Article

Conceptualization of Culture and Ethnicity within Social Work in Two Indigenous Communities: Implications for Culturally Adequate Social Work

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study compares social work in Sami communities within Norway and Native American communities in Montana in the US. A total of 39 social workers were interviewed. We investigated the conceptualization of culture and ethnicity, as well as the implications of these constructions for a culturally adequate social work practice. We find that social workers in Sápmi conceptualize culture and ethnicity as hybrid and fluid, while the social workers in Native American communities have a more fixed and static conceptualization. When working in Native American communities, social workers' theme of inequality among groups, and the continuing effect of assimilation on family life. Among social workers in Sami communities in Norway, little attention is given to power relations among ethnic groups. These differences in construction affect both the framing and the legitimacy of culturally adequate social work within these two contexts.

Keywords:

Both historical and contemporary research provide examples of how social work continues to colonize and do injustice to indigenous people (Godinet, Arnsberger, Li, & Kreif, 2010; Lawler, LaPlante, Giger, & Norris, 2012; Lawrence, 2000). Consequently, indigenous communities and researchers demand culturally adequate social work practices that address cultural discrimination and colonization (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Hart, 2010; Herring, Spangaro, Lauw, & McNamara, 2013; Järvensivu, Pohjola, & Romakkaniemi, 2016; Weaver, 2004). Colonization is defined as 'to settle in, and take control of, land outside your own borders' (Vocabulary Dictionary, 2017). We define *Indigenous people* as culturally distinctive groups, belonging to a land colonized by another culturally dominant group (Anaya, 2004). We define *culturally adequate social work* as social work that is culturally competent, humble and contextual. Culturally competent social work encompasses knowledge, values and skills (Weaver, 1999). Culturally humble social work requires self-reflection for a deeper awareness of power, privilege, structural inequalities and power imbalance (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015). Contextual social work grounds social work within the context of local culture and history (Merete Saus, 2010). Within social work, there is a growing interest in a family involvement, in which the involvement of kin and families is considered to be essential in meeting the needs of indigenous communities (Belone, Gonzalez-Santin, Gustavsson, MacEachron, & Perry, 2002; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2014; Henriksen, 2004a, 2004b; Herzberg, 2013; Merete Saus, 2008b). This is the inspiration behind our study. Through a qualitative comparative design, we use family involvement as a starting point for dialogue with social workers. We study social work in both Sami communities in Norway and in Native American communities in Montana in the US. We investigate: 1) How social workers conceptualize culture and ethnicity in focus group settings, and 2) The implications of these constructions of ethnicity and culture for culturally adequate social work in practice.

Sápmi is the homeland of the Sami, the indigenous people of northern Europe, and stretches across four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In this study, we have included Northern Sami communities on the Norwegian side of Sápmi. The state of Montana contains seven Native American reservations. In this study we included the Flathead Reservation, the Fort Peck Reservation and the city of Missoula, home to a significant population of Native Americans. The Flathead

Reservation is home to the Salish, Kootenai and Pend d'Orielle tribes. The Fort Peck Reservation is home to the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes. Missoula is a small college town that is home to members from many different tribes.

Background for the comparison

We recognize that the history of colonization unfolded differently in Norway and in the US (Shanley & Evjen, 2015). In addition, the two countries differ significantly with regard to socio-economic condition, organization of social work and the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Križ & Skivenes, 2013). The indigenous peoples in Norway and Montana are also different when it comes to geography, climate, lifestyle and cultural characteristics. Despite these differences, studies have shown that there are some striking similarities in the social work histories concerning these indigenous peoples. Within child welfare, their histories have a number of parallels, specifically, mission and boarding schools, child removal, legal responses and conceptualization of childhood trauma (Jacobs & Saus, 2012; Nicolai & Saus, 2013). Despite the historical parallels and some shared contemporary challenges, there has been little dialogue or sharing of experiences within the development of child welfare and social services between Norway and the US to date (Jacobs & Saus, 2012). Our study is an effort to contribute to an international dialogue among social workers in indigenous communities. The aim is to provide knowledge that influences the development of international discourse and policy-making in respect of indigenous social work. We place our research within a social-constructivist paradigm, wherein the conceptualization of culture and ethnicity in social work is contextual, flexible and informed by a dialectic process between interpretation and experience.

