Professionals not only provide expert services in structured situations consistently with two sets of fiducial responsibilities. They also do so consistently with two occupational orientations. However, here precisely is where complications enter the picture. Here is where the distinction between professions and other expert occupations begins blurring both analytically and empirically. Many other experts and practitioners may well adopt one or both occupational orientations, even as other experts and practitioners openly disregard one or both. Indeed, it is the manifest empirical variability here which in large part accounts for why sociologists have experienced so much difficulty in distinguishing professions from other expert and middle class occupations analytically, at a conceptual level. The same empirical variability, moreover, attends all additional structural characteristics of professionalism discussed in the next chapter, for many other occupational experts and practitioners voluntarily adopt – or feign adopting – these characteristics as well.

Our point in introducing variability into our discussion at this point rather than earlier is to draw attention to a “dividing line” within the occupational order. All qualities of occupational upgrading identified up to this dividing line, from Chapter 6 through Chapter 9, are constitutive of professionalism exclusively. In turn, all qualities identified from this point forward, beyond the dividing line, are still constitutive structurally of professionalism but they are not exclusive to professions empirically, in practice.

This dividing line, in short, serves two purposes in our sociology of professions. One purpose is that it indeed accounts, at least in part, for why the term “professional” is applied so broadly colloquially (which Julia Evetts is now exploring). The dividing line thereby reveals one major source of confusion in the scholarly literature. The other purpose is that the same dividing line reemphasizes the importance of the structural and institutional qualities of professionalism identified earlier, for these are indeed uniquely constitutive of
professions exclusively. The dividing line thereby reveals why professions and, equally important, the consequences of professionalism are indeed distinctive, irrespective of scholarly confusion and quotidian usage.

Our thesis is that in distinguishing professions from other occupations both analytically and empirically it is vital, first, to identify the structural qualities distinctive to professionalism exclusively. Then, in addition, it is equally vital to identify the immediate and institutional consequences and immediate and longer-term fiducial responsibilities which follow intrinsically from these structural characteristics. These qualities, consequences and responsibilities are all distinctive to professionalism exclusively. Only professions, not any other expert occupations or middle class occupations, provide expert services within structured situations on the basis of an independent sociocultural authority. As a result of this, only professions introduce into the larger society structurally both immediate consequences and institutional consequences. Likewise, only professionals, not other experts, are held structurally to two distinguishable sets of fiducial responsibilities.

Now we add complications which aptly reflect the flux and complexity of social life itself. Professionals can share, and typically do share, with many other experts and practitioners the two occupational orientations discussed in this chapter. They can also share, and typically do share, additional structural characteristics of occupational upgrading discussed in the next chapter. Some nonprofessional experts and practitioners may exhibit both occupational orientations, others only one, and then still others may disregard both; the same is true of the additional structural characteristics.

The central point for our purposes is that only professionals are compelled structurally – as they simply advance their own immediate positional and corporate interests – to exhibit behavioral fidelity to both occupational orientations discussed in this chapter and then also to all additional structural characteristics discussed in the next chapter. When professionals fail openly to exhibit such behavior as a piece this is literally suicidal for professionalism projects. This remains the case even if particular failures serve the self-interests of particular profession leaders or particular professional practitioners or researchers. Any open pattern of failures:

- Jeopardizes the positional power and compromises the positional interests of anyone in a professional position;