



EMPOWERMENT REPORT

(The Newsletter of the Empowerment Council)

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Mad Studies – What It Is and Why You Should Care

By Lucy Costa, Systemic Advocate in Mental Health

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From September 9th - 11th Lancaster University in the UK held a Disability Studies conference with a stream that focussed specifically on Mad Studies. This is very important and it signifies a step forward in our history, community organizing and hope for a more inclusive future especially for our next generation. Canada has some classes that do teach, “Mad Peoples History” but we need more commitment for an educational structure that supports learning, exploration and critical thinking in universities, colleges, and learning centres of all kinds. Given that for the last four decades lip service has been paid to inclusion, participation and rights for consumers/psychiatric survivors, it is reasonable to request that a morsel of funding be given to develop this area of study so we can build on the great work of our previous consumer/survivor leaders, and mentors.



Mad Studies is an area of education, scholarship, and analysis about the experiences, history, culture, political organizing, narratives, writings and most importantly, the PEOPLE who identify as Mad: psychiatric survivors, consumers, service users, mentally ill, patients, neuro-diverse, inmates and disabled - to name a few of the “identity labels” our community may choose to use. Mad Studies has grown out of the long history of consumer/survivor movements organized both locally and internationally. The methods and approaches for research are drawn from other educational fields such as women’s studies, queer studies, critical race studies, legal studies, ethnography and auto-ethnography (again, just to name a few). However, Mad Studies, right here, right now is breaking new ground. Together, we can cultivate our own theories/models/concepts/principles/ hypotheses and values about how we understand ourselves, or our experiences in relationship to mental health system(s), research and politics. No one person, school or group owns Mad Studies or defines its borders. As explained in the book, *Mad Matters*¹,

Mad Studies is a “project of inquiry, knowledge production and political action”. Presently, (and as discussed at the Lancaster conference) we need more action. All we have available as a “progressive” theory to us now is the “recovery model.” Yes, the recovery model is important but it’s not enough to understand who we are, or what is needed especially in the current budget-cuts climate that favours business plans and wealthy professionals’ opinions. More to the point, “recovery” has been co-opted by the mental health system. The money that is being invested into the system right now isn’t about recovery, it’s about efficiencies and outcomes and dishing out services cheaper and faster. There will be some people who will inevitably criticize or feel threatened by the idea of “Mad Studies”, but the reality is that there is huge potential for trailblazing and innovative ideas. Think of the amount of difference feminist studies made in the lives of women, or what queer studies has done for the LGBTQ community or critical race studies to our understanding of how race and law intersect. Why shouldn’t we have a Mad Studies?

¹ Brenda LaFrancois, Robert Menzies and Geoff Reaume (eds.) *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 2013) at pg. 13

Why Should You Care About Mad Studies?

1. What you don't know actually can hurt you.

When you do not have the words to name something that is oppressive, illegal or destructive, then you do not have the knowledge or power to change it. Words matter. Ideas matter. Truth matters. Mad Studies is about getting to truths, asking more questions and finding more words. Education is knowledge, and knowledge empowers us.

2. We have something valuable to teach other areas of study:



Here, I don't mean that we should be invited to a committee to review or offer feedback on an already developed project. I also do not mean sending consumer/survivors off by themselves so that they can tell their individual story or become a token poster

child in projects with complex, deeply entrenched structural problems. I mean that we are capable of teaching and offering deeper analysis that integrates critical thinking into what is going on and how things are done. United we stand, divided we fall. We would have a lot to offer the study of art, law, social work or ethics. For example, perhaps all projects that have to do with mental health should meet with some ethical standards as developed by the consumer/survivor community. I bet we could offer a lot to businesses that wanted to learn more about creating a "psychosis friendly" kind of place. I bet we could teach people who organize rallies and forums how to be more inclusive. I bet we could even teach astronaut Chris Hadfield a thing or two.

3. Flip the micro-scope

Perhaps it's time to flip the scope. Let's stop studying mentally ill people and start studying sane people, normal, well-adjusted, balanced and secure people.

What do their brains look like? Why do they get the kinds of haircuts that they do? How do they behave in workplaces, at cottages, in the banks? What's it like to be really rich and debt free? Let's not talk about this newly popularised notion of, "patients as teachers" and instead discuss "psychiatrists as bad learners." Flip the questions. Question the questioners. How many times have you been asked to participate or give your feedback on how to make the system better? Flip the scope - maybe it's time we stop answering *those* questions and have Mad Studies develop our *own* questions and research agendas.

4. We Are Not Alone

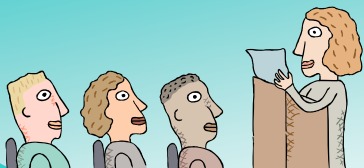
Way back in the 1940s, a group of ex-patients founded We Are Not Alone (W.A.N.A) in order to remind people of just that point. It was an early support group and yes, its part of our Mad Studies history like many other things we can hopefully house in a Mad Studies museum one day. We have evidence of our organizing, art, writing, thoughts and endeavours to make the world a better place. For example look at the [www. Psychiatricsurvivor archives.com](http://www.Psychiatricsurvivorarchives.com) or the Survivors' histories website <http://studymore.org.uk/mpu.htm> or the first support group in Vancouver called the Mental Patients Association [http:// historyofmadness.ca/the-inmates-are-running-the-asylum/view-movie/](http://historyofmadness.ca/the-inmates-are-running-the-asylum/view-movie/).