Contextual social work in Sápmi

The Sami people are a collective of similar yet different cultural groups, differing both in cultural markers and in the use of the nine distinctly different Sami languages (NOU 1984: 18; Zachariassen, Saba, Larsen, & Fokstad, 2012).[1] The Sami formally acquired the status of an indigenous people in Norway in 1990 when the country ratified the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989 (No. 169) (Selle et al., 2015). Through the ILO convention and the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sami people now have the right to culturally adapted health services (Boine, 2007; Skogvang, 2009). Compared

with other European countries, the Nordic countries are perceived as mostly homogenous (Allardt, 1981; Kraus, 2015). Cultural homogeneity, social equality and universalism are the dominant norms within Scandinavian welfare politics and Norwegian social work (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kraus, 2015). The universal Child Welfare Act protects all children in Norway, as the Norwegian welfare system does not specify services with regard to ethnicity. Beginning in the 1970s, social workers working with Sami families advocated for Sami perspectives in social work. In 1995, an Official Norwegian Report was published (NOU 1995:6) that put the cultural adaptation of social work for the Sami population on the agenda for the first time (Boine, 2007; Henriksen, 2016). Despite the well-documented need for cultural adjustment, in practice the social work knowledge base does not always fit the local context in Sami communities, even today (Boine, 2004; Järvensivu et al., 2016).

Contextual social work in Native American communities

Native American Tribes share a common descent within the American continent. However, there are significant differences in both culture and language among the tribes (Utter, 2001).[2] Three acts, the Indian Education Act, the Self-Determination Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), have been vital for the development of child welfare services towards the indigenous population (Belone et al., 2002). Under these acts, some tribal governments have contracts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to provide social services (Belone et al., 2002). Today, both tribal governments and the BIA provide social services for Native American people on some reservations in Montana. Social work practice concerning child welfare is determined by the child's status as a tribal member. The ICWA applies to children who are enrolled members, or whose parents are enrolled members of a tribe (United States Code: Tilte 25 - Indians, 1978). Although ICWA laws are in place to protect the rights of Native American children, tribal member children are still being removed from their families and communities at staggering levels in many states (Hill, 2007; Lawler et al., 2012). Native American children constitute 1.3% of the identified children within child welfare in 2014, compared to the total child population, in which only 0.9% are Native American (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Federal and BIA social work practices do not always match tribal needs (Belone et al., 2002). Scholars within Native American social work advocate the need for a social work curriculum to

include worldviews from outside those of the dominant Western world (Crampton, 2015; Niles & Byers, 2008; Tamburro, 2013).

Culture and ethnicity

Bernardi (1978) defined *culture* as an acquired whole arising from an interaction of four factors: the individual, the community, the environment and time. The individual being a creator and carrier of culture is a central actor in creating, maintaining and transmitting culture, as cultures are shaped in human collectives (Bernardi, 1978). Ethnicity is a construction that emerges when communities identify as being culturally different (Eriksen & Sørheim, 2006; Jenkins, 2008). In our analysis, we view culture through two theoretical lenses. The first theoretical framework discusses culture and ethnicity as either fixed or changeable concepts; while the second views culture in relation to inequality in power. The terms static, fixed, fluid and hybrid are used in this context, not in positive or negative terms. They are used as analytical terms to help understand the different perceptions of culture.

