Disciplining Disability under Danish Active Labour Market Policy

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Abstract

This article explores how caseworkers are re-constructing disability in the Danish welfare system and disciplining themselves and clients according to the active labour policy paradigm. Combining Foucault's ideas about discipline with Maynard-Moody and Musheno's method of interpreting street-level bureaucrats' stories (Foucault 1977; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), we analyze caseworkers' stories about their clients, fellow caseworkers and themselves to understand how they practice the ideology behind active labour policy. Our analysis uses Møller's (2009) interviews with 24 Danish caseworkers who administer social welfare and sick leave benefits based on disability as the primary eligibility criterion. We selected stories told by caseworkers that exemplify archetypes of good and bad citizens, good and bad clients, and good and bad caseworkers. Through interpretative analysis, we elucidate how caseworkers make sense of active labour policy and internalize the pressures of managerial reforms to discipline both citizens and each other.

Keywords

Introduction[1]

Active labour policy represents a shift from a secular to a moral perspective on social welfare. To be sure, the moral elements have always been part of welfare policy, but the neo-liberal turn in the last three decades is characterized by a strong re-emergence of a moral framework for governing the relationship between labour markets and social assistance, or between the work-based and need-based distributive systems (Stone 1984). This shift is particularly evident in policy towards disabled people. Over the course of the 20th century, disability as an administrative category for social policy moved from something seen as a character flaw to something seen as a biological impairment beyond the control of individual will. Since the 1990s, under

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current forms of active labour policy, disability is increasingly interpreted as a matter of personal willingness to work and moral rectitude.

When the Danish government began its active labour market policy in 1994 (Torfing 1999), policymakers as well as researchers expected that caseworkers would resist the new active orientation. They assumed that most caseworkers perceived themselves as advocates for the clients 'against' the fiscal interests of the state. In Denmark, as in most welfare states, policy reforms were in part directed at preventing this alliance between caseworkers and clients (Bang 2002). Like most neo-liberal reforms, Danish reforms addressed not only citizens' work motivations and incentives, but also *caseworkers*' motivations and intentions. A number of New Public Management reforms were put in place to constrain caseworkers' discretion. In Denmark and other places, by 10–15 years after active labour policy was introduced, caseworkers had, to a large extent, accepted the activation paradigm and were applying it to applicants (Møller 2009; Soss *et al.* 2011). Therefore, a key question for social scientists is why and how this change in caseworkers' attitude and behaviour came about.

Working in the tradition of street-level bureaucracy studies (Lipsky 1980; Hupe and Hill 2007), we explore how caseworkers are re-constructing disability in the Danish welfare system and disciplining themselves and clients according to the new paradigm. Combining Foucault's ideas about discipline and governing technologies with Maynard-Moody's and Musheno's method of interpreting street-level bureaucrats' stories (Foucault 1977, 1978; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), we analyzed caseworkers' stories about their clients, fellow caseworkers and themselves to understand how they practice the ideology behind active labour policy. Our analysis uses Møller's (2009) interviews with 24 Danish caseworkers who administer social welfare and sick leave benefits based on disability as the primary eligibility criterion. Inspired by Maynard-Moody and Musheno, we used caseworkers' own stories as morality plays that dramatize how they think about their jobs and how they reason about fairness and goodness in their work. Through our interpretations of these stories, we elucidate how caseworkers discipline both citizens and each other.

The Link from Policy to Administration

Frontline workers necessarily use discretion to implement policy and deliver government benefits and services (Lipsky 1980). Scholars have disagreed on whether street-level bureaucrats are controllable, and whether their exercise of discretion subverts the rule of law and policymakers' intent (Hupe and Hill 2007; Ellis 2011; Prior and Barnes 2011). In the updated edition of *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, Michael Lipsky writes that some readers concluded from his book that 'street-level bureaucrats cannot be managed', and he takes pains to correct that impression. He reviews several recent policy and managerial reforms to demonstrate that reforms can and do change street-level bureaucrats' behaviour. However, he notes, '[p]redictably, the reforms shifted and constrained discretion, but did not eliminate it' (Lipsky 2010: 223). Moreover, Lipsky emphasizes, eliminating discretion is not a desirable goal. In democracies, citizens value responsiveness to individual circumstances and, there-

fore, they *want* street-level bureaucrats to be able to exercise some discretion and not apply rules mechanically (Lipsky 2010: 229–36). Our study addresses exactly this conundrum: How do frontline workers balance their responsibility to uphold new policy rules with their responsibility to treat citizens as individuals and to uphold their professional standards and moral values?

To answer this question, we must first sketch the laws and management reforms that created a new political environment for caseworkers. Three laws established the policy framework for Danish disability-based welfare programmes: the *Law of Active Social Policy*, the *Law of Sickness Benefits*, and the *Law of Active Job Creation Effort*. The *Law of Active Social Policy* governs the right to social welfare. Its twin goals are to prevent unemployment and enforce the social obligation to work. The law is not targeted at particular social groups, but is a universal right applicable to every citizen residing in Denmark who has experienced employment changes connected to disability (Act No. 1460 of 12/12/2007: Chapter 4, §11). The *Law of Sickness Benefits*, on the other hand, targets wage earners, self-employed tradesmen, the unemployed with a right to unemployment benefit, and persons who have acquired a disability that is covered by the law of industrial injury (Act No. 563 of 09/06/2006: Chapter 2, §2). The *Law of Active Job Creation Effort* is targeted at all unemployed people as well as all citizens on sick leave. The law is designed to contribute to an efficient labour market by assisting both unemployed and sick citizens who are not terminally ill or eligible for early retirement to get a job (Act No. 439 of 29/05/2008: Chapter 1, §1).

