The making of immigrant clients

An ethnographic study of categorisation work in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

by

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Summary

In this study, I contribute to our understanding of the welfare services provided to immigrants. How street-level bureaucrats make sense of and categorise immigrant clients determines the services provided to them. This categorisation has both individual and societal implications: it affects the immigrants' chances of living a 'good life' and the structures of social inequality, as well as the sustainability and legitimacy of the entire welfare state. Through four scientific articles, I explore the following: *How do street-level bureaucrats make sense of and further categorise immigrant clients? How does this work relate to the larger institutional relations of street-level practices?* My primary source of data is five months of ethnographic fieldwork at a frontline office in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). Using an abductive approach, I combine a street-level perspective with analytical concepts from institutional ethnography to unpack the categorisation *work* of caseworkers in NAV. I have focused on their mediating role as street-level bureaucrats and explored their work through their standpoint.

In NAV, the number of unemployed clients with immigrant backgrounds is steadily increasing, now constituting around half (45%) of the clients managed by the frontline offices. Moreover, immigrant clients often become dependent on benefits from NAV over time and alternate between services and departments within NAV rather than 'out' to paid employment. To improve their services to immigrants, NAV has defined 'immigrants' as a prioritised client group and developed a separate section in their counselling policy directed at improving caseworkers' cross-cultural counselling of immigrant clients. However, the policy does not define when and how the caseworkers are supposed to put cross-cultural counselling into use, at least beyond the concept of counselling *immigrants*. Hence, the caseworkers must operationalise an ambiguous definition of 'immigrant clients' within a bureaucratised and textually coordinated system of client categories. As NAV is increasingly characterised by welfare conditionality, the different client categories open for the provision of different services.

In addition to the five-month ethnographic fieldwork at a frontline NAV office, I rely on data from observations at three of NAV's internal courses in 'cross-

cultural counselling: how to counsel clients with immigrant background' and 11 subsequent interviews of caseworkers who attended the courses. During the fieldwork, observations, and interviews, I also gathered different texts that the caseworkers referred to, which constitutes a third source of data. My last data source is previous research analysed in a qualitative evidence synthesis.

The current study consists of four research articles that also serve as standalone contributions. The first article is a qualitative evidence synthesis of how social workers operationalise, that is make sense of and make use of, cultural competence and cultural sensitivity. The findings show how social workers experience challenges when they employ the cultural concepts in their street-level practice. The second article explores the circumstances in which street-level workers factor culture into their comprehension and categorisation of a client. The caseworkers do not interpret every immigrant client as 'cultural' but differentiate between cases dependent on whether they can make sense of the client's troubles within the institutional frames. Article three describes how caseworkers prioritise clients and depicts the 'positive' equivalent of being categorised as a 'different' immigrant client: *the star candidates*. The caseworkers perform an emotional creaming, where their emotions towards clients help them identify clients 'likely to succeed' in terms of bureaucratic criteria. The fourth article depicts how the caseworkers use institutional texts to exclude 'language cases' from services and benefits and how their practices take form as a pinball machine. Cases where they define the client's problem as concerning 'language' get *bounced* through the system and end up in the office *drain*, where it is out of play and 'stuck' with social security benefits.

By describing *how* street-level bureaucrats differentiate between and categorise immigrant clients in their everyday practices, these findings have three interrelated overall contributions:

1. When caseworkers categorise immigrant clients, they demonstrate nuanced understandings of immigrants and their challenges.

Street-level welfare bureaucrats must balance the principle of equal treatment and be responsive to the different needs of clients. Previous research has been inconclusive about which differences matter and describe how the street-level bureaucrats risk emphasising the distinctiveness of immigrants too little, too

much or the wrong way, particularly when it comes to 'culture'. My findings show how the differentiating dimension the caseworkers use is not (merely) whether the client is an 'immigrant' or 'cultural'. The caseworkers consider culture to be one of several potentially relevant aspects when they categorise immigrant clients. Culture is applied as a 'last resort' category for the client they struggle to make sense of within one of the institutional classifications. The caseworkers categorise these *non-sensible immigrant clients* as 'cultural' or 'language cases'. These are the clients who are avoided or excluded from services. Moreover, when they decide to prioritise a case, the decisive factor is whether the street-level bureaucrats consider the client as being 'far away' from success in the labour market. The findings show how the immigrant category may be counterproductive and contribute to the 'othering' of clients who do not easily fit the eligibility criteria for courses and benefits. To gain further insights into why welfare services struggle to accommodate some clients and provide sufficient services to them, future research should aim to further unpack what the street-level bureaucrats categorise as the residual vagueness of (immigrant) clients.

2. Street-level categorisation is a dynamic categorisation work.

In their examination of the welfare services provided to immigrants, researchers have focused on the input or output of street-level categorisation or have described categorisation as an independent variable. In the current study, I have used analytical concepts from institutional ethnography in an abductive approach to explore how street-level bureaucrats (in NAV) mediate access to and the outcomes from services through their *categorisation work*. This perspective has contributed to the unpacking of street-level categorisation as a dynamic work where the caseworkers make use of two intersecting interpretive frameworks: the distinction between immigrants/non-immigrants and sensible/non-sensible cases. The combination of a street-level perspective and analytical concepts from institutional ethnography have been crucial to describe how categorisation is a continuous process the street-level bureaucrats carry out during their everyday work and not just a result of their employment of static categories to specific client characteristics. or something the caseworkers do in the first interaction with a client. I encourage future research to use the notion of *categorisation work* to further explore the services provided to (immigrant) clients in other welfare services.

3. The non-sensibleness of (some) immigrants is textually mediated.

One of the most frequent recommendations for how to improve service provision to immigrant clients is through increased cultural sensitivity among street-level bureaucrats. My findings suggest that the bureaucratic frames—more specifically the institutional texts—contribute to mediating the non-sensibleness of (some) immigrant cases. The textuality of the bureaucratic context, such as the organisation of services, the terms and boundaries for benefits or measures and the performance indicators used, are important elements in street-level bureaucrats making of immigrant clients. This is particularly the case regarding the making of 'residual cases', the vague 'something more' that the street-level bureaucrats cannot seem to fit in the institutional categories. Hence, it is seemingly limited help in accentuating increased reflectiveness and recognition of (cultural) diversity among street-level bureaucrats to achieve a more accurate categorisation of and service distribution to immigrant clients. To identify the processes and mechanisms that contribute to such differentiating practices, researchers need to consider 'the street-level bureaucrat in context', which is typically proposed by social workers for clients.

These findings have three corresponding implications for NAV. First, to be of help to the caseworkers, client categories should be based on specific needs or troubles, rather than partially concealed demographic variables such as 'immigrant background'. Second, as the caseworkers categorise clients in a continuous process, the tools aimed at helping caseworkers differentiate between cases, such as the 'need assessment' needs to be adapted so that it is a useful part of their everyday work. Third, to change the outcomes of categorisation processes, there is need for a change in focus from the attitudes and knowledge of the individual caseworker to how the formulation of terms, conditions and measures promote specific differentiation-practices and contribute to create the vague 'something more' of (immigrant) clients.

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PART I

1 Introduction

Immigrants are often highlighted as a group to which welfare institutions fail to provide adequate services. What services people get depends on how street-level bureaucrats interpret their troubles and, assign them to a bureaucratic category (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014; Lipsky, [1980] 2010). When they categorise people into institutionally manageable clients, street-level bureaucrats must balance two interrelated demands: a) the must recognise critical differences in people's needs so that they buffer social inequalities, while b) not overemphasising these differences so that they assure equal access to services. However, we know little about what street-level bureaucrats *do* when they differentiate between and translate immigrants into institutionally manageable clients and how they do this during the course of their daily work. It is in these everyday practices 'in which client categories are produced, maintained, modified and broken' (Juhila et al., 2007, p. 13). In this study, I illuminate these practices and, by so doing, provide important insights into the distribution of welfare services to immigrants and services' limited success in accommodating (some) immigrants. I explore the following questions: *How do street-level bureaucrats make sense of and further categorise immigrant clients? How does this work relate to the larger institutional relations of street-level practices?*

My primary data source is five-month ethnographic fieldwork in a frontline office in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). Through four scientific articles, I examine the *work* the caseworkers in NAV do when they categorise clients with immigrant backgrounds, the relevance of culture and culturally sensitive practice, the role of caseworkers' emotions towards their clients, and how the caseworkers engage with the institutional structures in their categorisation.

Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to circumstances where they need support from welfare services. The main objectives of welfare services are to provide security and equal opportunities to citizens, regardless of their social background (Anttonen et al., 2012; Rugkåsa, 2012). Welfare services are intended to buffer economic and social marginalisation, to which immigrants

are particularly exposed (Koopmans, 2010). This is also the situation in Norway (Tronstad et al., 2018; Ødegård et al., 2020). Researchers and policymakers describe service provision to immigrants as work that differs from 'ordinary' work and that requires special skills, knowledge and awareness from street-level bureaucrats, particularly regarding culture (Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020). However, the only common denominator of immigrants is that they are foreign born. The group is highly diverse, and street-level bureaucrats struggle regarding which differences to emphasise in their comprehension and categorisation of immigrants as clients. Thus, welfare services' ability to accommodate the needs of immigrant clients depend on how street-level bureaucrats make sense of immigrant clients and allocate them to a client category.

The contextual departure point of the current study is NAV. NAV makes an interesting case for exploring *how* street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant clients. About 45% of the people registered as unemployed in NAV have an immigrant background (NAV, 2021b). The share of immigrants that succeed in getting permanent employment remains low, and a large number of this group end up having to rely on means-tested and restrictive social service benefits on a permanent basis (Aamodt, 2018). To improve the services provided to this group, NAV has formulated a specific section in their counselling policy on 'how to counsel clients with an immigrant background'. They also offer courses on the subject for their street-level caseworkers. However, NAV do not define which clients to categorise as 'immigrants', instead leaving it to the street-level caseworkers to make sense of and make use of the category in their everyday service provison.

1.1 Overall research questions

As street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, [1980] 2010), the caseworkers in NAV 'make the linkages between clients and ruling discourses, "working up" the messiness of an everyday circumstance so that it fits the categories and protocols of a professional regime' (Devault & McCoy, 2006, p. 27). Although the caseworkers in NAV are governed by social welfare policies, rules and regulations in the sense that they are bound to implement the policies formulated by policy makers, it is ultimately the definitions, decisions and

actions made by street-level bureaucrats that constitute the welfare services as they are experienced by clients (Lipsky, [1980] 2010). Therefore, I start the empirical exploration in the practices of the street-level caseworkers in NAV. To explore the categorisation work of the caseworkers in NAV, the overall research questions guiding this project are as follows:

1. *To what extent do the caseworkers emphasise culture as a differentiating dimension in their work with immigrant clients?*
2. *What interpretative frameworks do the caseworkers make use of when they categorise immigrant clients, and how do they make use of them?*
3. *How do the caseworkers engage with the bureaucratic context when they categorise immigrant clients?*

The current study does not provide knowledge about categorisation in the sense of identifying different immigrant or client characteristics. Rather, it explores the work implicit in the caseworkers' categorisation of a case, analyses the interpretive frameworks the caseworkers employ, and investigates how the institutional setting influences both the interpretive frameworks of caseworkers and accessible categories. By exploring the processes of categorisation and how they affect the services provided to clients with an immigrant background, the current study contributes to improving our understanding of the micro-dynamics in street-level policy practice (cf. Moseley & Thomann, 2021).

Table 1 provides an overview of the relationship between the articles and the overall research questions. The horizontal rows describe the contributions of each article. The vertical columns describe which findings from the articles contribute to answer each research question. Although all the articles contribute to all three research questions, some contributions are subordinate. I have written the subordinate contributions in grey and the articles' main contributions to the research questions in black.

	RQ1: *To what extent do the caseworkers emphasise culture as a differentiating dimension in their work with immigrant clients?*	RQ2: *What interpretative frameworks do the caseworkers make use of when they categorise immigrant clients, and how do they make use of them?*	RQ3: *How do the caseworkers engage with the bureaucratic context when they categorise immigrant clients?*
Article 1: Navigating the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work	Culture is one of several aspects that the social workers consider relevant to explain cases regarding immigrant clients.	The social workers refrain from interpreting all immigrant clients within a cultural framework.	A lack of time and resources require the social workers to reduce the facets they consider in their work with immigrants.
Article 2: 'I don't know what to do – could it be cultural?'	Culture is applied as a 'last resort' category for the vague troubles of non-sensible, immigrant clients.	The caseworkers make use of two intersecting interpretive frameworks in their dynamic categorisation work: immigrants/non-immigrants and sensible/non-sensible.	The clients who do not easily fit the institutional classifications are categorised as non-sensible cases.
Article 3: Emotional creaming	Whether the caseworkers consider the client 'far away' from success in the labour market is crucial to the caseworkers' decision to prioritise their case.	Caseworkers use their emotions as interpretive schemes for identifying 'star candidates': sensible immigrant clients likely to succeed in labour market integration.	Caseworkers' emotions towards immigrant clients are *embodied expressions of a rational logic in institutional demands,* such as formal criteria for services and quantifiable measures of success.
Article 4: A welfare pinball machine?	The caseworkers make use of institutional texts to categorise 'language cases' outside of their jurisdiction.	'Language' is a category for non-sensible immigrant clients that excludes clients from services other than means-tested social security benefits.	Textual descriptions of benefits, measures and the organisation of teams contribute to the construction of 'language' as a category of problems that close the clients in the system.

Table 1: The relationship between the articles and research question

Each article has its own specific research question and contributes to different fields of research. Additionally, taken together, the four articles illuminate how street-level bureaucrats in NAV categorise immigrant clients by three main contributions: articles 1, and 2 answer RQ1 by describing how the caseworkers show nuanced understandings when they categorise immigrants and their challenges. The street-level bureaucrats seem to acknowledge that culture is only one of several differentiating dimensions as they attempt to make sense of and categorise immigrant clients. Article 3 also answer RQ1 by describing how caseworkers' consideration of whether the clients is 'far away from success in the labour market is another critical dimension in their categorisation of immigrant clients. Second, my use of analytic concepts from institutional ethnography in articles 2, (3) and 4 has allowed me to describe the categorisation *work* the street-level bureaucrats do. This answers RQ2 by describing how the caseworkers make use of two intersecting interpretive frameworks when they categorise immigrant clients: immigrants/non-immigrants and sensible/non-sensible, where the understanding of the client as non-sensible affects the services they receive. Third, articles 3 and 4 build on article 2 and answer RQ3 by describing how the bureaucratic context contributes to mediate the non-sensibleness of immigrants through the institutional texts. Specifically, I examine the textual organisation of services, the terms and boundaries for benefits or measures and the performance indicators that are used.

1.2   Outline of the thesis

The current thesis consists of two main parts.

The first part is divided into seven chapters that describe and discuss the background, context, design, and findings of the project. In chapter two, I outline how 'immigrants' can present a challenge for welfare bureaucrats. The principle of universal welfare requires them to consider that immigrants may have different needs from other clients. However, researchers diverge in whether and how street-level bureaucrats should accentuate these differences to provide sufficient services to immigrant clients. In chapter three, I describe my contextual departure point. The chapter depicts NAV as a street-level bureaucracy with a focus on labour market integration, welfare conditionality

and caseworker accountability. Further, I present NAV's efforts to provide better services to immigrants by training their caseworkers in cross-cultural counselling. In chapter four, I describe the theoretical perspectives that have informed the study. I take an abductive approach and use analytical concepts from institutional ethnography to expand my theoretical understanding of how street-level bureaucrats categorise clients. Chapter five presents the methodological framework of the study, particularly the sample, data and analysis. In the chapter, I account for the methodological choices and ethical considerations I have made during the study. I also discuss the validity and limitations of the study. Chapter six consists of an overview of the main findings of the four articles that constitute the project. Finally, in chapter seven, I summarise and discuss the results of the articles in light of the three overall research questions of the project and consider the scholarly debates on immigrant clients, categorisation and universal welfare.

The second part of the thesis comprises full-text versions of the four scientific articles that constitute the project.

1.3   Concept clarifications

Before I continue, I want to clarify three essential concepts I make use of in the current study: immigrants, clients, and caseworkers. These are all concepts that researchers may use in different ways in different contexts. In the following, I describe how I use these concepts.

1.3.1   Immigrant

An *immigrant* can be defined in multiple ways, and researchers diverge in their understanding of the distinctiveness of immigrants (see section 3.2.). Statistics Norway defined an immigrant as a person that has moved to Norway and is foreign born, with foreign-born parents and grandparents (Dzamarija, 2019). However, the immigrant population in Norway is diversified (Daugstad, 2005; IMDi, 2021). In policy documents and statistics immigrants are often divided into subgroups based on the cause of migration, such as refugees or labour migrants or region of origin, such as Eastern European or non-Western immigrants. To provide knowledge about the distribution of welfare services or why welfare services fail to accommodate (some) immigrants, Norwegian

researchers have focused on specific groups of immigrants, such as Somalis (Friberg & Elgvin, 2016) or labour migrants (Friberg et al., 2013). However, I have not started the current study with a predefined understanding of who constitutes an 'immigrants'. This is also an attempt to describe 'the social organising that generates different outcomes and opportunities for different people' (Lund & Magnussen, 2018, p. 269). My aim is not to define the characteristics of different immigrant categories but to gain knowledge about how street-level bureaucrats make immigrants as clients through processes of categorisation. Therefore, I have explored how the *street-level bureaucrats* make sense of and use the category 'immigrant client' as part of their categorisation work.

1.3.2 Client

Client is a contested concept, especially within the field of social work, because it implies a passive understanding of people who receive support from the welfare services; hence, it tends to have negative connotations (Juhila et al., 2007). Several other terms have been suggested for describing people that need assistance from welfare services in less normative terms, such as service user (Eriksson & Nissen, 2017), citizen (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018), citizen-client (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2009) or consumer (Juhila et al., 2007). Several of which have also been criticised for not sufficiently describing the complexities of the relationship between services and recipient, particularly regarding the power structures of welfare institutions (McLaughlin, 2009). My focus is on the processes through which street-level bureaucrats categorise the individual as a client (Juhila et al., 2007), not on the individuals in these positions as such. Such categorisations are often described as people processing (Evans, 2010; Zacka, 2017), *clientisation* (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014; Hall et al., 2007) or construction of institutional identities (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003; Lundberg, 2012). Although I acknowledge the concerns regarding the term 'client', I use it to specifically keep these processes in view: the street-level bureaucrats' mediating role in the distribution of services through categorisation, something terms such as 'service-user' or 'citizen' would not contribute to in the same extent. In addition, my data about clients comes from casefiles and the caseworkers. Hence, my data of the people they work with is already processed by the welfare bureaucracy, and therefore I do not have the

full knowledge of the circumstances of the 'people'. Therefore, my use of the term *client* is aimed at accentuating the *institutional* perspective on the categorisation of immigrants into clients.

1.3.3 Caseworker

What the street-level bureaucrats in this study have in common is that they all work directly with cases, so I refer to them as *caseworkers*, exploring their work as a form of public professionals (Bartels, 2013). The caseworkers manage different services and benefits, but they all assist (migrant) clients in (re)entering the labour market. I use the notions of caseworker and street-level bureaucrat interchangeably. Although article 1 focuses on social workers, the current study is not about social work as a professional discipline. However, the findings have important implications for social works' objectives of social justice and the common appeal for cultural sensitivity and reflectiveness among street-level bureaucrats. Moreover, the empirical evidence of the significance of professional (social work) training is contradictory. Evans and Harris (2004) and Belabas and Gerrits (2017, p. 135) argue that professional background 'influences street-level bureaucrats' ideas of discretion, values and practice, and construction of service users as clients'. Sadeghi and Fekjær (2019) find that the difference in competence between social workers and non-social workers in NAV is small because of the level of education and internal training. In my data, I cannot find systematic differences between groups of caseworkers based on their professional background. Hence, I have not distinguished between caseworkers based on their professional background

2 Immigrants as a challenge for street-level bureaucrats

This study departs from the common argument in the literature that immigrants present a challenge for street-level bureaucrats' provision of universal welfare services. The principle of universal services entails two important aspects. 1) The street-level bureaucrats must ensure that all citizens, regardless of ethnic or cultural differences, have equal access to services. 2) They must be able to recognise the different needs of people to secure equal quality and outcomes from services and buffer social inequalities. The increasing extent of people leading transnational lives, both voluntarily and as refugees, results in populations with disparities in experiences and in ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds (Hvinden & Johansson, 2007; Talleraas, 2020a). Research show that this diversity may create challenges for street-level bureaucrats in their efforts to balance the two aspects of universal welfare services, affecting the services they provide to immigrants. I aim to contribute to these scholarly debates by providing in-depth knowledge of the work the street-level bureaucrats do when they differentiate between clients and distribute services accordingly. In the first section of this chapter, I describe welfare services as buffers of social inequalities and how welfare services' ability to accommodate immigrants has both individual and societal implications. In the second section, I describe how researchers diverge in their understandings of how street-level bureaucrats are supposed to manage this diversity. The main divergence is whether researchers understand immigrant clients as someone that *are* different, or if they are *made* different, and thus whether the street-level bureaucrats emphasise the distinctiveness of immigrants too little, too much, or the wrong way.

2.1 Universal welfare services to diverse clients

Social justice, human rights and respect for diversities are core principles in social work (Healy, 2007; International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2014). An important objective of social work is to achieve human rights through practice (Ife, 2012). Welfare services and social work are supposed to buffer social inequalities and provide social justice and societal participation

(Valtonen, 2001). Although this applies to all client groups, immigrants are particularly exposed to circumstances that require efforts from welfare services (Boccagni, 2015; Koopmans, 2010). Tronstad et al. (2018) describe how problems regarding health, work, income, and housing, accumulate in certain immigrant groups. These are situations to which immigrants may be more exposed because of certain structural aspects, such as discrimination (Midtbøen, 2016), stigma (Handulle & Vassenden, 2020) or low socioeconomic status (Hermansen, 2017). In other words, immigrants are especially exposed to processes of social marginalisation and thus in need of assistance from welfare services. Thus, it is important that welfare services can accommodate the needs of (immigrant) clients to ensure equal opportunities, reduced inequalities, and the social, economic, and political inclusion of minority groups. These are also important parts of the United Nation's development goals to reduce inequalities within and among countries (United Nations, n.d.). The independence of welfare benefits, participation in the labour market and paid employment are especially important for an individual's opportunities and security (Standing, 2011). These factors all have great influence over people's circumstances (IMDi, 2021) and are typically used as indicators for the integration of immigrants into society (Brekke et al., 2020). Moreover, if particular groups become dependent on welfare services, this will not only affect the individual, but it may also affect the sustainability of the entire welfare state (Brochmann, 2010; Det kongelige arbeids- og sosialdepartement, 2016; Koopmans, 2010; Kymlicka & Banting, 2006; NOU, 2017; Ødegård et al., 2020) and challenge the redistributive potential of the services, social cohesion and the legitimacy of the welfare state (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011; Kivisto & Wahlbeck, 2013). However, immigrants seem to be a group that welfare services do, in fact, struggle to sufficiently accommodate, and researchers describe how welfare services are unevenly distributed among immigrants and non-immigrants (Morissens & Sainsbury, 2005; Thomann & Rapp, 2018).

Universality is a core principle in (Nordic) welfare services. This is a way to secure the redistributive character of welfare services (Van Hootegem et al., 2020). In the Nordics, the idea of universal welfare services 'carries some idea of wholeness, unity, totality and sameness' (Anttonen et al., 2012, p. 3). Norway is a social democratic welfare state characterised by generous and

universal welfare schemes (Esping-Andersen, 1990), with equality and social democracy as two of the core ideological foundations (Widerberg, 2020). Thus, Norwegian welfare services are founded on the idea that clients are relatively similar and that they need the same (extent of) services. Norwegian welfare services are characterised by 'high-quality standard solution' that is accessible to everyone (Vike, 2018, p. 253). Hermansen (2017) further characterises the Norwegian welfare state as egalitarian and generous. Anttonen et al. (2012, p. 6) describes how universalism 'does not mean that all people can use the same social benefits or welfare services irrespective of their needs', but 'people in the same situation must be treated in the same way'. Hence, the street-level bureaucrats must be able to identify and be responsive to the different situations of individuals. The increased diversity among clients may challenge the principles of universalism in welfare services, where '(…) some forms of accommodation to diversity conflict with notions of universalism associated with sameness' (Anttonen et al., 2012, p. 11). Thus, street-level welfare work involves 'trying to recognise and act upon inequality so as to achieve equality. The equal treatment of liberalism is accordingly added by unequal treatment aiming at equality' (Widerberg, 2020, p. 32). Hence, one challenge for street-level bureaucrats is how to attend to diversity and differences within the frames of universal welfare and in a way that uphold welfare services' function as buffers.

2.2 Diverging descriptions of the distinctiveness of immigrants

In their 'accommodation to diversity or difference [street-level bureaucrats] may have to respond to various kinds of inequalities resulting from social, political, economic and physical factors, while seeking to avoid reproducing or justifying such inequalities' (Häikiö & Hvinden, 2012, p. 78). Hence, street-level bureaucrats may struggle regarding which differences to accentuate in their service provision to immigrant clients and how to do this. Torres (2006) argues that the definition of a group of clients as a particular category implies that this group has problems that differ from other client groups. However, researchers differ in their descriptions of the distinctive needs of immigrant clients.

There are two main strands of research that focus on the particularities of welfare provision to (immigrant) clients. The first describe how street-level bureaucrats must recognise that immigrants *are* different from other client groups, and that these differences are significant for the service provision. Researchers warn about street-level bureaucrats emphasising the distinctive needs of immigrant clients *too little*. Especially within social work research, the focus has been on how street-level bureaucrats must recognise the (cultural) distinctiveness of immigrant clients (Boccagni, 2015; Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012; Volckmar-Eeg, 2020), and argue that this is crucial to achieve objectives of social justice (McGregor et al., 2020). Researchers within this perspective frequently advocate the need for cultural sensitivity or cultural competence in service provision (Boccagni, 2015; Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020). However, the conceptions of 'culture' differs (Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020). In this study, I do not attempt to define culture or 'the cultural' (Røyrvik, 2019; Barth, 1998), but explore how street-level bureaucrats make sense of and make use of culture when they categorise clients. Researchers and policy makers differ in their conceptualisations of the immigrant client group, and hence which characteristics and needs the street-level bureaucrats must be attentive to. Crabtree et al. (2016) describe how Muslim clients require specific knowledge and competencies from social workers. Refugees and asylum seekers have also been characterised as groups that have specific needs (Hagues et al., 2019; Käkelä, 2019; Robinson, 2014). The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) emphasise the reason for immigration and duration of residence as important differences among immigrant groups that affect their circumstances and level of integration (IMDi, 2021). Other researchers have a more general conceptualisation, emphasising how street-level bureaucrats need to tailor their service provision to clients with immigrant (Grødem, 2016), minority (Hedlund & Moe, 2010; Kriz & Skivenes, 2010) or cultural (Testa, 2017; Yan, 2005) backgrounds. Although minority clients and clients with 'other' cultural backgrounds may not be immigrants, these last three conceptualisations are often used interchangeably. Kipperberg (2015) describes how immigrants need specific consideration from social workers because of their migration experiences.

The other strand of research describes how the actions and considerations of street-level bureaucrats *make* some clients different. Jenkins (1994, 2000)

emphasises that groups and categories are constructed as a result of the processes of identification, where group boundaries are negotiated and managed. Häikiö and Hvinden (2012, p. 77) argue that:

> Many apparently personal characteristics of individuals are socially constructed, created by the ways in which societies are organized and social relations are structures as a result of past and current power relations. As cultural constructions, groups, communities and even nations are ways of organizing similarities and differences (Bottero and Irwin, 2003, p. 464). Differences are articulated in terms of imagined communities or groups by constructing boundaries of belonging.

Research from this perspective, have focused on how the street-level bureaucrats construct categories of clients and institutional identities through their practices (Caswell et al., 2010; Cedersund, 2013; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003; Juhila, 2007; Mäkitalo, 2003; Talleraas, 2019; Villadsen, 2003; Vitus, 2003), and hence attempt to unfold 'essential categories that take identities as fixed' (Häikiö & Hvinden, 2012, p. 77). This perspective forms an important rationale for the current study: To explore how caseworkers' categorisation of immigrant clients and how this influences the distribution of services. Harrits and Møller (2011) describe how categories often presents as based on objective characteristics, but their emphasis on particular characteristics contribute to construct 'normalcy'. Bundgaard & Gulløv (2006) describes how street-level workers in the Danish pre-school mute and mark differences between children with immigrant and non-immigrant background. Researchers show how street-level bureaucrats may make use of informal distinctions, such as their perceptions of the worthiness or deservingness of clients (Thomann & Rapp, 2018) or their appraisal of how immigrants fit into ideological constructions of 'ideal clients' (Roberts, 2019). Schütze and Johansson (2020), also describe how street-level bureaucrats are more likely to describe their work with immigrants as difficult if they hold negative attitudes towards migrants. Hence, the street-level bureaucrats' comprehension of clients may be informed by a personal bias. Vitus (2003) describes how welfare institutions have the power to define and construct some people as different or deviant. Hence, several researchers have explored how street-level bureaucrats 'sort out' (Diedrich et al., 2011; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013) clients with an immigrant background as a client group. Studies describe how street-level bureaucrats differentiate

between immigrants and other client groups in two interrelated ways, by emphasising differences a) too much, or b) the wrong way.

Several researchers argue that street-level bureaucrats emphasise the differences between immigrant and other clients *too much*, resulting in the 'othering' of immigrant clients (Cedersund, 2013; Chambon, 2013; Danso, 2015; Julkunen & Rauhala, 2013; Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012). Rugkåsa (2012) describes how ethnic minority women are categorised as different from majority women, which leads to them being treated differently within the frame of labour market integration. The street-level bureaucrats in Rugkåsa's study construct a dichotomous understanding of the two categories of women. Although Dahinden's (2016, p. 2211) plea for demigranticisation is about migration research in general, her argument about the risk for 'contributing to a worldview where migration- and ethnicity-related differences are predominant and seen as naturally given' may also be applicable to street-level bureaucrats. A related argument is that street-level bureaucrats seem to explain the challenges of immigrants in *the wrong way*. This perspective particularly highlights how the emphasis on immigrants as 'cultural' may contribute to conceal other critical aspects of immigrants' challenges (Jönsson, 2013), such as gender or socioeconomic status (Drange & Orupabo, 2018; Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019). Eliassi (2015) describes how Swedish social workers struggle to balance the discourses of colour-blindness and universalism with the discourses of culturalization, where the social workers tend to explain misunderstandings and conflicts with immigrant clients as culture. This depiction of how street-level bureaucrats may wrongly emphasise culture in their work with immigrants has inspired me to explore when and how street-level bureaucrats highlight 'culture' as relevant to their categorisations of clients. For a more detailed description, please confer article 2.

Previous research is contradictory regarding how street-level bureaucrats do and should emphasise the distinctiveness of immigrants. Thus, street-level bureaucrats have a difficult task in finding the right balance and risk making all three missteps as they translate people with immigrant background into a client category, emphasising the distinctiveness of immigrants too little, too much, or the wrong way. I build on these perspectives and explore what street-level bureaucrats *do* when they differentiate between (immigrant) people through the categorisation of them as clients during the course of their everyday work.

3 NAV and labour market integration of immigrants

In the current study, NAV serves as my empirical entry-point. This has two main reasons: First, NAV is a highly bureaucratic system (Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2021), where access to services is conditioned by how street-level bureaucrats categorise people in light of criteria of eligibility (Gjersøe, 2020). Hence, the street-level caseworkers must categorise people into one out of several client categories and provide services accordingly. Moreover, this work is highly textual. The caseworkers must account for their considerations in relation to rules, regulations, and measures (Andreassen, 2018). This enables me to explore the connection between their categorization of clients and the bureaucratic context (see section 4.3). Second, NAV serves a high proportion of immigrant clients (NAV, 2021b). Thus, the street-level bureaucrats frequently review and work with immigrants. Because of their limited success in integrating immigrants into the labour market, they have also defined immigrants as a prioritised client group and developed tools to assist the caseworkers in their work with immigrant clients. However, the 'immigrant clients' group is highly diverse, and the street-level bureaucrats have to make sense of it before using it in their practice (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). In this chapter, I elaborate on these two reasons. In the first section, I describe NAV as a street-level bureaucracy with a focus on labour market integration, welfare conditionality and caseworker accountability. In the second section, I outline NAV's work with immigrant clients and describe their efforts to accommodate immigrant clients by training their street-level bureaucrats in cross-cultural counselling.

3.1 NAV as a street-level bureaucracy

Norwegian welfare is often characterised as 'workfare' (Hagelund et al., 2016), where welfare benefits are constructed to encourage participation in the labour market (Brodkin & Marston, 2013; Øversveen & Forseth, 2018). One of the main goals of the NAV reform in 2006 was to increase the number of people who became independent of welfare services and into paid employment (Fossestøl et al., 2014; Terum & Jessen, 2015). Welfare policies in recent years

has been characterised by an increased focus on labour market participation (Lundberg, 2012, p. 31). This is also the case internationally, where several welfare reforms have focused on work and activation (van Berkel, 2020; Fuertes & Lindsay, 2016; Künzel, 2014; Lindqvist & Lundälv, 2018; Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2014; Nybom, 2013; Senghaas et al., 2018). NAV was created as a one-stop shop (Lundberg, 2018), or 'joint frontline service' (Breit et al., 2018), by consolidating the Labour Market Authority, the National Insurance Service, and municipal social services in one organisation. The logic was to provide integrated services and avoid people being thrown back and forth between different agencies like a 'shuttlecock' [kasteball] (Lundberg, 2012). Therefore, NAV covers several areas of welfare policy, such as health, labour market integration, and income security, making it a complex organisation. The street-level NAV offices manage two interrelated tasks: they administer benefits to people who are out of work and support them in entering or re-entering the labour force (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). NAV administers around one third of the Norwegian national budget (NAV, 2020) through pensions, or family schemes, as well as health benefits or social security benefits. Hence, virtually the whole population is 'on welfare' (Vike, 2018). As with other street-level bureaucracies, NAV is service intensive, with conflicting goals and limited resources (Lipsky, [1980] 2010). NAV's overall objectives are 'more people active and in work; fewer people on benefits; a well-functioning job market; the right services and benefits at the right time; good services tailored to the users' needs and circumstances; and an efficient labour and welfare administration' (NAV, 2020 [author's translation]). These point to different levels of welfare policy but can be summarized in two main and interrelated objectives: good quality in service provision and increased labour market integration of clients. How street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant as clients influences both objectives.

NAV's work is characterised by welfare conditionality and accountability, which are informed by the discourses of activation (Djuve & Kavli, 2019; Hagelund et al., 2016). NAV's services are progressively differentiated and connected to only specific categories of clients (Gjersøe, 2020). The caseworkers serve as gatekeepers who concurrently ensure and limit access to services (Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2021). NAV differentiates between different client groups and eligibility for services through client profiling and

categorisation (Gjersøe, 2020). Only people that the street-level bureaucrats consider eligible for the specific service will get access to it. This is not just an ideological practice but a way to secure the sustainability of services and target services to the people who need it the most. This conditionality depends on what Widerberg (2020) describes as welfare objectification; this involves increased textuality, accountability, focus on 'activities that count' and the construction of and separation of clients into categories. The caseworkers' work is highly textualised, and they must account for and justify their considerations through textual decisions (Molander et al., 2012; Devault et al., 2014). Caseworkers' decisions must comply with laws and regulations. Erlien (2017) identifies over 40 different rules and regulations for benefits in NAV. Each of these benefits have laws, directives, routines, forms and criteria defined in different texts. Hence, NAV has been criticised for being too bureaucratic, with limited room for social work and professional discretion (Skjefstad, 2013). Andreassen (2018), however, argues that the structural and bureaucratic measures of accountability seem to have a limited impact on limiting street-level bureaucrats' discretion. Quite contrary, the standardised descriptions of the work processes and routines leaves openings for caseworkers' discretionary judgements regarding how to assess and differentiate between clients (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015).

The frontline NAV offices are characterised by a large degree of problem solving and ad-hoc work (Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2021). NAV consists of 293 frontline offices (NAV, 2021a) organised within a partnership model between state and municipal welfare administrations (Fimreite & Lægreid, 2009). NAV employs around 19,000 people, of which 5,000 are employed by local authorities (NAV, 2020). To both secure coordinated services and local flexibility, NAV consists of relatively autonomous frontline offices that answer to the Directorate of Labour and Welfare. Therefore, the services provided by the frontline offices vary (Fossestøl et al., 2015). Each municipality and NAV agree on which of the municipal services will be included in that NAV office (NAV, 2020). In addition, the offices have the autonomy to choose how to organise the office. One of the main differences between offices is whether they are organised by the principle of specialisation or generalisation (Fossestøl et al., 2014), that is, whether the caseworkers work with special benefits or if they provide services to clients independent of which benefits they receive.

3.2 Immigrant clients and cross-cultural counselling in NAV

Almost half (45%) of the people who are unemployed and who rely on services from NAV have an immigrant background (NAV, 2021b). Although there are differences between groups, immigrants have a lower level of participation in the labour market than the remaining Norwegian population (IMDi, 2021), with immigrants from Asia (10.7%) and Africa (14.3%) having the highest levels of unemployment (SSB, 2020). Having few low-skill/low-wage jobs that are accessible to newcomers, combined with a highly regulated labour market, may contribute to making it difficult for immigrants to gain employment in Norway (Grødem, 2016). NAV is supposed to buffer the difficulties in access to the labour market by providing counselling, courses and measures that may improve a client's employability (Diedrich & Styhre, 2013; Olsen & Oltedal, 2020). However, (some) immigrant clients seem to have a long presence within the NAV system, alternating between benefits, services and departments (Aamodt, 2018). Many immigrants also become dependent on social service benefits as this is one of the few income security benefits that is independent of previous membership in the national insurance scheme (Dokken, 2015; Kann et al., 2019). In 2016, 56% of the payments from social service benefits went to immigrant clients (Tønseth & Grebstad, 2019). In their vignette experiment, Terum et al. (2018), find that street-level workers in NAV do not discriminate against clients with a North-African name. However, several studies and evaluations describe how NAV seem to fail in supporting clients with an immigrant background into paid employment because of (cultural) differences in expectations, understandings and values (Friberg et al., 2013; Friberg & Elgvin, 2016; Rugkåsa, 2012), or because the initiatives and allocation of services do not sufficiently coincide with the needs of the clients (Djuve & Kavli, 2015, 2015; Djuve & Tronstad, 2011; Hardoy & Zhang, 2010; Sandbæk & Djuve, 2012). However, we have limited knowledge of how the street-level caseworkers consider and work with immigrant clients during their daily work. This is an important motivation for this current study.

To enhance their goal attainment with immigrants, in policy documents, NAV has defined clients with an immigrant background as a prioritised client group. However, there are several, somewhat conflicting, definitions of the group,

making it difficult for the street-level bureaucrats to make sense of and make use of the client category in their practice. In the official documents from the ministry of labour, they delineate 'immigrants from outside EEA' as a prioritised group (Det kongelige arbeids- og sosialdepartement, 2021). In yet other internal documents, NAV depicts minority-language-speaking people, people from a foreign culture or multicultural people as distinct groups within the 'immigrant client'-group. In their counselling policy, however, NAV simply define 'immigrant clients' as a distinct group (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2019). The counselling policy is an intranet-based platform available to all caseworkers designed to increase the caseworkers' qualifications in counselling methods and labour market integration (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2019). The objective is to increase the quality in caseworkers' interactions with immigrant clients and coordinate efforts and practices among the frontline NAV offices. The section on 'counselling clients with an immigrant background' consists of PowerPoint slides on general considerations when encountering these clients and knowledge of migration, immigration and intercultural encounters. The section is divided into three parts addressing the challenges in (1) communication, (2) culture and (3) bureaucratic competency and understanding of Norwegian society. Moreover, the counselling policy recommends cultural sensitivity and awareness among caseworkers. NAV also offer courses open for all street-level caseworkers on cross-cultural counselling. I attended three of these courses as part of my data production (see section 5.3.1.1).

There are, however, some assumptions implicit in the counselling policy that suggest that the caseworkers may have trouble using it in their service provision. The effects of the category 'immigrant client', 'cross-cultural counselling, and 'cultural sensitivity' for the realisation of increased service quality and goal attainment with immigrant clients may therefore vary according to how the caseworkers make sense of and make use of it in their practice. First, the caseworkers do not necessarily have a way of knowing whether the client in fact has an immigrant background. In some instances, the client's country of origin is listed in the casefiles, or the caseworkers may find a copy of the client's residence permits. However, in other instances, there is no information in the systems regarding whether the client has a Norwegian background or not. Hence, the caseworkers must find approaches to identify

whether the client is an 'immigrant client', and therefore require 'cross-cultural counselling. Second, the descriptions in the counselling policy implies that counselling clients with immigrant backgrounds would be different than counselling other clients and explicitly addresses cultural differences as a distinctive aspect of working with immigrant clients. Hence, culture and cultural differences are mainly linked to clients with immigrant backgrounds and to ethnicity. Third, the counselling policy frame the caseworkers as different from the immigrant clients.

> *All counselling has a cultural aspect, but this becomes more influential when the counsellor and the client have different backgrounds, different culture, experience, standards and expectations.* (from the counselling policy, author's translation)

Hence, the counselling policy implies that in counselling clients with a non-immigrant background, the clients and caseworkers will have the same backgrounds, cultures, experiences, standards and expectations. Fourth, the counselling policy highlights the challenges street-level bureaucrats may experience in meetings with clients with an immigrant background but does not elaborate on how the follow-up should or may be accommodated to assist this client group into gainful employment. What cross-cultural counselling would constitute in each case is not clearly defined. With this as my contextual point of departure, I explore how the street-level caseworkers in NAV do the categorisation of immigrant clients during the course of their daily work. I particularly study to what extent they consider culture as being relevant in this work.

