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Editorial

What it means to be human, what it means to be hurt, and what it means to thrive.

Caroline Leah, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

I was excited to accept the role of European Review editor and to introduce myself on my very first editorial. I am a registered social worker in England and a social work academic at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK in the Social Care and Social Work Department. I have held a variety of roles in HEIs from leading undergraduate and post-graduate taught social work programmes to post-qualifying leadership courses. When I was in practice, I was a mental health social worker and a team manager and I led multidisciplinary mental health services, supporting people with various mental health diagnoses and psychosocial issues. This year - as I have become more research active - my attention has turned to applied research and how it is operationalised by social workers to inform their best practice. To this end, I am currently a co-applicant on the National Institute of Health Research - Applied Research Greater Manchester programme that seeks to address both how to improve the capacity of social work researchers in the workforce to respond to, and meet, the needs of populations in health and care systems. This research activity is pivotal for discovering new and evaluating better ways of preventing illness and delivering care and is at the leading edge of innovative applied research, care, and treatment capabilities. Through aligning practice-based research literacy with the needs of people receiving social work services this role dovetails my two core areas of interest: developing a social work workforce that is research informed and person centred, and developing person centred co-created research projects with people with lived experience.

This work corresponds to my attraction to research that allows marginalised voices to soar in all their messy glory, that intimately asks us all to question what it means to be human, what it means to be hurt, and what it means to not only survive, but to thrive. We are a product of our past, but we grow upward and onward. During these turbulent times, with increasing sense of disenfranchisement, division, civil unrest, and war I am redrawn to the famous 'Hope Speech' by Harvey Milk (1978). Milk was an American Politician and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California. He stated, in his now famous Hope speech, in 1978,

...the only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow.

Milk was a visionary, and he was successful at building collaborations centred around social justice and equality, that were people focused and inclusive. Core values that speak to us as social work professionals. It is part of a social worker's role and responsibility to support people using services to believe in a better future and to enable them to identify and make the changes they want to happen (Leah, 2012 p.165). It is with this sense of inclusiveness that I wish to broaden the focus of the reviews in the journal, to expand what we review into other communication mediums, beside books. Thus, henceforth, the Review Essay section will include reviews of documentaries, plays, films, museum exhibitions, podcasts and TED talks that are pertinent to qualitative social work.

As a social work educator, I have used a variety of media in the classroom. Utilising different mediums can be inclusive of marginalised groups, and of people living with disabilities, particularly when such mediums have been co-produced, as in the example of the Cheshire East film on adult safeguarding. This powerful and impactful *slam* was conceived during an educational social work leadership programme I led at Manchester Metropolitan University. A slam is designed to engage an audience to make them think about a particular social issue, with a clear purpose of intent to make the audience feel a certain way. It is a way of celebrating parts of oneself that hegemonic power structures seek to silence, repress, or discriminate against. The service users involved attended a peer support group and due to the caring and innovative approach of all parties supported by a shared vision of co-creation and coproduction, we devised a highly emotive poem that paid witness to the service users traumatic experiences of trauma, abuse, and safeguarding that they put into their own voices to co-create an impactful film. I invite you to [watch the film, Cheshire East Safeguarding: The Spoken Word, and respond](#).

My interest in co-creation has been a thread throughout my professional and academic career. The Silences Framework (Serrant, 2010) is a central tenet on the [ImprovE-ACT research project](#) that I am a co-applicant on. My role is to lead on the interviews with the professionals involved in detaining Black African and Caribbean Men in England and Wales to psychiatric in-patient hospitals. The Mental Health Act (1983) covers the assessment, treatment, and rights of people with a mental disorder in England and Wales. Under this Act, a person can be detained and treated without their consent if they are deemed at risk of harm to themselves or others by an Approved Mental Health Professional and two specialist doctors. Black British people are over four times more likely than White British people to be detained under this legislation. The aim of the research is to reduce the number of disproportionate detentions on Black males, the compulsory hospital admissions for people with mental health conditions and improve their overall experiences along pathways of mental health support. The co-creation aspect aims to centralise the voice of previously silenced communities, so their voices are heard, understood, and acted upon to create meaningful change.

The methodology is underpinned by Experience Based Co-design (EBCD), which is an inclusive approach that has synergies with participatory and user experience design to develop quality improvements in social and health care services. The EBCD process entails service users, carers and staff critically reflecting on their experiences of services, and working together to identify improvement through prioritising, co-devising, and implementing change (Donetto, 2015). It centralises service users, carers, and professionals' experiences, and is a methodology that speaks to intersectional disadvantages.

Finally, I leave you with an open heart and invitation to think constructively about audience, purpose, and approach and to invite you to discuss your ideas for review, in a way that I hope will make the section richer and more relatable to all.

References

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