Make Mine Melody: Building Beloved Community in Bibliography Using Mad Citation Practice

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Hello, dear reader. Your thoughtspace is welcome here, and I encourage you to use the sides of these pages and make them your own—whether through doodles, arguments, or tiny stars signaling your agreement or disagreement with my thoughtspace, from wherever and whenever you are in the world. I use “thoughtspace” in place of “thought” to invite you more directly into a kairotic space of conversation. I’m honored you’re here with me now, and I’m grateful you’ve chosen this missive to care about amid everything transpiring for you in apocalypse time—I see you, and I’m making space here to respect that commitment you made with me today, or this past version of me sitting with you right now.

I want to share with you a citation style I’ve been experimenting with and then invite you to call back with your own remixes after you’ve seen where I’ve been so far. This is, like any writing style, a continual work in progress. I’ve learned that this expectation of easy coherence, of hard-and-fast rules to be quickly mastered, are part of an inherently ableist architecture of academy design, where my supposed responsibility is to be immediately understandable to the greatest possible number of people—even if my intended audience may feel displaced by the neoliberal obligation to optimization. The ever-optimizing undercurrent that dominates ideas of “progress” comes to fruition at the expense of those to

—Beth Boquet, Michelle Farrell, and Shannon Harding, “Caffeine During Quarantine; or, Sabbaticaling in the Time of Corona”1

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whom optimization rhetorics never assisted or openly excluded. I align with the communities of critical disability studies and mad studies, whose ways of knowing and being in the world often go un(der)represented inside academic spaces precisely because of the implication of that aforementioned obligation: in order to appeal to the most people possible, you must take as true that most people do not have “abnormal” views. In this ableist architecture, difference is adjacent to incoherence (because it prevents end points and rules), and incoherence is a synonym to inadequacy (because it prevents traditional methodology from enjoying automatic validity). I like to think that all these words are actually different words with different definitions, and I’d like to presuppose you agree with me.

So if you and I agree that in this space we instead privilege the “abnormal,” we’ve created a brave space for a mad crip dialectic that is very carefully translated by my kaleidoscopic lens, a phrase I have used in the past to describe each scholar’s lens as always already unique and dynamically modified by every experience, reading and bodymind we’ve ever met. While we all have kaleidoscopic lenses that we use to translate the world, and may even share dozens of the same readings and lived experiences, what I see through my unique kaleidoscope will differ from what you view through your own, and so on and so forth throughout academia. Because I identify as a mad bodymind (to lovingly borrow from Margaret Price’s terminology), it is fair to assume that in a “normative” conception of academic scholarship it is likely most people would regard my views as “outlier” or otherwise “abnormal,” and therefore incoherent, inadequate, and ostensibly irrelevant. Mad studies—as an emergent activist body of poststructural scholarship—asks, What if these neurodivergent or mentally ill kaleidoscopes are important perspectives with which to understand the social and structural relationships occurring around us every day? Is it possible that the “expert” opinion on mental illness, as a series of pathologized diagnoses in need of eradication and cure, is worthy of further investigation from the lenses of perceived “disordered” life? This is a familiar refrain for those acquainted with critical disability studies, which advocates for the primacy of disabled lived experiences and imaginaries in the quilt work of sociopolitical theory and human rights practice, particularly in light of intersectionality and marginalization frameworks (reminiscent of sister fields feminist studies, queer studies, critical race theory, and others). In these scholarship arenas, the difference is the point, and I would like to posit the argument that this may also be a useful dynamic in modern citational practice. Leveraging kaleidoscopic difference in paratextual frameworks like bibliography may achieve many of the same general goals that mad studies and critical disability studies take
such fervent interest in—namely, more equitable, intentional, care work—oriented representation.

This is not an entirely unique thought: feminist citational practice has been coded in syndicated whispers since at least 1991 with the publication of Katie King’s “Bibliography and a Feminist Apparatus of Production,” which has since been revisited by North American feminist authors interested in the legitimization of alternative forms of bibliographic scholarship. Of particular note is art critic Maiko Tanaka, whose autocritical dialogue about exchanging letters with a friend culminates with a luminary insight: “But in my letters, I also acknowledge the reader—my friend—which in turn opens up the potential to situate the reader’s own experiences as also being significant. . . . This act of turning a personal source of empowerment [re: letters] into collective agency is something I have learned is a legacy of feminist pedagogies for collective empowerment and transformational change.” Maiko signals a turn here in her experience of letter writing that she maps onto citational practice by breaking the fourth wall between the dialogue of herself and her friend (the letter recipient) and introducing her third-party readership as both “significant” and welcome, a knowing movement from didacticism to conversationalism reaching beyond the epistolary form in a move she calls “collective agency.” In this sense, paratext is not chiefly instructive but is rather another place where collectives can manifest and glow.