4 An abductive approach to categorisation in street-level bureaucracies

In the current study, take an abductive approach to theories and use different theoretical perspectives as 'ways either to ask new questions or to make new observations possible (Dewey 1925; James [1907] 1981)' (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 174). My ambition in taking an abductive approach is that the study not only contribute to new knowledge, but also to further theoretical development (Swedberg, 2017). An abductive approach also entails a reciprocal relationship between theory and empirical data. Hence, theory has been pivotal throughout the research process (Vassenden, 2018). This is unlike the inductive approach in, for example, classical grounded theory (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Abduction has its roots in American pragmatism (Peirce, 1934) and entails an openness towards theories. Hence, I have used theories as analytical tools, rather than as a basis to test (theoretical) hypotheses in a deductive analysis. In the first section of this chapter, I describe how my overall theoretical point of departure—or theoretical 'gaze'—is informed by Lipsky's ([1980] 2010) understanding of the mediating role of street-level bureaucrats. To understand how welfare is distributed, we need to explore what happens at the street level, or what the street-level bureaucrats *do*. The street-level perspective ties in to the cornerstones of the Chicago school of sociological thoughts, with an emphasis on peoples' *doings* and how they construct meaning (de Montigny, 2007; Høgsbro, 2015; Joas et al., 2009; Seltzer & Haldar, 2015). This also forms a rationale for my ethnographic design (see sections 5.3 and 5.3.1.2). Although the street-level tradition thus provides an important direction for the current study, the tradition is also highly empirical and lacks cumulative theory development (Moseley & Thomann, 2021). Hence, I rely on other middle-range theories and concepts (Merton, 1949) to further understand how street-level bureaucrats categorise clients. In the second section, I account for some of the different theoretical perspectives on categorisation in welfare bureaucracies. There are several different theories that focus on street-level categorisation. However, I argue that these perspectives do not offer sufficient analytical concepts to explore how street-level bureaucrats categorise clients

and during their daily work, and how their practices relate to the bureaucratic context. In the third and final section, I describe how I have used analytical concepts from institutional ethnography to expand on theories of street-level categorisation by exploring the categorisation *work* of street-level bureaucrats and how their work engages with the ruling relations through institutional texts.

4.1   The mediating role of street-level bureaucrats

With his book *Street-level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* ([1980] 2010), Michael Lipsky forms the basis of the street-level tradition in studies of welfare institutions. Lipsky's ([1980] 2010) main argument is that street-level bureaucrats have a critical role as mediators and moderators between political ideals and regulations, on the one hand, and the reality of citizens, on the other. Hupe and Hill (2019) argue that street-level bureaucracy research has become a scholarly theme of its own. Several researchers have further developed Lipsky's analysis (cf. Brodkin, 2011; Evans, 2010; Hupe, 2019b; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2009; Zacka, 2017). Nothdurfter and Hermans (2018) describe how the street-level approach has manifested within the fields of social work, public management and social policy. Within social work, the perspective has been used as a way to highlight the dilemmas and complexities of social work practice, the extent of professional discretion, and the influence of managerialism, along with how social workers make policy through practice (Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018).

I take the practices of street-level bureaucrats as my point of departure. Street-level bureaucracies share characteristics with Weber's ideal type of bureaucracies, such as the large extent of division of labour and highly textual work procedures with predefined rules and regulations (Weber, 1971). Nevertheless, Lipsky critiques the Weberian description of the ideal type of bureaucracies as highly rationalised organisations, where their rule-oriented nature reduces the latitude of bureaucrats, (Gubrium, 2016; Weber, 1971) and where bureaucratic practice is subject to principle (Gubrium, 2016). Lipsky's argument, in contrast, is that *street-level* bureaucrats perform 'complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines or instructions cannot circumscribe the alternatives' ([1980] 2010, p. 15). Lipsky further asserts that although the work of street-level bureaucrats may seem highly scripted, it also requires

improvisation, discretion and responsiveness to the individual client (Hupe, 2013; Lipsky, [1980] 2010). The discretionary considerations and practices of street-level bureaucrats are critical for the outcomes from welfare services. The street-level perspective shares theoretical underpinnings with interactionist sociology (cf. Joas et al., 2009), where situations, interactions and practices are given analytical priority. Rather than investigating the presupposed behaviour of street-level bureaucrats based on 'policy as written', I therefore explore 'policy as performed' at the micro-level (Hupe, 2013, p. 435).

The reasons, decisions and actions of street-level bureaucrats ultimately amount to policy (Brodkin, 2012; Lipsky, [1980] 2010), and the street level constitutes 'government-in-action' (Hupe, 2019a, p. 3). Thus, the actions of street-level bureaucrats construct public policy as they are experienced by citizens. This is done in two main ways: 'They exercise wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact. Then, when taken in concert, their individual actions add up to agency behavior' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 13). Hence, the street-level perspective correlate to social constructionism (Järvinen & Miller, 2015). However, from the street-level perspective, social policies are not just the aggregate of the individual actions of street-level bureaucrats; instead, the street-level bureaucrats construct policy through their interpretation and use of (already existing) rules and regulations. Hence, the street-level bureaucrats *operationalise* social- and welfare policies (Evans, 2010; Hupe, 2019; Lipsky, [1980] 2010; Zacka, 2017); that is, they make sense of and make use of such policies (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). Consequently, in the current study, I consider how the actions of street-level bureaucrats relate to policy frames, institutional regulations, and expectations (cf. Eikenaar et al., 2016).

My perspective on street-level bureaucrats as active agents who operationalise policy have implications for my theoretical understanding of their categorisation of cases. The categorisation of a client is an occasion that accentuate the meeting between people and system (Mäkitalo, 2002) and where street-level bureaucrats have critical role mediators. This forms an important rationale for my study design. Street-level bureaucrats play an active and crucial role in determining 'who gets what, when and how' (Lasswell, 1936), they serve as the gatekeepers for welfare services (Fargion et al., 2018), where one of their main functions is to 'determine the eligibility of citizens for government benefits and sanctions' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 4).

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To determine eligibility may be considered a straightforward decision. Bureaucratic eligibility criteria are usually manifested in texts, such as checklists, laws and regulations. From this perspective, the process resembles a *shape sorter* [puttekasse], where the workers place squares in the square holes, triangles in the triangular holes, circles in the round holes and so forth. Hence, differences in access to and outcomes from policies are considered highly regulated by institutional structures. This view opens 'the possibility that the fault for problematic practices lay not entirely with the bureaucrats themselves but with the structural conditions they faced' (Brodkin, 2012, p. 942). However, '(…) program rules can often be interpreted in different ways, and individuals often do not neatly fit into eligibility criteria' (Keiser, 2010, p. 247). Hence, street-level bureaucrats have the interpretive power to decide *how* individuals fit the criteria, where 'rules and regulations provide only a measure of guidance in determining eligibility' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 60). From this perspective, the workers can shape the elements to put in the shape sorter—the clients—and the holes they are supposed to fit in—the criteria—based on what they accentuate, at least to a certain degree. Although the street-level perspective acknowledges the relation between structure and agency in the distribution of services, it provides few analytical tools to explore how this unfolds in practice.

The street-level perspective provides an interesting theoretical framework for studying street-level categorisation and (in)equality in distributed welfare. However, it has also been criticised for providing a too harmonic understanding of street-level practice. Several researchers have built on Lipsky, exploring the power, conflict and negative effects of discretion (Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018). Dubois (2010) highlights how the mediating role of street-level bureaucrats implies that they have the power to modify policies based on their interests. This difference in power is also a significant characteristic of the bureaucrat–client relationship (Evans, 2011; Fargion et al., 2018). The street-level bureaucrats perform delegated authority exercised in the name of the state (Hupe, 2013). However, the considerations and prioritisations of street-level bureaucrats may contribute to distorting policies and adding to the inequalities in outcomes. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2012) describe how the street-level bureaucrats stand in a conflict between the institution and their clients, where they need to navigate opposing interests, acting as state-agents or citizen-

agents. Similarly, Zacka (2017) describes how the moral dispositions of street-level bureaucrats influence how they manage 'impossible situations' in the meeting between institution and client. Evans (2010, 2011) adds a layer to this conflict by describing how the professional background of street-level bureaucrats may encourage opposition towards problematic policies. Vitus (2014) also outline how street-level bureaucrats may work to avoid, or even counteract, reproducing problematic institutional identities and framings inherent in the institutional policies. Thus, the street-level position is a position where the bureaucrats must manage shifting loyalties. However, some argue that these perspectives (over-)emphasise the agency of the street-level bureaucrats and neglect the structuring elements of the institutional setting in which they work, such as measures of accountability (Brodkin, 1997). Evans and Harris (2004) criticise researchers for being too concerned with whether the discretion and discretionary considerations of street-level bureaucrats is 'good' or 'bad' and call for a stronger emphasis on the situational elements of street-level discretion. This forms an important rationale for what I aim to do in this study.

4.2   Theoretical perspectives on street-level categorisation

Welfare service provision depend on street-level bureaucrats' 'processing of *people* into *clients*, assigning them to categories for treatment by bureaucrats, and treating them in terms of those categories' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 59). How street-level bureaucrats categorise people is crucial in mediating the relationship between input and output in street-level welfare bureaucracies–which people get what services (see Figure 1). The categorisation of people has real consequences for clients (Juhila et al., 2007), in that it opens (only) for specific services. Hacking (1985) describes how the making of people takes place in the intersection between (expert) labels from above, and the reality of the person from below. In the clientisation process, categories serve as framing devices through which ordinary troubles are translated into serviceable problems (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014). Emerson and Messinger (1977) describe troubles as a vague sense of 'something wrong', but it is unclear what that something is and how to approach or treat it. Gubrium (2016) emphasises that in contrast, (institutionalised) problems have a logic of clarity that is the

result of problematisation; a process that 'transform[s] the vagueness of what is troublesome into what is claimed to be clearly problematic' (Gubrium, 2016, p. 22). This problematisation is a core element of the categorisation and clientisation process. Here, institutional texts offer 'formal guidance for how to problematise troubles by eclipsing vagueness' (Gubrium, 2016, p. 23). The process when street-level bureaucrats categorise a client does not merely depend on how the street-level bureaucrats differentiate between people based on their personal assessments but is intimately linked to the bureaucratic context. This suggest that the clientisation-process is informed by institutional discourses (Mäkitalo & Säljö, 2002).
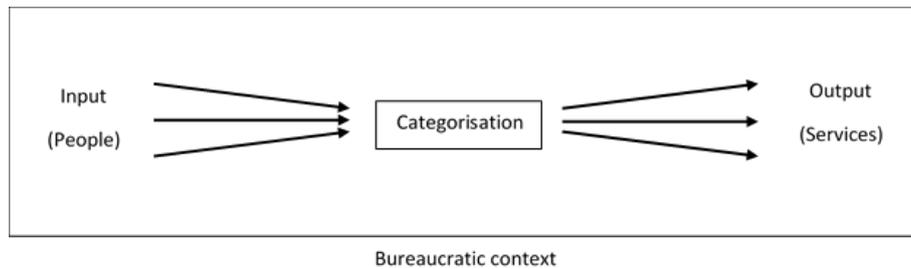
Figure 1: Categorisation mediate the relationship between which people get what services within a bureaucratic context.

Next, I outline two main theoretical perspectives on (street-level) categorisation. One focuses on the *categories*, and how they function as a differentiating *mechanism*. The other conceptualise categorisation as a differentiating *practice*. From the first perspective, categories serve as scripts for caseworkers' expectations of and approach to different groups of clients. How a client is categorised determines the measures to be taken in response to the perceived problem, which functions as a guide for action (Goffman, 1974; Weick, 1995). Hacking (1985) argues that categories influence how we understand, perceive and consider the world. This may happen in several different ways. The formal categories identify target groups for policies. Thus, categories function as organising structures (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016, p. 78) serving to differentiate between groups. Moreover, a category may be

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labelled positively or negatively. Jenkins (1994) describes how the definition of some groups into specific categories contributes to define 'members of the category in question as socially deficient or lacking in some fashion and serve to label them further as "undeserving" or "troublesome"' (Jenkins, 1994, p. 214). This is often the result of simplifications, differentiations and processing of information (Diedrich et al., 2011), that may be based on and reinforce prejudices, stereotypes and street-level bias (Talleraas, 2019). The definition of categories may be influenced by several discursive oppositions, such as culture, race, ethnicity, and citizenship (Vassenden, 2010). This perspective of categorisation as a differentiating mechanism may be criticised for having a too static understanding of categories as clear-cut and predefined, where some clients are defined into or out of the categories by the street-level bureaucrats (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013).

The second perspective on (street-level) categorization provides a more process-oriented understanding on street-level categorisation and is also the perspective I rely on in the current study. There are three main ways in which the practice of categorisation has been conceptualised theoretically: a) as a discretionary consideration, b) as decision making and c) as sensemaking. In my articles, I have employed insights from all of them.

First, categorisation practices may be conceptualised as discretion. Lipsky ([1980] 2010) describes categorisation as an outcome of street-level discretion. Molander et al. (2012) describe epistemic discretion as a mode of reasoning where discretionary considerations consist of judgements that are argued for and justified in relation to institutional criteria. This understanding indicates that categorisation requires knowledge, interpretation, and judgement. Discretion has been conceptualised in numerous different ways, such as administrative discretion (Bouchard & Carroll, 2002), or professional discretion (McDonald & Marston, 2006; Molander, 2017). However, conceptualisations of street-level discretion tend to either be defined in a way that makes it too abstract to explore it as practice, by simply describing categorisation as discretion, or have a too rigorous description of what a discretionary consideration entails and hence encourage a deductive logic (Hupe, 2013). This conceptualisation therefore has a limited apparatus for open-ended exploration of how street-level workers categorise clients.

A second and similar way to conceptualise categorisation practices theoretically is as decision-making processes. Van Parys (2019) describe how this strand of research focus on explaining the decisions street-level bureaucrats make. Keiser (2010) measure variation in decision-making as street-level bureaucrats determine eligibilities. However, this perspective portrays categorisation as a *moment* of decision making (Hall et al., 2007, p. 13). It therefore lacks an analytical apparatus to explore categorisation as a process intertwined in the everyday practices of street-level bureaucrats.

This brings me to the third way street-level categorisation practices can be conceptualised theoretically: as sensemaking. Raaphorst and Van de Walle (2018) explore how street-level bureaucrats interpret client characteristics and suggest a signalling perspective as an analytical framework to. This resembles Weick's (1995, 2001, 2006) conceptualisation of sensemaking, with a focus on interpretive frameworks and cues (Weick et al., 2005). Raaphorst and Van de Walle (2018) connect the more general sensemaking framework to street-level practice. This conceptualisation of categorisation as a result of interpretive frameworks directs attention to the processual and interpretive aspects of categorisation. However, it fails to connect how street-level bureaucrats differentiate between clients in the bureaucratic context. Hence, the conceptualisation lacks one (important) dimension.

The existing conceptualisations of categorisation as a differentiating mechanism and practice provides in-depth understandings that may prove particularly valuable if categorisation is positioned as the independent variable in research (cf. Van Parys, 2019), rather than as a research object in itself (Hupe, 2013). However, the theoretical conceptualisations I have presented do not provide sufficient analytical concepts to help me explore *how* street-level bureaucrats *do* categorise immigrant clients *during their everyday work* and how their categorisations of clients *relate to* the bureaucratic context (see Figure 1).

4.3 Expanding theories of categorisation through institutional ethnography

I combine the theoretical perspectives presented above with analytical concepts from institutional ethnography to unpack and explore how street-level bureaucrats make sense of and further categorise immigrant clients and how this work relates to the larger institutional relations of street-level practice. Hence, the current study *is* not *an* institutional ethnography in its purest sense. Institutional ethnography has been described as an alternative sociology (Mykhalovskiy et al., 2021; Smith, 2005; Widerberg, 2015a). In her formulation of institutional ethnography, Smith takes inspiration from several theoretical traditions, including feminist theory, ethnomethodology, and dialogism (de Montigny, 2007; de Montigny, 2021; Devault, 2021; Nilsen, 2017; Smith, 2014; Tummons, 2017). Smith (1999, 2005) developed institutional ethnography as a critique of, and alternative to mainstream and objectifying sociology (Lund & Magnussen, 2018), where acting subjects are reduced to social phenomenon (Rua, 2012). In this objectifying process, social knowledge is made to be independent of the actors or subjects. Here, knowledge is separated from the subjects and their experiences and made out to be something over and above them and presented as an objective truth. From an institutional ethnographic perspective, researchers need to 'start with humans and the activities and experiences they have, which is situated in a particular practice or activity' to understand society (Widerberg, 2015a, p. 15 [author's translation]).

Several scholars argue that institutional ethnography is an approach that requires the researcher to follow specific procedures and methods (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b), but to different degrees (see for example Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Rankin, 2017). However, this authoritive understanding has been challenged by a more pragmatic viewpoint (Tummons, 2017; Walby, 2013), proposed in large by Nordic scholars (see examples in Lund & Nilsen, 2020a; Widerberg, 2015b). These Nordic scholars encourage the use of institutional ethnography in combination with other theories and methods to gain insights into, in particular, the workings of welfare institutions (Widerberg, 2015a). I take inspiration from this understanding of institutional ethnography. Nordic scholars have typically legitimated their 'partial' use of institutional

ethnography by claiming they are *inspired by* the approach (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press). Devault (2021) describes this as a 'hybrid-approach' because of its extensive use of complementary theoretical perspectives. In this study, I make use of institutional ethnography in an abductive approach (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press). Hence, I use analytical concepts from institutional ethnography to concretise and further develop the theories of street-level bureaucrats' categorisation of clients.

My abductive approach towards institutional ethnography has allowed me to explore the actions of street-level bureaucrats as a form of categorisation *work*; to unpack the practices, knowledge and skills involved in this work and how it relates to the institutional context in which they work (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press). Although institutional ethnography contributes towards accentuating the same elements of categorisation as the perspectives outlined in section 4.2, the concepts in institutional ethnography contribute to a more in-depth exploration of these elements, largely because they must be operationalised empirically. For example, by not just establishing that texts are part of categorisation practices but encourage an exploration of how the street-level bureaucrats make use of the different texts in their categorisation work. I get back to this below. Figure 2 is a further development of Figure 1 that illustrates how institutional ethnography contributes with concepts that assist in the unpacking of categorisation.
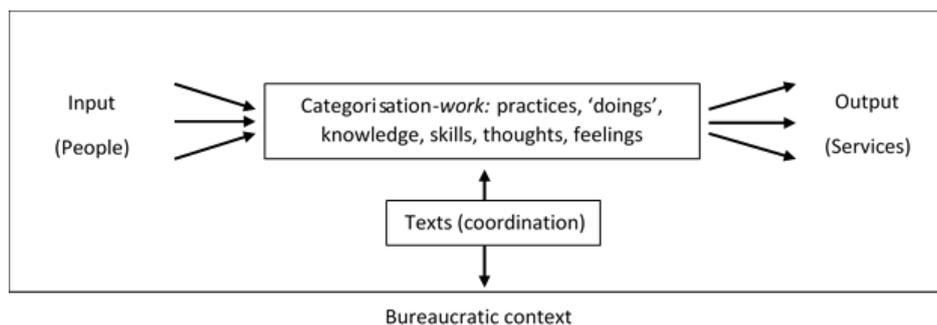
Figure 2: Unpacking categorisation through analytical concepts from institutional ethnography.

There are correlations between the street-level perspective and institutional ethnography. The two traditions direct attention to the actions and 'doings' of people and keep in view the larger structures that encompass the actor. My motivation for employing an institutional ethnographic approach is that it comprises several analytical concepts that are useful to explore 'what actually happens when public policies are enacted' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 213). Smith (1999, 2005) emphasises how the research should not end in individual experiences but investigate how their experiences are coordinated with others, or how they are 'socially organised'. Hence, perspectives from institutional ethnography contribute to challenge distinctions and dualisms between 'structure-agency, macro-micro and individual-society' (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b, p. 3), where the micro-actions of the caseworkers are understood as concerted by the macro-structures of the institution in which they work. In the Norwegian context, several researchers have used institutional ethnography as an approach to explore street-level welfare practices (Åsheim, 2018, 2019; Breimo, 2015; Lundberg, 2012; Magnussen, 2020; Nilsen, 2016; Øversveen & Forseth, 2018). My abductive approach has been informed particularly by three concepts from institutional ethnography: work, ruling relations and texts.

Institutional ethnography has encouraged an analytical focus on the categorisation *work* of caseworkers, where I have focused on their practices, 'doings', knowledge, skills, thoughts, and feelings as they make sense of and categorise immigrant clients. Inspiration by ethnomethodology, w*ork* constitutes an analytical concept that encourages rich descriptions of actors' activities (de Montigny, 2021). 'By institutional ethnographers, "work" is used in a generous sense to extend anything done by people that takes time and efforts, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about' (Smith, 2005, pp. 151–152). Hence, this concept contributes towards changing the focus from identifying different forms of discretionary decision making to opening up to what actually happens: what they do and how they do it, including how they think and feel (Smith, 2005, p. 151). I have explored the practices, knowledge, reasons, and argumentations that is part of 'conceptualizing, naming, selecting, differentiating and classifying' (Campbell, 2016, p. 250). The focus on work contributes to deconstruct the *institutional captures* (Nilsen, 2021; Smith, 1999), which are ways of talking about work which are descriptively empty. It

is through unfolding these notions that we get knowledge of what actually happens, how and why. Lund and Magnussen (2018) suggest that institutional ethnography is useful to explore *how* people *do* categories and categorisation.

The concept of *ruling relations* encourages my exploration of how the caseworkers' practices connect to coordinating mechanisms such as textual, institutional, and discursive frames. In institutional ethnography, people are understood as fundamentally social beings, where they actively interact with their surroundings and make sense of it (Widerberg, 2015a). However, our actions and understandings are influenced by what Smith conceptualises as ruling relations: 'the extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connects us across space and time and organise our everyday lives' (Smith, 2005, p. 10). In her conception of ruling relations, Smith (2005) takes inspiration from Foucault and his understanding of discourse. However, she criticises his conception as one that locates discourse externally to subjectivities as something that imposes on and coerces them (Smith, 2005). Hence, the discursive world is given priority over the life world, and the actual are made into an expression of discourse (Rua, 2012). Smith introduces a more relational understanding to discourse, where the subjects, although sometimes unconsciously, engage with these discourses as they perform daily acts, such as walking down a city street or shopping for groceries. Smith (2005, p. 18) argues that our focus should be on how 'these daily acts articulate us into social relations of the order I have called *ruling*'. Thus, in institutional ethnography, discourses are something that is being done, put to use and changed in the interactions between actors and between actors and their surroundings (Widerberg, 2015a). Nilsen (2021, p. 366) describes how discourses may be part of professional language by form of *ideological codes,* textually mediated and replicable schematic understandings, such as 'the good parent', or what Magnussen (2020, p. 66) describes as the 'ideal refugee'. Lund (2015) encourages researchers to search for such ruling relations by looking for traces of ruling in people's activities: references to texts, and institutions when people do things and when they describe why they do those things in certain ways. By asking actors about their activities, the researcher is searching for how such ruling relations are 'doing something' to people's activities as those activities are being performed (Rua, 2012, p. 22).

Texts constitute a material form of ruling relations. Smith's (2006) conceptualisation of texts provides me with an analytical framework for exploring *how* texts influence how the caseworkers categorise immigrant clients. The institutional ethnographic approach facilitates a perspective on texts as a link between caseworkers' practices at the micro-level and the bureaucratic context at the meso- and macro-levels. Texts have a material and replicable character that allows them to be distributed broadly and taken up by different people at different times (Smith, 2006; Walby, 2013). Texts, such as road signs or instructions on cash registers, coordinate our actions from outside our local space (Smith 1999, pp. 80–92), as *translocal relations*. People perform their activities in relation to textual regulations and instructions developed somewhere else within the institutional structure (Smith, 2005). However, people also choose how to read and activate the texts, where the 'activation by a reader insert the text's message into the local setting and the sequence of action into which it is read' (Smith, 2005, p. 105). This is what Smith (2005) refers to as the text–reader conversation. Hence, the actor is active in interpreting and relating the texts to their reality, but the texts also 'enter into' and coordinate the actor's practices. In an institutional ethnographic approach, texts are studied as a practice. In bureaucracies, the workers also produce texts through their casework (Griffith & Smith, 2014; Nilsen & Steen-Johnsen, 2020). This may be through forms and schedules, or texts that are freely written by the caseworkers. On example is the production of client files, where the caseworkers translate experiences into objectified statements about the other (Smith, 2006). The descriptions of the client in these files serve as the institutional representation of the person (Smith, 2006) and is what constitutes the departure point for further actions. This is an example of how texts are part of *accountability circuits*. The street-level bureaucrats need to justify their actions and decisions in texts, where they are accountable to the formulation of rules, regulations, and procedures (Nilsen, 2017). Hence, texts function as regulatory frames that 'govern the selection of what will be recorded, observed, described, and so on' (Smith, 2005, p. 191). In the current study, I do not focus on the content of these texts per se but rather on how the texts enter into the categorisation work of street-level bureaucrats, how they use them, argument in relation to them and create them.

5 Methodology

In this chapter, I account for the methodological choices and ethical considerations I have made during the study. The overall design of the study is explorative. This requires the use of different perspectives and approaches (Maxwell, 2009). Although data imply different levels of involvement from the researcher, my perspective on data is that they are always produced as an interpretive process (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, p. 36). As a researcher, I decide who to talk to and how, how to focus the research, what to ask, what to describe and how to further interpret and present the data. Additionally, the informants also interpret my questions, my role and the research situation and choose what to share and how. Hence, data are not something that researchers can 'collect' from informants, as something unpolluted by the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 67). In the first section of this chapter, I discuss my subjectivity and position myself as a 'halfie'. I further describe how my halfie position has provided challenges and opportunities in the study. The second section consists of a presentation of the study's research design, sample, and analytical approach. In the third and last section, I discuss some ethical considerations central to the study, and the study's limits. The current study has been reviewed and recommended by the Data Protection Official for Research (NSD) [project reference: 738596].

5.1 Subjectivity and my researcher position

In the present study, I am positioned as a 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Zulfikar, 2014). The halfie position is one where the researcher is both an insider and outsider at the same time. Before starting the PhD, I worked as a caseworker in NAV for one year, learning about the organisation, work processes and institutionalised language from within. My position as a halfie has provided both opportunities and challenges. Most importantly, it freed my capacity because the system and work were already familiar to me. Rudie (1997) highlights that one must understand the code, or the syntax, of the social context in which one engages as a researcher, and when one knows the syntax, it will reduce the complexity of the situation. My familiarity with how the frontline offices functioned, the different benefits, rules and regulations and the overall

system meant that I spent less time getting to know these things as I prepared the study design and during the production and interpretation of the data. Hence, I could explore situations that I already knew might provide interesting insights into the work of the caseworkers. One example is how I had experienced that the caseworkers used the team meetings as arenas for discussing cases, making these discussions into a key situation for my fieldwork. However, my halfie position also produced two essential challenges regarding (1) interpretation and (2) potential blind spots. These challenges prevailed throughout the research process but were particularly prominent during the fieldwork.

First, my halfie position might have influenced how I interpreted what the caseworkers said and did and why. My familiarity with the institutional context and work in NAV somewhat complicated the production and interpretation of data because I had to separate between what I knew from my own experiences and what I got to know from my informants. Not because I could not use what I already knew, but because I had to stay open to how the caseworkers may do things differently than I had done and have different understandings of the work I used to perform myself. NAV is an organisation in constant change (Lundberg, 2012). Hence, the work of caseworkers may also have changed since I left the organisation. This was particularly important during the fieldwork. Hence, I wrote down my preconceptions of what the caseworkers did and why before and during the data production in an effort to separate this from new interpretations during data production. I used these notes actively both in the production and interpretation of the data to check my understandings and ask questions of the caseworkers. My intimate knowledge of the procedures and work processes may have cast shadows on what was really going on and what might be interesting to the research.

Second, the halfie position comes with potential blind spots regarding what the informants told me and what I noticed. The informants might only implicitly tell me about what they do and how, seeing me as an insider. This may also cause an ethical problem. I will get back to this later. I was also afraid to tell them too much about my own experiences because I did not want it to function as a normative reference point that could make them less inclined to talk to me. When I started the research, I tried to keep my previous knowledge less evident in my interactions with the informants. Although I told them that I had

previously worked as a caseworker, I tried to ask naïve questions and act unfamiliar with NAV. However, this act felt artificial and prevented me from taking advantage of the benefits of being a halfie. This challenge faded as the research developed. My knowledge of NAV and their work became more natural after I had talked to more caseworkers, especially after the introductory stages of the fieldwork. I became more confident in my researcher role. During the fieldwork, the caseworkers also seemed to take my knowledge more for granted because I had been a part of their workday for a while. I could also more easily detect the similarities and differences between my previous knowledge and what they told and showed me from their work. This provided opportunities to explore their work further.

Second, as a halfie researcher, I was familiar with the professional discourse in the institution. It was a challenge not to ignore the things that I was familiar with (Wadel, 2014, p. 90) and unfold the institutionalised language and professional discourses that '… provides a framing of the way work is thought about and undertaken' (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 70). To counteract such potential blind spots, I made weekly summaries of my fieldnotes in English. This forced me to explain what was happening in a less institutionalised language. I had to explicate and explain what was usually inherent in the institutional categories or concepts. Wadel (2014, p. 90) talks about concepts and categories as both potential 'pigeonholes' that the researcher may overlook or take as natural, but also as a necessity to understand and make use of the knowledge that people have. Familiar structures, such as the institutionalised language, were a blind spot in my data for some time. I took for granted what the caseworkers meant. For instance, this occurred when the caseworkers were talking about challenges regarding 'language'. From my work in NAV, I naturally assumed that they meant a lack of proficiency in Norwegian and that it might be difficult to communicate with the clients lacking 'language'. I wrote it down as part of the case discussion, but I did not pay any more attention to it. I started to translate 'language' into 'proficiency in Norwegian' in my English fieldnotes because that is what I thought they meant. It was not until one of the caseworkers asked the others in a team meeting if they could elaborate on what they meant by the client having 'challenges with language' that I understood that it was not necessarily so simple. Learning from this experience, I more frequently asked the caseworkers to elaborate or explain things they did and

said that I thought I knew but that was not obvious. Although I have tried to pay particular attention to and make efforts to make visible potential blind spots such as the institutionalised language, I cannot exclude the fact that there probably still are blind spots in my data and analysis.

5.2 Gaining access to NAV

A common challenge for researchers is to gain access to the people, situations or organisations they want to explore. However, my process of gaining access to NAV and an office to do my fieldwork in was not characterised by challenges. I easily got in contact with persons who later functioned as key persons in the project. Because my process has been quite uncomplicated and have provided valuable guidance to the project, I want to describe how I went about gaining access. I hope the following description can help and inspire future researchers in preparation of their access strategy.

As I started the study, I tried to get as much knowledge as I could about NAV and their work with immigrants, both from research, policies and the information NAV themselves provide on their objectives, priorities, statistics and measures. From this information, I noticed people or departments related to this field.

It has been important to me that my PhD-project provides information of value to the organisation. Therefore, I reached out to the Directorate of Labour and Welfare quite early in the process. This is the organisation responsible for the control and management of NAV. I explained how I wanted to know more about their work with immigrants and the challenges and possibilities they may consider fruitful to explore further. They agreed to a meeting, and I had a long and interesting meeting with the one person at the directorate responsible for questions regarding 'immigrants'. After the meeting, NAV agreed to comment on my project proposal and help me get the data I needed to do the project. Over the course of a couple of months, I presented my project, and NAV provided important comments on the project from their point of view. For instance, they told me about what NAV already had knowledge of, besides from what is written down in research reports or articles, along with the things they believed to be true but did not have actual data on.

In parallel to my project development process, I conducted informal interviews of key persons in the NAV system. These were the people I had noticed in my review of research reports and policy texts or those who the directorate thought could provide me with valuable insights. I wanted to get to know the field from within the organisation: what they experienced as challenges in their work with clients with immigrant background and how the organisation tried to manage these challenges. I talked to a total of about 20 people. Some were associated with NAV's special unit, formerly known as NAV Intro. These units were responsible for knowledge of the immigration field; they functioned as resources to the frontline offices and to the county and directorate regarding policy development. I also had initial conversations with people working in the county administrations or frontline offices that had a particular focus on their work with immigrant clients. After the conversations, I wrote down my thoughts about what they emphasised as challenges and knowledge gaps regarding NAV's work with immigrant clients. They all acknowledged the diversity among their clients with immigrant backgrounds in terms of background and their potential needs from NAV. However, they also highlighted that their (NAV's) efforts seemed to miss the mark regarding (some of) the clients with immigrant backgrounds. They disagreed on whether to define 'immigrants' as a specific client group in policy would help improve their services and emphasised that they had limited knowledge about how street-level bureaucrats understand and worked with these clients in their daily work.

The people I talked to functioned as door openers and helped me get access to both the internal courses and what eventually became the office where I conducted my fieldwork. Although I believe that contact with NAV at an early stage of the project development and their help in gaining access has benefitted the project, it has also brought about some ethical questions, particularly regarding the independence of the research and for the caseworkers to potentially consider me a management-representative during the further data production. I will discuss these issues later in the chapter.

5.3   Research design

To get insights into why NAV has been unsuccessful in their efforts to accommodate (some of) their clients with immigrant backgrounds, I wanted to explore the field from the street-level bureaucrats' point of view. I therefore started the empirical investigation from the standpoint of the caseworkers in NAV. I use Smith's conception of standpoint as the 'social positioning of the subject of knowledge, the knower and creator of knowledge' (Smith, 2005, p. 9). Smith is inspired by the conception of 'standpoint' from feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1987). However, in institutional ethnography 'standpoint' is not associated with a specific position or category of race, gender or class, instead it represents a subject position from where experience and knowledge are discovered (Smith, 1999, p. 10). The study is grounded in 'concrete reality and the everyday problems of ordinary human beings' (Dunn, 2018b, p. 58), more specifically of the street-level caseworkers in NAV. This means that the knowledge and work of the caseworkers have been my entry-point of investigation. I have been interested in the 'doings' of the caseworkers and tried to contextualise and ground their work by illuminating the 'connections between the troubles of individuals and the institutional and systemic forces shaping their lives' (Dunn, 2018a, p. 30).

Another important aspect of the research design is that the study has an explorative design. In terms of institutional ethnography, one can describe this as focused on a problematic and inquiry into a field, rather than as a search for specific answers to a definitive question. A problematic is 'a territory to be discovered, not a question that is concluded in its answer' (Smith, 2005, p. 41). You may have noticed that the current study has research questions. However, these questions are directed towards exploration, not as questions searching for definitive and clear-cut answers. I have also used relatively open-ended approaches in the empirical investigation: observations, interviews and fieldwork. I conducted the empirical data production over a one-year period during the spring and fall of 2017.

5.3.1   Sample and data

I base the study on three empirical data sets; 1) observations of three full-day courses of 'how to counsel clients with immigrant background' and subsequent

interviews of 11 caseworkers who attended the course, 2) a five-month ethnographic fieldwork at one frontline NAV office, 3) texts from the course and fieldwork, in addition to laws, regulations and administrative texts. In addition, I have used previous empirical research as fourth set of data for a qualitative evidence synthesis. I have used the different datasets to explore, respectively, how the institution frames the caseworkers' work with immigrant clients (observation of courses), the reflections and thoughts of the caseworkers (interviews), the practices and skills involved in the counselling of immigrant clients towards a job (fieldwork) and the institutional and discursive context (texts).

The different data build on each other; the courses create the foundation for the interviews, in turn founding the basis for the fieldwork, and the insights from the fieldwork are compared and contrasted with the data from the qualitative evidence synthesis. Hence, I could pursue the processes they referred to and challenges addressed as the research progressed. I did not use the different data to confirm or discard the other but to broaden and develop the findings. This approach facilitates what Maxwell (2009, p. 126) defines as 'rich data'. However, I have given priority to the fieldwork in the articles. The fieldwork enabled me to contextualise the understandings the caseworkers had expanded on in the interviews and investigate challenges they had discussed during the courses. Although the discussions at the courses, the interviews and fieldwork all provide data on practices and reflections of caseworkers, it was the fieldwork that went from 'saying' to 'doing'. However, my analytical focus in the articles is informed by all sets of data.

Table 2 provides an overview of the three empirical datasets and what they consist of. The texts included were all gathered at different times during the data production. During the observations, interviews and fieldwork, I have focused on references to institutional structures and texts and how the caseworkers relate to and activate these in their work. Hence, I have described the texts in the vertical column in relation to the stage in the data production process where they were obtained. However, the texts are a separate dataset in the study that I have used in my interpretations of the other data. Moreover, the observations have served as an arena for recruiting caseworkers for individual interviews, and (as described above) the key persons functioned as door openers for the fieldwork in particular.

	What/who	**3. Texts**
Key persons	Directorate of Labour and Welfare County administration NAV special units	The counselling platform Laws/regulations Organisation chart
1a. Observations	3 full-day courses	Handouts from the course
1b. Interviews	11 individual caseworkers	
2. Fieldwork	5 months, 115 situations: 35 team meetings, 59 informal conversations/case discussions, 15 meetings with clients, 3 external meetings, 3 days in the office reception.	Overview/descriptions of measures Descriptions of local routines and procedures Information/brochures for clients Forms Client files NAV's computer system

Table 2: Overview of the three sets of empirical data: (1) observations and interviews, (2) fieldwork and (3) texts

5.3.1.1 Observations and interviews

I performed participant observation of three of NAV's internal full-day courses in 'counselling clients with migrant backgrounds' during the spring of 2017. Advisers from the resource centre on immigration in NAV were responsible for the courses, and they were open to the participation of caseworkers at the frontline NAV offices. My main motivation for observing the courses was to recruit caseworkers to individual in-depth interviews following the course. However, the courses also provided insights into how NAV frames the caseworkers' work with clients with immigrant backgrounds, and disagreements among caseworkers.

The courses consisted of lectures, roleplay (between the teachers, not involving the caseworkers) and group assignments or discussions. The caseworkers sat in groups of four or five around a table. During the courses, I sat at one of the tables and participated in the discussion or groupwork around that table. Most of the caseworkers were women, and about a third of them had an immigrant background. My data consist of detailed fieldnotes that I wrote down during the course, depicting what the instructors emphasised, what the participants discussed in plenum and when and their feedback to the instructors. I did not,

however, write down what the group I sat with discussed because I did not want to intrude on their consent to participate and wanted them to talk freely when they attended a course intended to increase their competency in the topic. However, during breaks, I approached some of them and asked for elaborations on things they might have said during the discussion. This gave them the opportunity to decline the inquiry. Goffman (1989, pp. 125–126) notes that by conducting participant observation, 'you are in position to note their gestural, visual, bodily response to what's going on around them and you're empathetic enough (…) to sense what it is that they're responding to'. The courses provided information about what NAV as an institution emphasise, hence contributing to contextualise the work of caseworkers. In addition, it provided knowledge on how caseworkers with different backgrounds understand conceptions such as culture, integration and work and what they experienced as challenges and the possibilities in their work with clients with an immigrant background. Moreover, it provided insights into uncertainties and disagreements among the caseworkers or between caseworkers and policy makers, such as discussions about which clients that they should understand as 'immigrants'.

I conducted 11 individual interviews with caseworkers conducted shortly after the courses. This allowed me to get further knowledge about what the caseworkers think about the descriptions of their work with immigrant clients as a special type of work requiring specific skills and awareness. In the interviews, I asked the caseworkers questions related to how they perceived the course, what they had learned from it, their own experiences and thoughts about counselling clients with immigrant background and their reflections on culture and cultural sensitivity in NAV. The interviews varied in length between one and two hours. Two of the participants were males, the rest of them were females. Their ages ranged from 27 to 55. Three addressed their own background as immigrants during the interviews. The caseworkers worked in different parts of NAV with different categories of clients, but they all worked with assisting clients get back to employment. I conducted the interviews in the caseworkers' offices or in a meeting room at the NAV office where they worked. In addition to taking handwritten notes during the interviews, I used an audio-recorder and later transcribed the recordings.

I used the same interview guide throughout the interviews (see appendix 6), but my way of questioning evolved somewhat between each interview. The

interview guide was, as shown in the appendix, quite extensive. I took an open-ended approach and did not ask about everything in every interview but tried to build on the preceding interviews. However, after the initial interviews, I experienced that the caseworkers responded to my questions with 'ideological accounts' (Nilsen, 2021), such as politicalised perceptions of immigrants and their difference from other clients—both positive and negative or descriptions of their work that entailed 'taken for granted' truths (Curwen et al., 2020, p. 178), what Smith (2005) refers to as institutional captures. For instance, that their counselling of clients depended on 'what the client is eligible for', without elaborating how they decided eligibility or what the counselling would constitute in each case. Inspired by the work of Nilsen (2017) and Liodden (2015), after a couple of interviews, I changed the second part of the interviews to ask the caseworkers to tell me about cases where culture seemed to be of relevance or what they experienced as 'typical' immigrant cases. Further, I asked them to elaborate on what they did in these cases and why and to contrast their stories with differing experiences. These questions produced more elaborate data on how the caseworkers related to questions of culture and ethnicity in their counselling of clients of immigrant backgrounds.

5.3.1.2 Fieldwork

From September 2017 to January 2018, I conducted a five-month ethnographic fieldwork at one frontline NAV office. The fieldwork facilitated knowledge of what the caseworkers do, how they do it and their dilemmas and reflections in situ. More specifically, I wanted to get situated knowledge of how the caseworkers differentiated between cases, what the caseworkers considered the appropriate approaches and strategies for different cases and how the institutional setting influenced the caseworkers' work. Hence, I focused the fieldwork on caseworkers' formal and informal discussions of cases. The ethnographic approach enabled me to get to know the individual, processual and institutional aspect of the caseworkers' work.

