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# **‘What am I... for her?’ Feminism and Disability with/in the Postmodern**

**A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Social Policy at  
Massey University**

**Michelle Lunn  
1997**

# **Dedication**

**This thesis is dedicated to the women who participated in this study. Although you remain anonymous you are the co-authors of this study.**

# Abstract

A feminist postmodern analysis of the lives of women with physical disabilities is presented in this thesis. Postmodern feminism provides a framework through which the lives of the six women who took part in this study can be understood. Political strategies and interventions are conceptualised and interwoven with these understandings of the participants' lives. The discursive practices operating to produce the subject position 'woman with a physical disability' are described and analysed. It is argued that a postmodern feminist analytical framework is appropriate in this analysis as it is sensitive to the ways in which power works to constitute particular subjects, and alive to the multiplicity and diversity of everyday life.

The production of non-disabledness as the norm and disability as the Other to, or opposite of, this norm is called into question in this thesis. The ways in which this research project, as undertaken by a non-disabled researcher, impacts upon the production of disability as Other, or the question of, 'what am I... for her?' is central in this analysis. This thesis examines the question of, 'what am I... for her?', in relation to 'identity', 'the body' and the construction of 'the self'. A participatory research method, designed to mediate relations of power between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' provides a foundation for this study. This participatory method is designed to insure against appropriation of the voices of the research participants.

This thesis aims to contribute towards the realisation of the aims of disability politics and feminism by making links between the two bodies of knowledge that foster political interventions at all levels of the social network.

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