Like active labour policy elsewhere (Van Berkel and Borghi 2008; van der Haar 2007), Danish policy included management reforms to steer caseworker behaviour, thereby reducing their discretion, their autonomy and their ability to thwart the intent of the policy reforms. Four management tools were especially significant. First and foremost, the so-called 'freedom of methods' (*metodefrihed*) for caseworkers was suspended. Instead of caseworkers being able to choose from a range of methods to evaluate citizen eligibility, they were required to use nationally standardized methods such as 'resource profiling' and 'work ability rating' (National Labour Market Authority 2009). The intent of this change was to narrow caseworkers' job tasks, so that instead of performing comprehensive client evaluations, they were now limited to evaluating only clients' work motivation and willingness to return to the labour market (Ministry of Social Affairs 2001). Second, the government introduced performance measurements to evaluate each municipality's level of job activation, that is, the proportion of applicants returned to work and the proportion of beneficiaries who received services or benefits. Third, caseworkers, municipalities and citizens were all subject to sanctions if they failed to meet performance targets. Finally, administration of benefits was somewhat deprofessionalized. Before active labour policy, most caseworkers were trained in professional schools of social work, undertaking a three-to-four-year clinical training programme leading to a degree as a 'social counselor' (*socialrådgiver*). Under active labour policy, agencies increasingly employed as caseworkers former secretaries and administrative assistants who were given a one-year social-work course at a public administration school to prepare them for frontline jobs in government agencies.

Møller's interviews were not designed to find out how management tools influence caseworkers, but the interviews revealed that caseworkers are influenced by the new policy and that for the most part, they are actively and consciously engaged in trying to adapt to it. Thus, our purpose is not to document whether, how and to what extent these policy and managerial reforms changed caseworker behaviour, but rather, to portray how caseworkers *understand their jobs* in light of the reforms and how they *think about* administering active labour policy – how they interpret the changes in their own thinking, how they believe their colleagues think, and how they think about educating and reforming their clients. In other words, we try to get inside the human brain of administrative discretion.

Discipline, Religion and the Use of Stories

Michel Foucault (1977) pioneered the idea that governments seek to discipline their populations both as individual citizens and as a unified population. He coined the terms 'governmentality' and 'subjectivation' (*assujettissement*) to describe how multiple levels of government use technologies of individualization to instill self-discipline in subjects, both officials and citizens, so that they accept norms of good behaviour and conform to those norms of their own will. The subjectivation of citizens describes the way this normative becomes a governing tool to discipline and to individualize subjects, for example, social clients (Foucault 1978, 2007: 184). Under neo-liberalism, the normative or 'good' citizen is one who works, and through market labour becomes self-sufficient for self and family. As Schram *et al.* (2010) note, in the context of active labour policy, social welfare programmes discipline citizens not only through punishments such as sanctions, but also through positive incentives and paternalistic educative programmes. Caseworkers are expected to *teach* and *model* normatively correct behaviour for clients and each other.

Foucault described the courtroom as a place where accused persons must explain their actions to a judge as in a 'confessional act' in order for the judge to decide whether the accused should be normatively corrected through punishment (imprisonment) or be allowed to enter a rehabilitation process (e.g. detention at a psychiatric hospital) (Foucault 2003), and he explored similarities between the judicial system and the church as confessional institutions. Foucault also saw social offices and mental hospitals as institutional settings where citizen-clients are required to 'confess' their incorrectness before their treatment and normalization can begin (Foucault 2000, 2003). Others have noted many similarities between the social organization of neo-liberal welfare policy and religious institutions (see, especially, Schram *et al.* 2009). In the Danish case, caseworkers approach the task of separating the deserving from the undeserving as a matter of revealing the client's motivation to work, and the encounter often becomes an occasion for the client-citizen to acknowledge the self-inflicted reasons why he or she has ended up seeking public assistance (Carstens 2002; Mik-Meyer 2004; Born and Jensen 2006; Møller 2009). As we analyzed the caseworkers' stories, we were struck by how often they expressed themselves in quasi-religious metaphors (confession and revelation), and how much their stories resembled the classic religious narra-

tive of conversion, the journey from doubt to faith. We do not make an argument about New Public Management and religious institutions in general, but we hope to show that by using religious metaphors and narratives as a lens to interpret the caseworkers' stories, we deepen our understanding of how they experience the process of self-discipline under active labour policy.

As Maynard-Moody and Musheno demonstrate, caseworkers' stories about citizen-clients express moral standards and reveal the norms and beliefs that shape their judgements. By listening to and analyzing such stories, we explore how *they* understand their work and, particularly, how they believe they gained experience and learned to become better street-level bureaucrats – as well as morally worthy people in their own eyes. In our research, as in studies in the USA (Schram *et al.* 2010), caseworkers often describe a personal trans-formation and a revelation that made them see the true worth of work labour activation. Therefore, by exploring how caseworkers tell stories about citizen-clients and colleagues, we get an opportunity to explore what normative criteria they apply in their discretion about eligibility.