Culture and ethnicity as fixed or changeable

Bhabha (1994/2004) stresses that cultures are hybrid concepts, and that there is no singularity or originality of cultures. All cultures influence each other. Bhabha (1994/2004) calls the meeting point of diversity within cultures 'the in-between space'. This in-between space provides a base for studying the ongoing negotiations of cultural identities (Bhabha, 1994/2004). Ethnic identity is situational and overlaps with 'communal' and 'local' identities, and one person can hold different identities depending on the situation (Jenkins, 2008). One example is when an individual identifies as 'Salish' in contrast to another tribal affiliation. In another situation, members of different tribes identify as Indians, as opposed to being non-Indians. A Norwegian equivalent is people identifying themselves as belonging to the Sami community of Karasjok, as opposed to belonging to the Sami community of Kautokeino. In another setting, they both identify as being from the Norwegian county of Finnmark, as opposed to being from a different county, Troms. Within social work, there is a tendency to conceptualize the ethnic and cultural identities of people from non-European or non-Euro-American cultural groups in fixed categories (Tsang, 2001). An alternative approach is to build a social work theory and practice around a

definition of ethnicity as a social consequence (Fong, Spickard, & Ewalt, 1995). This provides the space for a plurality of identities within ethnic groups.

Culture in relation to inequality in power

The Sami in Norway and the Native American tribes of Montana have experienced a profound loss of land and cultural oppression. Culturally adequate social work acknowledges this discrimination and the racism experienced by indigenous people (Herring et al., 2013). According to Comaroff (1996), the origins of ethnicity often lie in relations of inequality, with indigenous people sharing experiences of colonialism, assimilation and oppression (Anaya, 2004). Any understanding of ethnic relations needs to capture these historical and political power relations. Comaroff (1996) states: '(… there cannot be a theory of ethnicity or nationality per se, only a theory of history capable of elucidating the empowered production of difference and ethnicity' (p. 166). Said (2001) claims that colonization not only monopolizes land, but also narratives, ideas and worldviews. Dominant European cultures have had the defining power to name and label ethnic groups (Said, 2001; Smith, 2012). Thus, colonization forms the context for social work in indigenous communities.

Method and methodology

Indigenous methodologies

Indigenous methodologies aim to decolonize scientific knowledge by placing knowledge production within a local cultural and historical context (Smith, 2012). In our research design, we maintain a special focus on two central elements in indigenous methodologies: 1) to ensure the relevance of research questions and valid interpretation through a dialogue with the communities included in the study (Goulding, Steels, & McGarty, 2016; Porsanger, 2004), and 2) to give back research results to the community and participants (Porsanger, 2004). To help facilitate a dialogue, we initiated all interviews with a presentation of the Norwegian context for the Montana participants, and vice versa. Interviews were conducted in an alternating manner between the indigenous communities in Norway and Montana to facilitate a continuous presentation of our interpretations to the participants, and to ensure that a concluded dialogue further informed the interviews. For an in-depth description of ethical and methodological reflections on study design, see Nygård and Saus (2016). The research project received ethical approval from both the ethics committee of the

Norwegian Centre for Research Data and the Tribal Institutional Review Boards in Montana.

Comparative methodology

We followed a case-oriented comparative method, employing a holistic approach towards the social unit studied positioned within a contemporary and historical context (Ragin, 1987). Utilizing a holistic approach, we analysed the material within the entirety of the context within which it must be understood. While comparing and contrasting the viewpoints of the different groups, we aim to uncover more than just the differences and similarities between these social contexts. According to Weber, a 'comparison' provides an opportunity to reveal unique aspects of social specificities that would be impossible to detect otherwise (Mills, Van de Bunt, & De Bruijn, 2006). It enables us to see shared ideas and experiences from one context in relation to another. Performing a binary comparison within two different social systems, we compare the social phenomenon, rather than the social systems themselves (Dogan, 2002).

Method

The main method utilized in this study is focus group interviews, which are a way of exploring ideas, language and conceptions shared by a group of people within a context (Wilkinson, 1998). The participants are cultural and professional experts within the area of discussion. Periodically, the participants in group discussions included the interviewers in the dialogue, aiming to address and explain their knowledge and worldview to an 'outsider'. Such articulations provide an insight into what the group as a whole viewed as important, rather than the individual's personal perceptions. When group interviews were difficult to facilitate, individual interviews were conducted, which used the same questions and themes as in the group interviews, and were semi-structured. We made use of the focus group method in interviews with two or more participants, though interviewing in small communities sometimes resulted in only two interview participants. A Family Group Conference (FGC) was used as a reference point for dialogue about family involvement and cultural adequacy in social work. FGC was first developed based on Maori culture and tradition facilitating family involvement in decision-making processes (The Maori Perspective Advisory Committee, 1998/2001). For further details, see Burford and

Hudson (2000) and Lupton and Nixon (1999). We asked participants about their experiences with- and ideas about social work in their local communities.

