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CHALLENGING DUALISM: PUBLIC PROFESSIONALISM IN 'TROUBLED TIMES'

Abstract

In recent decades neo liberal reform has significantly impacted on public sector professionals. Sociological interest in such impact has tended to focus on the professional as a subject of such reform: as either de-professionalized 'victims' who feel oppressed by the structures of control or strategic operators seeking to contest the spaces and contradictions of market, managerial and audit cultures. This paper challenges such a *dualism* as reflective of wider separations of agency and structure that have plagued sociological thinking down the years. Adopting a *relational* approach to duality the paper examines the ways in which agency and structure combine both to constrain and enhance professionalism in the context of UK public services. This approach challenges modernising agendas which seek to re-professionalize or empower professionals without examining the changing conditions of their work or the neo-liberal conditions which frame their practice.