The field office is located on the west coast of Norway and serves an urban area with a large proportion of immigrant residents; the caseworkers regularly manage cases where the client has an immigrant background. Fossestøl et al. (2014) distinguish between small-, medium- and large-sized offices, where large NAV offices are the ones with more than 40 full-time employees. Hence,

the field office can be characterised as a large frontline office. However, in the first article, I described the office as of a medium size because it is smaller than the specifically large ones (more than 100 employees). Frøyland et al. (2016) describe how the size of the offices influences the collaboration both internally in the office and with external partners. The office size also influences their organisation (Fossestøl et al., 2014). The field office is organised by the principle of specialisation. This implies that each team typically works with one client group. However, the office is organised based on divisions between state and municipal areas of responsibility, the division of client groups based on their 'service need' and the different types of benefits: health related, unemployment and social (Kane, 2020; Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, submitted). The office is located across three floors, with the office reception areas on the ground floor, and office spaces on the two remaining floors. Several of the caseworkers have their own separate offices, but some offices are shared between four caseworkers. The office is organised into three departments with smaller teams of caseworkers that work with the same category of clients. Similar to several other NAV offices (PROBA, 2018), the field office has a separate youth team that share responsibility for all the cases of clients under 30 years old. This is the only team in the office that works across divisions between benefits and areas of responsibility. When I started data production, the office had recently employed an additional caseworker to serve as a contact between the introductory programme for refugees and NAV. Most employees are female, which coincides with the general gender-composition in NAV (Fossestøl et al., 2014).

The difference between conceptions of ethnography and fieldwork is much debated. Ingold (2014) questions whether reducing ethnography to fieldwork is to neglect the anthropological tradition. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that there is considerable overlap between the concepts of 'fieldwork' and 'ethnography'. Both refer to a holistic view of research, where a range of methods can be employed and integrated (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). I will not discuss the two conceptions further but adhere to the understanding of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and use the two notions interchangeably. Ethnography encourages an open-ended approach where the researcher has the flexibility to pursue interesting situations or information as the fieldwork proceeds (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Fieldwork is a familiar

ethnographic method that is usually 'grounded' and empirical, producing detailed descriptions on practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are the most used tools when doing fieldwork. During the fieldwork, I engaged in field conversations (Buvik et al., 2020) with the caseworkers. Wadel (2014) emphasises the combination of asking questions and doing participant observations as the best way of getting to know the practices of informants. Fieldwork also implies a high degree of participation from the researcher (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014) because the researcher participates in the situations with the informants.

During the five months of the fieldwork, I had access to an office or desk at the NAV office. However, access to workspaces at the office was limited. I borrowed a workspace where the caseworker was absent that day, so I had to change where I sat every day. On a typical day, I arrived at the office, found a workspace to put my things and got coffee from the kitchen. Based on my halfie knowledge, I had decided to concentrate the fieldwork around team and department meetings. Most days, I had already scheduled meetings and proceeded to join them. The use of fieldwork methods made it possible to notice, describe and unpack the work the caseworkers did in meetings, what they emphasised, the trade-offs, (heated) arguments and how they employed institutional texts and protocols. Cases the caseworkers had brought up in the meetings served as an entry point for further field conversations with the caseworkers after the meetings. I would join them in their office after their meeting or have a cup of coffee with them in the kitchen. Some of the discussions resulted in the caseworker inviting me to join them in a meeting with the client. They always asked the client for permission before having me join them. If the client agreed for me to participate in their meeting, I also joined the caseworker when they prepared for the meeting and the work following the meeting. Hence, I got to know what kind of information they used in their preparations, how they planned their meetings and the further case proceedings following different meetings. Besides participating in meetings, my days at the office consisted of me hanging out in the kitchen and walking around the office asking caseworkers from different teams if they had time to talk to me about some of their cases or about their work. I also used my analytical notes (see below) to further direct my inquiries with the caseworkers. The objective was

to get to know as much as I could about their work, the organisation of their work, the coordination of their work with other caseworkers and collaborators and how they managed their (immigrant) cases.

I was not present at the office all day or every day during the five months. The ethnographic data consist of thick descriptions of a total of 115 situations comprising 35 team meetings with all teams in the office, 59 informal conversations or case discussions with caseworkers, 15 meetings with clients, three external meetings with employers or collaborators and three days I spent in the office reception. The situations are described in the fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 1995). Because of confidentiality reasons, I have not written down personal information about the clients they discussed, only noting the characteristics of the case and what the caseworkers asked about, highlighted and considered in the discussions. This, of course, limits the following analysis. I produced handwritten descriptive notes of what was happening, some direct quotes of what people said, which people were part of the situation and how and why. My motivation for not using a video- or audio-recorder to document the fieldwork was twofold. First, I wanted to protect third parties, such as clients. Second, as I conducted a five-month fieldwork, it would have been impractical to record everything. It would have left me with an excessively large amount of data to transcribe or manage. Hence, the production of data would still have involved selecting only some situations to document, on purpose or by accident. Wadel (2014, p. 83) refers to Arthur Koestler, who defines the production of data as 'a discriminating activity, like picking of flowers, and unlike the action of a lawnmower'. I decided to only use handwritten notes that I later expanded on using a computer. This allowed me to be present in the situations I took part in. In addition, it did not create a separation between data from recordings (audio/video) and from handwritten notes but gave equal status to all data from the fieldwork. I normally did this either continuously during the day, at the workspace I loaned or at the end of the day after I got home. I focused my fieldnotes around descriptions of the situations, people, their actions and interactions. Additionally, I wrote analytical notes of my reflections of a situation, what I could focus on as the fieldwork went on and questions or problems that I wanted to explore further.

5.3.1.3 Texts

The interviews and fieldwork provide information about the understandings, reflections and practices of the caseworkers. A third important source of data is texts. Texts are essential in institutional practices because they enter into and coordinate sequences of action (Smith, 2006; Smith & Turner, 2014a). Hence, I was interested in how the caseworkers made use of the texts in their work, holding them accountable and prescribing courses of action (Smith, 2006). This way of considering texts as occurrences in institutional practice (Nilsen, 2021) differs from how texts are used as data for a discourse or document analysis. In the current study, texts constitute the link between the actions and understandings of caseworkers and the institution. The texts are a separate source of data, but I have analysed them as the caseworkers' reference to and use them in the other sets of data: which texts they refer to, how and why. The texts that I use as data contribute to 'identify the specific institutional setting, its professional discourses and regulating text that frames the everyday actions of professionals and users' (Høgsbro, 2015, p. 67).

As described in Table 2, I collected the texts at three points. Before starting the observations, I transcribed the counselling platform, I read and saved four different laws, and I gathered formal organisation charts. During the observations of the courses, I saved handouts from the course. Most of the texts, however, I gathered during the fieldwork. These consist of six different types of texts: 1) overviews and descriptions of the different measures, 2) descriptions of routines, procedures and workflow, 3) information and brochures for clients, 4) work forms, 5) client files and 6) three of NAV's different computer systems: Arena, Gosys and Modia. The different texts can be divided into local and translocal texts (Smith & Turner, 2014a). The translocal texts are those that are used throughout the organisation and among their collaborators, hence contributing to coordinate or 'hook up' the work of the caseworkers with other people, settings and activities (Nilsen, 2017). When I gathered these texts, I focused on the texts that the caseworkers referred to in their work or during the course or interviews. There are several ways in which texts can be part of an institutional ethnography (see examples in Smith, 2006; Smith & Turner, 2014b). I decided to focus on how the caseworkers engaged in textually coordinated practices through text–reader conversations (Nilsen, 2016, 2017).

Hence, I have not focused on the content of the texts per se but rather how they were part of the everyday work of the caseworker.

5.3.1.4　Previous empirical research

In addition to the three empirical data sets, the present study also consists of data from a qualitative evidence synthesis. During my literature review for article 2, I realised that there were few scientific papers that empirically explore culturally sensitive or culturally competent practice. Most of the published papers on the topic are either focused on a theoretical argument for why such practices are needed or on efforts to develop such practices, often among social work students. This motivated a thorough review of the empirical qualitative research on social workers efforts to operationalise the concepts in practice. Hence, article 1 was written after article 2.

A qualitative evidence synthesis is particularly good for exploring why and how an intervention or policy works, the appropriateness and applicability of policies and the barriers and facilitators for the implementation of interventions or policies (Flemming et al., 2019). The data consist of 12 empirical studies that were obtained through a systematic search of the research literature in three databases and a manual review of reference lists of selected papers. The data concentrate around the *concepts* of cultural competence, sensitivity and so forth. This means that the studies that more generally explored the connection between migrants and welfare services without using the concepts are left out of our data. More details on how the systematic search strategy and analysis was conducted are outlined in article 1.

5.3.2　Analytical approach

In the current study, the production and interpretation of data developed simultaneously. Especially for ethnography, the production and interpretation of data are highly intertwined (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, my analytical approach can be divided into two phases. The first phase was the analytical notes I composed during the production of the data. These notes functioned as directions for further inquiries, both in the interviews and fieldwork. The second analytical phase was the rereads and sorting of data after finishing the data production.

My overall analytical approach has been abductive. This means that I have developed the analysis through alternating between empirical data, existing research and theory (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Following the data production, I systematically and thoroughly reviewed the data by reading through my notes from the observation of the courses, the transcriptions and notes from the interviews and the fieldnotes. In this process, I made remarks about things that surprised me, puzzles (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), surprises (Burawoy, 1991), or anomalies to existing research or theories (Vassenden, 2018). When I explicated these puzzles, I made use of data from all the datasets. I also used the analytical notes from the data production as reminders of the things I experienced as puzzling when I entered into the field but that I might later take for granted as I explored the field further. These puzzles—or anomalies—served as entry points for the further scrutiny of the data. I developed the puzzles into the research questions for articles 2, 3 and 4. The puzzles or research questions developed from them pertain to different aspects of the caseworkers' work. I have relied on different parts of the data in the further exploration of them. In articles 2, 3 and 4, I have employed (some of) Smith's (2005) conceptions of work, ruling relations and texts as sensitising (Blumer, 1954) in the analysis. I focused on describing what the caseworkers do, both practically and as part of their considerations, the resources they rely upon when doing it and especially how they in their 'doings' make use of or refer to institutional texts.

I conducted the analysis of these puzzles in separate and subsequent processes for each of the articles. When I started the analysis, I printed out the data relevant to answer each of the research questions, such as the case discussions or the interviews. Next, I spread them out on the office floor and started to read through them. I highlighted situations, sayings or doings that I considered relevant to the research question. I sorted the material into codes (cf. Emerson et al., 1995). These codes were, of course, different in each of the analyses. For instance, in the analysis of article 4, the sorting consisted of identifying different texts, and I coded the material based on what type of text they referred to when they described language cases, such as *laws*, *forms* and so forth. Later, I went through the data within the different codes and recoded them according to what they use the texts for, such as *argument for client problem, assign the case to a different team,* or *transfer to social service benefits.* Similar to a

grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), I wrote down analytical memos to the sections I highlighted on a post-it. These memos described what I thought the section was about. However, contrary to a grounded theory approach, I also suggested theoretical perspectives or research that may be relevant in the further exploration of the section I highlighted. After I had read through all of the material several times, I started to sort the situations on a large piece of paper. I tried to identify similarities, differences and nuances between them. In addition, I started to sort the post-its in relation to each other. Analysis is also about writing up the data into a coherent story (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). In a continuous process where I conferred the data, looked at the post-its and searched through previous research and theory, I wrote (and rewrote) the findings section of the article. See each article for a more detailed description of the relevant analytical approach.

5.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are something that permeates the research process, from explicating the problem or research question to writing up and presenting the findings. During the whole process, I have made efforts to maintain the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Ethical Committee of Social Science (NESH, 2018). Throughout this chapter, I have also tried to be transparent about the methodological decisions I have made. This is one example of how I have accommodated the norms of 'hability', 'validity' and 'communism' (Kalleberg, 2007; NESH, 2018). In the following, I further discuss some specific ethical challenges that I have grappled with, and which extend across all four groups of ethical norms and Merton's description of the scientific ethos (Kalleberg, 2007; Merton, 1938), including 1) my independence from NAV and the reality in the caseworkers' consent, 2) protection of third parties and 3) the amount of data and dissemination of findings.

The directorate, county and local administration facilitated my access to NAV. One of the ethical challenges I had to manage was therefore my independence from NAV. Although NAV contributed with valuable input in the development of the project, it was important to me that I got the freedom to explore every angle that may be interesting during data production. I did not, however, experience that NAV tried to direct the research. Quite the contrary, both the

administrative level in NAV and local management of the field office encouraged me to explore potential criticisable practices and provided me with the latitude I needed to explore these practices. Nevertheless, I was particularly aware of the potential influence of management both in how the caseworkers perceived my role, thus how they acted and what they told me and the authenticity in their consent to participate in the study. Moreover, I took certain steps to limit the implications of my affiliation to management. First, I told the caseworkers that I had previously worked as a caseworker in NAV and that I was interested in their struggles, dilemmas, and practices. I emphasised that they were the experts about their work and that I wanted to explore their work through their standpoint. This was both something I emphasised in the information letters and my interactions with the caseworkers. Second, particularly during the fieldwork, I took measures to not intrude on their consent. During the first week of the fieldwork, I visited all the caseworkers in their office and asked if they had any questions for me or about the study. I referred to the information letter I had sent them by email previously and asked if they were okay with me being there. Only a few caseworkers seemed somewhat reluctant to me being there. However, I was supposed to be part of their everyday work environment for quite some time. Hence, it would be difficult for them to fully decline being part of the study. I tried to accommodate this challenge by trying to bypass the few caseworkers who seemed reluctant to participate, leave the kitchen when they came to have lunch or coffee and talk to them a few times during the fieldwork to clarify their feelings towards my presence. This resulted in me leaving a couple of them out of the data and subsequent analysis.

The current study is about street-level caseworkers in NAV. However, their work revolves around clients. The Directorate for Labour and Welfare exempted the caseworkers from their duty of confidentiality (ref. 17/1687, see appendix 3). In the instances I would participate in client meetings, the caseworkers also asked the clients for consent in advance, and there were a few clients who did not want me to take part in the meetings and where I did not participate in their meeting. However, in the case discussions, the caseworkers would talk about cases they worked with. Any identifying information about the clients that the caseworkers may have disclosed have been left out of my data. This, of course, entails that there are some analyses I have not been able

to do, such as systematic comparisons of client characteristics, systematic studies of the course of every case and studies of the client population. Although such analyses could be interesting, they are only loosely relevant to the aim of the present study.

In this chapter, I have described my three empirical datasets. These constitute a large amount of data. This means that I have a considerable amount of data that I have not made active use of in the analyses. Although I have mainly used data from the fieldwork in the articles, the other sources of data were both necessary and valuable to the study, both in their production and interpretation. In hindsight, I could also have used my notes from my initial conversations with key persons in NAV as data from the management level. Data abundance and unused data are aspects of research that have received increasing attention as an ethical challenge. My solution has been to have a separate document where I write down ideas for future studies where I can utilise these data. One example is to perform a discourse analysis of the texts that NAV provides for their clients, either in general or of the brochures from the office reception, exploring the depictions and discourses of clients present in these texts.

5.5   The limits of the study: Validity, generalisability and limitations

Every research study has some limits as to what the study can say something about because of weaknesses and blind spots. I have addressed questions regarding my position as a halfie and how it may have influenced my interpretations of the caseworkers' work (see section 5.1). To counterbalance potential single-researcher bias, I have also continuously discussed my findings and interpretations with other researchers both within and outside the 'NAV field' throughout the project. In addition, I have deliberated on my analyses with people working as caseworkers in NAV. However, these are not the same caseworkers as those who participated. Hence, I have not provided the participating caseworkers with the opportunity to comment on my analyses.

The study has an explorative design, aimed at unpacking how street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant clients. However, in a research project, there are always questions about whether the empirical evidence coincide with the

statements one makes about the world (Gobo, 2004; Maxwell, 2009). The frontline offices in NAV are all organised differently (Fossestøl et al., 2015; Helgøy et al., 2010), and it is difficult to identify what the *typical* NAV office looks like. There may still be differences between offices that can influence whether my findings from one frontline office would be valid throughout NAV. Some offices may, for instance, structure the process of categorisation stricter or depend less on categorisation because they are organised as generalists. However, the aim of the current study has been to describe some institutional processes with generalising potential (Widerberg, 2020). My sample does not merely certain amounts of caseworkers, groups or offices but also practices, reflections, situations and processes (Gobo, 2004).

A second aspect regarding the limitations of this study is whether my emphasis on the standpoint of caseworkers contributed to too harmonic descriptions of the caseworkers' work. I may not have a particularly critical perspective of their practices. My focus on the practices of the caseworkers may also contribute towards portraying clients as passive recipients and 'victims' of the caseworkers' categorisation (cf. Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003, p. 230), concealing how they may manage the categories in which they are placed. This was not my intention but rather a result of me wanting to provide in-depth knowledge about the caseworkers' work from their standpoint and, thus, contributing to the theoretical development of street-level categorisation.

I have not distinguished between caseworkers based on individual traits such as professional background, gender or ethnic background. However, these are elements that may influence how they interpret and manage clients (cf. Eikenaar et al., 2016; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015). In addition, there is an increasing proportion of street-level bureaucrats that have an immigrant background. This has received limited attention in street-level research. Of the caseworkers participating in the course, about a third had immigrant backgrounds. Coming into the room where the course was held, one of them said, 'I'm participating in a course to learn how to counsel myself'. I have not highlighted the caseworkers' ethnic backgrounds in this study. This is mainly because my data do not suggest that there are systematic differences between caseworkers, but also because a systematic review of each caseworkers' background was not designed. Nevertheless, I cannot rule out that it could have provided interesting data, even if not significant. I encourage future research to explore how such

individual or group characteristics may influence caseworkers' categorisation of immigrants.

Looking back, I could (of course) have used other methods to explore how street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant clients. One example could be to use focus groups to get insights into how they make sense of immigrants and the disagreements between caseworkers. This could have allowed me to also take their backgrounds into consideration. However, interviews, either as focus groups or only individual interviews, would probably make it more difficult to unfold the institutionalised language and get insights into what may be 'tacit knowledge', or practices of which they were less aware (cf. Nilsen, 2021). Moreover, the individual interviews I conducted also contained some normative descriptions of their work, how they were supposed to do it, a critique of the organisation, their opinions of how it should be and stereotypical depictions of immigrants. Hence, by only doing (focus group) interviews, I would easily have ended up with the same findings as previous research. Hence, the combination of empirical data from institutional text, participant observations and semistructured, in-depth interviews, in addition to the five-month ethnographic fieldwork, has allowed me to gain insights into the everyday work of the street-level caseworkers. This has been crucial for the findings, such as the distinction between sensible and non-sensible (immigrant) clients.

6   Summary of results

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the four research articles that comprise the present study. Each article provides novel contributions to the literature of equity in welfare, migrants and street-level discretion. Article 1 describes how social workers struggle to make sense of and use of the one-dimensional concept of cultural sensitivity in their work. Article 2 shows how the caseworkers perform a dynamic and continuous categorisation work where they try to make sense of immigrant clients within interpretive frameworks. Article 3 depicts how the caseworkers differentiate between clients by prioritising immigrant clients who they feel are 'star candidates'. Article 4 describes how the either-or nature of the textually mediated institutional classifications contributes to the caseworkers *bouncing* 'language' cases through the system much like in a pinball machine.

Table 3 provides an overview of the four articles, the journal they are accepted or submitted to, their status, research question, methods, and data. Below, I summarise the main findings of the four articles. Naturally, I reference arguments already made in the articles. In the following text, I have added the page number from the article from where the point is originally made.

Title	Journal	Status	Research question	Methods and data
Navigating the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work: A qualitative evidence synthesis of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in practice	*Journal of Comparative Social Work*	Published, Co-authored with Elisabeth Enoksen	What challenges do social workers experience in their efforts to operationalise the cultural concepts in practice?	Qualitative evidence synthesis, 12 empirical studies for thematic synthesis
'I don't know what to do – could it be cultural?' The operationalisation of cultural sensitivity among street-level workers in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration	*Social Policy & Administration*	Published, single-authored	When and how do caseworkers consider culture relevant to a case?	Five months ethnographic fieldwork, thick descriptions of 78 situations of case discussions, abductive analysis
Emotional Creaming: Street-level Bureaucrats' Prioritisation of Migrant Clients 'Likely to Succeed' in Labour Market Integration	*International Journal of Social Welfare*	Published, Co-authored with Anders Vassenden	What role do emotions play in caseworkers' decision to prioritise cases, and (how) do these emotions relate to the institutional context?	Five months ethnographic fieldwork and 11 individual semistructured interviews, abductive analysis
A welfare pinball machine? How immigrants with 'language problems' get stuck in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)	*Tidsskrift for samfunns-forskning*	Submitted, first submission, Co-authored with Anders Vassenden	Explores how the mechanisms by which (immigrant) clients become stuck within NAV are created by how caseworkers categorise them as 'language cases'	Five months ethnographic fieldwork, texts, institutional ethnographic approach

Table 3: Overview of the four articles, journal, their status, research question, methods and data.

6.1 Article 1: Navigating the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work: A qualitative evidence synthesis of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in practice

Article 1 is co-authored with Elisabeth Enoksen. The article explores the challenges social workers experience in their efforts to operationalise concepts such as cultural sensitivity and cultural competence. Although presented as the first article of this study, it was written after article 2. The literature review for article 2 inspired this qualitative evidence synthesis. The data consist of 12 empirical studies that were obtained through a systematic search of the research literature in three databases and a manual review of the reference lists of selected papers (p. 106). The studies had a large variation in focus and definition of culturally diverse service users (p. 111). The social workers in the studies seemed to struggle to make sense of and make use of the one-dimensional concepts of cultural sensitivity or cultural competence in their work (p. 109). In addition, culture was merely one out of several aspects that the social workers considered relevant for explaining the cases regarding immigrant clients.

In the article, we identified four key challenges in the efforts to conceptualise and operationalise the cultural concepts in social work practice (p. 109-115). 1) *Who* to define as culturally diverse service users: there is not a consistent description of which instances that are cross-cultural, and the social workers had a hard time identifying which clients that required unconventional approaches. However, the social workers refrained from interpreting all immigrant clients within a cultural framework and diverged regarding which differences they emphasised. 2) *What* aspects of culture to consider in the encounters with culturally diverse service users: in instances where the 'cultural' clients were defined either by the researchers or institution, the social workers still had trouble defining *what* aspects of culture to take into consideration in their work with these clients. This reflects the ambiguous conceptualisation of culture and how it may be defined in several different ways. However, it is seldomly defined in the description of the cultural

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concepts. 3) *How* to consider and approach these aspects of culture: in instances where the social workers had identified what aspects of culture to be sensitive to or competent of, such as religious practices, they still reported difficulties in *how* to be sensitive to or show competence of these aspects in their practice. Thus, the practical implications of being sensitive to culture in the interactions with a specific clientis unclear. 4) The capacity to work in a culturally appropriate manner within the organisational context *where* this work is undertaken: the social workers described that although they understood what the concepts entailed, they might not have the capacity within the organisational context to act in what they perceived to be a culturally competent or culturally sensitive manner. A lack of time and resources required the social workers to reduce the facets they considered in their work with immigrants. This last challenge regarding how the institutional framework influences the work of social workers may not have received sufficient attention in scholarly debates of culturally competent or sensitive practice.

We developed a model that depicts the essential questions of who, what, how and where to employ the concepts into practice (p. 109, 118). However, the studies we included in the synthesis did not particularly address *why* the social workers should be competent of or sensitive to culture in their work—why the social workers are supposed to interpret and work differently with some clients. The studies simply characterised some clients as 'cultural' and in need of 'different' services. This may contribute to the difficulties the social workers had in pinpointing which clients required such efforts and what this extra effort should consist of. Hence, the qualitative evidence synthesis suggest that we need more empirical knowledge on how social workers categorise clients as 'different' and needing something 'other' than ordinary work and the relevance of culture in this work.

6.2 Article 2: 'I don't know what to do—Could it be cultural?' The operationalisation of cultural sensitivity among street-level workers in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration

Article 2 is single-authored. The article is a core component in the current study. It unpacks the practical work embedded in being culturally sensitive, by

exploring the circumstances in which street-level workers factor culture into their comprehension and consideration of a client (p. 98). The empirical foundation of the article comprises 78 formal and informal case discussions from the five-month fieldwork (p. 102). The analytical focus is to unpack the *work* inherent in the caseworkers' discussions as they make sense of a client and make decisions about further case proceedings (p. 101, 102). The article depicts how the caseworkers' consideration of culture depends on the implicit categorisation of a client as both non-sensible and regarding an 'immigrant client'. In these instances, the caseworkers categorised the client as a *cultural immigrant client* (p. 107).

The article describes how the caseworkers categorised cases based on how they perceived them, what the problem may be and how they could work with the specific client as the case proceeded (p. 103). The caseworkers made use of two intersecting interpretive frameworks in their dynamic categorisation work: immigrants/non-immigrants and sensible/non-sensible (p. 103-105). The two dimensions functioned as continuums with four outer categories, where the caseworkers negotiated the substance of the categories and how different clients may fit into them (p. 108). First, the caseworkers distinguished between immigrant and non-immigrant cases. This, however, depended on whether the caseworkers considered the client's immigrant background as relevant. Second, the caseworkers considered some cases as sensible because they could easily fit the institutional classifications. However, other cases were more difficult for the caseworkers to make sense of within the institutional classifications, and the caseworkers categorised these as non-sensible. When they managed such non-sensible cases, the caseworkers would search for cues that could help them make sense of the case. In this process, ethnicity, language, and motivation served as cues for culture for non-sensible, immigrant cases (p. 105-109). Culture was applied as a 'last resort' category for the vague troubles of non-sensible immigrant clients and concluded extensive efforts to define the client's challenges (p. 108). Although ethnicity, language and motivation seemed to function as cues for a client being interpreted as cultural, the caseworkers' emphasis of specific cues differed. Hence, in this article, I have not defined specific ethnicities or other characteristics as decisive for how the caseworkers categorised the clients.

The article describes how caseworkers did not culturalise all immigrant clients. This was quite the contrary: they acknowledged the complexities of (immigrant) cases. However, the conceptual ambiguity of culture may promote the perception of the *cultural* immigrant cases as intangible (p. 109). The caseworkers' use of culture as a category for the non-sensible immigrant clients might promote 'othering', not of all migrant clients, but of the 'cultural immigrant clients' (p. 109). Categorisation relied upon the available institutional classifications and whether the caseworkers consider these classifications suitable to describe the client's problems as they understood it. In the non-sensible cases, the caseworkers lacked an institutional language that could describe the complexities of cases in terms that make sense within the bureaucratic context (p. 109). The findings also imply that the caseworkers' categorisation of a client was not merely done when a person first applied for welfare services; it was a continuous process where the caseworkers suggested possible interpretations of the client at hand. In this process, they simultaneously negotiated the boundaries between different categories (p. 108).

6.3 Article 3: Emotional creaming. Street-Level bureaucrats' prioritisation of migrant clients 'likely to succeed' in labour market integration

Article 3 is co-authored with Anders Vassenden. The article describes how the caseworkers differentiated between cases they prioritised and the cases that they did not. Hence, it depict the 'positive' equivalent of cultural immigrant clients described in article 2: *the star candidates*. The article uses data both from the fieldwork and individual interviews with caseworkers to investigate the role caseworkers' emotions play in their decisions to prioritise cases. Furthermore, it examines how these emotions relate to the institutional context in which the caseworkers work. Hence, it provides important knowledge about practices influencing the differentiation between clients and the services they obtain.

In the article, we introduce 'emotional creaming', which conceptualises emotions as embodied expressions of a rational logic in institutional demands (p. 2). Emotions have typically been considered a personal bias in decisions to prioritise clients (p. 1-3). However, we show that caseworkers' subjective

emotions were not irrelevant to the decisions to prioritise a case, but they were mediated by organisational conditions. The article shows how caseworkers' emotions towards immigrant clients were structured by the bureaucratic context, such as formal criteria for services and quantifiable measures of success (p. 7-9). Caseworkers used their emotions as interpretive schemes for identifying 'star candidates': sensible immigrant clients likely to succeed in labour market integration (p. 5). The 'star candidates' spurred enthusiasm with the caseworkers because they were motivated and/or easy for the caseworkers to identify with and that met formal requirements within the institutional setting (p. 6-7). In this sense, management tools, such as caseworker accountability and performance incentives, produce caseworkers' emotions, whereby some clients will appear less favourable than others, hence producing less enthusiasm from the caseworkers (p. 8-9).

The article describes how it is not sufficient for a caseworker to feel positive about a client for them to prioritise the client. The connection between caseworkers' emotions and the institutional context does not preclude the existence of prejudice or personal bias (p. 8). However, the emotions of caseworkers may contribute to reproduce systematic differences in street-level service distribution because they mirror who institutional measurements and objectives depict as the 'ideal client': clients who want a job, contribute to society and have the ability to enter the labour market with minimal state-funded supports (p. 8). Hence, caseworkers' emotional creaming of star candidates suggest that the differentiating dimension is not a client's ethnic or cultural background or their migrant status, but rather whether the caseworkers consider the client as 'far away' from success in the labour market (p. 9).

6.4 Article 4: A welfare pinball machine? How immigrants with 'language problems' get stuck in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

Article 4 is also co-authored with Anders Vassenden. This article builds on the findings from article 2: the distinction between sensible and non-sensible clients, and aims to further explore how the institutional setting may influence the categorisation of (cultural) immigrant clients. It is also the only article

written in Norwegian. This was done because the article explicitly addresses the way NAV specifically is organised and how the organisation contributes to the construction of 'language' as a particular category of problems. The article departs from the observation that several immigrant clients seem to get stuck in the system, and only get access to means-tested and restrictive social service benefits on a permanent basis (p. 6). When I asked caseworkers in NAV why they seemingly struggled to provide sufficient services to clients with an immigrant background, they described having challenges with clients that 'do not know the language' and that these clients often ended up as a 'shuttlecock' (kasteball), getting thrown back and forth between different teams. However, through our analyses, we propose the 'pinball machine' as an alternative metaphor (p. 4-5, 20-22) . Contrary to the 'shuttlecock' (kasteball), the pinball machine metaphor 1) has acting subjects, 2) suggests that different teams have different statuses because some caseworkers *bounce* cases, while others try to *flip* them or work in the team that serve as a *drain* and 3) describes how the caseworkers act within a *playing board*, which contributes to structuring their work.

In the article, we rely on institutional ethnography to explore how the caseworkers' use of texts affected their construction of *language* as a particular category of problems that the caseworkers may allocate cases to (p. 4). For immigrant clients, the caseworkers' categorisation of their problems as 'language' functioned as a gravitation field (p. 14-15). 'Language' was used as a category for non-sensible immigrant clients that excluded these clients from services other than means-tested social security benefits (p. 17-18). The article describes how the either-or nature of the textually mediated institutional classifications contributed to the caseworkers *bouncing* 'language' cases through the system as in a pinball machine (p. 14). The caseworkers made use of institutional texts to categorise 'language cases' outside of their responsibility (p. 14). For instance, one of the terms for work assessment allowance was that the client's challenges with keeping a job was caused by health issues. The caseworkers working with work assessment allowance used this as an argument to exclude clients lacking sufficient skills in Norwegian from that benefit. As the caseworkers would say, the clients' challenge is language, not health (p. 14). This is just one example of how the caseworkers used descriptions of the benefits they worked with to exclude or bounce cases

from their team to other teams in the office and down the board. The *flipperteam* then tried to keep the case active by *flipping* it back up the board, attempting to redefine the problem of the case so that it fit into the terms of one of the other teams (p. 15-17). However, there were some cases that they struggled to keep in play. This were the cases where they failed to redefine, hence remaining categorised as language cases. These cases fell through to the *drain* of the pinball machine: the team working with social security benefits (p. 17-18). In this team, the client received no active efforts from NAV to assist them in getting into the labour market (p. 16). Hence, there was no way out of the system for these clients (p. 18). The article describes how the caseworkers' use of textual descriptions of benefits, measures and organisation of teams contributed to the construction of 'language' as a category of problems that 'lock in' the clients in the system (p. 18-19). Hence, this article provides crucial knowledge about how some immigrant clients are sorted out and categorised as 'language cases'. These clients are provided services that are less than beneficial, for the clients and for the objective of labour market integration.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The four articles all contribute to our understanding of how street-level bureaucrats make sense of and categorise immigrant clients, along with how this work relates to the institutional setting. However, the articles also have three combined contributions:

1. The caseworkers show nuanced understandings of immigrants and their challenges;
2. They perform a dynamic categorisation work; and
3. The non-sensibleness of (some) immigrants is textually mediated.

Below, I discuss the implications of these contributions. First, I review how my findings contribute with knowledge of the service provision to immigrant clients and discuss the usefulness of the category 'immigrant client' for street-level practice. Second, I outline how my use of the street-level perspective and analytical concepts from institutional ethnography contributes to our theoretical understanding of how street-level bureaucrats categorise (immigrant) clients and discuss the applicability of conceptualising bureaucratic categorisation as a *categorisation work* for future research. Third, I deliberate how the textually mediated principles of welfare conditionality and accountability influence the principle of universal welfare services and argue that future research needs to consider 'the bureaucrat in context'. I describe the implications of these findings for NAV's work with immigrant clients.

7.1 Nuanced understandings of immigrants and their challenges

The findings suggest that a client's immigrant, national, ethnic or cultural background are not the differentiating dimensions the caseworkers consider as decisive for the client's need for services. This raises the question of the applicability of 'immigrants' as a specific client category, and whether it helps the street-level bureaucrats in their service distribution. In their work, the caseworkers do not necessarily know which clients have immigrant backgrounds. My findings describe how caseworkers differentiate between clients by considering them as 'more or less immigrant', where they do not

necessarily emphasise the client's formal status as immigrant, or their cultural or ethnic background at all. Both articles 1 and 2 show how the street-level bureaucrats acknowledge that immigrants may have various problems: health, language, motivation, education and so forth. Hence, the findings contribute to nuance the assumptions that street-level bureaucrats emphasise culture (and ethnicity) *either* too little, too much, or the wrong way. This is not the same as saying that the caseworkers always comprehend immigrant clients correctly or that they do exhaustive reviews of all the cases they work with; it varies *when* they accentuate differentiating aspects such as culture when they categorise clients. Of course, this does not exclude the existence of stereotypical reasoning among the individual street-level bureaucrat. In several studies where they have done interviews or vignette studies with social workers and other street-level bureaucrats, the workers have described that it is culture that makes dealing with immigrants so difficult (Kriz & Skivenes, 2010; Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019; Williams & Soydan, 2005; van der Haar, 2006; Ylvisaker et al., 2015). Hence, caseworkers might have clear and even prejudicial conceptions of culture, ethnicity and specific client groups. In my ethnographic data, however, when the caseworkers are discussing specific cases, they do not demonstrate such conceptions. Hence, there might be differences in how caseworkers talk about such differences and how they operationalise them in their practice. The findings reported in the current study suggest the importance of ethnographic data in exploring the significance of stereotypes, biases and cultural explanations in how street-level bureaucrats differentiate between clients in their everyday practice.

When the caseworkers categorise clients, the main distinction is not whether the client is an immigrant or not but whether they consider the case as *sensible* or *non-sensible*. The current study suggests that the caseworkers' distinction between sensible and non-sensible cases is crucial for what services the clients are provided. The street-level bureaucrats in this study struggle to operationalise what 'immigrant troubles' are in a clear manner. This gives reason to question the implicit assumptions in the literature that immigrant clients *are* different from other clients and that they need something other than ordinary proceedings. However, because the definition of immigrants as a specific category of clients presuppose that immigrants differ from other clients (Torres, 2006), the caseworkers may contribute to *making* immigrants different

as they search for differences. NAV's focus on immigrants as different contributes two particular categories of problems differing from *non-immigrant* clients: the possibility that their troubles may be connected to culture and 'language'. Both of these categories are distinct 'immigrant'-problems. Both 'language' and 'culture' also have negative implications for the clients; they contribute towards complicating the complexities of the cases and excluding the clients from services. Hence, the separation of immigrants into a specific client category may contribute to the 'othering' of non-sensible, immigrant clients. The 'immigrant client' category seem to function as a framing device (cf. Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014), where the focus on recognition of differences contribute to reproducing them (cf. Häikiö & Hvinden, 2012). However, this may not be the case when it comes to the sensible immigrant clients. The caseworkers categorise sensible immigrant clients as 'problems with health' or as 'in need of a [specific] course or activity', and prioritise 'star candidates' for services. These processes may, of course, also arise from caseworkers not being able to recognise what may be particular 'immigrant' troubles in the sensible immigrant cases, such as structures in the labour market which may make it difficult for even star candidates to succeed.

In both practice and research, 'culture' tends to be synonymous to (non-sensible) 'immigrant clients'. The connection of culture strictly to ethnicity can contribute to misconceptions of cultural differences (Vassenden, 2010), where culture becomes something only relevant to immigrants. This may contribute to underrating the relevance of culture in street-level welfare provision. In this study, I have focused on caseworkers' explicit references to culture and implicit remarks about cultural or ethnic differences during the discussion of cases (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). This means that I have not focused on defining culture or how the caseworkers conceptualise culture. Culture can be defined in several different ways and with emphasis on several dimensions of complexities (Hylland Eriksen, 2007). In article 2, I describe language, motivation and ethnicity as the cues for culture. However, my focus has been on the process of categorisation, not on defining specific clients or cultural characteristics per se. Hence, the clients placed in the other sections of Figure 3 (sensible clients or non-immigrant clients) might still be 'cultural' in the sense that they have a specific (ethnic) background or display what may be considered as cultural attributes, but in the discussion of these cases, the caseworkers do not address

culture as an aspect relevant to their understanding of the client and their challenges. To further unpack the relevance of cultural differences in street-level work, future research should explore which conceptualisations of culture the caseworkers rely on. In addition, it could be interesting to further describe the characteristics the street-level bureaucrats refer to when they categorise a client as 'cultural', and whether such characteristics are considered differently in their categorisation of clients with non-immigrant backgrounds.

The findings suggest that the caseworkers' consideration of the client's personal resources, being able to 'make use of anything', 'know the language' and being 'motivated' are maybe even more important to how their case is categorised than a clients cultural or ethnic background. However, such traits are not distinctive for immigrants but refer to the employability of clients (Diedrich & Styhre, 2013) or how they are considered to fit the bureaucratic criteria (Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2021). The immigrant category may displace the focus from other (important) distinctions between client groups, such as personal resources or socioeconomic background. Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al. (2014) find that social class is a significant factor in client outcomes. Future research is needed for systematic but open-ended comparisons between how street-level bureaucrats categorise clients with immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. One interesting approach could be to further unpack what the street-level bureaucrats categorise as the residual 'vagueness' of different client categories, both regarding immigrant and non-immigrant clients. This could provide important insights into why welfare services struggle to accommodate some clients and provide sufficient services.

7.2   A dynamic categorisation work

Institutional ethnography has provided me with analytical concepts that encourage a focus not just on the inputs or outputs of categorisation, but on the work the caseworkers do when they categorise (immigrant) clients: their *categorisation work.* The current study shows how the caseworkers perform dynamic categorisation work. Thus, the findings contribute to expanding our understandings of how street-level bureaucrats categorise (immigrant) clients. The combination of fieldwork methods and concepts from institutional ethnography has been crucial to obtain more applicable knowledge about which

immigrant clients that the caseworkers categorise as 'different', which differences they highlight and how the boundaries between categories are negotiated and managed. This has made it possible for me to explore the interpretive frameworks the caseworkers make use of and how they make use of them. Thus, institutional ethnography has been crucial in gaining knowledge of how the caseworkers differentiate between sensible and non-sensible immigrant clients, how it relates to the bureaucratic context and how this categorisation influences the services they are provided. Thus, these findings contribute to unpacking the black box that is typically conceptualised as street-level categorisation (cf. Figure 2).

The conceptualisation of categorisation as a type of work has allowed me to explore it not merely as a moment of decision making but rather as a continuous process of caseworkers making sense of cases while working with them, by activating interpretive frameworks and in relation to the available institutional classifications. The caseworkers' categorisation work involves careful reviews of a case, knowledge about different categories that are available, skills regarding lines of argument and feelings. Most important, the allocation of a client to a category is not done in one sequence: it is fragmented and dynamic, and it happens at different times and places during the daily work of caseworkers. It may be done when they meet a colleague in the stairwell or by the coffee machine and ask about how to interpret and proceed in a case. In addition, the findings of this study have shown how the categorisation is not just part of the first contact between clients and welfare services. The caseworkers' categorisation work is a continuous work of interpreting and differentiating between cases, where the content of and boundaries between categories are subject to change. As described by Emerson and Messinger (1977, p. 122), the experience when one remedy does not work instigate 'a search for other remedies, and as the search continues, troubles assume a cyclical pattern (e.g., Goffman, 1969: 361-69)'. This suggests a close interrelation between how the street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant clients, the processual characteristics and the institutional framework. I will get back to this in section 7.3. However, the description of categorisation as a continuous process may only be relevant to the cases that are considered non-sensible, where the original categorisation or remedy has failed.