Data construction

In total, there were 39 participants in this study, all of whom were social workers or stakeholders working in indigenous communities. The term *stakeholders* refers to persons with influence on social work practice, but without direct social work experience or current involvement. Participants were recruited among social work professionals for the purpose of the interview. In addition to being professionals, they held several roles as community members within the communities where they worked. The interviews were conducted from 2013-2015.

Interviews in Sami communities	Interviews in Native American communities
Presentation of participants	
16 participants: 5 men, 11 women	23 participants: 4 men, 19 women
Universal social services; staff both ethnic Norwegian and ethnic Sami	Specialized social services; staff mainly Native American
Participants' position: Child welfare workers Child welfare leaders Social worker at NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) Social workers and stakeholders at a Competence Centre	Participants' position: Child welfare workers Child welfare leaders Social workers in social services Leaders at social agencies Teachers at social work department at Tribal College Tribal council members
Interview description	
Total of 6 interviews: 4 group interviews with 3-7 participants 2 pair interviews 0 individual interviews	Total of 10 interviews: 2 group interviews with 4 and 7 participants, respectively 4 pair interviews 4 individual interviews
Participants were colleagues	Some of the participants were colleagues, others were recruited based on where they worked and lived

The interviews were done at workplaces.	The interviews took place in both public places and at workplaces, but also in the homes of participants or the interviewer.
The interviews were conducted during working hours.	Most interviews were conducted after work hours.
Language: Norwegian	Language: English

Analysis of the material

The research design is built upon Haavind's (2000) methodological framework of the 'interpretative method'. The research process is a dyadic circle between data construction and interpretation. We investigated the social world of the social actors, and their construction and conceptualization of reality (Blaikie, 2010). Inspired by Boine (2012) and Boine and Saus (2012), we researched social workers' objectives, rather than what they are actually doing. Following an abductive strategy, data and theoretical ideas were played against each other (Blaikie, 2010). The analysis of the interviews was organized thematically, and we used the data analysis programme NVIVO to systematize the data. Within the scope of this article, we have not focused on gender or class.

The differences in the organization of services for both the Sami and the Native American populations is an analytical challenge in this study. In Norway, all social services are universal, and the staff with social service agencies are of mixed ethnic affiliation. In Montana, the social services are specified toward ethnic groups, thereby resulting in agencies being primarily staffed by Native American social workers. In the study, we have not categorized participants as indigenous versus non-indigenous. This is because the category of Sami versus non-Sami is misleading, and in some instances wrong. As a result of the assimilation policy, categorizing ethnic identification in Northern Norway is not straightforward (Oskal, 2003; Selle et al., 2015), as people with Sami generational belonging might not necessarily self-identify as Sami (Pettersen, 2015). Some people identify as Sami in one context, and non-Sami in another. One example of complexity in Sami identification in our interviews was when one participant claimed, 'None of us is Sami.' However, another participant later shared that her own mother spoke Sami – still, she did not herself identify as Sami. When an interviewee self-identifies as non-Sami in a work-related interview, it does not preclude the same person from identifying herself as Sami in a different

context. We do not find the same dilemma in the Native American communities studied. In this study, we elaborate on the social work discourse as it is expressed in indigenous communities. During focus group interviews, we researched the meaning constructed within a collective setting, rather than concentrating on individual workers' perceptions. Independent of social workers' ethnic affiliation, these services and social workers are significant carriers of the conceptualization of culture and ethnicity within social work.

