Positioning a Post-professional Approach to Studying Professions

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Abstract

The term post-professional has had minor use outside sociology but has not been deployed within the sociology of professions. A post-professional approach is argued to have major utility for studying professions, against the backdrop of the traditional trait and power approaches. First, a range of empirical changes in recent decades, such as the conjunction of professions and organisations, constitutes new data needing new theorisation. Second, inspection of changing theoretical configurations in these decades indicates the field has multiple contributory perspectives available. Finally, several key elements of a post-professional perspective are outlined, indicating potential for elaboration of the idea.

Introduction

Sociology of professions remains a significant site of intellectual endeavour and engagement today despite having lesser visibility than topics in the academy such as post-modern themes, globalisation, pluralist theorising or the politics of identity. Sociological inquiry, as with other fields, changes foci through time, and disciplinary boundaries in the academic marketplace are permeable. The study of professions and professionalism is a strong candidate for cross-disciplinary investigation. Contributing positively to such conversations, however, requires a greater refinement of a distinctively sociological contribution that can be made from the standpoint of sociology of professions.

This article proposes the notion of post-professional as a strategic new framework for the sociology of professions. It is argued here that approaching the sociology of professions post-professionally offers fresh interpretive possibilities at both theoretical and empirical levels. Analysing occupational expertise within a post-professional perspective
removes the restrictive vision that traditional trait sociology of professions absorbed from functionalist theorising. The present proposal stands in contrast to the two most identifiable theoretical perspectives in the field, preferring to draw upon the multiple perspectives available today. These two perspectives are the trait approach which was dominant for much of the twentieth century, especially in North America, and the power (or power/conflict) approach which emerged subsequently in the 1970s in opposition to the inadequacies of trait theorising. The power approach chronicled types of self interest (occupational closure, status and economic rewards) as key drivers of professional action, instead of unreflectively accepting the definitions of professions themselves, the idea that altruism and public service defined who could really be counted as professions, as the trait approach had done.

Today the trait model is considered inherently ideological in presuming professional goodness. It fell out of favour along with functionalist theory, having been savaged by the power critique in the 1970s. From a New Zealand perspective, the time-bound and culturally specific assumptions of the trait model had severe limitations cross-nationally as an analytic tool. Its benchmark importance, however, persists today: it continues as the de facto model of professionals themselves, there is some covert use within academia, and it is self-consciously used as a template by professionalising groups. The present-day status of the power approach is less obvious, and will be returned to later in this article.

Trait theory claimed professions could be defined by cataloguing traits (the number varied) said to constitute such occupations. Flexner (1915) and Greenwood (1957) are often cited. Pavalko’s (1971) list of traits provides a window: (1) theory or intellectual technique, (2) relevance to basic social issues, (3) substantial training period, (4) motivation - the service orientation, (5) autonomy, (6) sense of commitment, (7) sense of community, and (8) code of ethics. Absence or presence of these characteristics positioned an occupation along a professional-non-professional continuum. Wilensky’s (1964) article entitled “The professionalisation of everyone?” used a five step chronological sequence to identify professions according to how far along the sequence they had progressed: (1) a substantial body of people begin doing full-time some activity that needs doing, (2) a training school is established, (3) a professional association is formed, (4) the association engages in public agitation to win support of the law for the protection of the group, and (5) a code of professional ethics is developed. The cultural and time-bound specificity of these definitions was not appreciated at the time, but gave significant ideological and empirical limits to the accuracy of these definitions (Vollmer and Mills, 1966). They were imbued with such modern Western meta-narratives as progress, individualisation, formal rationality, scientific epistemology, but overlooked inherent contradictions.

As the main twentieth century perspective in the sociology of professions, the trait approach provides the departure point in proposing any new interpretive or integrative perspective in the field. Even today it is “continuously sedimented into sociological research and practice” (May, 2007, p. 32). Having said that, however, the proposal here is not an oppositional stance either, such as that attributed to the power approach. There is a proper place for functional analysis. Any full explanation of professions greatly benefits from identifying and describing how components function in relation to one another, in manifest and latent forms, and tracing consequences within the larger social systems of which they form a part. It is simply that explanation is always more than the sum of functional description. For professions as other social phenomena, this more can be made up, as it was during the ascendancy of the trait approach, by ideological gloss masquerading as factual description.

As an example of the interplay of social theory and everyday civil society, Freidson’s (1970) concept of professional dominance challenged the triumphalism of 1960s American medicine, at the same time as it challenged the tidiness of trait theory. In New Zealand, feminist challenges to Herbert Green’s medical research eventuated in the cervical cancer inquiry (Coney, 1988), paralleling the debates and pressures for change occurring elsewhere in first-world countries across many professions. Tensions implicit in the Green scandal, including the
god-like status of top professions versus performance/quality assurance measures, individualisation of the lay-profession relationship versus national and sectoral contexts, and client rights versus expert knowledge, paralleled the modernist meta-narratives presumed within the academic sociology of professions trait model.

At the same time as considering the contribution that a post-professional sociology of professions might make to other disciplines, the concern here is to articulate a common sense of purpose in studying professional occupational groups sociologically, for those within the field itself. The politics of identity, whether ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability or class, are endlessly played out in professional lives and settings. Further, the proportion of the professional workforce employed in large complex organisations inscribes those professional identities and responses in organisational contexts to an extent and in ways that may in the future be regarded as characteristic of this century.

