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**Understanding Health and Illness: An
Investigation of New Zealand Television and
Lay Accounts**

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Psychology at Massey University

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Abstract

Within contemporary society, television is a prevalent source of health information. This thesis draws on insights from health psychology, media studies, and medical sociology to explore the ways that people of lower socio-economic status draw on television health coverage to construct their views on health and illness. Three primary data sets are used in an interrelated manner to investigate the complexities of this process. First, an analysis of four New Zealand health documentaries investigates the ways contemporary health concerns are covered on television. Second, an analysis of the accounts constructed in twenty individual interviews is used to explore participants' views on health, illness, and these same health concerns. Third, an analysis of four focus group discussions is used to investigate the processes through which participants construct interpretations of the health documentaries and reconstruct their views. Generally, findings indicate that the programmes, individual interviews, and focus group discussions function as cultural forums within which various shared explanations are drawn on in order to make sense of four contemporary health concerns: the health reforms, the privatisation of medical services, men's health, and aging. By exploring these processes, this thesis contributes to knowledge of the shape and focus of health coverage and the role of health communication in the refinement of lay views.

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