

Editorial: Destination Mad Studies

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The biomedical approach to understanding and treating people's experiences of altered states of mind and/or distress continues to dominate mental health policy, practice, and research. Responding to distress and unusual emotional or mental experiences as largely matters of a "broken brain" (Webb, 2010) is not only dominant within psychiatry but also within related disciplines such as psychology, nursing, and social work. Together these and other allied professions form what is known as the *psy complex*, which is an expansive and overarching system that informs and intersects with other neoliberal systems of oppression (Gorman & LeFrançois, in press; LeFrançois, 2013). The effects of this widespread dominance means that key professions, such as social work and mental health nursing, serve as handmaidens (Adam, 2014) to carrying out biomedical psychiatric interventions, eschewing those professions' roots in critical and radical approaches to providing support within a social model (Beresford, 2002, 2005; Beresford, Perring, Nettle, & Wallcraft, 2016). In effect, the allied professions of clinical psychology, psychiatric social work, and mental health nursing have been almost wholly complicit in perpetrating the violence (Shimrat, 2013), racism (Butler, 2016; Kanani, 2011; LeFrançois, 2013; Voronka, 2013), sanism (Fabris, 2011; Poole et al., 2012), and epistemic injustice (Donskoy, 2015; LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016; Liegghio, 2013) that are inherent to psychiatric oppression. However, the emergence of Mad Studies in Canada via critical disability studies, provides a convincing and unifying challenge to both the biomedical model of psychiatry and to its adherents within the *psy complex*.

In this special issue of *Intersectionalities*, we approach Mad Studies as an epistemological and methodological shift away from the paternalistic professional dominance over the lives of those deemed mad. Centring the theorizings, research, practices, and culture of people who have been psychiatrized, Mad Studies provides a politicized space for the activist scholarship and action emanating from mad movements to thrive. Yet, Mad Studies understands itself not as fixed but as an evolving in/discipline where no one individual, school, institution, or local community holds authority or ownership over its definition and the directions it may take (Costa, 2014). Instead, it is a collective project that is developing primarily out of the politicized discussions, theorizings, research, interventions, and social actions taking place within our mad communities (see Ingram in this special issue). In addition to addressing psychiatric violence and challenging the pathologization of

altered states of mind, this collective project also has involved an infusion of mad cultural production (Dellar, Curtis, & Ester, 2000; Diamond, 2013) with the celebration of mad community and experiences, but without glamorizing or effacing what at times may be experienced as unbearable distress and deep pain (Gorman & LeFrançois, in press).

Some of the issues that have been of importance within Mad Studies to date include a focus on psychiatric survivor analyses (Finkler, 2014), the maddening of text (Wolframe, 2013), and mad readings of the wider world (Ingram, 2015; LeFrançois, 2015; Russo, 2016). In addition, much emphasis has been placed on documenting and teaching mad people's history (Bain, Ballantine, Bell, Collie, & Fullerton, 2015; Beckman & Davies, 2013; Burstow & Weitz, 1988; Chadha, 2008; Davar, 2015; Davies & MPA Documentary Collective, 2013; Patel, 2014; St. Amand & LeBlanc, 2013; Starkman, 2013; Reaume, 2009; Reville, 2013; Roman, Brown, Noble, Wainer, & Young, 2009) as well as on collective efforts at exposing and providing a systemic critique of psy violence (Ben-Moshe, Chapman, & Carey, 2014; Burstow, LeFrançois, & Diamond, 2014; LeFrançois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013; Russo & Sweeney, 2016). Moreover, as a vehicle for subverting the erasure of mad people who have been racialized and colonized—both within psychiatry and within mad movements—transnational, critical race, and post-colonial lenses have been integral to Mad Studies from its inception (Ben-Moshe et al., 2014; Gorman, 2013; Gorman & LeFrançois, in press; Gorman, sainsi, Tam, Udegbe, & Usar, 2013; Gorman & Udegbe, 2010; Haritaworn, 2013; Kanani, 2011; LeFrançois, 2013; Mills, 2014; Nabbali, 2013; Patel, 2014; Tam, 2013; Voronka, 2013).

