



International Mad Studies Journal

Statement of Commitment

The *International Mad Studies Journal's* Statement of Commitment outlines our commitment to the Mad Studies community, intersectional and anti-oppressive journal practices and our approaches to accountability, accessibility, and inclusion. This is a living document that will continue to change, reflecting our ongoing learning and growth as a team and community and we welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have to improve it. You can share your feedback with us via madstudiesjournal@gmail.com.

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Commitment to Mad Studies

Mad Studies brings together theory, activism and creativity, drawing on the experiences, thinking, history and politics of the Mad community. Mad Studies originates from grassroots movements fighting for the rights of people labeled as “mentally ill” as well as intersecting disability and other social justice movements. Mad Studies would not exist without the ingenuity, organizing, and activism of the Mad community.

IMSJ is the first dedicated Mad Studies journal. As such, we are dedicated to developing mad knowledges, history, culture, politics, and ways of knowing. IMSJ is grounded in the values of Mad Studies and the Mad community, including:

- Critiquing and questioning traditional ideologies and practices in mental health
- Challenging and resisting stigma/discrimination/psychiatrization/pathologization experienced by Mad identified people
- Privileging the embodied/experiential knowledge of Mad identified people
- Remaining accountable to the Mad community by producing practical knowledge that improves the actual lives of Mad identified people (Menzies, LeFrançois & Reaume, 2013)

Commitment to Mad identified people, Mad positive people, and the Mad Studies Community

IMSJ has chosen the language “Mad identified” and “Mad positive” based on the work of Mad activists, scholars, organizers, and community members such as Toronto-based David Reville (2013). However, we also recognise the complex, context-dependent relationships people have with madness, and also resonate with Dina Poursanidou's notion of 'Mad ambivalence' that include ambiguous or conflictual experiences that may fall outside of widely held understandings of madness (Spandler & Poursanidou, 2019, 5).

Who is the Mad community?

IMSJ views madness as a shared experience that exists across history, geography, and social location. People across social intersections can experience and identify as Mad, disabled, neurodivergent, chronically ill, etc. Any person can have experiences of madness, difference, distress, or experiences outside of “normalcy”. People can experience pathologization/medicalization/psychiatrization internally, from their social circle, in institutional settings, or when seeking healthcare and support services. Anyone can experience stigma/discrimination/sanism due to their experiences of madness/distress/difference. The Mad community includes people who variously identify as mad, psychiatric survivors, mental health consumers, service users, patients, voice hearers, plural/multiple, neurodiverse, and/or psychosocially disabled people.

Who is the Mad positive community?

Any person is capable of being Mad positive, whether they are Mad or not! Mad positive people can be Mad identified people with an empowered, compassionate, curious, justice-oriented perspective on experiences of madness. Mad positive people can also be non-Mad people working in support of the Mad community. Mad positive people and scholars seek out, center, and amplify Mad knowledge, centering these perspectives in their work no matter their own lived experience.

Commitment to the Mad Studies Community

IMSJ recognizes the diversity of social locations and lived experiences within the Mad community. As a majority mad-identified editorial team, we see this as a source of enrichment in the development of alternative frameworks and knowledge rooted in the collective wisdom of Mad identified people.

IMSJ is concerned with privileging different ways of knowing. We are not defined by a single perspective or ideology. We see this as a meaningful way to oppose hegemony in academia and to develop diverse Mad knowledge and perspectives. The editorial team is supportive of any submissions that are important to developing the field of Mad Studies; if submissions don't meet traditional or pre-existing criteria, we are open to changing the criteria!

IMSJ remains accountable to the broader Mad community by developing, publishing, and thereby giving voice to critical theory and praxis, social justice and activism, and practical material that is accessible to both professionals and service users.

Commitment to Intersectional Practice

IMSJ acknowledges that not everyone can reclaim Madness or Mad identity due to ongoing carcerality, surveillance, or pathologization at the intersections of Indigeneity, race, ability, class, gender identity and expression, and/or citizenship status among other experiences (Joseph, 2019). Further, IMSJ recognizes that the field of Mad Studies is inarguably dominated by white scholars. Mad Studies theory and praxis has centred white conceptualizations of madness, and critiques of psy-knowledges, while ignoring the practices and approaches of Mad people of colour (Redikopp, 2021). IMSJ cannot commit to intersectional practice without recognising and acting to address the ways that Mad Studies has excluded racialized and intersectional perspectives and "continues a colonial project of 'othering' by failing to account for the structuring role that white supremacy and settler colonialism plays in the construction, organization, and distribution of madness itself" (Redikopp, 2021).