A post-professional approach builds on contemporary insights and is not a challenge to the detailed work undertaken from a range of perspectives such as critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism, neo-Weberian, and cultural/post-colonial analysis; quite the contrary. Although such perspectives have not all been equally focused on professions and professionalism, the concepts they deploy have provided a wealth of new insights into professions, power and knowledge in modern society. Together such insights constitute an alternative voice to the hegemonic modernist trait approach to sociology of professions. This alternative comprises multiple voices in fact, since the concerns and critiques of such current perspectives can be quite different from one another, and at points incommensurable.

In proposing a post-professional approach this article aims to preempt suggestions that this merely adds to an overcrowded category of posts in social science debate. The intransigence of the dominant model and the diverse critiques and analyses being made today create the changing theoretical landscape of the recent past affecting analysis of professions. We are now post the sociology of professions trait paradigm, yet it continues often semi-invisibly to encroach on analysis. It is the continuing engagement with, and challenge to, the presuppositions of the standard trait model that invites description of contemporary sociology of professions as post-professional.

The proposal for a post-professional framework for the sociology of professions is developed here in three parts: changing empirical data; changing theoretical terrain; and foci of a post-professional approach. In the next section, eight areas of change concerning professions are used to argue that these new social realities increasingly undermine the credibility of trait suppositions, and are also sufficiently diverse to exceed the individual scope of currently available paradigms. The middle section mounts the argument that inconclusive meta-positioning of theoretical change in the sociology of professions constrains clearer analysis of professions and professionalism as well as limiting exchange with other disciplines. The final section identifies four key elements in post-professional sociology of professions serving as a more satisfactory basis for theorising professions and professionalism today.

Changing society, changing professions

The empirical changes within and around professions and professionalism mean the phenomena being investigated are rapidly changing even as they are being studied. Such changes occurring within late-modern society as we enter a new global information age create an imperative for new theoretical framing and explanations. Many of these recent changes, a selection of which is listed below, are being chronicled in a variety of disciplines including sociology, and this development also calls for a new integrative post-professional perspective.

The labels professional and professionalism are in ever-widening use. Rightly or wrongly what these words are used to mean, or are taken to mean, in everyday and other contexts is of importance just by the generality of such usage. A New Zealand example is Burns’ (2007) study of media usage of these terms. Claims of commodification of expertise (de-professionalisation), the emergence of new professional claimant groups (e.g., public relations; town planners), expected attribution of professional qualities to new functions and roles (e.g., professional...
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sportsmen and women); and explicit commercialising dimensions of professional practice, sometimes related to earning capacity (business professionals) and sometimes seen in terms of the cost of government provision of services (professional performance), all involve structural and discursive change. Traditional sociology of professions does not adequately theorise them.

Boundaries between professional and non-professional occupations continue to shift. As a wider range of occupations and functions adopt the appurtenances of professional activity, mistakes or misbehaviour of individual professionals is newsworthy. The Arthur Andersen auditing failure in the Enron scandal has parallels in legal conduct in New Zealand’s Winebox enquiry (Molloy, 1998). Expansion of tertiary education, and correspondingly the number of professionals in the latter part of the twentieth century, means that professional advice or consultation is often provided to persons who are equally or more expert/professional in another sphere. The simple dichotomy of lay-professional (May, 2007) in earlier conceptions of professions has now been disrupted in a number of ways: the multiple professionalities within which modern people exist; countervailing forms of expertise engaging with professionals; and new forms of lay informational resources.

The internal constituencies of even mainstream professions are changing. The most apparent of these changes is the feminisation of the professions. Main professions today have at least half their incoming membership comprising women even in traditional masculine occupations like law. Early-modern professionalisation excluded or marginalised women's involvement in professions (Witz, 1992), so the consequences of this fundamental shift in professional membership will continue to work through. Equally important in the expanded membership numbers of professional groups is the broader socio-economic range from which professional recruitment is made, and also the more diverse ethnic communities now represented. Again notwithstanding rearguard actions, these are fundamentally new pressures, the consequences of which have decades yet to work through as these cohorts move up the professional age profile. Fletcher's (2001, p. 6) post-structural/critical study of how women engineers' advice to colleagues is “disappeared” in masculine environments where only own project completions count, is an example of shifts and splits in this kind of work. Conventional trait sociology of professions has been blind to these particularistic features within a universalistic ideology.

The boundaries between professions and organisations are less sharply defined than in the past. Professional and employee status can no longer be considered opposites as they were often portrayed in the mid-twentieth century (Scott, 1966). The substantial proportion of professionals working as employees within governmental, commercial and non-profit sector organisations today contradicts such formulations of incompatibility. The profoundness of this change, which is linked to the others described here, is a key aspect of post-professional sociology of professions. Tensions reflecting this profession-organisation conjunction include: positioning of technical/professional versus managerial authority; increased numbers of women professionals versus re-gendered hierarchies within organisations; increased number and size of corporations versus access and client rights; expansion of tertiary qualifications versus commodification and de-professionalising pressures; professional productivity versus compliance and quality assurance. The model of an independent, largely self-employed, professional dispensing disinterested advice in a one-to-one relationship continues to have tremendous importance as an ideal and ideology (May, 2007), but should not be confused with the contours of contemporary professional practice in organisational settings. Further elaboration of this as one of the bases of a post-professional framework is made later in this article.

