The discursive construction of professionalism: An episteme of the 21st century*

Kiely Flanigan Adams

abstract

Constructions of professionalism in the 21st century extend beyond traditional, structural analyses of historic divisions of labor. In exploring the changing nature of occupations and the limitations of previous analyses of professions, a more robust conceptualization of discourse is needed to account for a plurality and contingency of meaning articulations and subject positions. In this article, I argue that professionalism functions as a Foucauldian episteme because its diverse articulations cut across institutions and define the rules for that which is considered legitimate knowledge in the 21st century. Building on Cheney and Ashcraft's (2007: 146) framework of professionalism as a 'complex interplay of symbolism and materiality in the domains of interaction and artifacts surrounding "the professional"', this study contributes an understanding of how the professionalism episteme organizes a changing set of discursive articulations and the constitution of new subjectivities. In marginalizing constructions of the 'Other', the professionalism episteme prevents all employees from achieving dignity and meaningfulness at work.

Introduction

> […] all the means by which humanity was meant to have been made moral so far were fundamentally immoral. (Nietzsche, 1998: 36)

I recently heard about a disturbing workplace incident experienced by a student Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA). She had spent the first four months of her clinical residency being verbally harassed, publicly and privately, by a male doctor. These interactions escalated into the doctor physically assaulting her during the wrap-up of a non-life threatening procedure – twice. Once, he walked around the patient gurney and came up behind the student, took her by the shoulders and forcibly maneuvered her towards the door. The second time, he reached across the patient to push her hand, while verbally

327

harassing her. The student, in a calm voice, asked the doctor not to touch her. He became agitated and started screaming at her to leave the room. The student asked the doctor not to speak to her in that way. This only agitated him more. After asking her supervising CRNA, a passive witness to these and other transgressions on the part of this doctor, for permission to leave the situation, the student filed a formal written complaint. Despite the fact that the doctor had been counselled previously on inappropriate interactions with another female student CRNA, the doctor only received another proverbial slap on the wrist. The student, however, was counselled about being 'more professional'. Her supervisors lectured her – saying, as a student CRNA, there were certain things she needed to learn to tolerate and that the most important thing to remember was that the professional thing to have done was to stay in the room no matter what was going on.

The situation is more complicated than I am suggesting in this brief vignette. But the point I am trying to make through this narrative is that professionalism, for all the ways in which it is invoked with positivity, also hides processes of marginalization. In this particular case, the construction of professionalism reifies power/knowledge differentials, which privilege the man, the doctor, the instructor – a certain authority – and masks the subordination of the woman, the nurse, the student – the 'Other'. In the name of professionalism, as it is constructed in this particular workplace, the student has limited recourse to address the indignity and powerlessness experienced in that situation. This is what concerns me about professionalism. Professionalism disciplines in ways that make the work environment presumably more pleasant, such as by minimizing conflict, limiting emotional expression, enforcing dress codes, ordering work relationships, encouraging proficiency and knowledge, and instilling autonomy and responsibility. Yet professionalism simultaneously serves to obscure and silence a variety of gender, occupation/profession, skill, race and class inequalities, raising concerns about for whom and to what ends professionalism serves.

Given its pervasiveness and taken-for-granted nature, professionalism warrants renewed attention and theorization. This essay argues for an understanding of professionalism in terms of Foucault's notion of the episteme. Such a move recasts professionalism as a field of knowledge constituted through a set of discursive practices and formations, and which cuts across institutions to shape and reify a particular way of knowing the world. Theorizing professionalism as episteme enables deconstruction of embedded assumptions about professionalism, thereby revealing politically implicated linkages with problematic effects within and beyond the workplace. In order to reveal these connections, an analysis of professionalism must introduce an element of pluralism. It is no longer sufficient to look at professionalism as a unified construct with an implied objective status, as some traditional sociological analyses have employed (e.g. Abbott, 1988; Brint, 1994; Freidson, 2001; Wilensky, 1964) because articulations of professionalism have colonized non-occupational domains. Departing from existing work that sees professionalism as tied to specific applications, such as occupational closure or organizational discipline, this paper develops an account of professionalism that better recognizes its proliferation into the realm of the everyday.

Instead of looking at professionalism as a set of practices, a type of expertise or a disciplinary mechanism, professionalism as episteme enables us to analyze professionalism as a broad, dispersed discursive formation – an epistemological configuration. As Larson (1990: 32) suggested, 'a theory of professions should be centrally concerned with the conditions under which knowledge is produced and applied in ways that make a difference for the life of others'. As the professionalism episteme structures the conditions of possibility of knowledge, it functions as a logic with specific material effects. These effects include the ways in which work-related identities and relationships are formed, shaped and maintained. Identities are central to how employees find meaning and dignity at work and home. Therefore, my intention with this conceptualization of the professionalism episteme is to provoke critical organizational critique that challenges taken-for-granted articulations of professionalism by showcasing the proliferation of professionalism into non-occupational domains, as well as the privileging of particular professional subjectivities.

