

Andrea J White - Electroshock Unplugged: An autoethnographic reflection on organizing against electroshock by a shock survivor

A major thrust of the anti-psychiatry movement in Toronto has been a focus on banning electroshock marked by events such as "Stop Shocking our Mothers and Grandmothers" held on Mother's Day. Activists have effectively made public the disproportionate usage of electroshock in women and in senior citizens. They have detailed and rightly decried the use of forced electroshock on involuntary patients/inmates. They have also highlighted and disseminated research (Andre 2009, Breggin 2008, Breggin 2005) and shock survivor narratives (Frank 2005, Funk 1999) attesting to the link between electroshock and brain damage, particularly memory loss that is often persistent and permanent. The "shocking" imagery associated with this controversial treatment which is often believed by naive publics to be rarely if ever used, serves to ignite attention and makes for effective political theatre. An unintended consequence of the imagery and horrors of this "treatment" is that it may unwittingly distract activists, researchers, and the public from other insidious psychiatric practices such as the often irreversible and life-threatening side-effects of anti-psychotic drugs and the psychiatrization of everyday life. Additionally, a hierarchizing of electroshock as the worst "treatment" in psychiatry's arsenal causing life and soul destroying brain damage may inadvertently silence those individuals who have had electroshock. This paper used autoethnographic reflections from the point of view of someone who has experienced nineteen electroshocks to consider other methods and possibilities for organizing against psychiatric violence that may be less silencing and have greater emancipatory potential for psychiatric survivors mad people, service users, and radical professionals.