New technologies continue to alter the relativities of occupational power and skill within existing groups, and between groups (Abbott, 1988). Professions (medicine being the exemplar) have shown longstanding adeptness in institutionalising skill domains and absorbing new ones into their existing frameworks (e.g., Willis, 1983, p. 26-43). However, new patterns of technological innovation continue to pressure existing divisions of labour in the de-skilling of professional work or creating demarcation of subaltern functional areas within professional work. Computer technology, the most far-reaching technological change,
includes not solely electronic equipment and technical measurement (e.g., MRI, DNA, geodesic surveys), but the capacity to manage, audit, and communicate professional knowledge, information and expectations. Applying Braverman’s (1974) deskillling thesis rather than Pavalko’s (1988) trait model to New Zealand small-business use of accounting software, and the dramatic reduction of accountants’ expert domain, illustrates the need to go beyond the capacity of conventionally understood theories of professions and professionalisation.

Managerialism and professionalism have been the two most successful occupational projects of the twentieth century (Martin, 1998). Their conjunction in late modernity is a key element in the legal-rational society Weber foresaw, even as contradictions can also be seen: on the one hand efficiencies and client service delivery are maximised, yet on the other as O’Neill (2002) describes, compliance regimes quickly stultify productive professional performance. Theorising the empirical conjunction rather than unsatisfactorily persisting in assertions of simple oppositionality or difference is necessary. The role of New Zealand government’s Pharmaceutical Management Agency (Pharmac) shows these dual modes of contestation and authority in setting Ministry of Health spending on medicines. Regular iterations of media and lobbying controversy concerning Pharmac’s operations (e.g., access to Herceptin for breast cancer) attest the boundary significance of its function.

Emerging economies follow modernising paths that only partly correspond to the Western account, leapfrogging some stages, and developing educational, regulatory and labour force practices to meet their own needs and compete in the global marketplace (Johnson, 1973). Professional training in third-world countries is often marginalised by Western technical and regulatory standards (e.g., Sri Lankan doctor retraining); drain of professionals to first-world countries; and by third-world countries producing graduates for export (e.g., Philippines nurses). What does it mean in terms of professionalism when two thirds of the population go on to tertiary training as they do in the United States (Derber, Schwartz and Magrass, 1990): is more professionalism created, or is it diluted? Further sequences of change are occurring, like the export of professional jobs to less expensive countries (e.g., IT professionals in India); the production of services in first-world countries from third-world countries (e.g., Indian English tutor in India instructs children in the United Kingdom); navigation of national restrictions on the production of first-world professional services in third-world nations (e.g., law; architectural design); and travel of first-world clients to receive their professional care in third-world professional hands (e.g., medical tourism). These changes are well beyond the scope of conventional models of professions.

The role of central states has been undertheorised in analysing professions in the Anglo-American literature. Historically informed studies of professions have made the best assessments of state involvement (Berlant, 1975; Burns, 1979; Johnson, 1973; Krause, 1996). Writings by sociologists in the continental European tradition put a different perspective on the role of the state in actively defining its own needs and how these were to be met through professional groups (Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990; Evetts, 2003). More pragmatically, the current role of the state in introducing new compliance and governance regimes and quality assurance legislation or regulations for major sectors in society again challenges the adequacy of the autonomous profession trait model (Noordegraaf, 2004). Such programmes are established across traditionally demarcated professional boundaries, despite objections. Two New Zealand examples, The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 and the parallel Social Workers Registration Act also in 2003, are illustrative of similar shifts in other first-world countries. The cost of professional services directly or indirectly funded by the state reflects a number of tensions: the desirability of national provision versus taxation funding (e.g., health, education, welfare); the economics of monopoly versus managing quality and risk (Carillo and Zazzaro, 2001); or scandals of institutionalised poor practice versus rewarding mid-level social propriety (Molloy’s 1998 case study of one large New Zealand law firm). Adequately theorising professions and comfortably including the role of the state sits beyond the passive capacity of trait descriptions.

This sample of contemporary changes demonstrates the need for re-orienting sociology of professions, not simply on a concept-by-
Few would disagree that trait functionalism dominated sociology of professions until around 1970 in Anglo-American jurisdictions, particularly in the United States, though professions in European sociology have been positioned differently and recent development of theoretical focus there has not made the same assumptions. Further, most commentators would identify the decisive challenge in the 1970s by what came to be known as the power or conflict approach. Freidson (1970) and Johnson (1972) on either side of the Atlantic led the way with new attention to historical data. Freidson’s notion of professional dominance by autonomous physicians within a medical division of labour, and Johnson’s identification of professionalism as simply one form of occupational control in the producer-consumer relationship, opened the way to highlight power, self-interest, the economic and cultural consequences of professions - a quite different vocabulary than expertise, altruism, and public service (Larson, 1977). Illich’s (1975) critique of hubris, wealth and power in organised medicine contributed to this watershed period of broad social critique of the pillars of modernity.

