



An Introduction to the International Mad Studies Journal: A Collective Reflection on Processes, Movements, Journeys, Futures, and Unfurlings

Sinclair, Aimee; Elwyn, Rosiel; Scholz, Brett; et.al.

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Sinclair, A., Elwyn, R., Scholz, B., Spandler, H., Maylea, C., Stott, S. B., Happell, B., Fossey, E., Cosantino, J., Grey, F., Thorburn, K., & Watson, S. (2023). An Introduction to the International Mad Studies Journal: A Collective Reflection on Processes, Movements, Journeys, Futures, and Unfurlings. In *International Mad Studies Journal* (Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. e1–e8). *International Mad Studies Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.58544/imsj.v1i1.5237>

Document Type: Published Version

Link to Published Version: <https://doi.org/10.58544/imsj.v1i1.5237>

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EDITORIAL

**An Introduction to the *International Mad Studies Journal*:
A Collective Reflection on Processes, Movements, Journeys, Futures,
and Unfurlings**

The International Mad Studies Journal Community

The *International Mad Studies Journal (IMSJ)* was founded by a psychiatric survivor in Naarm (Melbourne, Australia). This was in the context of working in academia and seeing the challenges of producing alternative knowledges and ideas in mental health. They gathered like-minded people together, predominately from Australia, but also from across the world. The group included Mad scholars who were consumers, survivors or ex-patients of mental health services, as well as aspiring allies from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and professions. Together, we wanted to challenge the dominance of traditional mental health discourse, both inside and outside the academy. We wanted to actualise the visions that have been held by many in the past about showcasing and celebrating Mad knowledge and perspectives.

Mad Studies arose from within the Mad community itself, and draws upon many decades of critical scholarship about Madness, especially the way that Mad people and Mad experiences have been hidden, marginalised and silenced. In this way, Mad Studies has more synergy with Critical Disability Studies, Queer Studies, Critical Race Studies and Trans Studies, each arising from their associated social movements, rather than from conventional academic and professional disciplines ('critical' or otherwise). Mad Studies has significant synergies and intersections with those movements and studies too.

The development of Mad Studies corresponded with increasing numbers of Mad identified people doing scholarly work, especially doctoral work, whom David Reville has referred to as 'high knowledge crazies' (as cited in Spandler et al., 2013). Several key texts have been published in the field, most notably the edited collections *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Menzies, LeFrancois and Reaume, 2013) and *The Routledge International Handbook of Mad Studies* (Beresford and Russo, 2022). We wanted to support and develop this work by producing a fully open access journal for Mad Studies.

Whilst there is plenty of 'critical' scholarship about the 'psy' professions (psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy and allied disciplines), there is no specific journal which focuses on more radical approaches to mental health practice, policy and politics. There certainly is no academic journal which foregrounds critical Mad-centred knowledge. The IMSJ community sought to rectify that. We were aware of lots of radical mental health publications, notably *Asylum magazine* in the UK, which we took inspiration from. However, we wanted to create a space for explicitly scholarly work, which might not find a home in

conventional 'mental health' journals, or other journals associated with specific disciplines - psy and otherwise.

This journal is just one way in which Mad knowledge can be developed and disseminated. It sits alongside, and in collaboration with, many other forms of Mad knowledge generated within Mad communities. We seek to work alongside an international community of Mad-identified and Mad-allied individuals operating within a coalitional politic of solidarity and shared liberatory visioning. We aspire to work collectively toward the furthering of Mad Studies scholarship which centres Mad community desires, care, hopes, and autonomy for what and how this journal should be.

In our vision for Mad knowledge to be taken seriously, within and outside the academy, it felt necessary to have an appropriately 'scholarly' journal for our community. However, we are clear that this will be unlike any other journal and there are key tensions involved in producing a publication devoted to Mad knowledge. Many of the discussions about establishing the journal occurred leading up to and into 2020 – meaning that we were learning to navigate working together as a team at the same time as the world was learning to adapt to COVID-19. Throughout our regular IMSJ meetings on Zoom, with individuals logging in from around the world, we often found ourselves wishing we had recorded or otherwise captured our rich discussions navigating tensions within Mad Studies.

In this first editorial of the journal, we attempt to highlight some of these tensions and challenges. We seek to articulate, by means of an embodied remembering, and share with readers how and why we came to certain decisions, many of which are still in a state of unfurling and becoming, evolving in tandem with ever-changing personal, global and disciplinary contexts. We have learned a lot going through the stages of developing this Issue from conceptualising the journal, building our teams, and bringing these pages together. We know there are many lessons for us still to learn and countless grapplings for us to continue to confront and unpack.

