

TEN “BIG BANGS” IN THEORY AND PRACTICE THAT HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE TO AUSTRALIAN POLICING IN THE LAST THREE DECADES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses what could be considered the top ten innovations that have occurred in policing in the last thirty years. The intent is to focus attention on how practice could be further inspired by additional innovation. The innovations are discussed here as “Big Bangs” as a way of drawing attention to the significant impact they have had on policing, in the same way that the cosmological Big Bang was an important watershed event in the universe’s existence. These ten policing innovations ushered in, it is argued, a new mindset, pattern or trend, and they affected Australian policing profoundly; although many had their roots in other settings long before Australian policy-makers implemented them.

Keywords: police research, innovation, policy-making, criminology

BACKGROUND

Each of the ten “Big Bangs” that follow ushered in a new mindset, pattern or trend in policing practice. Each has significantly changed the way in which policing is now conducted in Australia. Some have been very successful; others less so. This paper looks back over the last thirty years and discusses these themes and trends in the context of their policy implications and practice ramifications.

There are some caveats and criteria that need to be mentioned at the outset. Not all of the Big Bangs have undergone evaluations as such (for example, it is difficult to evaluate *community policing* as a concept), but each has emerged from theoretical development. Not all of the Big Bangs have led to effective implementation, as there is a well-recognised disconnect between a good idea and a legislative or policy response (Sarre, 2011). The innovations discussed here are not considered from a cost-benefit perspective either, because that would involve an econometric exercise of substantial proportions. Finally, there has been no

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attempt to rank these developments in order of importance. They are presented here to stimulate discussion and, hopefully, to inspire further policy development.

1. GENDER DIVERSITY IN POLICE RECRUITMENT

It is axiomatic that gender diversity is essential to the employment landscape in Australia. Police ranks, however, have been dominated by men for most of Australia's history. The first appointments of women as police in Australia were made in 1915, initially in New South Wales and then in South Australia. But progress was slow. A political force advocating their recruitment was a loose coalition of women's groups called the *women police movement* (Prenzler, 2015). Women's charitable and political organisations lobbied for a specialist group within the police to deal more effectively with women and girls caught-up in welfare institutions and consequently the criminal justice system. Somewhat surprisingly, it was not until 1961, when the Northern Territory adopted this policy, that all Australian jurisdictions were finally employing female officers.

For much of their history, Australian police forces were workplaces characterised by white males of Anglo-Saxon heritage; recruitment was based on onerous height and weight restrictions that were subsequently shown to be unrelated to the work that police perform (Prenzler, 2015). Antagonism to women in the ranks was intense: in 1971 only 1.8% of police officers in Australia were female. That rate had risen to 15.2% by 1994 and it currently stands at around 25%, although the clustering is mainly at the lower and not senior ranks. From a policy point of view, this can be seen as a less-than-optimal integration outcome (Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013, p.129).

The 25% mark has been brought about by an admirable and visible commitment to gender equity in the last three decades, driven by a legislative imperative for equal opportunity. Indeed, in South Australia, Commissioner Grant Stevens announced in December 2015 his intention to implement a 50/50 gender recruitment strategy that would be aimed at increasing female officer numbers. Australian police departments now tout exemplary human resource management policies, with increasing efforts to become flexible and so-called "family friendly workplaces" (Prenzler, Fleming & King, 2010).

All of the old recruitment criteria, which focused on strength and height and thus discriminated heavily against women are gradually being replaced by selection criteria that are focused on education, trainability, long-term health (including mental health) prospects, communication and problem-solving skills

(Prenzler, 2015; Robinson, 2015). However, more needs to be done. Gender discrimination still occurs. The *Report of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission* released in December 2015 (EO & HRC, 2015) found Victoria Police had a culture of cover-up, unlawful acts and unreported sexual discrimination and harassment cases. The report was most uncomplimentary, suggesting commissioners should keep a watching brief on these issues if further improvement is to be gained.

2. EMBRACING DIVERSION: PUSHING OFFENDERS OUT OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY

Given the evidence that the probability of an offender returning to the juvenile courts increases as the number of appearances of that offender increases (Cunneen & White, 2002, p.78), police have been at the forefront of policy reforms designed to promote diversionary options at the earliest opportunity. If police are embracing diversionary practices, it becomes less likely that young persons, especially Indigenous young persons (Blandford & Sarre, 2009), will continue into the formal criminal justice processes.

