CTV has been portrayed as the friendly 'eye in the sky' benignly watching over the population. However, despite there now being a growing body of literature on the effectiveness of CCTV in reducing crime[1], little attention has been focused on who and what is actually watched by CCTV operators and how operators determine what constitutes suspicious behaviour. To answer these questions we will draw on data from over 600 hours of observing the operation of three CCTV control rooms to present a summary of our findings on the social construction of suspicion.[2]

The suspicious eye

Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong subject CCTV operators' definitions of suspicious behaviour and persons to scrutiny.

Selective targeting

In large city centres and busy high streets CCTV operators are faced with a major problem: given the sheer volume of people passing into their view, the vast majority unknown to them, who and what should become the target for more intensive surveillance? The answer is unsurprising: CCTV operators selectively target those social groups they believe most likely to be deviant. The consequences however are less palatable, since it leads to the over representation of men, particularly if they are young or black. Nine out of ten target surveillances were on men, and four out of ten on teenagers.

"People who appeared lost or confused were targeted as were those who suddenly changed direction or backtracked as such behaviour was seen as indicative of criminal intent."

Black people were between one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half times more likely to be surveyed than one would expect from their presence in the population.

Three out of ten people were surveyed for crime related matters, two out of ten for forms of disorderly conduct, but the largest category, nearly four out of ten were surveyed for 'no obvious reason'. This was echoed when we examined the basis of suspicion, with only one quarter of people subject to targeted surveillance because of their behaviour. In a further third of cases, operators' suspicion was alerted from outside the system, but the most significant was categorical suspicion where people were surveyed merely on the basis of belonging to a particular social or subcultural group.

The reason for the surveillance and the suspicion on which it was based were also found to be socially differentiated. The young, the male and the black were systematically and disproportionately targeted, not because of their involvement in crime or disorder, but for 'no obvious reason' and on the basis of categorical suspicion alone. When older people and women did become targets it was far more likely to be for crime or order related offences and because of their overt behaviour.

Working rules

In order to explain how CCTV systems produced this particular configuration we argued that it was necessary to examine the working rules operators developed in response to their key occupational concerns. For operators the most pressing problem faced was, how in the absence of prior knowledge as to a person's intentions, could they maximise the chance they would select those with deviant or criminal intent? Eight working rules were identified and the first three rules showed how suspicion was predicated on stereotypical assumptions as to the distribution of criminality, behavioural displays which operators associated with trouble, and prior knowledge as to a person's criminal record.

The first of these was seen to be most important, with suspicion being generated by operators' negative attitudes towards male youth in general and black male youth in particular. Visual clues as to a person's moral character were

also read off from a person's clothing and posture. Thus, if a youth was categorised as a 'scrote' they were subject to prolonged and intensive surveillance. Unsurprisingly, overt displays of disorderly conduct led to targeting, but more significantly so did running and loitering, even though these rarely led to the identification of any criminal activity. Personalised knowledge was found to be used rarely by operators as the basis for targeted surveillance, but was an important component in transmitted suspicions, especially from store detectives.

Inappropriate behaviour

These three primary working rules, were accompanied by four other working rules which classified people and their behaviour in relation to their location in time and space and operator's normative conceptions of place. These rules were especially important in determining which particular young men, out of all those potentially available, were subjected to prolonged surveillance because they were deemed to be 'out of time and out of place'. The temporal and spatial classification served to compound categorical suspicion but was also based on a normative ecology of place which singled out certain people and behaviours as inappropriate. This was found to be less influenced by strictly crime related concerns than the commercial image of city centre streets which saw certain people being defined as 'other'. Thus drunks, beggars, the homeless, street traders were all subject to intensive targeted surveillance.

Operators' attention was also drawn to those whose orientation to the locality suggested unfamiliarity or showed signs of unease. People who appeared lost or confused were targeted as were those who suddenly changed direction or backtracked as such behaviour was seen as indicative of criminal intent.

Challengers

Finally, anyone who directly challenged, by gesture or by deed, the right of the cameras to monitor them was especially subject to targeting. Operators became particularly sensitised to the possibility that people may be

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Meeting the challenge

Laura Hawksworth of the Audit Commission urges crime and disorder partnerships not to stop at mere compliance with the Act.

Community safety is a key component of quality of life. Crime and fear of crime can literally wreck lives. The challenge of community safety is therefore to deliver sustainable improvements on issues of concern to local people. This is what is really behind the Crime and Disorder Act. But how much can you legislate for, and how much is dependent on effective and accountable implementation?

Research conducted by the Audit Commission over the past year suggests that the new statutory responsibility will certainly put community safety squarely on the map for those who did not opt to form partnerships in its 'discretionary phase'. More will however be needed to make sure that partnerships make a difference to local communities, and do not simply stop at compliance with the Act.

Entrepreneurial

It should be acknowledged that the Crime and Disorder Act is largely a response to the enthusiasm and innovation that has already taken place in local agencies. Current partnership arrangements are however entrepreneurial and reflect the fact that community safety has not been a statutory duty. To provide just one example. not all local authorities had a member of staff to lead on this work by March 1998; only half of all District and County Councils had a community safety co-ordinator. Half had some form of strategy in place by that date, but many were in fact documents outlining partnership structures and did not go on to detail programmes, resources or targets. HMIC recently found that over half of

trying to conceal their identity and intentions and thus deceive them as to their true purpose or deny them the opportunity to identify them at a later time.