This article begins by exploring the relationship between work, occupations and professions. Then, in addressing the limitations of traditional sociological analyses of the professions, I argue for a more comprehensive discursive approach to studying professionalism. In order to point to the complexity of issues and concepts tied to the varied invocations of professionalism, I use Foucault's conceptualization of episteme to highlight two discursive transformations distinctive to the 21st century: (1) the professionalism episteme incites and coordinates new, varied discursive articulations outside the purview of occupations and (2) the professionalism episteme locates and privileges particular subjectivities. After presenting professionalism as episteme, I suggest this theorization warrants additional attention, specifically in relation to its marginalization of alternative ways of experiencing work and life.

Professions, occupations and work

A critical unit of organizational structure in both for-profit and non-profit organizations, occupations play an important role in defining life at work. More specifically, 'occupations are cultural constructions based on structural realities of jobs having wide societal relevance' (Kalleberg and Berg, 1987: 36). Most jobs center around a set of defined tasks and activities. As such, occupations are a way to aggregate like-minded job activities into categories spanning different organizations and industries.

Professions usually are understood as occupations with special status as experts and/or moral authorities (e.g. doctors, lawyers), often as a result of extensive education, training and licensing. The related concept of professionalism, both as a professionalization project and as a behavioral expectation, is a mimetic response – an attempt by individuals, occupations and organizations to replicate the social, moral and political power of established professions. A key goal for occupations attempting to professionalize business operations is social closure. Many occupations take steps, including garnering state support, to delineate and control unique occupational jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988). Macdonald

(1995: 29), for example, describes the process of social closure in the following manner: 'the occupation and its organization attempts to close access to the occupation, to its knowledge, to its education, training and credentials and to its markets in services and jobs; only "eligibles" will be admitted'. Through these efforts to professionalize and achieve social closure, professions and occupations become analytical categories for researching and discussing social and structural divisions of labor.

There is an extensive body of sociological research on the occupational division of labor. In some cases, research has taken structural approaches. These studies relate professions to traits (Brint, 1994; Lammers and Garcia, 2009; Wilensky, 1964), societal functions (Begun, 1986), American culture (Bledstein, 1976) and power (Freidson, 2007). In other cases, research takes various process orientations. These studies look at the professionalization of occupations through particular steps (Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995; Wilensky, 1964), as well as through spheres of jurisdictional competition (Abbott, 1988). Yet these perspectives of occupational status and change are not wholly satisfying because they narrowly relegate professionalism within discrete occupational categories. Contemporary forms of work point to a complexity that cannot be captured in structure- and process-centered accounts.

Since the early 1970s, the nature of work and employment relations has become increasingly characterized as contingent, flexible, mobile, and heavily tied to global information and communication technologies. Prevalent neoliberal discourses privilege market-driven approaches, reduced governmental protections, and individualistic cultural values. Importantly, these changes shift risks from organizations to employees (Kalleberg, 2011). There is an increasing precarity experienced in both 'good' and 'bad' jobs in contemporary organizations, characterized by fewer worker protections such as unions and no implicit employment contracts (*ibid*.). Individuals whose employment is at the mercy of another individual, including professionals, executives, bosses and managers, are subject to increased insecurity and powerlessness in the postmodern employment relationship. Conditions of precarity are important for understanding professionalism as episteme because, as Fournier (1999: 281) points out, 'the appeal to professionalism is one of the strategies that is deployed to control the increasing margin of indeterminacy or flexibility in work'. Overall, these combined changes in the nature of employment relations have implications for methodological approaches to work and occupations.

The changing nature of work in postmodernity corrodes standard understandings of occupational divisions. In a knowledge economy, specialized knowledge becomes the domain of everyone, which may suggest a new permeability in occupational categories. One perspective suggests, 'occupations remain task-based mechanisms for dividing labor; however, there may be several ways to allocate task sets among jobs and workers and, accordingly, many occupational forms of work control' (Damarin, 2006: 458). The flexibility and mobility of the postmodern period eventually may render occupational divisions of labor more fluid, dynamic and potentially irrelevant. Indeed, 'occupational structures serve a defining function that tends to be backward-looking, reflecting what existed in the past, rather than forward-looking, reflecting trends in the changing

organization of work' (Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance, 1999: 166). These changes in the structure of work present an opportunity to look at jobs and occupations in more dynamic ways, beyond unified categorizations. Discursive analyses are well suited to answer this call.

Discursive analysis

Several researchers identified productive linkages between discourse and occupational professionalization by drawing attention to the use of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism for socializing employees within strategically crafted occupational identities. Four examples illustrate this perspective. First, Fournier's (1999) work proposes that professionalism acts as a way to control employee conduct and is an important element of new occupational groups' identity formation. Such localized discursive constructions of professionalism highlight specific interactions and negotiations shaping professional identities. Similarly, Anderson-Gough et al. (1998: 1) examine the socialization of trainee accountants and find that 'part of being a professional person involves a "regulation of the self" in terms of the articulation of a professional discourse, the following of formal and informal norms of conduct'. In a third example, Larson (1993: 6), who also employs a Foucauldian discursive analysis in her work on architectural change, finds that 'elite standing depends on the perceived discursive capacity of particular producers in specialized areas of the production of culture'. Lastly, several researchers (Grey, 1997; Kipping, 2011; McKenna, 2006) found the use of jargon a key part of the professionalization process for management consultants, particularly in claims of expertise to clients.