A number of types of diversions are relevant here: informal cautions (used for minor offences and, generally, first time offenders), formal cautions (used for those cases that are assessed as minor by the investigating officer), diversions of offenders into the specialist courts (such as drug courts, mental health courts, and family violence courts) (Daly & Proietti-Scifoni, 2011) and family conferences (which can be convened as an alternative to the juvenile courts). This last option emerged in the late-1980s upon the realisation that reintegration of young offenders was more likely to occur if interactions with them occurred *outside* of the justice system.

Relevant cases (usually referred by police, but can be court referred) are those typically where victims are involved or where the offender has committed the offence before. A family conference is a mediated forum that identifies and attempts to resolve the problems that may have precipitated the offending behaviour. Conferences usually lead to undertakings by the offender, examples of which include attending a drugs and alcohol information session, attending anger management counselling, writing letters of apology to a victim, making payments of compensation, and doing community service.

An evaluation in Canberra twenty-five years ago showed reductions in violence for youths (less than thirty years of age) when they were randomly

assigned to a conference rather than court. In the first two years after arrest, violent offenders who participated in conferences had about 50% less reoffending than those who went to court (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Another study showed reductions of 15–20% in re-offending across different offence types regardless of the gender, criminal history, age and Aboriginality of the offenders (Luke & Lind, 2002).

While evidence of the overall effectiveness of conferencing has been less convincing in recent times (Smith & Weatherburn, 2012; Sherman, Strang, Mayo-Wilson, Woods & Ariel, 2015, p.20), the evidence does suggest a somewhat positive trend. Daly (2000) found high levels of victim satisfaction with conferencing and concluded that restorative justice programs work at least as well as court-based responses, and, interestingly, at no more cost. Police support for conferencing and other diversionary practices remains strong, thus giving these diversionary approaches continued buoyancy. From a policy perspective, the question that now presents is: What innovations can criminologists propose that might take these developments to the next level?

3. COMMUNITY POLICING: POLICING WITH THE CONSENT OF THE COMMUNITY

In the 1980s policy-makers turned to what has become known as *community policing*. This is policing that places a key emphasis on foot patrols (“beat” policing) and community service, not unlike the roles played by peace-keepers of the pre-industrial era. Most importantly, community policing shifted the philosophy away from faster reactive measures towards proactive models of operation that are developed after a process of community consultation. That is, in a system of community policing, citizens provide the grass roots information about policing needs along with the resources that they have, and the police provide the personnel and the hardware to carry out the tasks required. Therefore, it is a joint, and theoretically, equal operation. Community policing is designed not only to prevent criminal activity, but to reduce the conditions under which deviant behaviour is encouraged.

The story of the last thirty years of community policing has brought mixed reviews. Fundamental to the notion of community policing is shared functions and mutual cooperation, and that was never really going to happen (Weisburd, McElroy and Hardyman, 1989). Indeed, it may not be appropriate at all to shift

power from the police to the community in the way envisaged by those promoting the model (Sarre, 1996).

However, the idea of systematising community involvement in crime reduction was ground-breaking. This innovation has withstood the test of time in so far as there has not been a wholesale retreat by Australian police to anything like the reactive models that were used prior to the 1980s. But new questions have arisen: How can policing now adapt this model to social media, portable communication devices and a generation that is not only socially active, but geographically mobile?

4. PROBLEM-SOLVING AND INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING

Until the current generation of policing, police typically patrolled at random, waited for distress calls and responded accordingly when they came. Under this traditional reactive model, police responded to calls that were not only treated in isolation, but considered closed when the case was solved or filed.

Problem-solving policing, by contrast, de-emphasised random patrolling, and sought-out precipitating factors, which, if eliminated, had the tendency to stop or at least to limit the anti-social conduct that otherwise might have occurred.

Problem-solving policing, and the allied approach of intelligence-led policing, is consistent with the view that not all crime and disorder problems are the same, nor are the neighbourhoods and communities in which they occur the same. A problem-oriented strategy attempts to collate incidents together in order to describe the larger picture (Prenzler & Sarre, 2015). This has the spin-off effect of police being able to avoid political pressure to task resources to certain crimes at the expense of others because the former may carry some emotional, but not material, community concern.

Examples might include a domestic violence strategy that attempts to tailor police responses in accordance with what is known of the occupants of a house, namely whether there is a history of violence or a firearm on the premises. A community with a history of racial victimisation may benefit from a policing strategy that endeavours to root-out acts of racism. Such approaches have the potential to identify and ameliorate conditions that would otherwise require repeated police mobilisations and thus prevent the wastage of valuable policing resources (Moore, 1992).