As a majority-white, English-speaking team, IMSJ must confront our part in perpetuating racist and colonial structures, contexts, and concepts. IMSJ continues to attempt to centre

knowledges of the Global majority. IMSJ must remain accountable to the Mad community by working towards a Mad Studies that actively seeks to deconstruct racist, sexist, classist, ableist, and sexist underpinnings, and supremacy at all levels. An intersectional Mad Studies practice must work to recognize, learn and unlearn, support, and amplify experiences of madness that have been previously silenced, excluded, or overlooked. IMSJ affirms the [Mad People of Colour Manifesto](#).

Guiding Frameworks

IMSJ recognizes the ways in which Mad Studies has intersected with grassroots social justice movements such as Queer and Trans liberation, the Disability justice movement, and Black liberation movements. In the development of Mad-specific knowledge and praxis, IMSJ looks to continuing and emerging excellence in critical scholarship, and activism across socially oppressed groups.

In our commitment to Mad-identified people and the Mad Studies community, IMSJ draws on frameworks that seek to identify, resist, and address injustices experienced by marginalized people and celebrate the “longstanding legacies of resilience and resistance which are the inheritance of all of [those] whose bodies and minds will not conform.” (Sins Invalid, 2015).

These guiding frameworks include:

- Disability Justice
- Healing Justice
- Epistemic Justice
- Spatial Justice
- Inherent Rights
- Care-ful scholarship
- Restorative justice
- Transitional justice
- Transformative justice
- Transformative justice
- Pimatisiwin (‘The Good Life’)
- Degrowth

Commitment to Anti-Oppressive Editorial/Reviewing Practices and Processes

IMSJ was founded by a psychiatric survivor, in the context of working in academia and seeing the challenges of producing alternative knowledges and ideas in mental health. IMSJ recognizes the oppressive qualities of traditional/status quo/commonsense practices and processes across institutions of social support, education, healthcare, and recreation. These practices and processes are rooted in values of whiteness, colonialism, ableism, sanism, patriarchy, cisheterosexuality. People whose social locations and lived experiences fall outside of dominant ideologies and identities may feel alienated or excluded by such practices. Many people have been harmed in the name of perpetuating, spreading, and reproducing these ideologies and value systems.

The IMSJ team has created journal practices and processes that are informed by anti-oppressive values. We recognize the historical and ongoing impacts of oppression, and that multiple intersecting oppressions can be experienced with compounding effects. We also recognize that the best way to identify and overcome oppressions is to learn from and work with the people directly affected.

We are committed to making the foundation of the journal, as well as its policies, protocols and processes critically reflective and reflexive, intersectional and inclusive. However, without active commitment and embodied accountability, such statements can fall into performative language and gestures. In an effort to engage in anti-oppressive journal practices, IMSJ is committed to making journal practices as transparent and open as possible.

Ongoing Review of Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices at IMSJ:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z_Lf48v79LL_RyyFlctdjl4e31cjFxwdKYcik6PWAQ0/edit?usp=sharing

The above is based on [Anti Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors](#).

Language for participation vs publication

IMSJ understands language is a reflection of our understanding of an experience, issue, or community. We believe that language is indicative of how a problem is conceptualized, and whose voices are being listened to when informing one's understanding. We see how the language of western psychiatry is used to preserve structures of power and oppression that occur in particularly benevolent/benign contexts, supposedly in the "best interests" of the Mad community.

There are a wide variety of perspectives, frameworks, and language to interpret, understand, and communicate our experiences about disability, illness, difference, distress, and 'mental health'. We also recognize that not everyone is able to reclaim their Madness, and the language of Madness and Mad Studies. IMSJ wants to encourage community connection, and we don't want language to become a barrier to participation. People are encouraged to self-identify using the language and terminology that feels most affirming, empowering, and true to their lived experience. This might include reclaiming language from the psy* disciplines if used thoughtfully, appropriately, and in a way that does not work to further psychiatrize/pathologize Mad people. IMSJ encourages the use of non-pathologizing language wherever possible, as well as language that is as accessible as possible to a broad audience, including the wider Mad, survivor, and service user community.

