

## **Nicole E Pietsch - “Did you think I'd crumble? Did you think I'd lay down and die? Oh no not I” : From Survivors’ Stories to Feminist Organizing ? The Continuum of Psychiatric Resistance in the Anti-Rape Movement**

Statistics reveal that two of three Canadian women have experienced sexual violence[1]. Yet despite the social context operant in sexual violence, medically labelled “psychiatric problems” – for example, substance use, self-harm and anger – are regularly defined as pathological in women survivors of sexual violence[2]. This essay identified how contemporary psychiatric conceptualizations of female survivors of sexual violence reproduce historic constructs of the hysterical female body: a biomedical phenomenon, emblematic of “the traditionally negative characteristics considered to be feminine” – for example, “duplicity, theatricality, suggestibility, instability, weakness, passivity, excessive emotionality”[3]. This work used an anti-racist, anti-oppression framework to identify feminist conceptualizations of sexual violence as strategic resistance to psychiatry – itself a sexist institution.

Acts of feminist and survivor-based resistance to psychiatry include:

- Maintaining an understanding of sexual violence that does “not locate the determinants of violence against women [with]in women’s lives or in the ways [that] they [choose to] cope”[4]
- Maintaining a focus on “the socio-political underpinnings of violence vis-à-vis service delivery” for survivors[5]
- Maintaining spaces for survivors’ voices and expertise
- Anti-rape workers’ capacity to “assert and reinforce boundaries in ways that do not exploit power differences between clients and staff”[6]
- Holding society accountable for the problem of sexual violence, as opposed to locating this problem in individual sexual offenders, survivors, and medicalized “symptomology”

[1] METRAC Sexual Assault Fact Sheet.

[http://www.metrac.org/programs/info/prevent/ass\\_fact.htm](http://www.metrac.org/programs/info/prevent/ass_fact.htm)

[2] Canadian Mental Health Association: Violence and Trauma – Impact of traumatic events upon women's mental health. <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/women.asp?CID=6153>

[3] Bankey, R. “La Donna é Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman”. *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 1. 2001, 40.

[4] Bonisteel, M. and Linda Green. “Implications of the Shrinking Space for Feminist Anti-violence Advocacy”. Presented at the 2005 Canadian Social Welfare Policy Conference, Forging Social Futures, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, 25

[5] *Ibid*, 33

[6] *Ibid*, 40