The analytical concepts from institutional ethnography have allowed me to describe how the street-level bureaucrats categorise a client not merely as the result of the caseworkers' employment of static and predefined categories that some cases end up in. This conceptualization of differentiating practices has provided in-depth knowledge about the processes that contribute to the consideration of culture as relevant, why some clients get prioritised and how some clients get stuck in the system. This also contributes to changing the focus from which clients *are* different to how the interplay of caseworkers' practices and bureaucratic context manifest in interpretive frameworks where some clients are *made* different. However, in articles 2, 3 and 4, I describe three client categories that the caseworkers use: the cultural immigrant clients, the star candidates and the language cases.
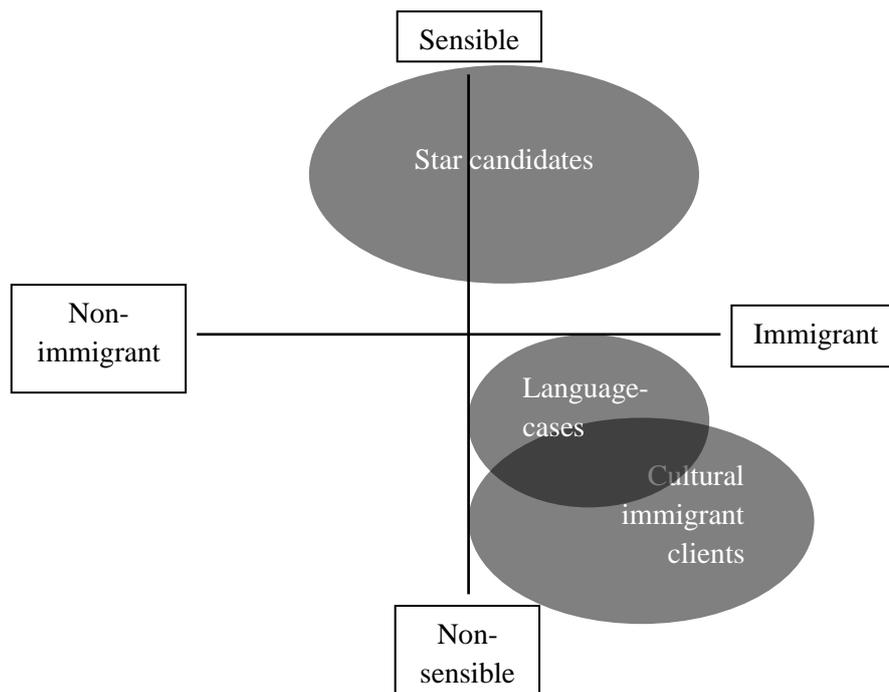
Figure 3: The interpretive frameworks and categories of immigrant clients

As shown in Figure 3, the three categories have quite a large radius. Maybe even more important, whether the caseworkers categorise a client within one of these categories depends on how they make sense of the case within the interpretive framework and is not based merely on 'objective' client characteristics. In this study, I describe *how* the caseworkers make use of such interpretive frameworks and categories as part of their categorisation work and do not make strict definitions of which clients they interpret within which frameworks, as Raaphorst and Van de Walle (2018) do in their study.

The conceptualisation of how street-level bureaucrats differentiate between clients as a categorisation work may also prove valuable to studies within other welfare institutions, such as child welfare services. Norwegian Child Welfare Services have been criticised for ethnocentric reasoning (Rysst, 2020; Tuastad et al., 2017) and the culturalisation of immigrants (Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019; Ylvisaker et al., 2015). Moreover, the demand for cultural sensitivity in services have been increasing (Handulle & Vassenden, 2020; Holm-Hansen et al., 2007; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019). The conceptualisation of categorisation work as an open analytical tool, may encourage new insights into the perceived discriminatory practices of child welfare services. If the difficulties in accommodating immigrants stem from how the street-level bureaucrats in child welfare services categorise clients and how institutional texts may influence this work, an increased focus on cultural sensitivity and reflexivity will not change the provision of services. Hence, I encourage future studies to explore the categorisation work of street-level child welfare workers.

The combination of a street-level perspective and analytical tools from institutional ethnography has been critical for the findings of the current study. Talleraas' (2020b) suggest a similar approach of complementing institutional theory with institutional ethnography to explore the labels used by street-level bureaucrats to describe clients. However, my ambition is not merely to suggest a combination of the two perspectives, but to contribute to theoretical development. My abductive approach has allowed me to theorise about street-level categorisations (cf. Swedberg, 2017) as a form of categorisation work that is highly influenced by the institutional frames in which they do their work (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press). I encourage future studies to make use of concepts from institutional ethnography to further develop theories of street-level bureaucracies in an abductive approach. This may contribute to more

cumulative theory development within the research tradition of street-level bureaucracy (cf. Moseley & Thomann, 2021). Moreover, it could contribute to open institutional ethnography to 'mainstream' sociology instead of as an approach only used by the initiated few (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press; Walby, 2007). The description of such partial and abductive use of institutional ethnography as merely 'inspired by institutional ethnography' contributes to undermining the potential for theoretical development in taking an abductive approach (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, in press).

7.3   Textually mediated non-sensibleness

I have described how the street-level bureaucrats categorise immigrant clients as the result of a complex interplay between their practical work and the bureaucratic context. The textuality of the bureaucratic context, such as the organisation of services, the terms and boundaries for benefits or measures and the performance indicators that are used all contribute to mediate non-sensibleness. The non-sensible cases are categorised into a residual category, such as culture or language. The caseworkers show nuanced comprehensions of immigrant clients and show an understanding of their challenges as multidimensional. However, the street-level bureaucrats must reduce the troubles of people into one problem (Gubrium, 2016; Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014). Although article 4 describes how these institutional problems actually consists of multiple layers of sometimes overlapping definitions, the requirement to neatly define clients into categories of institutionally manageable problems construct a system that emerge as one dimensional. Hence, the troubles of people become complex because the institution only permit certain well-defined problems (Caswell et al., 2010). The textually mediated problem categories do not have room for the vague 'something more' (cf. Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). Because of the either-or nature of the bureaucratic classifications, the caseworkers may need one or more categories for the 'residual cases', or those cases that do not easily fit into any other category. However, the categories specific for immigrants, such as language and culture, make it possible for the caseworkers to exclude immigrant clients from the other categories. The challenge for service provision may not be the immigrants but rather how the bureaucratic context contributes to creating an insurmountable complexity. This resonates with the findings of Garsten and

Jacobsson (2013, p. 825) that describe how 'administrative categories work as "technologies of government" that "make legible" desirable traits in the individual'. Though they appear as objective entities, these texts are created by someone, with specific aims and interests. Widerberg (2020) describes how the introduction of neoliberal reforms such as New Public Management (NPM) and the marketisation of welfare services may challenge the universal structure of such services. One example is how caseworkers are evaluated based on their success in supporting people gain paid employment (Breit et al., 2018; Fossestøl et al., 2014, Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2021). This may especially be relevant regarding the street-level bureaucrats' consideration of which clients are 'likely to succeed' and hence get prioritised. Caseworkers have to account for and justify their actions in an accountability circuit, where institutional texts and measures provide a framing of how they are supposed to consider and categorise clients: which characteristics they emphasise and give significance and which they ignore. Moreover, as described in article 1, the street-level bureaucrats may not have sufficient time or resources to question the texts and how the texts inform their categorisation.

The institutional texts may be problematic or contribute to problematic practices. However, they are crucial for the workings of welfare bureaucracies and for the coordination of universal service provision. Some argue that we need to rely more on the professional discretion of caseworkers and give them latitude to act accordingly (McDonald & Marston, 2006). However, the universality of welfare services presupposes that the caseworkers account for their actions by documenting their steps (Brodkin, 2008; Molander et al., 2012). The caseworkers' decisions need to be justified according to laws, regulations and directives to secure and coordinate equal treatment of equal cases. This is done through texts. However, this may be different in institutional contexts that are less bureaucratised. In addition, as street-level welfare services are characterised by scarce resources (Lipsky, [1980] 2010), services cannot be open to whoever wants them. Hence, means-testing is not intended to exclude people from services (Andersen, 2012) but to target the people with the most severe needs. Welfare conditionality is intended to secure the sustainability of the welfare state and for services to uphold their function as buffers against social marginalisation to vulnerable groups. If we are to achieve the objectives of equally good services to everyone who needs them, we need accountability

and conditionality to coordinate street-level work, at least to a certain extent. Hence, texts cannot be excluded from the street-level welfare services. However, my findings suggest that the way rules and regulations are formulated and used by the caseworkers contribute to excluding (some) immigrant clients from (some) services. This suggest that discrimination may be embedded in the institutional structures (Jensen et al., 2017a). Nevertheless, it may be right that the troubles of some clients are, in fact, 'cultural' or 'language'. Hence, the decision to exclude these from e.g. health-related benefits may be accurate. To get further knowledge of 'who gets what, when and how' (Lasswell, 1936), future research should further explore how street-level bureaucrats activate and use institutional texts in their categorisation work, alternatively by using case files as data (cf. Åsheim, 2019), and try to explicate the discourses implicit in the texts and how these influences how people are considered and categorised (Nilsen, 2021; Smith, 1978).

I have described how the caseworkers are active in their use of texts, in *how* they emphasise different aspects of the client's case, as in article 2, 3 and 4. Thus, the textually mediated dimension of sensible or non-sensible cases contributes to connect the micro-actions of caseworkers to the macro-structures of the bureaucratic context. However, the emphasis on the significance of bureaucratic texts may encourage a deterministic understanding of street-level categorisation, where the texts are understood to govern service distribution and differentiate services. One of the limitations of the current study is that I have not emphasised street-level bureaucrats' potential opposition to the way texts coordinate services. Because the caseworkers need to argue against the same texts, potential disagreements may be less visible. Nilsen and Steen-Johnsen (2020) describe how accountability and 'justification loops' contribute to disguising critique and opposition by streamlining the arguments and reasons street-level bureaucrats may use. Although the street-level bureaucrats may resist the execution of policies, this resistance may be less explicit. This suggests the importance of acknowledging 'the professional in context' (cf. Fjeldheim et al., 2015; Richmond, 1922) to be able to identify the processes and mechanisms that contribute to such differentiating practices. It is seemingly limited help in accentuating increased reflectiveness and recognition of (cultural) diversity among street-level bureaucrats to achieve a more accurate categorisation of and service provision to immigrant clients. It is quite the

contrary: the strong focus on cultural sensitivity or cultural competence may be counterproductive and contribute to hide how the bureaucratic context influences how caseworkers make sense of and categorise immigrant clients: the making of immigrant clients.

7.4 Implications for NAV

The insights from this study contributes with knowledge of how the categorisation work of street-level bureaucrats influences the redistributive capacity of Norwegian welfare services (cf. Kivisto & Wahlbeck, 2013). One of my motives for conducting this study was to contribute not only to theoretical development, but to gain knowledge about why NAV are unsuccessful in their efforts to improve labour market integration of immigrants, and how they may change it. The three contributions of the study correspond to three important implications for NAV and their services to immigrant clients.

First, the definition of immigrant clients as a specific group seems to be counterproductive. It does not help the caseworkers in their work with immigrant clients, because it may be defined and operationalised in several different ways. Immigrants are a heterogenous group and may not have the same needs from NAV. The findings show that the caseworkers may not consider immigrants' needs any different than from other clients just because they are immigrants. This also resembles the findings of (Djuve et al., 2011). This suggest that to be of help in caseworkers' work to provide equal treatment and individual responsiveness, the client categories need to be based on the specific needs of particular clients rather than (partially concealed) demographic variables.

Second, the current study describes the categorisation *work* of street-level caseworkers. The findings show that this work is not merely a moment of decision-making. Hence, as the current tools are primarily design to assist in 'mapping out' the case and the client's needs in the first meeting (cf. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2010), these may be of limited help to the caseworkers. Thus, NAV may need to develop tools that support the caseworkers in their efforts to make sense of, differentiate between and categorise (immigrant) clients during their everyday work. The caseworkers need means that help them to 'reboot' their categorisation and redefine the problem of the case. This may

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avoid the *bouncing* of (immigrant) clients and encourage categorisation work similar to the 'flipperteam'. This team tries to define clients within the categories, instead of sorting them out. Moreover, as the continuous work of categorisation predominantly concerns the non-sensible clients, NAV may explore the 'work' implicit in the street-level bureaucrats' first and initial categorisation of cases and investigate whether it is possible to make this first categorisation more accurate. This may prevent the making of non-sensible clients.

Third, and related, the findings describe how eligibility criteria, terms and regulations, and performance indicators contribute to mediate the categorisation of clients. Thus, the formulations of the institutional texts affect which clients that get which services. Therefore, in order to change the allocation of services to (immigrant) clients, NAV needs to shift focus from the attitudes and knowledge of the individual caseworkers to the understandings implicit in the texts of the bureaucratic context and how these inform the categorisation of clients.

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PART II: The articles

Article 1

Volckmar-Eeg, M. G., & Enoksen, E. (2020). Navigating the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work: A qualitative evidence synthesis of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in practice. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, *15*(2), 101-126. https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v15i2.314

Article

Navigating the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work: A qualitative evidence synthesis of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in practice

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Abstract

Faced with increased global migration, there is a growing concern that social workers need more training in- and knowledge of culture and ethnicity. These understandings have come to influence research, education, practice, codes of ethics and organizational policy, constituting a multicultural discourse within the field of social work. Social workers are expected to have cultural competence, and exercise cultural sensitivity in their practice. However, a clear and consistent understanding of what it means to be culturally competent or culturally sensitive is missing, and there seems to be little consensus in how to define and apply these concepts, both within research and practice. The aim of this qualitative evidence synthesis is to synthesize what previous empirical research reports about social workers' understandings and experiences when operationalizing the concepts into practice. Through data-based and a manual journal search, 12 qualitative empirical studies were included in the synthesis. Our analysis describes four main challenges in the studies' efforts to operationalize the cultural concepts in social work practice: 1) *Who* to define as culturally diverse service-users; 2) *What* aspects of culture to consider in the encounters with culturally diverse service-users; 3) *How* to consider and approach these aspects of culture, and 4) the capacity to work in a culturally appropriate manner within the organizational context *where* this work is undertaken. The literature acknowledges these challenges to varying degrees. We summarize the four challenges in a model, and argue that the model can be useful in further awareness-raising, development and integration of our understandings of cross-cultural social work. By depicting the essential questions of who, what, how and where to employ the concepts into practice, we aim to assist scholars, practitioners and educators to help navigate the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work.

Keywords
social work, social work practice, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity, qualitative evidence synthesis, literature review

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the multicultural discourse has gained increased significance within the field of social work. Researchers argue that the impact of globalization and migration poses new demands and challenges on social workers (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Boyle & Springer, 2001; Green et al., 2016), with a growing body of research examining how social workers should provide culturally competent and sensitive services to diverse service-users. Culture is a complex and ambiguous concept. As early as the 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified more than 100 anthropological definitions of culture. Adding the word 'competent' to culture unsurprisingly generated countless descriptions. By the millennium, 'literally hundreds of conceptual definitions' of cultural competence existed (Boyle & Springer, 2001, p. 55). Cultural competence is also just *one* of the concepts describing how social workers should work with service-users from culturally diverse backgrounds.

In this article, instead of providing a theoretical definition of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity, we do a qualitative evidence synthesis of previous *empirical* research and synthesize what they report about social workers' understandings and experiences when operationalizing the concepts into practice. In order to operationalize a concept, social workers have to both create a mental definition of the concept and turn these mental definitions into something applicable in their practice with specific clients (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). In other words, we explore how social workers understand the concepts and make practical use of them, and the challenges they experience in this work.

It is beyond the scope of this article to list and define all the various concepts of cultural competence or sensitivity that exist. We note that the most frequently used concepts are cultural competence (Horevitz et al., 2013), cultural skills (Kandylaki, 2005) cultural sensitivity (Fernández-Borrero et al., 2016) and cultural awareness (Yan, 2005). The concepts of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity represent two main strands in the literature. One focuses on social workers' competence or skills to work with cultural issues, while the other emphasizes social workers' reflective processes, respect and humility toward cultural differences, as well as social workers' attention to- and awareness of cultural aspects in their practice. We

use the notion of *cultural concepts* as a collective term referring to cultural competence and cultural sensitivity.

Although some researchers engage with a broad understanding of culture, including sexuality (Charnley & Langley, 2007) and disability (Dupré, 2012), in most of the literature within the multicultural discourse of social work, culture is connected to ethnicity, race or religion. Researchers portray 'social work with ethnic minorities as an area that requires specific knowledge and competence' (Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019, p. 5). International and national guidelines outline social workers' responsibilities in working competently with culturally diverse people (IFSW, 2018; NASW, 2017). The rationale behind the cultural concepts is that if social workers employ practices described as culturally competent or culturally sensitive, the services to minority service-users will improve. However, several studies argue that social workers fail to work in a culturally appropriate way, by either overemphasizing (Anis, 2005; Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019) or underestimating (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012) the significance of culture in their interaction with clients. Consequently, recommendations for practice diverge. Moreover, as the concepts are mostly theoretical descriptions of practice, they do not necessarily capture the empirical reality of social workers and the challenges they encounter in their cross-cultural work. Making sense of- and making use of these theoretical and somewhat ambiguous concepts in practice therefore pose potential challenges for the social workers, and it is difficult to know whether the concepts are applicable for social workers in practice. This is where our study makes a novel contribution.

Previous literature reviews within this field seem to a large extent to be focused on specific populations (Jackson & Hodge, 2010; Poon & Lee, 2019), specific interventions (Horevitz et al., 2013; Jackson & Samuels, 2011) or on defining or explaining the concepts (Henderson et al., 2018; Jackson & Samuels, 2011; Poon & Lee, 2019; Suh, 2004). Most of them are within the field of health science, and the social workers and their reality are not present.

In this qualitative evidence synthesis, we ask the following research question: What challenges do social workers experience in their efforts to operationalize the cultural

concepts in practice? This will provide insight, not just into how the cultural concepts are understood by social workers, but also the applicability of the concepts in social work practice.

We acknowledge that the use of the terms 'service-user' and 'client' in social work are debated (Hübner, 2014). Because the data in our study consists of previous research, and because we want to stay true to their original intention and meaning, we will comply with the terms as used in our data. Additionally, since the studies differ in whether they use the term service-user or client, we will use the terms interchangeably.

After a presentation of our search strategy and data, we introduce our findings. Our synthesis shows that the studies report four main challenges in their efforts to operationalize the cultural concepts in social work practice. We summarize these challenges in a model, and discuss these findings in light of scholarly debates of cross-cultural social work.

Methods and data

This study is based on a synthesis of qualitative evidence (Flemming et al., 2019; Grant & Booth, 2009; Hannes & Macaitis, 2012; Noyes et al., 2019). A qualitative evidence synthesis is particularly good to explore why and how an intervention or policy works, the appropriateness and applicability of policies, and barriers and facilitators for the implementation of interventions or policies (Flemming et al., 2019). We conducted a systematic search of the research literature in order to identify qualitative studies that explore social workers' operationalization of the cultural concepts. Furthermore, we looked for '"themes" or "constructs" that lie in or across individual qualitative studies' (Grant & Booth, 2009, p. 94). The objective of the research synthesis is to obtain a holistic interpretation of a phenomenon by analysing qualitative studies that inform a specific research question (Flemming et al., 2019; Grant & Booth, 2009; Hannes & Macaitis, 2012; Noyes et al., 2019). The process from developing the search strategy, examination and sampling of studies, and analysis, has been done in collaboration between the authors. We argue that this strengthens the quality of the qualitative evidence synthesis, as well as reducing

potential single-researcher bias. Nonetheless, we cannot exclude the fact that our background as ethnic Norwegian women, with an academic background within the field of social work and sociology, may have influenced our reading and interpretation of the articles.

Literature search strategy

The search strategy consisted of a combination of: (1) systematic and comprehensive literature searches in three databases, and (2) manual reviews of reference lists of the selected articles from step 1. We searched in three databases: SCOPUS, Academic Search Premier and SocIndex. A professional librarian within the field of social work also assisted us in developing the search strategy.

After initial searches in the databases, we identified terms used in scholarly discussions of multicultural social work. We defined specific terms as combinations of culture (culture, cultural, culturally, intercultural, interculturally, cross cultural, cross-cultural, cross culturally, cross-culturally) and sensitivity, competence or corresponding terms (sensitive, sensitivity, aware, awareness, reflexive, reflexivity, responsive, responsiveness, humility, competence, competent, skill, skills, knowledge). This resulted in 127 specific terms that we implemented in our search string in quotation marks, combined with the Boolean operator OR. To help refine our search, we included 'social work', empiric* or qualitative or quantitative, and practice. All the search terms had to appear in either abstract, title or as subject terms. To be included in this qualitative evidence synthesis, studies had to comply with four inclusion criteria: a) Published in English in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals from January 2000 to March 2020. As we have exclusively included studies published in English, our synthesis consists of studies predominantly from European and Anglo-American countries; b) Empirical contributions, investigating the operationalization of the concepts, not merely theoretical or methodological discussions of the concepts, c) The concepts comprise a key element to the study, in which the study takes one or more of the concepts as its point of departure. Studies exploring how social workers work with diversity in general, without linking it to the cultural concepts, have hence not been included in this qualitative evidence synthesis, and d) They explore the understandings and perspectives of professionals in their contact with service-users.

We have therefore excluded all studies in which the sample consists of students or teachers, or studies that only focus on the service-users' perspective. Since we focus on the operationalization of the concepts, we have excluded quantitative studies that merely measure the levels of cultural competence or sensitivity among social workers. Although we have done a systematic review of the literature, using 127 different cultural concepts, we cannot disregard that our search strategy might have left relevant studies undetected due to the myriad of existing concepts.

Search outcomes

Our searches were carried out in March 2020, and generated 462 articles. After removing duplicates, 431 remained. Both authors reviewed title and abstract, removing 401 articles that did not comply with our inclusion criteria. After a full text review of the 30 remaining articles, 20 were removed. Five of the articles reported findings from two studies. To prevent single study bias, we only included one article from a study. We performed a manual examination of the reference lists of the 10 remaining articles and added two articles to our sample. Our search strategy yielded 12 empirical studies for analysis and synthesis (see Figure 1).
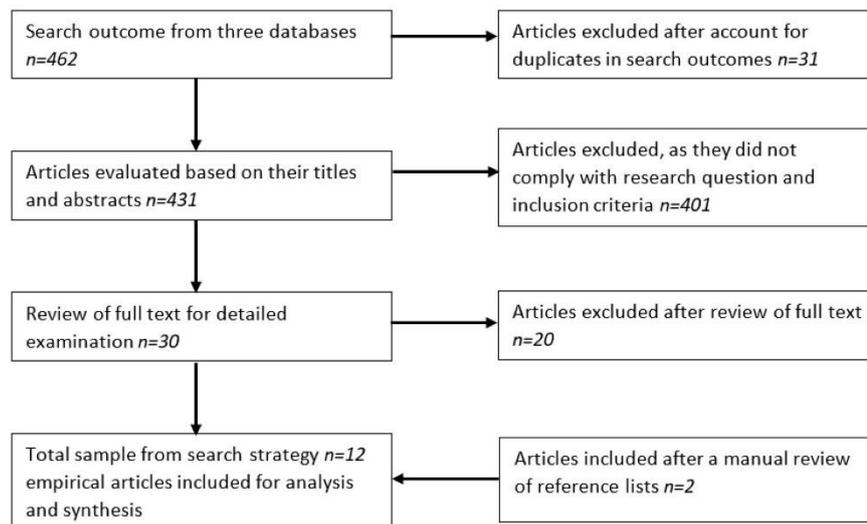

Figure 1: Search process and outcomes

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Study characteristics and quality appraisal

We used the criteria of Walsh and Downe (2006) to appraise the studies: scope and purpose, design, sample, analysis, interpretation, reflexivity, ethical considerations, relevance and transferability (context). No studies were excluded due to a lack of methodological soundness, with Table 1 providing an overview of the studies. The studies represent a broad range of geographical contexts. Several of the studies report findings from a specific social work setting, while others aim to provide more generalized accounts of social workers' interpretation of the concepts in their work with minority service-users. The studies take different concepts as their entry point, and some use several concepts. Most of the studies discuss cultural competence (Allain, 2007; Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015; Davis, 2009; Graham et al., 2009; Hall & Rammell, 2017; Harrison & Turner, 2011; Hedlund & Moe, 2010; Käkelä, 2019; Kwok et al., 2018; Willis et al., 2017; Yan, 2005), or cultural sensitivity (Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015; Graham et al., 2009; Hedlund & Moe, 2010; Testa, 2017). Some of the studies also argue that cultural sensitivity is part of cultural competence. Hence, all the studies take either cultural competence or cultural sensitivity, or both, as their point of departure.

Analytic approach

The 12 studies were analysed and synthesized in collaboration between the authors. We conducted a thematic synthesis, inspired by Thomas and Harden (2008). Based on careful readings of the articles, we identified themes and patterns across studies. Each of the authors individually read through every study and noted their initial ideas, before we jointly generated themes and codes. We then alternated between analysing the studies individually, and a collective interpretation of the findings. We started by coding the text and developing descriptive themes, such as 'client groups', 'organizational factors', and 'culture and cultural features'. We later created the two aggregate themes 'understandings of difference (making sense of)' and 'practical work (making use of)'. Through a constant comparison, both within and between studies (Cooper, 2015), we identified differences and nuances. Based on these initial stages, we developed analytical codes in which four challenges related to the operationalization of the concepts into practice emerged. We present these in the following.

Findings

Our analysis showed four challenges in social workers' efforts to operationalize the cultural concepts: 1) Who to define as culturally diverse service-users; 2) What aspects of culture to consider in encounters with culturally diverse service-users; 3) How to consider and approach these aspects of culture, and 4) the capacity to work in a culturally appropriate manner within the organizational context where the work is undertaken. The challenges are summarized in a model (Figure 2). In the following, we describe the similarities and differences in- and between the studies in relation to these challenges.
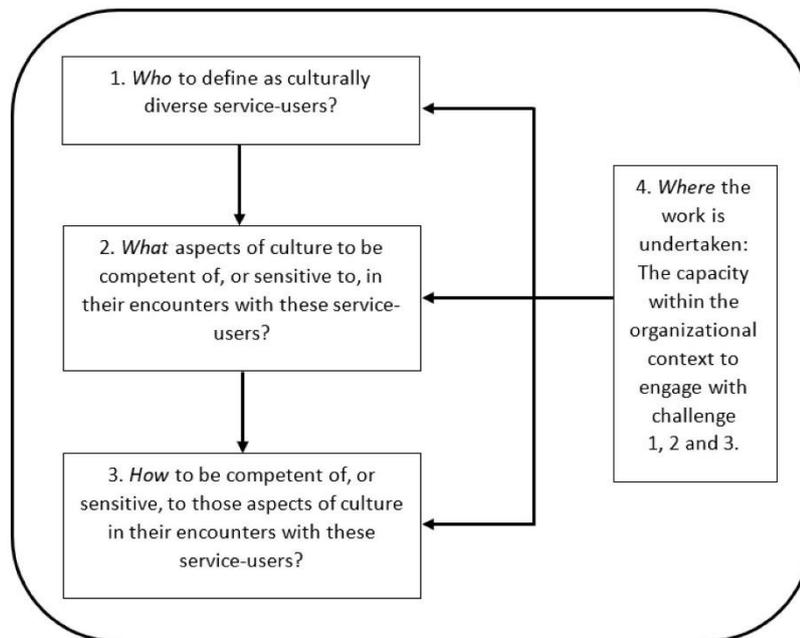
Figure 2: Four main challenges embedded in the operationalization of the cultural concepts in social work practice

Who to define as culturally diverse service-users?

The studies diverged in who they focused on as 'culturally diverse' service-users. In some of the studies, it was evident that cross-cultural social work was understood as including service-users of specific ethnicities, religions, language and/or experiences. In these studies, the *researchers* predefined which service-users required a culturally

competent or sensitive approach. Hedlund and Moe (2010) emphasized the demand for reflective practices when working with indigenous people, and argued that social workers need to engage with indigenous worldviews. Kwok et al. (2018) focused on social workers' responses to the needs of South Asian migrants in Hong Kong, and questioned the appropriateness of applying Western-based approaches and practice models within this context. In Allain's (2007) study, the service-users were described as black and minority-ethnic children. Two of the studies focused on how social workers ensured and expressed cultural sensitivity in their encounters with service-users from specific religious groups, namely Jewish Ultra-Orthodox (Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015) and Muslims (Graham et al., 2009). Käkelä (2019) focused her study on social work practices with service-users who had specific *experiences*; refugees who were simultaneously experiencing the compounding effects of displacement and immigration control. Willis et al. (2017) explicated that their study focused on social care staff working across differences of culture, ethnicity, religion and language.

Whereas some studies, to varying degrees, demonstrably defined the specific (minority) groups that required the social workers to perform cultural competence or sensitivity, others highlighted cross-cultural social work as conditioned by the difference between the service-users' and the social workers' cultural or ethnic background. Hall and Rammell (2017) asserted that while white social workers constitute more than half of the social workers in the US, most of the people receiving social work services are people of colour. Based on this, they argued the need for practitioners to recognize how their cultural make-up influences their responses. Testa (2017) also emphasized the cultural difference between users and helpers, and focused on social workers' encounters with services-users from cultures different from the social worker's own.

A few of the studies did not define who the culturally diverse clients were, or which instances called for the use of cultural competence or cultural sensitivity by the social workers. These used broader descriptions of these service-users, such as 'clients from diverse backgrounds' (Harrison & Turner, 2011), 'culturally different clients' (Yan, 2005), and 'culturally diverse families and children' (Davis, 2009). In these

studies, the social workers had to define who to categorize as culturally diverse clients who needed something other than conventional social work methods and measures. We will come back to this in the next section. The large variation in focus, and the definition of culturally diverse service-users in our rather small sample of studies, creates a backdrop for the studies' findings concerning social workers' understanding and operationalization of cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in practice.

What aspects of culture to consider in encounters with culturally diverse service-users?

When describing what aspects of culture they considered relevant in their work, the social workers in the studies of Band-Winterstein and Freund (2015), Graham et al. (2009), Hedlund and Moe (2010) and Kwok et al. (2018) emphasized specific traits they needed to be attentive to- or competent with when working with culturally diverse clients. However, as described above, these studies concerned pre-defined groups of service-users; Jewish Ultra-Orthodox, Muslims, the Samí people or South Asian migrants.

Yet, in most of the studies the social workers had to define what aspects of culture they had to be competent at- or sensitive to. In their general understanding of the concepts, the social workers acknowledged that the work with minority service-users might entail challenges that differed from those of other service-users. The social workers described how they must be attentive to potential prejudice and discrimination (Davis, 2009), and were aware of potentially simplistic understandings of culture (Allain, 2007). They highlighted how cultural diversity and service-users of a minority background called for an awareness of cultural values and beliefs (Käkelä, 2019). Some of the understandings of difference and cultural diversity the social workers employed still reflected essentialist interpretations of culture (Käkelä, 2019; Kwok et al., 2018), and a homogenization of cultural needs (Testa, 2017). Thus, the social workers, as expected, portrayed culture as an ambiguous concept.

Although attentive to culture and different minority groups in a specific case, the social workers in the studies expressed uncertainty about what aspects of culture

they should be sensitive towards or competent about. Allain (2007) described how social workers were unsure about which culture to consider in their interaction with children of dual heritage. One social worker explained how a child that is half Asian might still identify mostly as white, thereby complicating their efforts to implement culturally appropriate measures (Allain, 2007, p. 135). Another social worker emphasized how their work is complex because 'there are many different cultures within countries' (ibid.). Similarly, the social workers in the study of Harrison and Turner (2011, p. 340) reported that everything a person says or does might be an expression of culture, as culture might refer to identity, community traditions and norms. The social workers in their study understood culture as 'something that applies to everyone – but it equally evoked particular ideas about difference and indeterminacy' (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 341).

Across the studies, the social workers also debated whether they should focus on the service-users' affiliation with a cultural group, or on their individual identity (Allain, 2007; Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015; Davis, 2009; Harrison & Turner, 2011; Willis et al., 2017). The social workers in the study by Hall and Rammell (2017) categorized cultural diversity on different levels. Some spoke of humanity as one entity, others described racial, cultural or familial groups, while others again highlighted each service-user's individual uniqueness. The social workers in the study by Harrison and Turner (2011) acknowledged that 'individuals do not always think and act in ways that are consistent with their cultural background and may contest or resist cultural practices' (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 340). The social workers were concerned that an excessive focus on culture 'may detract from the importance of individual experience' (ibid.), and highlighted the importance of taking a person-centred approach (Harrison & Turner, 2011; Willis et al., 2017).

How to consider and approach such cultural aspects?
The studies described cross-cultural social work as disparate and multifaceted. In the social workers' descriptions of how to provide culturally competent and sensitive services, they highlighted openness as both a necessity and a challenge. The social workers emphasized openness and self-reflection as a prerequisite when working cross-culturally, and how they had to 'be as open as possible' and 'put aside

personal opinions and thoughts', even if they 'may not always agree' (Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015). The ability to empathize and listen to the service-users was also highlighted by the social workers in the study by Band-Winterstein and Freund (2015). The social workers in the study by Harrison and Turner (2011) described experiential learning as an important part of cultural competence, in which the social workers learn from their experiences. Moreover, social workers accentuated being at ease with uncertainty, testing personal assumptions, asking questions in a respectful manner and recognizing personal fallibility as critical aspects of working across diversity (Harrison & Turner, 2011).

This openness was also a challenge, and emerged as an unattainable ideal to the social workers. Several studies addressed the potential conflict between professional ethics and cultural codes. Social workers in Testa's (2017) study expressed an experience of personal dissonance when their cultural values differed from service-users' values and beliefs, describing challenges in balancing personal or cultural beliefs of service-users with social work interventions in a respectful way. Several studies also emphasized the social workers' uncertainty about culturally appropriate behaviour, such as a fear of appearing ignorant (Willis et al., 2017). Social workers described culture as a potentially sensitive topic (Allain, 2007; Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015), and experienced anxiety about getting it wrong or making mistakes (Allain, 2007). The social workers were also unsure about whether to prioritize clients' universal needs or their specific cultural needs (Allain, 2007). Although social workers admitted a fear of not asking the right questions, they also acknowledged that they needed to ask questions in order to do their job (Graham et al., 2009; Harrison & Turner, 2011). In this stance, the social workers in the studies differed in that some reported getting paralyzed by the uncertainty of how best to proceed, whereas others stressed that they could not dwell on the fear of unintentionally offending service-users. One social worker asserted: 'It's important to be OK with being uncomfortable, to know that working cross-culturally the ground is never going to be stable, it's always going to be shifting... And if you are not sure that there's nothing wrong with asking. So, there's that respectful inquiry. We are going to make mistakes' (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 341).

The capacity to work in a culturally appropriate manner within the organizational context

Several of the social workers in the studies emphasized organizational frames and contextual factors as important aspects of their practices. Although the social workers generally expressed an understanding of what cross-cultural social work entails, they also described how the organizational context might influence their efforts to work in a culturally competent or sensitive manner. Some of the social workers emphasized how this influence might be positive, as the organization has the authority to impose that social workers employ measures of cultural competence (Testa, 2017), or to increase social workers' sensitivity towards cultural diversity through courses or training (Willis et al., 2017).

The social workers highlighted how organizational constraints impeded their efforts to work effectively with diverse service-users. They described tensions between competing priorities (Allain, 2007), and how the mandate of the organization may encourage efforts other than working in a culturally competent or sensitive way (Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015; Harrison & Turner, 2011). Although acknowledging the importance of making respectful inquiries, the social workers also described how big caseloads, high pressure, a close monitoring of services and a lack of time impacted the depth of their work (Allain, 2007; Harrison & Turner, 2011; Käkelä, 2019; Testa, 2017; Willis et al., 2017), and led to superficial explanations of culture, faith and ethnicity (Allain, 2007). Social workers described that they did not have the time or resources to explore the position and situation of their service-users, as 'it takes time to understand' (Willis et al., 2017). They reported how service specialization reduced their capacity to work flexibly and creatively when needed (Harrison & Turner, 2011; Kwok et al., 2018; Testa, 2017). The social workers may identify needs that they cannot help with because they are outside the scope of the agency in which they work (Harrison & Turner, 2011; Testa, 2017). Hence, service gaps and specialization may directly impact the ability to engage with service-users' needs. Although the social workers might have a clear understanding of the concepts of cultural sensitivity or competence in service delivery, organizational constraints and bureaucratic demands are 'sometimes thwarting social workers' attempts to

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respond appropriately to the needs of service-users from different backgrounds' (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 344).

Discussion

This qualitative evidence synthesis shows that the operationalization of cultural concepts generates four challenges. First, because there is not one consistent description of which instances are cross-cultural, the social workers had to decide *who* to define as culturally diverse, and which encounters with service-users required something more than conventional approaches. Second, even though the social workers might know which clients to consider as culturally diverse, they still had trouble defining *what* aspects of culture to take into consideration in their work with these clients. Third, after defining what to be sensitive to or competent at, the social workers nonetheless reported difficulties in *how* to be sensitive to- or show competence in relation to these aspects. Fourth, the social workers described that although they understood what the concepts entailed, they might not have the capacity within the organizational context to act in a culturally competent or sensitive manner. This challenge relates to *where* the work is undertaken. The first two challenges refer to the ambiguous notion of culture, whereas the last two relate to the practices emerging from the concepts. In the following, we will discuss these challenges in relation to each other, to the concepts and to the discourse of cross-cultural social work.

The studies in this synthesis showed that social workers were aware of- and reflected upon both structural factors, including potential discrimination or prejudice, and the potential influence of social and cultural identities at both the individual and group level. The social workers thus seemed to neither culturalize the client's problems, as proposed by Anis (2005), nor neglect culture as a relevant factor (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012). We cannot rule out that the studies in this synthesis might have an overrepresentation of social workers who are highly aware of the challenges of working cross-culturally. This may contribute to more nuanced descriptions than from social workers in general. Further empirical research with a broader sample of participants is therefore needed to explore the real-life practices of social workers. Moreover, previous research has shown the presence of bias in social workers'

understanding of- and work with people with a minority background, resulting in discrimination and 'othering' (Ylvisaker et al., 2015). As the aim of our study has been to explore the challenges arising in the operationalization of cultural concepts into practice, our findings cannot confirm or rule out the influence of such unconscious bias in the literature or social workers' practice. It could be useful for future studies to include this perspective.

Across the studies, the social workers experienced difficulties operationalizing culture into an applicable concept in service delivery. In general, the studies described social work with culturally diverse groups as requiring something other than ordinary social work. The literature on cultural concepts tends to characterize cross-cultural social work as *different* (Miu, 2008), but seldom defines what this difference consists of. This also presupposes a homogenous majority culture that includes all other clients. In other words, some clients are characterized as 'cultural', whereas others are not. However, the social workers in the studies had difficulties in pinpointing which clients required such efforts, and what this extra effort should consist of. The findings show that in social workers' effort to operationalize the concepts, almost every difference could potentially be relevant. The social workers in the studies were unsure about what significance to give culture in their understanding of the service-user's social identity. Given the ambiguous definition of what culture is (Anis, 2005; Anthias, 2001; Jenkins, 1994; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), and what the cultural concepts entail (Boyle & Springer, 2001), this might not be surprising. In the studies that specifically defined religious or ethnic groups, the social workers were more specific in which cultural traits they deemed relevant in their work. Although these traits might be relevant in terms of the chosen focus for that specific research, there might be other aspects of these clients' social identity that could be relevant, or other clients that could require culturally competent or sensitive means.

Diversity exists on multiple levels (Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013). Our findings show that social workers struggle to grasp this multifaceted phenomenon in their work, and that processes of identification and categorization 'operate at the individual, interactional and collective levels' (Jenkins, 1994, p. 219). Such processes might result in a simplification of complex cases, in which the service-user's migrant

or ethnic background could be overemphasized (Elrick & Schwartzman, 2015). Garran and Werkmeister Rozas (2013) suggest implementing intersectionality in the notion of cultural competence in order to recognize a person's 'multiple identities and complex relations to power' (Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013, p. 103). They emphasize social workers' flexibility and reflexivity as important features of cultural competence (ibid.).

Still, our findings show that although social workers acknowledged flexibility and reflectiveness as important features of their work, they did not necessarily have access to the required resources or organizational prerequisites to carry out the work in an ideal way. The organizational context influenced whether the social workers were capable of working cross-culturally. Contextual factors may not have received sufficient attention in scholarly debates of culturally competent or sensitive practice. As our findings show, the decontextualized descriptions of cross-cultural social work contribute to creating a normative ideal that social workers fall short of living up to in their practice.

Although the concepts contribute to important debates of cultural diversity and social work, and highlight differences in the experiences and values connected to cultural and social identity, they also tend to leave the practical operationalization of cross-cultural social work to the individual social worker. The findings presented in this qualitative evidence synthesis portray social workers' practices with cultural minority service-users as complex and permeated by uncertainty. Researchers seem to engage with this complexity by continuing to develop new concepts with only subtle nuances that focus on, e.g., the inter-cultural rather than culture, or humility rather than awareness. We argue that the attempts to clarify such a multifaceted phenomenon as cross-cultural social work through the continuous introduction of new cultural concepts, further complicate practice. The solution is arguably not to create more theoretical concepts, or to attempt to provide a final definition of them, but instead to investigate how and if the concepts are useful for practical implementation. 'Without application to professional practice and service delivery, the academic formulations fail to make any difference in the lives of diverse groups of clients' (Boyle & Springer, 2001, p. 59).

We have developed a model (Figure 2) that attempts to capture the key challenges inherent in the operationalization of cultural concepts into social work practice. The model could be useful as a tool for social workers by depicting the essential questions of who, what, how and where to employ the concepts into practice. However, it is not possible, nor advisable, to provide a final answer to these questions. This work is dynamic, and requires continuous efforts from social workers in terms of asking, reflecting and debating. The model arises from empirical descriptions of social workers' efforts. We argue that it can be used to further analyse scholarly portrayals of specific cultural concepts, and whether they sufficiently address the real-life challenges of social workers. Hence, the model can be useful in the further development of cross-cultural social work.

Conclusion
It is evident from the studies included in this synthesis that cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in social work is a complex field on several levels. It is problematic in terms of who the culturally diverse groups or individuals are. It is further complicated by a lack of a clear understanding of what is expected from social workers in order to achieve cultural competence, and how this is best practiced with groups or individuals with diverse cultural needs. In addition, there are several contextual factors that may influence the possibilities of practicing cultural competence. The social workers reported being uncertain, uncomfortable, and ambiguous when working cross-culturally. This does not mean that they are culturally incompetent; rather, it may reflect a field that is constantly changing and with few clear answers. The complexity of this field is reflected, and maybe also reinforced, by the many concepts aimed at capturing its essence. Instead of trying to eliminate the uncertainty and complexity in this work, we argue that working cross-culturally requires continuous inquiries and reflexivity from social workers. By providing a model of the key challenges inherent in the cultural concepts, we hope to assist scholars, practitioners and educators to help navigate the multifaceted landscape of culture and social work.

