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'It's complicated': Professional opacity, duality, and ambiguity—A response to Noordegraaf (2020)

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ABSTRACT

In this comment to Noordegraaf's 'Protective or connective professionalism? How connected professionals can (still) act as autonomous and authoritative experts', we argue that Noordegraaf has contributed significant insights into the development of contemporary professionalism. However, we argue for a less binary and more complex view of forms of professionalism, and for finding ways of understanding professionalism grounded in a relational view of everyday professional work. The first section (by Johan Alvehus) suggests that Noordegraaf's 'connective professionalism' is primarily about new ways of strengthening professionalism's protective shields by maintaining functional ambiguity and transparent opacity around professional jurisdictions. The second section (by Amalya Oliver and Netta Avnoon) argues for viewing professionalism on a range of protection–connection and offers an approach for understanding how connective and protective models co-occur. Both commentaries thus take a relational, dynamic, and somewhat skeptical view on the reproduction and maintenance of professionalism.

KEYWORDS: professionalism, connectiveness, ideal type, ambiguity, expertise

INTRODUCTION

Noordegraaf's thought-provoking and challenging paper 'Protective or connective professionalism? How connected professionals can (still) act as autonomous and authoritative experts' (2020) has significantly contributed to a revitalization of discussions on the nature of professionalism (Adams et al. 2020a,b; see also this issue). Noordegraaf argued that the professionalism of today is moving toward a new form. While the old 'protective' model of professionalism was based on professional exclusivity, intraprofessional norms and control forms, and a fixed position in society, this is now being replaced by a 'connective' professionalism, characterized by increasing complexity, increased relational demands, shared expertise and decision making, and a more interactive relationship to society. Noordegraaf argues that we now face a 'reconfigured image of professionalism in which risks, dilemmas, and ambiguities are part of professional working lives' (p. 219) to the extent that 'the nature of professionalism is affected' (p. 210). This calls for new ways of understanding the way in which professional work is performed and the nature of the relationships between professions and their external stakeholders.

The two commentaries provided here are largely in agreement with Noordegraaf's call for more detailed empirical work in the area of professionalism. We agree that Noordegraaf puts the finger on significant aspects of professionalism. However, they both argue for a less binary view of forms of professionalism and for finding ways of understanding professionalism grounded in a relational view of everyday professional work. Both commentaries view professionalism as complex and always containing ambiguity and opacity, duality and multiplicity. They also express some reservations around Noordegraaf's diagnosis; we have different ways of approaching these changes, and different views of their magnitude.

Whereas Noordegraaf sees the old protective shields of professionalism as withering away and connectiveness taking over, Alvehus argues that the connectiveness identified primarily comprises new ways of strengthening the protective shields by maintaining ambiguity and opacity around professional jurisdictions (Abbott 1988). Alvehus shows how functional ambiguity and opaque transparency operate in everyday professional conduct, such as billing, leadership structures, and the implementation of technology. For example, how a newly implemented Human Resource Management (HRM) system in accountancy was at the same time replicated, revised, rejected, and circumvented. Explicitly discussing Noordegraaf's suggested protective devices for connective professionalism, he argues that these should be understood as new variations of protectiveness.

Similarly, Oliver and Avnoon argue that the notion of protected professionalism is on the range of protection–connection and offers an important baseline for understanding how connective and protective models are concurrently occurring. This complexity that professions are able to create, of both boundary work and networking, is part of their core abilities to function and preserve status under ambiguous conditions. Drawing on theoretical insights on identity and exemplifying with the complex relations between radiologists and data scientists, they show how different connected–protected options become manifest on different levels: self, intraprofessional, and interprofessional. Furthermore, they emphasize how these can occur simultaneously, but also change over time. Professions are thus able to create complex forms, such as connected protectiveness, and protective connectedness.

Thus, both articles, from different theoretical views, engage with Noordegraaf's novelty claim, and his way of approaching the new connectiveness. While sharing a commitment to empirically nuanced analysis, they recognize that professionalism is a contested concept and thus 'risks putting the social scientist into a role of endorsing the claim to special status of certain interest groups' (Watson 2002). Hence, theorizing professionalism demands a reflexive distance to its object of study. These commentaries therefore take a dynamic, relational, and somewhat skeptical view on the reproduction and maintenance of ideal-type professionalism. We also call for more empirical research on these complex relations in different contexts, aiming to understand similarities and differences as well as time dynamics.