Intelligence-based models have demonstrated their worth, and police are supportive of them. Nonetheless, new questions for police commanders arise when it comes to addressing crimes that span national security and domestic policing. For it is here that the police potentially risk tarnishing their image with community claims of political interference, the violation of civil liberties, and the abuse of (secret) powers associated with intelligence work.

5. FORMING POLICING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

In the last thirty years in policing there has been a noteworthy shift away from police assuming sole responsibility for the maintenance of public order towards a model that sees police enjoining others to form partnerships with them (Dixon, 2005, p.5). Police have developed alliances with groups and professionals who focus not only upon social and economic stability (such as teachers, social workers, employment personnel and recreation officers), but also with those who advocate and advance more specific crime prevention programs (such as the Australian Crime Prevention Council).

The emphasis here is on non-police resources being brought to bear on local security problems. The popular Neighbourhood Watch program immediately comes to mind. More generally, there are various courses and programs that teach crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). The focus of CPTED is on opportunity to reduce crime through public surveillance and target hardening.

These partnerships now extend to a large pool of personnel who look like police, but who are not. Indeed, there has been a dramatic growth in the private security industry since its identification over three decades ago as a key player in policing and security (Shearing & Stenning, 1983). Indeed, a citizen, when moving around the community in daily life, is far more likely to be directed, challenged or searched by a private security officer than by a police officer.

Private providers of security are now an indispensable part of the policing landscape. They engage in investigations, take witness statements, inspect bags, detain suspected shoplifters, monitor detention centres and court precincts, patrol shopping centres, and serve in crowd control operations around sporting and other community events. Indeed, private security has been described as “the primary protective resource” in modern society (Pastor, 2003, p.44).

Moreover, international research has found that private security directly contributes to reductions in criminal victimisation, albeit with a widening gap

world-wide between victimisation of the rich and poor relative to their ability to afford security staff and devices (van Dijk, 2008, pp.129ff). The result has been increased government regulation, although its ability to do anything more than attempt to keep disreputable applicants out of the industry has been mixed (Prenzler & Sarre, 2008).

Associated with this trend is what has been referred to as *third party policing*, a term that acknowledges the role played by businesses, property owners and inspectors working for government and non-government agencies to engage in policing activities that are not directed by police (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2006). The overall result is a *pluralisation* of social control mechanisms of which state-run police forces are simply a part, albeit a crucial one (Prenzler & Sarre, 2006).

The important part of this is that, while the relationships between public and private operatives are still very much in a fluid state (Sarre & Prenzler, 2000), police are, for the most part, accepting of the partnership role played by non-police (Prenzler & Sarre, 2007). It is a mutually convenient arrangement, but can it usefully be extended further? And if so, in what ways?

6. REINFORCING THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICE PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

According to the growing body of research on this subject, people are more likely to obey the law if they consider that the police are behaving “legitimately,” that is, in a procedurally fair manner (Tyler, 2006). Findings from studies examining the association between police legitimacy and compliance with the law suggest that the former (fair and just processes, along with respectful treatment of individuals) is fundamental to achieving the latter (Tyler, 2003). Where police appear neutral and unbiased, and their decisions are perceived as objective, the perceptions of fairness are enhanced (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Moreover, when people view the law and enforcers of the law as acting lawfully and being procedurally fair, they are more likely to defer to rules and to police decisions, and to self-regulate (Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Policing becomes less problematic in such an environment.

These findings are supported by the fifth *European Social Survey* that was recently conducted across twenty-eight countries. The study found that trust in police procedural justice is the strongest and most consistent predictor of a “felt obligation to obey,” the association being positive and significant in relation to all

countries for which a dataset became available in 2012 (Hough, Jackson & Bradford, 2013).

Barkworth & Murphy (2015, p.270) reported the same thing here in Australia.

Procedural justice appears to be consistently important for influencing both emotional reactions and compliance [with the law and the police] ... By engaging with the public in a polite, respectful, and empathetic manner, police officers will be able to reduce negative sentiments and emotion directed at them, thereby increasing people's willingness to comply with them both immediately and in the future.

Research has also shown that procedural justice is an important predictor of victims' satisfaction with the criminal justice system (Murphy & Barkworth, 2014). Moreover, tailoring the way police speak to drivers during routine encounters (such as random breath testing) can have significant implications for police-community relations (Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus, Eggins, & Martin, 2015; Mazerolle, Bates, Bennett, White, Ferris & Antrobus, 2015).