As the first and currently the only Mad Studies journal, IMSJ exists to support the development and expansion of Mad Studies theory and praxis. Part of this includes the development of new language and frameworks for understanding distress, difference, and diversity, and interrogating responses to those experiences. We are committed to using the language of Madness, while constantly interrogating the language used in Mad Studies.

Commitment to Equitable, Ethical and Accountable Journal Practices

Accountability Statement

As scholars with various privileged and oppressed identities, we, ourselves, have experienced harm within the publication process and have often felt powerless to address this. Given our commitment to center voices and lived experiences traditionally considered “unscholarly”, abject, inappropriate, incoherent, etc. elsewhere within the world of academic publishing, we recognize that authors may come to this journal having already experienced rejection and harm rooted in ableism, sanism, racism, anti-Blackness, sexism, anti-queerness, anti-transness, xenophobia, anti-Indigeneity, anti-fatness, etc. in covert and overt forms. We recognise the many ways that journal practices may perpetuate harm e.g., when authors and peer reviewers engage in a process of “blind” peer review, our names may be hidden from one another but our social locations, internalized biases, prejudices, and socializations within larger, dominant systems always remain.

We continue to commit ourselves (because this process must be ongoing, dynamic, and critically reflective) to a publishing process that doesn’t recreate, reinforce, or overlook these harms. We recognize that harm can occur, and it is up to us as a journal community to take direct accountability for any and all harm that may happen during the process of expanding the field of Mad Studies from an international perspective. As we come together across cultures, backgrounds, frameworks, disciplines, and differences, power is always at play and, despite our unwavering efforts to ensure that harm does not occur, we recognize that it may. What we do to address this, correct this, heal from this, and ensure it does not happen again is a core part of our mission as a journal, and members of the broader Mad and Mad-allied global community.

IMSJ Accountability Process

How are we defining harm?

Harm is any experience - covert or overt, conscious or unconscious - of oppression, microaggressions, microinvalidations, or microinsults rooted in ableism, sanism, racism, anti-Blackness, sexism, anti-queerness, anti-transness, xenophobia, anti-Indigeneity, anti-fatness, etc.

We have developed our accountability processes with the understanding that harm is different from discomfort. For example, as a journal committed to critical Mad Studies scholarship, we will push scholars to challenge their own internalized privilege and confront the ways in which they benefit from hegemonic ideologies such as white supremacy, ableism, sanism, coloniality, and Eurocentric worldviews, to name a few. When pushing a white Mad scholar to address their whiteness in their theorizing and analysis, this may feel uncomfortable for scholars who have not been challenged in these ways before. However, this is not harm. Having a submission rejected from the journal because it does not fit the scope of the journal or does not adequately engage with Mad Studies scholarship is also not harm.

Engaging in discussions around madness, distress, and difference can bring up uncomfortable feelings and emotions. One person's interpretation, and the language they use to communicate their experience may be difficult for other IMSJ community members to receive. The IMSJ team understands that these are vulnerable conversations that can often bring up challenging feelings, emotions, and memories for the people listening and witnessing. Our ability to engage with lived experience is not conditional on the information being easily palatable, understood, or resolvable. The IMSJ team understands the importance of finding a balance between people being able to share their authentic lived experiences, while keeping the safety, dignity, and humanity of all community members in mind. Finding a balance between identifying discomfort and harm in this context requires a commitment to ongoing communication and negotiation. The IMSJ team is open to listening to feedback and adjusting our understanding of "best practices" in this area.

What to do if you experience harm as an author or member of the IMSJ community?

We seek to offer explicit access points for authors and members of the IMSJ community to name microaggressions and other forms of bias, prejudice, racism, oppression, and harm that they may experience during the journal submission, editorial feedback, peer review, publication, and/or copy editing process.

