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Mad mothering: Learning from the intersections of madness, mothering and disability

Abstract

This paper brings together the fields of Mad Studies (LeFrancois et al.), Matricentric Feminism (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*) and Critical Disability Studies (Goodley "Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies"). Our aim is to expose and challenge "relations of ruling" (Smith ~~, *Institutional Ethnography,*~~ 79) that both produce and discipline 'mad mothers of disabled children'. We begin our analysis by exploring the un/commonalities of the emerging histories of the three disciplines. We then identify analytical points of intersection between them including: critiques of neoliberalism; troubling the 'norm' (including radical resistance and activism); intersectionality, post-colonial and queer theory. Finally, we turn to points of divergence and possible tensions between these theoretical approaches as we explore the absence of disability in Matricentric Feminism, the contested place of mothering in Critical Disability Studies and the absence of mothering in Mad Studies. We are invested throughout in the political possibilities of affect and activism that emerge from the feminist insight that the 'personal is political'. Finally, we consider what can be learned from an intersectional critique of 'good mothering' and how this theorization might inform social justice work.

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Introduction

We believe this is the first paper to bring together the developing fields of Mad Studies (LeFrancois et al.), Matricentric Feminism (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*) and Critical Disability Studies (Goodley "Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies") to theorise the

pervasive construction of 'the mad mother of a disabled child'. One does not have to dig for long through cultural or scholarly archives to discover the 'mad mother of a disabled child' as a pervasive, ubiquitous and ambivalent figure in the global North: from the cold 'refrigerator mother' of the 1950s thought to cause autism in her child through her own madness (author), to studies framing parenting of disabled children through psychological "stress and coping" models (Lazarus and Folkman), to today's 'mad' mother who makes 'unreasonable' demands on strapped education and health care systems in seeking support for her disabled child (author). Our aim is to expose and challenge the "relations of ruling" (Smith ~~*Institutional Ethnography,*~~ 79) that both produce and discipline 'madness' and 'mothering' in the lives of mothers of disabled children. By relations of ruling we mean material and discursive forms of power that tie everyday experiences as women and mothers to power relations and institutional regimes like special education and biomedicine. These regimes and their ruling texts, such as diagnostic tests and labels, make some truths and lives possible (e.g., these mothers are 'mad') and others unimaginable (e.g. that madness is produced through ableist systems). We bring these developing fields together to offer new theoretical resources of resistance against ableist-patriarchal-sanist regimes and their ruling relations.

As authors, we occupy a range of intersecting subject positions: we are mothers of disabled and non-disabled children, academics, practitioners, activists and mad identified people writing from Canada and from the United Kingdom. As academics in disability studies, critical psychology and education we work within critical, post-structuralist and post-humanist frameworks that challenge the myth of the autonomous, able- bodied/minded self and disrupt the centrality of the 'human' within onto-epistemologies underlying much social science research on mothering and disability

(Authors). This means, in broad terms, we are invested in critiques of neoliberalism; in troubling the 'norm'; in intersectionality, post-colonial thinking and queer theory; and in the political possibilities of affect and activism that emerge from the feminist insight that the 'personal is political' (Hanisch; hooks *Talking Back*). Our own histories have driven us to try to make sense of the matters of madness that shape our lives (LeFrancois et al.). We are acutely aware of the multiplicity of constructions of 'the mad mother of disabled children' and have direct experience of being identified as and actively claiming the status of 'mad mothers'. We also know to check our privilege and the limits of our own theorizing as white, cis, middle-class women. We experience marginalization as mothers and single mothers and make claims to knowledge from our status as academics.

While questions of madness and mothering have been explored in some depth by feminist motherhood scholars (Wong), feminist social scientists (Kruger et al.) and other critical scholars (Haley) and philosophers (Oliver "Julia Kristeva's Maternal Passions"), questions remain about mothering, *disability* and madness. Our approach begins from the sitpoint of the 'mad mother of a disabled child' (sitpoint is used here, in preference to standpoint, following Garland-Thomson's (2002)'s deployment of the term to remind us that disabled women have much to contribute to feminist scholarship); from the fractures and dissonance within the everyday and everynight worlds of 'mothers of a disabled child' (Smith). The impetus for this paper is in this way distinctly feminist and matricentric and asserts the importance of the "personal is political" (Hanisch; hooks *Talking Back*). A critical approach to the concept of 'mad mother of a disabled child' that links personal experiences of 'madness' and 'disability' to oppressive social forces is much needed in contemporary times. While data are not differentiated by gender categories, the most recent figures suggest that there are 0.8 million disabled children in Great Britain (Office for Disability Issues) and 57% of parents of disabled children are

