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**SOCIAL WORKERS' SENSITIVITY TO
MICROAGGRESSIONS TOWARDS
NONBINARY CLIENTS**
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Abstract

This thesis explores Danish social workers' sensitivity to the risk of committing microaggressions towards nonbinary clients. The theoretical framework primarily relies on microaggression theory. As a point of departure, the author developed a Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients, which includes eight microaggressions that nonbinary clients might experience from social workers. The empirical material is based on interviews with twelve Danish social workers, using an interview guide including eight vignettes that incorporate microaggressions from the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients. The vignettes present a storyline about a case with a nonbinary client who receives assistance from a social worker. The interviews were conducted semi-covertly, as participants were informed about the microaggression focus after the interview to avoid potential bias influencing their answers. The analysis yields two main findings. First, the interviewed social workers employ various strategies to avoid committing microaggressions towards their nonbinary clients. Second, social workers often feel uncomfortable around nonbinary clients, which influences their behavior towards them. The conclusion is that the selected sample of social workers was sensitive to the risk of committing microaggressions towards their nonbinary clients.

Keywords: *microaggressions, nonbinary client, social work, the gender binary, gender identity*

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1 Introduction

Microaggressions are like paper cuts—nearly invisible yet profoundly painful. Statements towards nonbinary individuals, such as "Don't you think there is a connection between you being nonbinary and your mental illness?" or "It is too confusing to use your pronouns!" exemplify microaggressions. The power of microaggressions lies in their subtlety, leaving recipients to grapple with the ambiguity of whether a comment was discriminatory. They represent a subtle form of discrimination (Nadal, 2019, p. 1404) that reflects internalised biases (Jones & Rolón-Dow, 2018, p. 37).

Despite their subtlety, microaggressions can significantly harm the well-being of those who experience them (Sterzing et al., 2017, p. 83). This impact can be considered particularly severe for groups already facing significant challenges. According to Følner et al. (2020), nonbinary individuals in Denmark emerge as a particularly marginalised group within the LGBTQ+ community. They are characterised by lower levels of openness, experiences of stigmatisation, heightened loneliness, and decreased mental well-being such as high-stress levels, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Følner et al., 2020). Thus, it can be assumed that nonbinary individuals who require assistance from a social worker for various reasons face even more significant challenges due to their higher risk of mental health issues compared to the general population. Moreover, microaggressions can exacerbate these challenges, with nonbinary individuals experiencing more negative reactions and discrimination than other groups within the LGBTQ+ community (Følner et al., 2020).

Being nonbinary in a binary society can be emotionally exhausting since nonbinary individuals are often held accountable to the gender binary categories 'female' or 'male' (Barbee & Schrock, 2019, pp. 583-584). The prevalence of the binary system is evident in gendered institutions such as municipalities and healthcare systems that adhere to the binary social security number system (Smolle & Espvall, 2021, pp. 523-524). Nonbinary individuals often feel excluded in binary-dominated spaces (Johnson et al., 2023, p. 2), facing challenges like gendered bathrooms (Barbee & Schrock, 2019, pp. 583-584). They frequently experience being misgendered as either 'female' or 'male' (Barbee & Schrock, 2019, pp. 583-584). Moreover, coming out as nonbinary often involves educating others about gender identities beyond 'female' and 'male' (Darwin, 2017, p. 327). Thus, having to explain or defend their gender identity can result in stress about disclosing it (Johnson et al., 2023, p. 2). Nadal (2023, p. 89), a leading researcher in the study of the impact of microaggressions on people of colour and LGBTQ+ people, states that nonbinary individuals are more likely to experience microaggressions because they do not conform to the gender binary. He

explains that this might be because cisgender individuals feel discomfort around those who do not fit into the traditional 'female' or 'male' categories.

Given the elevated risk of mental health problems among nonbinary individuals, many are likely in contact with the welfare system. Research indicates that social workers often lack sufficient knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community (Smolle & Espvall, 2021; Siverskog, 2014; Frederiksen-Goldsen et al., 2014). This knowledge gap is significant, as education and awareness are crucial in preventing microaggressions that stem from internalised biases (Baryeh & Rasool, 2023, p. 587). Furthermore, while there is research on the impact of racial microaggressions in social work for both clients and practitioners (e.g., Weng & Gray, 2020; Weinberg & Fine, 2022), a notable gap exists regarding microaggressions in the interactions between social workers and nonbinary clients. Compounding this issue is the inherent power imbalance between social workers and clients (Antczak, 2016, p. 128). Therefore, if social workers lack knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues and the microaggressions resulting from internalised biases, it raises concerns about their interactions with nonbinary clients. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the sensitivity of Danish social workers to the risk of committing microaggressions against their nonbinary clients.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore Danish social workers' sensitivity to the risk of committing microaggressions against nonbinary clients based on the concept of sensitivity as defined in the theoretical framework of microaggression theory on page 18. In short, *sensitivity* is defined in this thesis as a feeling of emotional distress when witnessing a microaggression. The purpose of the thesis is explored by examining the following research question:

- How do Danish social workers navigate the risk of committing microaggressions against nonbinary clients?

The research question is based on the assumption that all social workers strive to be respectful towards their clients. Consequently, I use the term navigate to suggest that any microaggressions committed are unintentional and not intended to marginalize nonbinary clients. Secondly, the research question assumes that there is a risk of Danish social workers committing microaggressions when interacting with nonbinary clients- a concern informed by my literature review and my experience as a social worker within the predominantly binary Danish welfare system. Thirdly, the research question

assumes that in meetings between social workers and nonbinary clients, social workers often act as gatekeepers to various opportunities within the welfare system, placing them in a position of power and thereby increasing the risk of committing microaggressions. Therefore, navigating the risk of committing microaggressions refers to the methods social workers use to avoid such actions, including various prevention strategies, which will be unfolded in the analysis.

1.2 Outline of the Thesis

To address the problem statement, the thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter includes the thesis's introduction and the problem statement's presentation. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the development of microaggression research and social workers' knowledge about gender identities. In Chapter 3, I outline the theoretical framework, clarifying the concepts of sensitivity and insensitivity and presenting microaggression theory and the theory of oppression 'Othering'. Chapter 4 details the thesis methodology, including the theory of science, the considerations behind method choices, the development of the interview guide, data collection and processing, research quality, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 5, I present my empirical findings within the theoretical framework of microaggression. I first explore how Danish social workers navigate the risk of committing microaggressions against nonbinary clients and the strategies they employ to maintain professional conduct. The second part of the analysis examines Danish social workers' attitudes and behaviour changes in response to the gender identity of nonbinary clients. Finally, in Chapter 6, I draw conclusions based on the analysis and discuss potential avenues for further research. Before outlining previous literature, I will clarify key concepts for the thesis in the next section

1.3 Clarification of Concepts

In this section, I will define key concepts for this thesis. For instance, to clarify the differences between gender identity and sexual orientation, I will explain both cisgender and heterosexuality, although only cisgender is relevant to this thesis. This section also provides an overview of the concepts used throughout the thesis.

The Gender Binary

The gender binary is the fundamental notion that there are only two gender categories: female or male, each associated with specific roles, behaviours, and expectations (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.23). Throughout this thesis, referencing 'the binary' is a reference to the gender binary.

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of gender identification, such as female, male, transgender, or nonbinary, regardless of the sex assigned at birth (Nadal, 2018, p.101).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an individual's personal and social identity based on three main components: who they are attracted to, how they express that attraction, and their sense of belonging to related communities (Nadal, 2018, p.71).

Cisgender

Cisgender refers to individuals whose assigned sex at birth aligns with their gender identity (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.23)—for example, being biologically a female and identifying as a woman.

Transgender

Transgender is a term that encompasses identities which do not conform to the individual's biological gender, although often used within the binary, referring to either transwomen or transmen (Smolle & Espvall, 2021, p.525).