Interpreting stories does not allow researchers to reach conclusions about the frequency of any phenomenon beyond the analyzed cases themselves. The strength of this method is its ability to generate new understanding of how legitimacy is constructed and used by professionals to categorize and manage client-citizens rather than how often something happens. Gathering stories during an interview and examining them retrospectively also has some advan-tages over more structured interviewing (see Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003: ch 3). During an interview, informants often engage in self-censorship or frame answers hoping to please the interviewer. When informants are given the chance to tell a story, however, they usually get engaged in the telling, remembering both the facts and emotions of the events and forgetting about self-censoring and self-presentation. In that sense, informants' stories can be more honest and more revealing than their purely descriptive, explanatory or analytical answers to questions.

Data and Methods

Our research material comes from one-hour long interviews conducted by Møller with 24 Danish caseworkers who administer social welfare and sick-leave welfare programmes.[2] The original research project aimed to explore solidarity theory using Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984). The interviews were structured to elicit the caseworkers' solidarity orientations and modes of categorizing clients – relatively crude and stereotyped versus relatively nuanced and individualized – in order to determine whether there is a correspondence between the type of solidarity orientation and the mode of categorization. The interviews were conducted in 20 Danish municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants in August and September 2007.

The interviews were systematically analyzed for correspondence between caseworkers' solidarity orientations and ways of categorizing. To support a systematic analysis, NVivo software was used to code all interviews. The overall conclusion was that caseworkers tended to have mechanical solidarity

orientations, that is, they made paternalistic and moralistic judgements. Case-workers with this orientation were more likely to make stereotyped classifica-tions of citizens, distinguishing between 'worthy deserving' and 'undeserving' citizens, and to let strong social stereotypes such as 'the malingering woman' determine their evaluation procedures. Only four caseworkers out of 24 had an organic solidarity orientation, that is, they treated everyone as equal members of the collectivity and they tended to use empirical rather than moralistic approaches to evaluating clients (Møller 2009: 225). In most inter-views, caseworkers told stories to clarify or explain their answers to Møller's semi-structured questions. In the original research, these were coded as 'case-worker stories'. For this article, we reviewed all the caseworker stories and selected six we thought were most relevant to understanding how caseworkers interpreted 'active labour policy' and their responsibilities under it.

To get at how the caseworkers perceive the important moral and political aspects of their jobs, we selected excerpts from the selected stories where the caseworker seemed to be describing an archetype, an example that stood for something larger. We classified the stories into archetypes of good and bad citizens, good and bad clients, and good and bad caseworkers, reflecting how caseworkers used their stories to illustrate a positive or negative lesson (see figure 1). For the good and bad client archetypes, we used the stories in which the caseworkers themselves portrayed a client as worthy or not. For the good and bad caseworker archetypes, we used stories in which caseworkers either

Figure 1

Stories as archetypes of good and bad citizens, clients and caseworkers

Social role: / Normative qualities:	Citizen	Client	Caseworker
Good	1. The ideal citizen: 'Those who need help but don't ask'	2. The deserving client: 'The straight-A girl with a brilliant career'	5. Reformed caseworkers: 'The story of my own conversion'
Bad	6. Discipline through warning stories: 'The good faker and the naïve caseworker'	3. The undeserving client: 'The woman whose engine stopped'	4. Unreformed caseworkers: 'The ones I call "Florence"' 6. Discipline through warning stories: 'The good faker and the naïve caseworker'

talked directly about how they had grown from poorer caseworkers into better ones, or in which they talked approvingly or disapprovingly about other caseworkers.

We analyzed the stories for insights into how social workers came to learn, accept, and discipline themselves and clients according to a new way of thinking about disability. We also read all the stories as pedagogical – that is, we looked for the lessons caseworkers seemed to draw about what makes a client good or bad (or difficult), and what makes a caseworker skilled and professional or not-so-skilled and not-so-professional. To analyze the stories, we developed a set of questions that we applied to each story.[3] Having agreed on the structuring questions for our interpretative analysis, we each wrote a preliminary analysis of each story. When we shared our drafts, we often disagreed, and the process of discussion, disagreement and persuasion almost always led to more precise and (we think) convincing interpretations.

The Stories

1. The ideal citizen: 'The story of those who need help but don't ask'[4]

Social assistance is one of many relationships between individual citizens and the state. The eligibility criteria for each social assistance programme embody a political consensus that the kinds of people included in the programme have a legitimate claim to assistance from the community as a whole (Stone 1984). Active labour market policy represents a changed political consensus about the kinds of people who deserve social aid. The story of the ideal citizen exemplifies what this changed political consensus means at the level of an individual caseworker.

In answer to a question about why some clients are harder to evaluate than others (Møller 2009: 352), the caseworker began with a philosophical speculation about human nature:

> 'Well, everything about the discussion of whether it is self-worth or self-confidence and so on and so forth. Like – and maybe this is where the self-worth is sitting – in the backbone, and maybe this is MISSING in some people. What do I know (. . .) [I]t may be much more easy to break it in some people than in other people (. . .). These are kind of big questions that we don't use on a daily basis (. . .) But it is definitely some of the stuff I'm thinking a lot about.'

