

**Review:** Driedger, D. (ed.) (2010). *Living the Edges: A Disabled Women's Reader*. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc. ISBN 978-1-926708-17-1.

Reviewed By Sheila Hamilton

[williamhamilton@telus.net](mailto:williamhamilton@telus.net)

Diane Driedger describes *Living the Edges: A Disabled Women's Reader* as "a vehicle for women with disabilities to share experiences with other disabled women, and with the public at large" (p. 1). I agree that this book achieves the goal of giving disabled women a voice – thus, this a book that I would strongly recommend to people unfamiliar with the lives of disabled women.

Driedger explains in the introduction that in 1993, the feminist journal *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* published a special issue on Women and Disability. Inanna Publications and Education editor, Lucianna Ricciutelli, asked Driedger to edit a disabled women's reader using the 1993 special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* as a base. The essays, poems, and pieces of visual art in the reader are divided into five sections – "Who we are on the edges", "Naming the edges: Barriers", "Violence on the edges", "With us on the edges: Relationships and sexuality", and "Challenging the edges". The collection begins with an introduction by the editor, Diane Driedger, and finishes with biographical information on the contributors.

Driedger introduced me to the work of women that I wish to learn more about. This is one of the strengths of the reader. An additional strength is that articles by women with intellectual disabilities are included. Driedger fulfilled the mandate of giving disabled women voices by doing this. Voices of people with intellectual disabilities in general, and women specifically are largely unheard in our society and in disability studies literature.

The first section of the book – "Who We Are On the Edges" – is strong. Sharon Dale Stone's article "Must Disability Always Be Visible: The Meaning of Disability for Women" is one of the articles from the 1993 special journal issue on Women and Disability that is timeless. Stone reminds us that 'the body can teach us'. I would add that 'disability can teach us'. This is the key importance of disability studies. As an emancipatory discipline, disability studies needs to benefit disabled people. However, disability studies also has the potential to benefit our communities. The community can learn and profit from listening to those of us living the edges. Charlotte Caron in the article "Living on the Edges" – which she co-wrote with Gail Christy – states that "... from the edges we can name injustice and stand in solidarity with others who do not have privilege and power in society."(p.38). Caron and Christy assert that as disabled women, they have wisdom needed by our world – wisdom such as: "the norm has to be diversity" (p. 34). Susan Wendell's article "Feminism, Disability and Transcendence of the Body" and art and poetry by Anjali Dookeran and Marie Annharte Baker persuasively close this very good section of the book.

The second section "Naming the Edges: Barriers" did not start as effectively as the first section. This is due to the use of dated articles from the 1993 special issue. Cheryl Gibson's "Margins Are Not for Cowards" and Doreen Demas's "Triple Jeopardy: Native Women with Disabilities" have important content that required updating. The contribution by Tanis Doe and Barbara Ladouceur, "To Be or Not to Be? Whose Question is it Anyway: Two Women with Disabilities Discuss the Right to Assisted Suicide" is another example of a dated article. Fifteen years later, there are many – including Canadian disabled women - who could have written eloquently about this subject. Jane Field's "Coming out of two closets" was less dated. Field states "I don't hide my disability and I don't "overcome" it, either." (p. 87). This simple

statement says much that is relevant today. Julie Devaney's "Performing my Leaky Body" is exceptional. Nancy E. Hansen's "A Delicate Balance: Chronic Conditions and Workspace" and Sally A. Kimpson's "Living Poorly: Disabled Women Living on Support" are examples of pieces that gave voice to disabled women's experiences and provided thoughtful analysis of those experiences. Not all of the articles required explanation but when they did and it wasn't included, this contributed to my perception that some articles were not as valuable.

Primarily newer pieces made the third section "Violence on the edges" strong. Maria Barile in "An Intersectional Perspective on Violence: A New Response" reminds us that the definition of violence must be expanded to include the experiences of disabled women. For example, Barile reminds us that purposefully using complex language to intimidate women with intellectual disabilities is violence. Barile challenged my ableist perspective on violence against women – informing us that aggressors against disabled women are most often "people in positions of power paid for by the state". Barile encourages us to continue to work hard for inclusion. Michelle Owen's "Have you experienced violence or abuse?: Talking with Girls and Young Women with Disabilities" is another exceptional article in this section of the book. This piece is based on relatively recent research and gives specific examples of how the results of disability stigma are experienced as violence by girls and young women with disabilities.

"With us on the edges: Relationships and sexuality", the fourth section, is a mix of timeless and out-of-date pieces. They are important pieces in a historical sense. The book would have been improved if pieces like Linda Nancoo's "Marriage-able?: Cultural Perspectives of Women with Disabilities of South Asian Origin" were either revised or accompanied by a newer commentary by the same author.

"Challenging the Edges" is the title of the final section of "Living the Edges". "Walking a Women's Path: Women with Intellectual Disabilities" and "The Freedom Tour Documentary: An Experiment in Inclusive Filmmaking" describe two interesting projects with and by women with intellectual disabilities. Josee Boulanger, Susie Wieszmann, and Valerie Wolbert's description of the making and screening of a film about institutions for disabled people challenges *from* the edges rather than challenging the edges themselves. As Margaret J. Wheatley asserts "The edge is where life happens."

Dreiger's stated goal with this book was to combine key articles from an important special issue of a feminist journal with newer pieces by and for disabled women. This goal was achieved. The result is a book giving a voice to disabled women. As such it is an important contribution to disability studies literature. There are specific pieces in this collection that I would suggest to any disability studies scholar, disabled woman, feminist, co-worker, friend, or family member.

#### Reference

Wheatley, Margaret, J. (2010). *Perseverance*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.