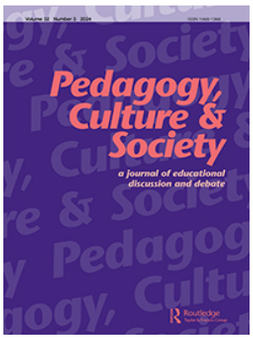

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Can Black Critical Theory sit with Mad Studies in education in Britain?

Nadena Doharty

Department of Sociology, University of Durham, Durham, UK

ABSTRACT

This article draws on the scholarship of Black Critical Theory in education. It enriches this literature by provocatively commanding scholarly and methodological space for Mad Studies to explore, understand and address, distressed Black pupils' experiences of anti-Black sanism in education in Britain. Currently limited by the proliferation of mental health literature that too often decontextualises and pathologises Black suffering outside of anti-Black contexts and dominates our understanding of mental health, illness, treatment and care, this article outlines the necessity of *maddening* Black Critical Theory to advance hermeneutic and testimonial justice to those pupils living mad while Black.

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Introduction

Black pupils in British schools continue to face obstinately high levels of racism, and it is having a deleterious impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The effects on Black pupils' mental health and wellbeing are clear: in 2021, 88% of Black pupils reported that experiencing racism in schools affected their mental health 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' with only 2% answering 'not at all' (Race and Racism: Mentally Healthy Schools n.d.). More broadly, Black pupils experience a variety of dehumanising and degrading events including being disproportionately strip searched (38%) despite only representing 5.9% of the population, and these searches are, in the main, conducted unlawfully (de Souza 2023). In Hackney, London, a teenage Black girl (anonymised as Child Q) was suspected of having cannabis and intimately strip searched – during menstruation – without a teacher or parent present. This sheds light on the ways in which the climate of schooling remains antagonistic to Black children, and that the pervasiveness of antiblackness, 'defined by and in radical opposition to the central, foundational, and unique structural positionality of Black people' (Vargas 2021, 183–184) is omnipresent.

Contemporarily, these degrading experiences are often supported by the proliferation of important analyses informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the UK that highlight the interpersonal, cultural and institutional conditions that can generate mental distress in Black pupils (Doharty 2019, 2020; Gillborn 2006, 2015; Gillborn et al. 2012; Joseph-

CONTACT Nadena Doharty nadena.doharty@durham.ac.uk Department of Sociology, University of Durham, 32 Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HN, UK

Salisbury 2020, 2021; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2018; Thomas 2012; Vieler-Porter 2020; Wallace 2018, 2023). What these studies usefully point to is the structural embeddedness of white supremacy – a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Ansley 1988, 993).

As a theoretical and methodological tool for analysing *racism* that has been successfully applied to racialised Black communities, CRT has been useful in identifying the racist conditions that could drive Black students to mental distress; however, it has been less precise about the risks of disclosing mental ill-health experiences or histories. These disclosures are not the same for all groups, and in wider British society, can be deathly for Black people because of *antiblackness* (Centre for Mental Health n.d.; Kinouani 2021). British society, including the mental health system, is saturated with antiblackness. Therefore, Black Critical Theory is useful for paying more nuanced, historicised and praxis attention to the ways in which the social construction of Blackness – rooted in the values of antiblackness – continues to matter in the lives of racialised Black people. This article, however, provocatively argues that it is by *maddening* Black Critical Theory through the scholarship and activism of Mad Studies, that we can re-centre distressed Black voices. This article focuses specifically on racialised Black pupils with mental ill-health histories, experiences, or conditions rather than conflate mental ill-health as an inherently Black experience.