For this caseworker, there are two kinds of people, those with self-worth or self-confidence that enables them to be hardworking, self-supporting citizens, and those who lack these traits and therefore become dependent on the state for assistance. From her introduction to the '*big questions*', she went directly to examples of two colleagues:

> 'That we here in the house [office] have – well we have had a colleague who lost his arm at a very young age because of cancer and who is by the way dead by now as a 39 year old man (. . .) – and he slaved away until the end and didn't want a [disability] pension (. . .) And Johan who we have here, who is blind and makes

a huge effort and goes out and gives talks to people about why they can't get a flex job, for example, right?'

In this story, the caseworker uses her two colleagues as a kind of natural experiment to illustrate that personal character, rather than physical impairment, determines whether a person works or seeks assistance. Both colleagues had what would be considered severe impairments in most modern disability benefit schemes. By using these vivid examples of people with severe impairments who work, the caseworker makes her argument that the difference between assistance seekers and non-seekers must be found in personal character, specifically, a certain kind of personal strength that she likens to the '*backbone*'. If even these 'obviously' severely impaired people can work, that must be proof that working is a personal choice. The caseworker clearly believes that whether one works or not is a matter of will, not bodily capacity or incapacity. By expressing will with an anatomical metaphor, the caseworker explains how the physical dimension of work ability is ultimately subordinated to a purely mental phenomenon. Instead of treating impairment as a physical matter, the social worker integrates the policy idea of activism as a particular attitude people should express in order to avoid a negative spiral of deteriorating impairment. Her story 'proves' to her that despite having severe impairments, people who hold the correct active attitude do not ever ask for help.

The question of will versus ability, the caseworker says, is not something she thinks about '*on a daily basis*'. In other words, it does not consciously or directly enter into her decision-making process. But, the issue of will and personal character are '*the big questions*' that inform eligibility decisions in the background, and always have (Stone 1984). Implicitly, it seems, the good citizen will not ask for benefits, will not even need benefits, because he '*takes care of everything himself*'. Pushed to its logical conclusion, the caseworker's reasoning implies that there are no citizens who really deserve disability benefits.

The storyteller presents two model citizens who are heroic, not ordinary, people. The first is portrayed as a martyr figure who lost his arm to cancer: he '*slaved away*' and died at age 39, never having asked for a pension. We do not know whether he asked for other kinds of help from the state or from anyone else. However, he certainly received his medical care courtesy of national health insurance and tax contributions of his fellow citizens, but the caseworker does not think of this as social assistance. She sees assistance through a narrow lens – the door to her office – and in that lens, the man never appeared asking for help. The blind colleague, too, almost certainly received assistance from the state. The social worker says that he has an assistant to help him organize his papers and '*that is the only assistance he gets*'. Seen from an economic perspective, however, a full-time assistant at work is hardly minor help, because the state pays a full-time salary to one person to act as assistant to another. Following Foucault, we see the caseworker as a governing actor who uses normative standards of active labour policy as disciplinary tools more than management tools, such as resource profiling and work ability rating. The idea of *activism* and the concept of *willingness to work* as an *attitude* are disciplinary tools to praise her colleagues as model citizens who behave

correctly – and to hold them up as good models, in contrast to assistance-seeking citizens without a '*backbone*'.

2. The deserving client: 'The straight-A girl with a brilliant career'[5]

A caseworker told this story in response to a question whether she believed that clients with chronic pain are treated differently than other clients, and if so, why (Møller 2009: 352)?

> '*Some years ago I had a young girl or a young woman who was 34–35 years old. (. . .) She had had a brilliant career and she was kind of a straight A-girl all the way through high school and she went out and got a training place in a bank. Before she was fully trained, she was headhunted to another department and everything was going straight ahead. But she also experienced a riding accident when she was 18 years old. She had problems with her neck and these problems became worse (. . .). She really had a brilliant career. Then she was married and had some children and then suddenly everything fell apart and she ended up on my desk one day.*'

The caseworker clearly likes and even admires this client: a straight-A student, a brilliant career, driven to find a professional job, sought after by headhunters. Or rather, the caseworker admires the person the client once was, because now, everything has fallen apart:

> '*And she came and turned in a sickness CV she had done herself containing I don't know how many pages. The CV was schematically divided into sickness types, periods where her illnesses had been acute, symptoms and treatments, and there was so much that I thought "oh my god here is something totally wrong"* '

Here is an important key to how caseworkers assess applicants they feel compassionate about – they consider not only the person who '*ends up on my desk*' but perhaps give even more weight to the *former persona* of the applicant before she entered the benefits office. Unquestionably, this client's middle-class attributes appealed to the caseworker, and because of that strong appeal, her first reaction was not suspicion of the client's motives (as in the next story), but rather empathy along with skepticism about the woman's own self-diagnosis: '*Oh my god, here is something totally wrong*'. If this woman could construct such a complex and detailed '*sickness CV,*' the caseworker apparently thought, she must have a serious psychiatric disability – not an attitude problem nor a physical disability. Once the caseworker made this mental shift in her mind, she approached the client differently:

> '*Then I managed to wangle a deal with a psychiatrist we were cooperating with, because I found the case odd, weird. (. . .) I then talked to [the client] about it and she reacted saying "Ahhh – a psychiatrist" (. . .) because it wasn't her head that was the problem (. . .). It was a lot of physical things and then it actually turned out that she had a personality disorder in spite of all the things she had been able to do, and when we had all this stuff peeled off her, it turned out that her father actually always did suffer from depression without ever being treated for it, and he has always been the*

kind of father who laid down at home on the sofa and the family had to adapt to this. (. . .) There were so many other things to it and she actually ended up receiving an early retirement pension.'