Although these working rules produced nearly nine hundred targeted surveillances, they only led to forty five deployments, predominantly for crime and order related incidents. The deployments produced an arrest of one or more persons in twelve incidents. The majority of arrests (seven), were related to fighting and involved charges for breach of the peace or assault and three related to theft.

By way of conclusion we want to pose three questions. First, will those social groups who intensively experience the discriminatory gaze of the cameras come to recognise their marginalised status as they see the cameras move back and forth to track their presence and passage through the streets? If they do, will this lead them to collectively question the legitimacy of CCTV surveillance? And finally, if this happens, will we see the development of an organised culture of resistance, both symbolic and physical: will balaclavas be-

come the fashion garb of the street wise and will sabotage and destruction of the cameras become more frequent, inspired by a nascent political consciousness? ■

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Notes:
1. See *Surveillance, Closed Circuit Television and Social Control* edited by C Norris, J Moran and G Armstrong, published by Ashgate in 1998.
2. The authors would like to acknowledge the Economic and Social Research Council who made possible this research by funding a project entitled 'Surveillance, Order and Social Control' as part of its Crime and Social Order Research Programme. For a more detailed account of our research findings see Norris, C and Armstrong, G *The Maximum Surveillance Society: the politics and practice of CCTV surveillance in Britain*, which will be published by Berg in 1999.

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multi-agency projects did not have any evidence of the problem they were trying to tackle, just 5% had been evaluated as successful.[1] More formal structures and accountabilities - as envisaged by the Act - need to be developed to place community safety work on a firmer footing.

However the issue of how the new strategies are to be resourced is likely to be a major challenge which the Act itself does not resolve. The argument runs like this: community safety should pay for itself on cost-benefit grounds and partners should therefore reach into their pockets willingly. But very few areas have attempted the kind of cost-benefit analysis which just might concentrate minds, and even if they have, financial constraints - both economic and legal - make it very difficult for many authorities to do justice to community safety at least in the short term. There are plenty of barriers to hide behind for the unconvinced. The new statutory partnerships are now forming around the country and treading this contentious ground often for the first time.

Moreover, to comply with the spirit of the Act, partnerships will need to pay attention to issues of local delivery, people and the development of a new practice, and once again there is a window of opportunity to learn lessons from the 'discretionary' stage. These are outlined below.

Local champions

At the local level, community support is needed for interventions, both from local people and political leaders. Local people must be involved not only in defining local problems but often they will be best-placed to suggest solutions. Often a local champion can convince the community to take action or not to support an initiative. The most effective local projects seemed to be those with a local identity - perhaps with a local base and a degree of financial flexibility to respond to local people's concerns. Unless local people are aware and committed to tackling crime and fear of crime, improvements made by local agencies are unlikely to be sustained. Especially in high crime areas, delivery must look to the long term.

To achieve more within limited resources, local partnerships should also take account of the contribution that the mainstream departments can make to community safety, through accommodating community safety targets in their everyday work. Much is already happening within partner agencies that might be redefined as community safety or targeted at community safety problems. For example, Bradford Council is conducting a best value pilot on community safety and has identified key contributions to community safety within each department of the local authority, including:

- using the home care service to offer safety advice to 5000 vulnerable people in their own homes; and

- using the youth and community services to provide diversionary activities for young people.

Balanced approaches to crime prevention

Staff from the partner agencies also need common processes to enable them to work together effectively. The more mature partnerships are already adopting a 'problem solving approach' to community safety, ensuring all work is researched and targeted on problems that are well understood, rather than jumping to an 'off-the-shelf' approach. Where problem solving is actively promoted, the results are impressive, with co-ordinators holding joint training sessions and exchanging updates of the latest research findings.

Current community safety strategies have a bias towards situational approaches to preventing crime, relying on CCTV cameras and home security improvements. In fieldwork sites the majority of funds from community safety budgets were going on such approaches. Staff explained that in part this is due to the need to have a 'visible' product for community safety work. However research is indicating the need for a balanced approach to crime and its causes. In future, local partnerships should reflect this. This will be likely to produce a greater focus on social approaches to tackle offending behaviour, which itself implies longer term approaches.

Supporting initiative

Partnerships will also need to support local projects, in particular ensuring that they have clear reporting procedures, management systems, advice and help with problem solving. In particular, reliance in many cases on relatively small organisations such as groups of voluntary mediators to deliver community safety work means partnerships are more likely to need to nurture and help these organisations to run efficiently and effectively.

Last but not least, partnerships will need to ensure that the right people are in place to do the new work on community safety. Particular attention will need to be paid to attracting and training people with new skills, such as problem analysis and problem solving as well as dynamic individuals to lead local projects and challenge professional barriers. Overarching agencies - such as police forces or county councils - can play a valuable role in co-ordinating the learning across geographic boundaries, spreading good practice and even providing joint training. At the national level the forthcoming crime reduction strategy will hopefully provide central co-ordination and support to local agencies.

Partnerships around England and Wales are currently involved in working through implementing the Act and following the Home Office guidance. It is timely now to reflect on what the Act is about and the lives these local strategies are trying to improve. The changes implied in the Act will need to be managed carefully, and achieving more than narrow compliance will require commitment to the long term. ■

Note:
1 Beating Crime, HMIC Thematic Report, Home Office, 1998.