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# **Out of Sight, Out of Mind:**

## **An Exploration of the Sexuality Experiences of Women with Enduring Mental Illness**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Masters of Philosophy  
at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the sexuality experiences of women with enduring mental illness. Sexuality is a complex and important aspect of a person's health and well-being. Yet, health professionals seem generally reluctant to discuss sexuality related issues, and few research studies have explored the sexuality of women with enduring mental illness. The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding about these women's sexuality experiences, including how they would like health professionals to address this aspect of their lives. Eight women were interviewed individually, and then together as a focus group. Working from a feminist theoretical perspective, the interview transcripts were analysed thematically. All the women considered their sexuality an essential component of their identity. However, powerful interlocking systems controlled and influenced how the women expressed their sexuality, often marginalising, and positioning them as 'Other'. The women's experiences highlight the need for mental health professionals to recognise that sexuality is an important aspect of a person's care and recovery. Mental health professionals need to offer services that enable women with enduring mental illness to openly discuss their sexuality.

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