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Resisting the System: Counter-Narratives in the Australian Consumer/Survivor/Ex-Patient Movement, 1970-1990

Medical history is continually being remade through evolving research approaches, shifting perspectives, and the recording of diverse narratives. Traditionally, psychiatry has been dominated by authoritative accounts; however, recent research has shifted towards a more nuanced understanding that includes the voices and perspectives of those with lived-experience of madness. One significant development in this area is the increased interest by social historians in counter-narratives of resistance, especially those found within the Consumer/Survivor/Ex-Patient (CSX) Movement. This movement, comprising individuals, organizations, and networks, opposes the potentially harmful impacts of the mental health system. These counter-narratives challenge mainstream psychiatric narratives and advocate for social change by highlighting the personal stories of those oppressed, excluded, or silenced. This presentation will detail my research to date on CSX movement counter-narratives between the 1970s to the 1990s, focusing specifically on the impact that lived-experience knowledge has on making and re-making history in this area. I draw primarily from an oral history interview conducted with Sandy Watson, whose personal experiences propelled her to publish the newsletter that became a platform for counter-narratives, personal stories, poetry, and cartoons critiquing the mental health system. The presentation will explore the evolution of the CSX movement through the 1990s, influenced by international perspectives and language reclamation, such as adopting terms like "mad." It will also examine the shift in narratives as more individuals with lived experience became employed within the mental health system. The

presentation aims to contribute to the current scholarship on madness in Australia, and on individual and collective forms of resistance in the form of counter-narratives.