Table 1: Overview of the studies included in the analysis

Study	Country	Scope and purpose	Design and analysis	Data	Sample	Context	Ethical considerations
Allain, 2007	Great Britain	Uses a cultural competence framework to explore what social workers understand by 'cultural needs', how they implement the legislation on cultural needs, and what action they take to meet the cultural needs of the young people with which they work.	Qualitative, Three linked sub-processes: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing/ verification	Individual semi-structured interviews	8 social workers: 6 described themselves as Asian or black, 2 as white	Looked after children	Yes
Band-Winterstein & Freund, 2015	Israel	Explores how social workers in different areas of expertise express their cultural sensitivity in encounters with Jewish Ultra-Orthodox clients.	Qualitative, Phenomenology, Bracketing and categorization	Individual semi-structured interviews	33 social workers: 9 with Ultra-Orthodox background, 13 Modern Orthodox, 11 Secular	General social work. Therapy-sessions	Yes
Davis, 2009	USA	Explores how family and practitioner perception of cultural competence compare to diversity practice models. Identifies potential discrepancies in conceptualizations that may inform further development of social work diversity practice models and culturally responsive service.	Qualitative, Concept mapping, Deductive content analysis	Focus groups	4 children's mental health systems of care communities. Both professionals and families	Children mental health systems	Not stated
Graham, Bradshaw, & Trew, 2009	Canada	Produces localized knowledge of Muslim clients. Provides insights into issues faced by agencies working with Muslim clients. Examines how agencies can modify their approach to ensure that Muslim clients receive adequate and culturally sensitive services.	Qualitative, Textual coding, pattern coding	Individual semi-structured interviews	50 social work practitioners who work with Muslim clients	General social work	Not stated
Hall & Rammell, 2017	USA	Aims to gain insights into the perceived cultural competence of social work practitioners.	Qualitative, Explorative, Three-level coding	Qualitative interviews, Questionnaire	72 social workers, currently practicing	General social work	Yes
Harrison & Turner, 2011	Australia	Explores how social work graduates understand and make sense of cultural competence in practice.	Qualitative, Thematic analysis	Focus groups, Individual semi-structured interviews	20 social workers who had graduated within the past five years	General social work	Yes

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Study	Country	Scope and purpose	Design and analysis	Data	Sample	Context	Ethical considerations
Hedlund & Moe, 2010	Norway	Aims to contribute to reflective practices and engagement with indigenous people's worldviews when practicing social work. And examines whether certain patterns in interaction between health and welfare professionals and users lead to the development of cultural sensitivity/competence.	Qualitative, Phenomenology, Thematic data matrix	Qualitative interviews	7 health and welfare professionals, and 8 Sámi service-users	Health and welfare services	Not stated
Kwok, Lee, & Law, 2018	China	Aims to shed light on scholarly discussions of multicultural social work. Explores approaches and strategies employed in response to the needs and structural issues faced by South Asian migrants in Hong Kong. Discusses theoretical assumptions about cultural competence.	Qualitative, Explorative, constructivist; Content analysis with inductive category development	Individual interviews, Conversations with service users, Participant observation	15 social workers from 11 NGO's, 1 official from Race Relations Unit, 2 informants from Hong Kong Council of Social Service, Conversations with 25 South Asian service users	NGO's integration efforts	Not stated
Käkelä, 2019	Great Britain	Explores social worker' experiences of negotiating and accommodating cultural differences with service users; Social workers' understandings and experiences of culturally competent practice with asylum seekers.	Qualitative, Mixed methods, Thematic analysis	Individual semi-structured interviews, Vignette	8 social workers and frontline staff working with: children and families (5), youth justice (1), criminal justice (2)	Asylum seekers and refugees	Yes
Testa, 2017	Australia	Explores how cultural diversity impacts on social work practice, and how social workers understand culturally sensitive practice.	Qualitative, Narrative, constructivist; Thematic analysis	Individual semi-structured interviews	10 social workers working frontline in health care	Health care organizations	Yes
Willis, Pathak, Khambhaita, & Evandrou, 2017	Great Britain	Provides social care practitioners' perspectives on how to work in a culturally and professionally competent way. Explores their level of comfort when working with difference, and the extent to which they perceive the existing training on cultural competence meets their needs.	Qualitative, Thematic analysis	Individual semi-structured interviews	39 adult social service practitioners: 25 with White British background, 6 Asian, 5 'Other' White, 2 Black African, 1 Filipino	Social care	Yes

Study	Country	Scope and purpose	Design and analysis	Data	Sample	Context	Ethical considerations
Yan, 2005	Canada	Examines how social workers interact with their own cultures when working with culturally different clients. Aims to explain how cultural awareness works in practice and contributes to empirical investigations of cultural competence/awareness.	Qualitative, Grounded theory, Constant comparison	Individual semi-structured interviews	30 frontline social workers: 14 from health and mental health services, 6 in child welfare services, 10 in various community services	General social work	Not stated

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Article 2

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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"I don't know what to do—Could it be cultural?" The operationalization of cultural sensitivity among street-level workers in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration

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Abstract

Faced with increased global migration and a more ethnically diverse clientele, several studies stress the need for more culturally sensitive welfare services. Others warn that the focus on culture might lead to the culturalization and othering of clients from ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds. In the Norwegian context, cultural sensitivity is implemented in policy documents of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) to improve services for immigrant clients. However, the operationalization of cultural sensitivity into service delivery remains unscrutinized. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at a frontline NAV-office, this article unpacks the *practical work* embedded in being culturally aware, by exploring the circumstances in which street-level workers factor culture into their comprehension and consideration of a case. The article employs a process-oriented approach to its analysis of caseworkers' discussion of cases. Findings show that caseworkers explicitly consider culture mainly when cases appear diffuse and intangible. The caseworkers discuss plausible explanations to make sense of these cases, only one of which is culture. Thus, the caseworkers distinguish culture from the client's ethnicity or migrant background. These findings refine the perception of street-level workers' inability to respond to questions of

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ethnicity and culture, by describing the dynamic processes of implicit categorization and sensemaking embedded in being aware of culture. The study also highlights the importance of empirical, ethnographic accounts to unpack the operationalization of such theoretical and ambiguous concepts into practice.

KEYWORDS

categorization, cultural sensitivity, culture, ethnography, NAV, operationalization, street-level bureaucracy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Several studies focus on how immigration has changed the clientele in welfare services. They conclude that caseworkers need more training in and knowledge of culture and ethnicity (Boyle & Springer, 2001; Jani, Osteen, & Shipe, 2016). The main arguments are that street-level workers either overemphasize or underestimate the relevance of culture and ethnicity in their work. These understandings influence research, professional education, street-level practice, codes of ethics and organizational policy, constituting a multicultural discourse, especially in the field of social work (Nadan, 2017). Several concepts have been formulated in response to the perceived inadequacy of welfare services to manage the multicultural reality. The most frequently used are cultural sensitivity (Fernández-Borrero, Vázquez-Aguado, & Álvarez-Pérez, 2016), cultural awareness (Jackson & Samuels, 2011), and cultural competence (Jani et al., 2016). Although the terms overlap, all entail an *awareness of culture, one's own and/or that of others*. The operationalization of this awareness of cultural preferences in service delivery has received limited attention. Hence, being culturally aware, culturally sensitive and culturally competent, appears as abstract and mere theoretical concepts (Harrison & Turner, 2011). Likewise, "culture" in these concepts and what you are supposed to be aware of, have competence on, and be sensitive to is unclear. This article will unpack the *practical work* embedded in being culturally aware, by exploring the circumstances under which street-level workers factor culture into their comprehension of a case.

Most of the empirical research in this field is based on what caseworkers say they would do (Williams & Soydan, 2005), or their perceptions and understandings of culture (Harrison & Turner, 2011). Valuable as these studies are, they can only tell us so much. This article combines fieldwork methods with a process-oriented approach, to explore *when and how caseworkers consider culture relevant to a case*. Case discussions amongst caseworkers in The Norwegian Labour and Welfare administration (NAV) serve as the empirical entry point. These discussions are an essential part of caseworkers' daily routine, where they deliberate relevant measures in specific cases. The frontline NAV offices have a dual mission: They administer benefits to people who are out of work and help them enter or re-enter the labour force. About 30% of NAV's unemployed clients have immigrant background (NAV, 2019). NAV is a bureaucratic system, with extensive regulations, specialized and standardized work processes. However, there is generous room for discretion (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). It is a decentralized and complex system with autonomous frontline offices that answer to the Directorate of Labour and Welfare. The offices are organized within a partnership model between state and municipal welfare administrations (Fimreite & Lægreid, 2009). Services are constructed to encourage participation in the labour force, together with generous economic benefits (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011).

To consolidate and improve the services for immigrant clients, NAV has introduced intercultural counselling as part of their counselling policy. Intercultural counselling addresses challenges in communication, culture and

understanding of Norwegian society, and recommends cultural sensitivity and awareness. Hence, cultural sensitivity is reflected in policy documents to provide equal services between frontline offices, and to enhance service delivery and goal attainment with immigrant clients. This makes NAV a good entry point for the investigation of the operationalization of cultural sensitivity. Therefore, I rely on notions of cultural sensitivity and awareness and direct attention to caseworkers' work with clients from an immigrant background. This article does not define *culture* or *cultural sensitivity* but explores how welfare caseworkers operationalize cultural awareness in their work. Operationalization implies a mental definition of culture, along with how and when to be aware of it. The article answers a call from Jani et al. (2016) to investigate the way caseworkers "define cultural competence and translate it into discrete practice behaviours", providing valuable perspectives into the workings of welfare bureaucracies. After a discussion of research on cultural diversity and welfare services and the theoretical underpinning of the article, I describe the methodological framework and data, then present and discuss the findings.

2 | CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND WELFARE SERVICES

A growing body of research conceptualizes the work with culture in welfare services (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Green, Bennett, & Betteridge, 2016), especially in social work. *Cultural competence* refers to professionals gaining competence and knowledge of other cultures, values and perceptions, in order to make correct judgements of the kind of measures needed in a case (Jani et al., 2016). Cultural competence has been criticized for its static understanding of culture, as something one *has* and that is shared among people of similar ethnicity. In response to this criticism, the concepts of *cultural awareness* and *cultural sensitivity* have become more frequent. Here, culture is something that becomes relevant in the interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds, and an awareness of culture is proposed. However, within research and policy, the three concepts are used differently, making it hard to separate them from each other and to present a definitive definition of them.

The conceptualization of cultural awareness, competence and sensitivity seems to depart from a perception that street-level workers inadequately manage the multicultural and multi-ethnic reality. Ethnicity and culture are presented as intertwined and as constitutive categories (Jenkins, 1994), where culture is relevant in interethnic encounters. Saunders, Haskins, and Vasquez (2015) argue that professionals and street-level workers must be trained in cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in order to provide better services. According to Fernández-Borrero et al. (2016), training in cultural diversity and cultural knowledge brings a greater degree of cultural awareness and responsiveness to services. An awareness of culture thus ensures the recognition of differences and acknowledges "the other" (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012). However, Patil and Ennis (2018) assert that through the connection of ethnicity and culture, cultural competence is presented as relevant only to non-Western immigrants. Diedrich, Eriksson-Zetterquist and Styhre (2011, p. 273) state that categories in welfare services often fail to incorporate more complex information, "separating (...) individuals into discrete either/or categories". These processes might result in the simplification of complex cases (Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018; Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019), where clients' migrant or ethnic background is overemphasized (Elrick & Schwartzman, 2015). Elrick and Schwartzman (2015) describe how statistical categories might be turned into homogenized social categories. The focus on culture might therefore result in othering clients of ethnic minorities and a culturalization of social problems (Anis, 2005; Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019). In sum, researchers imply that street-level workers either overstate or understate culture.

However, few studies explore the operationalization of the concepts of cultural awareness, competence, or sensitivity into professional practice. Harrison and Turner (2011) demonstrate how social workers struggle to employ cultural competence. The participants in their study spent a considerable amount of time discussing the substance of "culture," concluding that it can evoke a multitude of understandings (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 341). The social workers also discussed the content of cultural competence. However, operationalizing the concept was problematic. Harrison and Turner (2011) therefore question the applicability and relevance of cultural competence in practice. Similarly, in their study of how social work educators and students conceive cultural competence (training), Jani

et al. (2016) show how the respondents find the concept of cultural competence to provide some prescriptions for practice, but that its conceptual ambiguity complicates the transfer into action. One respondent stated, "I understand the concept, but what does it tell me to *do*?" (Jani et al., 2016, p. 317). In Williams and Soydan's (2005) vignette study, caseworkers explained their considerations and measures in two cases of potential domestic child abuse—one of which was a family from an ethnic minority background. The caseworkers reportedly adopted similar measures in the two cases but considered culture relevant only to the ethnic minority family (Williams & Soydan, 2005, p. 910). However, the *practice behaviours* of a culturally competent person remain unscrutinized (Jani et al., 2016, p. 312). Caseworkers' ambivalence regarding questions of ethnicity and culture, stress the importance of investigating the practical operationalization of such concepts and caseworkers' decisions on how and when to emphasize culture in a case, and when not to.

Considering the unclear conceptualization of cultural awareness, the operationalization of when and how to be aware of culture, depends on the decisions and discretionary considerations of the professionals. Caseworkers have to categorize and position themselves and their case within a framework of diversity (Cedersund, 2013). Researchers emphasize that these processes might be influenced by frontline workers' attitudes towards clients (Keiser, 2010), referring to the professionals' perceived worthiness of a client group (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017; Jenkins, 1994; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). Heuristics and client typologies also shape the professionals' images and judgements of clients (Eikenaar, de Rijk, & Meershoek, 2016; Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). Workers might search for information based on their expectations (Lipsky, 2010, p. 122), constituting an institutional bias. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the workings of street-level bureaucracies, other studies highlight street-level workers' categorizations as more dynamic and interchanging processes (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018). Talleraas (2019, p. 15) shows how welfare bureaucrats use a multitude of categories, but also signal "incertitude about how to label, or even think about, people leading transnational lives". Moreover, Øversveen and Forseth (2018) and Lundberg (2009) show how the institutional categories influence the work and considerations of caseworkers and structure the identification of a person as a client.

3 | CATEGORIZATION WORK, CUES, AND INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS

Social policies "permit and require considerable discretion for their implementation and street-level delivery" (Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018, p. 301). Lipsky (2010, p. 61) emphasizes two aspects of discretionary considerations. The first points to the definition of the problem as a problem; "classifying the behaviour or background of the client" (ibid.). The frontline workers have to assess the client's situation and place the problem into a category. The second aspect is that the categories themselves are fluid and open to interpretation (ibid.), where the actions of street-level workers actively construct and reconstruct the categories (Diedrich et al., 2011, p. 286). The categorization of a case makes it manageable in terms of bureaucratic criteria.

Street-level discretion and categorization might be considered a "black box," that comprise which cases are placed in which categories. I take a process-oriented approach, understanding the discretionary considerations of caseworkers in their operationalization of cultural awareness as a kind of *categorization work*. Taking inspiration from Smith's (1999, 2005) institutional ethnography, *work* does not refer to formal processes or tasks, but directs analytical attention to how and why people do what they do. This work is done within an institutional complex, where some understandings and categories are accessible, and others are not. The categorization work connects both to discursive understandings of culture, as well as to the institutional apparatus and its established categories. Categories thus also function as coordinating mechanisms, where the institutional manifests itself in actors' experiences as ruling relations (Smith, 1999). The notion of work helps unpack the process of categorization, where street-level workers have to make sense of the case and the categories into which it may be placed.

Making sense of a case is a collective process in which plausible scenarios and understandings are taken into account so that the pieces can be put together into a story that "holds disparate elements together long enough to

energize and guide action" (Weick, 1995, p. 61). One way of recognizing and categorizing a case is to look for cues (Weick, 1995), "familiar structures (…) from which people develop a larger sense of what might be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p. 50). Cues are attributes that help identify a case. They are usually constituted of client characteristics (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018), and might be either verbal or non-verbal (Jenkins, 1994, p. 211). The search for and interpretations of such cues are allocated to interpretative frameworks that street-level workers use to give characteristics of a case or client a "signalling status" to become meaningful signals (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018). The placement within such frameworks allows for perceiving, identifying, and labelling a case, and presents *guided doings* (Goffman, 1974). The ideologies or paradigms embedded in frameworks influence what people notice, which cues are considered relevant and how they connect to the situation (Weick, 1995, p. 133). Such beliefs might refer to different understandings of a client's status, such as discourses of culture, race, ethnicity or citizenship (for a more comprehensive discussion, see Vassenden, 2010). Sensemaking comprises a collective and local coordination of what serves as legitimate knowledge upon which to base the interpretative framework and assessment of cues (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018; Smith, 2005).

The notion of work, combined with theory of sensemaking and signalling, thus facilitate exploration of "the knowledge, skills, and experiences involved, (….) the difficulties to be overcome as well as the tension absorbed as part of doing the work" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 72) of operationalizing cultural sensitivity into discretionary practice. This provides an understanding of caseworkers' practice as related to the broader institutional setting, to power and ruling, and not just an outcome of their personal beliefs or biases. The objective is to describe some institutional processes that may have generalizing effects. Hence, the implications are on the institutional and policy level.

4 | METHODS AND DATA

The article is based on 5 months of ethnographic fieldwork (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Mannay & Morgan, 2015) conducted in the fall of 2017 at a frontline office in NAV. The office is on the west coast of Norway. I gained access through the Directorate of Labour and Welfare. The office serves an urban area with a large proportion of immigrant residents and the caseworkers regularly manage cases where the client has immigrant background. The average caseworker manages about 100 cases. The office is medium-sized. The five teams in the office work with clients on different welfare benefits, such as health benefits, social security benefits, or unemployment benefits, but they all assist clients with entering or re-entering the labour force. Most of the employees are women. To protect the anonymity of the few male employees, I refer to all caseworkers as female. A few of the caseworkers also have migrant backgrounds. Names of all informants in the article are pseudonyms.

Before starting the fieldwork, I held an information meeting at the office. I informed the caseworkers about my presence in the office and described the project concerning their work with immigrant clients and the relevance of culture in their work. I distributed an information letter with my contact information to the caseworkers, in case of questions or concerns. The caseworkers gave written or verbal consent to participate. The Directorate of Labour and Welfare also exempted the caseworkers from their duty of confidentiality, so that they could discuss cases with me. No identifying information about clients is in the data. The research complies with ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Ethical Committee of Social Science research. The project has been reviewed and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research (NSD).

The team meetings functioned as a key situation for the fieldwork. I came to know the different teams and their work. Each team met once a week to discuss cases, get information about and deliberate on the routines, procedures and the organization of their work. Most of the meeting time was dedicated to the discussion of cases. In these discussions, the caseworkers have to explicate their understanding of the case, constituting a good entry point into the caseworkers' work—what they emphasize, their arguments and disagreements. I was an observer in these meetings and did not suggest cases for discussion. However, the caseworkers sometimes mentioned me when they discussed

cases they considered relevant to the project. There might also be things that are left out of the discussions because of my presence, or because it is taken for granted among the caseworkers. During the fieldwork, I therefore wanted to be in situations that would open for different roles and relations, to get a range of perspectives and understandings. I had access to a workspace in the office, usually in one of the shared offices. In addition to the long duration of the fieldwork, this encouraged a more natural relationship with the caseworkers. It was easy to talk to them about their work and get to know their workdays. In the shared offices, the caseworkers also tended to engage in informal case discussions as there were several caseworkers present.

The ethnographic approach made it possible for me to ask for explanation, clarification, or elaboration of practices or cases mentioned in meetings or discussions I attended. I engaged in field conversations with the caseworkers in their offices, in the kitchen over coffee, or walking to or from meetings. The caseworkers also stopped me in the hallway or dropped by my workspace, to ask about the project or tell me about cases or meetings they thought might be of interest to me. At the same time, I took care not to intrude on their work or take unfair advantage of their willingness to participate. I excluded a couple of the caseworkers from the data production and analysis because they seemed uncomfortable with my presence or reluctant to speak with me. As I could not attend every discussion or meeting, the descriptions are not an exhaustive representation of every case the caseworkers manage. Rather, they illustrate the caseworkers' categorization work. The data consist of thick descriptions of 78 situations, comprising 30 team meetings and 48 informal case discussions described in fieldnotes.

Ethnographic fieldwork requires the researcher's intense involvement in data production (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I constantly negotiated my role and relationships in the field, which influenced what was noticed, asked about and written down. I am a young, ethnic Norwegian woman with an academic background. Most of the caseworkers usually called me "the researcher" and seemed eager to share their knowledge. Others seemed sceptical of my presence. Typically, this was when the caseworkers expressed understandings that would elsewhere be perceived as prejudicial. The extent of the fieldwork, however, allowed them to explain or elaborate on such statements. A year prior to the fieldwork, I worked as a caseworker in a different NAV office for 1 year, learning about the organization, work processes, and institutionalized language from within. This positioned me as a "halfie," being both an insider and an outsider to the field simultaneously (Abu-Lughod, 1991). In my experience, this facilitates more intimate knowledge and makes it easier to identify situations worth exploring. It might also simplify the social context, freeing cognitive capacity and attention. However, the halfie position comes with blind spots, which possibly makes it difficult to ask naïve questions. It might influence the caseworkers' approach to me, emphasizing elements of their work or specific clients. Moreover, some caseworkers used me as a sounding board for their struggles with managers and policy makers. As the fieldwork continued, my knowledge of the field and relationship with the caseworkers became more natural, making such situations less frequent. To distance myself from my tacit knowledge, I summarized the fieldnotes in English rather than my native language, Norwegian. This exercise appeared to help me use a less institutionalized language and go beyond my immediate understanding of the field.

Institutional ethnography (Smith, 1999, 2005) informed my analytical approach. The understanding of work directed attention to the practices, experiences, and reflections of the caseworkers. The case discussions take on very different forms, depending on the case. The content of the discussion, as well as time spent on the discussions varied. The caseworkers would mention culture on some occasions but not on others, seemingly considering culture both as relevant and irrelevant under different circumstances. This finding does not support claims that the caseworker in general place too much or too little emphasis on culture, hence constituting an anomaly to previous research (Abbott, 2004; Vassenden, 2018). I asked the caseworkers about these situations during the fieldwork to elicit their reflections. This anomaly thus informed the further data production and later analysis. After finishing the fieldwork, I sorted the data based on team affiliation, and then based on the content of the discussions at case level. I subsequently identified common and divergent themes through constant comparison of the caseworkers' emphasis in the descriptions and discussions. The analytical focus has been on unpacking the work inherent in their discussions. Not considering whether culture is emphasized, but how and when it is emphasized as part of the categorization work. Like Williams and Soydan (2005, p. 910), I have focused on the caseworkers' explicit references to a

(collective) culture and to the client's ethnic or immigrant background in the analysis, in addition to implicit remarks on perceived differences in practices, values, beliefs, or expressions.

5 | FINDINGS

In their discussion of cases, the caseworkers categorized each case based on how they perceived it, what the problem might be, and how they could work with the case as it proceeds. This categorization made each case manageable in institutional terms. In this work, they reviewed several cues to categorize the case. The consideration of culture as relevant in a case only happened in some situations, where the case was categorized as an immigrant, non-sensible case. Hence, the operationalization of caseworkers' cultural awareness was connected to their understanding and categorization of the case. In the following, I will present the interpretive framework the caseworkers made use of in this work, before describing how different cues were acknowledged within this framework resulting in some cases being considered as *cultural immigrant clients*.

5.1 | Placing the case: Sensible or non-sensible, immigrant or non-immigrant

In the case discussions, the caseworkers drew distinctions between categories of cases. Regarding immigrants and culture, these distinctions happened along two dimensions in particular. First, they distinguished immigrant from non-immigrant cases. This distinction was not, however, simply dependent on the client having formal immigrant background. One day I shared an office with Nora and two of her colleagues. When I asked them if they had any cases that might be interesting for me to hear about, Nora replied:

> *I have one case with a German client and one involving a Swede. Are they immigrant enough for you? I also have a case with a British man, but I do not know if that will be so interesting for you. I think it's quite an easy case. He has a good resume, good education and work experience from several places and sectors. I will try to get him into this course [showing me a pamphlet].*

Nora's statement indicates that she did not necessarily see her clients as immigrants, even if they originated from another country. When discussing cases that they conceived as straightforward, caseworkers did not stress the client's immigrant background or culture. When describing these cases, the caseworkers did not necessarily mention clients' names, appearance, or country of origin. These factors were consequently not known in the discussion and hence not considered in the review of the case.

I attended a meeting with the team working with social security benefits. The caseworkers ended the meeting by telling me that it was a shame that none of the cases they discussed were relevant to me, since they did not concern immigrant clients. However, that was only half the truth. One of the caseworkers replied:

> *All my cases pertained to clients with immigrant background, but I did not find it relevant to mention it in the discussion, because it did not have anything to do with their challenges and the case.*

Most of the cases that this team discussed pertained to their clients' financial situation, and whether they were eligible for social security benefits. As one caseworker put it:

> *It's about math. We add and subtract and see what we end up with. If the result is that they [the clients] have less money than they are supposed to, we give them more money.*

In these discussions, the caseworkers did not have to explain or make sense of the case. All they had to do was to determine a client's eligibility for benefits. In this work, the client's immigrant background was not considered relevant.

The second dimension the caseworkers activated in the placement of cases was that of sensible and non-sensible cases. The caseworkers used specific phrases when talking about cases where they did not easily recognize the problem at hand:

> *"There is something I can't really grasp."*
> *"It is not a standard case." "This is not an ordinary." [Referring to institutionalized levels of*
> *need: ordinary/standard, situational, special, long-term]*
> *"There is something more here."*

In the case discussions, these phrases seemed to ascribe the case as non-sensible, suggesting to the other caseworkers the need to engage in a more comprehensive search for problems and interpretations. These statements also describe how these non-sensible cases did not seem to fit the established institutional categories. In a meeting with the team working with unemployment benefits, Erica described an unemployed male client with an immigrant background:

> *I do not know what to do! He only wants courses, no work practice or language training, but qualification*
> *courses. The biggest problem is the communication... One thing is that he lacks proficiency in Norwegian,*
> *but it is also his personality and his expectations of me. It will be difficult to transfer the case to another*
> *team, because I should be able to handle it and get something done—considering his résumé. I want to help*
> *him, but it is just so hard... There is something about the communication, but there is also something more.*
> *Something that I cannot really grasp.*

Seemingly, Erica struggled to identify the problem of the case. She mentioned several potential challenges that she faced in helping this client find a job, the biggest of which was "something" related to communication. The lack of a recognizable problem instigated a comprehensive deliberation of what made this case so complicated. The discussion of Erica's case covered several topics. The caseworkers deliberated a variety of courses that could be relevant for the client, his financial aid, more of his case history, and the possibility of transferring the case to another team. The discussion ended without identifying the central problem:

> *Christine: He would never get in a position to get into the labour market on his own, but he still has to be*
> *able to make use of the things we can offer.*
> *Elisabeth: Could it be cultural?*
> *Erica: He just does not want anything [sigh].*

The combination of the comprehension of the case as a non-sensible case and the client being perceived as "immigrant" set in motion a process whereby the caseworkers searched for and (re)defined the problem. The caseworkers tested different hypotheses and plausible explanations for the status and development in the case. The client's immigrant background and the possible relevance of culture were addressed, as were other potentially relevant aspects of the case.

These findings show that during the case discussions, the caseworkers implicitly categorized each case by positioning it along two dimensions (Figure 1). One dimension is the understanding of the client as "immigrant" or "non-immigrant." In the non-immigrant cases, the caseworkers did not consider the client's immigrant background as relevant, and so it was not the same as the client not having an immigrant background. In other words, there was far from a clear correspondence between formal immigrant status and being categorized as an "immigrant case." The second dimension is the caseworkers' definition of the case as sensible or non-sensible. These categories depended
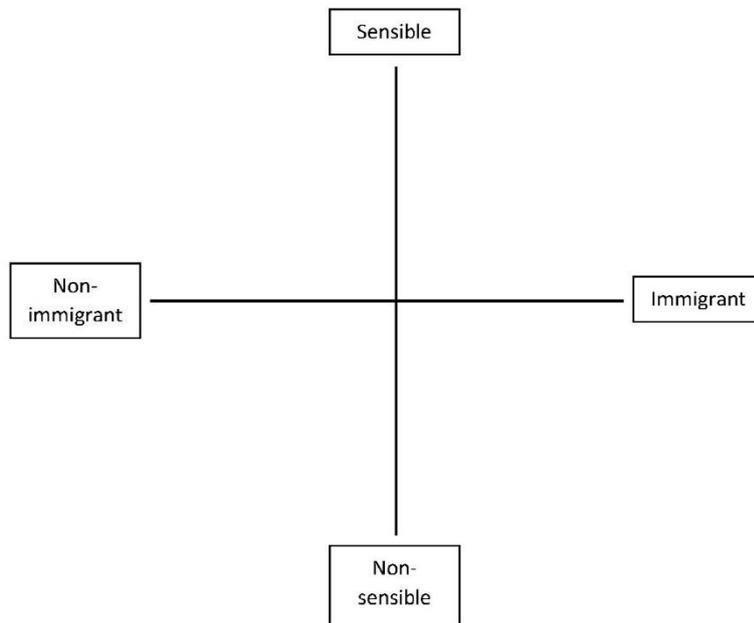
FIGURE 1 The two dimensions of the interpretive framework for placing a case

on whether the caseworkers easily recognized the problem in the case, or if they saw it as diffuse and intangible. The two dimensions constitute the interpretive framework the caseworkers relied upon when considering a case. When the caseworkers tried to make sense of the case, they activated this framework as part of their categorization work. The two dimensions can be seen as continuums where the boundaries among the four categories; immigrant or non-immigrant, sensible or non-sensible are continually negotiated by the caseworkers in the case discussions.

5.2 | Cues of culture: Ethnicity, "language," and motivation

In their categorization of a case as immigrant or non-immigrant and as sensible or non-sensible, the caseworkers searched for cues. Some cues in particular seemed to evoke the caseworkers' awareness of and attention to culture: Ethnicity, "language," or motivation. One example is a discussion within the team working with sickness benefits. The case centred on a taxi driver with a bad back; the taxi driver's Turkish background was presented upfront. The caseworkers found that the taxi driver had occasionally worked full time, so they tried to figure out how his health situation had changed the times he was able to work. They discussed the matter at length:

> *Are there any "objective" medical findings? Could there be other things that might explain the pain? And is*
> *he actually in that much pain? Pain is a subjective perception.*

In the discussion, the caseworkers treated eligibility to health benefits as dependent on objective findings, not diffuse illnesses or subjective pain descriptions. The institutional categorization of health thus influenced the caseworkers' comprehension of the case. The suggestion of the problem consisting of "other things" initiated the

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caseworkers' attempt to (re)define the problem of the case: Was it possible for his employer to accommodate his bad back? Could he change jobs? Why was he working as a taxi driver? Was he motivated to work? What was his home life like? How was his wife? Was she working? Should they talk to his doctor to get him some kind of treatment? Did he really have a bad back, or did he simply not want to work? Or was this a cultural problem? As one caseworker stated:

> *In some cultures, people just sit down if it hurts; they just do not use the part of the body that hurts and wait until the pain passes. Maybe he lacks motivation to work?*

In the discussion, the caseworkers looked for cues that could help them make sense of a non-sensible case. The caseworkers cited their previous experiences with other Turkish taxi drivers, whom they saw as a particularly difficult group characterized by subjective symptoms and apparent lack of motivation. The caseworkers therefore rejected the initial definition of the problem as a simple matter of whether the client was disabled enough to be eligible for benefits. Combined with the client's Turkish background, the impression of there being something more to the case, especially a question of motivation, triggered an understanding of the case that could be explained by culture. The client's ethnicity and perceived lack of motivation to work seemed to function as cues that mobilized the caseworkers' cultural awareness. Nonetheless, this was not uncontested in the discussion as the caseworkers also considered several other aspects of the case before getting to culture.

In both the Turkish taxi driver's case and Erica's case, the connection between the different characteristics of the case and culture was made explicit. However, the caseworkers also implicitly referred to culture. In a conversation with a caseworker working with sickness benefits, I asked how culture is relevant in her work. She responded by telling me about difficulties with language, suggesting a link between notions of language and culture. Likewise, Ida told me about a report she had received from a collaborating institution about one of her clients:

> *This report says that the client has a difficult time following work hours because of praying times. He also does not respond well to having female supervisors. This is not unusual, however, and is something we can work on. The good thing about this specific report is that it also emphasizes difficulties in communication. [Reading from the report]: "The client is not attentive or responsive and is headstrong and stubborn." This is cultural, wouldn't you say? In order to get this information, we have to dare to put it into words. But it is not easy to put these things into words, especially things that fall somewhere between culture and religion, but these elements are important information.*

The report stated that it was not the client's proficiency in Norwegian that was problematic, but the way he communicated with people. Ida deliberated on communication and culture in making sense of the case. I asked Ida what she saw as the problem with the case. She replied:

> *The client has health problems, but language and motivation are the main reasons why he is out of work.*

Ida initially talked about difficulties in communication, culture, personality, and religion, later summing it up as challenges related to "language and motivation." This suggests that the caseworkers' consideration of culture might be implicit in their notions of language and motivation. Thus, the caseworkers' notion of language does not necessarily refer to the client's proficiency in Norwegian, their vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation, but to culture. However, Ida asking "this is cultural, wouldn't you say?" also suggests a test of her conception of culture by negotiating its substance.

These findings demonstrate how the implicit categorization of a case as a non-sensible and immigrant case instigated a search for cues that could help clarify the kind of case and client at hand. Ethnicity, "language" and motivation served as cues for culture, and as implicit references to culture. The caseworkers introduced and
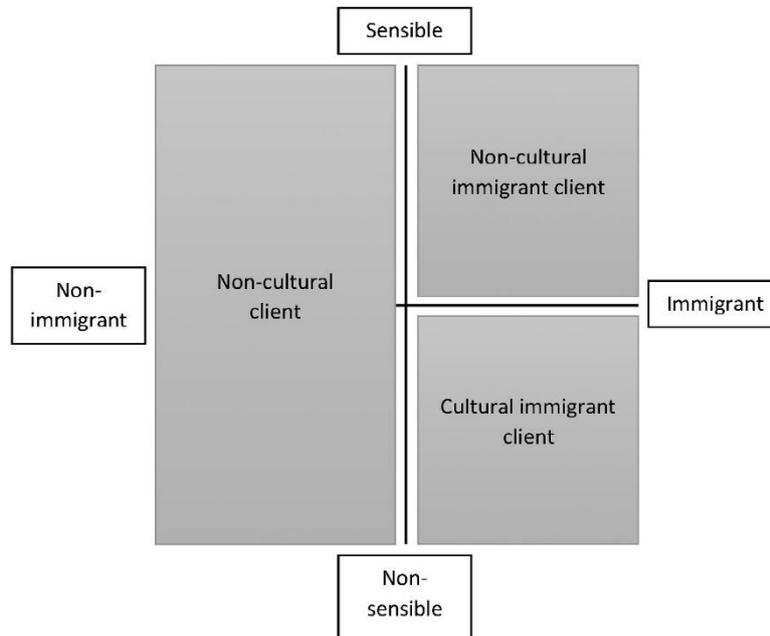
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FIGURE 2   The circumstances in which caseworkers considered culture relevant—the non-sensible, immigrant cases

addressed culture relatively late in the process of (re)defining the problem of the case, as in the situation with the Turkish taxi driver and with Erica's case. The caseworkers reviewed several other aspects of the case and the client before considering culture. They engaged in a process of elimination, where culture might also be ruled out as irrelevant. Hence, there was not a causal relationship between the presence of the cues and the definition of a case as pertaining to a cultural immigrant client. The case also had to be categorized as non-sensible and immigrant (Figure 2).

A discussion between two caseworkers on how to proceed in a case illustrate how there may be a lack of consensus on the interpretation of the different cues. Prior to a meeting with a single mother from an African country, Cathrine told me how she needed to explain a few things to the client because the client lacked proficiency in Norwegian. When she returned to the office, Cathrine summarized their conversation:

> *I experience her as active and well informed. She requested work practice and wanted to get into an activity in addition to school [the client was finishing upper-secondary school in Norway].*

Cathrine started to discuss the case with the two other caseworkers with whom she shares an office. One of the caseworkers asked if the client might be a candidate for a program to which they often assigned non-sensible cases:

> *Anna: She is a single mom, does not have any formal education, and has children who need a bit more attention.*
> *Cathrine: Well, she is resourceful and manages by herself even with her children. She can handle her*

schooling in addition to being the sole provider for her children. We might look into the program later, but at this point we will start with work practice and see how it goes.

Cathrine and her colleague had very different ways of making sense of this case. The discussion illustrates how the different cues, "language" and ethnicity did not necessarily elicit the same understanding. Moreover, in her description of the case prior to the meeting, Cathrine did not use the term "language," but "proficiency in Norwegian." She described the client as motivated and with specific goals and emphasized that the client seemed quite enthusiastic about making progress in her own case, wanting work practice. Although describing the client as African, Cathrine seemed to categorize the case as a sensible one. This illustrates how the caseworkers' consideration of culture depended on the implicit categorization of a case as *both* non-sensible and regarding an "immigrant client." In these instances, the caseworkers categorized the case as a *cultural immigrant case*, where they mobilized their cultural awareness and regarded culture as relevant to the case.

6 | THE CULTURAL IMMIGRANT CLIENT

In the operationalization of cultural sensitivity, the caseworkers have to decide when and how to be aware of culture. The findings suggest that the caseworkers are capable of recognizing the complexities of the cases during their discussions. The caseworkers negotiate the substance of the categories and how different cases fit the categories at hand, while actively constructing and reconstructing those categories (Diedrich et al., 2011; Lipsky, 2010). The categories of immigrant or non-immigrant, and sensible or non-sensible fall along continuums, rather than as binary categories (Diedrich et al., 2011). Hence, a clear typology of client characteristics or professional preferences regarding an awareness of culture seems unsuitable. On the one hand, these findings show that the caseworkers are mindful of possible diversity factors and circumstances, other than culture, distinguishing culture from ethnicity (Barth, 1998). In their comprehensive discussions, the caseworkers deconstruct their clients' position (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2012), acknowledging that the clients' status include structural factors, such as class positions. The notions of cultural awareness or sensitivity thus seem inadequate to capture the challenges of the migrant clients, and hence are not appropriate to ensure the recognition of clients. The caseworkers' distinction between immigrants and non-immigrants is not based on statistical categories and objective criteria, as indicated by Elrick and Schwartzman (2015), but on the consideration of the client's immigrant background as potentially relevant to the case. Hence, ethnic disadvantages in social policy and welfare as argued by Vickers, Craig, and Atkin (2013) might not be absolute but influenced by such work processes described in this study. These findings thus expand notions of institutional and ethnic biases in welfare services. On the other hand, these findings might support the claim that the caseworkers *under-recognize* the cultural dimension by addressing culture only when they experience the case as difficult and unclear. The clients placed in the other sections of Figure 1 might still be "cultural" in the sense that they inherit cultural attributes. However, in the discussion of the case, the caseworkers do not treat culture as relevant to their understanding of the case and its challenges. Moreover, in non-sensible non-immigrant cases, the caseworkers also speak of motivation, for instance, but they explain the client's lack of motivation as a personal challenge or based on the absence of relevant measures in NAV, not as pertaining to a collective culture. Hence, cultural aspects of sensible or non-immigrant cases might not be adequately discussed. These findings suggest that after a case has been assigned a category, the categories become dichotomous and based on simplifications (Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018), particularly in the way the caseworkers discuss culture. In this process, the caseworkers have reviewed "all" other possible explanations and understandings of the case. The explicit consideration of culture and the client's immigrant background thus is a last resort for the caseworkers in the process of making sense of the non-sensible case. The perception of a case as non-sensible also implies a reference to the inadequacy of the institutional categories to capture the challenge and complexity of the case (Diedrich et al., 2011). It is not possible to make the case institutionally manageable. The institutional categories thus have a ruling function in that some categories

are accessible to the caseworkers in their categorization work. Hence, some cases are considered sensible and easily fit the institutional categories, and others fall outside these categories and become non-sensible.

Another aspect of operationalizing the concept of cultural sensitivity entails making sense of culture. The findings of this study support the claim of Williams and Soydan (2005) and Harrison and Turner (2011), in that the caseworkers experience ambiguities regarding the relevance of culture in their work. The conceptual ambiguity of culture is reflected in the caseworkers' practice in this study. The caseworkers might be attentive to culture all along, although not addressing it explicitly until a case stands out as not making sense—not fitting into the institution's labels such as challenges of health or with education. The caseworkers may interpret language, motivation, and ethnicity as related to or even comprising culture. The caseworkers also place information on some things that may be difficult, such as personality traits or communication in the "culture" category, all of which are features that do not fit into other categories of the institution. The caseworkers' categorization practices thus reinforce the ambiguity of culture, as something that might be "anything and everything" (Harrison & Turner, 2011, p. 341). This understanding of culture might promote othering, as demonstrated by Patil and Ennis (2018). Not of all migrant clients, but of the non-sensible, "immigrant" cases—the cultural immigrant clients.

This conceptual ambiguity of culture also promotes the perception of the cultural immigrant cases as intangible. The caseworkers lack an institutional language that can describe the complexities of cases in terms that make sense within the institutional bureaucratic categories. The caseworkers' categorization of the case has practical implications for the clients in that it determines the measures to be taken in response to the perceived problem, functioning as a guide for action (Goffman, 1974; Weick, 1995). In this sense, the interpretive framework depicted in Figure 1 might contribute to caseworkers' expectations of and approach to different groups of clients, as a schema (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012), as presented in Figure 2. Hence, the caseworkers' operationalization of cultural sensitivity may encourage an identification of the "members of the category in question as socially deficient or lacking in some fashion and serve to label them further as 'undeserving' or 'troublesome'" (Jenkins, 1994, p. 214). The consideration of a case as "something more," different and non-sensible also implies a reference to the caseworkers' own cultural background even if it's seldom explicitly addressed by the caseworkers. Future research should explore how caseworkers' social position, cultural, and ethnic background might influence such processes.

