



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

TITLE: ‘I’m not in the special club anymore’: Exploring the professional identities of complementary medicine practitioners teaching within universities

Author/s: Caragh Brosnan

Affiliation/s: School of Humanities & Social Science, University of Newcastle

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) degree programs offered in Australian universities have come under attack recently from sceptics who argue that such courses teach only ‘pseudoscience’. Moreover, the academic staff teaching these courses have themselves been described as ‘quacks’ and publically named and ‘shamed’ in media reports. From a sociological perspective, little is known about this group of professionals who span the seemingly disparate fields of CAM practice and academia. How do they navigate between these two social worlds, and how are their professional identities constructed? Combining theoretical insights from the sociology of professions with Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, and drawing on data from 32 semi-structured interviews, this paper explores the professional identities of academics working in three university-based CAM disciplines in Australia: osteopathy, chiropractic and Chinese medicine. By analysing the motivations, aspirations and strategies of these individuals, the paper contributes to understanding the similarities and differences between the CAM professions, the formation of professional identity in these fields, and how individual and professional dispositions intersect with the structures of contemporary academia.