JOHAN ALVEHUS

FUNCTIONAL AMBIGUITY, OPAQUE TRANSPARENCY, AND THE PECULIAR RESILIENCE OF PROFESSIONALISM

In aiming to paint a picture, neither gloomy nor rosy, Noordegraaf (2020: 206) argues for recognizing a 'reconfiguration of professionalism' that implies 'the rise of new forms of professionalism'. We are moving from a 'protective' to a 'connective' professionalism. Professionalism is thus undergoing profound change.

Again.

In fact, professionalism always seems to be undergoing profound change. Oppenheimer (1972) argued that professional work was becoming proletarianized, losing its unique autonomous character, and turning into just plain old industrialized work. In the 1990s, the critique of New Public Management (NPM; see Hood 1991) got traction, arguing that a toxic combination of market-oriented and bureaucratic control mechanisms was undermining professionalism in the public sector. In the private sector, many observations have been made of the increasing commercial orientation of professional service firms, the exemplar case being accounting firms (Hanlon 1996, 1997; Sharma and Sidhu 2001; Broberg et al. 2018), and thus the undermining of professional ideals. Some argue that professionals are increasingly moving toward a situation where organizational values mimic and replace those of professionalism (Evetts 2011), or where hybrid solutions arise as professionals seek legitimacy through organizational arrangements (Kirkpatrick and Noordegraaf 2015). Changes are aplenty.

Yet, throughout this, we are still able to recognize 'professionalism', 'professions', and 'professionals'. Despite the threats, there seems to be a strong resilience to professionalism—at least the last 50 years of perceived threats have not fundamentally challenged the existence of professionalism. Instead, perhaps, we should ask why, in the face of these challenges, professionalism persists?

In this commentary, I will reflect on the claims about changes in professionalism in relation to the persistence of the very same. I begin with a brief to excursion into theories of ideal types of professionalism, before discussing patterns that maintain it. Finally, I return to Noordegraaf's (2020) argument and try to bring some new perspectives into what comprises his idea of 'connective professionalism'.

Ideal types

One common way of approaching issues of professions and professionalism is using ideal types. Ideal types, most often associated with the sociology of Max Weber, aim for 'the highest possible degree of logical integration by virtue of their complete adequacy on the level of meaning' (Weber 1968: 20). An ideal type identifies a set of characteristics or traits associated with a social phenomenon, and molds an image of how these interrelate into a coherent whole. Ideal types are constructed on the basis of a set of theoretical assumptions, leading to several ideal types that are mutually exclusive. This provides a very clear image 'on the level of meaning', but it also has the consequence that 'it is probably seldom if ever that a real phenomenon can be found which corresponds exactly to one of these ideally constructed pure types'(Weber 1968: 20). Ideal types are theoretical tools that help us direct our gaze toward potentially interesting social phenomena.

One such approach, popular in studies of professions and professionalism, is that of Freidson (2001). He identified three different logics of organizing work in society. The logic of markets means that service providers compete with each other to satisfy the needs of the customers, while customers have the final say in whether the service being provided meets their demands or not. Competition ensures that those best at providing the service thrive; however, new entrants are always keeping the service providers on their toes, improving the service delivery. In the logic of bureaucracy, a managerial hierarchy determines how work is undertaken, as well as who does it and assesses its quality. This is a key logic in many areas of society where markets simply would not work very well, for example, the judicial system. Finally, we find the logic of professionalism, where the ambiguities involved in the quality of the service delivery process are so large that it is unsuitable to leave it to managerial supervision or customer (client) choice, as only professional workers have the insight needed to perform and evaluate the task.

Different ideal types thus have their own distinctive identities and comprise coherent (but not necessarily harmonious) systems. Weber (1915/1946: 328) referred to this as 'internal lawful autonomy'. In Freidson's (2001) approach, a central element is how control over the work processes is exercised, something which forms a key element of the internal and lawful autonomy of each logic. While the ideal type of professionalism helps us in identifying persistent patterns of social action, the notion of internal and lawful autonomy points to how these patterns are maintained—sometimes deliberately, but often by means of latent pattern maintenance (Merton 1968).