This contrasts how I was taught to view hegemonic citational practice: as a sort of genealogy, one through which you can trace a few fairly discrete metaphorical bloodlines that tumble toward an unsteady present. This genealogy disposition is methodically ritualized in academia, in “literature reviews” that recall—in order—the lineages deemed properly rigorous, the dissertations half-spent recalling acceptable, expected, required canonized names and knowledges in order to iconize them among new research that can barely breathe, crushed and quieted underneath. We see it in reading lists, in undergraduate survey courses, in derivative syllabi and master materials that “define” eras but also perceptibly erase them: erase those of the wrong heritage, so to speak. And while academics such as Aja Martinez, Christine Lorre-Johnston, Jessica Hernandez, and Asao Inoue have recently troubled who gets to be part of the canonization bloodline, I focus on the academic citational-genealogical construct itself as necessarily also eugenic, extractive, and problematically linear. How can we actualize Maiko’s “collective agency”? How can we glow and alight others while traversing such a mechanized, breathless landscape?

I like to reject the fervent canonization of pastness, instead embracing theory as a forest, a delicate ecosystem of community thoughtspace.
Within these forests, sapling theorists of all variants can grow and inspire one another, trading oxygen and whispers of theory that alight their own localized tree communities. From this vantage, every tree is also a family tree, and every branch and leaf in the forest is afforded its own glow. The sun catches everyone in a system that relies on mutual aid and expansive survivalism: in order for you to thrive, I must thrive as well. The writer’s empowerment is a gentle (implicit) invitation for the reader to join the de-“prestiged” collective in solidarity of thought. It thus leverages citation practice as a calling-in, mobilizing radical opportunity to more carefully acknowledge where my thoughts derive.

I spent a lot of time thinking about ways to invite readers into a citation practice that validates the reader as conspiratorial in my thought-space. Was there a way to visibly “call in” beloved community researchers and artful thinkers in ways that make known conspirators feel “worthy” (a term I’m using carefully) and encourage them to unite with us in para-belongingness through publication? Recruitment is a powerful tool of nonviolent resistance, and the ways we “cit[e] texts and projects that inspire or support us in one way or another” can locate a beginning point to the sublime affectation of feeling “in” on the secret, feeling privy to the production of group activism and powerful, feminist knowledge dissemination. Care work–based recruitment borrows heavily from Black feminism (e.g., adrienne maree brown; Mia Birdsong), queer ontologies of being (e.g., Gpat Patterson; Ada Hubrig), and the critical disability movement (e.g., Margaret Price; Amy Gaeta; Hannah Facknitz and Danielle Lorenz; Travis Chi Wing Lau), from which the anti-psychiatrization and patient liberation movements derive. And while this article honors and uses this space to call for gratitude of the wisdom of well-known and well-cited theorycrafting, it also seeks to augment and disturb reifying “academic,” lineage-based mad crip canonization by continuing the discussion with new-wave voices within this glowing scholarly community, particularly those that consentingly identify as mad and/or mentally ill and perform institutional care work in circumstances that bear more similarity to student and/or contingent faculty marginalization considerations. What I came up with in the interim—the version of me at time of writing—is mad citation practice, borrowing from the noninstitutional ways in which mentally ill or neurodivergent (“mad”) researchers look at lived and living experience not as “additional” context building but as essential to the core of experimentation and knowledge production (for more on lived and living experience, I trust Peter Beresford; Nev Jones; Awais Aftab; Jessica Rauchberg). In genealogical scholarship, mentally ill knowledge making is essentially a research resource to mine: an abnormal
subject to interview and translate (as in Catherine Prendergast’s work on schizophrenics), a tantalizing story to observe from comfortable distance (as in Wally Lamb’s work on schizophrenics), or the basis of psychopharmacological bibles (as in the American Psychological Association’s work on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). This methodology wishes to draw on the unique ways neurodiversity maps onto academic writing.