7 | CONCLUSION

The findings presented here show how the caseworkers' cultural awareness is operationalized through the implicit categorization that caseworkers engage in when discussing cases. The caseworkers seem to categorize the cases as sensible or non-sensible and as concerning immigrant or non-immigrant clients. In a non-sensible, immigrant case, the caseworkers engage in a search for, and interpretation of cues that might help make sense of it. In particular, the cues of ethnicity, "language," or motivation seem to evoke the caseworkers' awareness of and attention to culture. Although one might argue that the caseworkers' focus on these client characteristics might promote the othering of clients, or constitute a type of institutional bias, the findings suggest a more complex process as the cues in themselves are not enough to mobilize the caseworkers' cultural awareness. The cues have to be interpreted within the framework of the case being *both* non-sensible and regarding an "immigrant" client in order to be understood as cues for the case concerning a *cultural immigrant client*. The interpretive framework gives these client characteristics a signalling status (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018). The application of such a framework, however, is a dynamic and collective process of discretion and categorization practices.

This study makes a novel contribution to the literature on social work and social policy. It adds nuance to the perception of street-level workers' inadequate response to questions of ethnicity and culture by describing the circumstances in which caseworkers factor culture into their consideration and comprehension of a case. Through dynamic processes of implicit categorization and sensemaking, the caseworkers' awareness of culture is rendered explicit and has practical consequences.

I argue that these processes are under-recognized parts of the practical work of being aware of culture in service delivery. The use of ethnographic fieldwork and data on "doing" adds new insights to the operationalization of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in practice. The complexity of culture combined with the normative aspects of cultural awareness make it difficult to talk about these topics in ways that are illustrative of these practices. Moreover, the fact that the caseworkers do not rely on culture when making sense of a case, does not preclude the expression of stereotypical reasoning in other settings, such as an interview. These findings thus demonstrate the value of ethnographic fieldwork to explore its meaning in practice. Process-oriented perspectives provide a useful framework for studying the abstract, ambiguous and theoretical concept of cultural sensitivity by making visible the practical work that goes into this operationalization. Although the processes described here, and the way cultural awareness is operationalized, are relevant for many people-processing organizations, the caseworkers in this study operate within a highly bureaucratic and specialized context comprising extensive regulations, standardized work processes and work focus. Additional research is therefore needed to explore the impact of such organizational structures on the consideration and emphasis of different elements in a case, and to test the robustness of the findings presented in this article within different social policy contexts.

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Article 3

Volckmar-Eeg, M. G., & Vassenden, A. (2021). Emotional creaming: Street-level bureaucrats' prioritisation of migrant clients 'likely to succeed' in labour market integration. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *0*(0), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12510

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Emotional creaming: Street-level bureaucrats' prioritisation of migrant clients 'likely to succeed' in labour market integration

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Abstract

Achieving equity in welfare provision depends on accurate understandings of the work of street-level bureaucrats. We explore the role of emotions when caseworkers prioritise cases. While *creaming* of clients whom street-level bureaucrats consider 'likely to succeed' is acknowledged as a way of rationing scarce resources, research tends to reject emotional involvement as bias, or neglect emotions in creaming-practices. This may produce inaccurate portrayals of *how* street-level bureaucrats prioritise cases. We challenge existing perspectives by bridging the literature on creaming and the sociology of emotions. We did ethnography and interviews with Norwegian caseworkers tasked with integrating migrant clients into the labour market. These caseworkers cream cases according to institutional/discursive understandings of 'star candidates' and rely on their emotions as embodied knowledge. We conceptualise such processes as *emotional creaming*, which unpacks a central, yet overlooked part of how street-level bureaucrats prioritise cases. This modifies the depiction of emotions as mainly personal bias.

KEYWORDS

creaming, emotions, integration, migration, NAV, street-level bureaucracy

INTRODUCTION

Based on an ethnographic study of Norwegian frontline caseworkers tasked with work integration of migrant clients, this article explores the *emotional* part of how street-level bureaucrats prioritise cases. It is widely acknowledged and accepted within the context of street-level welfare bureaucracies that caseworkers must ration scarce resources by selecting some cases to work with more actively (Lipsky,

[1980] 2010; Tummers et al., 2015). In research on prioritising, emotions have a somewhat ambiguous position. There are two main and contrasting perspectives:

1. One line of research considers emotional involvement a *personal* and *illegitimate bias* that potentially violates principles of equity (Eggebø, 2013; Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018; Moseley & Thomann, 2021; Taylor 2012; Zacka, 2019). Studies show that street-level bureaucrats tend to prioritise clients they get emotionally affected by (Moesby-Jensen & Nielsen, 2015), whom they deem particularly 'worthy' (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012) or

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[1]The research context is NAV, The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration.

with which they experience a personal connection (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017). In this perspective, emotions have also been connected to discriminatory treatment of migrant clients (Barrass & Shields, 2017; Schütze & Johansson, 2020).

2. Another body of literature explores the *creaming* practices of street-level bureaucrats (Hjörne et al., 2010; Lipsky, [1980] 2010; Tummers et al., 2015; Vedung, 2015), where the prioritisation of cases is a *rational* outcome of bureaucratic criteria, institutional policy and management. Creaming is when caseworkers prioritise 'those who seem most likely to succeed in terms of bureaucratic success criteria' (Lipsky, [1980] 2010, p. 107). In this latter line of research emotions are largely overlooked.

In sum—and put bluntly—in research on case prioritisation, emotions tend to be either *rejected* as illegitimate grounds for decisions or *neglected* in the empirical analysis. These perspectives on emotions, we argue, contribute to inaccurate portrayals of how street-level bureaucrats decide to prioritise cases and of how to subsequently achieve equity in welfare provision. We challenge each of these two lines of research, and ask: What role do emotions play in caseworkers' decisions to prioritise cases and (how) do these emotions relate to the institutional context? We bridge the literature on street-level prioritisation and the sociology of emotions and take inspiration from concepts like 'work feelings' (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Two interrelated dimensions structure our analysis and exposition: (a) the relationship between the individual (caseworker) and the institutional (bureaucratic organisation) level, and (b) the rationality–emotions interface.

Our study provides a novel perspective on the role of emotions in street-level bureaucrats' prioritisation of cases through two important contributions. First, in modifying Lipsky's ([1980] 2010) notion of creaming, we introduce '*emotional creaming*', which conceptualises emotions as *embodied expressions of a rational logic in institutional demands*. This provides new insights into *how* creaming is done and improves our analytical understanding of emotions in street-level prioritisation and offers a way out of 'rejects or neglects' in research. Second, our findings challenge the tacit view that presence of emotions in caseworkers' decisions to prioritise cases pertains only to personal bias and that these emotions will in themselves result in discriminatory treatment of clients, migrant clients in particular.

Our paper is structured as follows. After a short description of the context of our study, we review the literature on creaming and emotional bias. Next, we introduce a sociological perspective on emotions in organisations. We then describe methods and data before presenting our findings. In the discussion, we address the boundaries between emotional creaming and personal bias in light of research on (ethnic) discrimination and prejudicial treatment in welfare services.

NAV AS A STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY

Our study is situated within the largest welfare organisation in Norway, NAV. Norway is a social democratic welfare state characterised by generous and universal welfare schemes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Vike, 2018), and services are constructed to encourage participation in the labour force (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). NAV administers one third of Norway's national budget (NAV, 2020), and their main responsibility is to provide economic security for citizens and assist unemployed people in getting back to paid employment. NAV is a decentralised and highly bureaucratic system, with extensive regulations, specialised and standardised work processes, albeit with generous room for caseworker discretion (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). NAV differentiates between client groups and eligibility for services through client categorisation (Gjersøe, 2020). The caseworkers at the frontline NAV-offices assess whether a person is eligible for benefits and have responsibility to determine appropriate measures in a case after they get assigned benefits. The frontline workers manage different services and benefits, but they all assist (migrant) clients in (re)entering the labour market. There is no standard background among the frontline workers, but the majority have higher academic education, some of which in social work, and they have all undergone NAV's internal training (NAV, 2019; Sadeghi & Fekjær, 2019; Terum & Sadeghi, 2019). What the frontline workers in this study have in common is that they all work directly with cases, and we, therefore, refer to them as *caseworkers*.

About 45% of NAV's clients have migrant backgrounds (NAV, 2021). Because of this disproportionately high number of immigrants among NAV clients, they are a prioritised group. The share of migrant clients who become employed nevertheless remains low (Aamodt, 2018; Tønseth & Grebstad, 2019). The decision of whether to prioritise a (migrant) client among NAV caseworkers, therefore, makes a good case for exploring street-level bureaucrats' creaming practices.

CREAMING AND EMOTIONAL BIAS TOWARDS MIGRANT CLIENTS

Street-level bureaucracies play an active and crucial role in determining 'who gets what, when and how' (Lasswell, 1936). Street-level bureaucracies are characterised as service-intensive, with conflicting goals and limited resources (Lipsky, [1980] 2010). To manage the challenges in their work, street-level bureaucrats must ration their resources by prioritising some cases over others (Lipsky, [1980] 2010; Tummers et al., 2015). Although such client

differentiation is necessary, it is also problematic (Vedung, 2015), as it may lead to exclusion of clients from services (Brodkin, 2011). In this paper, we focus on caseworkers' decisions to *prioritise* cases. Both Kaufman (2020) and Lipsky ([1980] 2010) attribute these decisions to caseworker discretion and as situations of uncertainty. As the basis of the decision to prioritise a client, researchers have emphasised either caseworkers' *rational creaming* of clients based on organisational performance incentives, or to the subjective preferences and *emotional bias* of caseworkers.

Several researchers have explored the impact of organizational measures on caseworkers' decision-making and coping (Andreassen, 2018; Brodkin, 2008; Evans & Harris, 2004; Lipsky, [1980] 2010). Lipsky ([1980] 2010) emphasised *bureaucratic success criteria* as the fundamental principle by which caseworkers decide to prioritise a client. In his definition of creaming, Lipsky ([1980] 2010) further emphasised caseworkers' rational considerations when they determine which clients are 'most likely to succeed'. Creaming has typically been considered a rational frontline response to new public management instruments such as caseworker accountability and service conditionality (Kaufman, 2020). Organizational performance measures may contribute to 'steer' caseworkers towards creaming of clients (Brodkin, 2011). In their study of which clients that get prioritised in welfare services, researchers have treated organisational measures as the foundation of street-level workers' rational coping strategies. Hence, they have also established a division between these legitimate decisions, and the emotional and subjective bias of caseworkers.

Emotional or affective labour are essential parts of frontline work (Hochschild, 1979, 2012, 2019; Penz & Sauer, 2019). To achieve client success, street-level workers must motivate their clients by being empathic and understanding (Penz et al., 2017). The workers manage their affects or emotions to achieve institutional goals (Penz et al., 2017). Emotions are thus recognised as an important part of street-level workers' interaction with clients, and as something that are informed by institutional frames. However, the presence of emotions in *decision-making processes*, and in caseworkers' decision to prioritise cases in particular, is typically considered a personal and illegitimate bias. Moesby-Jensen and Nielsen (2015) described how social workers may become so emotionally involved in some cases, that their emotions may influence how they decide to manage the case. This may point to an affinity bias or affect heuristics in welfare bureaucracies, where street-level workers favour and prioritise clients that resemble themselves, that they connect with and *like* (Moseley & Thomann, 2021). Emotions thus potentially undermine bureaucratic principles of equal treatment (Eggebø, 2013; Fineman, 1996) and are a source to arbitrariness in service provision, not the least regarding migrant clients (Schütze

& Johansson, 2020). Thomann and Rapp (2018) found that Swiss welfare workers perceive migrant clients as less deserving than Swiss applicants. Schütze (2020) similarly described how caseworkers that have personal contact with migrant clients have more positive attitudes towards them. Belabas and Gerrits (2017) also showed that the personal connection caseworkers experience with a migrant client influences their assessment of the client and how they subsequently respond to client needs. Although researchers also show that there exist 'ideal' migrant clients (Roberts, 2019), migrant clients seem particularly vulnerable to biased treatment in welfare services based on caseworkers' (negative) feelings towards them.

Helpful as they are in their own respect, the perspectives outlined above leave certain gaps in how we conceive of how street-level bureaucrats prioritise clients, regarding the connection between caseworkers' emotions and the institutional context. As shown above, caseworkers' affects, attitudes and emotions in their decisions to prioritise a case are typically considered the result of personal and subjective judgements.

A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EMOTIONS

Taking inspiration from the sociology of emotions, we understand emotions as deeply social (Ahmed, 2013; Hochschild, 1979), and as an integral part of institutional and organisational practices (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). As argued above, the attention to emotions in research on discretionary decision-making has been limited, except from the consideration of such emotional involvement as something that may affect one's judgement (Ahmed, 2013), that is, as personal bias. The notion of affective labour or affective governmentality (Penz et al., 2017) suggest that the emotions of caseworkers may reflect institutional objectives. However, the focus is mainly on caseworkers' interaction with clients, and less on how the relation between emotions and the institutional frames may influence caseworker decision-making and prioritisation. We build on these insights and further explore what caseworkers' emotions *do* in these situations of decision-making (Ahmed, 2013). Ahmed (2013) argues that emotions are performative in that they affect our orientations towards objects and others. Emotions arise in social situations, in the encounters with and relations to others, where social factors function as a kind of interpretive scheme for labelling and managing emotions (Hochschild, 1979). In other words, emotions are experienced, framed and reproduced in social interactions (Sieben & Wettergren, 2010) and can be understood as embodied reactions of cultural bearings (Bourdieu, 2006). These sociological perspectives on emotions help us

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overcome the neglect/reject pitfalls because they allow us to study caseworkers' emotional expressions not as mere personal, affective, and passive responses to situations (Barbalet, 2001), but as based on individuals' evaluation or recognition of the situation (Thoits, 1989), an identification of the 'aboutness' of the contact (Ahmed, 2013).

In our attempt to bridge the literature on street-level prioritisation and sociology of emotions, we employ the concept of *work feelings* (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) in our analysis. Understanding emotions as products of interpretive schemes, Mumby and Putnam (1992) define emotional experience as 'the feelings, sensations, and affective responses to organizational situations' (p. 471). Hence, we can examine emotions both as an outcome of an organisational situation and as providing a script that frames actions and orientations (Ahmed, 2013). This conceptualisation allows us to explore emotions as constitutive of forms of knowledge that 'ground legitimate rational responses to organizational behaviour' (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 480). This knowledge may be implicitly or explicitly coordinated with the work of others through the social coordination, or objectified ruling relations, of the institution (Smith, 2005), such as regimes of written rules, administrative practices, evaluation tools and measurements. We use the understandings outlined above as analytical tools to explore emotions in caseworkers' decisions to prioritise a case and how their emotions may relate to the social organisation of their work.

METHODS

The data consist of Volckmar-Eeg's five-month ethnographic fieldwork in a frontline NAV-office in addition to 11 in-depth interviews with caseworkers who participated in NAV's internal courses in cross-cultural counselling. The combination of interviews and fieldwork provides insights into both 'sayings' and 'doings' of caseworkers. The differences and nuances in the data provided rich descriptions of the context in which these experiences and emotions were formed. The Directorate of Labour and Welfare exempted the caseworkers from their duty of confidentiality regarding the project so that they could address specific cases. No identifying information about clients is included in the data. For confidentiality reasons, as most caseworkers were women, we refer to all caseworkers as female. For the same reason, all participants in this paper are given Norwegian pseudonyms, regardless of ethnic/national backgrounds.

Sample and data

The caseworkers Volckmar-Eeg interviewed represent a range of work experiences and professional backgrounds.

The interviews took place in their offices, all of which are located near Norway's capital, Oslo. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted shortly after the courses. Volckmar-Eeg asked about the content of the course, their experiences of counselling clients with immigrant backgrounds, and asked them to reflect on culture and cultural sensitivity in NAV. The interviews lasted 1–2 h, were audio-recorded and transcribed. In addition, Volckmar-Eeg took notes of the interview and of caseworkers' gestures and emotional expressions. By facilitating a space for the caseworkers to reflect upon their experiences with different cases, the interviews provide data on the caseworkers' perceptions of clients and their work.

The fieldwork office is located on Norway's west coast. The office serves an urban area with a large proportion of immigrant residents, and the caseworkers regularly manage cases where the client has immigrant background. On average, caseworkers manage about 100–150 concurrent cases and are measured on their success in helping people gain paid employment. During the fieldwork, Volckmar-Eeg had access to a workspace at the field office. In addition to the long duration of the fieldwork, this encouraged a more natural relationship with the caseworkers. It was easy to talk to them about their work and get to know their workdays. The fieldwork consisted of observations of team and client meetings as well as informal case discussions, lunch talk and general observations. The ethnographic approach made it possible to ask for explanations, clarifications or elaborations of practices or cases. The ethnographic data consist of thick descriptions of 115 situations described in fieldnotes, comprising 35 team meetings, 59 informal conversations, 15 client meetings, 3 external meetings and 3 days in the office reception. Ethnography enabled us to capture emotions in process, insights into the conditions and consequences of the emotions, and the complex connections of reasons and feelings that comprise the caseworkers' work (cf. Albrow, 1997, in Sturdy, 2003, p. 88).

Analysis

Based on careful readings of interview transcripts and fieldnotes, we first sorted the caseworkers' descriptions into cases they prefer working and cases they avoid. Second, we looked for emotional expressions in their descriptions by identifying verbal expressions, such as likings ('I like that'), adjectives ('a great candidate') or judgements ('it's easier') and emotional displays, such as sighs, excited or raised voice and body language (gesticulations). Caseworkers' emotional expressions might illustrate positive or negative discrepancies in their work (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006). In the third step in our

analysis, we identified caseworkers' references to the larger institutional settings, discourses and work processes that shape their everyday work (Devault & McCoy, 2006; Lundberg & Sataøen, 2020; Smith, 2005). Informed by an abductive approach (Vassenden, 2018; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014), we were intrigued about *puzzles*, understood as observations not commented on in previous research or at odds with its assumptions (anomalies), such as how emotional the caseworkers appeared to be about formal and bureaucratic decision-making. We alternated between the three analytical steps, and between data and theory in subsequent, but interrelated operations to arrive at new, reconstructed or improved theoretical accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. In abductive analysis, theory is, hence, pivotal in the research throughout (Vassenden, 2018). This is unlike in, for example, classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Limitations

Our study has some limitations. First, we conducted our study within a highly bureaucratic people-processing organisation (NAV) that measures each caseworker on their individual success in getting clients into (permanent) paid employment. Our data are associated with the specific bureaucratic context in which they are produced, and future studies are needed to test the validity of the concept of emotional creaming in different contexts, investigating whether similar mechanisms are present in less bureaucratised systems with less emphasis on caseworker accountability. Second, as our study explores the potential link between caseworkers' emotional involvement and the institutional setting, we have not examined in detail how the caseworkers' personal or professional background may influence their decisions to prioritise a client. Finally, our data consist of *expressed* emotions in context, and do not cover all potential emotions that the caseworkers may feel during their work. Thus, we cannot disregard the possibility that some feelings may be object of self-censoring, vis-à-vis researchers and/or colleagues, that is, that there is a social desirability bias at play.

FINDINGS

In this section, we first describe the institutional setting of casework and how this setting consists of inadequate resources and rationing practices. Second, we illustrate the emotional component of casework, in particular the emotions that accompany caseworkers' decisions to prioritise cases. Finally, we outline how caseworkers' emotions relate to identifying *star candidates*, candidates considered

likely to succeed in labour market integration. This suggests that caseworkers' emotional involvement in a case is intimately linked to the institutional setting as an interpretive scheme. This is *emotional creaming*.

The ad-hoc institutional setting

The caseworkers are situated in a highly bureaucratised organisation with high caseloads. Although the high caseloads put pressure on the caseworkers, the ad-hoc nature of the institutional setting in which they work adds to their stress. A typical day for the caseworkers consists of a meeting with the team or department, and several meetings with clients or collaborators. They also manage incoming requests from clients that they must answer within 48 h. There is no check-in system in the office-reception, and several clients do not show up for their scheduled appointments. During the fieldwork, Volckmar-Eeg often witnessed the caseworkers running up and down the stairs between the reception and their office to check whether the client was present. Apparently, this took quite a lot of their time. The caseworkers must also coordinate their efforts with colleagues, as some of them share responsibility for clients. Therefore, the caseworkers often dropped by each other's offices with ad-hoc requests and questions. Interaction with clients, collaborators and colleagues generated additional work for the caseworkers, as they had to comprehensively document their actions in a case, process incoming applications and consider eligibilities, and register clients for courses or activities.

Each caseworker is evaluated monthly regarding their number of clients, how many clients they have registered to courses or other activities and how many they have helped secure paid employment. In this context, the caseworkers develop certain strategies to comply with overwhelming and immediate demands. Elisabeth (fieldwork) described how she had to differentiate between her clients:

> It's at the expense of other clients. We must make clear priorities and stop with all the Somalian women we don't believe in.

The ad-hoc nature of the caseworkers' everyday work seems to bring about practices where the caseworkers prioritise some cases over others and 'downgrade' those they 'don't believe in'. The caseworkers (fieldwork) regularly discussed how they could distinguish between the clients they should prioritise and those they could give up:

> How can we know what kind of candidate it is?

Emotional casework

During fieldwork, Volckmar-Eeg witnessed several instances when caseworkers sat together, and one spoke of how she wanted to give up a case or felt angry with a client. There were also several instances of the opposite, like when a caseworker would scream with joy in front of her computer when she realised that one of her clients got a job. Additionally, when they described clients they wanted to prioritise, caseworkers demonstrated many emotions. During a team meeting, Anna (fieldwork) talked about a client:

> I *really* hope this will be a story with a happy ending. He can't get a job on his own, even though he really tries. He has a good resume, and even though I just got a 'no' from one employer, I'm going to keep trying to help him.

There was a cheerful tone in Anna's voice when she spoke of this client. Smiling, she emphasised that he seemed to make genuine efforts. Although neither the client's nor Anna's efforts so far had resulted in him getting a job, Anna saw this case as a potential success and someone she wanted to help.

Similarly, Eva (interview) expressed eagerness towards some clients:

> He's from Afghanistan, but he was goal-oriented, so then I helped him a bit more. (...) It doesn't matter where they're from. If they show that they're motivated—'Yes, I'm learning the language; I want to do something with my life'—THEN I'm IN! If I can see that motivation, then I bother more with the client, so to speak. Then, I will help them move forward.

In describing her eagerness, Eva raised her voice. 'THEN I'm IN!' was spoken with excitement. Eva said she tends to go the extra mile with clients who signal motivation to enter paid employment. In such instances, the caseworkers reported becoming motivated, excited, and joyful.

In contrast, in a team meeting, Christine (fieldwork) described a client who annoyed and angered her. Using negative terms, she kept sighing and expressed disappointment with him going against their agreement: doing paid labour without informing her and flunking out of the course she had provided for him. She said she avoided working this case, but she was obligated to act on it now, as he was entitled to follow-up:

> He's so indecisive and only gives short answers when I ask him what we should do. (...)

> I'm considering telling him about all the work I've done in his case and telling him how disappointed I am. There's such a difference between the clients that really try (...), and those who are more careless, like him. (....) I just can't get through to him. He really drains me, and I avoid working his case.

This may seem like a small paradox: a client who has been working discourages the caseworker. Although his work might have suggested initiative on his part, he did not show motivation for what Christine had provided, and the work he had been doing did not result in a permanent job. Also, his initiative did not result in the kind of success that is measured in the system. Christine's troubles in understanding and relating to the client made it hard for her to see how she could help him.

The examples above illustrate the emotional aspects of caseworkers' efforts to assist their clients; they preferred to work with clients who invoked sympathetic feelings. Seemingly, the decision to prioritise a case was associated with their emotional involvement in that case.

'Star candidates' likely to succeed

Although their emotions towards clients seemed to be one of the resources that helped caseworkers reduce complexity in their decision to prioritise a client, positive experiences and sympathetic emotions alone did not necessarily result in the caseworker prioritising the client. Returning from a client meeting, Trude (fieldwork) spoke warmly of the client:

> 'He's so delightful. He just wants a job, and I understand that. But I have nothing to offer him. It's difficult when he doesn't know the language. He will not get into an ordinary position when he doesn't speak Norwegian'.

Trude then said she understood his difficult situation and that she liked him. However, she did not intend to prioritise his case but mentioned his case to illustrate the difficulties with clients who did not speak Norwegian. Thus, liking a client and positive emotions do not necessarily drive a caseworker to prioritise a client. Only so much latitude is given to emotions, and only some types of emotions direct further actions.

Marie (fieldwork) explained how she relies on one of her co-workers to 'check' her emotions towards clients to avoid personal bias:

> So, if I have strong feelings towards a client, I usually talk to [co-worker] about the case

to check if my feelings are legitimate and not something hindering the client getting my help.

The use of legitimate feelings here suggests that these differ from illegitimate feelings towards clients, those that might hinder the client getting her help. Marie was very much aware of and tried to counteract the possible influence of emotional bias in her decision-making. Seemingly, caseworkers distinguish between illegitimate bias and instances where they rely on their emotions as a type of knowledge in their decisions to prioritise a case. These legitimate feelings arise especially with clients whom caseworkers identify as star candidates. Encountering clients who meet the requirements of a 'star candidate' spurs enthusiasm with caseworkers.

Elsa (interview) explained how she became enthusiastic in some cases by simply stating:

> Sometimes I just think, "THIS is a star candidate. THIS will be good!"

She spoke passionately of such star candidates as individuals she could and would help succeed. As they are identified by caseworkers, star candidates have two main features, which both relate to the institutional setting.

(1) Star candidates are motivated and/or easy for caseworkers to identify with. Caseworkers considered clients easy to help if they showed motivation (the right way). While speaking fondly of a client to one of her co-workers, Caroline (fieldwork) explained why she was enthusiastic to work the case:

> She's eager. She wants a job and is motivated.

Caroline related her own enthusiasm to the client's apparent motivation to enter courses and to advance her own case. Caseworkers' perception of a client as easy to help might also connect to their ability to relate to the client on a personal level. Tina (interview) explained how she found it easier to work with clients when she experienced a mutual understanding:

> It's easier when we speak the same "language". When they understand you and you understand them.

That is, when the caseworker identifies with the client, the interaction requires less effort. The feeling of ease relates not only to the personal resources of client and caseworker but also to the institutional setting of casework. As previously shown, time and resources are institutional factors that influence casework. Moreover, the system surrounding

casework centres on quantifiable measures and success criteria. Once every month, all caseworkers receive feedback on how many clients they have on their list, how many are in an activity, a course, etc., and how many they have helped enter paid employment. Therefore, when a client takes initiative and shows motivation for specific courses or jobs, or when the caseworker experiences a mutual understanding with the client, it eases the caseworker's workload and helps them potentially provide good numbers for their evaluation.

(2) Star candidates meet the formal requirements within the institutional setting. The fact that a client shows motivation does not necessarily lead them to be prioritised. Caseworkers need something to offer the clients: courses or activities. Mathilde (fieldwork) returned from a client meeting and enthusiastically told her office mates that this client was

> such a resourceful woman. This is a great candidate because there are so many possibilities—she will make use of anything I offer her. (....) She's easy to help, and she just lit up when she asked me what she could do to help herself. She will be a dream to follow up.

Clearly, Mathilde's positive feelings were grounded in this client meeting the requirements for courses and in Mathilde seeing her as able to 'make use of' courses. Most courses that NAV offers clients require both Norwegian language skills and access to the labour market. To be deemed likely to succeed, a client's proficiency in Norwegian is an important factor, as in Trude's case. As Eva expressed above, if a client learns Norwegian, she becomes excited and willing to prioritise their case.

The term *star candidate* pertains to the institutional frames and the two features of star candidates are interrelated. To be prioritised, a client must fulfil both. Elise (fieldwork) returned from a meeting with a client, and stated:

> I really want to help this client.

She had been pessimistic about this client, as they had previously had several misunderstandings stemming from language issues. During the meeting, Elise's perception of the client somehow changed from someone unlikely to succeed to someone she really wanted to help succeed. Elise explained by saying:

> It could have been me.

She said she saw herself in the client and referred to her own experiences of being a mom, having higher education

and being a newcomer in a city. A few days later, Elise said she had gone to great lengths to help this client change her children's kindergarten to one closer to home so to spend less time commuting, freeing up time for work. Elise's case might be interpreted as bias. However, when elaborating on why she wanted to help the client, she kept referring to the client as:

> A nice candidate who could make use of so much.

Seemingly, Elise saw potential in the case, based on a combination of the client being motivated and that Elise related to and understood the client, in addition to the fact that there were resources available within the institutional frames to offer the client that she could make use of. In short, Elise's positive emotions towards the client were intimately related to the client's potential for bureaucratic success.

The caseworkers search for information that can help them distinguish between clients to cream and clients to whom they should give less priority. In this situation, the caseworkers' emotions play a key role. These emotions also connect to previous experiences regarding star candidates. Linda (interview) elaborated on how she considers other caseworkers' experiences in her work:

> Maybe others have something to tell about things they have done that have been a success, where they have gotten the client into employment.

She explained how her own and others' experiences with what has worked in the past aid her in identifying which clients might succeed in the future. Although the star candidate scheme reflects bureaucratic criteria, caseworkers also produce it from below by evoking previous experiences.

The caseworkers' consideration of which clients are likely to succeed connect to institutional and discursive understandings of star candidates—clients they consider easy to help and who can use what the caseworkers have to offer. These clients evoke positive emotions from the caseworkers, and they are creamed. The caseworkers' emotions thus help them distinguish between clients likely to succeed (the star candidates) and clients not to cream.

EMOTIONAL CREAMING

Our analyses provide two novel contributions to our conception of the work of street-level bureaucrats: (a) We outline one important aspect of *how* creaming is done and, by so doing, (b) modify prevailing depictions of emotions in street-level discretionary decision-making as personal bias. We suggest that practices like those presented in this paper be termed *emotional creaming*. Caseworkers' emotions constitute *embodied expressions of rational logic in institutional demands*. The clients whom the caseworkers hold positive emotions towards and become enthusiastic about, who 'are motivated' and 'can make use of anything', are the same clients whom they consider 'likely to succeed'; they meet the institutional requirements to qualify for activities and for later employment. Through ethnography, we have shown how bureaucratic success criteria manifest themselves through caseworkers' embodied experiences of star candidates. These findings have important implications for how we understand street-level bureaucracies and, finally, how to achieve equity in welfare provision. Emotions constitute embodied knowledge that the caseworkers employ in their decision-making, which often relates to the social organisation of their work. Although emotions, by their very nature, are seated in the hearts and minds of individuals (caseworkers), their role in caseworkers' decisions to prioritise a case depends on organisational conditions. Our findings suggest that caseworkers' positive feelings about clients reflect instances where they feel *able* to fulfil their institutional obligations. Their emotions seem thus to be structured by the institutional frames.

The connection between caseworkers' emotions and the institutional context does not preclude the existence of prejudice. On an individual level, caseworkers favour the 'easy clients' who resemble themselves. Some clients will appear less promising than others and, therefore, spur less enthusiasm from the caseworkers. The emotions of caseworkers may contribute to reproduce systematic differences in frontline policy implementation. The implications for (migrant) clients may not be any different than if decisions were made from bias. Nevertheless, our findings suggests that these mechanisms do not merely derive from caseworkers' negative attitudes or implicit prejudice towards migrants, as suggested by Schütze and Johansson (2020). Rather, they mirror how institutional measurements and objectives construct the 'ideal client'. Management tools, such as caseworker accountability and performance incentives (Brodkin, 2011), contribute to produce caseworkers' emotions. The ad-hoc institutional context, in addition to which resources that are available to the caseworkers (courses and measures) construct an ideal client, a star candidate. There seems to be some parallel between star candidates and what Barrass and Shields (2017, p. 14) describe as an 'invisible model of the ideal migrant'. The ideal migrant has the ability to 'enter the labour market with minimal state-funded supports' (Roberts, 2019) and work to make themselves hireable (Magnussen, 2020). This resembles what Penz et al. (2017) describe as the 'good customers' in job activation welfare

organizations: the pro-active jobseekers that typically are well-educated and have good chances in the labour market. Hence, caseworkers' emotional creaming of 'star candidates' suggests that the differentiating dimension is not a client's ethnic background or migrant status, but rather whether the client is considered 'far away' from success in the labour market in terms of personal resources. Caseworkers' emotional creaming may therefore contribute to reproduce class differences. Resourceful clients will eventually show up in the metric evaluation of the caseworkers' performance. Lower-class clients who are far from meeting the bureaucratic requirements for courses and jobs will more seldom spur enthusiasm with their caseworkers, probably irrespective of ethnic backgrounds. Conducting similar studies with other target groups than migrants, preferably through ethnographic methods, should be a task for future research.

If caseworkers are aware of the phenomenon of emotional creaming, this may assist them differentiating between their different *types* of emotions. Such awareness may help individual caseworkers and welfare institutions make sense of and adequately respond to emotional reactions in casework and provide tools to navigate emotional responses. Welfare institutions typically emphasise and attend to the individual caseworker's reflectivity and cultural sensitivity as means to prevent bias and achieve equity in services. This presupposes that the emotions of caseworkers are merely an outcome of personal preferences, even prejudice. Our analyses suggest that bureaucratic criteria structure caseworkers' experiences with their clients through clear measures of success and caseworker accountability. Caseworkers' emotional involvement in the decision to cream a case, as described in this paper, cannot simply be governed through institutional management. Quite the contrary, institutional management is intrinsic to how caseworkers feel about their clients. Although the caseworkers may have genuine wishes to help their clients, their emotions for clients seem to be strongly influenced by institutional frames. The caseworkers get emotionally involved in clients with whom there are *institutional* resources to do a good job. Hence, caseworkers' frustration with clients, such as with Christine, may mirror institutional pressure and frustration with the system. Caseworkers' feelings about interacting with clients who are positive, cooperative and whom they like might reflect instances of relief from a stressful workday. We believe these insights hold much promise for caseworkers' professional self-reflections, in helping to demystify somewhat what 'welfare work feelings' *are*; they are neither always 'dangerous' nor 'illegitimate' (notwithstanding that they can be). Rather, emotions are part and parcel of welfare casework. Some researchers argue that caseworkers with a professional social work training may be less affected by

personal emotions (Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Others emphasize how they may get more emotionally involved in their work (Moesby-Jensen & Nielsen, 2015) or be influenced by professional feeling rules (Nguyen & Velayutham, 2018). Future research should further explore how individual traits such as professional background, gender or ethnic background may influence caseworkers' emotional creaming—their emotional involvement in clients and engagement in coping practices.

The concept of emotional creaming has theoretical implications through the tight interconnection of emotional involvement and institutional demands in caseworkers' decisions to cream. Ethnography has been crucial to 'explore the relationship between rationality and emotionality in situ' (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006, p. 235) and to provide context to the caseworkers' considerations and emotional expressions. The findings presented here give reason to question the classical Weberian view of strictly rational and 'dehumanised' bureaucratic decision-making (Du Gay, 2000; Weber, 1971). By outlining one aspect of how creaming is done, we add nuance to the division between rationality and emotions in street-level discretion and suggest a connection between caseworkers' emotions and the institutional level. Our findings suggest that caseworkers' emotions may constitute an embodied knowledge that function as signals to reduce ambiguity (Barbalet, 2001; Imdorf, 2010) and inform caseworkers' decisions regarding whether to prioritise a client. The caseworker 'feels' that the client is going to be a (bureaucratic) success. Employing a sociological perspective on emotions also encourages researchers to explore not only how street-level bureaucrats manage their emotions but also how emotions are intimately linked to the institutional setting as an interpretive scheme. The concept of emotional creaming improves our theoretical understanding of emotions in casework and street-level discretion.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Research data are not shared.

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Article 4

Volckmar-Eeg, M. G., & Vassenden, A. (submitted). A welfare pinball-machine? How immigrants with 'language-problems' get stuck in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

Kasteball eller flipperspill? Innlåsning av innvandrere med «språkutfordringer» i NAV

A welfare pinball-machine? How immigrants with 'language-problems' get stuck in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

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Article 4: A welfare pinball-machine?

Sammendrag

Kasteball er en vanlig metafor for innlåsningsmekanismer i velferdstjenester. Metaforen beskriver brukere som «kastes» mellom tjenester og som ikke får den hjelpen de har behov for. Metaforen antyder høy grad av tilfeldighet i hvordan saker ender som kasteballer, hvem som kaster og hvorfor. Som begrep for faglig analyse er metaforen for upresis, og den gjør det vanskelig å foreslå konkrete tiltak for å motvirke innlåsningsmekanismer. Basert på et fem måneders feltarbeid ved et NAV-kontor og analytiske verktøy fra institusjonell etnografi, utforsker vi i artikkelen hvordan slike mekanismer skapes gjennom NAV-veilederes kategorisering av brukere. Vi foreslår at *flipperspillet* er en bedre faglig metafor enn kasteball. I artikkelen beskriver vi hvordan NAV-veilederne bruker regelverk og vilkår til å *støte* «språksaker» mellom team og avdelinger. Til tross for *flipperteamets* forsøk på å holde sakene i spill, ender saker som blir definert til å handle om språk i flipperspillets *hull*, «pensjonert på sosialhjelp». Artikkelen belyser dermed hvordan Nav-veiledernes kategoriseringsarbeid er særlig viktig i hvorfor innvandrere «låses inne» i NAV – varig avhengige av økonomisk sosialhjelp. Ved å introdusere flipperspillet som analytisk metafor, søker vi også å bidra til videre utforskning av velferdsstatens innlåsningsmekanismer.

Abstract

Cases getting thrown back and forth between services and benefits like a 'shuttlecock' is often described as a main reason behind containment of clients in welfare services. However, this metaphor makes no suggestions about who that is throwing them and why. It is therefore poorly suited for empirical analysis and makes it difficult to identify measures to counteract such mechanisms. Building on five months ethnographic fieldwork at a frontline NAV-office and analytical concepts from institutional ethnography, this paper explores how such mechanisms are created by how caseworkers categorize (immigrant) clients. Through our analysis, we suggest the *pinball-machine* as a more suitable metaphor. We describe how the caseworkers use institutional texts to *bounce* 'language-cases' between teams and departments. Cases that are defined as 'language-cases' end up in the *drain* of the pinball-machine, despite efforts from the *flipperteam* to keep the cases in play. The paper describes how the caseworkers' categorization work is crucial as to why (some) immigrants become stuck within NAV. By introducing the pinball-machine as an analytical metaphor, we also hope to spur further investigation of the mechanisms by which cases can become stuck within the welfare state.

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Nøkkelord

Integrering, Velferd, Språk, NAV, Institusjonell Etnografi

Keywords

Integration, Welfare, Language, NAV, Institutional Ethnography

3

Innledning

«Noe som er veldig vanlig og vanskelig er de som ikke kan språket. De faller ofte mellom alle stoler og ender opp hos oss» (Karina).

«Karina» arbeider som veileder i en sosialhjelpsavdeling i NAV. Hun deltok i en etnografisk studie om arbeidsinkludering av innvandrere i NAV. Her forteller hun om hvordan saker der brukere som har innvandrerbakgrunn og som mangler norskferdigheter ofte «faller» mellom de ulike avdelingenes ansvarsområder, og «ender opp» med økonomisk sosialhjelp. Slike tilfeller som Karina viser til, der brukere sendes mellom velferdsstatlige tjenester, omtales gjerne som «kasteballer». Kasteball-metaforen er utbredt i offentlig debatt og den begrunner politiske veivalg. Ett av formålene med NAV-reformen i 2005 var å unngå innlåsingsmekanismer som opptrer når brukere blir «kasteballer» mellom tjenester (Lundberg, 2012). Hva «kasteballer» egentlig *innebærer* i praksis, og hvordan kasteball-dynamikker opptrer, blir imidlertid sjelden tydelig definert eller avklart. Dette gjelder også i forskningen. Et søk i Idunn.no gir f.eks. 93 treff på forskningsartikler som inneholder ordene «kasteball»[1], men der få eller ingen definerer eller diskuterer selve begrepet nærmere. Vår studie av NAVs arbeid med innvandrerbrukere tyder på at kasteball-metaforen kan være både uheldig og lite dekkende empirisk, av flere grunner: For det første impliserer den vond vilje og/eller dårlig arbeid blant tjenesteutøvere, samtidig som den egentlig ikke impliserer noen spesifikke handlende aktører. For det andre nivellerer kasteball-metaforen nivåer i velferdsstaten. For det tredje antyder den høy grad av tilfeldighet. Kasteballmetaforen bidrar derfor i liten grad til analyser av hvordan slike innlåsningsmekanismer oppstår og hvordan de kan endres. Med utgangspunkt i et fem måneders feltarbeid ved et NAV-kontor og analytiske verktøy fra institusjonell etnografi (Luken & Vaughan, 2021; Lund & Nilsen, 2020; Smith, 2005), søker vi i denne artikkelen å utforske slike innlåsningsmekanismer og bidra til en bedre forståelse av hvordan og hvorfor de oppstår ved å introdusere *flipperspillet* som alternativ metafor.

Innvandrerbrukere i NAV fremtrer som et eksempel på såkalte kasteballer som «låses» i NAV-systemet – som varig avhengige av økonomisk sosialhjelp. Innvandrere blir ofte avhengige av velferdsytelser over lang tid og med overgang mellom ulike ytelser heller enn ut av systemet (Aamodt, 2018). I artikkelen beskriver vi hvordan NAV-veiledernes kategorisering av språk som problem står sentralt i disse innlåsningsmekanismene, og som noe som diskvalifiserer (innvandrer)brukere fra en rekke aktuelle tjenester og ytelser. Dette er viktig, ikke minst fordi *språk* står så sentralt i diskusjoner av innvandreres (manglende) arbeidsintegrering (Hardoy & Zhang, 2010;

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[1] 5. september 2021. Inkludert alle ord som starter med «kasteball».