A Series of Challenges

Structuring and Producing

The structure of the journal grew organically, with a Hub being formed to ensure frequent meetings would maintain momentum to produce the journal. Editorial and administrative groups were developed and designed to be open, porous, and mutually supportive. We were acutely aware of balancing the tension between needing sufficient structure to enable us to produce the journal itself, and also the need for sufficient *unstructure* to allow for people to contribute to the process in as flexible way as they needed, to accommodate people's fluctuating needs, energies and abilities.

We wanted to recognise the emotional labour involved in producing a collaborative journal like this, especially when many of us struggle with various personal, economic and

employment challenges, which, in turn, have been exacerbated by social, political and environmental challenges. For these reasons, we have not wanted to rush the process to get the journal out, and thus conform to prevailing ableist norms of productivity. Instead, we wanted to embrace slow and care-ful scholarship (Mountz et al. 2015), that is more congruent with alternative Mad and Crip time (Price 2011). At the same time, we wanted to honour our commitments to the wider Mad community and to those who have submitted their work.

Confronting Exclusions

We aim to contribute to a Mad Studies that directly confronts violent epistemic exclusions and corresponding injustices to Mad people within conventional scholarship (Daley et al., 2019; Rose, 2022). But it also seeks to address the exclusions and injustices *within* critical disciplines too, including Mad Studies itself (Spandler & Poursanidou, 2019).

For example, we are acutely aware that any discipline, however ‘critical’ can exclude those without formal education, or those who might lack educational opportunities. This often intersects with other forms of disadvantage in relation to social class and different cognitive styles and abilities. In particular, people with long histories of suffering, institutionalisation and psychiatrisation may have less access to alternative forms of knowledge production.

In addition, and most notably, despite its intentions, Mad Studies and collaborative disciplines have ‘whitewashed’ Mad Studies history, ontology, and phenomenology (Rose & Kalathil 2019; Bell, 2006; Beresford, 2019; Gorman et al., 2013), harmfully centring white, middle class, cis, heterosexual, patriarchal and colonial frameworks and ideologies. Thus it is vital for us to operate from a critically (Madison, 2020) and intentionally intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1995; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2018). As Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2018) caution, we cannot attempt “to fix problems of exclusion by simply adding missing people and experiences into intersectionality as a preconceived entity” (p. 61). Rather “intersectionality requires a rethinking of these approaches in ways that democratise the social construction of knowledge” itself (ibid.).

As an international journal taking on the call to challenge histories of exclusion and silencing, we recognise that our intentions and actions by no means preclude us from perpetuating these very harms. To engage in a democratisation of Mad knowledges and theorising requires a fully situated (Haraway, 1988) and deeply reflexive (LeBlanc, & Kinsella, 2016) praxis that extends to all aspects of this journal’s processes - processes that have already come to pass and those that are still being materialised and envisioned. We are acutely aware that this is very much a work in progress. For example, despite our claims to be an international journal, most of our core community reside in anglophone speaking countries with a heavy colonial legacy and we are currently only able to accept articles written in English.

In recognising that we need to do much more to address the multiple exclusions within Mad Studies, we are attempting to make our editorial community more diverse across a range of

different axes. We also seek to prioritise publishing work that actively challenges ableist, sanist, white supremacist, and colonial expectations of the written form, style, and convention. We also try to provide a supportive and welcoming environment for authors whose work has been denied elsewhere. In addition, we are committed to providing an open access offering of all publications to address the inequity that exists when knowledge production is gatekept through institutional and financial barriers. Notwithstanding these efforts, we are aware that we have a long way to go.

Seeking Validation and Avoiding Co-option

The systems of norms that shape academic journals are complex and their power structures are too often hidden within publishing protocols. Furthermore, the Western, colonial, and imperialist reliance on the written word - particularly when conveyed in accordance with the expectations of reason, rationality, objectivity - too often become a taken-for-granted vehicle for the perpetuation of sanist forms of knowledge production (LeFrançois & Voronka, 2022; Trouillot, 1995). Questioning these normative processes and methodologies (Bruce, 2021; LeFrançois & Voronka, 2022) has been a critical component of bringing forth this journal and amplifying the voices of our Mad community.