on antidepressants (Scope). In Canada, recent figures suggest over 200,000 disabled children with approximately 25% of parents reporting stress and/or depression (Statistics Canada). The discussions here, then, have implications for thousands of families in Great Britain and Canada, as well as for families living in similar neoliberal global North social contexts. Our aim is to bring together new theoretical resources to deconstruct a persistent and stigmatized identity, 'the mad mother of a disabled child'. We do so with the hope that this will support the social justice work of mad mothers of disabled children (author; author).

To shape our analysis, we begin by exploring the un/commonalities of the emerging histories of Critical Disability Studies, Mad Studies, and Matricentric Feminism. In the spirit of radical feminist and post-structuralist authors who introduced stylistic devices to disrupt androcentric language and master narratives (see Monique Wittig's work for example), we use the slash in our writing to draw attention to both unrecognized shared intellectual and activist histories as well as the driving forces of ableism and sanism and the divergences and tensions between them. Second, we identify analytical points of intersection between the three disciplines including reference to: critiques of neoliberalism and patriarchy; the question of the 'norm'; and post-colonial and queer theory. Third, we turn to points of divergence and possible tensions between these theoretical approaches as we explore: the absence of disability and the sanism implicit in Matricentric Feminism; the contested place of mothering in critical disability studies, and the absence of mothering in Mad Studies. Finally, we consider what can be learned from an intersectional critique of 'good mothering' and how this might inform the social justice work of mothers and others.

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1. Mad Studies, Matricentric Feminism & Critical Disability Studies: Un/Common Histories

We begin by exploring the points of intersection and divergence in the emerging histories of the disciplines. ~~Here we provide a brief synopsis of critical disability studies before spending some time describing mad studies and matricentric feminism as emerging fields that may be less familiar.~~

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In the UK and Canada, where the authors live and work, disability studies can trace its origins back to the 1960s and 1970s as a time when stigma associated with disability faced challenge, not least by disabled people (Hunt, Kelly). In the UK, the activist and theoretical impulse was toward a radical definition of disability that shifted focus away from individual medical 'deficits' to consider instead the social oppression of disabled people (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation). In Canada, Disability Studies emerged similarly out of what Kelly calls "social liberal forms of disability activism" by non-profit organizations. In 1981, disabled academic Mike Oliver used the term "social model of disability" for the first time (Authors). His aim was for disability studies and activism to focus on exposing and removing barriers in disabling environments (such as housing, education, transport, health and social care). Oliver's account of disability was heavily influenced by a Marxist materialist approach, but as disability studies have developed, they have taken an increasingly critical turn, drawing on a range of theories including feminism (Crow; Morris; Garland-Thomson); post-structuralism (Goodley *Disability studies*); critical realism (Vehmas and Watson); gender studies and queer studies (McCruer; Liddiard); post-colonial theory (Chataika "Disability, Development and Postcolonialism"), cultural studies (Titchkosky) and

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studies of ableism (Campbell; Goodley *Disability Studies*). However, the experiences of some groups of disabled people continue to be under-represented within disability studies including people with learning disabilities (Goodley *Disability Studies*); disabled children (Authors); mothers (Authors) and Mad identified people (Beresford). More, our two contexts are only one intertwined story of disability studies, which have developed multiple and global lineages including decolonial and global South perspectives questioning the value of global North theory for Others (Goodley "Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies;" Nguyen). Perhaps what connects a now global disability studies in postmodern times is the understanding of disability as an intersectional "space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all" (Goodley, "Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies," 632).