The ethnocentrism of the trait approach (to not even bother) to account for historical, cultural, global or national variations, became evident. The implication from conventional discussions is that there has been a succession of paradigms or perspectives in the field. This seems uncontroversial until questions are raised about what is less clear: what does the power approach encompass, or during what period was the power approach active? Such questions are not however asked. Researchers working in the sociology of professions today more usually conceptually frame their work by drawing on ideas from the paradigms mentioned previously such as critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism, neo-Weberian, or cultural/post-colonial analysis. Implicit in such choices is the absence of selecting concepts from the power approach. Sometime between the 1970s and today, the power approach has dropped out of formal utilisation. It continues to receive acknowledgement, but not self-conscious use. This oddity is significant. Three responses illuminate the positioning of power and conflict in recent decades.

Changing theoretical situation

This section argues that the changing theoretical domain invites a similar call to that presented by this empirical evidence. A basic contribution that post-professional sociology can make to the sociology of professions field is to challenge the periodisation of theory in the field. From a post-professional perspective, the power approach is not a period after the trait era, and possibly before some other period. The advent of the power approach is better seen as the breaking edge of the ontological security that trait theory’s self-approbation gave to professionalisation in modern Western society up to around 1970. This challenge thus centres on the location and interpretation of how the power approach is positioned in relation to the trait approach and alternative perspectives. This common periodisation fails to appreciate the inputs of varied perspectives within social science today, and thus invites misperception of the empirical data sketched. This in turn reduces the ability of academic investigation to satisfactorily theorise contemporary professions and professionalism.
responding to European Community evolution; and exchanges such as the International Sociology Association Research Committee 52 on Professional Groups, and similar fora.

Moving towards a new integration

Programmatic statements illustrate the uneven theoretical journey of the field. MacDonald’s (1995) attempt to answer his own earlier question is one of the few publications aiming to theorise the sociology of professions field in general. His chapters covered necessary ingredients to integrate contemporary sociology of professions: social stratification; cultural context; professions and the state; patriarchy and professions; knowledge and the professions. His proposed synthesis (1995, p. 32) of earlier work around the idea of professional project is a major advance, and it is incorporated here in the final section. But it can be argued that while he identified key components needed in a new perspective, the outline promised more than it delivered, not fully addressing the empirical evidence sociology of professions theory faces. As such, this is a movement towards a perspective rather than the provision of one. MacDonald’s (1995, p. x1) misguided belief in “the demise of functionalism” was balanced to a considerable extent by his caution about the supposed coherence of the power approach, noting quite diverse strands within the rubric, and the unsuitability of the term applied generically to “nearly all post-functionalists” (p. 5). This is an important insight. However, Macdonald (1995, pp. 5-6) cavilled at Johnson’s typology suggesting that it had been less productive of research than Freidson’s version which “attained considerably more popularity” in the United States. This favouritism appears to have stood in the way of his programme of developing a synthesis in the sociology of professions, such a view creating distance from what the power approach offered rather than engaging in development from it.

Producing a tidy chronology

Another programmatic statement can be found a decade later in Epson’s (2006) outline of what she termed a “conceptual overview” of the field. Research on professions, she said, can be divided chronologically into

Holding on to earlier trait analysis

In the post-professional challenge, Pavalko is an uncommon example in sociology of promoting the old model so publicly. His confident, unreflexive reiteration of the trait model of professions was published at the very time of the decisive shift to centring conflict and professional power (Pavalko, 1971). Pavalko reissued his text in 1988 with, unbelievably, the merest reference to the intellectual shifts of the previous two decades. The continued confidence to do this, and the inappropriateness of doing it, is a significant commentary on the North American milieu; other contributions, however, such as Larson’s (1977) dual project formulation by which professions improve status and market position, provide pivotal insights in this period of change. Piper (1994) is an Australian example of functionalist theory applied to the academic teaching profession in the mid 1990s.

The unmasking of trait accounts by the power approach has not been accepted by all sociologists. In the United States Abbott (1988) and Halliday (1987) aimed to maintain the connection to existing functional work even as they each established their own oeuvre - Abbott by stressing competition and the structural significance of occupational jurisdiction, and Halliday by insisting that public-mindedness amongst lawyers goes beyond monopoly and self-interest. Even Rossides (1997) writing a decade later, and setting out fresh ways of relating to the contemporary empirical world of professions, still used the earlier terminology of “functional and conflict perspectives” in his subtitle to frame the significantly new things he had to say about culture, deviance, policy and social adaptation. Implicit attachment to the old trait formulas in the uncertain perspectival terrain that emerged in the field led Macdonald, Ritzer and Hall (1988) to suggest the possible demise of the sociology of professions. Yet studies of professions and professionalisation all round the world have continued to grow. Anglo-European sociology of professions has in recent decades developed on a broad front: application of critical, feminist and post-structural debates; reviews of the role of the state (Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990);
three periods. In the first, the trait-based approach, she somewhat ambiguously blended structural writers like Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) with American functional theory (Parsons, 1939). In the second period, named as the power perspective, she identified Johnson (1972) and Larson (1977) but inexplicably omitted Freidson’s 1970 path-breaking text. The third period Empson identifies as framed by the neo-institutional perspective. She makes the surprising claim that it “has come to dominate the study of professions in recent years,” identifying DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Abbott (1988) with it. No timeframe is suggested when the change from the power to the institutional perspectives supposedly occurred, although the early 1980s might be inferred from DiMaggio and Powell’s publication date.