In this article, I draw on Mad Studies literature to offer the following theoretical provocations: 1) Black Critical Theorists in education should command and proactively generate scholarly space for those who are mentally distressed by antiblackness and its non-race-related intra-and-intersections in education because these communities are being denied the opportunity to develop alternative, non-pathologising discourses and resources that serve to understand, interpret and articulate their life-worlds. Therefore, there is an overreliance on parochial, medicalised terminologies and pathologies that violate oppressed people's human rights, and academic studies that until now, fail to capture the nature, complexity, and magnitude of *anti-blackness-as-distressing*. And 2) in so doing, we will not only identify-to-dismantle the maddening conditions that give rise to or exacerbate distress, but also honour fully and richly, our commitment to testimonial and hermeneutic justice from the perspectives of those at the sharpest end of an anti-Black world by recognising Black people with mental ill-health as credible, valid and valuable human experiences, affirming the humanit*ies* of distressed Blackness.

Black Critical Theory in education

Black Critical Theory in education (herein: Black Crit) has been advanced in the U.S. by Dumas (2016), and Dumas and Ross (2016) to call scholarly and praxis attention to critical theorisations of Blackness, that is, confronting the ways in which 'antiblackness as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism' continues to stand in opposition to the purity and humanity of being white (416–17). In the UK context, there are a variety of critical theorisations of Blackness borne from the intellectual and activist contributions of people

from African, Asian, African-Caribbean, Arab and 'mixed race' backgrounds 'nurtured [by] myriad multiracial alliances over decades and radical race-conscious scholarship by white thinkers' (Warmington 2014, 6). Consequently, there are no dogmatic tenets to prescribe how to understand its manifestations or roadmap to dismantle; however, Afro-pessimists' intellectual and political mobilisations have offered strong scholarly articulations that are useful to more intentionally recognise Black in-and-anti-humanity by understanding the nature, role and impact of anti-Black 'ideologies, discourses, representations, (mal)distribution of material resources, and physical and psychic assaults on Black bodies in school' (Dumas 2016, 16; see also Gordon 1997; Wilderson 2020). As a theoretical mode of analysis, anti-Blackness does not suggest Black people have no agency or humanity, rather, 'to locate in the globally shared notion of the Human the source of Black people's dehumanisation, suffering and death . . . [and] to reframe Black agency as necessarily and always engaging the fundamentally anti-Black world as it is' (Vargas and Jung 2021, 9).

For Dumas and ross, Black Crit *enriches* rather than replaces the work of Critical Race Theory (CRT) by developing and strengthening our language around the features and impacts of antiblackness. Its aim is not to necessarily provide solutions, though this has been taken forward by Ross (2021), as she explains, finding solutions 'in the meantime between time' for cultivating educationally reparative environments that offer Black students the opportunity to 'confront, navigate, refuse, and resist anti-Black violence and anti-Black racism in the larger society and in their schools' (232). This is a shift in analysis from CRT. Rather than operating as a critique of white supremacy, Black Crit affords centrality to antiblackness as the prevailing ideology that structures our worlds, which means that it is 'endemic and permanent . . . detailing how policies and everyday practices find their logic in and reproduce Black suffering' (429–30).

Though not in education, Vargas' analyses of antiblackness embolden the call for closer theoretical attention to its historicisation and contemporality by arguing that racism and antiblackness have too many irreconcilable differences. In the former, racism exists on a continuum with Black people on one end and white people on the other. Racialised groups exist along this continuum depending on their societally constructed privileges or disadvantages. However, any scholarly analysis of race and racism, à la CRT, implies that all racialised groups experience 'specific but related vulnerabilities because of the common denominator: imperialist cisheteropatriarchal white supremacist capitalism' (Hooks 2004 cited in Vargas 2021, 184). However, those drawing on Black Critical Theory will be reminded that the construction of the human in the Global North necessarily excludes Black people so analyses of racism remain incomplete in addressing the *specificity* of the Black (McKittrick 2015; Wynter 1989) in how the social and material world is constructed by the 'distance from Black people that non-Black and white people can establish and maintain' (Vargas 2021) such that when we analyse societal inequalities based on racism, 'a difference in *kind* is being confused with a difference in degree' (Vargas and Jung 2021, 8). Wynter's analyses of the human is useful for understanding the historicisation of anti-blackness from a Black Critical Theory perspective because she contends that the West's initial secularised development of Man as a political subject, and later, scientific and economic justifications for imperial expansion that was foundational to modernity, was inextricably bound up with *racialised* dynamics of power that demarcated human differences according to coloniser West and colonised non-West. Within this colonial