5. Mad Studies is about you!

Finally, and this may be the most important point; your ideas matter. It's not about how much school you've had, or credentials and it's not about your pocket book. It's about joining conversations. If you don't share your thoughts, opinions and knowledge, then you impact nothing and no one. The next generation of consumer/survivors are going to push us forward BIG TIME. There are some very serious issues and debates impacting the lives of service users and we have to help each other to speak up. We need to be thoughtful, smarter and more strategic about what we say and what we do. That will require everyone. That will require you.

Cheap and Crazy Symposiums: Mobilizing Strategic Conversations

A Day of Discussion of Clients' Rights, Madness, Addictions, Law and the Future of Advocacy



Where: CAMH. 1001 Queen Street West,
Community Centre, Training Room A
When: Saturday, November 22, 2014

For further details
see our website:
www.empowermentcouncil.ca

Systemic Advocacy – Organizing for Change

By Jennifer Chambers, Empowerment Council Coordinator

When does an individual advocacy issue become systemic?

- When many people have the same (or similar) problem(s).
- When the solution requires a change in a system that affects many people (like an institution, or a law) even if it has only affected one person so far.

A systemic issue may come to light from:

- Personal experience and/or experience of people that you know.
- Ongoing experience advocating for individuals.
- Members of a community coming together and sharing common experiences and concerns.

Community Development

This is an important means of both discovering systemic problems and organizing to address them. Anyone advocating on behalf of a community (such as people labelled with a particular disability) should have some means of talking with and hearing from this community. Paid advocates should be accountable to the people they are paid to serve.

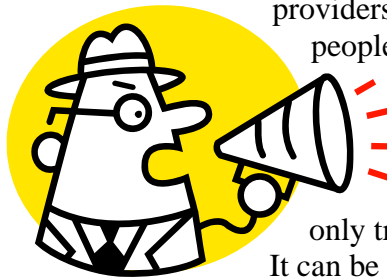
If the people you are advocating for have not joined

as a community, or have a community but have not come together around this issue, as an advocate, you could provide that opportunity. You could call a meeting, at an accessible and comfortable time and place. Spread the word by talking to the people concerned directly, don't just send flyers.

If people labelled with a disability have not come together previously, it is important that they spend time talking freely to other members of their group on their own. Conversation changes when people with a shared experience can talk together without others present. When this is not possible for practical reasons, it can be helpful to have allies present who are not part of a person's regular caretaking team.

This can be a difficult concept for some service providers and family members, and for the people who depend on them. However, when people can speak openly, without fear of reprisals or hurting anyone, it can lead to a new understanding - what we thought was only true of us is true for all (or many) of us. It can be a step away from the self blame that keeps us silent about things that hurt us.

Once this has happened, strategies for how to address these systemic problems can be developed and further allies can be sought.



Cheap and Crazy Symposiums: Opening Event

EC Co-Presents Screening of *Rocks in My Pockets* at the Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival

Where: TIFF Bell Lightbox Theatre, 350 King Street West

When: Saturday, November 15th at 10:00 am, Panel Discussion to Follow

The first ever feature-length animated film about mental illness, Rocks in My Pockets is a story of mystery and redemption. The film is based on true events involving the women of Signe Baumann's family, including her, and their battles with madness. It raises questions of how much family genetics determine who we are and if it is possible to outsmart one's own DNA. Packed with visual metaphors, surreal images and Baumann's twisted sense of humour, it is an animated tale full of art, women, strange daring stories, Latvian accents, history, nature, adventure and more.

Assessing CAMH's New Position Paper on Marijuana

By Tucker Gordon, Systemic Advocate in Addictions

CAMH has released an updated position paper on marijuana. In the previous one, from the early 2000's, they supported decriminalization. The newest paper supports legalization and regulation that is similar to how alcohol is regulated in Ontario. This is a positive change, three reasons of which are particularly relevant for our members. The regulatory method they propose is outside of what the Empowerment Council will comment on at this point in time.

The first has to do with what CAMH terms "net-widening" when it comes to policing. Net-widening is increasing the number of individuals impacted. Currently, as it stands, police can either lay charges or ignore marijuana consumption once it's seen. This already has a differential impact, in that those that have a private dwelling can consume with minimal risk (from the police) but those who share housing, reside in shelters, or are homeless are more likely to be detected. Once detected, these vulnerable people are more likely to be charged. This can create barriers to travel, work, volunteering and other activities.

If fully decriminalized, the police would have an option of levying a fine or ignoring the behaviour. However, since fines create a lesser impact, this would likely decrease how frequently the police ignore it. While the level of consequence would decrease, unpaid fines can damage credit. That in turn can impact getting housing, prevent a driver's license renewal or lead to garnishment from cheques, amongst other things. The lower the person's income, the greater the impact of the fine.

The Canadian Chiefs of Police are proposing partial decriminalization, for small amounts for personal use. However, that may be the most harmful option of all, as the people they would previously have charged would most likely still face criminal charges since "personal use" is not consistent between people; then net-widening will cause others who would've been ignored to now be fined.

Legalization does not create these negative impacts, and would remove the barriers that criminalization creates for people in terms of work, housing, and other areas of their life.

EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP FORM

EC Statement of Purpose: *To conduct system wide advocacy on behalf of clients.*

Contact Information: *(Please Print Clearly)*

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ Postal code _____
Telephone _____ Email address _____

I have used mental health and/or addiction services (*check those that apply*):

College Street site _____ *Queen Street site* _____ *Other: Mental Health* _____
Russell Street site _____ *White Squirrel Way site* _____ *Other: Addiction* _____

I support the purpose of the Empowerment Council:

Signature _____

Send to: **Empowerment Council, 33 Russell Street, Room 2008, Toronto, ON M5S 2S1**
Or fill out a membership form online at our website: www.empowermentcouncil.ca