The emergence of Mad Studies, too, has its roots in identity politics and the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, inspired by the publication of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1962 and Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* in 1964 (Gillis). Mad Studies began to emerge as an academic discipline in the 2000s. The graduate school at York University and Centre for Disability Studies at Ryerson University (both in Canada) began to run courses that sought to deconstruct medical models of Madness (Gillis). In 2012, Ryerson hosted an international conference on Mad Studies (Coyle). Following publication in 2013, *Mad Matters: A Crucial Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (LeFrancois et al.) has become a key text in the field. Just as disability studies challenges the dominant biomedical model of disability, Mad Studies rejects the medical model as "a jumble of diagnostic prognostications based on subjective opinion masquerading as science" (Menzies et al. 2). Intersectional from its beginning, Mad Studies encompass a diverse range of work by psychiatric survivors, Mad-identified people, critical psychiatrists, Mad artists and

others, both scholarly and activist in nature. At the core of the field is a critique of the power of biomedical knowledge and the psychiatric system, a focus on the experiences and knowledge of Mad-identified people themselves and an emphasis on generating new knowledge, approaches and action that value the experiences of mental health service users/survivors (Daley, Costa and Beresford 9). Like critical disability studies, Mad Studies reclaim derogatory language (such as 'crazy') and advance justice with and for non-normatively embodied/enminded people (Daley, Costa and Beresford). Theorizing madness and motherhood, however, remains marginalized in the field.

While Mad Studies and Disability Studies locate their origins in the 60s, Matricentric Feminism began in the 90s with the emergence of maternal theory and the motherhood movement (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*). In 1998, the Association for Research on Mothering was established at York University, Canada, from which emerged a number of landmark undergraduate and graduate courses in motherhood studies, and the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI)—recently re-named the International Association of Maternal Action and Scholarship and relocated in the United States. MIRCI has hosted an annual international conference since 1997 and houses the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, first published in 1999. The MIRCI founder, Andrea O'Reilly, also founded Demeter Press in 2006, a feminist mothering press that publishes on a wide range of topics including young mothers, feminist fathering, globalization, and Muslim, African, Indigenous, queer and disability experiences of mothering.

O'Reilly argues that feminist motherhood studies has not yet been legitimized within the larger feminist project despite growth within feminism in response to challenges from lesbian, Black and other marginalized voices to pay attention to diverse women's and women-identified perspectives and experiences in theory and activism.

~~O'Reilly argues that a~~A distinctive feminism for mothers focused on their/our particular needs, experiences and desires, which continue to marginalize mothers compared to non-mothers, is needed. Mothers, for example, are still facing the "maternal wall" in the workplace, disadvantaged compared to non-mothers in wages, leave and opportunities for advancement ("Motherhood Hall of Fame" 3). O'Reilly includes in the category of 'mothers', along with Sara Ruddick, "anyone who takes upon the work of mothering as a central part of her or his life" (2). She coined the term "matricentric feminism" in 2011 to mark it as a 21st Century feminism inclusive of ethics of care frameworks and equal rights feminism, distinct from its forbearer "maternal feminism" ("Motherhood Hall of Fame" 3). O'Reilly has initiated a global movement in motherhood studies that is both academic and activist in nature, including, for example, a feminist mothering group called "mother outlaws" that one of us discovered as a young mom. And yet, the theoretical resources of critical disability studies and Mad studies, as well as the experience and knowledge of mothers of disabled children hover at the edges of this movement, and signal new and needed directions for theory and activism in the field.

As we have seen, each disciplinary approach has a relatively recent history and shared foundations built on close relationships between identity politics, activism and the academy. We now turn to consider the extent of the theoretical connection between them.

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2. Interconnecting Mad Studies, Matricentric Feminism and Critical Disability Studies

Just as there are commonalities in the origin stories of the three disciplines, they also share theoretical resources and engage in intersecting analytical debates that we might bring to bear on the stigmatised figure of the 'mad mother of a disabled child'.

2.1 Critiques of Neoliberalism

The first point of connection is a sustained engagement with a critique of the forces of neoliberalism. The word neoliberalism is often invoked in contemporary sociological debates and has come to dominate global politics since the 1980s (Richardson). It is firmly associated with rolling back state activities and opposing what is characterized as "excessive intervention" in citizens' lives (Goodley *Disability Studies*). This is a form of rule that seeks to govern through "the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspiration".(Rose 41). For Rose, people are governed through their freedom. This means that the 'mad mother of a disabled child' is not only considered *individually* responsible for the care of their/our disabled child (and the resources this implies), but also for somehow ameliorating the *social* production of disability, madness and oppression. Not surprisingly, discussion of neoliberal contexts is very much evident from each disciplinary perspective.