Nonbinary

Being nonbinary is a gender identity defined as being outside the gender binary (Barbee & Schrock, 2019, p.572), with synonyms such as nonconforming or genderfluid (Holloway et al., 2022, p. 182). They may experience gender fluidity, a combination of gender identities, or an absence of gender altogether (Holloway et al., 2022, p. 182). Nonbinary individuals often prefer alternative gender pronouns such as 'they/their/them', but some reject pronouns altogether and prefer to be referred to by their full name (Darwin, 2017, p.329). Some nonbinary individuals identify as transgender, while others do not (Darwin, 2017, p. 325; James et al., 2016). Thus, in this thesis, nonbinary individuals encompass those who identify with a gender identity outside the binary, regardless of their identification as transgender.

LGBT & LGBTQ+

LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, where LGBTQ+ encompasses a diverse group of sexual orientations and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, queer individuals, and others (Nadal, 2023, p.71).

Heterosexuality

Heterosexuality is a sexual orientation where a person is attracted to individuals of the opposite gender identity within the gender binary (Argüello, 2021, p.13).

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity signifies the dominant or normative, meaning what holds power and represents the majority. Normativity reflects how power actively operates and perpetuates itself across various contexts (Argüello, 2021, p.13). In this thesis, examples include cisgender and heterosexuality.

2 Previous Research

In the following chapter, I will review the literature on several key areas central to this thesis, which provide the foundation for the understanding of the subject and the analysis of this thesis. For the context of my analysis, I will examine studies on social workers' knowledge of LGBTQ+ individuals, focusing on transgender and nonbinary individuals. Next, I will examine the development of microaggressions theory and research on microaggressions directed towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Finally, I will emphasise how the insights from this literature review have influenced this thesis.

2.1 Social Workers' Knowledge about LGBTQ+ Individuals

The introduction states that knowledge is critical for preventing microaggressions (Baryeh & Rasool, 2023, p. 587). Therefore, in this section, I will outline research concerning social workers' knowledge of LGBTQ+ individuals, focusing mainly on transgender and nonbinary individuals. I will also demonstrate how social work often renders gender identities outside the binary invisible.

Smolle and Espvall (2021) examined Swedish social workers' knowledge and experiences with older transgender adults. They identified challenges, including invisible needs, knowledge gaps, and organisational neglect of gender identity issues (Smolle & Espvall, 2021, p.522). Their findings underscore the importance for social workers to understand gender terminology and distinguish between gender identity and sexual orientation, as the participants mixed up these things with the consequence of making some identities invisible (Smolle & Espvall, 2021, p.529). Moreover, the study highlighted how a lack of knowledge rendered social workers unprofessional, as they could not ask respectful questions (Smolle & Espvall, 2021, p.525). These insights contribute to understanding the challenges faced by social workers in supporting transgender clients. The study by Smolle and Espvall (2021) highlights the need for education among social workers regarding transgender clients, and it is likely to presume that these findings can also be applied to nonbinary clients.

In addition, Siverskog (2014, p.386) found that social workers lack knowledge about trans issues and describe how social workers perceived LGBT as mostly about sexuality, making trans and nonbinary clients invisible. Similarly, Frederiksen-Goldsen et al. (2014, p.82) state that social work students and practitioners often lack adequate knowledge and skills for competent practice with LGBT populations. Frederiksen-Goldsen et al. (2014, p.82) state that three components are central to ensuring competent and qualified social work practice with LGBT clients: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Furthermore, Heffernan et al. (2023) explored social workers with a master perception of competence and comfort in working with persons who identify as transgender. Heffernan et al. (2023, p.157) highlight how a significant portion of the social workers participating while feeling competent expressed discomfort in working with transgender and nonbinary individuals, which is noteworthy as this discomfort can potentially influence interactions with clients who are transgender or nonbinary. Furthermore, Heffernan et al. (2023, p.142) argue that social service's physical environment and cultural climate can influence clients' feelings and behaviour. Heffernan et al. (2023, p.149) argue that if social service's positive attitude towards all individuals, such as coloured, disabled and LGBTQ+ individuals, is addressed through materials, symbols, and signs, it can help marginalised clients feel welcomed. They also argue for incorporating gender-affirming language in the organisation and for social workers to adopt it (Ibid., p.158). Finally, Heffernan (2023, p.143) highlights how social workers must continually work on their competence and ability to provide trans-affirming services. Thus, the Heffernan et al. (2023) study highlights a need for education to prepare social workers better to work with transgender clients and to be aware of the physical room of the organisation.

Finally, Dodd and Shelton (2021, p.33) observe that social work education, research, and practice often maintain cisnormativity by assuming everyone is cisgender. They identify five standard practices within social work that uphold cisnormativity, as highlighted by Blumer et al. (2013). First, *binarisation* occurs when only male and female genders are considered valid, such as when social security numbers offer only two gender options (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.27). Second, *misgendering* disregards individuals' gender identities (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.27). Third, *erasure* denies the existence of genders beyond male and female (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.30). Fourth, *pathologising* involves viewing non-cisgender identities as disordered, such as assuming mental health problems are linked to being transgender. Finally, *marginalisation* occurs when non-cisgender identities are seen as less legitimate than cisgender ones (Blumer et al., 2013, p.284). Therefore, Dodd and Shelton (2021) have underscored how standard practices in social work maintain cisnormativity, posing challenges for clients who do not conform to the gender binary.

In summary, the research cited above shows how social work practices often assume that clients are cisgender, rendering other gender identities invisible. It also shows that social workers frequently lack knowledge and education about LGBTQ+ individuals and how it affects the social workers' professionalism.

2.2 Microaggressions Research

Since microaggression theory is the cornerstone of this thesis, I will briefly outline microaggressions research development in this section. Additionally, I will review relevant research studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of this field's current state of knowledge and examine the critique of microaggression research and theory. Lastly, I will present literature on the consequences of experiencing microaggressions.

Pierce et al. (1978) laid the groundwork for the concept of microaggressions in the 1970s, shedding light on the subtle forms of discrimination experienced by Black Americans. However, it was not until Sue et al. (2007) reintroduced the concept of racial microaggressions that interest in microaggressions experienced a resurgence, marking a significant shift in academic literature and gaining more widespread recognition (Nadal, 2023, p. 45).

In microaggressions theory, scholars have focused significantly on developing classifications for microaggressions for various marginalised identities. Nadal et al. (2010, p.227-228) proposed the LGBTQ Microaggressions Taxonomy with, for instance, the microaggression of exoticisation, where LGBTQ+ individuals are dehumanised and treated as objects (see Appendix 3). Nadal (2019, p.1412) also proposed the Gender Identity Microaggressions Scale (hereafter: GIMS), which focuses on microaggressions against gender identities outside the binary (see Appendix 1). These taxonomies of microaggressions offer valuable insights into how marginalized groups experience such harmful behaviours. Researchers have expanded these taxonomies by identifying additional forms of microaggressions. For instance, Galupo et al. (2014, p. 463) recognize microaggressions, such as the denial of bodily privacy, as specifically related to transgender individuals.

Nevertheless, there has been a notable gap in the literature addressing nonbinary microaggressions (Nadal, 2023, p.91) until Croteau and Morrison (2023a, p. 418-419) developed and validated the Nonbinary Gender Microaggressions (hereafter: NBGM) scale. This scale was crafted to capture the various microaggressions experienced by nonbinary individuals. The NBGM scale has, for example, included the microaggression denial of gender identity, which occurs when a nonbinary individual is told that their nonbinary gender identity is just a phase or when someone suggests that nonbinary identities do not exist (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p. 429). Thus, the NBGM scale helps to understand the unique challenges nonbinary individuals face.

