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04/17/16

Final Paper

The Ethics of Police Body-Worn Cameras

Today police officers are faced with many challenges on and off the job. Many people do not value the work these officers do and they often think that power is being abused on the department’s side. This is why police body cameras should be effective immediately. While police officers are on duty they will be wearing these special cameras that are capturing the day to day life of a police officer. This new adaption to the police department should benefit the community and the gain back respect from the citizens. Therefore, I am studying the police body cameras in the United States and focusing on the pros and cons of this technology. I am also going to address the various ethical issues this device may cause for the department and the police officers who are first handedly using this technology. I am further going to consider what is more important, the pros and cons or the ethical dilemma. To better prove my thesis I am also going to find various cases and examples where departments are testing out this device and seeing the effects it has had on them. I think that this is going to further strengthen my argument and make a greater impact on the decisions that are being judged on this topic.

Currently, police departments have already adapted some new technological advances in their department. Some of these devices include wiretapping, fingerprints, some DNA research, etc. This is important to my research because it helps prove that technology can benefit police departments and the community. By looking deeper into the benefits of the police body cameras they can also see that by adapting to this concept it will be a strong move on their part (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 519).

Police-Body Cameras is an in depth video recording system that is going to benefit law enforcement by recording the police officers day to day interactions with people as well as their actions while on the job. Also important about the police body camera is the size of the recording device; it is small and can be clipped right onto the policeman’s shirt or pocket. Because of its size it is easily portable and can be carried around anywhere without much hassle for the user. The device not only collects video documentation but the audio as well. This is extremely beneficial to capture the words used by the officer as well as the perpetrator. This audio confrontation is going to be beneficial in court cases as well as in arrests. One of the most important things about the police body cameras is accountability. It makes sure that the police department is trained effectively on this technology and also that they are adequately using it in the correct way. Something to deeply consider is whether or not the body-worn cameras are going to lessen the occurrence of the use-of-force as well as the complaints against the police department (Ariel, Farrar, Sutherland, 2014. p. 510). By considering this device there are obstacles to consider; the first being that we lack sufficient financial resources as well as sufficient availability of technology. However, there are many successful stories demonstrating the potential technology has to help contribute to better, faster, and cheaper policing and law enforcement (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 518).

While facing this topic there are various pros or advantages to this device. With technology advances the way it is in today’s world it is important to step back and fully address the pros of a device and how it will benefit the world. These vast developments are providing many opportunities for not only law enforcement, but also for criminal investigation and prosecution (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 519). When introducing the police body cameras to the police department as well as the world, it is important because it is the first ability to have video evidence of the encounters police officers face daily. This is be detrimental if a case goes to court and there is video and audio of the confrontation between the defendant and the police officer. As mentioned earlier, accountability is going to be evident with the device and it going to limit the amount of he said/she said. There are many times where a police officer is scolded by his actions or the media makes to look like the police officer was in the wrong, these body cameras are going to be used to justify the actions that the police officer’s need to take and make sure that they are the correct actions. Not only will it help justify actions by the department it will also increase transparency throughout. With the evidence it can prove in court it is going to speed up the judicial proceedings as well as increase conviction rates. It will also help reduce the public complaints on the police force and lessen the use of force for the officers on the job. Not only does it decrease the amount of cases going to court, but it will also eliminate prosecutions due to a lack of evidence (Drover & Ariel, 2015. p. 80).

Another thing to consider when digging deeper into this topic are the disadvantages to this topic. With every new device you have to compare the pros and cons. With this new technology many of the departments do not have many polices and there are limited laws put in place to monitor the use the departments have with these cameras. Another thing to consider is that the police department is not forced to release the video evidence to the public and most of these videos are not even scrutinized. This could hurt the credibility of the police department. With technology anything is possible, the video can get deleted if it is deemed irrelevant and it can also be altered in various ways to enhance the video or decrease the quality of the video. One of the most important disadvantages that this device poses is the fact that it can cross that thin line dealing with privacy. By doing this it creates implications and that will also hurt the department. Another problem is that it is impossible to determine the effectiveness of this technology because of the complications it proposes. Studies say that even if courts had reliable statistics, it would be difficult to prove that these devices were the winning factor in solving the case (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 526).

There are some departments that have already adapted to this new device and they are seeing the benefits to this idea as well as the problems or bugs that need to be worked out. The first step was to start testing the technology itself. To do this the body worn cameras were tested by targeting the effect of the complaints that resulted from encounters regarding the recording devices. This experiment lasted roughly 12 months and was efficient by randomly assigning officers to “test run” these devices. The results from this simulation showed a variety of things, the most important being that the complaints filed against the officers dropped when the officers were equipped with the video camera devices. This shows that use-of-force was also eliminated when the officers were chosen to test out these cameras (Ariel, Farrar, & Sutherland, 2014. p. 523).

In 2012 there was a study in the Netherlands to gauge how the technology would hold up and gauge the current systems and see where they were in terms of law enforcement. The studies came to the final results that the technology poses many opportunities for the Netherlands, but with technology it also poses challenges when satisfying the citizens. When finding out these conclusions, the study was also done in other countries and it concluded that people were satisfied with the current technology that the law enforcement had adapted and that they were open to the opportunities the new body cameras had in store for their countries (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 519).

When trying to experiment with the body cameras it poses many challenges that researchers have to face. In Sacramento, the police department underwent a test run with the police body cameras and they found that it creates more liability while being on the job and they feel more responsible for their citizens and making sure that they are making the correct judgements and decisions that are best for the community (Drover & Ariel, 2015. p. 81).

