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***POLICING, MENTAL ILLNESS AND MEDIA: THE FRAMING OF MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS ENCOUNTERS AND POLICE USE OF FORCE*, KATRINA CLIFFORD (2021)**

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 347 pp.,
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The publication of *Policing, Mental Illness and Media* is timely. The frequency of fatal confrontations between police and mentally ill people is rising and is a real problem for police to respond to, for the media to report accurately and fairly, and for the wider society to properly understand.

But Clifford is clear her aim is not ‘to pass judgement’ or ‘seek to remedy the injustices’ but ‘to start a conversation and arrive at a more fulsome understanding of the relationship between policing, mental illness and media’ and to do so amid a complex interaction of politics and a professional culture undergoing accelerating change (26–27).

The opening chapters examine the complexities of that relationship, mainly in Australia, including circumstances that lead to police use of force, and the ways news media typically report deaths resulting from police contact with people in a mental health crisis. Clifford also covers the search for possible solutions that include police training, transparency and examples of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) models, and media’s role in shaping public understanding of what happens in critical interventions. Nearly every chapter presents interviews, case studies and copious references for further investigation.

Chapter 5, for example, is dedicated to a case study of 1998’s fatal police shooting of Paul Klein and recounts the violent circumstances of his death and how it was reported. The author critically unpacks the media coverage, especially the use of graphic photography and sensational headlines, together with dramatic visual framing that received an unprecedented number of complaints. News reporting did improve, as evidenced in the reporting of the coronial inquest with its less inflammatory words and images, and a shift in the framing that sought to normalize mental illness as something that could indiscriminately affect anyone (220–21).

While Clifford identifies a real problem, workable solutions are often harder to find. But Clifford offers a few. First, she points to the urgent need for better resources for mental health services and education. Kruger (2020) has argued a similar point, adding that violent mental health crises are really medical emergencies rather than criminal activity. Clifford notes signs of progress in the relationship between policing and mental illness, and its mediated presentations, including police training such as the New South

Wales police force mental health intervention team (MHIT) discussed in Chapter 3. The author also reports an improvement with police agencies on increasing the emphasis on communication and de-escalation, especially with mental ill people and distressed members of the public, as opposed to the perceived need to resolve situations quickly and authoritatively. But despite such reforms, mentally ill individuals in crisis continue to be over-represented among police use of lethal force cases worldwide.

While Clifford acknowledges there are no simple answers to the problems raised and analysed in this book, case studies, such as the Paul Klein incident, and the many other fatal mental health crisis interventions offer a window onto these complexities. Clifford is upbeat when she remarks that the relationship between policing, mental illness and the media is both complex and contested but not unchangeable (281). She challenges current media practices, and encourages a recent shift towards sensitive news reporting through socially responsible framing and communications.

In her conclusion, Clifford reminds us she set out to start a conversation on the issue and find a way forward. She has provided ample material for this. My only criticism is the book might reach a wider audience if the focus was broader than its concentrated lens on fatal police interventions. The inclusion of recent comparative studies on policing and mental health, and an in-depth discussion of what constitutes reasonable, legitimate and justifiable force would add to the content.

Yet Clifford should be congratulated for how she tackles a current and confronting problem with sensitivity and in-depth analysis. She does not offer immediate and simplistic solutions to a problem with many layers of complexity, but points to the need for improved media reporting, especially around framing, context and training.

Journalism and media educators will find this text highly beneficial, especially on how to report violent interventions. Those studying criminology, sociology and mental health would also benefit from the author's insights and expertise.

REFERENCE

Kruger, E. (2020), 'Mental health and the policing context', in P. Birch, M. Kennedy and E. Kruger (eds), *Australian Policing: Critical Issues in 21st Century Police Practice*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 367–81.

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