And so the caseworker helped this client and eventually awarded a pension. We cannot be sure whether this caseworker is more or less predisposed than others to look for signs of mental illness in applicants for disability benefits, but her mention of a father '*who always did suffer from depression without ever being treated for it*' strongly suggests that she believes depression is a real, clinical illness that should be treated. (By contrast, in the next story the caseworker sends an apparently depressed client to a fitness centre rather than to a mental health professional.) The caseworker seems to think that the woman's family history serves as corroborative evidence for her disabilities.

In addition to the caseworker's belief that mental disabilities can prevent people from working, her story suggests that she was motivated to investigate the possibility of mental illness by the client's high-status, '*brilliant*' career history and her outward appearance as a fine middle-class woman. In other words, the caseworker's clinical assessment was preceded by and filtered through her moral assessment and personal attitude toward the client. She interprets the woman as an example of a good citizen who '*fell apart*', that is, lost her self-discipline and her attachment to the labour market. However, by sharing her family history and agreeing to see a psychiatrist (after first resisting), the client essentially confessed her own incorrectness and accepted the caseworker's interpretation; thus, she was given empathy and help in return. In this light, the story exemplifies what Foucault called 'subjectivation', a process whereby an individual comes to internalize not only a bodily discipline but also a mental ordering; in this case, the good citizen accepts she has a psychiatric disorder that can explain her unemployment and her role as a passive sickness benefits receiver.

We therefore also see this as a conversion story and not just as a 'help' story. The caseworker helped – indeed pushed – the client to come to a revelation that she had psychological rather than physical problems. In fact, both caseworker and client had revelations, '*once we had all this stuff peeled off her*'. The client went from thinking she did not need a psychiatrist to realizing that she did have psychiatric problems and accepting long-term treatment. With that conversion came a transformation to a new state: now she is '*very happy*', the caseworker concluded.

3. The undeserving client: 'The woman whose engine stopped'[6]

This story came in response to a question about what factors and situations make evaluation of a client difficult (Møller 2009: 352). The caseworker reveals how she, and probably other caseworkers, use their own suspicion of citizens' lack of motivation as an important tool in assessing eligibility. In this story, instead of pursuing the physical limitations the client claims prevent her from working, the social worker notices how she fits a general stereotype of idleness, namely the stereotype of the welfare mother who uses maternity leaves to escape from the labour market:

'It can be that you [a client] have something that makes you go and hide yourself a bit in an unemployment fund, right? Then you [caseworker] have to break the cycle (. . .). I have a young woman right now, where I'm thinking: "She hasn't been doing anything since 2003, what is going on here?" (. . .) Then she remembers she has hyper-mobile joints (. . .). "And this is not a disease", I tell her, "it's a condition you have which should not prevent you from working". But, now this is what takes up the whole page plus that she hit her pelvis in 1994 I think it was (. . .). She draws out now that she cannot work anymore, by the way. Actually she hasn't been on the labour market in many years. And then there are two maternity leaves on top of it. So you see where we are?'

Caseworkers often conceive attitude problems as lack of motivation, and associate motivation with physical activity. As the caseworker continues this story, she almost imagines the client as a car that will not start because its spark plugs do not fire:

'Well, she is missing this spark, this ability to sell herself (. . .) you see, she cannot sell herself properly. And I do think that you lose some spirit when you allow yourself to stay in this pace (. . .). You can almost see it, when she arrives here. Well there is nothing, there is no movement (. . .). What I have done then is to give her an offer, which is actually a good offer we have in here at the moment, which we can give to people who need a BOOST in order to get going [at få i gang]. . . We send them to a fitness center, where there is a physiotherapist, who looks after them three times a week.'

The Danish word for fitness centre is '*motionscenter*' – literally a motion centre. The expression '*at få i gang*' translates as both 'to get going' and 'to get or set in motion', and here, the double-entendre captures how the caseworker uses medically prescribed 'motion' to 'get the client going' as someone who makes effort. By ordering clients to exercise the caseworker believes she can jump start their engines, so to speak. Once the client is physically active in the fitness centre, she will be motivated to learn the value of contribution or as the caseworker expresses it herself: '*because if you can't contribute to anything [real] it's better to be active like this*'. Using exercise as a disciplining tool starts a process the caseworker believes will change the client's lifestyle and hence her negative attitude about the labour market. This caseworker's connection of exercise, motivation and attitude in one context demonstrates the subtle relation between will and character as discussed by Foucault (2000: 176–200) in his analyses of the 'dangerous individual' on the one hand, and on the other hand, the relation between disciplining the mind through controlling the body (Foucault 1977: Part three, pp. 135–94). In this story, the client is something of a 'fallen woman' who has lost the desire to contribute to society and who instead lives off social benefits and the efforts of others. The caseworker conceives her job as making sure the woman regains the '*spark*', which is not only physical energy but the right attitude: to *want* to work. Her ending to the story is telling. '*When you can't contribute to something, it's better to be activated (literally: put in motion) in this way*'. Even if a client does not *feel* the virtue she is supposed to

feel (contributing to the larger good), she can be made to duplicate the virtue by going through the motions, in the same way a religious believer might acquire faith by going through the rituals of devotion.