Understood as an ideal type, professionalism will never exist in its pure form—the pure forms are 'pipe-dreams', in the words of Freidson (2001: 2). Professionals will work in organizations where what managers say is important and where clients may have ideas about what should be delivered. In terms of policy choices, key lines of debate exist in which logic should dominate: Should we have a government-run healthcare system or allow private healthcare providers? Yet, these choices and tensions do not per se affect the ideal types. The ideal types are derived from a set of theoretical assumptions, in line with what Weber prescribes, and they do not change just because empirical reality does. This is in contrast to descriptive or average types that 'identify and collate the total of common empirical traits or dimensions contained within a phenomenon with the purpose of describing and cataloguing the factors normally associated with its presence or absence' (Mike Reed, in Adams et al. 2020a: 7)—the approach taken by Noordegraaf (2020). So, if we approach changes in professionalism on the basis of ideal-type thinking, we would not ask what professionalism consists of empirically, but whether we still find the ideal type of 'professionalism' meaningful in order to understand a phenomenon in society.

Bringing this into the discussion about 'protective' versus 'connective' professionalism, I want to draw the reader's attention to the latter term, that is, professionalism. Apparently, there is something that justifies the label 'professionalism', despite the proposed changes. We can thus ask the question: Are there any ways in which actors in society reproduce the patterns we identify with the ideal type of professionalism? I would argue that there are at least two such patterns: *functional ambiguity* and *opaque transparency* (Alvehus 2021, forthcoming). I will introduce these in some detail, before moving on and applying them to Noordegraaf's (2020) claims.

Functional ambiguity

A common assumption in theories of professional and knowledge-intensive work is that this type of work is inherently ambiguous, and that this characteristic forces organizations away from control forms based on the monitoring and measuring of work processes or outcomes (Ouchi 1979; Alvesson 2001). To some extent, ambiguity is an inherent part of professional work, for instance, with regard to complex medical situations, when a doctor does not know how his/her patient will respond to novel treatment; or during audits, when the auditor does not know whether there were no actual errors or whether simply none were found; or in law, where the value of a specific piece of advice will only be revealed if the issue goes to court at some point in the future; and so on. Yet, there is more to ambiguity than the 'profession-relevant ambiguity' inherent to much professional problem solving (Abbott 1988: 41).

Allow me to make three illustrations.

Ambiguity is inherent to the professional division of labor. Despite common calls for transparency in learning, ambiguity seems, in fact, to play a key role here. For example, in accounting, the division of labor between junior and senior accountants creates a situation whereby junior accountants frequently have to deal with ambiguous situations that can easily be handled by senior partners (Alvehus 2017). This exposure to ambiguity is a key element of professional training as juniors prove, in this way, that they can deal with more complex problems and thus show their potential for more senior positions. To cite the memorable phrase of an accountant in Kornberger et al. (2011: 521): 'when you make manager, we put a big mountain in front of you and we want you to climb over it.' Moreover, Santos (2018) notes how standardization helps to reduce the ambiguity-induced anxiety of junior professionals, in her case lawyers, but also how this standardization is connected to deprofessionalization. Professionals must master profession-relevant ambiguity; somehow, this capacity needs to be developed. Ambiguity is a core element of the professional division of labor and fulfills an important function here in terms of professional development and selection.

A second example is professional stratification (Freidson, 1985). Over the last 30 years or so, specifically with the rise of NPM, there have been increasing attempts to control and assess professional work. Ways of measuring output, for example, abound; billable hours, student turnover, number of patients treated, readmittance, and so on. The problem, it seems, is not measuring professional work—the problem is that this is all too easy! And, of course, the problem that measurements rarely reflect the difficult judgments that are inherent to professional work (Styhre, 2013). However, this is not as straightforward as it is sometimes claimed: It is not a straight path to deprofessionalization. As far back as 1985, Freidson noted that professions deal with external pressure by means of stratification, that is, by developing professional roles that shield core professional work from control attempts. In a study of Independent Sector Treatment Centers in the UK, Waring and Bishop (2013: 154) saw how elite doctors 'were able to draw upon both economic and symbolic resources to advocate "new" ways of working', in doing so still defending, while also to some extent adapting to external pressure, their professional turf from 'outside' interference. Thus, control systems are appropriated by professionals, allowing them to maintain the ambiguity of their professional work, since 'outsiders' never really get to engage with the core work process. They retain the right to interpret the ambiguity inherent to exercising control as they have a significant influence on both the measurements used and how these are interpreted.