However, some scholars criticize microaggression research. Sterzing et al. (2017, p. 82) point out a fundamental research limitation for microaggressions research: most studies only focus on microaggressions targeting one identity, overlooking discrimination on multiple social identities.

The impact of microaggressions on individuals with singular marginalized identities is likely fundamentally different from the effects of intersecting microaggressions (Sterzing et al., 2017, p. 82). Thus, social workers must recognize the intersecting nature of marginalization to provide better support.

As mentioned in the introduction, nonbinary individuals face a higher risk of mental health issues compared to the general population, making the connection between microaggressions and mental health particularly significant (Nadal, 2023, p. 5). While existing research has established a correlation between microaggressions and mental health issues and extensively documented their impact on LGBTQ+ individuals (Nadal, 2023, p. 5), Croteau and Morrison (2023a, pp. 418-419) point out that there remains a gap in the literature explicitly addressing nonbinary experiences with microaggressions. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to infer that these experiences can adversely affect the mental health of nonbinary individuals.

Lastly, although there is existing research on the implications of racial microaggressions in social work for both clients and practitioners (e.g., Weng & Gray, 2020; Weinberg & Fine, 2022), there remains a significant gap in studies focused on microaggressions within interactions between social workers and nonbinary clients. As outlined in Section 2.1, social workers often lack sufficient knowledge about LGBTQ+ individuals. This lack of knowledge is critical, as it directly affects their ability to recognize and prevent microaggressions (Baryeh & Rasool, 2023, p. 587). Therefore, the absence of research on social workers' microaggressions toward nonbinary clients is particularly notable.

In conclusion, despite significant research on microaggressions targeting various marginalized groups, research on microaggressions towards nonbinary individuals is still in its early stages, resulting in a lack of comprehensive studies in this area. It has been highlighted that microaggressions experienced by nonbinary individuals differ from those experienced by other marginalized groups, as some people deny their very existence.

2.3 Summary of the Previous Literature

This section will briefly summarize the key literature that has informed my thesis.

The limited research on microaggressions toward nonbinary individuals, particularly within social work (e.g., Croteau & Morrison, 2023a), has laid the groundwork for this study, aiming to contribute a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics involved. Additionally, the existing literature on social workers' lack of sufficient knowledge about LGBTQ+

individuals (e.g., Smolle & Espvall, 2021; Siverskog, 2014), in conjunction with studies on the causes of microaggressions (e.g., Nadal, 2019; Jones & Rolón-Dow, 2018) and strategies for their prevention (Baryeh & Rasool, 2023), has significantly shaped the development of the research questions and its underlying assumptions.

The unique microaggressions faced by nonbinary individuals, such as the denial of their existence, have also influenced the decision to focus specifically on microaggressions targeting nonbinary clients rather than the broader transgender population. Furthermore, literature like Dodd and Shelton's (2021) work on how social work practices often presume clients are cisgender has provided crucial context for understanding participants' reactions to nonbinary clients and the microaggressions they experience in the analysis.

The mental health consequences of microaggressions (Nadal, 2023, p. 5) highlight the importance of examining this issue, reinforcing the significance of this thesis. Although Sterzing et al.'s (2017) call for an intersectional approach in microaggression research is not fully integrated into this study, this aspect is addressed in Section 6.2, where I discuss the study's limitations and suggest further exploration from this perspective.

3 Theoretical Frame

In this chapter, I conceptualize microaggression theory and introduce the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients. The scale includes different forms of microaggressions and serves as a template for constructing the eight vignettes used during my interviews with a sample of Danish social workers. To complement the theoretical perspective, I have added the concept of “othering” and distinguishing between being sensitive and insensitive to the risk of committing microaggressions.

3.1 Microaggression Theory

This section will describe microaggressions, define key terms and concepts, and explain their relevance to nonbinary clients.

Microaggression theory often focuses on microaggressions from historically privileged groups toward historically marginalised ones because the interactions between these groups reflect broader systems of power and societal oppression (Torino, 2018, p. 10). This thesis focuses on nonbinary clients, who, along with others whose gender does not align with their assigned sex at birth, are considered historically marginalised. In contrast, cisgender individuals are viewed as historically privileged. Individuals are taught from childhood that the experiences of historically privileged groups are considered the norm (Torino, 2018, p. 10). These internalised biases manifest in behaviours that may appear innocent but can be biased and discriminatory toward marginalised groups (Jones & Rolón-Dow, 2018, p. 37). Therefore, microaggressions reflect a person's unconscious or conscious biases toward individuals from marginalised groups, such as nonbinary individuals (Ibid.). Thus, microaggressions are subtle forms of oppression (Lewis, 2018, p. 48) that reproduce systems of dominance and power (Jones & Rolón-Dow, 2018, p. 37). Therefore, microaggressions is a practice of oppression.

To understand microaggression, one needs to comprehend othering. Othering is a process of oppression that divides people or groups into 'us' and 'others', where 'us' represents the dominant group that oppresses, and 'others' are the minority group that is oppressed (Dominelli, 2002, p.7). The 'us' are considered the norm (Ibid, p.14), while the 'others' are seen as outsiders to the norm (Ibid, p.18). As explained in the above section, the focus within microaggression theory is often centred around microaggressions from historically privileged groups toward historically marginalised ones. Historically privileged groups, such as cisgenders, will be considered the ‘us’, while historically marginalised ones, such as nonbinary, are considered the ‘other’. Othering happens through interactions (Ibid., p.18) and can occur in various social contexts, such as gender identity, race, sexual

orientation, age, and more (Ibid, p.44). These processes are exclusionary and dehumanising, turning those categorised as 'others' into outsiders who may experience discrimination for being seen as less than the 'us' (Ibid, p.45). Consequently, when a group is labelled as the 'others,' they can face discrimination, such as microaggressions.

Microaggressions refer to subtle yet pervasive forms of discrimination that marginalised groups experience in everyday interactions (Nadal, 2019, p. 1404). They can convey insulting, hostile, or negative messages about marginalised groups and be intentional or unintentional (Nadal, 2023, p. 5). The power of microaggressions lies in their invisibility, as those who commit them are often unaware due to internalised biases and their subtle nature. The invisibility also means that the receiver often may be unaware or in doubt as the microaggression is not always obvious (Sue et al., 2007, p. 275). Experiencing microaggressions can profoundly affect the well-being of those who receive them (Sterzing et al., 2017, p. 83). However, the impact of microaggressions may be more profound on historically marginalised groups because they remind them of their lack of power and privilege (Torino, 2018, p. 10).

Microaggressions can be categorised into three types: *microassaults*, *microinsults*, and *microinvalidations* (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). *Microassaults* can be seen as a modern form of old-fashioned discrimination, as they are often deliberate acts done without apology or remorse (Ibid.; Nadal, 2018, p. 44). They involve explicitly using offensive language or verbal or nonverbal actions (Nadal, 2023, p.6). A microassault directed at a nonbinary client can involve deliberate avoidance, such as not sitting next to them in a meeting or refusing to shake their hand.

In contrast, *microinsults* are often unconscious, subtle verbal or nonverbal actions that disrespect or diminish a person's heritage or identity (Sue et al., 2007, p.274; Nadal, 2023, p. 6). They frequently perpetuate stereotypes about marginalised groups (Nadal, 2018, p. 44). A microinsult directed toward a nonbinary client could involve using incorrect pronouns after the client has clearly stated their preferred pronouns. For instance, repeatedly referring to a nonbinary person as 'she' instead of using the correct pronouns such as 'they'.

