

FOREWORD

Work, Occupations and Professionalization: Cultures of Coercive Credentialism

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The professionalization of work is ideologically grounded in evolving traditions of modernity, capitalism, and liberalism. Modernity, as an ideology with its emphasis on both the “rational” and the division of labour, has impacted on work to such an extent that relations have been reduced to a rational calculation of “social value” (contractual considerations/exchanges) that justifies distorted claims of efficiency by armies of specialized technicians. In addition, professional values and beliefs have exaggerated forms of social solidarity which now woefully displace and replace any vestiges of authentic collective consciousness. Professionalization contributes to the classification and division of occupational concepts, the analysis and synthesis of work rules, the testing of performance indicators—all of which are calibrated according to a “rational” logic of instrumentality. The organization, allocation, and integration of widely dispersed work activities reflect particular social orders, that is, a socialized acceptance of the balance obligations and expectations.

Relying on rationalist methodologies and so called “objective” indicators, professions strive to ensure highly specialized roles and the diversity of functions guided by incorporating (a) a hierarchy of authority; (b) an impersonality of rules that explicitly state duties, responsibilities, standardized procedures and conduct of office holders; (c) rules of conduct that define achievement and trained competencies; (d) a specialized division of labour; and e) efficiency, that is, appointments to these offices are made according to technical superiority. Consequently, work is increasingly fragmented into autonomous spheres of specialized and mechanized knowledges. Fuelled by the “technical as rational,” the ethics of integrity in professions relate to self-serving functions of surveillance (control of information) that regulate and incorporate fully the mental and material production processes. Professionalism has also produced a set of disciplinary institutions, practices, and discourses which legitimate relations of ruling. Likewise, the “professionalization of work” refers to an organized and recognized constellation of values replete with norms, roles, and attitudes that are specific to technical activities.

Professionalism, the normative conceptualization of the cultural impact on work, is a historically transmitted pattern of symbolic meanings that communicate, perpetuate, and develop “forms of knowledge.” This inscription of dominant ideologies (narratives) frames opportunity structures that support self-serving professional occupational cultures which in turn impact on the text of identities, social representation, and the sense of belongingness that stresses shared attributes around which group members coalesce. This collective wisdom guides and validates perspectives and activities. The emerging collective identity normalizes attributes and images that confer essentialized master identities based on credentials, and the appropriation of technical knowledge and experiences. These values further reproduce a symbolic framework for the development and maintenance of particular notions of collective and individual self-esteem as well as offer a collective solution to actual and perceived occupational strains. Professionalism enhances group standards, behaviours, and values that establish hierarchies, membership requirements, informal rules, and coping strategies (accommodation and resistance) vis-à-vis the “outsider.” Symbols, rituals, mythologies, rhetorical devices weigh considerably in recruitment, retention, and promotion of various role incumbents.

Herein lies the problem to which *Work, Occupations and Professionalization* turns its attention in a timely, critical, and bold manner. This edited volume inquires into the social organization of professions especially in terms of cultural manipulations, legitimation performances, and frames of reference that justify professional practices and protect privilege. In addition, this book challenges marketplace conditions, professional standing, “de-politicizing” strategies and the role of financial compensation. For Bosanac and Jacobs the culture of professional interests and complicity have diverted attention away from the more enlightened voices and action of members and their respective client groups. Economic as well as bureaucratic convenience often shapes the delivery of “knowledge.” Despite the gaze of professionalism with its mimetic gestures of benevolence, there are inherent problems associated with accountability, independence, and credentialism that conceal as much as reveal how professionalization has become fluid, loose, and continually emerging webs of interaction characterized by shifting membership, limited involvements, role discrepancies, norm ambiguities, incomplete rules, and change.

Keeping this in mind, Bosanac and Jacobs, ask readers to recognize the tensions and contradictions that underpin conventional notions of professionalism and urge readers to explore the more transcendent possibilities of critical pedagogies. Transcendence, the movement beyond established practices, roles and expectations of the profession, situates professions in the struggle for social justice. Specifically, this book introduces the reader to the critical issues, important trends, theories, and various interdisciplines in the current manifestation of professions. Contributors to this volume examine critically the emerging theoretical issues, the transformation of professions and the problematic issue of credentialism. Imbricated within these

fruitful analyses are themes of hegemonized market mentalities, mainstream or “commonsensical” concerns, as well as meaningful comparative perspectives on this diverse body of scholarship. This project interrogates accommodative and challenging discourses that discipline the constitution and contributions of extant practices and policies that inform professionalization. This much needed study challenges liberal tinkering, extant thinking that serves as resources for maintaining the “margins” for the “other,” for creating contagious mythologies and for ensuring compliance with social injustices.

This anthology is a skillful, well-informed, balanced, and compelling presentation of traditional and contemporary theoretical concerns that confronts critically the professionalization of work. This highly accessible book approaches eloquently competing and complementary approaches that guide the ideological and institutional constitutions of professions by journeying beyond the academic issues to implicate praxis and policy concerns, emphasizes which will provide some fascinating classroom discussions. Briefly, this book is a powerful engagement that finally moves research on professions well beyond its ethnocentric borders towards a more inclusionary framework of comparative and interdisciplinary thought. Further, this text moves beyond prevailing normative claims by investigating conceptually the reproduction of the professional “self.” The inquiries into professional socialization implicate social, political, and economic struggles that reflect fundamental issues of inequality. That is, institutional forms of socialization are examined in terms of their respective relationship(s) with the state, political economy, law, and culture. The acting subjects and subjected actors, within the cultural calculus, are linked to hegemonic practices. Individually and collectively the chapters herein enrich our conceptual appreciation of the dynamics of conflict and contribute to an understanding of generic processes that extend beyond the specific context of professionalism. The studies comprising this volume demonstrates vividly how creativity pushes the field forward by interrogating privilege, deference to authority, and the arrogant imputations of dangerous defiance in the workplace.

The thought provoking and stimulating chapters, provide a solid contribution to critical thought and research by addressing pervasive mediations of commodity exchanges and market conditions. Professionalism as a mediated communication of mass society, administered politically and founded culturally, forms and informs identities in relation to commoditized work. Prevailing ideologies are unravelled within significant interactions, social organizations, and social structures. In an effort to address and enlighten these issues the editors have constructed a specific set of readings and arguments, involving an engagement with the themes of intersectionality. There is also clear evidence throughout the anthology of an attempt to hold on to a broad theoretical epistemology in order to elucidate as well as resolve a number of thorny issues which to date have obfuscated theoretical integration. The editors present a compelling and innovative approach to the use of professions as a resource

for the production of consensus, professions as contested terrains, and professions as ideological processes. The arguments are articulated within a plethora of themes based on social location, hybridity, cross-cultural communication, narratives of ideological climates and the mediations of culture and professional organizations which together create a system of meanings or moral/control narratives. Professions defined by dominant discourses determine thought, affect, enjoyment, meaning, and identity and various exigencies. The sensitivity to details of interpretations is a refined one, and it enables readers to yield some very significant insights and to open up a key of contemporary theorization in a potentially far-reaching way. Professions as a constituted complex set of mediations that interconnects consciousness and society, as well as culture and economy, is a view with which I fully concur. I thus welcome this anthology as a novel attempt to demonstrate the character of a hitherto neglected subject by illuminating the enduring and complex influences on decision-making practices of professionals.

This book should be required reading since it challenges the congested closures of conventional canons characteristic of so many mainstream edited volumes. I congratulate the efforts of the editors and contributors who complement each other in defying the defining gaze of professional authority and for overcoming the debilitating ethnocentrism that ignores universal inequalities of class, sexual orientation, race, and gender.