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**IDENTITY, CULTURE AND POWER:
TOWARDS FRAMEWORKS FOR SELF
DETERMINATION OF COMMUNITIES AT THE
MARGINS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Massey University Albany, New Zealand.

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Abstract

The thesis inquires into how communities at the economic and cultural margins can become self-determining, increasing control over health and well-being. Community development as a method of agency in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Canada is investigated. The inquiry has been precipitated by a number of factors, all of which remain salient features in shaping contemporary conditions in both countries. Among these are increased inequities in wealth and health status between population groups in both countries that have accompanied globalising processes. The economic and cultural dominance of particular sectors in these societies means that public policies often fail to reflect the needs, aspirations and cultural systems of marginalised communities. In engaging with these issues, public health discourse in both countries proposes community development as a key strategy whereby disadvantaged communities might address their needs, thus realising increased levels of health and well-being. However in both countries community development remains under theorised, and the potentialities of some communities unrealised.

The research is based upon the traditions of participatory and action research methodologies, within which a variety of qualitative methods are drawn on. The fieldwork was conducted with members of marginalised communities (predominantly low-income, migrant women) participating in community development projects and community developers working with these initiatives. The New Zealand component formed the initial and most substantive part of the investigation, after which these findings were tested in Canada.

The results suggest that 'identity' and 'culture' are key elements within agency dynamics, their significance partially associated with and increased by globalising processes. Analysis of the findings reveal 'power-culture' dynamics (the various combinations of power and culture that are operative within any context) to play a central role in constituting agency relations. The critical post-modern conceptualisation of power theorised, views power-culture relations to be unstable and changing at the interpersonal and community levels of relating. Structural forms of power progressively influence power-culture relations as transitions to institutional contexts are made. The research findings have important implications for community development and public health practice within both countries. A 'power-culture' approach to community development is explicated that conceptualises a number of practice frameworks for those

undertaking community development. These are articulated from three perspectives: (1) community development methodology as practiced by communities, (2) organisational capacity to undertake development work with communities, and (3) practice issues for community developers.

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