Lastly, *microinvalidations* are often unconscious and involve communications that exclude, negate, or invalidate the experiences of marginalised groups (Sue et al., 2007, p.274; Nadal, 2023, p. 6). They consist of verbal expressions disregarding, contradicting, or diminishing the firsthand experiences of individuals belonging to marginalised communities (Nadal, 2018, p. 45). Microinvalidations related to nonbinary clients can involve a social worker denying the existence of nonbinary identities altogether, dismissing them as 'confused' or 'going through a phase', which

implies that being nonbinary is not valid. In the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients, explained in section 3.2, the different forms of microaggression include a mix of microinsults and microinvalidations. However, I decided not to include microassaults as they are more blatant forms of microaggression. Therefore, I did not find them relevant for exploring how sensitive social workers are to the risk of committing microaggressions against nonbinary clients.

Moreover, related concepts within Microaggression Theory include the clash of realities, the invisibility of unintentional bias, perceived minimal harm, and the Catch-22 (Nadal, 2018, pp. 42-43). *The clash of realities* occurs when different interpretations of a situation lead to microaggressions, exacerbating tensions and spreading misunderstandings. This clash arises from diverse cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and individual perspectives. Consequently, it can lead to further marginalisation and harm (Nadal, 2018, p.42). *The concept of invisibility of unintentional bias* refers to how individuals internalise biases from dominant societal norms, leading to implicit biases against marginalised groups. These biases, often unrecognised, maintain inequality and discrimination (Ibid., p.43). *The concept of perceived minimal harm* involves the belief that these subtle acts, microaggressions, have little impact and do not significantly affect individuals' well-being or quality of life (Ibid.). *The Catch-22* refers to individuals' dilemma when considering addressing a microaggression. This difficulty arises because responding to microaggressions can lead to negative consequences for the person calling them out, such as further marginalisation, backlash, or professional consequences. Therefore, Catch-22 underscores the complex dynamics at play, where individuals must weigh the risks of speaking out against the harm caused by remaining silent (Nadal, 2018, p. 43).

The Catch-22 is relevant for the focus of this thesis because the power imbalance between a social worker and a client may affect a client's likelihood of confronting their social worker about a microaggression, as emphasised by Sue et al. (2007, p. 281) in the context of therapist-client relationships. I will use the concept of the clash of realities to demonstrate how differences in cultural backgrounds due to different understandings of language can lead to misunderstandings and scepticism about preferred pronouns for nonbinary individuals. Additionally, I will utilise the concept of perceived minimal harm to demonstrate that the power lies in their invisibility to the one committing microaggression. Furthermore, I will employ the concept of invisibility of unintentional bias to illustrate how the dominant view within heteronormativity, that there are only two genders, 'female' and 'male', is reproduced through microaggressions towards nonbinary individuals.

Finally, to assess the participants' risk of committing and ability to recognize microaggressions, I use the terms sensitivity and insensitivity. Building upon the research of Majeno et al. (2021), who investigated sensitivity regarding emotional reactions to microaggressions, I define sensitivity as participants feeling bothered, upset, or extremely upset about a microaggression. In contrast, insensitivity is having no emotional response, feeling positive about microaggressions, or performing microaggressions. Majeno et al. (2021, p. 138) used a 5-point scale to measure sensitivity, with levels including: "This event made me feel good", "It did not bother me", "It bothered me slightly", "It upset me", and "It upset me extremely". Unlike Majeno et al. (2021), I did not directly ask participants to indicate their emotional reactions to microaggressions. Instead, I interpreted whether the participants were sensitive or insensitive to microaggressions based on their responses during the analysis.

3.2.1 The Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients

To explore social workers' sensitivity towards microaggressions, I have developed a Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients with eight forms of microaggressions (see Figure 1). First, I will explain the background for developing the scale, and then I will detail the different microaggressions included in the scale.

I developed the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients by merging the two scales Gender Identity Microaggressions Scale (hereafter: GIMS) (Nadal, 2019) and the Nonbinary Gender Microaggressions scale (hereafter: NBGM) (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a) and incorporating other aspects based on research and other taxonomies on microaggressions that I thought relevant by drawing on experience as a social worker. Additionally, I drew on my experiences as a social worker, working with nonbinary clients and being part of a social worker team.

The GIMS has five subscales, and the NBGM scale has six subscales (see Appendices 1 and 2). I combined the scales because they had overlapping microaggressions and different ones that I thought were significant, drawing on insights from my experiences as a social worker. For instance, the microaggression *invasion of bodily privacy* occurs when asking about gender-affirming surgeries without consent but was only included in the GIMS (Nadal, 2019, p. 1412). Moreover, there were microaggressions in the GIMS and NBGM that shared similarities but were labelled differently, such as *misuse of pronouns* in GIMS and *misuse of gendered terminology* in NBGM (see Appendices 1 and 2). Likewise, there were subscales that, based on the literature review, I didn't find relevant, such as the NBGM's microaggression *trans exclusion*, which refers to when nonbinary individuals

are perceived as 'not trans enough' or 'not truly trans' (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p.429). Since the literature review indicated that social workers often lack knowledge of LGBTQ+ individuals (for example, Frederiksen-Goldsen et al., 2014), it didn't seem relevant to explore the participants' knowledge about this microaggression. In GIMS and NBGM, there were no microaggressions like *heterosexist or transphobic terminology* from the Taxonomy of LGBTQ microaggressions, which, for instance, describing a nonbinary client as 'flamboyant' (Nadal, 2023, p. 49, see Appendix 3). Therefore, I decided to develop my scale for measuring the participant's sensitivity to microaggression towards nonbinary clients to be able to include the microaggressions I found most relevant for this thesis.

As a result, I have created the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients, depicted in Figure 1, which classifies eight different forms of microaggressions that nonbinary clients potentially can experience from social workers.

Figure 1: The Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients

Type	Example
Deadnaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker continued to use the client's deadname even though the client had informed them about their new name. The client must correct the name the social worker uses to refer to them. The social worker uses the client's deadname in the journal.
Misuse of pronouns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker calls the clients by the wrong personal pronoun. The social worker uses the wrong pronouns in the client's journal.
Denial of gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker tells the client that their nonbinary gender identity is just a phase. The social worker has suggested that being nonbinary is a way to get extra attention. The social worker tells the client that there are only two genders.
Invasion of bodily privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker asks intimate questions about the client's gender-confirming surgery.
Denial of societal transphobia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The client is told that they complain too much about societal discrimination against nonbinary individuals. The social worker tells the client that they complain too much about how people react to their gender identity being nonbinary.
Negation of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker tells the client that they need help to use the pronouns that the client wants them to use. The social worker tells the client that it will take time to adjust to using different pronouns in the client's presence. When the client corrects the social worker on the pronouns they use for them, they complain about how difficult it is for them to get it right.
Pathologizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker attributes mental health issues to a client's gender identity.
Heterosexist or transphobic terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social worker employs derogatory language reflecting transphobic attitudes towards the client, such as the use of terms like 'abnormal' or 'flamboyant'.

3.2.2 The Microaggressions from the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients

As seen in Figure 1, the Microaggressions Scale for Nonbinary Clients consists of eight different microaggressions. First, we have *deadnaming*, which involves using a nonbinary client's birth name when they have officially changed their name or when asked to be called by a different name (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p. 429). This microaggression is included in the scale because I know from my

experience as a social worker that it can be challenging when clients change their name or have not officially changed their name but prefer to be called something else.

After that, we have *misuse of pronouns*, which refers to instances where people don't use a nonbinary client's preferred pronouns when referring to them (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p. 429). This microaggression is included in the developed scale because, according to the literature review, it is considered a significant aspect of nonbinary clients feeling validated that their preferred pronouns are used (Dodd & Shelton, 2021, p.27).

Then we have *denial of gender identity*, which occurs when a nonbinary client is told that their nonbinary gender identity is just a phase or when someone suggests that nonbinary identities do not exist (Nadal, 2019, p. 1412; Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p. 429). This microaggression is included in the scale based on previous literature indicating that social workers often lack knowledge about LGBTQ+ individuals (for example, Siverskog, 2014; Frederiksen-Goldsen et al., 2014). Thus, they may dismiss nonbinary gender identity as something that is not valid or real.