Here we see vividly another point made by Foucault about postmodern governmentality: the state has an interest in controlling its subjects, in this case, the desire to work and to contribute. And, quite important for Foucault, the state controls their wishes and desires in part by controlling their bodies, in this case, making their bodies *move* and their muscles *work*. By sending lazy and depressed clients to the fitness center, caseworkers get them to make efforts in spite of their slothfulness.

4. Unreformed caseworkers: 'The ones I call "Florence" '[7]

The caseworker who told the following story has a paralyzed arm. She told this story when she was asked to tell about her job evaluating the working capacity of clients with a health issue (Møller 2009: 352). The caseworker had 16 years of experience at the time of the interview, so that she worked extensively before active labour market policy began. This story could be a textbook case of how active labour market policy transforms – or should transform – caseworkers as well as citizens. She depicts two types of caseworkers – unreformed and reformed, and likens unreformed caseworkers to Florence Nightingale, an iconic do-gooder:

> 'Well, I experience some caseworkers here, sometimes I still unintentionally call people who – well you know who I mean? Those who want to help people, well there is still a kind of "Florence" to it.
> *Interviewer: What does that mean?*
> *Caseworker: To me it means that you have a help gene (. . .), that you want to help people, that you want to help people get better or to feel good. (. . .) What I experience is that it's hard for the caseworkers to get through this paradigm shift. (. . .). So, I have to follow the goals and the outcome requirements given [from the state], and there I think I can sense a paradigm shift (. . .). But there are still [caseworkers] (. . .) – well now you can hear my prejudice when I say "still"; there you can hear that I don't believe it should be like that (. . .). If you ask some caseworkers in this organization, then there are some who say: "I'm hired to help the weak", and where I say, "No, you are not. You are employed to get people into jobs".'

The image of the '*help gene*' suggests the caseworker thinks the disposition to help people is deeply ingrained and conflicts with the new activation philosophy. By saying, '*It's hard for caseworkers to get through this paradigm shift*', this caseworker shows empathy for the Florences of the world, and seems to indicate that she has been there and understands all too well. Then she switches from talking about caseworkers in general to telling how she personally overcame the difficulties: '*So, I have to follow the goals and the outcome requirements given [from the state]*'. In this sentence, we can almost feel how the process regulations and outcome targets discipline caseworkers. Metaphorically, she seems to use the rules and targets as exercise equipment to discipline herself, having already understood the shift in

thinking that active labour market policy demanded of her before she was actually able to act on the new thinking.

From her vantage point as a reformed caseworker, this caseworker can identify colleagues who have not yet reformed, and she feels disdain for them, although catches herself for '*unintentionally*' calling them a disparaging name ('*Florence*'). Yet, she still seems conflicted about her own transformation because she calls herself '*prejudiced*' for believing that caseworkers should not be '*like that*' – committed to '*help[ing] the weak*'. The influence of her own experience as a person with a disability is hard to know, but it seems plausible that because she herself works despite having a serious impairment, she might not have much respect for those caseworkers who take such impairments seriously. Like the '*Story of the straight-A girl*' (above), this story about the unreformed caseworker exemplifies how subjectivation occurs under the neo-liberal regime of labour market activation. Here we see how caseworkers (as opposed to clients) discipline both themselves and each other by making activation ideas fit with their own morality and professional identity.

This story has a complex ending, one that captures how active labour policy creates tension for both reformed and unreformed caseworkers:

> '*It would in any case be difficult – or it would be some challenge to find the pleasure in one's job when you are employed at a job center [the agencies responsible for activating and helping citizens who apply for benefits] if you cannot see the purpose in getting people into jobs. That is, if you can't understand that a job gives a human value (. . .) and self-sufficiency.*'

The caseworker shows that she now accepts the new philosophy – '*a job gives a human value and self-sufficiency*'. At the same time, she is keenly aware that this *is* a new philosophy, and she displays empathy for caseworkers whose views are out of synch with their job requirements, almost as if her own 'helping gene' is expressing itself.

