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AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S
INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL CHANGE

CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN COMMUNITY
WORK PRACTICE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature of community work in Aotearoa, specifically women's involvement in radical practice. The research particularly aimed to present a portrait of the elements of contemporary feminist inspired practice, as well as to investigate the significance of ideology in the participants' work.

A feminist research methodology is used, namely multiple, in depth, semi-structured interviewing. Three, two hour interviews were conducted individually with four women who work for social change. The interviews involved a reciprocal process of story telling and self reflection, where the women explored how they understand themselves and what has shaped their commitment to social change.

The women's stories encompass personal and every day aspects of life, an articulation of their vision for the future, and a commentary on aspects of broader institutional change. The research identifies aspects of the social context currently effecting community work, including the impact of libertarian political philosophies, and the ramifications of sexual abuse of children.

The insights gained are examined in the light of contemporary theories of community work and social change, in particular critical theory, feminism and postmodernism. The significance of ideology for community work practice is shown to be highly relevant for contemporary practice. Consequently, the Sayer Ideology Model (1990) of community work can be seen as having potential for the education of those working for social change.

The current directions and issues for contemporary practice are identified, generally focusing on the unique aspects of our lives which are neglected and denied by the dominant patriarchal culture. A strong emphasis on aspects of women's spirituality was demonstrated, and this was strengthened by a feminist analysis and a strong political analysis. The radical agenda in community work is shown to be alive and growing, despite the challenges of the current context.

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