

‘Whose Mind is it Anyway? John’s Story (Film screening)

Facilitators: Jayasree Kalathil, Dominic Makuvachuma Walker and Renuka Bhakta

Definition of ‘institutional racism’

The report of the inquiry committee, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, which investigated the 1993 killing of Stephen Lawrence, a young black man, defined institutional racism thus:

‘The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people’.

[\[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry): p 49]

The inquiry following the death in psychiatric care of another young black man, David ‘Rocky’ Bennett, in 1998 found the National Health Service (NHS) of England to be institutionally racist.

Questions to consider

1. Were John’s symptoms ‘controlled’? Was he ‘better’ or ‘worse’ at the end?
2. What does ‘outcome’ mean in a multi-cultural society?
3. What does ‘outcome’ mean to a) service users and b) psychiatrists? What might happen when they differ?
4. Should psychiatrists consider a person’s civil and human rights?
5. Were John and Dr Burns talking the same language? What are the implications of possible differences in language and meaning?
6. What assumptions and beliefs did the professionals involved with John hold? What are the implications of these on John’s care and treatment?
7. John’s beliefs are assumed to be ‘delusions,’ i.e. madness. How do we interpret other people’s beliefs? Is ‘delusion’ vs. ‘normal’ the only approach? Why are some beliefs ‘unacceptable’ (e.g. John’s belief re Queen)?
8. How are ‘race’ and ‘culture’ implicated in the film?
9. What do you think of John being called ‘Philip’ by hospital staff but not by the film production team?

Further Reading

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