5. Reformed caseworkers: 'The story of my own conversion'[8]

This story is a direct continuation of the previous one. The same caseworker went on to talk about the moment when she faced a tension between her old way of thinking and the new one and saw the light. In the previous story, she described how she was disciplined by '*the goals and outcome requirements*' of active labour market policy. In this story, she reveals that it was her boss in a previous job who initiated the process of her discipline and transformation:

> '*Five years ago a boss (manager) came to me during a period where I was dealing with sickness leave benefits and said to me: "I think you should tell people that it's your job to get them out of that chair and out [back to work]". No, I certainly wouldn't do that, because I was a social worker.*
> *Interviewer: But why was that in conflict with your role back then?*
> *Caseworker: Well, because this was how I was thinking, that I shouldn't put pressure on people. I should be more, albeit not an advocate for people, then at least I had to voice their case.*'

The boss actually tried to script her conversations with citizens: '*I think you should tell people that it's your job to get them out of that chair and out [back to work]*'. The caseworker resisted. She thought to herself that she would not speak the boss' words, because they conflicted with her identity: '*No, I certainly wouldn't do that because I was a social worker*'. Quite typically for conversion stories, the caseworker could identify the moment of her conversion and even some thoughts that went through her mind, but the reason why she changed her mind remains a mystery to her:

> '*And I really don't know why I did it, but then I tried. I took [the boss's advice] to heart and then I tried to make kind of an introduction to a conversation that I could use almost in general with everyone during the first meeting who had reported sick for work, that is, someone who receives sickness benefits. (. . .) That is, there are times when you don't say it [outright], but actually get the picture described during the first conversation: "We have a common task here. I must see to it and you must see to it and together we must see to it [that the client gets a job]".*'

Instead of adopting the boss' script, she made up her own that she could use with *all* clients who reported sick for work. Significantly, she does not see her role as first sizing up citizens, then framing the problem for them. She believes that all people who take sickness leave, with the possible exception of the seriously or terminally ill, should be told in the first conversation that their mission is to get back to work. At this point, she has internalized the idea of active labour market policy. The fact that she wrote her own lines instead of simply parroting the boss' words indicates that she experienced a genuine conversion. She could bring forth a statement of faith from her own self. She formed her own concept of how to approach citizens by making an alliance with them ('*We have a common task*') as opposed to the boss' one-sided, authoritarian approach (the social worker should '*get them out of the chair*'). In a way, she stayed true to her identity as a caseworker by working with clients instead of opposing them, but at the same time, she adopted the activation concept of her proper role by adapting it:

> '*I had to acknowledge to my boss – no I'm just kidding – that he was right. (. . .) I actually realized something I know very well from my education: that if you are talking within the same [meaning] frame and you are pursuing the same goal, then there is a bigger chance that you together will get to the same result, right? (. . .) And I might not go so far as to say it was a huge revelation to me, but I certainly realized that it worked and it has worked and it still does.*'

On the surface, the caseworker says that this experience was not really '*a huge revelation*', yet the word 'revelation' clearly came to mind when she told this story. She ends with something like the sense of awe that comes with revelations: '*It worked, and it has worked, and it still does*'.

6. Discipline through warning stories: 'The good faker and the naïve caseworker'[9]

Unlike the caseworker of the previous two stories, the woman who told this story was relatively young and had been working as a caseworker for only

about a year. Her story illustrates one important way that new caseworkers learn – from mistakes. The question that prompted this story was about her experiences regarding how clients present themselves in work evaluations (Møller 2009: 352):

> *'I ran down to Clara [fellow caseworker] and said to her: "Clara, didn't you just meet with the man wearing the red jacket and the crutches?" "Yes" she says. "He has had a fracture of the leg. And his legs don't work and that's such a pity for him". "Well, why don't you come and see here, because right now he's walking out on Bernstoffsvej with his crutches under his arm". Then you could see how he lazed across the street over to the gas station where he probably was going in order to buy a couple of beers. And then he went back to the bus stop. So, this happened just before we got off work. Then, when I passed him on my bike when I was on my way home from work, he sat at the bus stop with a beer in his hand, and the crutches were standing placed in the corner, right? And this is how some people present themselves.'*

The oldest stereotype in disability policy, going back at least to the 15th century, is the citizen who feigns disability to avoid work and elicit alms. In English poor law policy, the beggar who used crutches to fake disability was probably the most prevalent figure in conservative discourse promoting stringent controls on alms. The faker-on-crutches figure shaped modern disability policy into an administrative process whose central purpose was to distinguish genuine from feigned disability. All the elaborate clinical, psychological and work-testing methods used in contemporary disability benefit programmes evolved from this one impetus: to unmask the deceitful claimant on public support (Stone 1984: 31–2).

The stereotype of the faker-on-crutches persists, as this story shows. This is not to question the truth of the caseworker's story or to claim that disability fakers do not exist. Rather, the disability faker is a stereotype in the sense that he or she represents the caseworker's shadow enemy. Disability programmes have always tasked disability-determiners with the job of protecting the state against 'feigning thieves'. Caseworkers thus see themselves in a kind of political contest with citizen-claimants. When they discover a discrepancy between the citizen's story (*'He has had a fracture of the leg and his legs don't work'*) and the truth as they observe it (*'He's walking [on the street] with his crutches under his arm'*), they feel duped, naïve and likely also remiss in their public duties. Although the narrator in this story does not exactly gloat, she presents herself as a better detective than her colleague, and when she asks her colleague to come to the window, she uses the scene outside to discipline both of them.