According to Matricentric Feminism, the joint forces of neoliberalism and patriarchy construct 'bad mothers' (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*). Women who do not live up to neoliberal, patriarchal demands to engage in paid labour *and* care for children in order to raise 'productive' citizens (Jensen) become "outlaw mothers" (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*, 66). While Matricentric Feminism sees patriarchy and neoliberalism as inextricably intertwined, critical disability studies academics have made a similar argument in relation to ableism (a set of practices and beliefs that discriminate against those with non-normative bodies and minds (Campbell)). Goodley

et al., (98) argue that: "neoliberalism provides an ecosystem for the nourishment of ableism, which we can define as neoliberal-ableism." Just as 'bad mothers' are made through their failure to produce children who will place no burden on the state and society, disabled adults and children are made 'bad' by their bodily difference and their potential to descend into welfare dependence (Stone). Both neoliberal-patriarchy and neoliberal-ableism require mothers to raise 'good citizens' or face the categorization of 'bad mother'. Following the tradition of the poor law (Piven and Cloward), neoliberal states continue to make a conditional commitment to (reduced) welfare support. However, in order to benefit from these redistributive policies, 'mad mothers of disabled children' must comply with the demands of neoliberal governmentality by accepting their 'madness' and their children's 'badness' (Stone). Mad Studies have also set out to expose the role of neoliberalism in the making of mad subjectivities (Menzies et al.), taking aim at neoliberal-sanism as the ("the systematic subjugation of people who receive a mental health diagnosis or treatment" (LeFrancois et al. 339). In addition, the struggle against bio-psychiatry has brought Mad Studies into conflict with Big Pharma. Mad identified people who challenge the social and biomedical regulation of the psy-industries represent a problem as potentially unproductive citizens, dependent and/or risky mothers or parents (Haley) and as reluctant or inefficient consumers in neoliberal contexts. By drawing on an interdisciplinary perspective, we can see that 'mad mothers of disabled children' are constructed through the combined forces of neoliberal-patriarchy, neoliberal-ableism and neoliberal-sanism.

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2.2 Troubling the 'norm'

Given the demands of neoliberalism, it is not surprising that Matricentric Feminism, Mad Studies and Critical Disability Studies have complicated relationships with 'the norm'. In

contemporary neoliberal contexts, the norm functions as a key mechanism through which 'mad mothers' of/and 'disabled children' are produced and disciplined. Goffman's (1963) work on 'courtesy stigma' has been used to explore the stigmatized identities of mothers of disabled children arising from their relationship to a child with a 'spoiled identity' (author).

Female madness, of course, also has a long history. As Chesler (6; also see Ladd-Taylor and Umansky) argues, women are held to different standards of reason and normalcy than men and the notion of sanity is rooted in notions of male normativity. Mothers have adopted a range of responses to their categorization as mad and/or bad. Croghan and Miell describe a range of ways that mothers have resisted this categorization which include attempts to position their mothering firmly within the norms of mothering; pointing to the social and structural challenges they face that result in 'bad' mothering and even partial acceptance of their designation as 'bad' in order to negotiate better terms for them and their children with practitioners (Croghan and Miell). O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism*) describes modes of resistance through which mothers have actively sought to situate themselves *outside* the norms of the institution of motherhood by mothering *against* patriarchal versions of motherhood. She argues that those who have chosen to be "outlaws from the institution of motherhood" (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*, 67) are not bad mothers, they are empowered mothers.

Mothers of disabled children undoubtedly trouble and are troubled by norms. The arrival of a non-normative child renders the mother "grief stricken" or "in denial" (Lazarus and Folkman). Through the normative discourses of the psy-professions, it seems there is no possibility of a sane response to the birth of a disabled child (author) and the statistics reporting on the use of anti-depressants by parents of disabled

children could be used to support this claim (Scope). However, writing from Critical Disability Studies, many mothers consistently argue it is not their children that cause them distress, but engaging with services supposedly there to support their families (author; authors). Indeed, it is through interaction with those services that mothers who fail to conform to the demands of the system are constructed as 'mad' (author).

