

# CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH/MAD STUDIES

### Director's introduction

The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University is one of the university's 27 organized research units (ORUs), providing a home for research outside traditional academic units and moving research beyond departments and disciplines. At York, the Robarts Centre is the research engine for the collaborative and critical study of Canada. In its 2015–2020 charter, the centre linked its strategic research priorities to the growth and development of its research clusters. A central focus of Robarts has been on expanding research capacity through the development of new and dynamic clus-

BY GABRIELLE SLOWEY



**Gabrielle Slowey is an associate professor in the Department of Politics at York University and director of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies.**

ters. Robarts has indeed become a hub for research, with the research clusters akin to airlines operating out of a central terminal. The clusters reflect the diversity of Canadian studies in their scope, subject, and methodology, and they have become a significant source of growth for the centre in attracting grants, participation, and attention. As it has responded to researchers' requests to meet the centre's mandate, Robarts has become something of a research broker, connecting faculty, students, and the community under the rubric of research. Its focus

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## CO-EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

# Introduction to Canada Watch: Critical Perspectives on Mental Health/Mad Studies

In 2019 the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies invited us to establish a research cluster on Critical Perspectives on Mental Health/Mad Studies. The Robarts Centre had already been a generous supporter of our research on the Madness Canada/Folie Canada website, our online education site, *History in Practice*, the 2018 Mad Cities past–present exhibit in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and our 2013 documentary *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum* (all available on [madnesscanada.com](http://madnesscanada.com)). The time was ripe to pull in York's critical mental health/Mad Studies community more broadly. And thus the cluster was born.

BY MARINA MORROW, CINDY JIANG, SIMON ADAM, AND MEGAN DAVIES

**Marina Morrow is a professor at the School of Health Policy and Management in the Faculty of Health at York University.**

**Cindy Jiang is a research associate at the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies.**

**Simon Adam is a social scientist in nursing. Megan Davies is an associate professor in the Department of Social Science at York University.**


Our cluster is intended to mobilize and facilitate York research that examines mental health using critical theoretical approaches and social justice

paradigms. Working in conjunction with and in support of the Madness Canada/Folie Canada website and its associated projects, the cluster privileges perspectives of people with lived experience of mental health services, user advocacy and activism, and holistic forms of support that mobilize an intersectional analysis. In this spirit, in February 2020, we held our inaugural *Dialogue, Research, Inquiry, Action: Critical Perspectives on Mental Health/Mad Studies Cluster* meeting. That meeting brought together more than 40 participants from across the York

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psychedelics into Western psychiatric practice. Rose reminds us that the deep knowledge of psychedelics and psychedelic consciousness comes to Western practitioners through Indigenous healing practices, and he cautions against knowledge appropriation. He advocates a deep respect for Indigenous healing traditions, reflection, and humility on the part of Western mental health practitioners. Ultimately, Rose argues, any use of psychedelics in the Western context must be approached cautiously with a recognition that treatments are embedded in larger historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Collectively, these works represent some of the exciting Canadian scholarship emerging in critical mental health and Mad Studies that is shaping the ways in which we think about psychiatric biomedical dominance and posing viable social justice-oriented alternatives. In the wake of the pandemic, now is the moment to bring these alternative perspectives from the margins to the mainstream. Burgeoning enrolments in Mad Studies and Mad history courses and the strong presence of graduate students in this issue attests to a wide interest in approaches to mental health that go beyond biomedicine. This issue of *Canada Watch* marks a strong beginning from the Critical Perspectives on Mental Health/Mad Studies cluster. 

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on facilitating research has proved to be an effective strategy for breaking down research(er) silos and fostering productive research collaborations.

Critical Perspectives on Mental Health/Mad Studies is an example of a new research cluster that fulfills the centre's mandate to tackle issues that are important to Canadians and Canada. As the country—and, we hope, the world—emerges from a period of COVID-19 lockdowns, conversations about mental health have risen to the surface and make this issue of *Canada Watch* so very

timely. Indeed, the first meeting of the cluster occurred just one month before the first national lockdown was instituted, and the topics covered reflect the researchers' thoughts at the time. It is exciting to see the cluster collect the scholarship presented at its first meeting into this issue of *Canada Watch*, and it is our hope that future issues will similarly showcase the work of other research clusters.

For more on the other nine research clusters housed at Robarts, including the History of Indigenous Peoples Network,

Women and Inclusivity in Sustainable Energy Research Network [WISER], and the Groupe de recherche sur le Canada francophone, Canada francophile et les Études sur Canada en français, go to [robarts.info.yorku.ca/research-clusters/](http://robarts.info.yorku.ca/research-clusters/).

With that, I wish you all happy reading as you peruse this latest issue of *Canada Watch*. 