Concomitant to this important conversation is a lesser-demanded dialogue on gratitude and the ways in which our voices get used in academia’s recursive publication machine. Under a traditional rule set, we as area experts are under no obligation to notify, describe, or otherwise inform other scholars of their voice work appearing in our own works: I find this troubling and absolutist. I think the least we owe our collaborators is notification of their voice conjured within our own dialogues, and many academics already observe this practice as a nontraditional “courtesy.” What if this courtesy were formalized and engendered in citation protocol, and I was required to actively engage with and get to know the thinker whose words resonated enough with me to conjure them in my own works? In this way, radical voices can resist what queer theorist Patterson calls the “un/livable and un/lovable” conditions frontloading academic space, instead reframing interaction within a harmful neoliberal machine as an act of shared love and recognizance.

Similarly, disinterest with the ways in which colonial practice can be easily mapped onto citation is well studied, particularly in Black feminist conversation. The same attentiveness cannot be argued for neuronormativity interrogations, which I believe can act as a parallel site of feminist reclamation. I’ll show you how I have experimented with enacting mad citation as a process and try to explain how this form creates dialogue and cozy space with the reader as fellow conspirator, as a future member of beloved community that I just haven’t met yet—instead of the regular turn toward demeaning didacticism, reifying the assumption that what we have to publish are thoughts fully unique to our own minds. What follows is a series of two described images, screen captures from an early chapter of my dissertation that details some of the process I enacted to achieve “hypercollaboration,” which will be explained in more detail below. Both images are from the live versions of the online document that my beloved community, my citational forest, so lovingly read and helped me shape into a shared melodic resonance with its own unique movement by the key researcher.

Figure 1 is a screen capture (altered in full for low-vision friends) of a live document from the online Microsoft Word collaborative suite. The “live”
functionality works similarly to the “track changes” feature in classic Word, but online hosting permits multiple users editing the same document at the same time from different spaces (hence “live” titling). I write all my dissertation drafts in live documents to enable the fullest possible extent of collaboration free of corruptible doc files, complex email chains, and space/download compatibility (the web interface takes up significantly less onboard space on modern computers than the traditional suite equivalent, which can be tricky for older or outdated machines; affordability of new tech is a class-war issue). Active collaborators—those conspiratorial luminary minds I ask to appear in chapter work—are listed on page one of the document, giving a quick mapping of “who is here” and at what stage in the review process they are in (denoted in green for “read,” purple for “reading,” or red for “alternative status/not reviewed”). The first words they are greeted with when opening the private document link are important to increasing radical gratitude in citation and quotation practice: “hello and welcome to the deservingness hypercollaborative chapter. I’m really thankful you’re here with me.”

Following this mandate that I know and interact with the collaborators I wanted to use in my own work, I created a list of other rules for myself that reflected honoring lived experience. The rule set looked like this, and yours may look different(!):

1. (as discussed) All “beloved community” citations (key authors) must be people who I am personally familiar with; this way I can vouch for their ethical practice. I signal this gratitude and love with first-name citation, a familiar calling-in and a visual indicator that
they are kin of my forest and open to adding conspiring, radical kin to their own forests.

2. All citations must come from open-source (no fee, no paywall) materials.

3. All beloved community collaborators had to approve: the thesis, the authors they were comfortable appearing alongside, the open-source document(s) used, and how their ways of knowing were adding to the conversation.

4. All subcollaborators (authors whose data I used but whose original ideas do not appear partially or in full within the chapter) had to be contacted to give approval of their data usage in the chapter. (This did not apply to “conglomerates” or sources to which no ready “source” could be identified.)

As to tenet 1, I ensure I have spoken to the researcher in person or online to such an extent that I have reasonable cause to believe they hold the same general vision as me as to the importance of neurodivergence, madness, disabled voice work, and radical inclusivity in academic settings. As to tenet 2, I am also concerned with the ways scholars are left out of conversations via paywalls, institutional logins, and access to funding: if a source work I’d like to use is behind a paywall, there must be an easily accessed free version of the document. The overwhelming majority of my dissertation citations stemmed from podcasts, gray literature blogs, open-access journals, interviews, or conference proceedings (if the conference fee was free). For my purposes, I did count books I had to purchase as non–open source (because there is an ostensible paywall in the ability to afford the book/volume the text appears in), but in many instances the author had early draft versions they could make available for free on their website, blogroll, or Substack.