dynamic, Wynter suggests 'it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the "racially inferior" Human Other . . . and, as such, the negation of the generic "normal humanness", ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West' (2003, 266). It is this specificity of the Black that necessitates understanding how anti-blackness underpinned Blackness from its inception, and, as Wynter argues, causes Black people to operate historically and contemporarily as 'our present Darwinian "dysselected by Evolution until proven otherwise" descriptive statement of the human' (Wynter 2003, 267).

Anti-racist efforts, then, similarly imply (for Black people) that we can make 'articulatable claims of inclusion into the human family' to recalibrate the world, through political struggle, in our favour (Spillers 2003, 226 cited in; Vargas 2021). However, as Vargas (2021) reminds us, recalibrating the world through political challenges often result in anti-racist changes that are *programmatic* rather than *structural* and can be curtailed as quickly as political governments and climates change. We see evidence of this in the education in Britain, post-2020, whereby Black Lives Matter protests raised collective questions about anti-Black racism in schools and wider society. However, wider government responses clearly cannot be relied upon to embed anti-racist efforts for the long-term. In fact, the Conservative government's-initiated report into race and ethnic disparities in the UK (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021) declared that it: 'no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism' and refused to see the permanence and saturation of institutional anti-Black racism that is literally killing Black people (Doharty and Esoe 2023). Rather, institutional antiblackness is allowed to thrive when the structural mechanisms to identify, record and dismantle Black pupils' experiences of racism in school are proactively disbanded (MIND 2021).

This article is written within the political context of the United Nation's (UN) Decade for People of African descent (2015–2024). In this declaration, there are three priority areas: recognition, justice, and development. Despite this, countries like the United Kingdom continue to face obstinate levels of anti-Black suffering. In January 2023, nearly a decade into the UN's priorities, the UN's fact-finding visit found that racism across the country is 'structural, institutional and systemic' and 'people of African descent continue to encounter racial discrimination and erosion of their fundamental rights . . . [with] no assurance of effective redress' (United Nations 2023). Drawing on a Black Critical Theory perspective, the fact-finding visit sheds light on the 'technologies of violence – that is, the institutional structures and social processes – that maintain Black subjugation' (Dumas 2016, 14). This illuminates the urgent need to name and centre antiblackness in scholarly and practice understandings of mental health and illness if racialised Black people's rights and dignity are to be restored. For example, MIND, the mental health charity in England and Wales, has criticised the UK government's 'failure to require schools to report on racist incidents means the true scale of racism in schools remains unidentified – and the true impact unknown. This has to change' (MIND 2021, 30). Moreover, state-maintained schools in England have been issued with guidance on the teaching of topics that the government deems 'sensitive' and thus, might be construed as endorsing campaigning groups such as Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police so that teaching can remain 'impartial' (Department for Education 2022).

Further, the current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stubbornly refuses to apologise on behalf of the British government for its role in the transatlantic slave trade and to pay reparations. Mr Sunak suggests that 'What I think our focus should now be is, of course, understanding our history and all its parts, not running away from it, but right now making sure we have a society that's inclusive and tolerant of people from all backgrounds . . . trying to unpick our history is not the right way forward and is not something we'll focus our energies on' (Nevett 2023). This remark reveals two things from a Black Crit perspective. Firstly, subsuming all people into languages of inclusion not only renders the specificity of anti-Black violence absent, but also reveals that the British government does not perceive an apology is warranted for a group considered then – and still – as other than human. As Dumas notes therefore, we must gain a 'deeper understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of, violence against the Black' (Dumas 2016, 13). If Black pupils' experiences are simply not a priority because they are regarded as unworthy of being educated, why would schools need to be reminded of their statutory obligations to ensure they are not disadvantaging pupils based on 'race' (Equality Act 2010: Guidance 2010)?

