

# Preface

This book seeks to develop and explore an integrated theoretical framework called the role framework, which explains how involvement in mental health consumer-run organizations (CROs) can promote recovery. Given the book's emphasis on theory, it will primarily appeal to researchers who study consumer-run organizations and self-help. However, parts of this book can be useful to several other audiences. Students studying psychiatric diagnoses can use the accessible journalistic life history narratives and documentary photography to gain insight into the lived experience of developing and recovering from mental health problems. Rather than categorizing people with descriptions of symptoms, the narratives provide an insider's perspective on the development of mental health problems and the process of recovery. Mental health consumers may find the narratives inspiring because some of the featured consumers have made great progress towards recovery and also useful because the narratives share problem-solving strategies that others have used successfully.

This book may also appeal to several audiences outside of those directly interested in CROs, mental health problems, and recovery. Social psychologists may be interested in my novel application of identity theory. Researchers interested in theory development may be interested in my use of focused questions to develop the role framework. Qualitative researchers may be interested in the use of journalistic narratives as a research methodology because narratives can help to bridge the gap between research and practice by providing research findings that appeal to a broader audience.

Before readers judge the accuracy, validity, and usefulness of this work, it is helpful to consider several issues. First, I have an unique perspective that has substantially influenced the contents of this book, just as all writers' perspectives influence their work. My hope is that readers judge my work on its believability after critical inspection rather than the pureness of its objectivity. My subjective perspective has influenced this research in innumerable ways. Although I do not have insight into all of my subjective influences, I explain some important influences in the following paragraphs.

First, when I began writing this book, I was convinced mental health consumer-run organizations (CROs) were a good idea. The intention of this work is

not to prove that CROs are effective. Instead the studies presented in this book were intended to generate a robust theoretical for understanding how CROs can help to promote recovery. The efficacy and cost effectiveness of CROs remain important research questions. As such, I review the relevant research in this book, which makes it clear CROs can be beneficial. This book focuses on understanding how CROs can be beneficial.

Much of the research presented in this book is grounded in the insider's perspective, which has an important impact on the results. The people who go to CROs believe they are helpful; otherwise they would not attend. Further, members create and maintain an organization out of their own free will, making them unlikely to criticize the organization's existence. Thus, consideration of the insider perspective provides a favorable understanding of CROs. This book seeks to develop a generalizable theoretical framework that remains congruent with an insider's perspective, explaining both the nature of the CRO participation experience and how it changes the people who experience it. However, it is important to note that I do not intend to glaze over the problematic realities of CROs. Like any organization, CROs face formidable challenges and this work addresses important problems and limitations of CROs.

A second issue to consider before critically digesting this work is that I do not believe our social world is grounded in objective reality in the same way as physical objects. Relationships between people are abstractions. They are fundamental to our existence and yet each mind perceives each relationship differently. Ideally people reach a shared understanding of their relationship, but that understanding changes over time and is never entirely synchronized. Thus, there is no way to objectively study the social world behind our social behavior. Analysis will always be the product of rationality and logic grounded in subjective experience and perspective. Although this work is not objective, I hope it remains useful. My reasoning and logic in the development of a theoretical framework is as much art as science. Nevertheless, I hope readers find the work to be based on sound evidence and logic rather than vacuous rationalization.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-0699-0>

Consumer-Run Mental Health  
Framework for Recovery

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2012, XV, 217 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-0699-0