While these discursive accounts make an important intervention into traditional research centered on structure and process, they tend to construct professionalism as a tool that can be wielded for organizational/occupational means. Discourse can be conceptualized in more robust ways and integrated within broader systems of meanings and messages. Organizational research points to a need for 'deeper analysis of how such broader symbolic meaning systems systematically structure localized practices and identities, as well as how such ground-level translations and performances contribute to the editing and reformulation of broader cultural ideas and discourse in more interactive and recursive ways' (Lounsbury, 2007: 302). Given current cultural articulations, it is important to consider how professionalism as a broader assemblage of seemingly unrelated concepts structures the way we understand the world. Departing from a view of professionalism as a particular discourse or a specific discursive resource, as some studies suggest, this article positions the episteme as a more robust conceptualization for critiquing the pervasiveness of professionalism structuring work and life in taken-for-granted, everyday ways.

Organizational communication research offers one such avenue for reconfiguring the discourse of professionalism. In a critical examination of discursive articulations and

ambiguities surrounding professionalism from a communication perspective, Cheney and Ashcraft (2007: 157) call for:

> a return to the more robust notion of discourse advanced by Foucault, which allows for the consideration of bodies, adornments, and architecture (among other things) within the range of associations and manifestations of discourse as an arena of knowledge, interaction, and control. At this broad level, discourse refers to assemblages, contexts, and movements of symbols and artifacts that come to cohere around a certain defining idea, principle, or relationship.

Adopting this theorization of discourse emphasizes the plurality and contingency of meaning construction. This viewpoint opens the possibility of exploring the question, 'how is it that professionalism has come to exist as a particular configuration of practices, knowledge and discourse?' This type of Foucauldian discursive analysis is different from previous sociological discursive work on the professions. Instead of seeing discourse as a tool that can be strategically wielded, this approach recognizes discourse's ability to constitute the world as we know it. More specifically, a Foucauldian episteme is a helpful theoretical construct in thinking about the varied and broad nature of professionalism because it is a gathering space of seemingly unrelated articulations. With the permeation of professionalism into non-occupational domains, it becomes clear that the notion of professionalism requires a broader discursive formulation for understanding its material effects inside and outside of occupational categories. The epistemological work of the Foucauldian episteme is further elaborated in the following section.

Foucault's episteme

As deployed in two of Foucault's works, *The archaeology of knowledge* (1972) and *The order of things* (1973), an episteme is a unique gathering of various, dispersed discursive formations under a large, shape-shifting umbrella. These discursive formations mutate, change, shift and are displaced but retain a shared correlation to the organizing epistemic framework, thus constituting the knowledge, objects and practices of a particular historical period. In Foucault's (1972: 191-192) words, an episteme is:

> a constantly moving set of articulations, shifts, and coincidences that are established, only to give rise to others […] The episteme makes it possible to grasp the set of constraints and limitations which, at a given moment, are imposed on discourse […] in the enigma of scientific discourse, what the analysis of the episteme questions is not its right to be a science, but the fact that it exists.

Through the mobilization of discourses and practices, the episteme constitutes particular boundaries, which often go unchallenged. Accordingly, an episteme defines what is sayable, what is knowable, what is included, and what is excluded from possibility within a particular epoch.

Foucault (*ibid.*) examined the concept of episteme in *The archaeology of knowledge*, a methodological approach to understanding the formation of disciplinary discourses shaping society. 'In this *archaeological history*, what one is trying to uncover are discursive practices in so far as they give rise to a corpus of knowledge, in so far as they assume the status and role of science' (*ibid.*: 190, emphasis in original). Foucault (1973) also engages with the notion of episteme in *The order of things*. Here, discourse analysis plays a key role in Foucault's archaeological methodology. 'The fundamental codes of a particular cultural epoch that govern its language, schemas, values, techniques, and hierarchies of practices are often hidden from the view of those who are engrossed in their everyday activities' (O'Leary and Chia, 2007: 394-395). These codes become visible when linkages are identified across discursive practices, which highlight the existence and boundaries of knowledge within a particular time period. Foucault takes on three epochs, Renaissance, Classical and Modern, in order to reveal epistemic codes. The Renaissance period is governed by an episteme of resemblance, the Classical period by an episteme of classification and the Modern period by an episteme of interpretation (Foucault, 1973; O'Leary and Chia, 2007). Through *The order of things*, we are given examples of how an episteme focuses our attention on certain ways of knowing the world – thus, marginalizing 'Other' knowledges. Multiple, competing and overlapping epistemes are present at any one historical point in time. Thus, professionalism is one of many epistemes operating in the 21st century.