Results

Role of the extended family in social work

Sami social work professionals - In the Sami context, social workers negotiate the role of the extended family in the Sami community. In these negotiations, they view the extended family as being both present and not present. Social workers refer to some Sami families as being connected to traditional Sami culture while living within the cultural references of a modern lifestyle. They describe cultural identities as a balance between traditional and modern cultural expressions. In the interviews, stories of the different ways of being Sami, and the disagreement among Sami communities regarding what it means to be Sami, are expressed. Social workers describe how clients switch between the two identities: 'Sami' and 'Norwegian'.

Social workers describe how they strive towards an increased involvement of families in their practical social work. In general, there is a consensus that the involvement of family in social work practice is valuable. Though some agencies have created a curriculum within work procedures on how to involve family, most agencies have not created such procedures. Nevertheless, there is a shared understanding among colleagues of how families should be involved in practical social work. The participants we interviewed perceive a difference in their practice and attitudes towards family involvement and curriculum, compared to mainstream social services in Norway. As one social worker describes:

> *L1:*Sometimes we come across as a bit unprofessional (this can be the impression of other service providers). Because after all it's not the extended family that is ill, but the one person, or the mother and father that are arguing, or this child, or the nuclear family, one person in the nuclear family. And then we start going on and on about the network and everything. (Group Interview L)

Thus, this social worker experienced a different approach towards family involvement in the agency where she worked, compared to the norm in mainstream Norwegian social work.

Native American social work professionals - In the Native American interviews, there was no negotiation among participants on the role of family in Native American culture. They describe tribal cultures as family and community-oriented. In all the interviews, family and community involvement in social service provision was upheld as an important tool for working with Native American families, as participants considered it a mistake not to involve family in social work. Stories from social workers in the interviews in the Native American communities describe family involvement as 'common sense'. They say that this way of working is a natural part of the tribal social worker's mindset and cultural behaviour. Social workers did not describe a single universal method while talking about how family is involved in social work practice. Instead, they described a way of thinking, in which talking to- and being aware of family resources is common practice. Social workers make a distinction between tribal social work and state social work. Participants describe how they see social workers working in the state agencies as having a more model-driven and instrumentalist approach to cultural adjustment, compared to social workers within tribal social services.

Social work in local communities
Sami social work professionals - All agencies in Norway describe a connection to the local community. They argue that being familiar with the local culture and context facilitates flexibility in their work. The social workers describe how they are able to bring solutions closer to the families they serve, compared to what they would be able to achieve if working in an urban setting. Social workers tend to place community knowledge, rather than ethnicity, at the centre of their stories of how to adjust social services culturally. In their discussions, social workers connect cultural knowledge to life forms in local villages. One social worker illustrated the significance of local affiliation for ethnic identification in the following way:

> *L1:* This is a bit like the man saying that when we lived in Karasjok [a village with a strong Sami affiliation] I was a Sami, but when we moved to Trøndelag [a region with weak Sami affiliation] I wasn't a Sami anymore. (Group interview L)

In interviews, social workers describe how knowledge of Sami cultural characteristics are important in capturing cultural layers in their clients' identification and communication. One example is how clients engaged in a dialogue might embed claims with twofold meanings, as social workers familiar with Sami culture will be able to capture these layers. In the interviews many social workers show some sensitivity in distinguishing between Norwegian and Sami ethnicity. The Sami population is a majority in some communities and a minority in others. However, the participants claim that most inhabitants have some degree of connectedness to Sami culture. While working with clients, information on ethnicity is themed by asking what language they prefer to speak, or what is their name in Sami. Social workers say they do not directly inquire about their clients' ethnic affiliation.

Ethnicity as a concept is viewed and talked about differently in the Norwegian and Montana contexts. One example is how we construed ethnicity in interviews. Our research team sought advice from local mentors before conducting research in Montana, including one piece of advice we received from an elderly and experienced Native American researcher, which was to start the interview by asking what tribes were present. According to her, this would respectfully acknowledge the tribes. On the other hand, it felt indecorous to ask participants in the Norwegian interviews about ethnicity directly. In one interview in Sápmi, we asked participants about this difference. Participants confirmed, '(in Norway) you cannot ask that question'. We experienced that ethnicity is perceived to be a natural topic in the Montana context, whereas in the Norwegian context it is considered indecorous to inquire about ethnicity directly. Fellow researchers interviewing in a Sami context have experienced the same thing (Metere Saus, Salamonsen, Douglas, Hansen, & Thode, 2017). They also found that participants describe ethnicity as a sensitive topic. Ethnic identity is highly personal, and in some instances individuals might be uncertain about aligning themselves with an ethnic identity. Hence, inquiring about ethnicity can be emotionally charged in the Sami context.