However, while most sociologists of the professions would recognise the importance of the first two perspectives, few would name neo-institutionalism as the current main perspective, let alone see themselves as pursuing a neo-institutional agenda, even allowing for numerous citations of Abbott’s work. This perspective is no more compelling as a description of this recent period of theorising professions than other vantage points of analysis or critique. Understanding Empson’s research focus into large-scale professional service firms in law, accounting and commerce illustrates the value to be gained from cross-disciplinary interchange.

These generally unsatisfactory theoretical claims - not shifting from trait certitude (Pavalko), incomplete disciplinary paradigm (Macdonald), or the privileging of one view (Empson) - show the irresolution of the field despite important work continuing to generate new insights. Sketching several theoretical/disciplinary influences in analysing professions (it would over-concretise their role to term them sociology of professions perspectives) indicates more of the multi-paradigm nature of the situation that exists in this field. Post-professional critique is not against periodisation; merely that it needs to be appropriately grounded.

An era of multiple perspectives makes it difficult to know how best to organise analysis of this new world of professions and professionalism.

**Not periodisation, but analytic contribution**

Brief comments on several perspectival offerings suggest that it is not just the new empirical world, but a certain kind of reframing that produces post-professional analysis in a theoretical sense. The neo-institutional analysis of professions, Empson (2006) claims, provides a synthesis of trait and power perspectives:

Neo-institutionalists such as DiMaggio and Powell and Scott, view professionals as key institutional agents in society, promulgating rules and principles of apparently universal applicability and, therefore, encouraging isomorphism within institutional fields. Neo-institutionalists are, therefore, interested in the professions not just because they are agents of isomorphism in society as a whole, but because they offer insights into the creation and maintenance of specific institutional fields.

Systems perspectives are indeed important and sometimes underappreciated components in analysing professions and professional work, and the idea of isomorphism might corroborate Bourdieu’s notion of homology (Swartz, 1997, p. 121). However, Foucault’s *disciplines* or Bourdieu’s *fields* would seem to offer more promise in their articulation of structural, discursive and historical lines of inquiry. Neo-institutionalism struggles to avoid a continuance of the professor-centrism of the trait perspective, rather than the broader view of value and normativity in society which Bourdieu and other sociological work addresses.

In fact, neo-institutional analysis does to professions what policy analysis tends to do with Bourdieu’s notion of social capital, namely inappropriately concretising the concept as a real thing that can be defined and explained in terms of boundaries. To explore this congruence would take the present discussion away from its main focus, so to stay with the specifics of professions, the point is that institutional analysis all too easily and sensibly maps onto the commonsense notions of boundaries as fields - the legal field, the medical or health field and so on. Bourdieu’s (1987, 1991) contention is that it is the very boundaries that are key sites of contestation; it is not a matter of getting down to or through to the real line of demarcation, but that the lines separating
domains are socially and culturally constructed and contested. Boltanski and Thevenot’s (2006) exploration of six worlds or polities in society, which each have their own hierarchies of justification, is the kind of analysis needed to address the simplicities of neo-institutionalism.

Bourdieu wants to avoid either the reification of institutional patterning or the radicalising of total subordination, but he does use the language of symbolic violence, domination and similar terminology that fit uneasily into the system functioning of neo-functionalist and neo-institutional forms. These are contributors to the discussion, but insufficient conceptual tools to re-position professional analysis. Neo-institutional modes of analysis address one important part - structure - of sociological description and explanation, but inadequately incorporate the discourses that either produce, or result from, structural facets of social existence. This analysis inapty solidifies professions and professionalism into something they are not and credits them with a substantive rationality they do not have.

The economics discipline is in some ways the maintainer of key insights of the conflict/power approach to the sociology of professions. It is in economics that critique of anti-competitive behaviour and monopolistic structures of professions (Lees, 1966; Carillo and Zazzaro, 2001) has most strongly questioned the general socio-economic benefits of the professions. There is an irony here, however, that despite this clarity, the structuralism inherent in rational theory or neo-institutional models is often attractive to a different kind of commercial/economic assessment of professions and organisations which ignores the sociocultural and political discourses that shape value and arguments about legitimacy and focuses more on cognitive or rational actor conceptions. The often positivist (economic not philosophical) commitment to real-world analysis is tied with this difficulty in handling normativity, or incorporating national and cultural specificity.

Gender analysis of professions and professionalism, by contrast, applies a standpoint position to the social creation of professions, in critique of their universal truth and legitimacy claims. Professional projects were historically contested on gender grounds by men excluding women, something that is still largely unproblematised by those outside the field who have not studied this aspect of professions. Witz (1992) is an example of applying carefully and consistently the binarising logic of gender to the historical facts of medical professional specialties; other studies have made similar inspections of most professional groups. Davies (1996, p. 661) aims to integrate gender analysis and professions theorising by drawing on work from organisational studies to focus on professions. This conjunction is an important identification in the present concern to elaborate a post-professional way of viewing professions. She says, “In an era where professions are under unprecedented public scrutiny, sociological attention to their renewal needs to recognise that a key feature of profession, as presently defined, is that it professes gender”. Gender is thus of substantive interest in itself, but also raises key post-professional issues of normativity/legitimacy and discourses that dichotomise (Fletcher, 2001). Its limitation is that it is necessary to draw on other than solely feminist work to incorporate analogous features in relation to power/knowledge, lay positioning and other discourses of professionalism: post-colonial-feminist writing has already moved down this path.