The professionalism episteme

Approaching professionalism discursively relies upon particular historical and cultural contingencies. Because of these contingencies, it is not important to define professionalism *per se*.   Foucault cautions against seeking covert meanings and, instead, focuses on exteriority. Through the archaeological concept of exteriority, 'Foucault encouraged the critic to think about the possible mode of thought that would lead to and/or fix the boundary conditions for a particular statement or set of statements' (Blair, 1987: 370). How do discursive relationships come to exist? How does a particular set of relationships come to define, regulate and perpetuate certain practices and knowledges? For, it is 'at the limit of discourse' that discursive relations

> determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc. These relations characterize not the language (*langue*) used by discourse, nor the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice. (Foucault, 1972: 46)

Professionalism is an episteme because its diverse articulations cut across institutions and define the rules for that which is considered legitimate knowledge. The term is no longer the domain of professions, of professionals. Its pervasiveness saturates the workplace and now pervades culture, mass media, economy, politics and family. As a field limiting conditions of possibility, the professionalism episteme gives rise to particular subject positions. In essence, professionalism circulates within and between shifting relationships

with various articulations of language, context, knowledge, practice and subjectivity. These discursive articulations come together as 'a simultaneous play of specific remanences' (Foucault, 1991: 55).

In the following sections, I highlight two discursive transformations distinctive to professionalism in the 21st century. To complement and build upon dominant sociological work on the professions, I draw primarily from a selection of organizational communication, management studies, sociology and anthropology scholarship relating to professionalism. I intentionally selected an eclectic set of examples in order to begin building themes and identifying trends indicative of the varied and pervasive ground the professionalism episteme covers. This is consistent with the spirit of Foucault's (1972) conceptualization of the episteme in that it reflects the non-linear, seemingly unrelated patchwork of articulations the episteme stitches together.

Changing set of discursive articulations

As an episteme, professionalism organizes a diverse set of changing articulations. Professionalism has displaced the traditional, functional boundaries of early sociological work on professions. That is to say, professionalism is no longer strictly tied to work and occupations. The rules for what is considered professional are shifting, as demonstrated by the plurality of the following articulations coming together in the name of professionalism. Examples of the prevalence of professionalism outside the bounds of occupations include professionalism's connections to ideology, popular culture, entrepreneurialism and family.

Larson (1977: xviii, emphasis in original) analyzes the development of professionals and notes that 'the persistence as a category of social practice suggests that the model constituted by the first movements of professionalization has become *an ideology* – not only an image which consciously inspires collective or individual efforts, but a mystification which unconsciously obscures real social structures and relations'. However, Foucault would be quick to point out the problematic use of an unconscious ideology (see Mumby, 1992). As one of the 'universal skeleton-keys' (Foucault, 1980: 118), ideology is often appropriated and invoked in slapdash, negative ways. More specifically, Foucault (*ibid*.) takes the perspective that ideology

> always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth […] it refers to an order of a subject […] ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc.

The use of episteme differs from the use of ideology in that it is positive (not repressive), robust (goes beyond traditional analyses) and productive (challenges taken-for-grantedness) and avoids assigning valence (avoids truth claims) (*ibid*.). In comparison, lurking behind ideology is often 'the nostalgia for a quasi-transparent form of knowledge, free from all error and illusion' (*ibid*.: 117-118). Despite the knottiness of Larson's use of ideology, her work points to the reification of professionalism as a set of practices and knowledge – and also gives the opportunity to explore the differences between an episteme and ideology.

Contemporary popular culture shapes assumptions about professionalism. Television shows like Donald Trump's, *The Apprentice* (see Kinnick and Parton, 2005), and Mark Burnett's *Survivor* (see Thackaberry, 2003) counsel audiences about professional competencies in the corporate world (Cheney and Ashcraft, 2007). Popular press autobiographies of social entrepreneurs provide anticipatory socialization of nonprofit professionalism (Dempsey and Sanders, 2010). Professionalism now also makes an appearance in the gaming world. For example, Nintendo DS, Wii, and other video gaming platforms offer software such as 'The Personal Trainer' or 'My Coach' series, which promise to teach players how to cook or exercise like a professional. Television advertisements for GMC cars and trucks emphasize their 'professional grade', bringing the discourse of professionalism into product engineering and marketing. In each of these ways, popular culture strengthens the articulation of professionalism in terms of neoliberal consumerism.