Black Crit in education acknowledges that schools are sites of antiblackness. Thus, to continue analysing these experiences using tools that explore *racism* rather than antiblackness will remain incapable of 'grasping anti-blackness as a quintessential anti-social and anti-human condition and process' (see Vargas and Jung 2021). Identifying the prevalence of institutional antiblackness would locate the disproportionate and largely unlawful strip searching of Black pupils in British schools and their daily indignities legitimated structurally, as entirely congruent with a group excluded from 'modern concepts of humanity and normative sociability' (Vargas 2021, 193). The aim of Black Crit in education, then, should be to rupture rather than repair this social and material formation. I argue next that one area in which Black Crit could achieve this in education is to render more intentionally, the humanit*ies* of Black people through critical inquiry to understand: *where are the accounts from those purported to lack Humanity and Reason?* This is the first article in the UK to endorse that we take up this challenge.

Maddening Black Critical Theory in education

To reiterate my earlier intention, this article does not suggest a conflation between madness and Blackness – they are not synonyms. Indeed, medical racism in western Europe has already sought to conflate the two with psychiatric conditions such as Drapetomania, which was applied to enslaved Black people escaping bondage. However, this article does represent a scholarly call to those of us who identify with theorising schools and the broader processes of schooling as sites of anti-Black violence, to re-think the *fugitive*[1] (Ross 2020) possibilities that could be generated from observing how antiblackness fills *our own* scholarly gaps and silences in education – how it suffocates the multiple languages in which we might understand – or steadfastly refuse to understand – Mad[2] Blackness (Bruce 2021). More broadly across critical theories such as Postcolonialism and Feminism (including Black Feminism) there is a lack of attention paid to analysing the 'experience, the openings, the exclusions and the pathologisation of those labelled "mentally ill"' (Rose 2022, 272). The closest body of work available, according to Rose, is Mad Studies, but even then, it operates predominantly as a critique of the

medical model's limited understanding of a 'person's derangement at an individual level [where] all references to "life" are ignored or read through a psycho-pathological lens. The person is ripped from their material and social settings and treated as an isolate, a pathological one' (Rose 2022, xiii).

This is important because the recent joint report by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations is clear: the human rights of people with mental health conditions are being *violated* by the predominance and permanence of biomedical models of mental health proliferated by psychiatry. There is therefore an urgent need, globally, to fundamentally shift societies' laws and institutional and cultural practices to acknowledging and addressing the social determinants of distress that generate and contribute to poor mental health, and develop community-based, person-centred interventions for responses to people's distress (2023). Whilst this urgent call points to biomedical models' restrictiveness and ineffectiveness in understanding and responding to distress in a way that de-pathologises mental ill-health experiences, protects people's human rights and takes seriously the role society plays in undermining positive mental health, there is a fundamental *assumption of humanity* that presents a conceptual and ethical crisis for Black communities in mental health crises in Britain that have their lives ended, prematurely, by anti-Blackness. Maddening Black Crit in education, then, would acknowledge the anti-Black conditions that drive some Black pupils to distress, along with recognising distressed Blackness as a valid human experience rather than continuing to incite more layers of violence by rending their knowledges invisible.

An emerging field of inquiry, Mad Studies interrogates the 'social, medical, and legal systems through which mental "illness" is constructed and stigmatized' (Stefan 2018, para 3). Although the core tenets or boundaries are not universally shared or agreed because of its application to different intersectional (Mad) communities, interdisciplinarity is a defining strength alongside the 'archival resurrection or support of work by scholars who identify as any one of the varying terms under the 'mad' umbrella'' (Stefan 2018), and a liberatory goal in action, policy and practice (LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013). Whilst it converges with Disability Studies – including DisCrit (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri 2013) – there are clear points of divergence that are elaborated on extensively in others' works suggesting, instead, that they are *adjacent* rather than interrelated (McWade, Milton, and Beresford 2015; Morgan 2021; Stefan 2018). Key foci of Mad Studies as a social and political body of scholarship and activism are a) analysing how '*material conditions* affect madness and *influence* lived experience and care' (Stefan 2018, para 11); and b) pushing back against the social construction of mental 'health' and 'illness' by calling attention to *sanism*, 'the ways in which society values certain forms of human consciousness and being over others – that is, the preference, expectation, and command for the sane mind' (Van Veen, Ibrahim, and Morrow 2018, 259 cited in (Thorneycroft 2020). As Meerai, Abdillahi and Poole (2016) attest however, sanism exists on a continuum that interplays to a greater or lesser extent with societal privileges such as gender, class, sexuality, and religion. They make clear that sanism for people racialised as Black can be anti-Black in nature, which means the demarcation between sanity and insanity is 'always and especially compounded when it is visited on racialized bodies' (22).