A third example of functional ambiguity is leadership in professional service organizations. Many large commercial professional service organizations are led by a group of professional peers that may consist of several hundred individuals (Greenwood and Empson 2003). Within such a group, there will inevitably be informal hierarchies and power relations. Moreover, professionals usually demand a high degree of autonomy, and the power that can be exercised is contingent on others (Empson and Langley 2015). In this way, the distribution of political power within these firms is often ambiguous. While there may be formal positions, the core set of influencers often extends beyond this group, with those in formal positions not necessarily being a part of the core group of influencers. Thus, this leadership constellation is unstable as is the leadership process (Empson 2017; Empson and Alvehus 2020). This is often seen as dysfunctional by both professionals and observers alike, being an impediment to efficient decision making, making change processes difficult, and inviting political processes that are often seen as unwanted (Hinings et al. 1991; Ammeter et al. 2002; Morris et al. 2010). Yet, this is arguably a key element of actually getting things done in a professional organization. Ambiguity 'allows for gaps into which pressure can dissipate', as one practice head of a professional service firm put it (Empson 2017: 204). More generally, Empson argues that ambiguity facilitates action in that, for example, different individuals can tackle different issues, and in that it creates some leeway for senior managers to maneuver when handling, for example, a crisis.

All in all, these examples, as well as others (Alvehus 2021, forthcoming), point to ambiguity fulfilling an important function in professional contexts. This can be experienced as frustrating by individuals; however, by means of creating and maintaining ambiguity, core elements of the functioning of professional work and professional service organizations are maintained, such as learning, managing external control attempts, and facilitating decision making and managerial action in a complex environment. The production of ambiguity is a form of latent pattern maintenance in professional contexts, and thus ambiguity is functional in the sense that it reproduces the conditions for its own existence.

Opaque transparency

Another pattern that sustains professionalism is opaque transparency. Above, I noted the increasing influence of NPM practices, with a general trend being the way in which transparency into work processes and outcomes is being sought. Yet, this contradicts the ambiguous nature of professional work and is thus often seen as an antithesis to professionalism (Styhre 2013). However, professionals, professional organizations, and professions are increasingly being required to provide transparent images of their work and output, and do so. But the transparency they provide is often opaque.

An obvious example of this is the frequent attempts to measure working time in professional service organizations. By measuring, for example, billable hours (at consultancy firms) or hours spent teaching, researching, administrating, and so on (at schools and universities), the idea is to manage the time professionals allocate to their different activities and, in doing so, indirectly monitor and control their work. It seems simple at first: 1 h worked means 1 h reported to the control system. But the reality is instead characterized by game playing, underreporting, and constant self-scrutiny in terms of quality, which subverts the transparency. Alvesson and Kärreman (2004), for example, discuss the phenomenon of ghosting, whereby workers systematically underreport time spent on projects to be loyal to project managers and out of concern for their own careers. Others have studied how billable hours turn into gameplay and become part of a process of financialization (Alvehus and Spicer 2012; Cushen 2013). In both cases, the hours reported to control systems will only be loosely, if at all, coupled to the actual work done. Interestingly, this is often explicitly acknowledged by both workers and management, yet these practices persist and the opacity produced becomes the basis for management decisions.

Another example is how consultants use models—of change, recruitment, management, etc.—to convince clients about the superiority of the services provided. Studies of change management consultants have identified how consultancy firms promote rational change models (with up to 67 well-defined steps) as a key element of the service they provide (Werr et al. 1997). However, in practice, these models are rarely followed. And in fact, should they be, and if they worked in the rational way that they are said to do, then the consultants themselves would become obsolete. The model would suffice. But of course, the actual work being done, whatever its value, diverges from the model and the transparency that the model provides is, at best, a form of communication. Similarly, as noted by Clark (1995), the role of candidate shortlists, tests, and interviews in head-hunting consultancy is mainly one of props sustaining the performance of professional expertise on behalf of the consultant.