Next, we have *invasion of bodily privacy*, which occurs when intimate questions about nonbinary clients' bodies are asked, such as inquiries about having had gender-affirming surgeries (Nadal, 2019, p. 1412). I included this microaggression in the scale because social workers are often required to know many details about their clients, which increases the likelihood of unintentionally crossing this line and asking intimate questions.

Then there is *denial of societal transphobia*, which happens when nonbinary clients are told they complain too much about discrimination against gender nonconforming people or how others react to their gender nonconformity (Nadal, 2019, p. 1412). This microaggression is included because social workers often must ask their clients questions about how they are feeling and what occupies their thoughts to find out whether there is a need for an intervention or other kinds of help. Therefore, it is likely that nonbinary clients tell their social worker about their struggles to be nonbinary in a binary society and thus might be dismissed by their social worker.

Furthermore, we have *pathologizing*, which is when certain behaviors or traits associated with an individual's gender identity are perceived as pathological or disordered (Blumer et al., 2013, p. 284). This can happen if a social worker describes a client's gender identity using psychiatric diagnosis.

Then, we have *negation of identity*, which refers to situations where social workers struggle to accept a nonbinary client's gender identity (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p. 429). This microaggression is also included in the scale because, based on the literature review, social workers

often lack knowledge about LGBTQ+ individuals. They could potentially be sceptical about nonbinary as a gender identity.

At last, we have *heterosexist or transphobic terminology*, which occurs when a person uses offensive language reflecting transphobic or heterosexist attitudes towards another person, such as the use of terms like 'abnormal' or 'flamboyant' (Nadal, 2023, p.49). I included this microaggression based on my own experience of reading through journals where descriptions have included the word 'flamboyant' about clients with a gender identity outside the binary.

4 Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodological framework guiding the project's design. First, I will explain the two scientific approaches that have shaped this project, phenomenology and hermeneutics, along with my positionality. Subsequently, I will delve into the interview methodologies, detailing the development of the interview guide and the data collection and processing processes. Finally, I will address the ethical considerations of this thesis.

4.1 Theory of Science

4.1.1 Phenomenology

In this thesis, I explore microaggressions towards nonbinary clients through a phenomenological approach, focusing on the perceptions and subjective experiences of a sample of Danish social workers. The goal of a phenomenological approach is to describe the essence of a phenomenon to understand it, meaning that the essence defines the phenomenon (Husserl, 1970, p. 370; Tanggaard, 2017, p. 99). While capturing the entire phenomenon from a subjective perspective is impossible, I aim to grasp and interpret its essence.

When coding my empirical data, I focused on identifying the essence by uncovering patterns in the participants' sensitivity and insensitivity to microaggressions towards nonbinary clients. A phenomenological approach involves setting aside pre-understandings when interpreting the data. Researchers must consider potential biases that may shape their perception of the studied phenomena (Heidegger, 1996, p. 58).

To avoid bias, I reflected on my preunderstandings of microaggressions towards nonbinary clients before reviewing the collected data to examine what the participants specifically said. This approach allowed me to gain an initial understanding of the phenomenon. I then revisited the material with my pre-existing knowledge and theoretical perspective, which helped me gain deeper insights beyond the participants' statements.

4.1.2 Hermeneutic

Alongside phenomenology, my approach is also hermeneutic. In hermeneutics, any understanding is always conditioned by prior understanding (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 276-277). Therefore, to understand something, one needs to accept prejudices as they are essential to understanding (Ibid., p.270).

Interpretation emerges within the hermeneutic circle, where understanding is expanded and deepened through a spiral process of interpretation (Ibid., p. 266).

As understanding is always conditioned by prior understanding, the first step in a hermeneutic approach is always conditioned by one's prior understanding (Gilje, 2017, p.135). It is a kind of bias, and awareness is essential or will interfere with one's understanding (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 269-270). Trying to be true to the hermeneutic approach, I have gone back and forth between the research problem, literature, empirical material, and analysis. This process allowed me to alter my preconceptions, shifting my perception of what constitutes relevant literature for the literature review while contributing to a new understanding of the empirical material. Thus, I have adopted an inductive approach (Thornberg, 2022, p. 245). During the process, my preconceptions about the topic have changed. For example, I had not previously considered that it could be harmful to non-binary individuals when I expressed that I was still learning how to use the correct pronouns. However, through this research, my understanding changed, as I discovered that these kinds of statements could indeed be harmful and constitute the microaggression negation of identity. Although I will always have preconceptions, they can change (Gilje, 2017, p. 135).

Additionally, within hermeneutics, a principle of charity towards the participants exists, which means that I had to interpret what informants say and do with empathy, giving them the benefit of the doubt and respecting their perspectives (Davidson, 1984, p. 284). In the analysis, I carefully interpreted the participants' statements.

By grounding my theoretical approach in hermeneutics and phenomenology, the results of my study cannot be regarded as absolute truths. Instead, they are interpretive representations reflecting the participants' subjective experiences regarding the phenomena (Thornberg, 2022, pp. 247-248). However, the empirical data can contribute to developing new understandings and interpretations (Jørnø, 2014, pp. 47-50) of social workers' sensitivity/insensitivity to microaggressions towards nonbinary clients.

4.1.3 Positionality

I disclose my positionality to ensure transparency regarding my preconceptions and their impact on the research design. According to Haraway (1988, p. 587), positionality highlights the situated nature of knowledge and underscores the importance of recognizing one's standpoint and perspectives in producing knowledge.

I identify as a young, white, Danish, cisgender woman with a bisexual orientation. While acknowledging my privileged identities, I have also experienced microaggressions based on my gender and sexuality, such as dismissive remarks like "being bisexual is just a phase" (Nadal, 2023, p. 71). Although I have not encountered microaggressions within a power dynamic like the one between a social worker and a client, my experiences contribute to a better understanding of how microaggressions feel and their consequences. Moreover, I have also committed microaggressions, such as a misuse of pronouns. Additionally, I have committed the microaggression of negating identity by stating that I had difficulties using the preferred pronouns before understanding the harm it caused. Thus, I have experienced how knowledge can help prevent microaggressions, as I became aware of the potential harm caused by saying that someone struggled to use preferred pronouns. I learned that it can still be challenging even when one knows and wants to use a correct pronoun.

Secondly, inspired by Sackett's (2023, p.147) approach, I was initially drawn to this subject as a newly educated social worker studying gender studies. I found myself grappling with uncertainty about how to approach clients I perceived as having a gender identity outside the binary, based on their gender expression and notes in their journals describing them as 'flamboyant'. Should I inquire about their pronouns, offer my pronouns, or wait for them to disclose? Conversations at the lunch table with my colleagues also influenced my preconceptions. I did not understand my feelings when co-workers talked about gender identity outside the binary because they, as such, were not overtly discriminating. When I encountered the concept of microaggression, I could better understand my feelings towards the comments.

4.2 Choice of Method

Before selecting a method, I considered several factors. Given that the aim was to explore social workers' sensitivity/insensitivity towards microaggressions against nonbinary clients, my initial consideration was to conduct observations during meetings between social workers and nonbinary clients. In that way, I would have been able to observe if and to what extent social workers exhibited behaviours indicative of microaggressions (Aagerup & Nielsen, 2018, p.48+64). Observation offered an unbiased perspective compared to relying on self-reported data from the participants in an interview approach (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.128) due to the sensitive nature of meetings between social workers and their clients. However, ethical considerations ultimately rendered this approach unfeasible due to the sensitive nature of meetings between social workers and their clients.

