



Social Working: An Ethnography of Front-line Practice

Gerald A.J. de Montigny

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In this unique work directed at social workers, Gerald A.J. de Montigny maintains that they, along with other professionals, create an 'institutional' reality through their day-to-day practices. He traces the practical ways that social workers, when involved in child protection, struggle to produce a world which can be ordered, systematized, and subjected to their powers. It is a penetrating and sensitive analysis of how social workers in their everyday practice make sense from a confusing collection of case details to create organizationally defined problems and cases.

De Montigny uses the tension between his experience of growing up 'working class' and the difficult process of becoming a social worker to explore the practical activities professionals use to secure organizational power and authority over clients. This tension has forced him to confront the dilemma of how to stand on the side of clients when standing inside professional and organizational realities.

In the first half of the book, de Montigny focuses on the practices social workers use to produce a universalized professional form of knowledge. He examines social workers' use of ideological practices; fetishization of the social work profession; insertion of details from clients' lives into discursive order; accounting for front-line practice as a problem solving scientific practice; and naming of their own frustrations, conflicts, tensions, and pain as professionally manageable phenomena. In the second half of the book, based on his own work in child protection, he systematically examines how such reality-producing practices come to be expressed as child protection. He develops a synthetic account of his social work interventions on cases of child abuse and neglect. This book should be read by all practitioners and students of social work. It is an original and practical application of theoretical arguments to the everyday reality of social work.

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