A third set of discursive articulations of professionalism center on entrepreneurialism. Professionalism in the information age relies heavily upon notions of entrepreneurialism (Hanlon, 1998) and an enterprising spirit (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1990). One such study suggests competing logics related to professionalism contribute to the emergence of organizational spin-offs (Lounsbury, 2007). In another study, Scott (2008: 232) observes, 'the emergence of a collection of business-oriented professionals connects to another structural vocabulary: an emphasis on privatization, the ascendance of for-profit enterprises, and the increasing reliance on market controls and managerial mechanisms'. Market-driven economic articulations are heavily implicated politically. For example, Ngai (2005) examines capitalist forces, state socialist power and the local patriarchal culture to make an argument about the gendered resistance and agency of a Chinese peasantry social revolution. In the introduction, Ngai (*ibid.*: 11, emphasis added) makes an explicit reference to a discourse of professionalism shaping the contemporary Chinese economy:

> Restructuring class structures and relationships is a contemporary project for capital and the newly emerged elites in Chinese society. And yet the subsumption of class analysis in order to hide class positions and social privileges is their political strategy. The language of class is subsumed so as to clear the way for a neoliberal economic discourse that emphasizes individualism, *professionalism*, equal opportunities, and the open market.

Ngai's example adds an interesting nuance to the discussion of professionalism because it moves discourses of professionalism outside of organizational and popular culture contexts and into discursive assemblages related to class, patriarchy and gender. The articulation of professionalism in the Ngai example suggests broader discursive themes and contexts the episteme engenders. The notion of professionalism existing as a condition of possibility in Ngai's work is indicative of how the professionalism episteme brings together a set of seemingly unrelated relations – discursive articulations of professionalism not seen before in sociological analyses.

As a final example of changing articulations the professionalism episteme informs, we can look at family. Although professionalism contributes to the idea of an ideal worker, this notion rarely includes reproductive labor, including child bearing and rearing. Yet,

professionalism, as a set of epistemic competencies and knowledges, extends into realms traditionally situated outside the purview of sociological definitions of white-collar professional work. There are normative expectations for parents to educate themselves through reliance upon the expertise of childbirth doulas (for the growing professionalization of doulas, see Lantz, Low, Varkey and Watson, 2005) and child development experts, and yet, parents are expected to embody a certain professional comportment as role models for their children. And for those parents choosing to stay at home to rear their children for an extended period of time, there are resumé-writing resources to assist in translating reproductive labor into more professional discourse. 'Stay at home mom' becomes 'household manager' (for an analysis of bringing household activities into labor market discourses, see Duffy, 2007). Additionally, a host of professionalized services have emerged to help make home life more professional. Yard services, organization experts, feng-shui consultants, birthday party planners and certified nannies are all at a family's disposal to assist in the production and management of a professional, efficient family. In these articulations of professionalism, public/private and work/life dichotomies are blurred. As a result, discourses of professionalism previously relegated to the workplace now play a primary role in family and home life.

As these examples illustrate, the professionalism episteme shifts the boundaries of our understandings of professionalism beyond occupational divisions of labor and professionalization projects. Professionalism is now implicated in ideology, popular culture, entrepreneurialism, and family – to name only the representative examples discussed thus far. Through these diverse discursive articulations of professionalism, particular subjectivities are formed.

The constitution of new subjectivities

While this argument of professionalism as episteme adds an interesting nuance to existing research on the professions by establishing its discursive plurality and contingency, it also points to a potential brutality because in defining the conditions of possibility for what is knowable and sayable, the episteme also defines human subjectivity. In its organization and influence of what counts as legitimate knowledge, the professionalism episteme marginalizes the 'Other'. Otherness appears in many forms, but here I focus on how the professionalism episteme situates workers within particular subjectivities; it provides certain self-orientations. Future work on the professionalism episteme might look at how the professionalism episteme marginalizes the unemployed as a non-subject in contemporary society. To clarify, the problem is not with the existence of multiple, competing subjectivities, as subjectivities are 'ambiguous, fragmented, discontinuous, [and] non-rational' (Collinson, 2003: 534). The problem I see is that we often do not recognize these subjectivities as implicated within broader networks of knowledge/power and politics related to professionalism. As a result, professionalism can marginalize collectives of people – sometimes quietly, sometimes overtly, sometimes unknowingly – in ways that enforce and reinforce neoliberal discourses of obedient, entrepreneurial workers. Through various knowledge/power configurations of the professionalism episteme, the professional

subjectivity is made manifest. Based on the illustrative themes and trends I have identified thus far within the professionalism episteme, I point to five varied, yet related, subjectivities the professionalism episteme makes possible: the commodified professional, the embodied professional, the performative professional, the for-profit professional, and the archived professional.

An example of a subjectivity circulating within the professionalism episteme is the commodified self. In this subjectivity, an individual sees her/himself as a brand to be created, molded and sold. It is intimately linked to organizational and occupational expectations and governance. While the crafting of a commodified professional identity can be pleasurable (see Freeman, 2000; Nadeem, 2011), it can become problematic when that identity is co-opted for organizational means. The problem with this kind of subjectivity is that personal success is associated with self-packaging and branding, rather than a particular skill set or specialized knowledge (Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney, 2005). In developing a personal brand of 'professional', individuals model themselves based on normative expectations of how professionals dress, style hair, arrange space, select office décor, and so forth. Importantly, some individuals can be branded easily, while others will have more difficulty (*ibid.*). Neoliberal discourses of consumerism and professionalism influence that which is marketable. As such, gender, race, class, sexuality and age affect an individual's capacity for personal branding based on taken-for-granted, socially constructed depictions of the professional as a white, middle-aged, heterosexual man.