Openly questioning social workers about their microaggressions also posed challenges, as their awareness of the negative connotations might influence their answers, potentially leading to biased responses and skewed empirical findings (Aagerup & Nielsen, 2018, pp. 78-79). Therefore, I decided to combine interviews with vignettes, brief descriptive scenarios or stories presented to the respondent for comments (Renold, 2002, p.2). Vignettes are a way to explore the impact of various factors depicted within them on a participant's attitude, beliefs, or judgment (Hughes, 1998, p.384). As stated by Sampson & Johannessen (2020, p. 70), vignettes can serve as a time-efficient supplement to observational work and play a valuable role in social sciences. Sprecher (2023, p. 75) particularly points out the significance of vignettes for a social science discipline like social work (Forrester et al., 2008; Killick & Taylor, 2011; Stokes & Schmidt, 2011), especially when the topic is of a sensitive and vulnerable nature and could pose potential risks of emotional harm to participants (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014, p.427). Vignettes protect research participants by creating a distance between their own experiences and those of the vignette characters, which makes them well-suited for researching sensitive issues (Ibid., p.427). While vignettes can be an ethical alternative to direct observation, the method also has limitations. For instance, it may not fully capture real-life social dynamics and individuals' perceptions of how they would react since the hypothetical situations portrayed in a vignette may not necessarily align with their actual behaviour (Barter & Renold, 2000, p.311). Nevertheless, my approach aimed to explore participants' sensitivity towards microaggressions through their responses to the vignettes. Hence, it would be a sufficient method for exploring the problem statement.

4.3 Interviews

I conducted twelve qualitative interviews with Danish social workers to acquire knowledge and insights that could contribute to illuminating and addressing my research questions. The interviews and the included vignettes were conducted in a semi-structured format (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.127) to explore the participants' sensitivity to microaggressions towards nonbinary clients. As stated in Chapter 3, an interview guide was developed based on a microaggressions scale, with microaggressions integrated into the vignettes and a deductive approach (Aagerup & Nielsen, 2018, pp. 114-115).

4.3.1 Interview Guide

Before the interviews, I prepared an interview guide, see Appendices 5 and 6. The focus of the interviews was to examine the sensitivity and insensitivity of social workers towards microaggressions targeting nonbinary clients. To facilitate this, I structured the interview guide around eight short vignettes containing different forms of microaggression based on the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients. Following Brinkmann (2014, p. 437), the interview guide consisted of a structure that framed the interviews while allowing them to go along with the informants' thoughts.

In the interview guide, I employed a combination of closed and open questions (Røkenes & Hanssen, 2013, p.329). Following the literature on vignettes (see, for example, Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014, p. 437; Barter & Renold, 2000, p.310), the questions alternated between adopting the perspective of how participants believed the fictional characters would react and exploring participants' perspectives if they were to find themselves in similar situations. This approach considered both the reactions of the fictional characters and participants' anticipated feelings and responses. At the end of the interview, I disclosed that I was investigating microaggressions and briefly explained the concept. Subsequently, I asked participants if they allowed me to use the interview in my thesis. This approach is a technique outlined by Barton (1958, p.67-68) for asking embarrassing questions in a non-embarrassing manner by placing the question at the end of the interview.

4.3.1.1 Developing the Vignettes

When developing the vignettes, I considered the sources of data, the format, and how to capture reality accurately. Vignettes can be constructed from several sources (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014, p.431). Therefore, I crafted the vignettes using insights from literature reviews, the modified microaggressions scale, and my own experiences as a social worker.

Vignettes can be either fictional or based on real-life scenarios (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020, p.70). In this thesis, the vignettes are written fictive scenarios portraying specific situations around a case with a nonbinary client (Sprecher, 2023, p.76; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014, p.429). For authenticity, I have situated the vignettes within my four years of experience in the field. During this time, I worked as both a student assistant and a part-time social worker in a specialized adult section¹. This sector focuses on supporting adults with various challenges, including reduced

¹ Freely translated by the author from Danish to English: *specialiserede voksenområde*

physical or mental capabilities and unique social obstacles. These individuals often require assistance such as residing in residential care facilities or having a bostøtte, which is translated to support worker (Bekendtgørelse af Lov om social service § 107, §108 and §85, LBK nr. 67 af 22/1 2024, hereafter called the Service Act).

The story in the vignettes revolves around three fictitious characters: Maria, Alex, and Lone. Maria is the new social worker for the nonbinary client Alex, and Lone is Alex's support worker. Alex is a 26-year-old individual, but the birth name is Alexandra. They are nonbinary, preferring the pronouns 'they' and 'them', and prefer to be called Alex. Alex has been diagnosed with an anxious-evasive personality disorder as well as an eating disorder. They receive educational support², a public benefit for young people under 30 years old who are unemployed and have no education (Borger.dk, n.d.). Participants reacted by stating that the story was relatable and authentic, both in terms of the case and the clients and the conditions for the social worker. For instance, one of the participants said: "Okay, something I notice? Yes, so it sounds like a typical follow-up meeting. That there is a colleague who is ill, this is something that typically happens" (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30]).

I ensured the vignettes were simple and detailed, avoiding complexity (Barter & Renold, 1999, p. 314), and used language suitable for a social worker's background (Torres, 2009, p.107). As Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014, p.436) noted, it is essential to consider that terminology can have varied interpretations within the same professional group. Different understandings of support workers emerged during the interviews, but it did not affect identifying microaggressions.

Describing Alex's visual appearance, I drew on research by Barbee and Schrock (2019) and Darwin (2017) and personal experiences with nonbinary acquaintances. Barbee and Schrock (2019, p. 578) argue that nonbinary individuals challenge typical gender perceptions by adopting gender-neutral expressions, such as wearing binders, varied hair lengths, and mixing traditionally feminine and masculine clothing elements. Darwin (2017, p.327) found that nonbinary individuals often go for short-cropped or buzzed sides and/or back with longer hair on top/in the front. Hence, I developed the following description for Alex in the vignette:

Alexandra's hair is dark brown and curly, reaching down to the ears with a sidecut on the left side. Alexandra has a septum piercing, and both ears are filled with silver earrings. Alexandra is approximately 165 cm tall and has a robust build. Alexandra is

² Freely translated by the author from Danish to English: *Uddannelseshjælp*

wearing black, regular Dr Martens boots and a strong, dark brown pinstripe suit with a matching vest underneath. Alexandra's eyes are outlined with purple eyeliner extending slightly beyond the eye and wearing dark purple lipstick.

As Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014, p.436) state, one needs to consider how the vignette will be presented. To ensure continuity, I read the vignettes aloud to the participants. As the participants needed to have no prior knowledge of the interview content, I proceeded directly from the briefing to the vignettes without any introductions. However, through the first vignette, I introduced Alex through a brief overview provided by the fictive social worker, Maria, outlining Alex's case details, including income, diagnoses, and challenges. Additionally, the second vignette included the above-detailed description of Alex's appearance.

I incorporated the eight different microaggressions from the developed microaggression scale into the various vignettes, as depicted in Figure 2. In the seventh vignette, participants were presented with the microaggression *environmental microaggression*, which is discriminatory messages related to gender identity within institutions, such as gendered restrooms (Nadal, 2023, pp. 46-47). Environmental microaggressions were initially included in the Microaggressions Scale for Nonbinary Clients. However, during the coding, I found that it was not significant for exploring participants' sensitivity to microaggressions toward nonbinary clients, so I chose not to include it in the analysis.

Figure 2: Microaggressions in the Vignettes.

Vignette	Microaggression	How the microaggression are expressed
1	Deadnaming Use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology	The journal shifts between using 'Alexandra' and 'Alex'. The colleague on sick leave had described Alex as 'flamboyant'.
2	Deadnaming	The story describes Alex as Alexandra, but this is not something that the informant should notice because it has not been revealed yet.
4	Deadnaming Misuse of pronouns Negation of Identity	Lone calls Alex by their deadname. Lone calls Alex by the wrong pronouns. Lone tells Alex that it is difficult to use the correct pronouns.
5	Invasion of bodily privacy	Maria asks Alex if they want top-surgery.
6	Denial of societal transphobia Misuse of pronouns	Lone tells Alex that they complain too much about how people react to their gender nonconformity. Lone uses the wrong pronouns for Alex.
7	Environmental microaggression	There is no gender-neutral toilets.
8	Misuse of pronouns Denial of gender identity Pathologizing	Jytte uses the wrong pronouns for Alex. Jytte suggests that being nonbinary is just a way to get extra attention. Jytte states that there are only two genders. Jytte equates mental illness with gender identity.