Native American social work professionals - When asked about extended family and family involvement, the Native American social workers describe how community is part of the families' safety net, and, furthermore, how community is involved in social work. This broadens the scope of family involvement in social work by involving

community resources. One social worker proposed the involvement of community elders as cultural guides within social services, thereby facilitating a more systematic use of community resources. One stakeholder recounted how community elders helped the police in engaging with community members during crisis situations.

Communities at the Flathead and Fort Peck Reservations are small, where people know each other's families and kin. Social workers in the Native American communities describe community fellowship in relation to ethnicity. At Flathead, Fort Peck and in Missoula, indigenous and non-indigenous individuals live side-by-side. The communities gather around cultural activities, in which inhabitants may be divided to a certain extent between Native Americans and non-Native Americans. According to the social workers, having cultural knowledge means to know the structure, values and norms within the tribe, or in a multi-tribal work context.

Historical trauma and social work today

Sami social work professionals - In interviews with social workers in Sápmi, the history of oppression and assimilation is not as clearly articulated as it is in the Native American interviews. Nevertheless, in some interviews descriptions of conflicts and dilemmas regarding Sami identity were expressed:

> *L2:* When the idea of the extended family is strong and they (aunts, uncles, godparents, parents and others) interfere, and the younger family thinks that 'no, they should keep their noses out of it', then there's that problem. Sometimes (families) live with that, really strongly. The shift between the traditional thinking and the modern, divorced family with a mum here and a dad there – these ideas exist side-by-side. (Group interview L)

In the above-mentioned interview, social workers reflected upon how tensions in family life are influenced by assimilation and by the culture being in transformation. However, in most of the interviews in Sápmi, historical and contemporary colonization was not mentioned. As seen below in the presentation of Native American interviews, there is a significant difference in how assimilation and oppression are identified and addressed in these two contexts. In one interview in Sápmi, we asked the participants about this difference. The quote below is the reflections made by the participants:

> Q2: The Norwegianization policy that used to exist – today's generations are struggling, because of that policy. We know that.

Q2:   But that is mostly themed in the professional training that we get.
Q2:   I don't know to what extent the clients themselves talk about it.
Q3:   About Norwegianization?
Q2:   Yes. I think it's more in the professional training in Sami culture that we get – than what – than hearing it from the clients.
Q3:   Yes. I've been told stories that the Norwegianization was a traumatic experience. (Group interview Q)

Norwegianization is the Norwegian government's policy of assimilating Sami into becoming Norwegians. It seems as if even though the social workers know the history of Norwegianization, that knowledge is not integrated into their social work practice.

Native American social work professionals - In the Native American interviews, participants describe how they see the history of oppression continuing to negatively influence people, families and communities, even today. In their stories, social workers relate the struggle and suffering of families and individuals due to colonization. Viewing family problems in the light of colonization, social workers argue that social work practice needs to address the experiences of oppression. Historical trauma is an established concept for Native American social workers and stakeholders, as some social workers describe how the healing of historical trauma is part of social work practice and professionality. They describe how teaching people about tribal history and facilitating a process for clients to find their tribal identity are useful tools in addressing the trauma. The therapeutic model 'Mending Broken Hearts', which provides culturally-based healing from grief, loss and intergenerational trauma, is widely used (for further details see, White Bison, 2017). While not all agencies have these programmes, all participants link contemporary social problems to colonization, thus emphasizing the importance of including this dimension in social work practice. Involving family seems to be customary for social workers in the Native American interviews. In instances where families refuse to be involved, social workers see this in relation to colonization and historical trauma. As the quote below illustrates:

> *C1:* Because of historical trauma going through generations, it is hard for them to have a big meeting like the Family Group Conference, because of their own trauma, whether it is physical abuse, sexual abuse, so that's what we are finding is hard. Conflict within the family makes it hard to include them. (Group interview C)

Discussion

The main outcome of this study is to widen our knowledge of cultural adaptation in social work across different contexts. Through dialogue with social workers in indigenous communities, we find that culture and ethnicity are conceptualized differently within the two contexts of indigenous communities in Norway and Montana. The differences in conceptualization have consequences for the cultural adjustment of social work practice. In the following, we 1) discuss how culture and ethnicity are conceptualized as hybrid or fixed, followed by a reflection of implications for social work practice, and 2) discuss how the conceptualization of culture and ethnicity is related to power inequality before reflecting on implications of this construction for social work practice.

Culture and ethnicity as hybrid or fixed

In Sápmi, social workers construct culture and ethnicity as a continuum, in which ethnicity and culture are perceived as hybrid and fluid. Ethnicity is often constructed in abstract concepts as something changeable and negotiable. As a result, they lead towards an interpretation of culture as a phenomenon without clear boundaries. Hence, the 'us-and-them' dichotomy is constantly challenged in this Sami-Norwegian discourse. Social workers construct ethnicity in relation to geographical belonging. What it means to be Sami is situational and depends upon how Sami ethnicity is acknowledged within the community and family. Consequently, community knowledge is placed at the core of articulating culturally adequate services.

In Native American communities, social workers subscribe to a more fixed than hybrid understanding of culture and ethnicity. Ethnicity is understood as static, resulting in an interpretation of culture as something concrete, physical and material. Social workers relate ethnicity to tribal identification. Hence, cultural knowledge of the tribes is expressed as vital for culturally adequate services.

Implications for social work practice - The differences in the construction of culture and ethnicity in Sápmi and Native American communities, respectively, have implications for the development of culturally adequate social work. By viewing ethnicity as fluid, and perceiving families as influenced by both Norwegian and Sami cultural norms, Sami social workers reject the discourse of a single fixed way of living and being

Sami. In the Northern Norwegian communities, a large number of people occupy an in-between position, identifying themselves interchangeably between the dichotomies of ethnic Norwegian and ethnic Sami (Dankertsen, 2014). For understanding the approaches of social workers towards ethnicity in their local community, the theoretical frame of 'in-between-space' is useful. By constructing ethnicity as fluid, social workers can capture the continuum in the ethnic and cultural connections of families. Social workers describe a level of connectedness between the social worker and the community, allowing them to make services less static and more family-oriented. However, the construction of ethnicity as fluid and changeable complicates the legitimacy of culturally adequate social work. In Norway, social workers and policymakers have an ambivalent relation to when and if culture is deemed relevant. There is no collective agreement about whether it is useful to talk about two separate cultural groups. Articulating the content of culturally adequate social work, and gaining recognition for the need of such social work practices, is difficult in a context in which culture and ethnicity are made invisible, and the 'us-and-them' construction is constantly being negotiated.

Seeing culture and ethnicity as constant and concrete gives social workers in Native American communities a concrete approach to translating a non-indigenous social work to Native American cultures. By including traditional cultural values in social work practice, social workers inseparably enshrine family involvement in social work. Within tribal social work they strive towards including traditional resources, constantly aiming for services that are less instrumentalist and more family-oriented than mainstream social work. The construction of ethnicity as fixed and firm in the Montana context legitimizes the need for culturally adequate social work, thereby facilitating a discourse in which the debate concentrates on how to transform social work towards cultural adequacy, rather than discussing the need for such a transformation. However, we question whether the fixed construction of ethnicity possibly camouflages differences in ethnic affiliations among- and within families. We also raise the question of whether the fixed and static construction of culture and ethnicity provides less support for collaboration between social work in Native American communities and social work within other minority groups. This could make it a challenge to establish dialogue with other minority groups that might share similar challenges.

