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# HATS OFF TO VIDEO CAMERAS FOR POLICE OFFICERS

Second Place Timed W.A.R. P Winner

By Hannah Hill of Sweetwater High School

According to Harry Hitzeman of The Daily Herald, Officer David Wright raped a twelve-year-old girl for the first time. In August of 2016, he confessed to his crime in the middle of his trial. This does not mean all police officers are evil and immoral; it is simply stating that there are corrupt police officers in the world. There are people that will use positions of power in unjust ways to their advantage. When Wright decided to violate the girl, he probably thought that he would never be caught because of his position. Eventually he was discovered, but because there was no video evidence, it took almost a year for Wright to be locked up for multiple accounts of sexual assault.

Wright probably would have been discovered much sooner – or maybe even never have committed such a heinous crime – had he been required to wear a camera on his police uniform. Requiring uniform or dash cameras for police officers on duty has many benefits for members of our society.

Although cameras could reduce crime, the idea of being recorded during a police encounter is met with uncertainty by many officers and citizens. A reason for this is that cameras are often expensive. A court case against a rapist though, will be much more expensive than the few extra cents a tax payer may have to endure to make officers cameras possible. Another reason is that victims of many crimes may be less willing to come forward to a police officer about their problem if the officer is recording them. This is often due to fear of retaliation by their tormenter. A simple solution may be that the police officer is allowed to turn off their recording device if expressly asked to do so by the person coming to them for aid.

Although there are reasons to oppose the aforementioned cameras, there are also reasons to push for them. As previously stated, cameras would make civilians – especially women and minorities – safer during encounters with the police. It would decrease the chances for corrupt officers to take advantage of people. Cameras may give peace of mind to people engaged in an encounter by a police officer as well. If a woman is pulled over by herself in the late hours of the night by a man with a gun, one would imagine that she might feel comfort in knowing that they are being recorded just in case he has bad intentions.

*—A police officer who raped a 12-year old might have never committed that crime if he had been required to wear a camera on his uniform.—*

This would also affect the rates of police brutality. The news reports of the new age often report police shootings of African-American men by police officers. This has created a trust barrier between officers and society. In Rialto, California, a police department began requiring its officers to wear body cameras, and it has reported that over the course of one year, police brutality in the county has gone down about 60 percent and complaints about officers have gone down by about 80 percent according to a Safety Vision article. The department's new policy is breaking down the trust barrier between both sides of the issue because both people and officers now know that the truth can be proven.

The utilization of cameras not only creates safety for citizens, but it also creates safety for the officers wearing the cameras. In an article by Andrew Husband from Mediaite, a bystander of a police stop for a "traffic violation" posted a 30-second video online of what seems to be police brutality towards an African-American man. The video went viral and the Lenexa Police Department was ostracized for weeks. Then the department released the dash camera video of the encounter, which shows that the African-American man had drugs in his vehicle, a suspended license, and had numerous warrants out for his arrest. The video also shows the man inflicting injuries to his own body in an attempt to make it seem as if the officers used physical force to injure him. Because of the department's camera usage, its reputation and the officers' jobs are safe.

Any good plan will come with negative effects, but a plan is only useful if its positives outweigh its negatives. The benefits of having cameras by far outweighs the complications they could cause. The cameras can decrease rape cases among children and women, they can decrease hate crimes between authorities and minorities, and they can protect police officers from false, life-ruining accusations. A recording could have been the only proof that Officer Wright raped a twelve-year-old girl, but because he was not recorded, the little girl had to suffer through a year of reliving her horrible experience through court testimony before she could feel safe again. She and her family are very glad that he confessed, but one must wonder what might have happened if he had not. One must also wonder how many other women have gone through similar situations without proof of their claims.