4.3.2 Data Collection

On March 12, 2024, I posted a poster on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram (see Appendix 4). Following the suggestion of Aagerup and Nielsen (2018, p.117), who recommended using dedicated groups or chat rooms to contact potential informants, I posted on Facebook in two groups for social workers assisting students studying to become social workers. On Instagram, I posted a 'story' that followers to my Instagram account could see, which a friend shared. Additionally, I contacted 59 municipalities across Denmark, requesting my email to be forwarded to relevant departments with social workers. At a conference on March 13, 2024, about child refugees organized by the Red Cross, I spoke with a social worker and asked her to inquire among her colleagues. In total, 22 respondents expressed interest, and I interviewed 14 (see Figure 3).

The only criterion was that the participants had to be trained social workers and available for interviews before the Easter holiday in Denmark starting on Friday, March 22. Since the project's focus was broad, covering social work in Denmark and microaggressions against nonbinary

clients, I considered it sufficient. I selected 14 of the social workers for interviews. Two of them never returned the consent forms I had sent them, so only twelve interviews are included as data in this thesis. One of the interviews was conducted in person in the participant's home, five online via Teams and Zoom, and eight by phone calls.

Figure 3: Overview over Recruiting Participants

	Facebook	LinkedIn	Instagram	Social workers from conference	Mail to municipalities
Indicated an interest in participating	9	0	1	3	9
Participated	6	0	0	2	6

4.3.3 Data Processing

Transcription of the interviews was conducted with a focus on reproducing them as accurately as possible. Since all the data was in Danish, I translated all the quotes cited in the thesis into English. Translating could mean that something may have been lost, such as humour. The translated Danish word was sometimes put in [] and explained in a footnote. During transcription, it became evident how translating spoken to written language can alter the conversation; for instance, silence cannot be precisely represented (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.7). Therefore, I emphasized writing affirmative sounds like "Yes" and "Mhm" and inserted [pause] in the transcription when I interpreted it as a moment of reflection, such as silence after a question.

Moreover, I inserted [X laughs] when I or the informants laughed. I did this to remain faithful to the interviewees and better understand the context of what was said (Ibid., p.207). All the informants were allowed to read the transcript, suggest corrections or comments, and approve it.

I coded the data using both concept-driven and data-driven coding to get an overview of my data. First, I developed a coding scheme based on the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients, which is concept-driven coding (Ibid., p.227). However, I also coded data-driven as I noticed three recurring themes while coding: strategies, relationships, and professionalism, which I then added to the coding scheme (Ibid., p. 228). Coding created an overview of how the problem statement could be addressed. I sorted the statements according to the themes they touched on and subsequently linked the selected quotes to relevant theories for the analysis (Ibid., p.227-229). During the analysis,

some codes revealed significant patterns, while others, such as the environmental microaggression, did not align with these patterns despite generating rich data. Although environmental microaggression produced substantial data, it was irrelevant for addressing the problem statement.

4.4 Research Quality

The concepts of validity and reliability pose challenges when applied to qualitative research, as they were initially developed within quantitative methodologies (Bryman, 2012, p. 47). As a result, validity and reliability are primarily linked to measurement, which is often not relevant in qualitative studies, including this thesis. Bryman (2012, p. 390) cites Lincoln and Guba's (1985) argument that these concepts are unsuited for qualitative research. Instead, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative researchers should focus on trustworthiness and authenticity. In this section, I will explain these concepts and demonstrate how they have been applied to ensure the quality of this thesis.

4.4.1 Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness emphasizes the existence of multiple interpretations of social reality and is grounded in four key elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Credibility is ensured by adhering to best practices and presenting the research to participants to confirm that their social world has been accurately understood (Ibid.). However, due to the time constraints of this research, I decided early on that the findings would not be shared with the interviewees until after the thesis submission. This decision was communicated to the participants. While I recognize that respondent validation would have enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the thesis, the decision to forgo this step is a limitation of this study.

Transferability involves enabling others to assess the applicability of the findings to different contexts (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). I have sought to achieve this by providing thick descriptions throughout the thesis, allowing readers to evaluate whether the findings may be relevant to other situations. For instance, Chapter 4 offers detailed descriptions of the methodology, methods, and research process, serving as a foundation for evaluating transferability.

Complete objectivity is unattainable in social research; therefore, confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate that they have conducted the study in good faith. This concept demands transparency, ensuring that personal values or theoretical biases have not unduly influenced the research process or findings (Ibid., pp. 392-393). Bryman (2012, p. 39) observes that researchers cannot completely set aside their values when conducting qualitative research. Researchers must know their biases to understand how they may influence the research process. Reflecting on my

preconceptions about microaggressions toward nonbinary clients before analyzing the collected data helped minimize the risk of these biases affecting the interpretation of the data (Ibid., pp. 39-40).

Lastly, dependability is strengthened by having independent researchers review the research process to assess whether the procedures used were appropriate and whether the findings are consistent with the data collected (Ibid., p. 392). In this study, dependability has been enhanced by the guidance of Jan Magnusson, who, as a supervisor, has reviewed suggestions and materials and provided direction throughout the research process, thereby contributing to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

4.4.2 Authenticity

The second key aspect of ensuring research quality in qualitative studies is authenticity, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined. Authenticity comprises five criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity, all of which are related, to varying degrees, to research policy. The first criterion, fairness, concerns whether the research fairly represents different viewpoints within the study area (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). In this thesis, the participants' diverse perspectives suggest that they represent a broad spectrum of social workers. However, with a research sample of only twelve social workers, the extent of this representation is limited.

Ontological authenticity refers to whether the research helps participants better understand their social environment. In contrast, educative authenticity pertains to whether it enables them to better appreciate the perspectives of others within their social setting (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). During the interviews, participants reflected on these concepts. For example, Kimie remarked:

I already think I've reflected a bit on myself. Because I also find myself falling into that trap of using 'he.' But that says a lot about how difficult it actually is to retrain your brain to use 'they' and 'them.' Maybe even more so than 'he' and 'she.' So, it's tough. I understand that it's tough, and it's tough for me too. But I think one should make an effort. (Kimie, cisgender, she/her, lesbian, age [20-30]).

This thesis facilitated participants' reflections on social workers' practices with nonbinary clients, particularly regarding using pronouns beyond 'he' and 'she' to address all clients. Therefore, it can be

argued that participants gained a deeper understanding of their social environment through their involvement in the research.

Finally, catalytic and tactical authenticity assess whether the research has inspired participants to take action to change their circumstances and empowered them to take the necessary steps to do so (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). This is not easy to determine, as such effects typically occur after the interview process and would require a follow-up interview as part of the research design. However, since microaggressions often stem from unconscious biases, participating in a study focused on these behaviours and their impact could raise participants' awareness. Although this thesis did not include a follow-up, it is possible that participants' new awareness of microaggressions could influence them on multiple levels.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical concern of the research design is the semi-covert nature of the selected method, where participants could not give full informed consent before the interview. As microaggressions against clients are a potentially sensitive topic, there was a risk of potential harm to the participants to wait until the end of the interview to tell them about it. In this section, I discuss my steps to address the ethical concerns and describe my steps to minimize harm to the participants.