A final example concerns the role of formal systems of progression and professional development, often under the umbrella term of HRM. Such systems aim to create clarity for junior professionals striving to make progress in their firms, seeming, on the surface, to provide a clear set of skills to develop in order to move upward through the organization. In most cases, these might serve as relevant proxies for individual skills and competence, for example, the various career steps of medical doctors, which provide a system for assessing personal competence and, together with this, the potential to take on certain roles and responsibilities. However, underlying this transparency, there is often a messier reality. In a study of an accounting firm (Alvehus 2018), I noted how the newly implemented HRM system was simultaneously being replicated, revised, rejected, and circumvented. The HRM system was taken to be a clear and transparent way of describing professional progression and professional skills. Yet, in practice, the way skills were being assessed was interpreted very differently and, while the HRM system in itself was being acknowledged as important, it was paradoxically felt to be even more important to show independence in relationship to the system by bypassing it. It was a case of inverted appropriation, whereby the HRM system was instead being used as a counterpoint, in order to demonstrate entrepreneurialism and a willingness to circumvent the system in order to accomplish results.

The term opaque transparency is a way of describing the fact that, while a certain way of describing, talking about, or understanding professional service work generates a seemingly transparent image of what it is that is going on, the transparency in itself is opaque and obscures what *is* actually going on. We may willingly admit the game playing that goes on when accounting for billable hours, but this insight does not undermine the system; instead, its potential for creating transparency is deemed relevant. An outright denial of the relevance of an HRM system would make that system meaningless. Instead, the system is reproduced in talk and activities while simultaneously being undermined and circumvented by other practices. The transparency that it provides obscures much of what is going on. In this sense, obscure transparency reminds us of observations made in classical neoinstitutional theory, where formal structures are understood as ceremonial arrangements that reproduce institutionalized myths of, for example, rationality (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Obscure transparency is a concrete manifestation of the way in which this operates in contexts of professionalism.

Toward connective professionalism?

A question that begs an answer is: What exactly is it that functional ambiguity and opaque transparency maintain? Arguably, professionalism is a multifaceted phenomenon. The kinds of tasks a certain profession undertakes change over time, as professional jurisdictions change (Abbott 1988). The values of a profession may change, for example, in terms of what it means to be client-centric, or in terms of what quality means. What seems constant, however, is the way in which functional ambiguity and opaque transparency maintain professional autonomy, both on the individual and system levels. What this autonomy means, and which specific practices are involved, and whether it will lead to a strong and formally recognized professional identity, may vary between contexts. But when we recognize ideal-type professionalism, the maintenance individual and collective autonomy are always part of it. With this in mind, let me return to the question of connective professionalism.

Noordegraaf (2020: 206) identifies a number of 'protective "devices"' that have traditionally sustained professional autonomy: well-defined jurisdictions, occupational standards, specialization, judicial autonomy, and discretionary spaces for professional judgment. Such arrangements, Noordegraaf argues, have increasingly come under pressure in society. Professions respond to this, and should do so—Noordegraaf has a normative agenda mixed in with his descriptive—by changing profoundly. The 'nature of professionalism is affected' Noordegraaf argues (p. 210), as 'protective professionalism and protected professionals are becoming outdated' (p. 207). While agreeing with Noordegraaf's empirical observations at least to some extent, I would suggest a different interpretation.

One key observation is the perceived need for new forms of expertise, as cases are becoming more complex and involving an increasing number of specializations. Such 'distributed expertise' demands skills supposedly not needed before, such as those of navigating relationships, in order to accomplish professional tasks. Thus, the expertise demanded will have to be adaptive, involving learning, creativity, and innovativeness. However, nothing in this profoundly challenges professionalism. First, changes in the knowledge base are endemic to professions (Abbott 1988; Krause 1996). The image of professions as stable over time, in terms of what and how they do things, is merely mistaking a snapshot for a film. The key challenge identified seems to relate to professionals, on the one hand, developing an increased capacity for providing links to other knowledge bases and expertise, while on the other, the need to shield their own expertise remains. Losing your uniqueness means losing your stake in the game. Thus, rather to the contrary, to the extent that these developments continue, my proposition would instead be that professions will develop, on the one hand, new stratifications to deal with other forms of expertise, and would thus develop the opaque transparency needed to provide clear interfaces with other forms of expertise while retaining their own identities during the process. The tasks undertaken by the profession may change, but the ability to change jurisdictions is key to a profession's success in the struggle for legitimacy (Abbott 1988). However, this is no threat to professionalism—it is the way in which professionalism survives.