Post-structural critique, growing out of general consideration of modernity and the post-modern, has had a widespread influence on feminism, post-colonial theory and studies of sexuality as well as social theory in general. A juxtaposition not often made explicit in sociology of professions discussions is that post-structural theorising emerged around the same time as, not after, the emergence of the power perspective. Post-structural work at many points analyses the roles, functions, and performance of professions and has been central to development of new social theoretical perspectives. Foucault’s body of work, for instance, Birth of the Clinic (1973), could be viewed as a sustained critique of modernity in terms of the production and circulation of disciplinary power and knowledge embodied in professions and professionalism.

The realm of post-structural debate is a central area where the firmly realist orientation of neo-institutional study baulks, yet discourse is basic social science terminology today. While there is no need for analysis to be constrained by post-structural critique, the professions are primary
producers and circulators of what is constituted as knowledge and acceptable solutions in the meta-narratives of modernity. This requires extensive and sustained analysis of their discursive positioning in society and their co-option of such discourse to achieve both their official effects, and their social and economic positions. Fournier (1999, p. 280) in an example of the useful application of post-structural terminology described the “appeal to ‘professionalism’ as a disciplinary mechanism” over workers, an important insight into empirical changes in professional employment today.

Important other perspectival ideas include Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotion work, which has been applied to many professional situations, although less commonly to lay persons. Various forms of new professionalism such as Human’s (1991, p. 216) “democratic professionalism,” voiced within a background of critique of professional self-interest, would need to concomitantly identify the many other new things that have been occurring in and around professions to build a satisfactory overall new perspective. Risk analysis (Beck, 1992), is not especially thought of as a sociology of professions perspective, but his analysis of early-modern experts being perceived as producing goods, but only in late-modernity being understood to produce bads as well, constitutes a major proposal to reposition the field, even allowing for debate over concepts like reflexive modernisation and Beck’s early/late periodisation.

Such variety of theorising professions reflects an era of change. This section has proposed that the power approach is best seen as the break-up of the older trait hegemony (but not the break-up of the structures of professions), rather than a new period of theorising in itself. Each of the newer perspectives, in parallel, engages in one respect or another in critique of the functionalist trait model. Conflict, marginalisation, power are important in all of them, but so are other concepts and framings. In terms of an overview, if the power approach is the ragged end of an academically sanctioned trait mode of analysing professions, the whole period since the 1970s is broadly post-professional. Limitations of several attempts to chart a new theoretical course have been noted, and then brief attention was given to the perspectival multiplicity available. These limits, and these theoretical possibilities, it is argued, lead towards an understanding that we are currently in a period of post-professional theorising - not every piece of research fits this description, but inquiry that engages with such problematics in at least one of a range of ways does.

Towards a post-professional sociology of professions
The present post-professional vision suggests four key conceptual foci for engagement with the changing phenomenon of professions and professionalism. These can be seen in the best work in examples cited, and provide guidelines for further research activity. Such framing also recognises that changes in academic specialisation mean that theorising professions in this newer way is occurring and indeed has to occur within a variety of disciplinary fields. Post-professionalism is thus inherently cross-disciplinary both in terms of its subject matter and in terms of its intellectual and conceptual provenance; an inclusive sociology rather than a narrow specialising project.

Professional discourses and discourse around professions
Substantial elaboration of professional discourses and the texts of professions and professionalism in recent work at several levels can be counted as a most valuable advance (Gunnarsson, 1997). Clearly this appropriates the deconstructive capabilities of post-structural, post-colonial and feminist ideas of discourse. Some commentators argue that post-structural analysis is conservative in terms of activism, and this critique alerts us to the distinctive post-professional task of continuing engagement with structural components in professional performance and change. If genealogies of professions give insight - then what? Legislated position remains just that; education conduits continue to channel the production and circulation of professions and professionalism. One solution is that some analysts combine post-structural concepts with a critical ethnographic approach, or post-structural terms and a standpoint position. However, even as post-professionalism utilises the conceptual armoury of post-structural and
other perspectives, it needs to articulate its own points of theoretical engagement (Brint, 1997). Further, the complex gender blindness of traditional professions continues to find challenge using analyses such as Smith (1987), and Harding (1991) and others. By building discourse into the centre of post-professionalism, the absorption of universalist values and presuppositions from professions to the analysis of professions is at least problematised (Foucault, 1980; Gunnarsson, 1997), allowing a more global understanding of the role and effects of professional activity the chance to emerge.

Historian Barton (2003, p. 73) provides a New Zealand example in her analysis of nineteenth century scientists looking at “language, identity and professionalisation in the mid-Victorian scientific community” (without using the term post-professional). This focus on language and identity is characteristic of a post-professional approach influenced by post-structural and other recent perspectives. Barton names the concerns she has with conventional explanations of professionalisation of that group: dissatisfaction with existing professionalising interpretations; the significance or not of the standard binary of professional/amateur; and focusing on the categories and boundaries people use themselves. Her agnosticism to interpretations of professionalisation distinguishes her work from others’ which simply use it as a convenient organizing variable in studies of occupational groups and processes.