Legitimacy theory has justifiably captured a great deal of attention in research circles. The fruitful research in this field continues apace, and with good reason, for it flies in the face of the commonly expressed lay view that if police were given more latitude to ignore the rules, then the community would become more law-abiding. The "Dirty Harry" style of policing is exposed by this research as counter-productive (Klockars, 1980). If we are to advance developments in this area, criminologists and police commanders should be working together to design ways to facilitate its implementation.

7. ESTABLISHING AN EVALUATIVE (EXPERIMENTAL) BASE AND MAPPING THAT INFORMATION

Beginning in the 1980s, an evaluative (experimental) police research base began to be maintained and consolidated. We now know a lot more about the effectiveness of all aspects of police work because we have been testing the theories, evaluating the data, measuring outcomes, and mapping the geography of crime and its enforcement (Legrand & Bronitt, 2012).

Research into *hot spot* policing specifically, and crime mapping, generally, has revealed that crime tends to cluster in geographical areas (Chainey & Ratcliffe, 2005; Weisburd & McEwen, 1998) and that deploying police as a result of knowing these data can have benefits. Resource allocations can now be better determined by time and place considerations that give rise to efficiencies.

Australia's statistical database has grown exponentially, too. Until twenty years ago was there no effort being made to standardise Australian crime and justice statistics. That has all changed. The Australian Bureau of Statistics now hosts a number of databases, including police data (reported crimes and victimization rates), as does the Australian Institute of Criminology (soon to be located within the Australian Crime Commission), which manages a range of datasets including the Indigenous Justice Clearing House, deaths in custody statistics, homicide statistics, drug use monitoring data, cybercrime and deception offences, victims of crime and violent crime, and firearm monitoring. The Productivity Commission now has entire sections devoted to police resources, police numbers, and public confidence in policing amongst other things (Steering Committee, 2014).

Police regularly conduct internal reviews and establish their own evaluative bases using the data available; for example, the Australian Federal Police has an international deployment group with its own design and evaluation team. Since 1995 the Australian Institute of Police Management has been an integral part of police research and education in this country. We now know a great deal more on the best forums for police accountability, too, an important driver of public confidence in Australia (Prenzler, 2000). The information age is with us. Policing has benefited enormously from it. The nature of experimental research is such that it is ever-ready to push forward. The question is: What new horizons should criminologists be focusing on now?

8. SPECIAL POLICING OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AS A BADGE OF HONOUR

Police have made remarkable steps in the recent past towards recognising that some groups in society have special policing needs. Officers have tried to tailor their responses accordingly. The two special needs groups that should be mentioned here are Indigenous Australians, and Australians who identify as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or queer (LGBTIQ).

There is little doubt that the experiences of Indigenous peoples in their relationships with police has been, and often continues to be, qualitatively different from those of non-Indigenous Australians (Johnston, 1991). This arises in contemporary Australian society primarily through two main factors: a frontier war colonial heritage, and two hundred years of social construction of Indigenous peoples as inferior. These constructions continue to provide the context in which

contemporary police decision-making occurs (Cunneen, 2001, p.128). Even today the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples coming into police custody continue to grow. Indeed, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) constitute 2% of the Australian population, those who identify as ATSI currently constitute 25% of Australia's prisoner population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015), a policy failure of the highest order.

Nevertheless, there has been a concerted effort by Australian police to address the malaise. There has been a deliberate drive to recruit Indigenous police officers, a policy in keeping with the spirit of the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991; Kamira, 2001, pp.79–81), and Indigenous police women especially (Fleming, Prenzler & Ransley, 2013). There has also been widespread implementation of training in cross-cultural sensitivities in police academies, in concert, again, with the 1991 recommendations and designed to eradicate any police racism that may still persist.

Other initiatives include police support for Indigenous-run policing patrols (Blagg & Valuri, 2002). Similarly-structured Aboriginal Community Patrols began through funding by the New South Wales Attorney-General's Department's Indigenous Justice Strategy (Sarre & Sparrow, 2002). The appearance two decades ago of Aboriginal courts in Australia now make it more likely that those on bail will appear in person for hearings and thus be less likely to be ordered to custodial remands (Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia, 2013).

Police liaison officers have been tasked to incorporate into their duties the raising of confidence in police in the LGBTIQ communities such that they are more likely to report victimization. South Australia Police, for example, presently has a liaison arrangement with the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion to implement the 2014–2016 *South Australian Strategy for the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer People*. Considering the well-recognised antipathy shown by police two generations ago towards gay men, the change has been remarkable. But what are the next steps that need to be taken in order to refine special needs policing?

