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

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submitted to Massey University
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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

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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.

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