**Professional project**

The idea of professional project has continued salience. Extensions of the concept beyond Larson (1977), Witz (1992) and Macdonald (1995) promise further capacity to integrate description and explanation of changes. To the contingency of projects and the variety of each occupational group’s differing project, can be added the concept of professional maintenance project in defence of present or anticipated positions. Other professional projects are exercises in emulating established professions within the exigencies of changing cultural expectations. Associating professional project with discourse as well as structural concerns extends its use in theorising conflictual, adaptive and paradoxical elements in professional activity (Larson, 1977). Abbott’s (1988) jurisdictional analysis could also be read in terms of the idea of project.

Watson’s (2005) study of the gendered professional project of New Zealand funeral directing is post-professional (again, she does not use this term) in at least these senses: it occurs after the eclipse of the academic acceptance of traits as being sufficient explanation of profession; it unpicks a cluster of masculine closure strategies; it identifies both structures (sponsored training) and discourses (especially gender) in the recent three-decade feminising professional project; it grounds the cultural modelling of funeral directors on their masculinist conception of professionalisation; and it draws on organisational theory to theorise insights relevant to professional work.

**Interpenetration of professions and organisation**

The interpenetration of professions and organisations that was so problematic for trait sociology of professions earlier in the twentieth century is being viewed in quite different ways today. Whether issues of gender (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Fletcher, 2001), ethnicity (Mirchandani, 2003), or leadership are the centre of investigation, the old problematisation (Etzioni, 1969; Hall, 1968; Haug, 1971) has dissolved into different and broad themes of critique (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Davies, 1996; Fournier, 1999; Harding, 1991). It is not often that sociologists celebrate the cessation of something being rendered problematic, yet the passing of such attention in a multi-paradigm post-professional perspective, removes this false problem of profession-organisation incompatibility from the sociology of professions. Further, other work situations previously thought of as antithetical (business versus profession, union versus profession) are today quite commonly combined, as seen in the phrase “professional manager” (Kitchener, 2000, p. 130; Martin, 1998).

A post-professional viewpoint realigns the professional-organisation conjunction to the forefront in refuguring the sociology of professions. It also recognises the empirical shift in recent decades of the predominant pattern of professional employment within large organisations.
Post-professional attention to professional normativity can be defined on the one hand as the naming of and explanation of the following: the search for, assertion of, and demand for professional goodness in one moral terminology, or legitimacy in another. On the other hand, post-professional attention to professional normativity can be defined as the challenge to, subversion of, and the demand for such things as: accountability for professional adverse impacts (not necessarily in Beck's 1992 terms of risk-creation), self-interest, official identification, class, and other forms of identity. Post-professional research recognises the importance of both kinds of claims. Substantively it asks the question, within the unresolved tensions of contemporary professional performance, "How are professionals to be understood as “good”?" in the light of these contradictions. Only with the decisive break of the power approach were fresh insights generated in a field that was dominated by justificatory rather than explanatory variables (traits). Post-professionalism progresses that conversation by analysing the cultural positioning of professionals; claims of being professional; techniques of audit; and professional assurance regimes. Post-professional studies of law, for instance, eschew belief in more moral times (Kronman, 1995) but nevertheless engage with standpoint critique (Molloy, 1998; Nader and Smith, 1996) of normative and economic ramifications of recent growth of large-scale professional service firms, and law as the apparatus of modernity.

Extending the starting points

The potential theoretical use of these four foci within post-professionalism can be seen in its ability to deconstruct a number of old problems as these have been conventionally formulated in the sociology of professions. Post-professionalism reframes these as artefactual problems, generated from previously accepted theoretical assumptions. Even before resolving them, however, post-professionalism refuses to be constrained by them, simply walking past them on the basis that the empirical situation has changed. Post-professionalism addresses in new
ways each of the following old conundrums that have persisted long after the empirical situation out of which they were formulated has changed in major ways.

First, profession-organisation incompatibility is replaced by the issues in and around their mutual and near-universal contemporary interaction. Second, the so-called problem of semi-professions (Etzioni, 1969; Toren, 1972) is similarly dissipated by declining to accept autonomous professionalism as an historic endpoint. Third, the deprofessionalisation or proletarianisation of professions is neither simply a cause of celebration (House, 2003) nor commiseration (O’Conner and Lanning, 1992), but is better conceived as the continuation of the rational-legal logic of late modernity. Such capability of a post-professional sociology of professions, and new configurations offered to both old and new empirical situations, are indicative of a how a wider articulation of the perspective might be developed.

These observations are merely suggested starting points for wider explication of a fuller theoretical post-professional framework, clearly beyond the present sketch. This does, however, take the discussion further than merely programmatic statements, indicating possible substantive integration of work in the sociology of professions field. For instance, Johnson (1995), a supposed leader in the power approach to professions, exemplifies a more nuanced shift incorporating governmentality into his analysis. The connection to broader social change in contemporary society underpins each of these starting points. This outline does not constitute a claim for insisting on the use of the term itself. Rather, the use of a term like this simply provides a useful description of what is in fact transpiring in modern and global society today.

