



TITLE: A Foucauldian analysis of the separation of health and the sociocultural in rural health

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Australian rural health services are funded to provide generalist health care to everyone in their local communities. However, their ability to do this optimally is constrained. Complex power relations within what we call the 'intersecting space', the space in which the social meets the health system, where health consumers, practitioners and services intersect, underpin these constraints. In this paper, we analyse the power relations operating within the intersecting space, and examine how three central parties – rural health consumers, practitioners and services – are positioned, and what this means for rural Australia's most disadvantaged residents. In this analysis, we focus on: how social positioning is treated within the clinic and the dominant discourse of rural cultural homogeneity; the way in which biomedical discourses constrain the ability of rural practitioners to provide inclusive, client-centred care; and how discourses of sameness assume health equity yet produce inequity and inequality. We argue that recognising and addressing the social as part of health is essential to altering the existing power relations within the intersecting space. To do this, system-level change to enable local community control and integrated, culturally appropriate health care is required.