IMDi, 2021; NOU, 2017), også internasjonalt (Holzinger, 2020). I sitt arbeid må NAV-veilederne definere en hovedårsak til at brukeren er uten arbeid og plassere saken i en dertil egnet institusjonell kategori av problemer (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014). Hvilken kategori saken plasseres i, avgjør tjenestetilbudet brukeren får. Samtidig er ikke denne plasseringen noe NAV-veilederne gjør etter eget forgodtbefinnende. Når NAV-veilederne vurderer og kategoriserer konkrete saker, tar de i bruk det Smith (2005) kaller *styringstekster*– lovverk, regelverk og rutiner som koordinerer lokale praksiser. «Flipperspillet» er som følger: NAV-veiledere i ulike avdelinger bruker institusjonelle tekster, vilkår for ytelser og tjenester, beskrivelser av ansvarsområder o.l., til å definere «språksaker» ut fra sitt ansvarsområde og *støte* dem videre til andre team. Når de definerer en sak til å handle om «språk», så ekskluderer de dermed samtidig brukeren fra mange av NAVs tjenester og virkemidler. Denne problemkategorien virker som et slags gravitasjonsfelt, der disse sakene faller nedover mot flipperspillets *hull*, sosialhjelpsavdelingen. Analysen viser hvordan ett av teamene på kontoret, teamet leseren kan forestille seg som selve *flipperne* på spillebrettet, forsøker å holde saken i spill ved å redefinere problemet og sende den oppover i systemet igjen for en ny runde. De sakene de ikke klarer å definere inn i ansvarsområdet til de andre teamene, og som ikke er «klar for arbeid», faller imidlertid gjennom og «pensjoneres på sosialhjelp».

Flipperspillet er ikke ment å fungere som metafor for NAVs arbeid generelt, men for å begrepsfeste noen former for innlåsningsmekanismer, slike som vi diskuterer i artikkelen. Vi foreslår at flipperspill-metaforen gir en mer dekkende forståelse av disse velferdsstatlige innlåsingsmekanismene ved at den belyse tre viktige faktorer som kasteball-metaforen skjuler: For det første innebærer den aktive (og kompetente) aktører som *gjør* noe når de forsøker å definere og kategorisere problemet i en sak. For det andre beskriver flipperspillmetaforen samspillet mellom byråkratiske kategorier og vilkår (spillet) og velferdsbyråkratenes aktive arbeid med å kategorisere en sak. For det tredje fremhever den velferdsbyråkratenes, og tjenestenes, ulike nivåer og roller i dette arbeidet, der noen *støter*, og andre *flipper*. Ved å introdusere flipperspillet som analytisk metafor søker vi også å bidra til videre utforskning av innlåsningsmekanismer i velferdsstaten.

Artikkelens oppbygning er som følger: Vi beskriver først tidligere forskning om innvandrere, arbeid og NAV. Videre presenterer vi vårt teoretiske perspektiv på institusjonell kategorisering av problemer, med utgangspunkt i teorier om bakkebyråkrati og institusjonell etnografi. Vi gjør deretter rede for datamaterialet og vår analytiske tilnærming før vi presenterer og diskuterer selve flipperspill-mekanismen. Avslutningsvis diskuterer vi hva slike prosesser som vi beskriver betyr for arbeidsintegrering. Vi drøfter nytten og begrensninger med flipperspill-metaforen, og i hvilken grad våre funn kan generaliseres utover «vårt» NAV-kontor.

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Innvandrere, arbeid og NAV

Ca. 45% av arbeidsledige meldt til NAV har innvandrerbakgrunn (NAV, 2021), som er en betydelig overrepresentasjon vis-à-vis de 18,2% av befolkningen totalt som «innvandrerbefolkningen»[2] utgjør. I 2015 var andelen sosialhjelpsmottakere fire ganger høyere blant personer med innvandrerbakgrunn enn i befolkningen for øvrig (Dokken, 2015). Og over halvparten av sosialhjelpsutbetalingene fra NAV gikk i 2016 til brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn (Tønseth & Grebstad, 2019). Mange innvandrere mottar midlertidige og behovsprøvde ytelser som økonomisk sosialhjelp på en varig basis (Dokken, 2015). For mange innvandrere blir økonomisk sosialhjelp en fastlåst situasjon som de havner i fordi de har vanskeligheter med å skaffe arbeid, men som de kun kan komme ut av ved å skaffe arbeid. Det siste har vesentlig sosial og politisk relevans ved at arbeid vektlegges som den kanskje viktigste faktoren i innvandreres integrasjon i det norske samfunnet (IMDi, 2020, 2021; Olsen, 2017; PROBA Samfunnsanalyse, 2020; Rugkåsa, 2012). Forskning peker på to hovedforklaringer på hvorfor så mange innvandrere blir langvarig avhengige av ytelser og tiltak fra NAV. Begge fremhever innvandreres norskferdigheter eller språkopplæring.

Den første forklaringen peker på ekskluderende mekanismer i arbeidsmarkedet som gjør at mange innvandrere får behov for hjelp fra NAV. Flere studier beskriver hvordan innvandrere blir utestengt fra arbeidsmarkedet på grunn av strenge krav til formelle kvalifikasjoner og norskkunnskaper (Hardoy & Zhang, 2010), og diskriminering og fordommer i ansettelsesprosesser (Lunde & Rogstad, 2016; Midtbøen, 2016; Orupabo & Nadim, 2019). Disse to mekanismene virker både hver for seg og sammen, noe som resulterer i et arbeidsmarked med differensierte mulighetsstrukturer, der innvandrere har færre, og ofte dårligere, muligheter (Orupabo, 2016). Rettigheter til inntektsavhengige trygdeytelser henger i tillegg sammen med tidligere arbeidsdeltakelse. Dette kan bidra til å forklare den høye andelen innvandrerbrukere blant sosialhjelpsmottakere spesielt, da dette er den eneste ytelsen som ikke har slike vilkår (Dokken 2015).

Den andre forklaringen peker på mangelfull oppfølging fra NAV som årsak til at mange innvandrere forblir i NAV-systemet. Studier viser hvordan innvandrere mottar et utilstrekkelig tjenestetilbud fra NAV for å kunne overkomme de strukturelle barrierene i arbeidsmarkedet. Tilgang på språkkurs og norskopplæring blir trukket frem som utslagsgivende for overgang til arbeid for ikke-vestlige innvandrere (Hardoy & Zhang, 2010; Malmberg-Heimonen et al., 2019). Samtidig viser studier hvordan NAV-veiledere har få muligheter til å bistå brukere som har behov for norskopplæring og formell kvalifisering for å komme i arbeid ettersom det stilles krav til et visst norsknivå for å få plass i

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[2] Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerbakgrunn (SSB 2020)

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en del av NAVs kurs og tiltak (Friberg & Elgvin, 2016; NOU, 2017). I tillegg er det vanlig praksis i NAV at man ikke får dekket opplæring dersom man mottar sosialhjelp (Malmberg-Heimonen et al., 2019). Det er også flere studier som beskriver hvordan NAV-veiledernes individforklaringer og (manglende) forståelser av brukergruppen påvirker brukernes tilgang til ytelser og virkemidler. Friberg & Elgvin (2016) beskriver hvordan samhandlingen mellom somaliske brukere og NAV-veiledere preges av mistillit og lite gjensidig forståelse, og at dette bidrar til et dårligere tjenestetilbud for denne gruppen. Samtidig finner Sandbæk & Djuve (2012) at veiledere på NAV-kontorene ofte forklarer dårlig måloppnåelse med innvandrerbrukeres manglende motivasjon. Magnussen (2020) går enda lenger ved å beskrive hvordan bakkebyråkratene i NAV virker å trekke på stereotypiske forståelser av innvandrere, og at dette fører til marginalisering og forskjellsbehandling av innvandrerbrukere.

Som forklaringer av hvorfor så mange innvandrere forblir langvarig «låst» i NAV-systemet, peker forskning altså på (i) at et lite treffende tilbud eller mangelfullt virkemiddelapparat i NAV ikke klarer å kompensere for arbeidslivets strukturelle mekanismer, og (ii) at stereotypier og fordommer blant NAV-ansatte påvirker hvilke brukere som får hva slags oppfølging. Vi har imidlertid lite dybdekunnskap om hvordan institusjonelle prosesser i NAV-systemet i seg selv kan virke differensierende, i verste fall også diskriminerende. Både Magnussen (2020) og Midtbøen (2015) etterlyser et større søkelys på hvordan velferdsapparatet og organisatoriske faktorer kan skape diskriminerende praksiser.

Måten NAV definerer og kategoriserer brukernes problemer får konsekvenser for hvilket tilbud ulike brukere får. Rugkåsa (2012) viser hvordan plassering av minoritetsetniske kvinner i samme kategori gjør at de i byråkratisk forstand kan følge samme opplæringsprogram, til tross for individuelle forskjeller. Forfatter1 (2020) beskriver i sin studie hvordan «kulturelle innvandrerbrukere» blir en «pseudo-kategori» i NAV-systemet, der *kultur* favner de komplekse og sammensatte utfordringer som NAV-veilederne sliter med å gi mening til og enkelt plassere innenfor de byråkratisk definerte rammene. Også internasjonale studier viser at tjenestene som innvandrere får tilgang til, har sammenhenger med hvordan de kategoriseres i systemet og (Braun & Christensen, 2018; Diedrich et al., 2011; Diedrich, 2014; Diedrich & Styhre, 2008; Eriksson & Nissen, 2017; Mäkitalo, 2003). Diedrich et al. (2011) fremhever spesielt at byråkratiske kategorier og klassifiseringspraksiser i liten grad håndterer heterogenitet. Tranekjær (2015) beskriver også hvordan kategoriseringsprosesser er preget av makt og forhandlinger om medlemskap i «riktig» kategori.

Studiene vi henviser til over gir viktig kunnskap om hvordan velferdsbyråkratier potensielt fungerer diskriminerende gjennom måten innvandrerbrukere blir kategorisert. Vi bygger videre på disse innsiktene ved å benytte institusjonell etnografi som analytisk verktøy. Vi utforsker hvordan

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kategoriseringer av innvandrerbrukere *gjøres* av førstelinjeansatte i NAV og hvordan slike kategoriseringspraksiser er institusjonelt koordinert. På den måten bidrar vi også til økt kunnskap om innlåsningsmekanismer som bidrar til en akkumulering av innvandrere som sosialhjelpsmottakere.

Institusjonell kategorisering av problemer

Flere studier viser hvordan ulike lovverk, rutiner, retningslinjer og skjemaer i NAV bidrar til å skape forståelser og kategorier som de førstelinjeansatte navigerer mellom (Kane, 2020; Lundberg, 2012; Åsheim, 2018, 2019), men da med utgangspunkt i generelle brukergrupper av «arbeidsledige» med «brukererfaringer». Øversveen & Forseth (2018) beskriver hvordan vurderingsdokumenter i NAV kun etterspør beskrivelser av for eksempel brukernes CV eller helsesituasjon, og at dette bidrar til at visse egenskaper ved brukerne og deres liv blir definert som relevante og andre som uvesentlige. Øversveen & Forseth (2018) viser også hvordan disse dokumentene dermed virker retningsgivende i hvordan NAV-veilederne forstår arbeidsledighet, og hva brukerne har rett på av bistand for å komme ut i arbeid. I denne artikkelen utforsker vi lignende mekanismer i NAV-veiledernes møte med *innvandrerbrukere*, og hvordan relasjonen mellom NAV-veiledernes kategoriseringspraksis, tekstlig koordinering og institusjonell styring bidrar til at bakkebyråkratenes arbeid med innvandrerbrukere spesielt – i noen situasjoner – tar form som et flipperspill.

Vi tar utgangspunkt i teorier om bakkebyråkratiet (Lipsky, 2010) og anvender et institusjonelt etnografisk perspektiv for å utforske hvordan NAV-veiledernes kategoriseringspraksiser er koordinert av eller «hektet opp i» (Nilsen, 2021; Smith, 2005) institusjonelle strukturer. Bakkebyråkratier utgjør det siste leddet i implementeringen av offentlig politikk (Lipsky, 2010), gjennom at førstelinjeansatte gjør oversettelser, vurderinger og beslutninger om konkrete brukere ut fra politiske føringer, lovverk og reguleringer. Dette arbeidet forutsetter et byråkratisk system av kategorier som klargjør institusjonelle prioriteringer og relevans (Mäkitalo & Säljö, 2002). For å sikre likebehandling og effektive tjenester, er velferdsinstitusjoner avhengige av at førstelinjeansatte vurderer og kategoriserer saker ut fra tekstlig definerte og standardiserte kriterier for ytelser og virkemidler. Her må bakkebyråkratene vurdere og definere hva som er brukerens problem og hvordan de skal hjelpe dem. Bakkebyråkratenes kategoriseringspraksiser avgjør med andre ord hva slags tjenestetilbud ulike personer får. Lipsky (2010) beskriver kategoriseringsprosesser som et resultat av bakkebyråkatenes skjønnsmessige vurderinger. Denne kategoriseringen har videre implikasjoner for hvilke tjenester som gjøres tilgjengelige i en sak, der klienter, eller brukere behandles med utgangspunkt i den kategorien de har blitt definert inn i (de Montigny, 2011). Fordi det i velferdsstatens førstelinje nettopp er behov for å tilpasse politikken til individuelle forhold, er det nødvendigvis et rom for

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bakkebyråkraters skjønnsmessige vurderinger (Molander et al., 2012). Byråkratiske kategorier er derfor sjelden tydelige, entydige eller gjensidig ekskluderende. Samtidig bidrar bakkebyråkratenes faktiske vurderinger og beslutninger av hvorvidt en bruker fyller vilkår for ulike ytelser til å *skape* og *redefinere* innholdet i og rammene rundt kategoriene (Diedrich et al., 2011; Lipsky, 2010). Til forskjell fra en forståelse av innlåsning som «kasteball», åpner dette perspektivet for en mer aktiv forståelse, der førstelinjeansattes vurderinger og kategorisering av brukere avgjør hva slags tjenestetilbud disse brukerne får.

Når de førstelinjeansatte i NAV kategoriserer en sak, må tjenestemottakernes individuelle forhold oversettes og omarbeides slik at de blir gjenkjennelige og institusjonelt håndterbare (Åsheim, 2019, s. 241). Dette skjer gjennom at bakkebyråkratene definerer og plasserer brukerens situasjon inn i sosialt organiserte og klart definerte kategorier av *problemer* (problems) som svarer til en institusjonell kjede av spesifiserte responser (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014). NAV-veilederne arbeider innenfor et institusjonelt kompleks bestående av strengt byråkratiske rammer, og det Erlien (2017) identifiserte som over 40 *ulike* regelverk og stønader. Hver av disse stønadene kan ha tilknyttet både lovtekster, rundskriv, rutiner, skjemaer og vurderingskriterier som danner utgangspunktet for NAV-veiledernes vurderinger og kategorisering av brukere. Slike *styringstekster* skaper spesifikke, diskursive forståelser av «hvordan den sociale klient kan iakttages og beskrives – og på denne baggrund gøres til genstand for bestemte interventioner» (Villadsen, 2003, s. 193). På denne måten kan vi forstå innlåsningen av innvandrere i NAV-systemet som noe som ikke bare er et resultat av fordommer eller slett arbeid fra den individuelle veileder, men noe som ligger latent i de institusjonelle strukturene (jf. Jensen et al., 2017). Bakkebyråkratene må gi skriftlige redegjørelser for sine vurderinger ved å vise til aktuelle lovtekster, reguleringer og rutiner, og er på den måten ansvarlige overfor det byråkratiske systemet (Molander et al., 2012; Mäkitalo, 2003; Nilsen, 2017). Slik strukturerer disse tekstene veiledernes kategorisering av en person som klient (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2004; Lundberg, 2012). Samtidig er det når bakkebyråkratenes aktiverer tekstene i sine vurderinger og praksis, at det avgjøres hvilken betydning disse tekstene får (Smith, 2005).

Metode og data

Artikkelen bygger på to datasett: Styringstekster fra NAV lokalt og sentralt, samt etnografisk feltarbeid ved et lokalkontor i NAV. Styringstekstene gir informasjon om hvordan institusjonen gjør kategorier tilgjengelige for NAV-veilederne. Gjennom feltarbeidet kan vi se hvordan veilederne tar i bruk ulike styringstekster i konkrete saker. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet godkjente prosjektet og bidro til tilgang til datasystemer, ressurspersoner og lokalkontor. De fritok NAV-veilederne fra

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taushetsplikten i forbindelse med prosjektet, under forutsetning om at identifiserende opplysninger om brukere utelates fra datamaterialet. Prosjektet er også rapportert til og godkjent av Norsk senter for forskningsdata (NSD).

Det første datasettet består altså av ulike styringstekster. Noen er translokale og generelle; lovverk, rundskriv, skjema og teknologier, forskrifter og sentrale organisasjonskart. Disse tekstene gir blant annet informasjon om politisk bestemte inngangsvilkår for ytelser eller tiltak og beskrivelser av NAVs mandat. Andre er knyttet mer direkte til den lokale konteksten NAV-veilederne opererer i. Disse består av lokale rutiner, skjema, lokale organisasjonskart og arbeidsdeling på kontoret, samt sakspapirer som veilederne benytter og produserer i arbeidet sitt. Tekstene ble samlet inn både i forkant og i løpet av feltarbeidet, og utvalget består av tekster som har avgjørende betydning for NAV-veiledernes handlingsrom, som for eksempel beskrivelsen av NAV-kontorenes mandat, eller tekster som NAV-veilederne henviste til aktivt underveis i feltarbeidet.

Det andre datasettet er et fem måneders feltarbeid ved et NAV-kontor, gjennomført av [førsteforfatter]. NAV-kontoret er et bykontor som betjener en bydel med en stor andel innvandrere. Her har vi undersøkt NAV-veiledernes vurderinger og praksiser, og hvordan de aktiverer ulike styringstekster i sitt arbeid. Kontoret er organisert etter et spesialiseringsprinsipp (Fossestøl et al., 2015), der hver avdeling eller team har ansvar for ulike ytelser, innsatsbehov og tiltak. Førsteforfatter hadde tilgang til en kontorplass på NAV-kontoret gjennom hele feltarbeidet. Dette gjorde det mulig å delta i saksdrøftinger, brukermøter og andre formelle møter, men også i den mer uformelle delen av NAV-veiledernes arbeid. Saksdrøftingsmøter utgjør kjernen av feltarbeidet. I disse møtene samles veilederne fra ett team eller en avdeling for å diskutere konkrete saker og vurdere ytelser, virkemidler og videre saksflyt. NAV-veilederen som har ansvaret for saken, må redegjøre for sin vurdering før saken diskuteres i fellesskap. På den måten blir uenigheter, legitimiteten i ulike vurderinger, og utfordringer tydeliggjort. Den etnografiske tilnærmingen gjorde det mulig å spørre etter utdypinger fra NAV-veilederne mer uformelt i etterkant av disse saksdrøftingsmøtene; ved å ta en kaffe på kontorkjøkkenet eller stikke innom kontoret til den aktuelle veilederen. Videre ble NAV-veiledernes arbeid kontekstualisert ved at vi fikk innblikk i de praktiske rammene for deres arbeid; hvor mye tid de brukte på møter i løpet av en arbeidsdag, hvordan de søkte hjelp av hverandre, ad hoc-oppgaver som avbrøt planene for dagen, prioriteringer fra ledelsen o.l.

I analysen av dataene henter vi inspirasjon fra Dorothy Smiths institusjonelle etnografi (Griffith & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2005; Smith & Turner, 2014). Institusjonell etnografi gir analytiske verktøy for utforsking av relasjonen mellom lokale praksiser, institusjonelle prosesser og diskurser i samfunnet. I utforskningen av denne relasjonen spiller spesielt institusjonelle styringstekster en viktig rolle. Slike

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tekster vil, som beskrevet over, legitimere bestemte handlingsforløp og vil samtidig bli gitt betydning gjennom menneskers handlinger (Smith, 2006; 2005; 2001). Gjennom å koble de to datasettene har vi kartlagt hvilke styringstekster NAV-veilederne aktiverer når de skal definere hvor en sak «hører til», dvs. plassere den innenfor de tekstlige beskrivelsene av institusjonelle kategorier. Vi har rettet blikket mot det Lund (2015) beskriver som *spor av styring*: NAV-veiledernes eksplisitte og implisitte referanser til styringstekster, dokumenter og institusjonelle diskurser (Devault & McCoy, 2006; Lundberg & Sataøen, 2020; Nilsen, 2016), og hvordan NAV-veilederne bruker disse tekstene i sitt kategoriseringsarbeid. Vi har med andre ord ikke gjort noen tradisjonell tekstanalyse som dokument- eller diskursanalyse, men brukt tekstene til å utdype materialet fra feltarbeidet og dermed få innblikk i relasjonen mellom det lokale og det translokale nivået i NAV-veiledernes kategoriseringsarbeid. Vi er med andre ord ikke interessert i innholdet i tekstene i seg selv, men hva tekstene gjør eller får til å skje (Nilsen, 2017)

I analysene har spesielt forbindelsen mellom NAV-veiledernes bruk av styringstekster i kategoriseringsarbeidet, kategoriseringen av en sak som at den handler om «språk», og hvorvidt saken dermed «pensjoneres på sosialhjelp»[3] fanget vår oppmerksomhet. Vi har sortert materialet etter når og hvordan NAV-veilederne refererer til de ulike tekstene når de (1) plasserer en sak utenfor en aktuell problemkategori, (2) sender saken «opp» igjen til en ny runde i systemet, eller (3) overfører saken til ren økonomisk sosialhjelp. Gjennom analysene har *flipperspillet* vokst frem som metafor for relasjonen mellom de materielle tekstene som skaper bestemte rammer for NAV-veiledernes handlinger, og det arbeidet NAV-veilederne gjør i å aktivere og fortolke de ulike tekstene og institusjonelle kategoriene. NAV-veilederne vi møtte i feltarbeidet snakket gjerne om saker som «faller mellom alle stoler». I hvert tilfelle diskuterte de da om saken skulle «sendes ned», «prates opp», om den «hører til her» eller om den ble «fanget opp» av noen. Flipperspill-metaforen belyser og fremhever dermed bestemte aspekter av bakkebyråkratisk virksomhet. Carpenter (2008) beskriver hvordan metaforer alltid fremhever noe, men samtidig skjuler noe annet. Ikke alt kategoriseringsarbeid som NAV-veiledere gjør tar form av et flipperspill. Vårt poeng er at det er mange tilfeller der denne metaforen får frem noen trekk som f.eks. ikke kan fanges av uttrykk som «kasteball». Det er disse bestemte tilfellene vi fremhever i det følgende.

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[3] Å *pensjonere en sak på sosialhjelp* er en vanlig, men uformell betegnelse på saker i NAV der brukeren ikke anses å oppfylle vilkårene for uføretrygd, men der NAV-veilederne vurderer at de ikke har mulighet til å tilby brukeren andre ytelser eller virkemidler som vil kunne gjøre at brukeren får seg lønnet arbeid.

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Funn

NAV-veilederne må definere hver sak ut fra hva de mener er brukerens utfordring med å komme i arbeid. Hvert av teamene på kontoret arbeider med sine institusjonelle problemkategorier: typer av saker med spesifikke og enhetlige utfordringer med å få eller beholde arbeid. NAV-veiledernes definisjon av en sak må passe inn i én tekstlig mediert kategori av problemer, og plasseringen av en sak innenfor en av disse institusjonelle problemkategoriene åpner for like ytelser, virkemidler og tiltak fra NAV. Dette komplekse arbeidet henger sammen med hvordan NAV-veilederne aktiverer ulike styringstekster når de argumenterer for hvorfor en sak «hører til» et av teamene. I det videre vil vi beskrive hvordan ulike dynamikker og samspill mellom NAV-veiledernes praksis og bruk av ulike styringstekster gjør at *språk* får en spesiell posisjon som problemkategori og fungerer som en innlåsingsmekanisme der disse brukerne «pensjoneres» på sosialhjelp. Vi understreker at det ikke er NAV som sådan som fungerer som et flipperspill, men at flipperspillet gjør seg gjeldende i tilfeller der NAV-veilederne definerer at en sak handler om *språk*. Når saken (kulen) handler om språk, så støter de ulike teamene kulen vekk fra og mellom seg. Dette synes å gjelde alle teamene på NAV-kontoret som kan bruke ulike tekster til å definere språk ut fra sitt ansvarsområde. Kulene som handler om språk, faller dermed nedover til *flipperteamet* som forsøker å holde kulen i spill ved å flippe saken opp igjen. I visse tilfeller klarer ikke flipperteamet i holde saken i spill, og den faller dermed gjennom til flipperspillets «hull» – sosialhjelpsavdelingen. Kulen kjennetegnes i disse tilfellene av at bruker ikke kan norsk, og at NAV-veilederne vektlegger dette i sitt arbeid med saken.

Støting av saker mellom team

Teaminndelingen på kontoret følger to hovedprinsipper som definerer hva slags brukergrupper de ulike teamene har ansvaret for å følge opp. De to prinsippene for teaminndeling er delvis overlappende. For det første jobber de ulike teamene med brukere som har fått definert ulikt *innsatsbehov*; standard innsats, situasjonsbestemt innsats, spesielt tilpasset innsats og varig tilpasset innsats. «Innsats» viser her til hvor mye ressurser og hjelp NAV skal tildele eller yte i den aktuelle saken, altså om hjelpen skal være på et standardnivå, eller må tilpasses spesielt til den aktuelle saken (for utdypning se Kane, 2020). Innsatsbehovene beskrives inngående i «Retningslinjer for oppfølgingsvedtak i NAV» (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2010). Hensikten med disse innsatsbehovene er at NAV skal bruke mest ressurser på de som NAV-veilederne definerer til å ha størst behov for hjelp for å komme i arbeid, ved at de ulike innsatsbehovene gir ulik tilgang til ytelser og virkemidler i NAV. De fire innsatsbehovene beskriver altså fire ulike brukergrupper. Plasseringen av en sak i en av gruppene av innsatsbehov gjøres av NAV-veilederne ut fra en standardisert

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rutine/skjema for behovs- eller arbeidsevnevurdering, som ender i et oppfølgingsvedtak (Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, 2010; Kane, 2020). For det andre inndeles teamene etter hvilke ytelser de arbeider med; dagpengeytelser, helserelaterte ytelser eller sosiale ytelser. Vilkårene for disse ytelsene er beskrevet i folketrygdloven og sosialtjenesteloven. Inndelingen gjenspeiler også i noen grad det tradisjonelle skillet mellom statlige og kommunale ytelser i NAV. Det er disse prinsippene for teaminndeling som skaper rammene for problemkategoriene hvert team har ansvar for.

En gjennomgående tematikk i saksdiskusjonene under feltarbeidet var hvor en sak «hørte til». Dette gjaldt både nye saker og saker som hadde vært i NAV-systemet over (noe) tid. NAV-veilederne brukte mye tid på å avklare hvorvidt det var deres team som skulle ha ansvaret for en sak med utgangspunkt i kontorets teaminndeling. I et teammøte med avdelingen som jobbet med dagpengeytelser og brukere med standard eller situasjonsbestemt innsatsbehov, oppsto det diskusjon om en sak som Ebba hadde fått. Ebba uttrykte forvirring for hvorfor hun hadde fått saken:

> *Men hører denne saken egentlig til her hvis han [brukeren] fortsatt har behov for spesielt tilpasset innsats? Stemmer det at det er jeg som skal ha denne?*

I arbeidet med å avklare hvor en sak «hørte til», behandlet NAV-veilederne tekstlige representasjoner av brukerne, gjennom for eksempel legeerklæringer, CV, saksnotater, tiltaksrapporter o.l. som de videre vurderte ut fra kriteriene for sitt ansvarsområde. Ebba henviste til tidligere vurderinger av brukerens innsatsbehov (spesielt tilpasset innsats) som utgangspunkt for hvorfor saken ikke hørte til hos henne, i deres team. Kari, en av veilederne som jobbet med helserelaterte ytelser forklarte hvordan de gjør sine vurderinger:

> *De som jobber med SYFO [sykefraværsoppfølging] skal kun vurdere [om brukerne fyller] vilkårene for sykepenger. De som jobber med AAP [arbeidsavklaringspenger] skal vurdere om man har nedsatt arbeidsevne til ethvert arbeid på grunn av helse [vilkårene for AAP slik det er beskrevet i folketrygdloven], og dersom det ikke er helse som er utfordringen, så blir brukeren overført til et annet team.*

Karis forklaring viser hvordan dette arbeidet tok form som en ekskluderingsprosess, der NAV-veilederne brukte de tekstlig medierte kategoriene til å *støte* saken videre fra sitt team og over til et annet. Dersom NAV-veilederne definerer saken *inn* i sitt team, må NAV-veilederne begrunne vurderingen sin, gjerne i enten et oppfølgingsvedtak som beskriver brukerens innsatsbehov eller et vedtak på ytelser. Denne begrunnelsen og vedtaket må derfor passe hva slags type saker deres team har ansvaret for, slik det er beskrevet i lovverk, interne regler og rutiner. NAV-veilederne er med andre ord ansvarlige (accountable) overfor disse styringstekstene når de vurderer og definerer saker.

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Språk som problemkategori og gravitasjonsfelt

Flere saker byttet teamtilknytning og veileder underveis i vårt feltarbeid. I NAV-veiledernes vurdering av hvilket team en sak «hørte til» og forsøkene på å kategorisere saken utfra vilkår for ytelser og innsatsbehov, fikk imidlertid *språk* en spesiell rolle som problemkategori. Under feltarbeidet fortalte Turid (en av veilederne i teamet som jobbet med arbeidsavklaringspenger) om en sak med en polsk bruker:

> *En må spørre seg hva som hadde skjedd dersom han ble frisk. Ville han da fått jobb? Nei, fordi han kan ikke språket. Så da er det språket som er utfordringen. Det er få polske som går over på AAP, fordi de ikke kan språk. En må spørre seg hva som hadde vært tilfellet hvis det hadde vært en norsk bruker. Da kunne han ha omskolert seg. Det er ikke et spørsmål om helse, for han kan ha helse til andre jobber, men han kan ikke omskolere seg på grunn av språket. Vi må vurdere mot ethvert arbeid.*

Når Turid definerte denne brukerens hovedutfordring med å få arbeid til å handle om *språk*, definerte hun samtidig saken ut av den problemkategorien hun jobbet med. Dette begrunnet hun i lovverket og vilkårene for arbeidsavklaringspenger. Fordi hennes team skulle jobbe med de brukerne som hadde «nedsatt arbeidsevne til *ethvert arbeid* grunnet *sykdom, skade eller lyte*», kunne hun støte vekk saker der hun definerte brukerens nedsatte arbeidsevne til å handle om andre ting enn helse, for eksempel språk. På samme måte brukte NAV-veilederne beskrivelsene av innsatsbehovene for å støte videre de sakene der de definerte problemet til å være språk. NAV har ikke hatt egne språkopplæringstiltak, ettersom dette regnes som en kommunal oppgave (Friberg & Elgvin, 2016). Dersom brukere hadde behov for språkopplæring måtte de derfor inngå i andre typer tiltak, gjerne av lengre varighet. Dermed kunne NAV-veilederne argumentere for at brukeren hadde behov for «spesielt tilpasset innsats» og derfor ikke kunne regnes som «ordinær arbeidssøker» etter vilkårene for dagpengeytelser. *Språk* ble med andre ord en konkret problemkategori som NAV-veilederne kunne bruke til å støte vekk brukeren fra sitt ansvarsområde. Språk brukes av NAV-veilederne som argumentasjon for å utelukke brukerne fra en del ytelser, og er noe som kun gjelder innvandrerbrukere. Under feltarbeidet spurte [forfatter1] en av veilederne om hun hadde noen saker med innvandrerbrukere som hun kunne fortelle om. Veilederen svarte at:

> *Språk[problemer] gir ikke rett til AAP, derfor er det få innvandrere i denne gruppen [de som får innvilget AAP].*

Argumentasjonen om at språk ikke gir rett til arbeidsavklaringspenger henger sammen med NAV-veiledernes forståelse av at brukerens enten har språkproblemer *eller* helseproblemer. Språk er med

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andre ord definert som en egen og eksklusiv problemkategori. Saker som NAV-veilederne definerte inn i problemkategorien språk var spesielt utsatt for å støtes videre, og dette skjedde i alle teamene som jobbet med tydelig definerte problemkategorier. Språk som problemkategori virker dermed som et «gravitasjonsfelt». Språksakene blir ikke kastet tilfeldig mellom team som «*kasteballer*», men graviterer snarere nedover i systemet til team som arbeider med løsere definerte problemkategorier.

Flipperteamets arbeid med å holde saken i spill

Saker som defineres innenfor problemkategorien *språk* sendes ofte videre til teamet som har de mest uklare grenser for hvilke saker de jobber med, teamet vi vil omtale som «flipperteamet». Under feltarbeidet fortalte flere veiledere og mellomledere på kontoret (uavhengig av hverandre), at dette teamet har «mange sånne [innvandrersaker]». Teamet jobber blant annet med kvalifiseringsprogrammet (KVP), men grensene for problemkategorien(e) som teamet har ansvar for, er i stor grad uklare og omdiskuterte. Det følgende er et eksempel på hvordan veilederne i teamet forklarte hva slags saker de jobbet med, hva slags problemstillinger og brukergrupper:

> *Vi jobber med de som har spesielt tilpasset innsats, nedsatt arbeidsevne og som mottar økonomisk sosialhjelp med behov for langtidsoppfølging. Mange har vært arbeidssøkere veldig lenge, de står langt fra arbeidslivet, mangler basisferdigheter og har ofte en del svakheter som for eksempel rus/psykiatri, språk, flyktninger med sin ballast, straffedømte. Det kan også være de som holder på å gå ut dagpenger, etter dagpengeperioden og som ikke har avsluttet videregående skole og ikke har noen arbeidspraksis, drop-outs. Ungdom med spesielt tilpasset innsats kommer også til oss, eller så skal de til ungdomsteamet. De som får KVP er de som fremstår å være klare for jobb og som er motiverte. Vi jobber med unge, flyktninger og de med innvandrerbakgrunn.*

I motsetning til i de andre teamene, der problemkategoriene var enkelt definert, ga veilederne i «flippertemaet» typisk omfattende beskrivelser av brukerne de jobbet med, som de presenterte som en sammensatt gruppe uten ett felles klart definert problem. I sitatet forteller veilederen at vilkårene for å «høre til» i deres team var løst definert og åpent for tolkning, for eksempel at brukerne skal være «klare for jobb» eller «motiverte». Mange saker kan med andre ord passe innenfor deres bredt definerte ansvarsområde, med løst definerte inngangsvilkår. Flipperteamet hadde heller ikke én tydelig styringstekst som de kunne bruke for å støte en sak ut fra sitt ansvarsområde, slik veilederne i teamet som jobbet med arbeidsavklaringspenger kunne med folketrygdloven.

I teammøter brukte veilederne i flipperteamet så godt som hele sin møtetid til å diskutere saker. Veilederne i flipperteamet trakk frem at deres team skulle «fange opp» saker for å kunne gi riktig

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oppfølging. Samtidig trakk veilederne i flipperteamet frem at de var «siste skanse». Hvis ikke de klarte å holde saken aktiv gjennom å definere den innenfor eget eller andres problemkategori, så falt brukeren over på passive ytelser uten arbeidsrettet oppfølging, som økonomisk sosialhjelp. Så lange flipperteamet klarer å holde en sak aktiv, eller «i spill», er det imidlertid fortsatt potensial for at bruker kan komme i arbeid gjennom å motta arbeidsrettet oppfølging. Veilederne i flipperteamet brukte derfor mye tid og ressurser på å vurdere hvorvidt en sak kan *flippes opp* igjen. Gjennom omfattende kartleggingsarbeid forsøkte veilederne å avklare om de kunne sende saken andre steder i systemet. I en av teammøtene diskuterte flipperteamet en av Odas saker:

> *Det er en dame fra [afrikansk land] som har mann og barn. Hun har tatt videregående i Norge og har studiekompetanse, men er ikke motivert for mer skole. Hun har ikke [formell] kompetanse, ingen arbeidserfaring, ingen referanser, ikke kjennskap til norsk arbeidsliv og har barn. Hun er ikke så himla god i norsk.* Ragnhild uttalte: *dette høres ut som en som hører til i [teamet som jobber med dagpenger], at de kan prøve tiltak der først. Hvorfor skal hun hit? Det høres ut som situasjonsbestemt [innsatsbehov].* Oda svarte: *det var det jeg tenkte også. Hvorfor ikke prøve henne i arbeidspraksis? Har de ikke prøvd noen ting? Man kan kartlegge gjennom praksis. Språket er på plass og hun har gått videregående, og hun vil ut i jobb.*

I diskusjonen uttrykte veilederne i flipperteamet at de ikke forstod hvorfor saken hadde havnet hos dem, og stilte spørsmål for å avklare om de kunne redefinere saken inn i ansvarsområdet for et av de andre teamene på kontoret. Flipperteamet var det eneste teamet på kontoret som ikke bare forsøkte å avklare at saken *ikke* hørte til hos dem, men som argumenterte aktivt for en redefinering av problemet i saken og hvorfor saken derfor hørte til hos et annet, spesifikt, team. I sine diskusjoner av saker uttrykte veilederne i flipperteamet ofte frustrasjon over kategoriseringer og vurderinger gjort av andre team og det de mente var en for streng fortolkning av deres problemkategori – spesielt AAP-teamet. Oda uttalte:

> *Når AAP-avdelingen ikke tar alle med spesielt tilpasset innsats som har statlige ytelser, men kun de som har AAP, så betyr det at vi får alle med spesielt tilpasset innsats unntatt de som er syke nok for AAP.*

Gjennom å redefinere hovedproblemet i saken kunne saken flippes opp igjen i systemet og holdes i spill. Det fins likevel saker som veilederne i flipperteamet altså ikke klarer å holde i spill. Dette er spesielt saker definert inn i problemkategorien språk. Når språk defineres som brukerens hovedproblem, vanskeliggjøres arbeidet for alle NAV-veilederne, fordi språkopplæring ikke tilbys som eget tiltak. Det blir derfor et spørsmål om de har mulighet til å gi oppfølging i disse sakene. I et

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teammøte spurte en veileder «*har vi noe til dem?*» og henviste til en sak der brukeren snakket svært dårlig norsk. Lise svarte at «*yrkesrettet norsk kan brukes, men ikke bare for at de skal bli bedre i norsk. Det må være jobbutløsende*».

Denne mangelen på tiltak gjør at flere av veilederne blir kreative i å finne alternative måter å sørge for språkopplæring på. Samtidig innebærer det at veilederne må gjøre ekstra arbeid for å kunne tilby et tiltak som kan inngå i for eksempel kvalifiseringsprogrammet. Lise vektla også at tiltakene de tilbyr brukerne skulle være «jobbutløsende». En annen veileder i flipperteamet, Sonja, forklarte at:

> *Språk er en utfordring. For å komme inn i kvalifiseringsprogrammet må de kunne nyttiggjøre seg det. De må kunne føre en samtale uten tolk. Helsen skal være avklart og de jobber mot arbeid. De skal ha et sted å bo, de skal ikke kvalifisere til andre stønader og de må være motivert for arbeid. Dermed blir ikke kvalifiseringsprogrammet like lavterskel som tidligere, men heller en slags siste innsats for at de faktisk skal komme i jobb.*

Sonja beskriver språk som noe som gjør at en bruker ikke kan nyttiggjøre seg oppfølgingen. Samtidig trakk hun også frem mye annet som påvirker hvorvidt de vurderer en bruker som klar for arbeid. Eksempelvis skal helsen være avklart, de må ha en bolig og være motivert. De sakene som veilederne både definerte inn i problemkategorien språk og der brukerne hadde noen av tilleggsutfordringene Sonja nevnte, ble ofte definert som at de ikke var klare for arbeid, eller kunne nyttiggjøre seg tiltaket. Dette var derfor saker veilederne i flipperteamet hadde vanskeligheter med å holde i spill, og som også var vanskelig å flippe opp igjen. Disse sakene faller typisk gjennom til flipperspillets «hull»: til sosialhjelpsavdelingen.

Pensjonert på sosialhjelp i flipperspillets «hull»

For å legitimere hvordan de enten aktivt gir opp saker og slipper dem gjennom, eller at de ikke klarer å holde dem i spill, argumenterte veilederne i flipperteamet med at brukeren må være «klar for arbeid», må kunne «nyttiggjøre seg tiltak». I tillegg står det definert i tiltaksforskriften at NAV-veilederne bør vurdere tiltaket som «nødvendig og hensiktsmessig» for at brukeren skulle skaffe seg eller beholde lønnet arbeid for at brukeren skal kunne motta arbeidsmarkedstiltak. Ragnhild, en av veilederne i flipperteamet uttalte:

> *Det er fint at det er regler så vi ikke kan holde på i det uendelige, men jobbe med de som er reelle arbeidssøkere.*

Sammenkoblingen mellom (flere ulike) regler beskrevet i styringstekster og NAV-veiledernes praksis bidrar til at NAV-veilederne kan legitimere beslutningen om å avslutte den arbeidsrettede

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oppfølgingen og overføre saken til sosialhjelpsavdelingen. Sosialhjelpsavdelingen har ansvar for inntektssikring av brukerne gjennom behovsprøvd økonomisk sosialhjelp. Veilederne i sosialhjelpsavdelingen jobber ikke med arbeidsrettet oppfølging av sine brukere. Dersom brukerne (sosialhjelpsmottakere) ytrer ønske om å komme i arbeid, henvender veilederne i sosialhjelpsavdelingen seg ofte til flipperteamet. Tine, en annen av veilederne i flipperteamet forklarte:

> *Vi kan ikke ha oppfølging mot arbeid og aktivitet på alle de som går på sosialhjelp. De må være klare for arbeidsrettet aktivitet.*

Veilederne i sosialhjelpsavdelingen gjorde ofte uformelle forsøk på å «prate opp» saken til flipperteamet gjennom å stikke inn på kontoret til flipperteamet og diskutere saken muntlig. Resultatet ble ofte en ny, muntlig argumentasjon av flipperteamet for hvorfor brukeren ikke ble ansett som «klar for arbeid», eller å kunne «nyttiggjøre seg» tiltak. Igjen skjer denne vurderingen gjennom henvisning til språk:

> *De må ha et visst norsknivå. Først norsk og så program for å få mer ut av det. Det er dessverre mange som gjennomfører kvalifiseringsprogram og som snakker så dårlig norsk at de ikke får jobb. Heller norsk først og så praksis og så får de kvalifiseringsprogram når de har fått praksisplass.*

Språk som definert problem kan dermed bli en innlåsingsmekanisme: Brukerne faller gjennom til sosialhjelp fordi språk, gjerne i kombinasjon med tilleggsutfordringer, ikke defineres av veilederne som innenfor problemkategorien for deres team. Samtidig gjør den overordnede beskrivelsen av arbeidsrettet oppfølging i NAV, gjennom at brukerne skal være «klare for arbeid» eller kunne «nyttiggjøre seg» tiltak, at veilederne i sosialhjelpsavdelingen heller ikke får sendt sakene opp igjen da saker definert inn i problemkategorien språk også blir definert som *ikke klar for arbeid* av NAV-veilederne. Disse brukerne «pensjoneres» dermed som passive mottakere av sosialhjelp.