Understandably, many mothers of disabled children seek to reposition their children and themselves outside their designation as 'mad' and 'bad' through appeals to the norm. This can mean acceding to the demands of the medical model and an acceptance of their child's 'disorder' which, in turn, can lead to the search for a 'cure' and engagement with a host of psy-professional led interventions that seek to push their children closer to the norm (Tommey and Tommey). Others celebrate their children's diversity, rejecting normative expectations and the demands of the psy-professionals (author; author; author). Such resistance is often characterized as unreasonable behaviour and contributes to the categorization of mothers' non-compliance as 'madness'.

In their writing about grief from a Mad Studies perspective, Poole and Ward ~~(95)~~ describe the ways in which notions of 'good' or 'bad' mental states are governed by normative expectations: "Good grief is gendered, staged, linear, white and bound by privilege and reason. Good grief is productive, never interfering with business, the family or community. It is graceful and always grateful for expert intervention...Quite simply, good grief never breaks open the bone." (95). Poole and Ward's work reveals parallels between the requirement to do 'good grief' and 'good mothering'; both must also be staged, linear, reasoned, graceful, selfless and grateful for professional advice. Rejection of the foundational principles of 'good grief' and 'good mothering' is, as we shall see, a radical act of resistance.

Radical Resistance

The tyranny of the norm has provoked radical acts of resistance by mothers. As O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism*) argues: "non-normative mothers – whether they are defined and categorized as such by age, race, sexuality, or biology – can never be 'good' mothers of normative motherhood …" (75). This has led to a positive embracing of the status of "mother outlaws." ~~"Mother outlaws challenge neoliberal patriarchal versions of good mothering by challenging the focus on the functioning of the mother-child dyad in mothering practices" (ibid.).~~ These radical matricentric feminists propose "othermothering" as a disruptive alternative to patriarchal mothering. Othermothering promotes acceptance of the view that a mother should not be the only one responsible for raising a child (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*, 83).

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This distributed approach to mothering is mirrored within Critical Disability Studies. Mothers of disabled children are *normally* expected to be the sole advocates and activists for their child as well as taking the major responsibility for care and rehabilitation (author). In contrast, Authors invoke the disability commons (as a collective of disabled and non-disabled people who are committed to social justice) to resist the demands of neoliberal-ableism by coming together to distribute mothering practices among mothers and others. There have been calls for "unmothering" as a way of challenging the individualization discourse of patriarchal mothering "to break through silos of temporality and exclusion" (author). Unmothering, like othermothering, seeks to shift the responsibility for child rearing and for mother-activism away from mothers, or those who take the mothering role, to wider communities (authors).

Activism

Implicit in our discussion so far is the place of activism within Critical Disability Studies,

Mad Studies and Matricentric Feminism. O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism* 74) describes "advocacy-activism" as formal and informal acts of resistance by mothers to patriarchy. Activism from within a Critical Disability Studies perspective exposes and challenges ableism and dis/ablism (author). Mad Studies claims to be fundamentally "interdisciplinary and multi-vocal" (Menzies et al. 10), including academics and activists and those who occupy both subject positions in debates (Beresford; Voronka).

However, maternal activism has often struggled for recognition and is criticized for being 'emotional' in ways that other forms of activism are not (O'Reilly *Matricentric Feminism*). We agree with Ahmed that we cannot separate feelings from action and that anger is key to feminism and activism, but anger and activism by mothers of disabled children has been constructed as yet further evidence of their 'madness' (author). Mother-activism *on behalf of children* is, at times, validated in neoliberal contexts as the duty of mothers – especially if this activism is orientated towards mothers seeking resources to 'cure' or rehabilitate disabled children reducing their dependence on the state (e.g. Tommey and Tommey). And this activism has to be reasoned and reasonable. However, if mother-activists rebel against neoliberal-patriarchal-sanist-ableist standards of mothering this merely confirms their stigmatized status as 'mad mothers of disabled children' (author).

It is through their activism that mothers seek to create safe spaces for their children. Indeed, O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism*) points to the ways in which black mothers seek to immunize their children from the harms of racist ideology and draws on bell hooks' concept of home place to describe places of nurture for children away from demands of white privilege. Similarly, Campbell describes "safe" spaces for disabled people away from the omnipresent ableist gaze. Mothers of disabled children, too, seek to immunize their children from the profound effects of dis/ableism.