Conclusion

A post-professional approach to studying professions has been argued here in three stages. First, recognising a span of recent decades, a list of observable empirical changes in how professions actually function today was sketched, the mere listing of which demonstrates empirical newness outside the scope of conventional functional explanations of professions and professionalism. Second, against the background of previous trait theory, the variable adequacy of the academic project of studying professions and professionalism within sociology of professions in recent decades was considered. Third, a start was made on charting some main foci necessary for critically engaging professions and professionalism today. Its integrative intent for contemporary sociology of professions theory can be seen in the possibility of re-reading several chestnuts in conventional trait theory.

The notion of post-professional is an extension of, and critical engagement with, the central concepts of professions and professionalism. It is post in the multiple socio-theoretic sense of not merely (or even) chronologically after; but also in some senses as oppositional or contrasting to prevailing explanations or hegemonies; as well as resistant to, and revisionist of, existent orthodoxies and associated terminologies about professions. Post-professionalism is post in each of these ways in relation to the hegemonic trait model of what constituted a profession. It shares these multiple epistemological meanings overlapping other posts such as post-Fordism, post-Marxism, post-structuralism, post-feminism, and post-colonialism. Post-professionalism reaches across disciplinary and perspectival boundaries, addressing multiple new empirical configurations of professions and professionalism that are occurring in contemporary society. New paradoxes and oppositionalities are emerging in this post-professional milieu that can only partly be grasped through gender, culture, structure or institutional modalities.

In simple terms, post-professional sociology of professions looks to identify what is new about professions, professionalisation and professionalism and account for this theoretically. It is post because it addresses the situations, roles, resistances, innovations, skills and training of professionals, and the migrating applications of the idea of professionalism in the period since the confidence and certitude of mid-twentieth century professionals and Western society began to be seriously questioned. Sociology of professions passed this watershed around 1970.
Post-professional has the merit of being a term that is indigenous to the sociology of professions field. Clearly theorising society’s institutions and cultural processes at any given point in time may have congruence across many social phenomena, but without contesting voices that paradigmatic framing can lead to the construction of an artificial coherence that is not really present. Such was the case with the North American functionalist emphasis in mid-twentieth century. It seemed virtually impossible to break with the professions-are-good/beneficial rhetoric which built the normative claim of professions themselves into most core definitions of professions and professionalism. Hence the definitional Gordian knot, “What is a profession?” had no hope of being unravelled before the advent of the power/conflict critique. Post-professionalism, however, steps away from simply oppositional critique or challenge to professional actions: it investigates discourses, structures, as well as contexts and cultural milieux beyond the certainties of professions and professional goodness and competence. This new perspective also helps frame concerns faced by today’s sociologists of professions. The aim has been to open up fresh ways of looking at professions and generating theoretical and empirical insights. While the post in post-professional shares the ambivalence of other posts, it is offered here as having value in three ways. First, empirically, globalising, feminising, commercialising and technology trends have simply burst through the conventionalities of the former standard trait model. The unspecified end-point eschatology of becoming a profession is contradicted by this new material. Second, in a theoretical sense, the multiple perspectives within sociology of professions reflect sustained effort to deconstruct this historically specific modern social formation inscribed at the heart of first-world, text-based, formalist society. Each perspective generates strategic insights, yet substantive focus on professions necessarily co-exists with the central theoretic agenda each perspective has. Third, professions continue to be central agents in the functioning of late-modern societies, in both structural and cultural terms. Here, too, engagement with the performance of professional practice, ideology and change is post the hegemonic era of mid-century professionalism.

The theoretical purpose of riding the ambivalence of such a term is to avoid settling into the simple oppositions of either old or developing hegemonies, which are inscribed in professions and professionalism as central cultural products. This is the key point, although aggravating to those simply desiring functional or realist clarity based on taken-for-granted beliefs. There are also implications for other topics in sociological research. Achieving some disciplinary coherence in a post-professional field which includes competing interpretations offers some possibilities for challenging other fields of research in terms of the cultural significance and certainty with which they approach their work, and suggests new ways of reframing such enterprises.

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Managing Work and Organisations: Transforming Instrumentality into Relationality

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Abstract

Management education, we argue, is a significant hegemonic force, but a force that holds potential for the articulation of an emancipatory discourse. In contemporary management education, explicit and implicit commitment to narrowly conceived ideas about economic efficiency and growth as proxies for human wellbeing has diminished the conditions of service in employment for many and has exacerbated poverty and its associated distress for the vulnerable. The transformation of this situation requires a change in the way we see and treat ourselves and each other. It requires the transformation of the instrumental ethic by which we govern ourselves and Earth to a relational ethic. The New Zealand experience is examined for its revealing and revolutionary lesson and promise.

Introduction

This special edition of New Zealand Sociology invites an examination of the splits and shifts in the study of work and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our response to this invitation is a discussion of the explicit and implicit commitment to economic efficiency and growth as proxies for human wellbeing now normalised in management education. These proxies have dominated political, social, and economic thinking in this country for several decades. Promising enhanced wellbeing for all (Humphries, 1998) this focus has diminished the conditions of service in employment and exacerbated poverty and its associated distress for the vulnerable (Child Poverty Action Group, 2006). In our classrooms, the supposed validity of these proxies underlies the often unspoken, unexamined assumptions of those business students who have rarely been required to think beyond profit maximisation as the...