

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Policing the mentally ill:
Making sense of links in the chain of
interagency collaboration in the community**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Stephanie Denne

2010

ABSTRACT

The shift to community care through the deinstitutionalisation movement in New Zealand has been criticised for producing fragmented and uncoordinated service provision for those with mental illness in the community. As a result, the police are coming into increased contact with the mentally ill, often in times of crisis, positioning police at the junction between mental health services and the criminal justice system. Barriers to access for integrative, comprehensive mental health care in the community have led to police understanding their position as the 'ambulance at the bottom of the cliff'. While previous research has attended to police officer attitudes and points of interaction with those with mental illness in the community, little has been said regarding understandings of the collaborative relationships from the vantage point of those officers policing the mentally ill. The current research sought to address this gap in the literature by exploring how police make sense of their experiences with those with mental illness in the community using a Foucaultian form of discourse analysis. The discourses that co-articulated and produced understandings of the position(s) of police in community service provision for the mentally ill and the power relationships between the police, the mental health system and the mentally ill can be understood through 'links in the chain'; 'the (un) identifiable other'; 'no-man's land'; 'underdogs'; and 'the cure'. These systems of meaning making from the police vantage point reproduced and re-institutionalised constructions of the mentally ill as 'criminal' or 'disordered', necessitating mechanisms of power and control to address the 'risk' mental illness posed to the community. Through such understandings the police, as society's institutional response to 'threat', necessarily occupy the position of the 'ambulance at the bottom of the cliff' at the institutional boundaries between disorder and criminality. And it is here that the institutional response to mental illness re-emerges as re-institutionalisation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although my name may appear as the ‘sole author’ of this thesis, I deeply believe that everyone who has walked beside me through this journey and process is very much a part of this completed work. By taking this opportunity to thank a few of those who helped me arrive at this destination, I also acknowledge that there are many more who are in my heart and in these pages.

Firstly I would like to thank the officers who participated in this study. I appreciate the time, effort and knowledge you gifted to me, the trust you showed in me by sharing your stories, and the compassion and dedication to the community you demonstrate on a daily basis. Through the process of this research I have increased respect and gratitude for the job that you do in the face of the challenges you confront. I hope that you feel both heard and validated by this research.

Words could never fully express the amount of thanks and gratitude that resides in my heart for my supervisor, Dr Leigh Coombes. I feel extremely blessed to have had such an amazing mentor and teacher. Not only did you go above and beyond expectations as a supervisor, but you also provided strength, inspiration and motivation as a friend. Your wisdom, sincerity and vision will remain part of who I am now, wherever the future takes me. I hope I have made you proud.

Dan and River, thank you for being there and never giving up on me. Thank you for accepting my silence and my absence, and embracing me in the laughter and the living. Thank you for being my rock and my home. Both of you are in every page and within every word. I love you.

Brigid and Karen, thank you for never failing to supply the coffee, the distracting chatter and the comfort of a friend. You are extremely amazing and inspirational women and your friendship enabled me to push through the ups and downs of writing this thesis and never give up.

Family and friends I have not named, I hope I have been able to express to you along the way how much your support and encouragement has meant to me. It is both humbling and overwhelming to reflect on how much love and generosity I have been surrounded with over the last few years. I am blessed and I am thankful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
 Deinstitutionalisation	3
History of the movement	3
Criticisms of the movement	8
 The ‘threat’ of those with mental illness in the community.....	16
Perceptions and attitudes of the general public	16
Literature on the ‘dangerousness’ of those with mental illness	18
 Police interactions with those with mental illness	24
Nature of contact with the mentally ill	24
Police attitudes towards the mentally ill	28
Discretion and the power to arrest	32
Policy and legal considerations	36
Police as mental health workers	39
Training and skills for working with the mentally ill.....	42
Time management and resources	46
Relationships with mental health service providers	49
 The current research	52
METHODOLOGY AND METHOD.....	55
 Social Constructionism	57
 Discourse Analysis	61
Foucaultian Discourse Analysis	64
 Reflexivity	71
 Discourses relating to police	72
 Discourses concerning the mentally ill.....	78
 Sampling and recruitment	82
 Data collection	87
 Transcribing	90

Ethical considerations	93
Analysis	96
ANALYSIS	103
 Links in the chain.....	103
The first link – handing them on	105
The middle link – babysitting	118
The last link – the buck stops here.....	130
 The (un) identifiable other.....	137
Raising the flag	138
The hidden danger	149
Sitting up and taking notice	155
 No-man's land.....	159
The unticked box.....	161
Cracks in the system	172
 Underdogs	178
Making do	179
Underdogs stick together	189
 The cure.....	199
Taking control	201
Medicating the sickness	213
DISCUSSION	223
REFERENCES	237
APPENDICES	249
 Appendix A: Information Sheet.....	249
 Appendix B: Participant Consent Form.....	251
 Appendix C: Interview Questions	252
 Appendix D: Authority for the Release of Transcripts	253