Consequently, it is more accurate to acknowledge anti-Black sanism, which, 'takes into account how identity is negotiated, stripped away' (23) and its endurance in wider society continues to make it deathly to declare madness (Kinouani 2021). In compulsory

education in Britain, empirical research on Black pupils with mental ill-health histories, experiences or conditions are frighteningly absent resulting in a range of hermeneutic and testimonial epistemic injustices (Fricker 2007). Hermeneutic injustice refers to a person's inability to comprehensively interpret, articulate and understand their experiences because of a 'lack of opportunities for [them] to participate in the generation of interpretative resources for making sense of' their social world (Kinsella 2006; Medina 2012; cited in; LeBlanc and Kinsella 2016, 67).

'How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal' is regarded as a seminal text in powerfully highlighting the orchestrated levels of anti-Black violence directed towards Black pupils in the UK (Coard 1971). Specifically, it identified that 'educationally subnormal schools' were being used as a 'dumping ground' for large numbers of Black children incorrectly identified as 'subnormal' because of entrenched teacher racism. Once there, the vast majority never returned to mainstream schools and suffered academically as a result. The government was institutionally legitimating Black communities as 'deficit' with wider policies such as 'bussing' and so were not proactive in stopping this scandal.

However, 'subnormal' is a sanist term: it operates as a barometer with which to measure – and exclude – the 'normal' from the undesirable, for it is in the 'shoring up of the sane body and mind . . . [that] the loathing of mad bodies manifests' (Thorneycroft 2020, 96). Though it was widely regarded as acceptable language in its time, what does this language reveal about the contempt wider society had – and continues to have – for those deemed neurodiverse or 'mad' (Coard 1971; Richardson 2019; Wallace and Joseph-Salisbury 2022)? What if there were inevitably distressed or neurodiverse Black pupils in these schools? It is a possibility, but the lack of a body of work from, by and with these pupils mean that we rely on theorisations of experiences that seek to *generate as much distance as possible between* Blackness and madness – a form of hermeneutic injustice that prevents the development of non-pathologising discourses of distress.

This pattern of committing hermeneutic injustices by privileging medicalised discourses of distress is similarly shared in the broader mental health system. In the UK, King and Jeynes (2021) demonstrate the reluctance of the broader mental health system to consider how taken-for-granted 'White values rooted in Eurocentrism' informs views about racialised Black people that can and often does lead to heavy-handed legal controls over their bodies and minds. This leads to cycles of coercion, fear and stigma (Kinouani 2021). Consequently, 'there is an urgent need for effective coproduction, co-learning, and shared decision making based on values of liberation' that include racialised Black people (King and Jeynes 2021, 461). The voices and lived experiences of the *centrality of anti-blackness* from Black people who may experience psychological distress and suffering as a result, are virtually absent from mental health practice and research thus continuing to uphold 'dehumanising practices' (Kinouani 2021, 35).

In education, mad Black knowledges continue to be marginalised by the passive acceptance of wider predominantly psychiatric-informed ways of identifying, understanding and responding to mental distress. In essence, hermeneutic injustices permeate the research in this area, too. From the research that utilises pre-determined tools to 'survey' Black children's 'normal' or 'abnormal' thresholds for mental health experiences, and analysing the results by researchers only (Deighton et al. 2019; Klineberg et al. 2006) to cross-sectionally analysing mental health impacts that conflate Black communities in one small sample ignoring the specificities and nuances of their identities (Klineberg et al.

