

## **PATHWAYS, BRIDGES AND HAVENS: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S HEALTH**

Joanne Gallivan and Suzanne Cooper, Eds.  
Sydney, Nova Scotia: Cape Breton University Press, 2008

### **REVIEWED BY NANCI WHITE**

A number of social and psychological determinants have altered the landscape of research into women's health issues over the last 50 years, particularly the foothold gained by non-western notions of the mind/body relationship, the rise of feminist centred social science scholarship, and the inroads of a more global data base informing North American welfare state policies and their advocates. While women are the benefactors of the many positive aspects of these changes, there are alarming cracks in the social welfare edifice, particularly in terms of women's caregiving programs. The result has been that there are more and more worrisome answers to the question: "where does it hurt?"

The mainly methodological articles in this collection showcase a diversity of studies, perspectives, and topics relating to the determinants of health in specific subgroups of women: sufferers of cervical cancer, chronic illness, addiction, fibromyalgia, depression, anxieties of long term caregivers, depression, and women struggling with career and family in the legal profession.

In addition, as a salient backdrop to these in depth researches, there are critical meta essays construing the macro determinants of women's poor health: the backsliding welfare state, a malnutritive health care system budget and a non-inclusive mental health policy posing particular challenges for immigrant women.

These initiatives were first made

public at an institute in Halifax, Nova Scotia in June 2008, sponsored by the section on Women and Psychology (SWAP) of the Canadian Psychological Association. This book is a permanent record of the stimulating work and ideas presented there.

The most significant revelations of these papers was the surprisingly little amount of social support and encouragement necessary to give women the tools to fight the crucial battle against despair and self-blame in their daily lives. While it is certain that reducing public spending will increase social and economic inequalities and contribute to a lower quality of life for women in particular, and that the crumbling health care system is at the intersection of caregiving, health, stress and gender, it is also true that for most of these women studied their resilience was the best weapon in the war on women's decreased mental well-being.

Despite being enforced caregivers for all ages and all relations both here and abroad, women's ability to successfully meet the demands of multiple roles appears to lead to greater satisfaction, fulfillment, and an enhanced self esteem. Even the reality of aging, thought to be a stressor, in fact often empowers women and gives them confidence.

The complexities of even tenuously achieving a work/family/health/ life balance are readily apparent from these studies, but the most heartening conclusions come not from the revelations that music soothes chronic pain, or that worrying less about what others think of us makes us happier with ourselves, or even that new technologies offer hope and good advice for isolated caregivers needing coping strategies and mechanisms for sharing. But it is instead that the instinctual underpinnings determining women's psychic and physical resources (in the face of economic and social restraints) have given us effective tools to solve our dilemmas, in concert, by reaching out to one another, caring for one another, in person and on paper, and believing

that love and compassion will guide the way. We may not be 'the woman we used to be' or the woman we would like to be, but we are eager to get there.

Attitude is a powerful first step in her direction.

*Dr. Nanci White is an assistant professor in English who teaches "Healing Fiction" online at York University.*

### **FIRST DAY**

Malca Litovitz  
Toronto: Guernica Editions Inc.,  
2008

### **SLOW DANCING: CREATIVITY AND ILLNESS: DUOLOGUE AND RENGAS**

Malca Litovitz & Elana Wolff  
Toronto: Guernica Editions Inc.,  
2008

### **REVIEWED BY ANNA NATOLI**

There was an article called "In Praise of Useless Things" but actually I think that the human soul needs poetry and that it will always be around and that it serves a real function in our psyche.

—Litovitz & Wolff

*First Day* (2008) and *Slow Dancing* (2008a) are two books of poetry, prose, rengas, and a duologue; although the thematic content is vast I want to speak to the significance of these two publications for a special issue on Women and Cancer. Each of these texts contains traces and echoes, and at times, vivid expression of a woman's journey of navigating living, healing, surviving, and witnessing the effects of cancer on her body, her movement, her mind, the poetry; but this is not overshadowed by the tracing and echoes of living, loving,