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2.3 Intersectionality: post-colonial and queer theory

Discussions of the intersections between mothering, madness and disability are also often informed by postcolonial thinking. As O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism*) explains, the view that the mother is not the only one responsible for a child is central to African thinking. Writing from the intersection of postcolonial and Critical Disability Studies, Chataika and McKenzie argue for a centering of indigenous knowledge and describe the Zimbabwean philosophy of "ubuntu"—the valuing of human dignity through valuing family and community—as a challenge to global North power and its preoccupation with the autonomous individual. In mothering practices, a global North, individualised focus on the mother-child dyad makes no sense from the perspective of ubuntu; the mother and child can only be understood as part of their wider communities. We do not wish, here, to homogenize or to exoticize African ways of understanding and valuing the human, however, ubuntu offers the possibility to disrupt the mechanisms through which global North neoliberal contexts maintain power in disability research agendas globally and produce and discipline 'mad mothers of disabled children'.

Queer theory, and work that queers motherhood, also informs discussions of madness, mothering and disability. In her edited collection, *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, disability and queer theorist and mother Margaret F. Gibson argues for the promise of bringing together queer theory with maternal theory as a seldom-explored intersection. The collection explores how this intersection offers new tools to examine the relational, embodied, everyday experiences of queer mothers and their links to institutionalized heteronormativity and patriarchy. This focus adds new insights to the re/turn by some queer theorists of kinship to radical

questions of parenting that explore non-normative family structures, for example, as a site of resistance (Gibson 4). Gibson's chapter, "Upsetting Expertise: Disability and Queer Resistance" (203-218) adds disability studies to this intersection. Based on experiences with professionals as a lesbian mother of an autistic child, Gibson explores and politicizes maternal rage as a form of queer and disability resistance. Author's work on maternal resistance around the infamous "refrigerator mother" of the 1940s and 1950s (understood to cause autism in her child as a result of disordered emotions and love) or the "mother warrior" of our contemporary moment burdened with normalizing her child and mitigating all risk of autism, also queers mothering at the intersection of disability studies and matricentric theory (author; author). As Gibson suggests, "Queering motherhood can […] start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political and/or symbolic components of 'expected' motherhood are challenged" (6). Such work on maternal resistance offers new resources for theorizing 'mad mothering of a disabled child' at the intersection of matricentric theory, queer mothering and critical disability studies.

3. Absences, tensions and points of departure

So far, we have pointed to the intersections between the disciplines and their common political and analytical starting points for discussions about mothering, madness and disability. However, there are tensions between the three disciplines.

3.1 The absence of disability in Matricentric Feminism

We begin with the omission of disability in the field of Matricentric Feminism. O'Reilly (*Matricentric Feminism* 75) alludes to 'biology' as playing a role in the construction of the 'good mother' but disability is absent. We could argue that there is an

implicit ableism within Matricentric Feminism in which empowered mothers are described as "more **effective** mothers for children, that such mothers are **healthier** women and more **productive workers**, and that empowered mothering is **beneficial for families and society at large**" (O'Reilly 7; **our emphasis).** There is a danger here of lapsing back into neoliberal-ableist constructions of motherhood. Neoliberal-sanism also haunts Matricentric Feminism which criticizes maternally correct mothers for "literally driving themselves and their offspring crazy" in their search for perfection (Almond as qtd. in O'Reilly 63). While O'Reilly argues we need to disrupt forces of violence aimed at mothers, there is a need to attend to the forces of ableism, sanism and racism *as well as* patriarchy in order to contest the stigmatized identity of 'the mad mother of a disabled child'.

