

Accountancy stereotypes add up to stable profession

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The media is littered with celebrity trainers, bakers, nutritionists, even gardeners. But, one profession is always missing from the roster - the celebrity accountant. The reason is most likely due to the negative stereotypes propagated for centuries. However, this is no bad thing, according to researchers in Australia who suggest in the *International Journal of Critical Accounting*, that stock characters entrenched in popular culture provide professional stability.

Frances Miley of the University of New South Wales and Andrew Read of the University of Canberra, Australia, point out that recruitment advertising by the professional accounting bodies often portrays the jobs on offer as befitting an "ambitious person who seeks an exciting and rewarding career". In stark contrast, the stereotype of the ideal accountant is one of a dull and boring person focused only on counting the beans and having a keen eye for detail but few social skills. "These views seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum," the team reports. Research into career choices suggests that most would-be accounts see the substantial financial rewards expected of this career as being attractive and that students often believe the stereotype to be accurate.

The researchers have investigated the role of [stereotypes](#) in "commedia dell'arte", a form of improvisational theatre developed in 15th century Italy. This performance art form exploits stock characters based on the [common stereotypes](#) of the day. And, the team suggests, serves a useful purpose through the encoded information of the stereotypes portrayed.

The team contend that, "if the recruitment advertising by the accounting profession is successful in changing the stereotype of the accountant that has long been entrenched in [popular culture](#), instead of being beneficial to the accounting profession, it would be deleterious. Hence, there is benefit in the accounting profession trying to maintain the stereotype." The team concludes that there is also something sinister about the retention of stereotypes and how it would not serve the profession for anyone to attempt to change that stereotype, which would most likely prove impossible regardless. They suggest that, "Although a constructed and mythical view of the accountant, the stereotype allows the accounting profession to maintain its exclusivity and accountants to hide their power."

More information: Miley, F. and Read, A. (2014) 'Advertising the accountant: a stereotype in crisis', *Int. J. Critical Accounting*, Vol. 6, Nos. 5/6, pp.423-440.

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