



Ten Criticisms on Professionalism

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Editorial

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Professionalism consists of a set of commitments that professionals agree on. These commitments require adherence to specific ethics and rites which, on the one hand, should be taken into account for the benefits of service receivers and, on the other hand, should preserve the status, reliability, and respect of that profession. To put it differently, professionalism has considerations inside and outside of the professional domain. Evidence of abundant oaths and declarations in the past – starting with the Hippocratic Oath – shows that professionalism is as old as the emergence of professions. In some other professions, professionalism was not recorded from the beginning and remained unwritten for years. Due to the institutionalization of professions in recent decades, professionalism has sometimes been reduced from the level of profession to the level of organization to the extent that even some small organizations have developed codes of ethics and codes of conduct for themselves. The addition of

professionalism to ethics and individual and social values has made criticizing professionalism difficult. This has made the existent literature on professionalism insufficient. In the following, ten criticisms on professionalism are provided and discussed.

Professions as discourse from Foucault's point of view

In his significant lecture "Order of discourse" in College de France, Michael Foucault (1926-1984) defined discourse as the violence which is imposed on the world. Discourses are concerned with their advancement more than anything else, and therefore, seek to cover what is occurring against their movement or the events opposing them. In his view, discourses, whether in the position of producing knowledge or in the position of extending it, are controlled externally or internally. The aim of the controlling restraints of discourses (whether imposed internally or externally) is to prevent the revelation of what is happening against the movement. One such controller is societies of discourse, or publications. Suppose that you are writing a book on psychology. If you do

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not publish the book through a specific media, no one may ever take your ideas seriously. Discourses are replete with division and rejection methods. Foucault claims that divisions include rejections and this is one of the controlling methods which discourses employ for retaining their own power as well as restraining the component of the "event". In Foucault's view, neither conversation nor interpretation leads to discourse criticism. Rather, criticism is caused by gaining dominance over those components which control the discourse.

If we recognize professions as typical instances of discourse, professionalism is evidently an instrument for controlling and restraining professions. Through bidirectional targeting (both in and out of a profession), professionalism is busy with constant valuing, classifying the professionals, creating divisions based on the validity of professions, and rejecting the other side of the division. Moreover, it is cautious nothing opposed to the movement of professions occurs, since, for instance, the validity of professions and public trust should not be damaged. Hence, professionalism prevents professional crises from being revealed and becoming evident. Defensive professionalism, which defensive medicine is an instance of, is caused by profession's attempt to control and restrain crises and events.

Professional ethics or professionalism: Etiquettes or ethics?

Another challenge is the inability to distinguish between professionalism and professional ethics. Professional etiquettes are taught to the novices in each profession under the guise of ethics. However, it seems this is more in order to present the profession as something especial and differentiated. Moreover, it is sometimes preferred in the educational system to teach professionalism instead of applied ethics. Regarding medicine, for instance, perhaps the honor and integrity of physicians which are counted as significant discussions in professionalism

are emphasized prior to presenting the theoretical discussion of abortion which is an important subject in applied ethics.

Pressure on professionals

Charismatic leaders of professions transform professionals into an instrument in the framework of ethical and behavioral codes to benefit the profession rather than the public. If the pressure on professionals is filling the gaps which exist in the system and organization and masks the weaknesses of the laws, it leads to a reaction from professionals. Obsessive managers are especially inclined to make professionals similar to each other and have increasing expectations from them. The balance between work and family or between work and life is also among the paradoxes of professionalism. This is an instance of usual conflict and contrast of professionalism in balancing the inside and outside of the profession. It seems that devotion must happen prior to entering a profession. Although this does have a virtuous resonance, practically, it is neither possible nor favorable.

Guild or profession

Professionalism is likely to be reduced to guild laws. Hence, the reduction of moral discourse to a legal one is seen in many approaches of professional commitment. Detailed, lengthy, and ample ethical codes are not executable unless they are maintained through laws and regulations. This is the point at which the boundary between law and ethics disappears; in order not to keep professionalism restricted to advice and recommendation, it is preferred to employ discussions in the philosophy of law and the power of law. Here, the institutions and committees for professionalism compete with disciplinary committees. One instance of this is the competition between hospital ethics committees and forensic medicine centers.

Erosion of lexicons

Outspoken and generous use of lexicons on

ethics in professionalism is such that no behavior is non-assignable to a lexicon in ethics. In other words, when ethical and virtuous principles – such as honor – are attributed to professionals' behaviors, they refer to people not the actions. When people are ethically distressed, it is expected that lexicons lose their validity and value. Professionalism is at crisis in respect to the balance and determining the position between principlism and particularism in ethics is critical.

The dominance of stereotypes in professionalism

Professionalism, as a professional ideology, is involved in verbal and behavioral stereotypes. These stereotypes can be instruments for stigmatizing as well as creating a context in which people do not feel any need to reflect on their behavior. Moreover, sometimes cultural and social stereotypes hide themselves behind stereotypes of professionalism and benefit from them. Dress codes are an instance of this. In many societies, dress codes of professions represent social and religious values rather than professional ones.

Profession or semi-profession

Based on the power which professions impose in respect to division and rejection, they can regard themselves as professions and other social acts as semi-professions, jobs, and occupations. Perhaps you identify nursing as a profession, but if you search the internet, you will see that it is considered to be a semi-profession. Professionalism adjusts the list of its components – whether in the definition of the profession or that of the professional – in a way that division and rejection benefit itself.

Novelty hindrance

Professionals who have little adherence to the strict order of professionalism and its principles are not necessarily heedless.

Professionalism does not give a chance to the emergence of novelty and creativity and tries to control even the least change which is not in accordance with professional bureaucracy. In spite of all the emphasis professionalism places on the concept of trust, it has little trust in itself. Non-resilience and distrust are its default programs for facing professionals in many cases such as in academic systems.

Reduction of professional ethics to professionals' ethics

Professionalism gives all the share of ethics and behavior to the professionals by weighing their ethical load. Reduction of medical (engineering, teaching, and etc.) ethics to the morality of physicians (engineers, teachers, and etc.) is ignoring the contribution and role of ethical differentiation of processes, laws, structure, and technology. In other words, professionalism sometimes overlooks organizational ethics. Here is the point at which professionals should work more and more so that the organizational wheel – with its false processes or wrong structure – constantly turns.

Accumulation of ethics

Accumulation of ethics and behavioral rules are increasing in professionalism. There is an abundance of ethical codes and standards of conduct which are ready to judge individuals' behavior and catch them red-handed. The accumulation of ethics can be transformed into unethicity, just as when the accumulation of law leads to lawlessness. Of course, seldom do you find people whom the accumulation of ethics has led to ethical obsession. The burden of ethics on the shoulder of those whom you recognize as role models or excellent samples of professional behavior may lead them to ethical obsessions.

It seems that the emperor of professionalism may sometimes be naked, especially while he is giving ethical recommendations or supporting the profession.