The remaining tenets govern how much “say” my community had in the creation and re-creation of themselves and their theories within my thoughtspace. Collaborators could ask to switch open-source documents, ask to use certain quotations in place of other ones, or make any other comfort changes they wanted to apply to their appearance in the document. This also included the choice to appear by first name or last name, as well as their way of introduction in the text (in at least one instance, a collaborator chose the moniker “ungrading theorist and Hazel’s dad,” and this was honored). Since many collaborators are already familiar with one another’s works (particularly in smaller disciplines like critical disability and mad studies), they were also able to offer helpful edits and calls
to other works that I hadn’t considered; this line editing and additional calling-in was an act of love on their part and was honored wherever possible. In many cases, the theorists or strategies that came to mind already appeared later, which speaks to the synchronicity of community and the privilege of building good research in community-cognizant practice.

Figure 2 speaks to this community dynamic, where collaborators were invited to leave their thoughts and ideas throughout (or not—as time allowed) and build-with instead of placing me in the positionality to build-for. As I’ve written elsewhere, the dynamic of speaking-with versus spoken-for is important in neurodivergence and madness: the ways our ideas are reparsed, rephrased and co-opted has been taken up by such minds as Bonnie Burstow in other helpful venues that discuss the politics of mad voicework within the academy. In figure 2, Shane and Seo-Young offer feedback on the chapter’s direction, word choice, and argument strategy. Being able to see each other’s edits also leads to helpfully critical dialectical conversations otherwise unavailable to myself and my allies. Similarly, I asked you at the beginning of this chapter to interact with, doodle in, or call back to me in the margins. This white space isn’t silence in the live doc; it’s an opportunity, it’s a calling-in and a speaking-with.

I’m aware my ways of knowing and being and speaking are disorienting and nontraditional, and I like the way that refusal of form creates pause with readers: this pause is a powerful silence that decenters typicality in favor of other melodies, ones that have been intentionally silenced through hundreds of years of eugenic practices and policy making within academia’s walls. To conclude, the entire visible corpus of feminist citation practice is less than twelve articles as of 2022, showing not only a lack of interest in mindful citation but also a general lack of readership or editorship in ways to redevelop or reimagine the “paratext” of publication: the works cited, the bibliography that builds the power in the tower.
of prose. I would posit that centering the community-ness of writing is the reason that writing transpires at all, for any of us—withouth inspiration, without the words of elders and conspirators and like minds past and present, we don’t translate or remediate important ideas that need to be spoken again and again. I envision a postapocalypse time academy that frontloads the value of community (and community-based citation, like mad citation) in artful and inventive ways, in ways that honor the speaking-with dialectic and the iconoclasm of radical movements and their care work ontologies: Black feminist solidarity, queer love, crip radicalism, and mad revolution are some of the movements I’ve drawn on (and feel great gratitude for) in the pathway I walk to become a more ethical, thankful, loveful, antipower and anticanon community builder. There are plenty of divots and curves along this pathway—not least of which involves how to decide who in community “fits” well, the politics of first naming, the publication standards of citation protocols—but writing is as iterative as my own kaleidoscopic bodymind. I have great gratitude for this publication and its editors—Kate Ozment and Lisa Maruca—for seeing the value of our conversation and conjuring space for it in a traditional format, so we could have the chance to talk today. And I’m most grateful for you, reader, for giving me this timespace to hear out my thoughtspace—I hope some of it resounded melodically with your own ideas and you take this methodology to places I could not.

In beloved solidarity,
sarah madoka currie
May 10, 2022

sarah madoka currie (@kawaiilovesarah) is a doctoral candidate working between the lines of critical disability studies, mad studies, social work practice, and critical university studies. She has given more than forty workshops, invited talks and conference presentations on mad-positive pedagogy, universal design for learning strategy, facilitation training, disability rhetoric, and applying equity, diversity, and inclusion practice. She writes occasionally for open-access venues like this one and tries her best to keep her three cats off the keyboard.

NOTES


2. I use this phrase is to signal pandemic-circumstantial time while intentionally giving credence to the ways in which other concomitant events greatly heightened the pain, tension,
suffering, and grief that transpired during this crisis temporality, which at present stretches from 2020 to 2022. “Apocalypse time” validates the myriad crushing events and by-product trauma that the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated or otherwise deeply complicated.

3. There are competing beliefs in disabled/mad space regarding capitalization of m/Madness. I choose not to capitalize, but this is a personal ethic, and I empathize with the arguments in favor of capitalizing, particularly in publication.


7. Tanaka.


FURTHER READING

The Cite Black Women Collective: https://www.citeblackwomencollective.org/.