Caseworkers share these faker stories as warnings to each other to be ever vigilant in their jobs. Thus, this story has two archetypes: at one level, it depicts a classic bad citizen who seeks to free ride on society; at another level, it depicts a caseworker who fell down on the job, because of a misperception that transformed her good intention into incompetent behaviour (she failed to detect a faker). Inside a social welfare bureaucracy, the faker story's main function is to discipline caseworkers. Indirectly, through caseworkers' heightened sensitivity to cheating, this story also functions to discipline citizens.

Hence, in figure 1 we have categorized this story as both 'bad caseworker' and 'bad citizen'. Outside government bureaucracies in the larger realm of public discourse, faker stories serve another political function. In policy debates about liberalizing or constricting social welfare programmes, these stories warn legislators and the general public about invisible enemies in their midst. Faker stories always serve to push social policy in the direction of stringency.

Conclusion

Administrative data can tell us how street-level bureaucrats' behaviour changed – for example, how they make greater or lesser use of particular categories, or how their overall pattern of decision-making changes between liberality and stringency towards clients. Stories can tell us how caseworkers think about the decisions that ultimately become administrative data points. From our analysis, we draw several conclusions about how caseworkers' adapt their discretionary decision-making to active labour policy and their process of disciplining clients and themselves.

First, the age-old issue of whether disability is a real phenomenon or a question of will persists. As we noted in the introduction, welfare systems incorporate general answers to this question that may lean more or less to one side or the other, but within that larger political tendency, eligibility-determiners always struggle to identify where they believe an individual appli-cant fits in the continuum between genuine barriers to work and personal willingness to work. By examining caseworkers' thinking at a moment when policy has shifted and they are expected to shift their own thinking to accord with policy, we gain a glimpse into exactly how caseworkers move themselves to a different position on the spectrum.

Second, New Public Management tools such as formal regulations, outcome targets, performance assessments and sanctions pressure caseworkers to accept new norms of active labour policy. The stories tell us about subjec-tivation of caseworkers, that, is how they *internalize* the norms – not simply respond to incentives in a rote way, but how they make sense of the norms and reconcile them with their prior beliefs and moral judgements. To a striking degree, they seem to experience their transformation in a way akin to religious revelations and conversions. The new belief system does not feel imposed from outside (or at least few of Møller's respondents mentioned sanctions). Rather, the stories show that many caseworkers can point to moments when they saw in a new way and acquired genuine belief in the rightness of the new norms.

Third, caseworkers often think through stories. Although they talk about rules and policies, when they try to explain how they implement rules, they do not think in abstract categories but rather in stories with characters, plot and moral valence. They interpret some cases as not only singular instances but as pedagogical and moral lessons. They use stories to educate themselves, to symbolize and to remember their lessons.

Fourth, caseworkers experience their decision-making as difficult and full of tension. They want to be 'good' employees and follow the rules, but they also want to be good caseworkers and do the best thing for clients. They reconcile

this tension in part by comparing themselves with other caseworkers. In doing so, they evaluate and judge fellow caseworkers in addition to evaluating and judging clients. Just as they place clients on a continuum between worthy and unworthy, they place other caseworkers and themselves on a normative continuum, and they strive to occupy a place at the 'good end'. The stories are testimonies of how caseworkers understand the legitimacy of their jobs as well as how they manage the gap between policy intentions and street-level discretion.

Finally, the stories and our analyses help to explain how street-level bureaucrats convert a general policy into the practical judgements that ultimately constitute administration. These routine, ordinary, small daily judgements work on many levels – individual identity formation, individual and organizational learning, distribution of government services, and dispensing justice. Before a policy becomes real, it becomes an administrative practice internalized by street-level bureaucrats through discipline and reflected in and through storytelling. In this perspective, the administration of a policy must be seen as a *practice* that reflects much more than the transformation of policy intentions and formal rules (Wagenaar 2004: 644). General rules are not simple guidelines; rather, as we saw in the stories, rules are abstract thinking that must be converted into meaningful actions. Policy administration is both highly improvisational and creative. Street-level bureaucrats must make it up as they go along, and they 'make it up' by composing stories to teach themselves how to act in a meaningful way.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Jørgen Elkit, Gitte Sommer Harrits, Lars Thorup Larsen, Jørn Loftager, Carsten Jensen and Sanford Schram for constructive comments. We also thank Michael Lipsky for inspiration and guidance in our work.
2. Unlike Maynard-Moody and Musheno, who explicitly instructed their informants to tell stories, our stories emerged during interviews when respondents spontaneously told a story in order to better explain their answer to a question. All stories and quotations have been translated from Danish by the authors, and the excerpts have been slightly edited for conciseness and clarity. Text in quotation marks and italics indicates quotations from the interviews; other descriptive language, metaphors and the story titles are our characterizations of the story material, and non-italicized words in quotes are not from the interviews. Because we are making use of much material that was not analyzed in Møller (2009) and has not been published, we cite these excerpts according to Møller's original interview numbers.
3. We used four questions when we analyzed the selected stories:
   1. What does the story describe an example of?
   2. What moral ideas are being portrayed through the story?
   3. What is the political narrative?
   4. What is the lesson the caseworker is trying to teach the interviewer?
4. Interview 8, question 5.2.
5. Interview 3, question 7.4.
6. Interview 7, question 6.
7. Interview 16, question 1.
8. Interview 16, question 1
9. Interview 11, question 8.

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