



## **An Introduction to Social Psychology**

### Living with Multiple Sclerosis

#### **Dr Linda Finlay:**

I set out to study the lived experience in multiple sclerosis and in my research I actually interviewed several people with multiple sclerosis. Now what was so striking was that they all had completely different stories, and I soon realised that actually it was not possible to do a study on this is what the experience of multiple sclerosis is like. It was clear to me that I needed to focus in on the individuals and kind of honour their story. And Ann was one of the individuals, and I thought she had a really important story to tell. In Ann's interview she talked about having a numbness in her hands that had spread, spread up her arm, and then it subsided, leaving her with a little bit of numbness in her fingertips. And that's pretty much all she had wrong in a way. And, and that was what I was thinking: well, it's not that bad in, in the grand scheme of things. But of course I wasn't setting aside my understandings of the medical condition not being so bad. Whereas really I needed to tune in to what Ann was feeling about this and what it meant to her. And she did something in the interview which just yanked me back to her life world and really showed, showed me, from her perspective, what it was about.

She, she described the sense of not being able to feel her babies skin properly, so that she could love them. And she did this gesture, this kind of embodied gesture, which just whoa, and I ... and I suddenly got it. I suddenly realised what ... whatever the medical status of her hand, that was really irrelevant. For her, having a little bit of numbness in her hand, meant that she couldn't touch her babies. In medical terms her symptoms were relatively minor, but her entire world was derailed. One of the valuable things that has come out in my research with Ann is, is actually working with health professionals. They do exactly what I did, which is kind of thinking: oh well, she's just got a little numbness in her fingers, no big deal. And then they switch off. And I say wait a minute, you've got a person there with a whole life, look at how her, her whole world has been disrupted. I think phenomenological research in general reminds the professionals to listen and hear what it is like for the individual.