9. REVOLUTIONISING TECHNOLOGIES

Police surveillance capacity is now at a level never before seen, not just the new equipment available to police, but the cheap surveillance equipment now available to the public who regularly share data with police to assist them with their inquiries. True, these devices have been around for a considerable time: there has been CCTV

targeting crime in Australia for decades (for example, see Sutton & Wilson, 2003), but there are now ever-increasing opportunities for portable surveillance technologies to be incorporated into daily police routines (Chan, Doran, Brereton, & Legosz, 2001).

The use of body-mounted cameras by police officers designed to protect them in their work is now commonplace. The relatively low cost associated with fitting officers with vehicle-mounted cameras that provide CCTV surveillance in real time via mobile connectivity makes this a viable (and cost effective) choice for governments. There are two drivers of this trend: the availability of the technology at a price that is more affordable than it was a decade ago, and a global culture of fear and distrust which have provided surveillance practices with legitimacy as unexceptional tools of social order (Sarre, 2014).

Police are also the beneficiaries of technological advances in data extraction and retention, especially in so far as they have been identified as crucial tools in anti-terrorism strategies. True, the jury is still out regarding the ability of these strategies to fulfil these needs (Sarre, 2015), but police have adopted confidently the instruments of innovative data surveillance.

It should be mentioned that there is a growing concern that the use of these technologies has the potential to undermine public confidence in police. This can happen in one of three ways. The first two relate to content on the Internet: police may be filmed doing things that they ought not be doing while they are on duty (one can immediately think of the Rodney King beating) (Kearon, 2013, p.418) or may contribute to their own reputational damage in the public eye by their off-duty and inappropriate use of social media (Goldsmith, 2014). The third comes from the technology itself: police will continue to take the brunt of public criticism that they are simply revenue-raising when using road traffic technology to penalise unsuspecting motorists (Kearon, 2013, p.421).

Government policy-makers, parliamentarians, and the courts alike are searching for the required balance between levels of surveillance that will provide information for the maintenance of security, and the rights of individuals to be free from the prying eyes of agents of the state. On balance, one can form a responsible view that surveillance technologies are more benign than harmful, and that policing policies are finding the required balance. In order to continue to reap the fruits of our free and open society, this is an area ripe for further research. Being crime-free is an ideal goal, but not at the expense of diminishing the community's civil liberties. Where should the line be drawn?

10. CHAMPIONING POLICE EDUCATION OUTSIDE OF THE ACADEMY

There has been a distinct shift in policing education towards an emphasis upon broader educational opportunities for police. This increased focus on tertiary education for police has been driven in part by calls emanating from major reviews and corruption inquiries (Prenzler, Martin, & Sarre, 2010). Indeed, in 1989, the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police corruption located one of the reasons for the dishonesty that had been uncovered in policing in Queensland to be a lack of appropriate education amongst rank and file officers (Fitzgerald, 1989, p.365).

The Commissioner, Tony Fitzgerald, sought to apply the findings of United States research that indicated that broader education outside of the academy generated a greater awareness of the social context of policing, contributed to improved management skills, and produced improvements in communication, negotiation and problem-solving abilities (Carter, Sapp & Stephens, 1989).

The growth of tertiary education for police has been mirrored to a considerable extent by the enormous growth in policing research conducted by university researchers and governmental research bodies (such as the former Australian Institute of Criminology and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research). Moreover, in New South Wales and Western Australia, police academies have been integrated with universities, while in other states and territories there is considerable weight given to tertiary education in recruit selection and in framing promotion criteria (Prenzler, Martin, & Sarre, 2010). There is no going back to the days when all education was police academy-based (Trofymowych, 2007/8), although the way forward towards full degree qualifications across the country remains uncertain. Arguably, this is an area of policy development that deserves police commanders' highest priority if we are to continue to make advances in better policing training and practice.

CONCLUSION

These ten Big Bangs, all of which have appeared in the time-frame of less than two generations, have led to major developments in the way in which we do our policing. We should take encouragement from the extent to which police leaders in Australia have become cognisant of the vast and growing tomes of policing literature and have acted upon the findings contained therein. We should take heart from the amount of governmental policy-making that has emerged from the ripening field of police research. The emergent body of knowledge allows us to

be confident that the shifts in policing theory and practice we just discussed will continue to remain influential into the future. All the while, our evaluation methods will need to be sharpened continuously in order to keep abreast of further developments. To borrow a phrase from the current Prime Minister, there has never been a more exciting time to be involved with policing research, education and training in Australia.

NOTE

This is a revised and updated version of a paper that was presented at the National Policing Summit, Melbourne, on 5 August 2015 with the title of: “The Top Ten Innovations that have made a Difference to Policing in Australia.”

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