While there are, at the same time, notable contributions within Matricentric Feminism that take up intersections of disability and mothering, the mad mother of a disabled child remains silent. *Disabled Mothers* (Filax and Taylor) takes up the central theme of mothers' resistance to the norm and contributors draw on critical disability studies thinking through their experiences of disabled (and ill) mothering- including mental illness and postpartum depression. However, the theoretical and activist resources of Mad Studies remain absent along with the 'mad mother of a disabled child'. *Moms Gone Mad: Motherhood and Madness, Oppression and Resistance* (Wong) develops the theme of motherhood and madness as a site of both oppression and empowerment or resistance. For Wong, "The terms *mad*, *misfit* and *outlaw* depict outliers from the conventional norm. Exactly what we strive to be: mothers acting up in ways to fight against the grain of expectation…" (3). The chapter by Letourneau and Giesbrecht reclaims mothering as a positive, rather than destructive or risky force in the context of postpartum depression (165-181). However, intersections with Critical Disability

Studies are not explored within the collection and, despite grounding the volume in Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness*, sanist language, at times, peppers some of the contributions. The ubiquitous figure of the 'mad mother of a disabled child' is also silent.

3.2 The contested place of mothering in Critical Disability Studies

While we argue that Matricentric Feminism is uncomfortable with the presence of sanism and ableism within discourses of motherhood, Critical Disability Studies has also been uncomfortable with, and even hostile to, a focus on motherhood (authors). The Marxist materialist origins of disability studies led to a critique from feminist scholars who argued for a place for emotion and affect in disability studies and acknowledgement that the personal is political (hooks, *Yearning*). Yet disabled mothering remains marginal within disability studies (Frederick) and non/disabled mothers of disabled children have struggled to find a voice within critical disability studies (authors).

3.3 The absence of mothering in Mad Studies

While Mad Studies shares affinities with disability studies and the critique of biomedicine, Mad scholarship has, until recently, remained relatively silent on the topic of motherhood. Scholars within allied fields such as Matricentric Feminism who write on madness and motherhood often do not acknowledge any affinity with Mad Studies, or, indeed, the existence of the field itself as seen above (Wong). What's more, a recent anthology in social justice and critical mental health, which includes a chapter on Mad Studies' critiques of women and madness, makes no reference to the existence of mothers (Morrow and Malcoe). More recently, Mad Studies scholars have offered auto-ethnographic accounts of the regulation of pregnant mad bodies (Haley "The (Un)writing of Risk on my Mad Pregnant Body"), critical reflections on their experiences

of sanist oppression and epistemic violence enacted on their own mad mothers (Liegghio), as well as arguments for maddening feminist political economy and the neoliberal-sanist and neo-eugenic regulation of sexuality, biological reproduction and parenting (Haley *Intimate Constraints*). We encourage this coming undone of silence and silos between Mad Studies, Matricentric Feminist and Critical Disability Studies in order to understand the prevalence, stigmatization and construction of 'the mad mother of a disabled child'.

Future directions: learning from one another

The work yet to be done within each discipline in terms of learning from one another is very clear. *We* notice these (particular) omissions *because of* our lived experiences of madness, mothering, and raising disabled children, and yet these issues remain out of view for academics in their respective fields. As Lemert ~~(ref)~~ argues, people at the margins often have a better view of the mainstream from which they are excluded. And yet, when we talk of our lived experience in research, despite our feminist stance, we still fear that any claim to rigour we might wish to make will be compromised. There is some irony that it is only through our engagements with families in research *and* our lived experiences that we have come to notice 'mad mothering' as unfinished business for Matricentric Feminism, Mad Studies and Critical Disability Studies. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that we can only ~~every~~ offer a partial account of the multiple intersectionalities in mothers' lives.~~By bringing these developing fields together, we offer up new analytic tools to deepen the work of exposing and disrupting highly oppressive and individualizing neoliberal relations of ruling that regulate the lives of 'mad mothers of disabled children' and indeed of us all.~~

Finally, we began by setting out our aim to support the diversity work done by mad mothers of disabled children. Resistance can feel futile when it is merely re-inscribed back into the dominant narrative and used to re-affirm the madness of the non-compliant mother. There is a glimmer of hope, however, as mad mothers (and others) come together in the 'real' world and on-line (See justiceforLB.org and rightfulives.org). These spaces of resistance are growing, and alliances are forming between and beyond mad mothers of disabled children (authors). ; silos are being broken down between disciplinary spaces and between scholarship and activism (authors). Through engagement with theory, we have revealed that: to resist mad motherhood is to provoke responses that make visible neoliberal-ableism, neoliberal-sanism and neoliberal-patriarchy. We hope making these forces visible will, in some small way, support the social justice work of mad mothers of disabled children in neoliberal contexts.

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