

## Reviews

### CCTV

edited by Martin Gill

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#### *Reviewed by Brandon C. Welsh*

Does closed-circuit television (CCTV) reduce crime? This is the question that preoccupies politicians, policy-makers, CCTV managers, and, of course, the media. And rightly so, because if CCTV surveillance cameras do not reduce crime then why should the UK government continue to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on them for this expressed purpose? The effectiveness of CCTV in reducing crime was the focus of a recent study commissioned by the Home Office.<sup>1</sup> The study—a systematic review incorporating meta-analytic techniques of the highest-quality available research evidence—found that CCTV had a significant desirable effect on crime, but the overall reduction in crime was a very small four per cent. While press reports played up this finding, they overlooked (or ignored) some of the more important and, arguably, more useful findings from the study, such as that CCTV was most effective in reducing crime in car parks and vehicle crimes, that it was far more effective in reducing crime in the UK than in the US, and that the effectiveness of CCTV-led schemes in car parks may have been a result of a package of interventions focused on a specific crime type (vehicle crimes). The point here is that just knowing if something works in general does not reveal much. Rather, what is important is knowing about the ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘under what circumstances’, and, of course, ‘why’. The focus on such important questions is the major strength of Martin Gill’s new edited volume, *CCTV*.

Three of the book’s eleven chapters examine the effectiveness of CCTV in reducing different crime types in public and private settings, and in each of them the authors go beyond the question ‘Does it work?’ In one chapter, Sander Flight and his colleagues report on an evaluation of three CCTV schemes to reduce crime, disorder, and fear of crime in shopping areas in Amsterdam. In addition to investigating the effects on these problems, the authors pay particular attention to the important matter of displacement, something which, as the authors observe, is rarely studied in CCTV evaluations. In another chapter, Stig Winge and Johannes Knutsson report on an evaluation of a CCTV scheme in the city center of Oslo to reduce crime and disorder and increase the public’s feelings of safety. Importantly, this study also examined whether the CCTV scheme displaced crime to adjacent areas not covered by the cameras.

In a slight departure from these two effectiveness studies, Karryn Loveday and Martin Gill’s chapter on an evaluation of the use of CCTV in a large retail chain investigates why some stores were more effective (ie in reducing loss of goods due to theft) than others. The authors focus specifically on whether or not stores used designated CCTV operators. What makes this study even more useful is that the authors do not stop at their finding that ‘stores with designated CCTV operators generate more benefits to the security of a store’ (p 121); they go on to investigate how stores that use these CCTV operators could be improved to further increase store security.

The second major strength of this book is its coverage of what may be referred to as fundamental issues facing CCTV. Six chapters take up the following: implementation (two chapters), coverage of and compliance with legislation, evaluation methodology, offenders' views on CCTV, and future technology. While each chapter on these issues is well written and informative, three stand out. The two chapters on implementation issues facing CCTV, by David MacKay and by Polly Smith and her colleagues, provide information on key factors that influence the introduction of and support for town center CCTV systems, and offer important lessons which need to be considered in the design and implementation phases of CCTV schemes. Readers can take away from these chapters valuable information on what to do (and what not to do) in the crucial steps leading up to and during the implementation of CCTV schemes.

The chapter on evaluating CCTV schemes, by David Farrington and Kate Painter, is the other chapter that stands out. It provides an excellent overview of the criteria for methodological quality of evaluation research, and an appraisal of the merits of using high-quality evaluation designs to assess the effects of CCTV on crime. The main message here is that high-quality evaluation designs (the minimum involving before-and-after measures of crime in experimental and comparable control areas) are needed to answer questions about a scheme's effectiveness, as well as helping to establish why it did or did not work. Without this it is difficult to have any confidence in a CCTV scheme's observed effects on crime.

While much of this book's focus is on CCTV use in the UK and Western Europe (and there is also a chapter on the history of CCTV use in the UK), US-based researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers with an interest in this form of surveillance technology will find a great deal that is relevant to the US experience. At a time when CCTV use in both public and private settings is growing rapidly in the US, the UK experience in particular offers a number of important lessons, from the importance of public support for CCTV schemes, the role of other crime prevention measures alongside CCTV, and the numerous other potential benefits—beyond a reduction in crime rates—that CCTV offers.

*CCTV* is an important book. All of those concerned with CCTV surveillance and social control will be much wiser for having read it.

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### Notes

- 1 Welsh, B.C. and Farrington, D.P. (2002) *Crime Prevention Effects of Closed Circuit Television: A Systematic Review*. Home Office Research Study No. 252. London: Home Office.