A second challenge to old protective professionalism is autonomy. Here, Noordegraaf argues that decisions and judgments are no longer a purely professional affair, instead moving toward decision-making processes between professionals, clients, and possibly also other stakeholders. However, this could hardly be seen as something new. Instead, client orientation and the involvement of the client in decisions have long been recognized as key in understanding professionalism (see, e.g. Anderson-Gough et al. 2000), with the power relationship between professional and client rarely being as one-sided as it is often assumed to be (Sturdy and Wright 2011); although this varies, of course, from professional context to professional context. However, involvement in client relationships fulfills different roles in the development of professional expertise and, although the role the client plays in professional judgment varies between professions (Alvehus 2017: 214), client relationships are an integral part of professional work. Thus, the need to be 'wired in' and to 'navigate relations' is inherent to functional ambiguity.

A third challenge to professionalism that was proposed is the increasing calling into question of professional authority. Issues concern, for example, knowledge on climate change or technological development, but also the development of a posttruth condition (McIntyre 2018: 215) society. In the face of these challenges, Noordegraaf argues, professions need to find ways of 'perform[ing] trust'. Again, however, this is something that professions traditionally excel in (and have been criticized for; Larson 1977). Arguably, managing relationships with other stakeholders, with other professional groups and pseudoprofessions, and with the public is precisely the very process through which professionalism is maintained. Increasing access to information may cause problems in this regard, for example, in medicine, where doctors are increasingly encountering expert patients. Yet, meeting challenges to their medical expertise, from both laity and from occupational groups claiming alternative expertise, has always been an element of the medical profession—part of its core competence, one might say (see, e.g. Wharton 2002). The need to maintain opaque transparency may shift toward new groups and new fora (for example, in dealing with Internet activism), yet the pattern when it comes to maintaining professionalism—producing opaque transparency—will not necessarily change fundamentally.

What, then, of this new 'connective professionalism'? From the standpoint adopted here, there might not be so much novelty involved. It seems that we can still recognize autonomy on the individual and collective levels—we are still talking about the ideal type of professionalism being relevant for understanding what is going on. Moreover, the examples given point to the fact that the same fundamental processes for maintaining professionalism are relevant, that is, functional ambiguity and opaque transparency. Changes in society may change the preconditions for these processes, yet the changes are still possible to make sense of by drawing on 'classical' notions of professionalism, and the protective patterns maintaining the inherent and lawful autonomy of professionalism. Thus, what Noordegraaf may have identified is not, perhaps, a new form of professionalism; instead, what he may have identified is a slight shift in the practices through which professionalism is maintained.

Conclusion

Change always happens; the cliché of *panta rei* comes to mind. There are certainly analytical frameworks that help us to identify change on a more detailed level, such as Abbott's (1988) framework for discussing jurisdictions, or Freidson's (2001) ideal typical approach. When working with ideal types, as Noordegraaf (2020) does, we need to keep in mind whether these are Weberian logical derivatives or whether they are 'average types' (Mike Reed in Adams et al. 2020a: 7). In this commentary, I have retained a Weberian ideal type approach to the phenomenon of professionalism, in doing so facilitating a discussion of the changes that Noordegraaf proposes. Through this, I have argued that what Noordegraaf is pinpointing is not, perhaps, so much a matter of new professionalism, but of changes in the practices that maintain professionalism. This means that, while professionalism on one-level changes, for example, in that professions might need to develop new roles and new professional stratifications to protect professional jurisdictions, these changes are not radically new. Instead, they are variations of two underlying themes: functional ambiguity and opaque transparency. These patterns still maintain the core of professionalism, that is, individual and collective autonomy. Thus, what Noordegraaf observes is not so much a major shift at the heart of professionalism, but an evolutional adaptation in terms of the practices through which the latent pattern maintenance of the logic of professionalism is accomplished. Professionalism prevails but, perhaps, the new protectiveness lies in its connectiveness.