As a group, we came together to edit this special issue of *Intersectionalities* bringing in our own knowledges gained as psychiatrized activist scholars who have been involved in various forms of mad and/or disability organizing and survivor research as well as teaching against the grain in social work, mental health nursing, disability studies, and community care. Through an open call for contributions, we aimed to produce a thematic issue that would provide a transdisciplinary—or, perhaps more cogently, an in/disciplinary—collection of articles that would explore the relationships and contributions to Mad Studies of different fields of study and different social movements. We hoped to attract contributions that demonstrate the ways in which the project of Mad Studies has been taken up both inside and beyond Canada, within disability studies, social work, and 'mental health' generally. We hoped to showcase contributions that demonstrate an understanding of madness through the filter of social justice and, in particular, with the centring of the analyses of those who have been psychiatrized. We asked potential contributors to consider what kind of knowledge production might lead to the development of non-medical conceptualizations and alternative social responses to madness, sanism, and psychiatrization, including resistance to current power relationships within and outside of the psy complex. In addition, we asked: "In what ways does madness intersect with other socially disadvantaged subjectivities in (re)producing hierarchies of dominance and subordination?" And: "In what ways does using an intersectionality lens support the unpacking of the role of sanism within the matrix of domination?" And: "What are the working realities of mad scholars and advocates

within both academic and non-academic settings?” In keeping with the journal’s focus of addressing issues of social difference and power, we sought contributions that would consider the intersections of age, disability, class, poverty, gender, sexual identity, geographical (dis)location, colonialism or imperialism, Indigeneity, racialization, ethnicity, and citizenship.

However, with focusing this special issue on Mad Studies and the psy professions, we do not envisage—and, indeed, argue strongly against—a takeover of Mad Studies by “well-meaning” and “benevolent” professionals. The appropriation and subsequent distorting of grassroots approaches from mad movements by parts of or all of the psy complex has a long history, including psychiatric survivor narratives (Costa et al., 2012; Russo, 2012; Russo, in press), the recovery approach (Morrow & Weisser, 2012; Poole, 2011, Recovery in the Bin, 2015), peer support (Fabris, 2013; Penney & Prescott, 2016), and other forms of co-optation (Burstow & LeFrançois, 2014). Even as Mad Studies becomes subsumed within the academic industrial complex (Gorman & LeFrançois, in press), it must be further entrenched within our various mad communities and must remain connected to the overarching social movements that gave rise to it (LeFrançois, 2015, 2016; Reville, 2013). If these connections become severed or weakened, the doors will be open for social work, mental health nursing, and other professions to take possession of Mad Studies and employ it to serve agendas that may be incongruent with the grassroots mad politics from which it arose. The point of Mad Studies being taught to students and practitioners within the psy complex, is to enable them to learn from those who have been psychiatrized and to encourage them to return to the embrace of their profession’s roots in critical and radical approaches to practice. In many ways, this means detaching themselves from the handmaiden’s role to psychiatry and rethinking and repositioning their work. In many ways, it requires a stepping back and letting go of coercive powers and medical interpretations. In many ways, it means centring and taking a back seat to psychiatric survivor practices, mad theorizings, and other forms of knowledge production emanating from mad movements. We remain skeptical that the professions within the psy complex are ready to do this, given hindrances to transforming the mental health system (Carr et al., 2016). However, we are hopeful that the rise of Mad Studies as an in/discipline will continue to challenge and subvert the psychiatric apparatus (Holmes, Jacob, & Perron, 2014), compelling the professions currently allied to psychiatry to rethink their biomedical allegiances and to begin to foster new ones that are truly anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and anti-sanist. We trust in the relevance and the emancipatory potential of Mad Studies.

The response to our call for contributions was overwhelming. We felt encouraged by receiving over 55 submissions, and regretfully needed to turn away many strong potential contributions in order to make for a special issue of manageable size. By the end of the editing process, we accepted less than one fifth of the received submissions. In many cases, it was frustrating to not be able to publish the scholarly work submitted to us. From this experience, however, we made a decision to commit to an edited book project, in order to provide space for some of the excellent submissions that did not make it into this special issue.

We know we will have fallen short of our hopes and goals in putting together this special issue. While we are aware of many absent voices, we are also encouraged by the diverse range of authors who have become involved, both in terms of their backgrounds and the topics they brought in. We see this as a signature of the strength of Mad Studies. While selecting the abstracts we did not wish to compartmentalize people crudely as survivors, non-survivors, or allies but aspired to include a spectrum of different topics. However, knowing that the academic work of mad-identified scholars is often subject to anonymous reviews based on positivist and clinical criteria, we aimed to organize what we consider to be a true *peer* review process. We found it important for the manuscripts to be subjected to the critical view of other mad-identified scholars, so we made sure that at least one of the two reviewers for each manuscript identifies in this way.

