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EDGES, MARGINS AND ROCKY PERCHES:
LIFE STORIES OF OLDER DISABLED WOMEN

A thesis
submitted to Massey University
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work
at
Massey University, Palmerston North

Wendi Wicks
1998
This is a book (sic) about edges, margins and rocky perches. It is the story[ies] of survival in these outposts as told by the residents: disabled girls and women (Rubin, in Fine & Asch, 1988: ix).
ABSTRACT

EDGES, MARGINS AND ROCKY PERCHES: LIFE STORIES OF OLDER DISABLED WOMEN

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The life stories of older disabled women are explored in this 'insider' study, as a part of dis-covering this marginalised community.

Current images of disabled women, and explanations of how their identity is conceptualised focus principally on one or another factor. But this only provides a partial or static explanations, and laws policies and practices using such concepts as a basis are likely to be less than adequate. A key issue in this study is thus how identity for disabled women, can be adequately conceptualised. An alternative approach of multiplicity, of 'in between' as articulated in writings by Sawicki (1993) and Bhabha (1994) is proposed.

Oral history interviews were conducted with seven disabled women over the age of 60. Methodology was carefully formulated to be appropriate to the situation of this marginalised group. Two central features were consultation with the community of disabled women, and partnership processes used with the women whose lives were audiotaped. Conventional oral history methods were used, with appropriate modifications to technique and technical considerations to ensure accessibility.

The interviews were analysed in terms of the themes emerging from the interviews. The themes are in three main groups. The first grouping is about invisibility, attitudes and effects arising from the attitudes. The second grouping draws out the way disability, gender, age and work were seen to relate to one another. The third grouping is about the way identity is conceived, and how seemingly-discrete parts of identity fit into a whole.

The study has implications for disabled women, and to others for whom identity does not derive solely from one group. The concept of multiple identities is therefore significant to lawmakers, policy formulators, employers and temporal and spiritual leaders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was completed with the assistance of many people, and I wish to acknowledge their generous contributions of time, energy and wisdom.

To Grace, Dianna, Karen, Ann, Sophia, Olive, and Verona, my especial thanks. Your life stories, and the occasions of their telling were wonderful. To share your stories has been a huge privilege. I salute you all.

To the community of disabled women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, who urged me to “get on with it”, I did, and here are the first fruits. They are a treasure, for us all and a trust for our futures. Their numbers will grow.

My reference group of disabled women were just as I had hoped: strong, clear-minded and supportive. Their voices and insights often kept me from going off track.

My supervisors, Ruth Anderson and Marg Gilling had an immense dedication and a strong belief in quality work. Their input meant that I moved, (or sometimes staggered) towards high standards. I have gained hugely from their input.

I had support in different dimensions from a number of individuals. In terms of ongoing personal and intellectual support, Coral Beadle gave large amounts of personal and intellectual support, and was always there for me. Mike Gourley, Robyn Hunt, Margi Crawford and Mel Bogard were other dear friends who encouraged and nurtured me.

Judith Fyfe, Hugo Manson and Linda Evans shared technical expertise and practical suggestions about oral history. Their calm and enthusiasm helped greatly. Meanwhile, Brenda Watson transcribed hours of tapes with great efficiency.

To you all, thank you.
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