As scholars who have experienced harm before and chosen not to bring this up to journal editors out of fear of our manuscript being rejected as a result, we want to create intentional space and entry points for these dialogues to exist at IMSJ and for restorative and reparative practices to occur. This offering is likely to be messy. Instead of avoiding the mess, we lean into the mess and the tension of co-creating something new here together. This Accountability Statement and Process is a living document as this process continues to unfold and we evolve as a journal community.

If you experience harm in your association/interaction with IMSJ, the next steps are as follows:

- please email our journal at madstudiesjournal@gmail.com. (Alternatively, you can email our co-editors - Adam Davies, Hel Spandler, Jen Poole and Jersey Cosantino as of March 2025 - directly.) Your email will only be read by those editorial team members who will be responding to the concern/complaint.
- After receiving a concern/complaint, the editorial team will organise to meet with you online or by phone. You can expect a response within 2 weeks.
- We will reach out to you to talk about the next steps, including:
 - what support looks like for you,
 - what steps or processes might be taken, and which of these you feel most comfortable with, and
 - a plan for responding to the concerns and harms, ensuring that you approve of the plan before it is enacted.

Contacting us about a harm you experienced will not jeopardize your submission and the publication of your work in our journal, if you decide to move forward with us as a home for your work.

Commitment to Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility and inclusion are integral to the goals of IMSJ, Mad Studies, and the Mad community. IMSJ is committed to reducing or removing barriers to participation, and creating a welcoming environment for disabled, neurodivergent, chronically ill, sick, and Mad people. We recognize the value, brilliance, and potential of the Mad community, and the many ways in which we are limited by ableist, sanist, assimilative, and exclusionary practices. The Mad community is diverse in identity, lived experience, access and support needs. IMSJ views the contributions, collaborations, leadership, and disruption of non-normative bodyminds as strengthening the field of Mad Studies, and benefitting our community, processes, and publications (Chandler et al., 2020). We believe that meaningful inclusion comes from a place of relationality, interdependence, and mutuality, rather than obligation or compliance.

IMSJ Approach to Accessibility and Inclusion

The editorial team of IMSJ and the IMSJ community are majority mad-identified, and our lived experience informs our approach to access. We are committed to providing an experience of access and inclusion that is informed by our own experiences of ableism and exclusion, and more importantly, our experiences of access intimacy (Mingus, 2011). We

recognize that the most effective and empowering accessibility practices come from the skills and brilliance of disabled people (Lakshmi Peipzina-Samarasinha, 2018). We understand access as both foundational to the structure, organization, and development of IMSJ, as well as a commitment to a dynamic, iterative, disruptive, and transformative practice (Chandler et al., 2020).

Carmen Papalia developed Open Access, which approaches accessibility as an embodied, integrative negotiation (Papalia, 2018). The five tenets of Open Access include:

1. Access is understood as a “perpetual negotiation of trust”, depending “on those present, what their needs are, and how they can find support with each other and in their communities.”
2. Accessibility is more than a checklist or set of policies “enforced in order to facilitate a common experience.” Rather, it “acknowledges that everyone carries a body of local knowledge and is an expert in their own right.”
3. “Open Access is the root system of embodied learning”, cultivating “trust among those involved” to enable “each member to self-identify and occupy [their own] complex embodiment.”
4. Access must disrupt “disabling conditions that limit one’s agency and potential to thrive.” Open Access “operates under the tenet that interdependence is central to a radical restructuring of power”. Normalcy is reimagined as “a continuum of embodiments, identities, realities, and learning styles.”
5. Open communication and sharing of collective needs and preferences creates “a responsive support network that adapts as needs and available resources change.”

(Papalia, 2018)

How will you experience accessibility and inclusion at IMSJ?

As an open-access journal, IMSJ is primarily concerned with the accessibility of our publications and virtual spaces. We work to ensure that people in and out of academia, across stakeholder positions, feel welcome and comfortable engaging with the journal, website, and community spaces.

IMSJ practices are grounded in care-ful, anti-ableist, anti-sanist scholarship that affirms the fluid experience of disability, access needs, and crip time (Abrams, Floyd & Abes, 2024). We continue to build alternative approaches into our editorial processes, communication, and design practices, making accessibility an integral part of work, not something that is offered “only in times of struggle” (Abrams et al., 2024).

