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## P R E F A C E

THIS BOOK TURNS OUR ATTENTION to two important developments in human service provision. One is the changing relationship between professionals and service users. The traditional lines of demarcation between service providers such as social workers, counselors, nurses, and therapists on the one side and service users on the other side have been shifting. Old dichotomies are disintegrating, replaced by roles with overlapping goals and responsibilities. Professionals increasingly apply, and some resist applying, user-oriented sensibilities and understandings. They also work together with other professionals within managed service organizations to incorporate the voices of service users into their missions and into the way they function. Conversely, having access to and developing competence in evidence-based knowledge, service users increasingly are taking on the semblances of professional expertise, and some have become adamantly antiprofessional in the process.

The other development is the widespread feeling that human service provision has lost its way, that it is more concerned with systems of accountability, with rules and regulations, than it is with service and care. The moral terrain and working environment of both service providers and service users have been overshadowed by administrative imperatives. In the scramble to develop and implement models of optimal functioning, the seminal unit of service provision—the human service relationship—has become a nexus of cardboard figures designed through management rationalities. In this environment, the experiences of those in need as well as those of professionals in the know are turned into lifeless ghosts of what they are on their

own. The strategic quality of social interaction, the inexorable interpretations and negotiations, the shifting allegiances, and the diffuse groundings of trust and collaboration are nowhere to be found.

The chapters in this book seek to reimagine that relationship by bringing its everyday moral bearings into view, restoring its diverse meanings and complex agency. The chapters are informed by the premise that the relationship should be seen as taking shape and developing in the interactive space between those who ostensibly provide human services and those who ostensibly receive them, not by way of experience-distant images of that. The tentativeness is meant to underscore the relationship's working contours—the roles, institutional divisions, means, and aims of which are neither fixed nor clear-cut. These cannot be gauged as if set in stone or as always in tow, but rather must be comprehended as developing in the very process of providing and receiving services. This foregrounds fluid and morally variegated terrain and cultural contradiction, whose essential qualities are rendered invisible, if not otherwise deemed irrational, in experience-distant perspective.

The service relations considered in the book range from child welfare, addiction treatment, social enterprises, and mental health to physical disability, doctoring, dementia, and palliative care. Bringing into focus everyday life, the chapters show in compelling detail how the workings of service provision can be at considerable odds with what is presumed in model-inspired welfare policies. An experience-near approach speaks loudly to the working, not the prescribed, significance of structures and interests. At the same time, the chapters are not blind to the difficulties that an experience-near approach reveals. If anything, they recommend an enduring openness to, and critical reflection on, the competing rationalities of the service relationship.

The approach of this book does not stand comfortably in the rush to rationalize the service relationship, the aim of which is to turn human troubles into discrete, assessable, and treatable problems. It is instead an approach that is centered in the grounded practices of living and relating to one another in service and care. Some refer to it as an everyday-life perspective. Characteristically, others resist reifying it with a label and simply take the view that nothing in life is inherently normal, troubling, or problematic, but rather derives its meaning and is rendered actionable in the course of living. It is an approach that features service providers and service users

as collaborative agents of their affairs, not privileging one over the other in the search for understanding and effectiveness. The approach upholds the primacy and lasting value of the service relationship, affirming the productive role it plays in the work and lives of providers and users.

The chapters are supported by research dealing with human relations at the organizational crossroads of service intervention. While most of them analyze specific bodies of empirical material, others are rooted in long-standing programs of empirical work. All draw inspiration from experience-near studies of subjective understanding and the interactions of providers and users. None focuses exclusively on political debates or formal policy agendas, yet each is critically attuned to issues of practice stemming from them. None takes social problems for granted, but instead—in the breathing room that practice provides—they turn our attention to the reflexive linkages between the troubles and problems that enduringly traipse through the service terrain.

The book is organized into four parts. The introductory chapter in Part I begins from the perspective that feelings persuade us as much as reason. Titled “From the Iron Cage to Everyday Life,” it presents in deliberate textual detail what it refers to as a “lurking” image of organized service relations. Drawing from Max Weber and Franz Kafka, who wrote in the early twentieth century and were key makers of the image, the chapter traces how its administrative imperatives have resonated through the sentiments of related concerns in the decades that followed. The imperatives still ring loudly in debates about how to conceptualize the service relationship. The chapters of Part II take up the views and actions of service provision from the standpoint of users. Their distinct attitudes and stakes in intervention are front and center. The chapters of Part III deal with everyday facets of professional work, from arts-based interventions to what the authors of Chapter 11 call “civil disobedience.” Professionals are presented as regularly crossing the ostensible divides of service provision, from shifting the employment of service providers to client control, to methods for sustaining relational citizenship in dementia care. The concluding chapters, which make up Part IV, present illustrations of reimagined service relationships, from the border crossings of mental health self-healing groups to the ineluctable identity shifts and border work of all service venues.

Taken together, the chapters reimagine the service relationship by making visible the working relevancies of service delivery. Whatever the

concern—be it the day-to-day interpretation of policy, dealing with organizational efficiency, managing diverse understandings, or applying professional ethics—their standpoint is that there is a basis in everyday life for viewing these as matters of practice. Everyday life's diverse rationalities cannot be subject to systems of accountability that erase difference, ambiguity, and ambivalence. They demand a form of accountability whose point of reference is the ordinary equity and novel sensibility that undergird all sides of the relationship. This is not to say that reimagination can be free of contradiction, but rather that it must resist approaches that elide it.