2006; Lereya et al. 2019); to reports that acknowledge the role ethnicity plays in mental ill-health experiences around school exclusions but not investigating that in detail when making recommendations about 'what works for reducing school exclusions among children with mental health difficulties at risk of exclusion' (Strand and Lindorff 2018); to seeing Black students' self-reporting in these pre-determined questionnaires as a limitation in need of parental or teacher corroboration of their experiences (Deighton et al. 2019; Klineberg et al. 2006) we witness the proliferation of hermeneutic injustices levelled at distressed Black pupils in Britain.

These previous studies point to the entrenchment of epistemic objectification whereby participation in research is permissible for knowledge production and transmission; however, it relegates persons from the role of active epistemic agent (or subject) to that of passive object, to be studied, observed, and in many cases, exploited. In other words, it shifts the speaker's epistemic status from informant to source of information (Fricker 2007, 132 in; LeBlanc and Kinsella 2016, 66). Therefore, a Mad Studies' perspective that recognises the saturation of antiblackness in our society *commands*, also, a social model of madness and distress (Beresford 2020; Maglajlic et al. 2022), urging us to resist *only* focusing on pupils with a formal psychiatric diagnoses as they stem from biogenetic and individualistic medical models of disability, and this might not be diagnoses sought, agreed, or shared by Black pupils (Eromosele 2020).

Testimonial injustices are also levelled against distressed Black pupils in Britain. Testimonial injustice refers to the credibility of the speaker being undermined because of the hearer's prejudice (Fricker 2007). Despite the paucity of work in this area, more contemporary research coalesces around the need for greater empirical and government policy attention needing to be paid to the specificity of Black pupils' mental health and wellbeing in UK schools, and the need for culturally appropriate specialist services (Arday and Morton 2022; Lavis 2014; MIND, 2021; Race and Racism: Mentally Healthy Schools, n. d.). Arday and Morton (2022) suggest that schools must centre the voices of distressed Black pupils (a form of testimonial justice), so that teachers have an awareness of the uniqueness of each child and how best to promote their wellbeing based on the challenges they face. Lavis (2014) argues that by understanding the specific nature and prevalence of Black groups' mental health problems, better interventions and services can be identified to support them because there is evidence to suggest there are barriers to early prevention of mental health support by Black groups. Whilst these read as positive mechanisms to redress testimonial injustices, it is only by maddening Black Crit in education can we hope to identify the pitfalls and challenges because of a lack of attention paid to antiblackness that continue to silence rather than affirm distressed Black pupils.

Therefore, maddening a Black Critical Theory perspective in education would challenge the assertions of previous research in the following ways: drawing on or centring lived experience is not an automatic antidote to the power differential that experts-by-*profession* can exert on distressed Black pupils to medicate or detain them against their will particularly when schools involve mental health services or the police (Dodd 2023). This is corroborated by the health research body, NHS Race and Health Observatory (Kapadia et al. 2022), which found that Black children are 10 times more likely to be referred to Child and Adolescents Mental Health Services via social services and youth justice teams rather than through the GP compared with White British children . . . [and]

Black people and other minority ethnic groups face harsher treatment, including being more likely to be restrained in a prone position or put in seclusion when detained on psychiatric wards. This points, then, to the issue of equivalence in knowledge production between lived experience and experts-by-profession – whose knowledge ultimately takes precedence when decisions about responses and approaches to distress need to take place, and which aspects of lived experience are being drawn on: 'the more contextual "everyday" or pathological everyday of individual illness' (Rose 2022, 184)? The result could be a form of epistemic exploitation whereby power imbalances are reinforced, through reducing Black pupils' knowledges to a form of educating dominant groups about their oppression and/or essentialising lived experiences to pre-determined and isolated elements such that pupils cannot offer more substantive contributions that would change harmful systems (Okoroji et al. 2023).