Culture and ethnicity related to power imbalance

In Sápmi, the power relations among ethnic groups are not a central theme in the construction of culture and ethnicity. Social workers do not link today's family dysfunction with the history of assimilation. This could imply that either the policies of assimilation currently have no effect on Sami families, or, to the contrary, that assimilation policies have become more ingrained and insidious in today's context. Research, however, shows the continued effect of oppression on Sami individuals and families (see Dankertsen, 2014; Eriksen, Hansen, Javo, & Schei, 2015; Johansen, 2004). The concept of cultural pain is used to describe shared experiences of assimilation (Saus, 2008a). Nonetheless, the Official Norwegian Report (NOU 1995) framing social work within the Sami population barely mentions the assimilation of the Sami people (Henriksen, 2016). Our study reflects that the consequences of assimilation and power inequalities are not integrated into social work profession and practice.

In Native American communities, social workers construct culture and ethnicity related to inequality between groups. Family problems are viewed as being closely related to the historical and current oppression. Historical trauma is defined as personal or collective physiological and socio-economic conditions caused by chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008). The historical trauma discourse has been widely used in both scholarly and Native American grassroots communities over the last two decades (Kirmayer, Gone, & Moses, 2014). This discourse comes to expression in the dialogue with Native American social workers.

Implications for social work practice - The difference in the conceptualization of power inequality has implications for the further development of culturally adequate social work in these two indigenous communities. Within social work in Sápmi, the systems for addressing the contemporary effects of previous oppressive policies have not yet been developed. The absence of this aspect in the construction of culture and ethnicity is striking, compared to the Native American context. In a feedback seminar in Sápmi, we presented our findings that social workers in Sápmi do not relate the assimilation politics to the family issues of today. We also commented on the absence of methods in Sápmi addressing these aspects. Upon

reflection, the participants commented that the political space in Norway is too narrow to address the historical trauma discourse. We argue that in this context it is difficult to argue for the further development of cultural adequacy, as the historical context for these arguments has not yet been given a voice.

In Native American communities, social workers view both dysfunction in family lives and the lack of identity in the light of historical trauma. They also see resilience in how people find strength and move forward, despite oppression. Social workers in Native American communities describe addressing historical trauma as a natural part of social work. This discourse extends legitimacy for the further development of culturally adequate social work addressing macro-structures of power inequality and oppression.

Conclusion

The difference in the construction of culture and ethnicity necessitates different adjustments of social work practice in the two indigenous contexts. In Sápmi, culturally adequate social work needs to persist in capturing the fluidity and hybridity of culture, resonating with the cultural ideas of the community where they work. The challenge is to capture the hybridity and fluidity, while keeping sight of the cultural differences and power inequalities. In Native American communities, culturally adequate social work needs to continue to capture the ideas of culture as firm and concrete, resonating with the ruling cultural ideas in communities. Social work must also be adapted to continue to provide adequate tools for addressing historical and contemporary oppression. A challenge for social work in Native American communities seems to be broadening the perspective to encompass other ideas of culture, thus facilitating cultural plurality within the group, as well as the possibility for sharing experiences across cultural groups. We argue that social work practice and development in indigenous communities in both Norway and Montana would benefit from a broader construction of culture and ethnicity.

Methodological considerations

We recognize that the empirical data used in this study do not fully represent the diverse indigenous populations of either Norway or Montana. However, the account of the social workers in these indigenous communities provides common ideas and

experiences from social work in a Native American and Sami context. Generating insight into how culture and ethnicity is conceptualized differently in different contexts, and how this might influence the cultural adjustment of practical social work, provides us with valuable knowledge. There are local variations in the perceptions of culture. Identifying conceptualizations of culture and ethnicity in the local context of social work, and their implications on legitimacy and the framing of cultural adequacy, are vital steps towards developing contextual culturally adequate social work. These findings are relevant and transferable to other contexts, in which social work should be culturally adjusted for minority groups.

End notes

1. For more knowledge on the Sami people, see Selle, Semb, Stømsnes and Nordø (2015), and Shanley and Evjen (2015).
2. For more knowledge on Native American communities, see Utter (2001) and Shanley and Evjen (2015).

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