training. If police training included cultural sensitivity/competency courses unarmed police shootings could be eliminated from our society. No longer would we have to hear about cases like Michael Brown on the news.

Michael Brown was an 18 year old African American that was shot and killed by officer Darren Wilson. The shooting took place on August 9th, 2014. At about 11:54 am Michael Brown went to Ferguson Market and Liquor where he stole a package of cigarillos. At about 12:01 pm officer Darren Wilson showed up in his police cruiser, alone. He saw two men on the side of the road and came to the realization that one of them fits the description of man that stole from the Ferguson Market and Liquor store. At 12:02 pm officer Darren Wilson called dispatch to say that he saw two men and one of them had fit the description of the robber. Officer Wilson then positioned his police car to block traffic and block the men trying to walk down the sidewalk. What happens next is where things begin to get fuzzy (New York Times, What Happened in Ferguson?).

Some witnesses said that Mr. Brown never moved toward Officer Wilson while he was being shot, others said that he had charged at Officer Wilson. Officer Wilson claimed that Mr.

Brown had charged at him. Other witnesses claimed that Mr. Brown had his hands down, others said that he had his hands up in the air (New York Times, What Happened in Ferguson?).

Upon further investigation several witnesses reported seeing an altercation near the vehicle between Mr. Brown and Officer Wilson. Some witnesses say that Mr. Brown punched Officer Wilson, while another witness said that Mr. Brown never made it inside the vehicle. Officer Wilson reported that Mr. Brown attempted to steal his gun from him. Upon further examination it was found that Mr. Brown's blood was found inside the drivers side door, outside the rear left door, on the upper left thigh of Officer Wilson's pant leg, and on Officer Wilson's weapon (New York Times, What Happened in Ferguson?).

A total of 12 rounds were shot at Mr. Brown, and Mr. Brown sustained at least six injuries, which included being hit in the forehead, top of head, chest, and right arm. Mr. Brown's body was found 153 feet from the police car, with a blood trail of about 25 feet. The jury deemed Officer Wilson was acting in self defense and was not sentenced to anything (New York Times, What Happened in Ferguson?). The city of Ferguson Rioted and caused the city millions of dollars (Jessica Chasmar).

With so many different claims from witnesses, it is almost impossible to tell who is telling the truth. If body cams were to be introduced to every single police station and officer in the country, we would be able to get a more clear picture as to what is going on out in the field. If cases like Michael Brown were to happen, we would be able to distinguish exactly what happened through body cam footage.

That being said there is psychological research that leads people to believe that body cams will not be enough. One of those things being, technology. Body cams only give us a very limited first person view of what is going on. Our whole perspective is faced towards the victim.

This can play a big role on how people see the situation. For example, in police interrogations being able to see the detective talk to attempt to coerce or trick the suspect makes witnesses of the video tend to side with the victim more often (Strange, Deryn, and Kristyn Jones).

Another big issue with body cams is the phrase “wishful seeing” in which people are essentially tricking their own brains to see what is not actually there. For example, people who side more with police will often want police to get a lighter punishment or be let off with a warning, so they may not see the video as harshly. While people who typically do not side with police will see the video as harsher and want a harsher punishment for the police. If people were able to acknowledge their biases they would be able to be impartial when looking through body cam footage (Strange, Deryn, and Kristyn Jones).

That being said, most police officers, and people in general, do not get enough cultural sensitivity training. Once someone is admitted into a police academy they get training for local laws, constitutional rights, civil rights, etc. This academy lasts for 12-14 weeks, but throughout their training they never get any courses in cultural sensitivity. This is a key hole in the police academy (College Quest, How to Become a Police Officer). Some organizations have begun to realize this is a problem, however, it seems like these organizations are a third party organization.

These third party organizations do a good service in giving police officers the ability to take a cultural sensitivity course, however none of these courses are required. The website clearly states that this could help officers that have committed an offense: “Are you looking for training for an individual officer or supervisor? Has a violation of department policy occurred with regard to harassment or discrimination? Diversity Builder offers in-person and remote coaching

with a live trainer. These sessions have proven to be highly successful by increasing awareness and changing behavior” (Diversity Building, Police Cultural Competency Training).

As this organization has a good concept, it is being implemented to late into the process. It is expecting officers to mess up in the field, which could result in an unarmed killing. At that point the damage has already been done, we need to be able to stop these problems from ever happening.

These third party organizations already exist, why don't we implement them into the 12-14 week courses that police are already obligated to take? Since these courses already exist, we could have these organizations bring an instructor, on site, and teach the people in the police academy about cultural sensitivity. This training may tack on an extra 2-3 weeks of training time to the academy and it may cost more money, but the results of these courses could save millions (Diversity Training, How to Become a Police Officer).

By the city making it mandatory to implement these extra courses into the academy, this could stop more unarmed shooting which would cause less jury cases between police and victims. And if there are not as many unarmed shootings then the relationship between police and people of color could begin to get better. With less shootings and jury cases, riots in Ferguson and Baltimore could be a thing of the past. And in a perfect world there would be no more riots or shootings.

However, even with cultural competency training we would see less shootings, but they could still happen. And in the event that they do happen, all police officers could wear body cams. Even though body cams have their problems, it would be a lot more useful than not having them at all. In the event that there is an unarmed killing, the jury would be able to see the body cam footage and get a clear picture as to what happened. No longer would we have to rely

on witness claims that are spotty and uncertain, we could have the clear picture right in front of us.

Through implementation of these training programs, the rate of unarmed killings will decrease. Police officers will be smiled upon, as they should, and they will be seen as heroes. People of color will stop having to fear being pulled over by the police. The issue of police brutality, will no longer exist or cases will be few and far in between, and all it will take is a little extra money and a few more weeks of training.

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