AMALYA L. OLIVER AND NETTA AVNOON

TYPES OF CONNECTIVITY AND EXPERTISE

There are as many types of connectivity in the construction of professionalism as there are fields of expertise. Combined, they form a great complexity. Noordegraaf (2020: 218) argued that 'connectivity has acquired special, contemporary meaning: in order to maintain expertise, autonomy, and authority, professionals need to acknowledge *interdependency*, instead of independence and mere dependency. They need to be aware of the fact that expertise is distributed'. Furthermore, he claimed that we need to know 'how expertise and authority become more relational, and which mechanisms and conditions help or hinder this' (p. 219). Thus, Noordegraaf (2020) suggested that professionalism is being constructed now to be more 'connective' than 'protective'. This distinction is in line with Noordegraaf's (2007) previous perspective that professionalism may take various forms. However, it is the complexity of these forms that we would like to discuss.

In his previous work, Noordegraaf (2007), following others (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2003), pointed to the constructed nature of professionalism. This means that in various socio-occupational contexts, professionalism is constructed differently (Larkin 2003; Muzio et al. 2011; Barley et al. 2016; Bellini and Maestripieri 2018; Carollo and Solari 2019). Another interesting argument is that certain types of professionalism are used as symbolic capital (Noordegraaf and Schinkel 2011). Symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993) is a form of capital that is 'transubstantiated', meaning that it can change into another substance. It is recognized as the 'legitimate token of status' (Noordegraaf and Schinkel 2011: 78) and is resorted to in-work interactions when certain interests are desired.

The thesis by Noordegraaf (2020) has attracted reactions and commentaries. Previous commentaries have suggested that professions have always been connected to other professions, management, and clients, and they were researched as such (Adams et al. 2020a,b). Therefore, the novelty of Noordegraaf's (2020) recent argument lies not in connectivism per se but rather in the utilization of it as symbolic capital. While in the past, a removed and somewhat snobby professional habitus was rendered prestige, professionals today are expected to form meaningful relations with clients, managers, and other professionals. The difference now is that previously protected and distant types of connections are now being constructed so as to become closer exchanges of knowledge and service (Muzio et al. 2011). This has an impact not only on the professional 'interaction order' (Goffman 1983) but also on macro structures, such as intraprofessional institutions.

Connected professional selves

Thus, the most important aspect of Noordegraaf's new definition of the 'connected' sense of professionalism is the link it implies between identity and structure (Giddens 1984). In other words, 'connective professionalism' has an impact on both the construction of professional identity (Stewart Clegg in Adams et al. 2020a) and the institutional level (Tracey Adams in Adams et al. 2020b and Pamela Tolbert in Adams et al. 2020a). In the connective model, professional identity has shifted to include alternative models of self that are more inclined toward close knowledge exchanges and providing services. This connected persona differs from the patriarchal persona of the past, which was withdrawn and reserved. As a result, professionals are more equipped to work with other experts and connected with clients due to the change in their identity and their sense of being 'a good professional'. When professionals construct their sense of professional self as 'closely connected and integrated', they will probably learn more, develop new skills, build professional institutions that are more inclusive and open, and cooperate more in the coproduction of knowledge with other stockholders.

However, as Ian Kirkpatrick suggested in Adams et al. (2020b), the protected model is very resilient. Thus, we should expect two identity models between which professionals can now alternate. Therefore, connected and protective professionalisms are copresent and additive rather than substitutive (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). We claim that the notion of protected professionalism is on the *range of protection–connection* and offers an important baseline for understanding how connective and protective models are concurrently occurring. Adopting connective models of professionalism does not mean that protective models are abandoned. Professionals are using protected models when convenient in their daily interactions, collaborations, or institutions. For example, although the imperative for physicians in hospitals is now to work in cooperating teams with other professionals, we are not seeing a demise in medical protective institutions, such as long exclusive professional training and residency, state licensing, and associations. Thus, the protected model is strong in the medical profession but benefits from some types of connections.

As Justin Waring (in Adams et al. 2020b) suggested, rather than dualities, we should take a good look at the types and degrees of connections. Connections may take many forms simultaneously on various levels (Oliver 2004), and these forms evolve over time with changing conditions (Montgomery and Oliver 2007). They can be simultaneously supportive and critical, trustworthy and manipulative, distant and caring, authoritative and submissive, competitive and cooperative, and so forth. This is what makes the social world so interesting, not only on the interpersonal but also on the intra- and intergroup macro levels. Studies on other forms of relations, such as interorganizational relations (Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr 1996; Oliver 2009) or ethnic relations (Hylland Eriksen 2007; Brewer, Gonsalkorale and van Dommelen 2013), point to complex intergroup relations, where distant and close relations, assimilation and marginalization, cooperation, and competition happen simultaneously. This is also true for professional cultures.