Moreover, drawing on lived experience relies heavily on distressed Black pupils being sufficiently able to make madness articulatable and communicable – all principles rooted in the values of Reason (Bruce 2021; LeBlanc and Kinsella 2016; Rose 2023) and thus, will exclude those pupils who appear to be lacking 'insight'. Similarly, it relies heavily on overwhelmingly white teachers being aware of the anti-Black sanist nature of British schools and wider society, and thus being able to sufficiently de-centre dominant discourses on mental health and distress so as not to impact their judgement of Black pupils' credibility; in essence, actively diverging from testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007). It remains unclear from the current research how teachers or Black pupils might tap into those alternative discourses because there continue to be Black communities 'wronged in their capacities as subjects of social understanding through structural prejudices which impact the production of (and access to) interpretative resources needed to make sense of their social experiences' (Fricker 2007 cited in LeBlanc and Kinsella 2016, 61). A leaked report by NHS Benchmarking (Thomas 2022) revealed that Black and mixed-raced children accounted for 36% of young people detained in the highest-level [psychiatric] units, despite representing just 11% of the population' and have the lowest access to support services, signalling that NHS mental health services are, in fact, *failing* Black children, which is yet another form of anti-Black violence and epistemic injustice.

Further, intrasectional antiblackness means that power *within Black communities* cannot be ignored as a reason why distressed Black pupils might not intentionally seek support from someone from the same culture (as well as, of course, culture-matching not always being possible because of the diversity of Black communities). This is important because anti-Black violence is amplified intrasectionally in varying ways when you layer colourism, texturism, and differently sized bodies into Black peoples' experiences of navigating sanist social worlds (Phoenix 2014; Strings 2019). The reliance on services as a response to mental distress underlines, the primary political and social concern 'to change services, not the aspects of the social that might be contributing to the "need" for services, if such there is' (Rose 2022, 47). These recommendations, then, continue to fall into the programmatic rather than structural changes outlined by Vargas (2021) thereby offering marginal to no respite from anti-Black sanism. There continues to be a need to generate alternative meanings about the significance of living with mental distress – affirming the humanit*ies* of 'living mad while Black' (Meerai, Abdillahi, and Poole 2016, 23) rather than making pleas to be inducted into the whiteness-as-normal Human family – an ontological and epistemological impossibility in an anti-Black world.

Some Mad Studies scholars have critiqued the scholarship for being too White and exclusive of the specificities of racialised and intersectional contributions (Castrodale 2017; LeFrançois, Beresford, and Russo 2016). Consequently, 'Mad Studies requires a mature capacity to deal with difference and diversity within its constituency' (Faulkner 2017 in Spandler and Poursanidou 2019, 3). One way in which Black Crit in education will re-orient Mad Studies (and vice versa), is by identifying the nature in which we understand, respond to, and treat mental health is so saturated with anti-Black violence that Black communities have spent lifetimes trying to rebut any claims to madness. Of course, the Mad Pride movements in the UK, Canada and elsewhere in the 1970s included Black communities that reclaimed madness and criticised the medical discourses. However, predominantly, the racial tropes of rage (the angry Black man or woman) have been synonymous with madness and thus, lots of critical engagements with the specificity of Blackness in education has sought to distance itself from these pathological and decontextualised labels. The challenge therefore is: how might intersectional and intra-sectional distressed Black voices be recognised as valid knowledge producers in education, and in what ways can they become *the entry point* rather than the addendum to orientations, language-use, and resources on mental 'health', 'illness', treatment, and care because they stand outside of society's normative sociability and human formations?

