

Crime and criminal justice research at the University of Sydney

Research brief 3

At the University of Sydney we're conducting exciting research into diverse crime and criminal justice issues.

This is the third briefing paper showcasing some of our projects and introducing you to our research staff. It looks at the work we're doing in psychology, law, philosophy, economics and gambling research.

Memory for people and events

Dr Celine van Golde is an Associate Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology. Her main area of expertise is memory for people and events in adults and children. She is particularly interested in interviewing techniques in forensic settings, such as those used by police, lawyers and judges, and how those techniques can affect memory accuracy for people we have seen, or events we have experienced or witnessed.

Celine is currently looking into factors that might cause misidentifications during criminal investigations and legal proceedings. She intends to use these findings to improve identification accuracy within forensic settings. Additionally, she is looking at how our memories of events can be influenced by subsequent information from different sources (for example, news reports) and the use of technology (for example, taking photos on mobile phones). She applies these research questions both to adults and children.

Find out more about Dr van Golde at:

<http://sydney.edu.au/science/people/celine.vangolde.php>

Formal approaches to legal reasoning

What is the appropriate role for statistical evidence in criminal trials? What's the best method and organisational structure for group decision making – for instance, for juries?

Professor Mark Colyvan is a Professor of Philosophy. His main areas of expertise are decision theory, logic, mathematical philosophy, and philosophy of science.

Dr Brian Hedden is a Lecturer in Philosophy. His main areas of interest are in formal epistemology, especially decision theory and rational belief theory.

Mark and Brian are conducting a project that uses formal (i.e. mathematical, statistical and logical) epistemological methods to improve our understanding of existing legal practices, and to propose recommendations for improving the consistency and accuracy of legal proceedings.

Since judges and juries rarely know all the relevant facts, they must make the best decisions possible in the face of uncertainty. Formal epistemology employs probabilistic reasoning to advance our understanding of how to form beliefs and make decisions in response to uncertain evidence. In particular, the project addresses the use of statistical evidence in trials and the aggregation of individuals' beliefs to reach group decisions in juries and judicial panels.

Find out more about Professor Colyvan's and Dr Hedden's research work at:

<http://colyvan.com>

<http://brian-hedden.com/>

Protecting whistleblowers in the corporate sector

Do whistleblowers in the public and private sector have the same protections? Are statutory protections the only option?

Whistleblowers are incredibly valuable in the fight against corporate corruption and misconduct. Whistleblower protections exist in Australia; however, this is concentrated in the public sector, with limited comprehensive legislation encompassing the private sector. While improving statutory protection is an important goal, there has been limited progress in this area.

Dr Olivia Dixon, from the University of Sydney Law School, is an expert in corporate law, particularly corporate crime. Olivia examined over 200 whistleblower policies in Australia and concluded that there's scope for improving how whistleblowers can be protected in the private sector.

Olivia found that company codes of conduct often require employees to report misconduct, and state that the company will not retaliate against whistleblowers. Whistleblowers might therefore deter retaliation with breach of contract action that enforces the company's obligations.

Find out more about Dr Dixon and her work:

<http://sydney.edu.au/law/about/people/profiles/olivia.dixon.php>

Using economics to understand crime Spotlight on Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark

Deborah Cobb-Clark is Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney. Joining the university in 2016, Deborah brings her extensive expertise in applying economic modelling skills to gain greater insights into youth delinquency. She often conducts her research by linking information from large administrative datasets to surveys.

Deborah has driven research projects that have investigated:

- the role of father figures in influencing a child's delinquent behaviour,
- the relationship between early marijuana use and educational outcomes, and
- how growing up on welfare can influence the risky behaviour of young people.

Deborah has found that father figures are likely to be a protective factor against delinquency, particularly for males. She also found links to early marijuana use and poorer education outcomes, which is often amplified by high-intensity use, being part of a large family and living in a family with a history of income support receipt. However, Deborah's research has found no evidence that growing up on welfare causes risky behaviour in a young person.

Find out more about Professor Cobb-Clark and her work:

<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/economics/staff/profiles/deborah.cobb-clark.884.php>

Investigating emerging problems: virtual reality gambling

Can virtual reality gambling lead to actual harms? What are the potential risks? How should we respond?

Unlike online gambling, in virtual reality gambling people can see and interact with others. Incredibly seductive, people immersed in this artificial world risk believing that losses are merely virtual, with no real-world connection or consequences.

Given the predicted increase in this activity, **Dr Sally M. Gainsbury** and **Professor Alex Blaszczynski** from our Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic have delved into the possible implications and risks of virtual reality gaming. They've found that virtual reality gambling appears to bring together some of the most problematic elements of gambling that have the potential to lead to gambling problems: availability, accessibility, and rapid and continuous play.

Internet technology could help with harm minimisation. Strategies could include sending problem gamblers personalised messages or private approaches by avatars, alerting them to the continued risks of playing; or displaying prominent time notifications alerting gamblers to how long they have been gambling; and including virtual areas where there is no gaming stimuli.

Without being alarmist, Sally and Alex stress that current gambling regulators have yet to develop – and possibly have not even considered – policies needed to protect consumers and ensure appropriate harm minimisation strategies.

Find out more about Professor Blaszczynski's and Dr Sainsburys' research work at:

<http://sydney.edu.au/science/people/sally.gainsbury.php>

<http://sydney.edu.au/science/people/alex.blaszczynski.php>

For more information on these or other crime and criminal justice work at the University of Sydney, contact Dr Garner Clancey: garner.clancey@sydney.edu.au



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