IMSJ is committed to practices that improve cognitive and linguistic accessibility, and is working towards plain language, easy-read and video (oral/spoken) versions of content. These approaches to writing avoid jargon or explain these terms in everyday language, encourage short sentences and paragraphs, and increase the white space on a page wherever possible (Centre for Inclusive Design, 2021).

We hope the people who find IMSJ feel that the journal content and community is a welcoming and inclusive space to engage with the ideas of Mad Studies and the Mad community. IMSJ understands the need for cognitive accessibility as connected to challenging hegemonic discourses and practices in academia and the western psy* disciplines, confronting epistemic injustices, and inviting the perspectives and knowledges of the Mad community regardless of access and opportunity. We encourage authors to engage with plain language approaches wherever possible. We continue to work to incorporate accessible practices into our everyday communications, events, and editorial processes so that disabled and Mad bodyminds and lived experiences are centered.

We recognize that our accessibility policies and protocols are in their early stages, and that our efforts may still fail to include the access needs of many individuals and communities. IMSJ is committed to responding to emerging access needs with humility and responsiveness. We do not want our journal practices to represent a barrier to people's ability to engage with the journal or community. We are working towards providing alternative formats or plain-text versions that are screen-reader compatible, changing or updating practices or content to address gaps in accessibility practices, and working to ensure individual accessibility needs are met.

Position Statements

Trans Inclusion at IMSJ

The Mad and Trans communities share many similarities in instances of having their identities, experiences, and ways of being readily pathologized by practitioners (Pilling, 2022). IMSJ recognizes the ways in which trans experiences are medicalized and called disordered in exchange for access to gender affirming care and medical transition.

The very real harm that trans people experience when interacting with western psychiatric systems of "care" goes largely unrecognized (Pilling, 2022). Instead, IMSJ is committed to making visible the role of cisnormative western healthcare structures, practices, and processes in the harm, distress, and disenfranchisement of trans people.

Trans people belong at IMSJ. Trans knowledges, experiences, and perspectives belong at IMSJ. We take seriously our commitment to challenging and resisting dominant psychiatric discourses, including the pathologizing and erasure of trans knowledges, insights, and experiences.

In the face of dangerous cultural discourses and political attempts to invalidate and erase trans lives, **IMSJ declares our unequivocal support for the autonomy, self-determination, safety, and joy of all trans people.**

Anti-Colonial Practice at IMSJ

The IMSJ team recognizes the ways in which colonialism drives the oppression and discrimination experienced by Mad-identified people. The IMSJ community is comprised of a global, majority white, European, Western team, and experience different relationships to colonialism. From our individual vantage points, the IMSJ community recognizes colonialism as a central, driving force behind historical and ongoing violence and oppression experienced across the globe.

The IMSJ community is committed to subverting colonial, binary understandings of “normality” that drive the medicalization, pathologization, and psychiatrization of Mad-identified people. We are committed to uncovering the ways in which colonialism subjugates and denigrates the collective knowledges of the global majority (Chapman & Withers, 2019). We continue to challenge the construction of white, European ways of knowing/being/doing that are positioned as superior, by intentionally engaging with and amplifying anti-colonial alternatives and Indigenous knowledges, value systems, and worldviews.

We continue to develop politicized understandings of colonial histories and “continuing colonial projects” (Koleszar-Green, 2018, 175). Our organizational culture must embody an ongoing practice of learning in ways “which do not appropriate but unsettle the privilege of ignorance” (174). We commit to meeting our individual and organizational obligations to use our privilege to support the sovereignty and leadership of the Indigenous communities whose traditional territories we inhabit and benefit from. Anti-colonial practice at IMSJ must extend beyond good intentions and acknowledgements.

IMSJ is dedicated to disrupting and dismantling editorial practices and processes that reflect assimilative, exploitative colonial logics. The IMSJ community continues to deepen our understanding of ourselves as settlers, guests (Koleszar-Green, 2018), and treaty people. IMSJ understands that anti-colonial practice must tangibly support resistance to ongoing colonial violence, as well as uncovering and interrupting manifestations of colonialism in our work, care, and lives.

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