

Foreword

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Mad Studies is not about separatism, empire building or marginalisation; nor is it about academic or professional elitism. Instead, Mad Studies centres the knowledges of those deemed mad, bolstered on the periphery by the important relationships, work and support of allies – or by those who comport themselves as mad-positive. This allows those of us deemed mad to formulate and advance our own understandings, theories, research, actions, practices and knowledges, each of which carries an inherently enhanced credibility *because* of direct experience. We might refer to this as mad activist scholarship, a form of knowledge production or collective intellectual contribution that is embedded in Mad community interventions and actions. At the same time, this form of knowledge production and activism also acknowledges not needing to resist and toil wholly on our own to dismantle what has become an all too economically powerful and deeply politically entrenched psychiatric system. The Mad Studies project offers us a way forward in revealing or creating knowledges that do not contain the distortions and harmfulness proffered by a biomedical psychiatry that is so distant from our lived realities. Also, it allows for the choice to integrate any useful existing or newly developing knowledges, actions and interventions proffered by critical academics, radical professionals and other allies.

Mad Studies, however, takes place within and without academia, but never without community. Richard Ingram, in coining the term Mad Studies in 2008, conceptualised it as an ‘in/discipline’ (Ingram, 2015; 2016). He explains that in some spaces like academia ‘sly normality’ (Mills, 2014; 2013) must be performed, while at the same time in mad community spaces the queerness of thoughts and behaviours – or the indiscipline that may characterise them – is

known, honoured and lived (Ingram, 2016), incomprehensible as that may be to the sanestream. Examples of where Mad Studies as an in/discipline is occurring in our various local communities include the reading group in the Netherlands initiated by Grietje Keller (Keller, 2015), the North East Mad Studies Forum¹ in England, and the group in Moncton, Canada initiated by Rachel LeBlanc, to name just a few. There are also the well-known courses in academia in Canada, Scotland and England. This book offers us several other examples of Mad Studies – of ‘thinking environments’ – ranging from survivor-produced knowledges to survivor-created and survivor-controlled practices to partnerships in research and higher education teaching, some lesser known, with little having been written about them previously.

In my view, this extraordinary volume represents a crucial and unprecedented account of what Mad Studies is all about. Notably, it is almost wholly written by psychiatric survivors, with the exception of only three chapters co-authored in partnership with allies, in addition to the last chapter written solely by ally Reima Maglajlic. I first met Reima in England in the mid-1990s, and it seems not accidental that I encounter her here again, decades later, in this book. We both studied under the late Professor David Brandon – in Rea’s words, ‘one of the first mental-health-system-survivors-cum-professors-of-social-work’ (p210). He was a formidable and leading figure in the psychiatric survivor community in the UK from around the 1970s until his untimely death in 2001, and the education we received from him was equally formidable. Initially through that mad activist education under David’s guidance and tutelage, and later through engaging in community actions and independent reading, I became familiar with and learned much from the previous writings and activism of most of the contributors of this volume. In fact, I have been profoundly influenced at different times over the past 20 years by the writings, activism and courage of so many of them.

And now, finally, we have this book, which I envisage will be taken up as foundational in Mad Studies. Many of the thoughts and teachings contained within it are authored by people who have been working in the trenches for a long time to create mad spaces in practice, education and research. In effect, we have a book in our hands that we can now dip in and out of, and which might just be able to sustain us in those bleak moments when the work we all do seems too overwhelming, dangerous or unachievable. Filled with poignant analyses, strong political commitments and a passion for social justice, the chapters weave together a multitude of ideas, perspectives and experiences. In reading it, sometimes I could feel the words resonating in my bones; sometimes I

1. See <http://madstudiesne.weebly.com/>

found myself cheering as the words on the page dared to say out loud what others will not – the simple yet complex truths that others do not have the courage or honesty to speak.

As such, this volume contains so many of the important arguments – mad activist arguments – that link together the diverse issues subsumed within the umbrella of Mad Studies. It offers critiques of biomedical psychiatry, allowing us to appreciate anew why different and mad-informed ways of understanding and addressing distress and extreme states of mind are of such central importance. In addition, it tackles head-on issues of psychiatric survivor exclusions linked to assumptions about (il)legitimacy and (lack of) credibility, both within and outside of psychiatry. As well, it interrogates the fairly consistent appropriation and distorting of psychiatric survivor contributions over time and across space.

Both the breadth and depth of this book's focus and discussion were at times arresting for me to read; I am left thinking through issues that are pressing but have perhaps not been invoked or developed in writing before. Here, we find warnings of what might happen when partnerships harm more than help, or when our goals lose their initially unabashed political grounding, or when we become corrupted by a hierarchical and competitive academic culture that is detached from the mad community and people's everyday lives. Here, we learn about the problems that arise when mad identity remains undisclosed, as well as analyses of the fragility and the impossibility of mad identity. Here, too, we are asked to think about and confront racism within and outside of psychiatry, including systemic whiteness not just within psy-systems but also within the mad movement itself, the privileging of white survivor contributions and the erasure of cultural memory when it is not consistent with established white Western understandings.

All this and so much more within its pages make this volume both vital to our movement and perhaps of fundamental importance to the evolution of Mad Studies. In short, this book has provided a locus for exposing – and being recognised for – the kind of meaningful meaning-(un)making that is possible within Mad Studies.

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References

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