Diskusjon

Ved hjelp av analytiske verktøy fra institusjonell etnografi viser våre funn hvordan NAV-kontoret og veiledernes arbeid i mange tilfeller tar form av et *flipperspill*, et «lukket» system der veilederne støter saker mellom team og avdelinger og der noen saker – de som blir definert til å handle om språk – ofte ender opp i flipperspillets «hull», «pensjonert på sosialhjelp». Flipperspillmetaforen skisserer hvordan tekstlige beskrivelser av ytelser og ansvarsområder gjør at problemkategorien språk fungerer nærmest som et gravitasjonsfelt, som «trekker kulen» ned mot hullet. Her er saken

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ute av spill. NAV-veiledernes kategoriseringsarbeid er koordinert gjennom større institusjonelle strukturer, gjennom at NAV-veilederne aktiverer styringstekster. Selve organiseringen av vilkår for tiltak og ytelser i NAV bidrar til at veilederne definerer noen saker inn i problemkategorien «språk». Dette virker diskvalifiserende for disse brukerne, også fra lavterskeltilbud som kvalifiseringsprogram. Samtidig er NAV-veiledernes bruk av slike tekster til å avgjøre om en sak skal klassifiseres innenfor eller utenfor regelverket også en viktig del av portvokterrollen deres: Bare brukere som har krav på det, eller behov for det, skal få tilgang til bestemte ytelser, tiltak og virkemidler i velferdsstaten.

Våre funn tyder på at hvilke brukere som får tilgang til tiltak, potensielt er skeivfordelt etter hvorvidt NAV-veilederne kategoriserer saker som «språksaker» eller ei. Språk er en utfordring som NAV-veilederne knytter spesifikt til innvandrerbrukere. Så selv om ikke alle innvandrersaker er språksaker, så er alle språksaker (i vårt materiale) innvandrersaker. Å bli definert som en språksak bidrar til at disse brukerne får et annet, og muligens dårligere, tjenestetilbud fra NAV. Språkutfordringer hos brukere er imidlertid en reell problemstilling. Flere studier viser at brukere med lave norskferdigheter får lite utbytte av tiltak (NOU, 2017) eller har utfordringer med å skaffe seg arbeid (Bjørnset et al., 2021; Grødem & Aspøy, 2013). En henvisning til brukernes språkutfordringer er altså ikke bare en unnskyldning NAV-veilederne bruker for å unngå å ta ansvar for en sak. Forfatter 1 viser i en tidligere artikkel basert på samme data som vi benytter her at NAV-veilederes bruk av kategorien «språk» ofte favner flere ting enn kun en brukers ferdigheter i norsk. Kategorien språk kan vise både til kultur, motivasjon og andre, udefinerte problemer (Forfatter 1, 2020). Språk blir med andre ord en slags uformell kategori som favner «de ubestemmelige» (Nilsen, 2017), de som ikke lar seg klassifisere inn i tilgjengelige byråkratiske kategoriene (Diedrich, 2014). Kategorien «språk» for innvandrere kan dermed være et eksempel på hva som skjer når menneskelige utfordringer ikke passer i forhåndsdefinerte byråkratiske kategorier. Vi vil understreke at våre funn ikke nødvendigvis avdekker urettferdighet eller diskriminering i tilgangen på velferdstjenester. Vårt anliggende er å beskrive den rollen *konstruksjon av språk som problem* spiller i NAV-veilederes beslutninger om hvilke ytelser og tiltak som brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn får tilgang til. Gjennom dette identifiserer vi hvordan mekanismer i velferdsstaten bidrar til at folk havner utenfor, og mer spesifikt hvordan «språk» kan bidra til å ekskludere og samtidig låse inn i velferdssystemet.

Innlåsingsmekanismene vi skildrer i denne artikkelen har vanligvis blitt beskrevet som at saker «faller mellom alle stoler», slik Karina gjør innledningsvis, eller som «kasteballer». Selv om vi ikke har klart å finne noen entydig definisjon av «kasteball», så brukes begrepet som regel av forskere for å beskrive saker som sendes videre i systemet i en evig runddans (Lundberg, 2012) og som derfor ikke får hjelpen de trenger og låses inne i systemet. Kasteball-problematikk blir ofte fremstilt som resultatet av et misforhold mellom byråkratiske kategorier og de reelle problemene brukere av

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velferdstjenester har (Eriksson & Nissen, 2017; Eriksson et al., 2008; Lundberg, 2012). En slik fremstilling impliserer at de bestemte kategoriene som *er* i velferdstjenestene rett og slett ikke passer med problemene som brukerne *har*. Kategorier og problemer blir med andre ord forstått som statiske. I tillegg er det uklart hvem som faktisk *gjør* noe. Kasteball-metaforen antyder at brukere kastes tilfeldig rundt i systemet uten nærmere beskrivelse av hvem som kaster og hvorfor. Det skilles ikke mellom ulike tjenestenivåer og alle fremstilles som å ha samme «rolle» i å kaste disse sakene rundt i systemet. Kasteballmetaforen angir slik en objektivert forståelse av mekanismer i velferdsstaten og hvordan de oppstår. I tillegg synes den ofte å implisere at kasteballene skapes av passive tjenesteutøvere som ikke evner å se utover sitt ansvarsområde. Dette knyttes ofte til et fragmentert hjelpeapparat (Olsen & Jentoft, 2010), preget av konflikter rundt jurisdiksjon (Abbott, 1988; Liljegren, 2012) og ressursknapphet som fører til at «politiske idealer om helhetlig behandling kan bli slukt av den daglige saksmengden» (Erlien, 2017).

Gjennom vår utforskning av hvordan NAV-veiledernes konstruerer språk som problem, beskriver vi slike innlåsingsmekanismer som et resultat av et aktivt og dynamisk arbeid der kategorier og kategorisering påvirker hverandre gjensidig. Dette skjer når NAV-veilederne oversetter en sak til et institusjonelt håndterbart problem. Flipperspill-metaforen illustrerer *hvordan* en slik «kasteball»-problematikk opptrer og skaper innlåsing (i bestemte saker). Flipperspillet bidrar til å belyse tre viktige faktorer som kasteball-metaforen skjuler. For det første innebærer den aktive (og kompetente) aktører. NAV-veilederne forsøker å holde saken i spill lengst mulig, med håp om at brukeren til slutt vil komme ut i arbeid. Gjennom å beskrive hvordan noen av NAV-veilederne støter en sak videre gjennom å definere en sak ut av sitt ansvarsområde, og hvordan andre tar rollen som *flippere* som forsøker å plassere sakene tilbake i andres ansvarsområde igjen, viser vi hvordan saker «kastes» og av hvem. For det andre beskriver flipperspillmetaforen samspillet mellom de byråkratiske kategoriene (spillet) og aktørenes arbeid med å kategorisere en sak. Når NAV-veilederne kategoriserer saker, er det et dynamisk arbeid der de gjennom å aktivere ulike styringstekster deltar aktivt i å forme innholdet i og grensene for kategorier. På denne måten viser vi hvordan «kastingen» av saker ikke trenger å handle om verken slett arbeid eller vond vilje hos NAV-veilederne. Snarere gir de institusjonelle rammene dem et handlingsrom for kategorisering av saker og for å avgjøre hvilke saker som dermed ender opp som kuler i et flipperspill. Spesielt rollen de ulike tekstene spiller, og måten NAV-veilederne ansvarliggjøres gjennom å måtte dokumentere sine vurderinger i lys av disse tekstene, bidrar til å legge bestemte handlingsbetingelser for hvordan de kategoriserer. Hvilke kategorier som er tilgjengelige, påvirker med andre ord kategoriseringsarbeidet (Emerson & Messinger, 1977). Det er altså ikke tilfeldig hvilke saker som blir «kasteballer» eller hvorfor de blir det. Dette påvirkes av hva de ulike tekstene spør etter og hva som vektlegges i beskrivelsene av vilkår

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for ytelser og virkemidler. Dette henger sammen med den tredje faktoren flipperspillet fremhever: Velferdsstatens ulike nivåer og roller. Noen tjenester har vilkår, som for eksempel at man skal være «reell arbeidssøker», eller ha «nedsatt arbeidsevne grunnet helse», som NAV-veilederne kan bruke til å definere saker ut fra sitt ansvarsområde. Noen saker, språksakene, sendes dermed nedover i systemet fremfor å kastes vilkårlig rundt. Flipperspillmetaforen har dermed flere styrker som bidrar til å nyansere og utdype hvordan innlåsingsmekanismer i velferdsstaten formes som en del av «the construction of serviceable problems» (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014, s. 1), som forblir ubelyste i kasteball-metaforen.

Flipperspillmetaforen har imidlertid også noen klare begrensninger som det er viktig å anerkjenne dersom andre skal kunne bruke den som analytisk modell i fremtidig forskning. Én begrensning er at et flipperspill er et lukket system der målet er å få en kule til å støtes mellom de ulike elementene så mange ganger som mulig. Det er slik en samler poeng. NAVs hovedmål er imidlertid å hjelpe flere ut i lønnet arbeid og at færre blir avhengige av velferdsytelser. Veiledernes arbeid består i å få brukere *ut av systemet* og over i varig lønnet arbeid. NAV er altså i utgangspunktet ikke et lukket system. I motsetning til i et flipperspill, er målet i NAV at en sak «fanges opp» av et av teamene som så klarer å få kulen, eller saken, ut av NAV-systemet og over i lønnet arbeid. NAV-veilederne måles i tillegg på, eller får «poeng», etter hvor mange brukere de følger opp som de får ut i jobb. Flipperspillet fungerer dermed ikke som metafor for NAVs arbeid generelt (det er heller ikke ment slik), men begrepsfester slike innlåsningsmekanismer vi diskuterer her. Et annet punkt som skiller NAV fra flipperspillet er at «hullet», eller sosialhjelpsavdelingen, forsøker å henvende seg til flipperteamet for å «prate opp igjen» en sak. Dette vil ikke kunne skje i flipperspillet. Der vil en kule alltid havne i hullet til slutt, og dermed være ute av spill. Selv om gode spillere kan holde en kule i spill svært lenge, så er det eneste mulige utfallet til slutt at kulen havner i hullet. Slik er (heldigvis) ikke virkeligheten. Selv om vi identifiserer mekanismer i NAV-systemet som bidrar til innlåsingseffekter for spesielt saker som defineres som *språk*, er det altså egenskaper ved NAV som påviselig skiller seg fra flipperspillet. I tillegg til at alt arbeidet i NAV ikke kan favnes av metaforen, er det også noen saker i de aktuelle avdelingene som metaforen heller ikke kan romme. Noen saker «fanges opp» av teamene som vi beskriver som *støtere*. Disse sakene kommer dermed ut av spillet på en måte som ikke ville være mulig i et reelt flipperspill. NAV er ikke mekanisk og lukket som et flipperspill, og NAV-veilederne er aktive i kategoriseringen av en sak på en måte som vi ikke vil finne igjen i flipperspillet. Det er likevel viktige deler av kategoriseringsarbeidet i NAV som flipperspill-metaforen treffer. Som modell viser den oss noe av virkeligheten, her også ved å vise frem de stedene der flipperspill-metaforen ikke treffer. Forestillingen om kasteballer omfatter all slags form for ansvarsfraskrivelse, der saker, eller brukere kastes rundt i systemet litt umotivert og vilkårlig. Flipperspillet favner ikke nødvendigvis alle

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slike kasteballer, men nyanserer og utdyper én type: de sakene som kastes rundt fordi ingen vil ta ansvar for dem og som dermed «låses» inn i systemet. Vi oppfordrer andre forskere til å utforske kasteball-problematikk videre ved å se på hvem, hvordan og hvorfor saker kastes rundt i *andre* tilfeller, gjerne ved bruk av flipperspillet som sensitiverende begrep og analytisk metafor.

Vi har brukt etnografisk data fra ett NAV-kontor til å si noe mer generelt om strukturer og prosesser i NAV. Kontoret vi studerte er organisert etter et spesialiseringsprinsipp. Videre forskning bør derfor undersøke hvorvidt slike mekanismer også gjør seg gjeldende på NAV-kontorer som er organisert på andre måter. Et annet spørsmål er hvorvidt mekanismene vi belyser her er overførbare til andre deler av velferdsstaten. Vi har i denne artikkelen spesifikt rettet søkelyset mot arbeids- og integreringsspørsmål ved å utforske kategoriseringsarbeid og -prosesser i NAV. Det er likevel grunn til å tro at problemstillinger knyttet til kategoriseringer og «kasteballer» også gjør seg gjeldende i andre velferdsinstitusjoner. Flipperspill-metaforen fremhever tjenesteutøvernes aktive (og ulike) arbeid med å definere saker (inn i og) ut av sitt ansvarsområde i situasjoner som tidligere har blitt beskrevet nærmest uten aktører. I tillegg retter den oppmerksomheten mot tjenesteutøvernes aktive konstruksjon av og arbeid med kategorier. Når vi skal forstå kasteball-problematikk og innlåsingsmekanismer i velferdsstaten, kan dét være like betydningsfullt som kategoriene i seg selv.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – NSD approval: Data and privacy protection

NSD

Maria Volckmar-Eeg
Institutt for sosialfag Universitetet i Stavanger
Ullandhaug
4036 STAVANGER

Vår dato: 26.01.2017   Vår ref: 51705 / 3 / HIT   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 20.12.2016. Meldingen gjelder
prosjektet:

51705	*Kultursensitivitet i NAV - et spørsmål om praksis. Når, hvordan og hvorfor NAV-ansatte tar i bruk tverrkulturell veiledning i den arbeidsrettede brukeroppfølgingen.*
	"Making People work - a question of cultural sensitivity"
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Stavanger, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Maria Volckmar-Eeg*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være
regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet
gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i
meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt
personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger
kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de
opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et
eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding
etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database,
http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.08.2020, rette en henvendelse angående
status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt
                                    Hildur Thorarensen

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Kontaktperson: Hildur Thorarensen tlf: 55 58 26 54

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

FORMÅL

Hensikten med prosjektet er å få økt kunnskap om kultursensitivitet i velferdstjenester i praksis. Jeg ønsker å undersøke om og hvordan kultursensitivitet anvendes av ulike NAV-ansatte på lokalkontor, og hvordan dette henger sammen med hvordan man jobber arbeidsrettet med brukere.

Den overordnede problemstillingen er: Hva betyr kultursensitivitet i NAV, og hvordan tas det i bruk av NAV-ansatte på lokalkontoret?

INFORMASJON OG SAMTYKKE

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet, men det må tilføyes at data også vil bli innhentet gjennom observasjon.

DATAINNSAMLING OG DATAMATERIALETS INNHOLD

Det oppgis i meldeskjema at data samles inn gjennom personlig intervju og deltakelse observasjon, og at det kun vil bli registrert personopplysninger om ansatte, ikke brukere. Personvernombudet gjør likevel oppmerksom på at dersom forsker skal observere situasjoner der brukere er til stede, så må forskers tilstedeværelse avklares med institusjonsledelsen, og brukerne bør informeres om observasjonen.

Det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om etnisk bakgrunn.

INFORMASJONSSIKKERHET

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Universitetet i Stavanger sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet.

PROSJEKTSLUTT OG ANONYMISERING

Forventet prosjektslutt er 31.08.2020. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:
- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette digitale lydopptak

Appendix 2 – NSD extension of project period

Utvidelse av prosjektperiode NSD:

Melding12.04.2021 13:35

Behandlingen av personopplysninger er vurdert av NSD. Vurderingen er: NSD har vurdert endringen registrert 12.04.2021. Vi har nå registrert 31.08.2021 som ny sluttdato for forskningsperioden. I tilfelle det skulle bli aktuelt med ytterligere utvidelse av den opprinnelige sluttdato (31.08.2020), må vi vurdere hvorvidt det skal gis ny informasjon til utvalget. NSD vil følge opp ved ny planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet. Lykke til videre med prosjektet! Kontaktperson hos NSD: Simon Gogl Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

Melding22.09.2020 11:07

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 738596 er nå vurdert av NSD. Følgende vurdering er gitt: BAKGRUNN Behandlingen av personopplysninger ble opprinnelig meldt inn til NSD 20.12.2016 (NSD sin ref: 51705) og vurdert under personopplysningsloven som var gjeldende på det tidspunktet. 11.09.2020 meldte prosjektleder inn en endring av prosjektet: Prosjektperioden blir utvidet fram til 04.04.2021. Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen/hele prosjektet vil være i samsvar med den gjeldende personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 22.09.2020 med vedlegg. Behandlingen kan fortsette. MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres. TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET Prosjektet behandler særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om etnisk opprinnelse og alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 04.04.2021. Opprinnelig prosjektslutt var 31.08.2020. LOVLIG GRUNNLAG Prosjektet har innhentet samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen er dermed den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om: - lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte har fått tilfredsstillende informasjon og har samtykket til behandlingen - formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål - dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet - lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20). NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte mottok var tilstrekkelig/godt utformet under personopplysningsloven som var gjeldende på det tidspunktet. Det vurderes at informasjonen også er tilstrekkelig for å innhente et informert samtykke og oppfylle informasjonsplikten etter nytt personvernregelverk. Informasjonen oppfyller krav til form, jf. personvernforordningen art. 12.1, og mangler kun informasjon om nye rettigheter og kontaktopplysninger til institusjonens personvernombud for å oppfylle alle krav til innhold, jf. art. 13. Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned. FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32). For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon. OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet. Lykke til med prosjektet! Kontaktperson hos NSD: Simon Gogl Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

Appendix 3 – NAV approval: Exemption from duty of confidentiality

Universitetet i Stavanger, Institutt for sosialfag
Postboks 8600 Forus
4036 STAVANGER

Att.: Prosjektleder Maria Gussgard Volckmar-Eeg

Deres ref:	Vår ref:17/1687	Saksbehandler: Knut Brenne	Vår dato:29.05.2017

DISPENSASJON FRA TAUSHETSPLIKTEN I FORBINDELSE MED FORSKNING

Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet viser til søknad mottatt 27.2.2017 om dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten for forskningsprosjektet " Kultursensitivitet i NAV – et spørsmål om praksis. Når, hvordan og hvorfor NAV-ansatte tar i bruk tverrkulturell veiledning i den arbeidsrettede brukeroppfølgingen».

Sakens opplysninger

Prosjektet inngår i prosjektleder Maria Gussgard Volckmar-Eegs doktorgradsarbeid. Veileder er professor Anders Vassenden ved UiS. UiS er behandlingsansvarlig enhet.

Prosjektet er beskrevet slik:

a) Prosjektets problemstilling
Overordnet problemstilling: Hva betyr kultursensitivitet i NAV, og hvordan tas det i bruk av NAV- ansatte på lokalkontoret?

Forskningsspørsmål:
-Når og hvorfor vekker en bruker noe som motiverer til «tverrkulturell veiledning» fra ulike NAV-ansatte, og hvem defineres som ikke i behov av kultursensitivitet?
-Hva slags skjønnsmessige avveininger gjør de NAV-ansatte når de skal veilede (innvandrer)brukere mot arbeid, og opplever de «tverrkulturell veiledning» som nyttig i dette arbeidet?
-Hvilke diskursive ressurser trekker de NAV-ansatte på, og hvordan navigerer de mellom alternative forståelser og målsettinger i møte med innvandrerbrukere?

a) Prosjektets formål/nytteverdi
Hensikten med prosjektet er å få økt kunnskap om kultursensitivitet i velferdstjenester i praksis. Jeg ønsker å undersøke hvordan kultursensitivitet anvendes av ulike NAV-

ansatte på lokalkontor og hvordan dette henger sammen med hvordan man jobber arbeidsrettet med brukere. Jeg søker også å få kunnskap om hva kultursensitivitet betyr

når veileder selv har innvandrerbakgrunn. Ca 30 000 personer med innvandrerbakgrunn står i dag utenfor arbeidsmarkedet. Det å få disse ut i arbeid vil gi en betydelig samfunnsøkonomisk gevinst. Er kultursensitivitet et nyttig verktøy for å øke målsettingen om flere i arbeid og likeverdige tjenester? Å få bedre kunnskap rundt metodene som brukes for å nå dette målet vil kunne bidra til bedre tjenestetilbud og mer målrettet veiledning.

Prosjektplan/prosjektskisse er fremlagt.

Opplysningene som ønskes er beskrevet slik:

Jeg vil innhente opplysninger om NAV-veiledere: navn, stilling, deres utdanning og arbeidserfaring, samt deres etniske bakgrunn.
Jeg vil også kunne få informasjon om brukersaker, gjennom deltakelse på saksdrøftingsmøter. Møtene vil tas opp med lydopptaker. Personopplysninger om tredjepart vil ikke registreres i transkripsjoner eller notater. Lydbånd vil slettes når prosjektet er ferdig.

Datainnsamlingen er todelt.

Del 1 vil bestå av observasjoner ved kurs i «veiledning av brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn» og intervjuer av deltakere (veiledere) i etterkant. Kontakt med veiledere vil videreformidles av kursarrangør med utsending av informasjonsskriv og samtykkeerklæring.

Del 2 vil bestå av deltakende observasjon ved to lokalkontor. Jeg vil snakke med alle ansatte som vil inngå i observasjonene (avdelinger/team som jobber med arbeidsrettet brukeroppfølging, statlig side) og gi dem informasjon i tillegg til samtykkeerklæring. Jeg vil også presentere prosjektet på et allmøte for alle ansatte. Observasjonene vil i hovedsak innebære deltagelse på avdelings- og teammøter der det skjer drøfting av saker. Dette vil kombineres med intervjuer/samtaler med veiledere i etterkant av møtene.

Utvalget er beskrevet slik:

NAV-veiledere som deltar på kurs i «veiledning av brukere med innvandrerbrukere», samt aktuelle NAV-veiledere og mellomledere som jobber med arbeidsrettet brukeroppfølging ved to lokalkontor (se pkt 9.2 for mer informasjon om utvalg av kontorene). Det vil være ønskelig med veiledere som har ulik erfaring fra NAV, ulik utdanning, og som har erfaring med veiledning av brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn. Dette for å få bredest mulig grunnlag for videre analyser. Informanter skal i hovedsak inngå i den ordinære driften av NAV-kontoret og ikke i særteam eller prosjekter.

Omfanget er beskrevet slik:

To tidligere intro-kontorer, og to lokalkontor

2

Ettersom intervjuer vil kombineres med observasjoner ved lokalkontorene vil det vanskelig kunne gis noen eksakte tall på hvor mange som vil inngå i datamaterialet, men jeg regner opptil ca 20 intervjuer.

Prosjektet vil behandle opplysningene avidentifisert (indirekte identifiserbar). Koblingsnøkkelen vil være knyttet opp mot NAV-ansatte og/eller kontor, ikke brukeropplysninger

Prosjektleder ønsker også tilgang til Navet (NAVs intranett), da hun benytter veiledningsplattformen som en del av sitt materiale

Prosjektperioden er oppgitt til 1.9.2016 – 31.8.2020.

NSD/Personvernombudet har 26.1.2017 gitt tilråding om at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Rettslig utgangspunkt

Det rettslige utgangspunktet for taushetsplikten er forvaltningsloven § 13, jf arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningsloven § 7 og lov om sosiale tjenester i NAV § 44.

Taushetsplikten er ikke til hinder for at opplysninger brukes når behovet for beskyttelse må anses ivaretatt ved at de gis i statistisk form eller at individualiserende kjennetegn utelates på annen måte, jf forvaltningsloven § 13a nr. 2.

For at det skal kunne gjøres unntak fra taushetsplikten i forbindelse med et forskningsprosjekt, må det foreligge et gyldig rettsgrunnlag. Dette innebærer enten gyldig samtykke fra de personene som er omfattet, jf forvaltningsloven § 13a nr 1, eller dispensasjon fra taushetsplikt til forskning, jf forvaltningsloven § 13d. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet er delegert avgjørelsesmyndighet etter forvaltningsloven § 13d første ledd til å kunne dispensere fra taushetsplikten til forskningsformål for så vidt gjelder opplysninger i saker på vårt ansvarsområde.

Vurdering

Prosjektet bygger på samtykkebasert deltakelse fra NAV-medarbeidere, men det er ikke lagt opp til innhenting av samtykke fra NAV-brukere, etter det vi kan se. Imidlertid er det i prosjektbeskrivelsen lagt opp til aktiviteter som lett kan føre til at taushetsbelagte og/eller sensitive personopplysninger om NAV-brukere - eller opplysninger om tredjeperson - utilsiktet framkommer, uten at det er gitt samtykke eller uten at det som framkommer er fullstendig anonymisert. Vi peker her på:
- Intervjuer med NAV-medarbeidere
- Observasjoner/deltakelse på interne møter med saksbehandlere og veiledere i NAV-kontorene, samt ved annen tilstedeværelse i NAV-kontorene
- Opptak av samtaler

Vi peker også på at omfanget av undersøkelsen er ganske begrenset (relativt få brukere på et meget lite antall kontorer i avgrensede geografiske områder), noe som kan medvirke til en mulig reidentifisering.

3

Disse forholdene gjør at vi må vurdere om det kan gis dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten, selv om prosjektet i utgangspunktet basere seg på samtykke fra NAV-medarbeidere.

Vi forstår prosjektet slik at det ikke fokuserer på personopplysninger om den enkelte bruker, men på betydningen av kultursensitivitet i relasjon til målsettingen om å få flere i arbeid og likeverdige tjenester.

Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet har vurdert søknaden og ser at undersøkelsen kan være viktig med tanke på utvikling av kunnskap om den aktuelle brukergruppens situasjon. Resultatene vil kunne komme gruppen som helhet til gode. Samfunnsinteressen i at undersøkelsen finner sted, vurderes til å overstige ulempen den medfører for den enkelte registrerte, jf forvaltningsloven § 13d.

Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet har etter en samlet vurdering kommet frem til at det er rimelig å gi dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten slik at prosjektet kan gjennomføres.

Under henvisning til det som er nevnt ovenfor stiller vi imidlertid visse vilkår, jf forvaltningslovens § 13d.

Det er en forutsetning at undersøkelsen kun skal omfatte myndige personer og at dataene kun brukes til det formål de er innhentet for. Vi gjør oppmerksom på at forsker er ansvarlig for å behandle personopplysningene i tråd med personopplysningsloven.

For øvrig gjelder følgende vilkår:
- NAVs deltakelse er helt frivillig, og arbeidet med prosjektet må ikke gå utover etatens primæroppgaver, eller medføre ekstra kostnader for NAV.

- NAV avgjør selv eventuell medvirkning til undersøkelsen, hvilke medarbeidere som deltar og utstrekningen/formen på medvirkningen. Det forutsettes at alle medarbeidere deltar på basis av samtykke.

- I forskers møte-/kursdeltakelse, intervjuer, samtaler og andre aktiviteter i NAV-kontoret må det ikke omhandles eller gis til forsker identifiserende opplysninger om saker og NAV-brukere eller tredjepersoner som ikke har gitt samtykke til å bli omtalt i den aktuelle situasjonen. Ev. slike opplysninger som utilsiktet fremkommer må slettes. Det tilsvarende gjelder ved bruk av lydopptak.

- Dersom forsker vil observere situasjoner der NAV-bruker(e) er til stede, må dette på forhånd avklares med NAV-enheten og bruker må på forhånd ha avgitt informert samtykke til forskers tilstedeværelse og til prosjektets bruk av data om brukeren.

- Bruk av Navet/veiledningsplattformen må avtales med ansvarlig instans i NAV, jf vilkårene i NAVs retningslinje «Autorisasjon og tilgangskontroll for tiltaksdeltakere, studenter, hospitanter og personer under myndighetsalder v1.0». Instansen som autoriserer tilgangen må påse at bruken avgrenses til veiledningsplattformen.

- Det gis ikke tilgang til registre eller saksmappe/journal i NAV.

4

- Ingen andre enn prosjektleder og ev. dennes veileder ved UiS skal ha tilgang til materialet fra undersøkelsen.

- Prosjektleder og ev. dennes veileder er pålagt taushetsplikt om alle opplysninger som fremkommer i forbindelse med undersøkelsen og som er underlagt taushetsplikt etter arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningsloven § 7 og lov om sosiale tjenester i NAV § 44, jf forvaltningsloven § 13e.

- Forskeren må påse at opplysningene oppbevares slik at de ikke kommer uvedkommende i hende og alt materiale som ikke er anonymisert og der identifikasjon kan være mulig, må oppbevares innelåst eller tilsvarende elektronisk sikret.

- Datamaterialet anonymiseres så snart som råd etter innsamling, slik at opplysningene ikke på noe vis kan identifisere enkeltpersoner, verken direkte gjennom navn eller personnummer eller indirekte gjennom kobling av variabler.

- Rapport eller annen publisering av undersøkelsen må ikke inneholde personidentifiserbare opplysninger. Vi legger til grunn at personantall under fem medfører fare for personidentifisering/reidentifisering. Fordi det gjelder et lite antall deltakere på få NAV-kontorer, må prosjektet sikre at resultatene i nødvendig utstrekning kategoriseres/grovkategoriseres på et nivå som sikrer mot reidentifisering.

- For øvrig må vilkår som blir stilt i vedtak fra NSD oppfylles.

Dette vedtaket kan påklages innen 3 uker fra mottakelsen av brevet, jf forvaltningsloven § 29. Klagen fremsettes for Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet som forbereder klagesaken til Arbeids- og sosialdepartementet.

Med hilsen
Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet
Økonomi- og styringsavdelingen
Sikkerhetsseksjonen
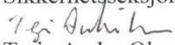
Terje Andre Olsen
Seksjonssjef

Knut Brenne
Seniorrådgiver

5

Appendix 4 – Letter of invitation – Interview

Invitasjon til intervju for prosjekt om kultursensitivitet i NAV

Jeg heter Maria Gussgard Volckmar-Eeg og arbeider som doktorgradsstipendiat ved Universitetet i Stavanger. Jeg gjennomfører et forskningsprosjekt om hva kultursensitivitet betyr i NAV, og hvordan det tas i bruk av NAV-ansatte på lokalkontoret. Hensikten med prosjektet er å få en bedre forståelse for hvordan en flerkulturell hverdag får innvirkning i måten dere NAV-ansatte på lokalkontoret gjør oppgaveløsingen. Jeg ønsker å få innblikk i hvordan dette ser ut fra deres ståsted, og kunnskap om hvordan deres arbeidshverdag ser ut. I tillegg vil prosjektet bidra til å undersøke ulike måter å skape endringer og sørge for kompetanseheving i organisasjoner, da i form av kurs og interne fagsamlinger. Målet er å få innsikt i hvordan kultursensitivitet gir uttrykk i praksis, og om dette er et nyttig perspektiv når det gjelder å utvikle flerkulturelle velferdstjenester.

Utvelgelsen av personer er basert på deltagelse på kurset «veiledning av innvandrerbrukere» holdt av NAV Integrering Oslo. Du får derfor en invitasjon til å delta i prosjektet basert på deltagerliste ved et av disse kursene.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Dersom du ønsker å delta i studien vil jeg gjennomføre et intervju med deg, enten pr. telefon eller ved personlig møte. Intervjuet vil vare ca. 1 time.

Spørsmålene vil handle om hvordan du opplevde kurset, og om og på hvilke måter du tenker at temaene på kurset kan knyttes til din egen arbeidshverdag. I tillegg er jeg interessert i å få kunnskap om din arbeidshverdag og erfaring med veiledning av brukere med innvandrerbrukere. Jeg ønsker at intervjuet også kan være en anledning til refleksjonsprosesser, der du kan få et utenfra-blikk inn i egen arbeidshverdag.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Intervjuet vil registreres som lydopptak og i notatform. Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, etter gjeldende regler for personvern og datasikkerhet. Det er ingen andre enn jeg som vil ha tilgang til personidentifiserbare opplysninger.

Resultatene av studien vil bli publisert som gruppedata eller anonymiserte data, uten at den enkelte kan gjenkjennes. Det vil si at ingen personnavn oppgis, og at ingen uttalelser blir gjengitt på måter som gjør det mulig å identifisere enkeltpersoner. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS. Prosjektet forventes å være avsluttet høsten 2020. Etter at prosjektet er avsluttet vil alle opplysningene bli anonymisert.

Deltakelse er frivillig

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt:

Maria Volckmar-Eeg, epost: <u>maria.g.volckmar-eeg@uis.no</u>, tlf: 92 88 11 07 / 518 32 586

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

………

(signatur og dato)

Appendix 5 – Letter of invitation – Fieldwork

Invitasjon til deltagelse i prosjekt om kultursensitivitet i NAV

I forbindelse med min doktorgrad ved Universitetet i Stavanger gjennomfører jeg en studie av hva kultursensitivitet betyr i NAV. Jeg ønsker å undersøke når, hvordan og hvorfor (ikke) kultursensitivitet og tverrkulturell veiledning anvendes av ulike NAV-ansatte på lokalkontor og hvordan dette henger sammen med hvordan man jobber arbeidsrettet med brukere. Hensikten med prosjektet er å få en bedre forståelse for hvordan en flerkulturell hverdag får innvirkning i måten NAV-ansatte på lokalkontoret gjør oppgaveløsingen. Ca 30 000 personer med innvandrerbakgrunn står i dag utenfor arbeidsmarkedet. Det å få disse ut i arbeid vil gi en betydelig samfunnsøkonomisk gevinst. Å få bedre kunnskap rundt metodene som brukes for å nå dette målet vil kunne bidra til bedre tjenestetilbud og mer målrettet veiledning. I tillegg vil prosjektet bidra til å undersøke ulike måter å skape endringer og sørge for kompetanseheving i organisasjoner. Målet er å få innsikt i hvordan kultursensitivitet gir uttrykk i praksis, og om dette er et nyttig begrep når det gjelder å utvikle flerkulturelle velferdstjenester.

Jeg vil være tilstede på ditt kontor i en periode for å få et innblikk i hvordan dette ser ut fra deres ståsted. Det betyr at jeg vil delta og observere på fag- og teammøter, delta i noen brukersamtaler, og ha samtaler med noen av de ansatte. Hvem jeg snakker med vil blant annet baseres på temaer eller problemstillinger som oppstår i møter, eller personer som innehar bestemte stillinger som er relevante for prosjektet. Jeg ønsker å få et bredt kunnskapsgrunnlag og god innsikt i deres arbeidshverdag.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Deltagelse i studien innebærer at jeg vil ha en samtale med deg om din arbeidshverdag og erfaring med veiledning av brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn. Temaer jeg vil være interessert i er hvilke problemstillinger du står overfor i din arbeidshverdag, og hva slags ressurser du har til å løse disse. I tillegg ønsker jeg å få innsikt i hva slags sakstyper du jobber med, hvilke vurderinger du gjør når du skal møte ulike brukere, og hva du vektlegger når du skal veilede brukere mot arbeid. Jeg ønsker også at deltagelse i studien vil gi deg anledning til å reflektere rundt egen rolle og praksis, og å få et utenfra-blikk inn i egen arbeidshverdag.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Intervjuer vil registreres som lydopptak og i notatform. Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, etter gjeldende regler for personvern og datasikkerhet. Det er ingen andre enn jeg som vil ha tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene.

Resultatene av studien vil bli publisert som gruppedata eller anonymiserte data, uten at den enkelte kan gjenkjennes. Det vil si at ingen personnavn oppgis, og at ingen uttalelser blir gjengitt på måter som gjør det mulig å identifisere enkeltpersoner. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS. Prosjektet forventes å være avsluttet høsten 2020. Etter at prosjektet er avsluttet vil alle opplysningene bli anonymisert.

Deltakelse er frivillig

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien eller om deltagelse, ta kontakt med meg:
Maria Volckmar-Eeg, epost: maria.g.volckmar-eeg@uis.no, tlf: 92 88 11 07 / 518 32 586

Appendix 6 – Interview guide

Intervjuguide til etter kurs

Takk for at du har tatt deg tid til å gjennomføre dette intervjuet med meg.

Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på bånd og transkribert. Intervjuet vil anonymiseres og lydopptaket slettes når prosjektperioden er over – august 2020.

Det er ikke noen rette eller gale svar, men jeg ønsker å se hvordan dette ser ut basert på en veileders ståsted – hvordan arbeider man med innvandrerbrukere, hvordan er forholdet mellom det dere lærer og deres arbeidshverdag – få tak i deres kunnskap om det dere gjør.

Intro (Navn, alder, kjønn)
- Hva slags erfaringsbakgrunn/utdanning har du?
- Kan du fortelle litt om jobben din?
    - ○ Stilling, team/avdeling
    - ○ Hvor lenge har du jobbet i NAV?

1. Opplevelse av kurs – hvorfor det?

a) Hvorfor meldte du deg på kurset?
b) Hvordan opplevde du kurset?
   a. Resonnerte det med erfaringen din?
      i. Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
   b. Ble det tatt opp ting du ikke hadde tenkt over selv?
      i. Lærte du noe (nytt)?
      ii. Er det andre former for kompetanse du mener er viktig når du skal veilede innvandrerbrukere mot jobb?
      iii. Var det noe du tenkte at burde vært tatt opp som ikke ble adressert?
c) Hvordan er kurset relevant for din arbeidshverdag?
   a. Var det nyttig? Kan det du lærte overføres til (en vanlig) arbeidsdag?
   b. Hvordan teker du ta du kan bruke det du lærte i jobben din?
      i. Hva tenker du at du kan bruke?
      ii. I hvilke tilfeller tenker du at du kan bruke det?
   c. Har du mange saker der det du lærte på kurset (ikke) er relevant?
   d. Har du mange innvandrersaker? Hva skiller disse fra andre saker?
   e. Hvorfor må man ha egne kurs rettet mot møtet med innvandrerbrukere?
d) Husker du caset som ble drøftet på kurset? (Beskrive/ta med?)
   a. Hvilke tanker hadde/har du om dette caset?

2. Fortell om saker (ikke nødvendigvis spørre om alle?) – hvorfor det?

a) Opplever du at det at bruker har innvandrerbakgrunn har betydning for hvordan man veileder mot arbeid?
   a. Kan du fortelle om en slik sak?
      i. For eksempel tiltak, vurdering av ytelse, innsatsbehov
   b. Hvorfor er det annerledes å veilede mot arbeid når bruker har innvandrerbakgrunn?
      i. På er annerledes? På hvilken måte? Hva skiller denne saken fra andre saker?
      ii. Er det forskjell på hva slags innvandrerbakgrunn de har?
      iii. Hva hvis en bruker har annen kultur enn deg? Hvordan ser det ut?
      iv. Arbeidsmarkedet? Hvilke faktorer spiller inn?
      v. Hva gjør det vanskelig?

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      c. Hva er en vanlig problemstilling når du skal veilede brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn?
          i. Hvor vanlig er det for eksempel at folk ikke vil jobbe med alkohol/svin?

b) Navn: legge ut navnene på bordet og lese de opp: Har det betydning, tror du, at disse navnene kommer opp i datasystemet/Arena?
      a. Er det vanskelig å snakke om, tror du?
      b. Hvis du får en ny bruker i Arena, med dette navnet. Hva gjør du videre? Hva vektlegger du? Hvordan spiller innvandrerbakgrunnen inn?
          i. Hva er neste skritt i saken? Kalle inn til samtale? Telefon? Gjennomgang av dokumenter/sak?
      c. Opplever du at disse navnene er dekkende for hvem som er innvandrerbrukerne i NAV?
      d. Hva tenker du om begreper som innvandrer, minoritetsspråklig og fremmedkulturell i NAV? Er det forskjell på disse gruppene, og hvem de er i NAV?
          i. Hva er forskjellen?
              1. Hvilke av disse gruppene arbeider du med i din jobb?
              2. Må du arbeide ulikt med dem?
                  a. Hvorfor?
              3. Kan visse typer saker knyttes til visse typer nasjonaliteter/visse typer innvandrere?

c) Hva vil du si at er din viktigste kompetanse/erfaring når du skal veilede brukere med innvandrerbakgrunn (mot jobb)?

d) Kjenner du mange med innvandrerbakgrunn?
      a. Møter du ofte folk med annen bakgrunn enn deg selv der du bor? I jobben?
      b. Vil du si at din egen (innvandrer)bakgrunn påvirker ditt møte med brukere?
          i. Hvordan?

3. Kultursensitivitet – hvorfor det?

a) Hva tenker du om begrepet kultursensitivitet (i ditt arbeid)?
      a. Hva betyr det? Hva er man sensitiv i forhold til?

b) Hva tenker du om hvordan disse temaene diskuteres i media? At noen innvandrere står utenfor arbeidslivet?
      a. Det blir ofte trukket frem at visse innvandrergrupper står utenfor arbeidsmarkedet – hva tror du er grunner til det?
      b. (Hva tenker de om at brukerne ikke er i jobb?/hvordan forholder de seg til dette?)
      c. Det er ofte en forestilling om kultur, hva tenker du om det?
      d. Opplever du at kultur er en viktig faktor i dine møter med brukere?
          i. Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
          ii. Hvordan

c) Hva vil du si at kultur er?