Our desire is for the journal to create much-needed space for ongoing critique of the constraining systems, structures and ideologies that dictate which bodyminds, behaviours, lived experiences, and knowledges are deemed sufficiently “scholarly”, credible and valid (Clare, 2017; Gorman et al., 2013; LeFrançois & Voronka, 2022; Pilling, 2022). We seek to make opportunities to redress barriers to lived experience leadership that exist in all layers of the academic ecosystem (Scholz et al., 2019). Therefore, we aspire to create a space unlike other journals that have traditionally excluded Mad and/or critical voices. Our intention is to foster the inclusion of Mad ways of thinking, feeling and being. We seek to include contributors whose path may not have conformed to a traditional academic career, or those who have not had access to formal academic spaces or normative ways of communicating. However, we realise there are significant challenges in this endeavour.

One such challenge lies in the need to ensure that our publication is sufficiently rigorous and scholarly enough to be taken seriously, whilst also being sufficiently flexible to include various types and forms of Mad knowledge, especially those which do not fit the conventionally accepted ways of ‘doing scholarship’. The Mad Studies scholar, Richard Ingram (2016) explicitly addresses this issue in a chapter called ‘Doing Mad Studies: Making (Non)sense Together’. He highlights the dilemma of authentically writing within the experience of Madness in a way that ‘makes sense’. Moreover, in the context of a mental health *and* academic system that has co-opted Mad knowledge, we are aware that our own project of developing a Mad Studies journal might risk the co-option itself. For example, co-opting Mad knowledge within a particular academic or scholarly frame (Russo & Beresford 2016).

Publishing Mad Knowledge

In early conversations, we all shared prior experiences of journal editors and peer reviewers not appreciating or valuing Mad or lived experiential expertise. We also discussed the often insidious ways that the industry of academic publication reinscribes able-mindedness as the unspoken norm, default, and expectation (Price, 2014). In response, it was important to us that we created a peer review system that actively rejects the ableist, sanist and neoliberal urgency of “productivity”. We wanted to operate within the fluid and unbounded processes of Mad time, challenging the silencing and invalidating by-products of toxic positivity, and centring generative and engaging dialogic exchange. We wanted to counteract the dismissive and often destructive systems that police non-normative forms of Mad bodymind knowledge production under the auspices of academic “scholarship” (Price, 2014; Schalk, 2018).

To this end, we sought to establish a mentoring system for submissions that peer reviewers recommended as needing extra support to prepare for publication. We also encourage discussion *between* peer reviewers to try to build collaborative capacity. This takes significant (Mad) time and effort. We hope that these processes and methodologies of care (Piepznasamarasinha, 2018) are evident, tangible, and deeply felt within the pages of this Issue, and also in the experiences of authors who submitted to the journal. Another motivation for this was to build capacity for reviewers, whilst also valuing that both having “formal” reviewing experience *and* coming to the position of peer review for the first time brought unique perspectives to the process.

Finally, we are aware that there are many alternative formats for Mad knowledge, apart from primarily text-based journal articles, such as art, poetry, zines etc (Woods et al. 2019; www.madzines.org). We want to work with, and alongside, these alternative forms of knowledge and, where possible, give them space within our journal. However, we also want to avoid the twin dangers of either co-opting them into an overly academic format, or sacrificing intellectual rigour. We felt the need to strike a delicate balance between challenging the status quo in terms of pushing the boundaries of what kind of publication is considered academic-enough and valid, and being inclusive of multiple Mad ontologies and ways of presenting them. As a journal, this is probably our ultimate challenge.

Moving Forward

Many of the questions we have discussed and pondered remain unanswered, and some have many possible answers. Recognising that some of the processes we followed to get here are imperfect, being actively returned to and revisited, we embrace the collective visioning that propels us forward, and the inherent uncertainty that processes of becoming so often entail. We are, thus, indebted to all who have made this journey of Mad knowledge production possible.

This journal seeks to honour these histories, communities, and movements by publishing scholarly work on archives of Mad thoughts, Mad dreams, Mad lives, Mad hopes, Mad

desires, Mad theories, and Mad resistance. We do this in the search for Mad futures that may become a home for us all via the transformative frameworks of Mad Studies. We thank you for your willingness to join us and look forward to engaging in this exploration together.

Authors' Note: This editorial grew from discussions across a series of conversations during International Mad Studies Journal meetings and has been written by some of us in the *International Mad Studies Journal* Community, including Aimee Sinclair, Rosiel Elwyn, Brett Scholz, Hel Spandler, Chris Maylea, Sam Brhaspati Stott, Brenda Happell, Ellie Fossey, Jersey Cosantino, Flick Grey, Kath Thorburn, and Sandy Watson. We have tried to capture some key discussions and issues raised within the community. We hope it contributes to these discussions, all of which are ongoing and unfolding.

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