A second subjectivity professionalism engenders is the embodied self. This subjectivity centers on a particular disciplined body. Here, professionalism discourses code bodies in specific ways (see Wolkowitz, 2006). For example, Rumens and Kerfoot (2009) studied constructions of professionalism from the perspective of professional gay men. That which defines the professional appearance is not limited to clothing – 'the body outline itself may be (re)sculpted in response to the take up of potential subject positions and identities coded in professionalism' (*ibid.*: 780). As an example, 'Douglas (paramedic) talked about how his "toned" and "angular" body shape projected a "straight acting" version of masculinity' (*ibid.*). In a different study related to female professional bodies, Holmer-Nadesan and Trethewey (2000: 240) found that 'good eye contact, a firm handshake, an upright (not uptight) posture, and paralinguistic markers are all external indicators of internalized control and an aestheticized, masculinized professionalism'. The authors also found that body fitness and avoidance of emotional outbursts were measures of professionalism. The body, in these studies, is the site of a professional subjectivity, which marginalizes the queer and the feminine.

Another example of new subjectivities emerging in the wake of the professionalism episteme is the performative self. This subjectivity fosters mimetic performances of professionalism. Nadeem's (2011) research in Indian call centers reveals the problematic social and political effects of the outsourcing movement. Professional identities constructed within the emerging IT industry have led to cultural self-alienation and emotional labor (e.g. forced accent neutralization, identity shifting, location masking). In teaching mimetic

performances of Western professionalism, corporate trainers encourage call center workers to make up Western names and to avoid using local inflections. As such, local Indian culture, speech patterns and cultural practices are marginalized as 'Other'. Workers in Nadeem's study have little choice in their work subjectivity – they must perform the Western professional.

A fourth subjectivity example is the for-profit professional. For Meisenbach (2008), the professionalism episteme manifests a sector-bias, in which for-profit orientations are dominant. Meisenbach (*ibid*.: 281) argues of her research that 'the results show fund-raisers encountering impressions that it is not okay for them to seek the same sort of personal advancement that is expected in dominant (for-profit) conceptualizations of professionalism'. Professionalism privileges for-profit orientations and subjectivities. Yet when these discourses of professionalism are juxtaposed with notions of philanthropic organizational objectives, tensions arise. In this case, non-profit professionals experience normative expectations to marginalize self-interest and promotion in the name of professionalism. This is at odds with conventional associations of self-promotion, as seen in the commodified professional. This draws attention to the dichotomy of for-profit and non-profit discourses of professionalism that exist in practice and are often overlooked in organizational research.

A final subjectivity I would like to introduce is the archived professional. An archive is not limited to texts, but also includes the breath and depth of discursive fields of articulation, including material manifestations like the human body and associated subjectivity positions (Foucault, 1972). I argue that the memory of 'being professional' lives on as an archived subjectivity long after leaving a particular job. The professional, as a general mode of subjectivity, marks the body and social memory in material ways. What is at stake when the professional retires, switches careers or gets fired? The resilient nature of the archived professional is demonstrated in Dempsey and Sanders' (2010) analysis of social entrepreneur autobiographies. The circulation and perpetuation of discourses of what it means to be professional in the nonprofit sector contributed to particular archived depictions of the nonprofit professional. As the authors note, founders John Wood from *Room to Read* and Greg Mortensen from the Central Asia Institute both experienced difficulty embarking upon their social entrepreneurship projects, in part because of a well-established professional identity in previous organizational contexts. Wood and Mortensen's initiation of their social projects 'only occurs after significant reflection about the risks such a move might have on their sense of self-identity, as well as the consideration of how others might judge them' (*ibid*.: 446). The professional identity is one that is socialized, normalized and resistant to change. Stoler (2009: 39) calls this kind of developed archival knowledge 'epistemic habits – steeped in history and historical practices, ways of knowing that are available and "easy to think", called-upon, temporarily settled dispositions that can be challenged and that change'. There is a need to assess the effects – personally, professionally, socially, politically – of an archived professional subjectivity that remains intact after the individual is no longer a member of the organizational context in which the professional identity was constituted.

Taken together, these examples of subjectivities engendered by the professionalism episteme point to the vast terrain in which professionalism operates. The professionalism episteme cultivates these subjectivities in a way that blurs and extends beyond occupational categorization. The commodified, embodied, performative, for-profit and archived professionals are particular self-orientations, which exist through the marginalization of various 'Others'. This is a perspective and insight that cannot be captured by structural and process-oriented approaches to professionalism. The discursive effects of the professionalism episteme normalize and discipline in such a manner as to stamp out dissent, conflict, diversity of thought and diversity of people. Certain subjectivities are privileged and others are marginalized. This limits opportunities for truly democratic organization, interaction, collaboration and living in our world today. Additional research is needed to explore the field of the professionalism episteme in which these, and other, subjectivities are created, circulated and maintained.