Collectively, the articles that are published here meet many of the aims we had for this special issue. They all fall within one or more of the overriding themes of racism, colonialism, cis-genderism and transphobia, sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism, classism, ageism, ableism, and the ways that these intersect with sanism. Looking at the special issue as a whole, three sub-themes can be traced: (a) detailing violence within and outside of the psy complex, (b) calling for solidarity with different social movements, and (c) interrogating intersections with other disciplines.

Concerning the first sub-theme, the contributors have detailed psy violence in relation to reproducing gendered violence within the psychiatric making of ‘penetration disorder’ (Tosh & Carson), the shifting standards of ‘normal’ for young people within psychiatry (Liegghio), the use of recovery to deem psychiatrized people as “failed citizens” within social policy (McWade), the immersion of psy governance within universities (Aubrecht), reproducing transphobia and sanism within media reporting and feature films (Lüthi), and reproducing racism within psychiatry and allied professions (Meerai, Abdillahi, & Poole; Keating).

In relation to the second sub-theme, the contributors have called on Mad Studies to engage in solidarity with black and racialized communities (Keating; Meerai, Abdillahi, & Poole), the trans community (Lüthi), illicit drug users (Smith), and survivor researchers (Sweeney).

With respect to the third sub-theme, the contributors have either overtly or indirectly interrogated the intersections of Mad Studies with Disability Studies (Ingram; Aubrecht; Liegghio), social work (Meerai, Abdillahi, & Poole; Keating), history (Aubrecht; Tosh & Carson), gender studies (Tosh & Carson; Lüthi), cultural studies (Smith; Lüthi; Meerai, Abdillahi, & Poole; Keating), sexuality studies (Tosh & Carson), childhood studies (Liegghio), media studies (Lüthi), and social policy (McWade).

Rather than describe or explain each article in its turn here, we encourage you to read through the articles and take from them what you deem important in the evolution of Mad Studies.

Although this special issue covers many important overriding themes and sub-themes, there remain absences that we believe Mad Studies needs to consider beyond what is covered here. Among issues missing from this special issue is the

psychiatrization of older people, and in particular their massive drugging with psychotropics in nursing homes. Also absent are the voices of Aboriginal peoples who have been deemed mad. Also of importance are geopolitical issues, with the contributors and editors of this special issue writing only from Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. What we have seen to date is Mad Studies publications primarily coming from the Global North, with a few exceptions (e.g., Davar, 2015, 2016; Mills, 2014; Nabbali, 2013). Given the importance placed in Mad Studies on transnational, critical race, and post-colonial lenses, we envision the evolution of publishing in this area to include more writings from those who hail from the Global South. At the moment, however, this remains lacking, and we must admit the disappointing lack of majority world perspectives in this special issue. There are likely other absences that are unapparent to us, as absences generally denote an erasure of some form. We must continue to interrogate the absences, and subvert their erasures, if the Mad Studies project is to remain intent on not reproducing violence and oppression.

Given what we initially hoped to achieve with this special issue, we asked ourselves what we hope will be taken away by readers in terms of research, teaching, and practice within the psy complex as well as in other fields such as disability studies. We have long thought that focusing narrowly on psychiatry was unhelpful for making sense of madness and distress. The confinement of these experiences to the psychiatric system is not only taking place physically—by the detention and treatment of people deemed “mad”—but also in terms of silencing what madness has to tell us about both our individual lives and the societies we live in. Mad Studies is doing the opposite: It does not only let mad voices speak, but also opens up a space for these voices to articulate themselves on their own terms. In doing so, Mad Studies does not only add new perspectives—it fundamentally turns the gaze. With the professional expert gaze always directed to those deemed mad, Mad Studies opens up a space for people deemed mad to look back. That gaze can then be directed at everything. It is therefore impossible to limit Mad Studies to an interrogation of the psy complex only. We hope that this special issue gives a taste of the many angles, truths, and complexities that open up when the world is seen and comprehended from the perspectives of those who are usually being observed and analyzed. Each of the articles that follows in this special issue demonstrates what such a turn can mean for the disciplines and fields to whom society has designated the task of understanding and treating people deemed mad. We also know that this fundamental turn of gaze can and will extend to all other corners of our lives. Taking many different points of departures, Mad Studies can lead us to a variety of places. We hope for this special issue to be just one of its many beginnings.

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