

Definitions of Professionalism - Social Sciences Literature

Paul Starr, **The social transformation of American medicine**. New York. Basic Books, 1984. p. 15.

'Professional authority can be defined, in part, by a distinctive type of dependancy condition – the dependance on the professional's superior competence. Dependance also arises at times from the emotional needs of clients and the administrative functions of the professions, created especially by the welfare state. And as I've indicated, the legitimation of professional authority involves three distinctive claims: first that the knowledge and competence of the professional have been validated by a community of his or her peers; second that this consentually validated knowledge and competence rests on rational, scientific grounds; and third, that the professional's judgement and advice are oriented toward a set of substantive values such as health. These aspects of legitimacy correspond to the kinds of attributes – collegial, cognitive, and moral – usually sited in definitions of the term profession. A profession, sociologists have suggested, is an occupation that regulates itself through systematic, required training and collegial discipline; that has a base in technical specialized knowledge, and that has a service rather than a profit orientation, enshrined in its code of ethics.'

William Sullivan. **Work and Integrity; The crisis and promise of professionalism in North America**. New York. Harper Collins, 1995, p. 2.

'Professionalism is a very loosely defined term. Originally, of course, it referred to the classic honourific occupations of medicine, the bar, and the clergy. These occupations certainly enjoy high status. When asked to rank the most desirable jobs, Americans have consistantly placed medical doctors just below supreme court justices, the top ranked job. Lawyers, clergy, dentists, college professors, and architects always appear among the top twenty ranks. Professions are typically described as occupations charachterized by three features : specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship, public recognition of a certain autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to regulate their own standards of practice, and a commitment to provide service to the public which goes beyond the economic welfare of the practitioners.'

Elliot Freidson. **Professional Dominance: The social structure of medical care**. Chicago, Illinois. Aldine, 1970. p. xvii.

'It is useful to think of a profession as an occupation which has assumed a dominant position in a division of labour, so that it gains control over the determination of the substance of its own work. Unlike most occupations, it is autonomous or self-directing. The occupation sustains this special status by its persuasive profession of the extraordinary trustworthiness of its members. The trustworthiness it professes naturally includes ethicality, and also knowledgeable skill. In fact, the profession claims to be the most reliable authority on the nature of the reality it deals with.' Note: Freidson in his 1994 book Professionalism Reborn (p. 16) suggested that he believed it extremely difficult to define professionalism *'In all, then, it would seem that in the present state of the art of theorizing about professions, recent comments on the issue of definition missed the mark. The definitional problem that has plagued the field for over half a century is not one created by squabbling peasants to be solved eschewing definition entirely. The problem I suggest lies much deeper than that, it is created by attempting to treat profession as if it were a generic rather than a changing historic concept with particular roots in an industrial nation strongly influenced by anglo-American institutions.'*