Table 1. Type of connections for radiologists and data scientists

Level of analysis	Type of connection: Full integration	Partial integration	Partial rejection	Full rejection
Self	One expert with a dual skillset in radiology and data science or a technology that performs radiological diagnosis	Radiologists/data scientists learn some of the skills of the other discipline but maintain their current titles	Each type of expert learns about the other discipline's skills but does not integrate them	Each type of expert negates the knowledge and skills of the other discipline
Intraprofessional	Training			
	Create a shared curriculum for radiological data science	Add data science/radiology courses to medical/computer science and engineering training	Offer elective courses in data science/medical knowledge in medical/engineering schools, or construct the other discipline's courses as 'less important' to students	Do not change medical/computer science and engineering education
	Occupational institutions			
	Create a shared association/platform	Establish data science branches in medical associations; establish medical branches and competitions on data science platforms	Establish ad hoc committees/teams in radiological/data science institutions; do not institutionalize them	• Medical associations do not change their structure • Data science platforms do not change their structure
Interprofessional	Integrate professional institutions, terminologies, databases into one profession	Share institutions, terminologies, and databases while preserving the independence of each discipline	Formally useArtificial Intelligence (AI) systems/radiological expertise, while informally dismissing them	Do not participate in any form of collaborative activities, shared information, or learning

Types of connectivity and expertise

The relational turn in the sociology of professions, in which the discussion moves away from professional boundary work to professional networking, is in line with other sociological discussions (Anteby et al. 2016). The sociology of professions focused traditionally on boundary work and its 'organizational form: credentialing, licensing, and the formation of professional associations and lobbying outfits are all calculated to secure the recognition of significant others and enforce it with a legal mandate' (Eyal 2013: 870). On the other hand, the sociology of expertise, following actor–network theory, focuses on networks and connectivity. However, professions can do both at the same time: connect through the creation of networks and protect through the establishment of boundaries. When exercising various strategies, they enjoy (1) the symbolic capital and power of monopoly and autonomy and (2) the symbolic capital and power of networking. Eyal defined the power of networking as such:

> Power then consists in exactly the opposite of monopoly and autonomy, namely, "generosity" and "co-production" ... a network of expertise, as distinct from the experts, becomes more powerful and influential by virtue of its capacity to craft and package its concepts, its discourse, its modes of seeing, doing, and judging, so they can be grafted onto what others are doing, thus linking them to the network and eliciting their cooperation. (Eyal 2013: 875–76).

Eyal's definition of relational power answers Noordegraaf's question: 'How can connected professionals remain experts, autonomous, and authoritative in complex webs of relations?' (Noordegraaf 2020: 211). The connected model of professionalism is no less effective in maintaining professional powers when a certain type of expertise is grafted onto what others are doing. When professions engage in boundary work and networking, they gain from both the power of monopoly and the power of networks.

Conclusion

We argue that instead of focusing on the dichotomy of protected and connected professionalism, we should ask what forms of connectivity are emerging. How is professionalism constructed and performed in different contexts? To illustrate the type of analysis we have in mind, see Table 1, an outline of connections between two groups of experts that conduct research and are relevant to the same jurisdiction: radiologists and data scientists. While radiology is allegedly an example of the protected model of professionalism, data science is a nascent profession and is allegedly evolving and institutionalizing according to a connected ideology (Susskind and Susskind 2015; Avnoon 2021). However, recent literature has shown that both within and between these two groups, connected and protected currents emerge (Fröhlich et al. 2018; Lebovitz 2019; Avnoon and Oliver 2021). Table 1 provides illustrations for both the range of connected–protected options and how they are manifested in different levels of analysis: self, intraprofessional, and interprofessional. These options of connectivity can occur simultaneously or change over time. This is only a basic illustration, but it can be further refined. When additional types of connections emerge, other levels of analysis are added (e.g. institutional, organizational, client relations), and a process (e.g. time-dependent dimension) is added.

In sum, instead of the duality between protected and connected, we suggest that future research should conceptualize and examine formal and informal mechanisms of both boundary work and networking. These mechanisms construct a sense of professionalism in different work settings, as well as focus on the link between professional identity and macrostructures within and between professions.

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