Suturing Black Crit in education with Mad Studies whilst recognising the frictions they inevitably generate together, could usefully inform the intra-and-intersectional anti-Black conditions that drive pupils to mental distress, the mechanisms by which pupils are characterised as 'mentally unwell' alongside the racial tropes of violence, and thus, how they are responded to and treated by education and mental health services that orient around anti-Black colonial logics of rationality and Reason. It is my argument, therefore, that critical theorisations of antiblackness *alone* in education cannot sufficiently identify the 'magnitude of the injury and the extraordinary efforts required to begin any process of meaningful redress' (Ross 2021, 229). In the 'meantime between time' (Ross 2021), my theoretical provocation is that we rupture the social and human formations by thinking anew about racialised Black mental health and wellbeing in British schools, in the context where mentally distressed Black children and young people are positioned as dually *unreasonable* and uneducable. As Rose argues, 'we would understand there is no "typical" mad individual, exemplifying a diagnostic category, but people positioned in complex spaces of intersectional differences' (2022, viii). By centring Black students as *the entry point* to how mental health, illness, treatment and care is understood can we generate effective scholarship that will de-centre anti-Black pathologising frameworks, and build interpretative resources built on affirmation of mad Black knowledges, as well as Black healing and liberation.

Conclusion

This article offers a British contribution to Black Critical Theory by developing dialogues with Mad Studies and applying their theoretical provocations and frictions to racialised Black pupils with mental ill-health histories, experiences, or conditions. First, it is important to recognise that Black pupils in distress have been an ignored group in terms of understanding their inter-and-intrasectional experiences and have been denied the opportunity to develop scholarly bodies of work and resources that de-centre medical

models of mental health, illness, treatment, and care. Therefore, it is incumbent on future critical theorisations of schools as sites of antiblackness that definitions are expanded to include those at the sharpest end, because mad knowledges are viewed as an oxymoron (Rose 2022).

The interdisciplinary dialogues between Mad Studies and Black Critical Theory also calls helpful attention to the necessity of dismantling sanism within scholarship, which would involve not using terms such as 'crazy' or 'insane' to describe human characteristics or behaviours as they remain an insult (Landry 2017; Rose 2022). I am not immune from sanist language having drawn on Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas and Harrison's (2008) framework for identifying the negative racial and gendered tropes applied to Black women in leadership roles – including the Crazy Black Bitch. By maddening Black Critical Theory, it is possible to identify the anti-Black *sanist* tropes that guide and mediate Black people's emotions as angry Black man or woman. As Bruce explains, these tropes have been synonyms for madness, but there is much to be angry about, and we must honour, fully, the important contributions of Mad Black people (Bruce 2021).

This article is not intended as a paternalistic plea to sympathise with mad Black pupils; it is a proactive call to root antiblackness out of our own scholarly silences by working with and in service to pupils purported to lack humanity and Reason. Only then, can the magnitude of antiblackness be effectively articulated and more precisely measured (Miraya Ross and Givens 2023), and the forms of redress – if indeed we are to rupture rather than repair – be sufficiently fit for purpose and sustainable. Although this is not a methodological piece with a clear set of tenets to follow – the antithesis of the inter-and -intradisciplinary fluidity required – it does raise the question: what theoretical concepts, or resources might be developed between and across Mad Studies and Black Critical Theory to amplify mad Black knowledges? This is an important next step because without effective scholarship in this area, Black students are spoken *about*, robbing them of their rights and dignity and thus, can only understand themselves and their experiences in psy-pathologising terms; they have no discipline that speaks to and with their Blackness and the significance of that in terms of racialised distress.

Notes

1. A fugitive space provides intentional radical possibilities on the margins of traditional, anti-Black school discourses.
2. Mad 'describes all persons who self-identify as such, or who have otherwise been deemed mentally ill or in need of psychiatric services', and is also used as a politicised discourse in the field of Mad Studies having its roots in the 1960s and 1970s Mad Pride movements.

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This article is written by a racialised Black woman who has been distressed by antiblackness, but who does not have a psychiatric diagnosis. In being transparent about my politics, what has

informed my mental health service avoidance is experiencing mad grief (Willer, Krebs, Castaneda and Samaras 2021) from losing two beloved family members, prematurely, after years of being *encountered by* (intentional phrasing) anti-Black psychiatric services in England.

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ORCID

Nadena Doharty http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7898-3340

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