Near the University of Cincinnati, there was an encounter with a police officer and a man. The man was pulled over because of a front tag, when the officer asked for proper identification the man could not produce it and proceeded to speed off. The police officer drew his weapon and tried putting it between him and the vehicle commanding the driver to stop. Unfortunately, he did not oblige and the gun went off killing the driver. This is an instant where video surveillance would have been necessary to find out the facts. Because there was no evidence, the police officer was shown in a bad light because it was he said/she said and the other person was dead and could not verify the facts of the story (Chokshi, 2015).

When the police officers are wearing these recording devices and monitoring everything people do, there is a breach of privacy to the citizens in the community. Privacy is important to people and it is also a civil right they have, by using this technology it creates the problem of infringement (Custers & Vergouw, 2015. p. 526). This breach of privacy could cause problems with the bond between police officers and the citizens, as well as decrease credibility to the departments. When consider ethics, things can get heated when dealing with this debate of the police cameras. Many people value their privacy; in fact they are entitled to it. But the question must be considered, by protecting the community how far will the police department go to ensure the right people are being captured? Most people consider their privacy above anything else and they feel distrust when they believe is being compromised. Police officers are used to being the bad guys, if these police cameras can ensure to lessen criminals from getting away and repeating their actions then the departments are willing to sacrifice people’s trust in hopes that their actions will be justified and people will understand that they are not intending to breach privacy, but instead to help keep you safe and the community around you safe.

When dealing with technology there are many limitations that a user must face, with the cameras they need to have batteries to work and sometimes they die unexpectedly. This implication can become extremely unfortunate for the police department as well as the citizens. If a police officer is really counting on the video evidence from a day on the job to help find a criminal, and he finds out that instead during that time the camera had died and he had missed all of the footage for that day. That example can also benefit the police officers as well. For instance, if the police officer wanted to abuse his power and do something unethical he can simply turn the device off and claim that the device had died. Unfortunately, this example is very likeably. This is where the concept of ethics comes in and making ethical decisions when given this power. Police officers vow to make an oath to protecting their citizens; they must also make ethical decisions when dealing with day to day encounters between people. Not only does this affect the community if an officer is being dishonest or unethical but it also affects the entire police department as well as the reputation the department tries to keep intact and up to par. Another thing that may happen with the camera is the fact that the images may not always be seeable or hearable, depending on the range it has as well as the span it has. This may cause problems because when a police officer is in pursuit, the camera may be moving rapidly it may not produce valid evidence.

Another issue is video altering, the department needs to be able to be trusted with this information they are being given and ensure that the tapes are not tampered with at all. This is one of the easier implications to eliminate. There are computer analysts that can verify whether an image or video has been altered in any way; however this still poses threats to the department. Police officers are faced with ethical decisions daily and they must make these decisions for the departments as well as for their community and people they are trying to protect. Unfortunately, things happen on the job that many police officers do not account for and they are faced with difficult circumstances and they are forced to make a decision and take a stand. Sometimes their decision may be questioned by people after and even the officer admits that maybe he or she could have handled the situation differently. This is where the video recording technology comes in; say there is evidence where the police officer is being shown in a poor light. There are ways to edit the video to cut that out or even alter it to portray a whole different scenario, this is where there becomes a problem and a breach of their duty. The community needs to be able to trust the devices are accurate with the most correct information, if the police department starts tampering with the evidence they are receiving from these devices then they break their ethical status. Fortunately, as I stated earlier if this evidence ever made it to court, they would be various professionals who can prove that the video has been altered.

Considering the pros of this topic and the ethical issues that come with it, it is safe to assume that the benefits of this new device outweigh the disadvantages as well as the ethical issues. If this new technological device gets passed on to the departments it will forever change the way the departments work. It will also change court cases and be more efficient and beneficial when trying to convict criminals as well as let the innocent ones go. This introduces the ideas of bringing real video evidence into the court room and also it protects the departments. It lessens the police officers from abusing their power and bullying the victims as well as eliminates untrue situations or actions that did not take place. For so long, the police department has been in the wrong light, people believe that they are in the wrong most of the time and their actions are not being justified, and by added this device to the departments it decreases that from happening. However the ethical implications are also important to consider, yes there are complications with this device as well as with any technological devices. Despite the problems that arise from the police body cameras, the advantages triumphs over the cons and the ethical implications and proves that the only thing this device will do is benefit the world.

This device is going to change the police department in various ways, however I believe that it is going to better benefit the department and change the game for the police officers. There have been many incidents where the community would benefit by having these devices installed in the departments. Not only is it going to lessen the force the officers’ use, but it will also eliminate crime cases and keep innocent people out of prison. In my opinion, the research I have done proves that the only decision to make in this case is when is the law going to be passed and when the departments are going to mandate having this technology throughout their departments.

It is important to educate the community of this discussion, especially focusing on the benefits and drawbacks to this new idea. This new device not only affects the police departments but everyone in the process. It is important that the community and citizens be educated on this new technology and how there are ethical implications and cons to this device. However by also showing the pros and advantages as well as stories and examples of this device in action, the citizens have a better understanding of what this device is and how it is going to affect them and their families. The main point to this paper is simply to better educate the people and make them fully aware of the implications this device has as well as the advantages.

Considering the research I have done on this topic, I conclude that the body cameras need to become a necessity for the police department to implement into their duties. Yes, there are many cons and implications that can happen if this gets passed, but if it does not then the citizens and community are going to continue doubting the police department and the police officers are not getting that proper check-in-balance they need to make sure that they are not abusing their power. By having the police body cameras throughout the departments it not only changes the way the department is working but also makes the relationship between the police and citizens better.

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