Concluding discussion

The discursive transformation of professionalism beyond traditional analytical categorizations of occupational professionalization projects is evident through new and varied articulations and subjectivities. Professionalism fundamentally has shifted how we think about work and life in today's society. The examples identified throughout this article, while contextually diverse, are correlated. There is a scattered arrangement of discursive 'mutations' (Foucault, 1991: 57) – all directed by the higher-order guiding principle of professionalism. Thus, the professionalism episteme has enabled us to identify and disarticulate some of the taken-for-granted linkages. Beyond occupational domains, professionalism extends into the realms of ideology, popular culture, entrepreneurialism, and family. Through these varied articulations, particular subjectivities are rendered natural and unproblematic, yet research suggests professional subjectivities privilege enterprising performances of white heterosexual masculinity. Although professionalism is often invoked in positive ways, a major contribution of this article is to present an alternative way of thinking about professionalism that demonstrates the colonization of professionalism into non-occupational domains and the insidious structuring of commodified subjectivities.

To reiterate, the professionalism episteme organizes the contingent and seemingly unrelated discursive articulations of professionalism into a field of knowledge that shapes what is knowable and sayable during the 21st century. As such, organizational studies are enabled to take a more critical look at the political effects of invocations of professionalism because it is no longer fixed as a static category of workplace attributes, behaviors, skills or values. Professionalism is a product of broader discursive articulations, which privilege certain voices, bodies, experiences, work and ways of knowing over others. This marginalization often serves particular organizational and occupational interests. The implications of this argument affect methodological approaches for future work on professionalism.

The professionalism episteme underscores the generative role of communication in building upon sociological frameworks of professions – giving attention to representational meaning construction, both material and symbolic. From the examples identified in this article, discourse bridges both macro- and micro-level manifestations of professionalism. A discursive approach to professionalism delivers a more robust analytic for organizational critique of the pervasiveness of professionalism structuring work and life. This opens up opportunities for a wide array of interdisciplinary studies for both theory and praxis orientations. As the professionalism episteme permeates occupational boundaries and traditional constructions of expert labor, how might organization, communication and sociology scholars partner to explore the shifting discursive articulations of professionalism using cultural, occupational, organizational and individual levels of analysis? Future studies of professionalism must examine all of these levels for more robust understandings of the effects of professionalism more broadly. The professionalism episteme offers a conceptual foundation for such analyses.

Importantly, the professionalism episteme is an ongoing project. There is no linear progression to a next stage of research. I have identified the shift from professionalism tied to organizational/occupational usages into a broader epistemological configuration – signaling the spread of professionalism into the everyday and non-occupational domains. However, the professionalism episteme presents an interesting way of thinking about organizational studies. By setting the boundaries for how we live and understand our world, the professionalism episteme generates many questions that hold promise for future research. What are alternative ways of organizing currently marginalized by the professionalism episteme? Is it possible to rearticulate professionalism with what might be considered radical ideals: love, compassion, dignity, respect, diversity and conflict? As epistemes are historically and contextually grounded, what will displace professionalism as a guiding principle for work and life in the next era? How can we re-imagine a world in which good, stable jobs, available and accessible by all, are infused with dignity and meaningfulness?

To close, this article establishes a foundational analytic for exploring these and other questions related to professionalism. Continual critique and questioning of the taken-for-granted usages of professionalism offer hope for opening up opportunities for more dignity and meaningfulness for people, particularly within the context of work. In thinking back to the opening vignette of the CRNA, how do the variety of power/knowledge differentials that cohere around notions of professionalism mask the subordination of 'Others', while simultaneously undermining chances for respectful employment relations for all people? By further exploring the episteme of professionalism and its effects and implications, scholars will disrupt the piety surrounding professionalism as it stands today. This will cultivate new possibilities of a world in which work does not come first – people come first.

references

Abbott, A. (1988) *The system of professions: An essay on the division of labor*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Anderson-Gough, F., C. Grey and K. Robson (1998) *Making up accountants: The organizational and professional socialization of trainee chartered accountants*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Begun, J.W. (1986) 'Economic and sociological approaches to professionalism', *Work and Occupations*, 13(1): 113-129.

Blair, C. (1987) 'The statement: Foundation of Foucault's historical criticism', *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 51: 364-383.

Bledstein, B.J. (1976) *The culture of professionalism: The middle class and the development of higher education in America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Brint, S. (1994) *In an age of experts: The changing role of professionals in politics and public life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cheney, G. and K.L. Ashcraft (2007) 'Considering "the professional" in communication studies: Implications for theory and research within and beyond the boundaries of organizational communication', *Communication Theory*, 17(2): 146-175.

Collinson, D.L. (2003) 'Identities and insecurities: Selves at work', *Organization*, 10(3): 527-547.

Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance: Occupational Analysis (1999) 'Implications for Occupational Analysis Systems', in *The changing nature of work: Implications for occupational analysis*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Damarin, A.K. (2006) 'Rethinking occupational structure: The case of web site production work', *Work and Occupations*, 33(4): 429-463.

Dempsey, S.E. and M.L. Sanders (2010) 'Meaningful work? Nonprofit marketization and work/life imbalance in popular autobiographies of social entrepreneurship', *Organization*, 17(4): 437-459.

Du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and identity at work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Duffy, M. (2007) 'Doing the dirty work: Gender, race, and reproductive labor in historical perspective', *Gender & Society*, 21(3): 313-336.

Foucault, M. (1972) *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1973) *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1991) 'Politics and the study of discourse', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds.) *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fournier, V. (1999) 'The appeal to "professionalism" as a disciplinary mechanism', *The Sociological Review*, 47(2): 280-307.

Freeman, C. (2000) *High tech and high heels in the global economy: Women, work, and pink-collar identities in the Caribbean*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Freidson, E. (2001) *Professionalism: The third logic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Freidson, E. (2007) *Professional dominance: The social structure of medical care*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Grey, C. (1997) 'Management as a technical practice: Professionalization or responsibilization?', *Systems Practice*, 10(6): 703-725.

Hanlon, G. (1998) 'Professionalism as enterprise: Service class politics and the redefinition of Professionalism', *Sociology*, 32(1): 43-63.

Holmer-Nadesan, M. and A. Trethewey (2000) 'Performing the enterprising subject: Gendered strategies for success (?)', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 20(3): 223-250.

Kalleberg, A. (2011) *Good jobs, bad jobs: The rise of polarized and precarious employment systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Kalleberg, A. and I. Berg (1987) *Work and industry: Structures, markets and processes*. New York: Plenum Press.

Kinnick, K.N. and S.R. Parton (2005) 'Workplace communication: What The Apprentice teaches about communication skills', *Business Communication Quarterly*, 68(4): 429-456.

Kipping, M. (2011) 'Hollow from the start? Image professionalism in management consulting', *Current Sociology*, 59(4): 530-550.

Lair, D.J., K. Sullivan and G. Cheney (2005) 'Marketization and the recasting of the professional self: The rhetoric and ethics of personal branding', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18(3): 307-343.

Lammers, J.C. and M.A. Garcia (2009) 'Exploring the concept of "profession" for organizational communication research: Institutional influences in a veterinary organization', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 22(3): 357-384.

Lantz, P.M., L.K. Low, S. Varkey, and R.L. Watson (2005) 'Doulas as childbirth paraprofessionals: Results from a national survey', *Women's Health Issues*, 15(3): 109-116.

Larson, M.S. (1977) *The rise of professionalism: A sociological analysis*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Larson, M.S. (1990) 'In the matter of experts and professionals, or how impossible it is to leave nothing unsaid', in R. Torstendahl & M. Burrage (eds.) *The formation of professions: Knowledge, state and strategy*. London: Sage.

Larson, M.S. (1993) *Behind the postmodern façade: Architectural change in late twentieth-century America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lounsbury, M. (2007) 'A tale of two cities: Competing logics and practice variation in the professionalizing of mutual funds', *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(2): 289-307.

Macdonald, K.M. (1995) *The sociology of the professions*. London: Sage.

McKenna, C.D. (2006) *The world's newest profession: Management consulting in the twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meisenbach, R.J. (2008) 'Working with tensions: Materiality, discourse, and (dis)empowerment in occupational identity negotiation among higher education fund-raisers', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 22(2): 258-287.

Mumby, D.K. (1992) 'Two discourses on communication, power, and the subject: Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault', in G. Levine (eds.) *Constructions of the self*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Nadeem, S. (2011) *Dead ringers: How outsourcing is changing the way Indians understand themselves*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1998) *Twilight of the idols*, trans. D. Large. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ngai, P. (2005) *Made in China*. Durham, NC: Duke.

Nintendo (2011) [http://www.personaltrainercooking.com].

O'Leary, M. and R. Chia (2007) 'Epistemes and structures of sensemaking in organizational life', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16(4): 392-406.

Rose, N. (1990) *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*. London: Routledge.

Rumens, N. and D. Kerfoot (2009) 'Gay men at work: (Re)constructing the self as professional', *Human Relations*, 62(5): 763-786.

Scott, W.R. (2008) 'Lords of the dance: Professionals as institutional agents', *Organization Studies*, 29(02): 219-238.

Stoler, A.L. (2009) *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Thackaberry, J. (2003) 'Mutual metaphors of Survivor and office politics: Images of work in popular Survivor criticism', in M.J. Smith and A.F. Wood (eds.) *Survivor lessons: essays on communication and reality television*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Wilensky, H.L. (1964) 'The professionalization of everyone?' *The American Journal of Sociology*, 70(2): 137-158.

Wolkowitz, C. (2006) *Bodies at work*. London: Sage.

the author   Kiely Flanigan Adams is a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is interested in critical approaches to organizational studies, particularly questions about identity, professionalism, and power/knowledge/resistance/pleasure. Before embarking on a career in academia, Kiely earned her MBA from the UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School and spent several years working as a management consultant.
E-mail: adamsk@unc.edu