The interviews were based on eight vignettes, all of which included elements of microaggression. My main methodological concern was that if I informed the participants about the topic before the interview, they would be more careful and inclined to give correct rather than true answers, which would bias the data (Roulet et al., 2017, p. 492). To ensure the accuracy of the collected data, I decided to include an element of semi-covert research (Denscombe, 2010, p. 88). In the field of social sciences, covert research has historically been seen as unethical due to the absence of informed consent (Mason, 2018, p. 152; Roulet et al., 2016, p. 1). Ethical conduct for social researchers involves ensuring that participants understand the nature of the research and their role in it (Denscombe, 2010, p.7). Furthermore, ensuring integrity requires transparency, honesty, and refraining from deceptive practices (Ibid., p.7).

To mitigate the method, I took the following steps. During participant recruitment, it was explicitly stated that they would be informed about some details afterwards. When agreeing to participate, the participants were aware that certain aspects of the purpose would remain covert until the end of the interview. Moreover, during the interview briefing and at the end, they were reminded

of the option to withdraw from participating. Thus, the participants were informed about how the study would be conducted.

When I recruited the participants, I clearly stated that they only had to give their full consent afterwards. The recording would be erased if they decided not to give it (see Appendices 5 and 6). To enhance the clarity and ensure informed consent, I reiterated the same information in the post-interview briefing (see Appendices 5 and 6), reaffirming their consent to participate and the use of the interview data. Also, I briefly explained what microaggressions are about and why they are interesting to research. After learning about the topic, all the participants confirmed their willingness to participate and gave permission to use the interview data. Some participants even encouraged me, saying: "Indeed, you are welcome to do so" (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60]) and "Yes, yes, yes, absolutely" (Sonja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

Waiting to inform participants about the study's purpose until the end of the interviews may raise ethical concerns. However, by ensuring that participants were informed about this design from the outset, including their right to exit at any time, and by providing information throughout the process, the study maintained transparency and a consent-oriented approach, mitigating this potential harm and upholding acceptable ethical standards and conduct.

After being briefed about the purpose of the interview and the study, the participants gave their informed consent (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 93) for the interview to be used in the project. Since the interviews were conducted online and over the phone, the participants were asked to sign a consent form and send it to me, allowing an additional opportunity to reconsider. Despite expressing their intention to participate and send the form, two persons never submitted it. Consequently, they were not included in the research. Their final choice not to send the form indicates a hesitation possibly influenced by the interview design. If so, it strengthens my argument that none of those who chose to participate were deceived.

On the contrary, they all gave their informed consent at various stages - prior to the study, during the briefing, during the debriefing, and when signing and sending the consent form. Privacy and confidentiality were meticulously maintained through anonymization and responsible data handling and storage (Mason, 2018, p. 96). Anonymization ensured that it was impossible to identify the identities of the participants (Roulet et al., 2017, p. 507).

Additionally, as part of the debriefing, I asked participants personal questions about their gender identity and sexuality (see Appendices 5 and 6). Given the sensitive nature of these questions, I posed them at the end of the session after explaining the study's aim and obtaining consent

again. I used this approach to ensure that participants felt comfortable providing such information instead of asking these questions at the beginning of the interview (Denscombe, 2010, pp. 164-165). I emphasized that their responses and the rest of the interview data would be anonymized and handled carefully. I based these questions on a hypothesis that being LGBTQ+ could make a participant more sensitive to microaggressions. Therefore, knowing some of the participants' social categories could provide significant insights when interpreting the data.

Some researchers justify covert research through a consequentialist lens, asserting that the benefits outweigh the costs of deception (Roulet et al., 2017, pp. 488-489; Baumrind, 1979, p.3). However, Roulet et al. (2017) argues that accurately balancing these factors poses significant challenges. Instead, they advocate a broader consideration of various ethical perspectives, particularly highlighting the "situated ethics" approach due to its adaptability to contextual variables rather than adherence to rigid universal codes (Nyberg, 2008, pp. 587-588). Situated ethics require researchers to reflect on their actions and understand the implications in each context. Rather than providing a final answer about what is morally acceptable, situated ethics necessitates the researchers to continuously question their actions to justify their choices as observers (Roulet et al., 2017, p. 503). Taking the advice, I have tried my best to be self-reflexive and have constantly questioned my decisions to ensure that acceptable ethical standards and conduct were upheld.

Ethical reflexivity prompts researchers to consider their influence on participants and their roles in research projects (Aagerup & Nielsen, 2018, p. 74; Mason, 2018, p. 151). There is a potential risk of harming the participants by causing a negative self-perception, such as feeling inadequate or insecure after the interview. To address this, I carefully assessed the potential impact of their involvement in the study (Denscombe, 2010, p. 7). During the debriefing, I informed them that while they could identify some microaggressions in the vignettes, they missed others. To mitigate any potential discomfort among the participants, I told everyone what microaggression is and that we all do it, often inadvertently and unaware of doing so. Moreover, as an additional step, I offered an opportunity for them to reach out if they had any concerns after the interview, opening up for their questions, thoughts, or reflections.

Aagerup and Nielsen (2018, p. 79) assert that covert research should only be employed within social work if the primary purpose is to examine the "system" and its employees. They further specify that the findings must be perceived as beneficial for the users and cannot be attained through alternative means. Covert research should only be done if the value of the knowledge produced can be justified and an acceptable ethical standard can be upheld. In alignment with Aagerup and Nielsen's

(2018) perspective, the research design of my study extends its focus beyond individual interactions to encompass systemic factors contributing to microaggressions within social work settings. The significance of the knowledge produced and its potential impact within the field of social work is underscored by gaining insight into microaggressions towards nonbinary clients, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges they face in accessing supportive social services.

5 Analysis

During the coding of the collected data, I identified two main patterns. First, when the participants were sensitive to microaggressions, they navigated the risk of microaggressions by applying strategies to maintain professional conduct. Second, the participants' attitudes and behaviours change in response to the gender identity of their nonbinary clients. In this chapter, I analyze these two patterns using the theoretical framework of Microaggression Theory and Othering presented in Chapter 3.

Numerous names appear in the analysis, as twelve social workers participated in the interviews, and three main fictional characters appear in the vignettes. To clarify, I provide an overview of the twelve participants' names in Figure 4 and an overview of the main characters from the vignettes in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Overview of the Participants

Names of the Participants			
Anna	Danni	Heidi	Katrine
Kimie	Lars	Louise	Maja
Malene	Mette	Mikkel	Sonja

Figure 5: Overview of the Main Characters from the Vignettes

Name	Role in the vignettes
Alex/Alexandra	The nonbinary client
Maria	Alex/Alexandra's social worker
Lone	Alex/Alexandra's support worker

5.1 Strategies of Professional Conduct

In this section, I will explore how the participants navigate the risk of microaggressions by applying different strategies for maintaining professional conduct toward non-binary clients. The analysis is based on the assumption that the participants aim to be respectful towards non-binary clients and do not want to commit microaggressions in their interactions with them.

Firstly, I will demonstrate how the participants were sensitive to microaggressions due to their potential negative impact on client-collaborative relationships. Based on these analytical points, I will outline the participants' strategies to avoid committing the microaggression of deadnaming and misuse of pronouns. Next, I will demonstrate how the participants distinguished between when something constitutes a microaggression. I will demonstrate how the participants

differentiate the impact of microaggressions based on the relationship between the one committing them and the one to whom the microaggressions are directed. Finally, I will illustrate some strategies employed to maintain professional conduct when working with written descriptions of clients.

5.1.1 Awareness on Microaggressions

As stated earlier about microaggressions, their power lies in their invisibility to the one committing them and often to the recipient (Sue et al., 2007, p. 275). However, the participants in this study display an awareness of various microaggressions included in the Microaggression Scale for Nonbinary Clients. This was, for instance, expressed through their concern about the potential negative impact microaggressions might have, such as the misuse of pronouns and deadnaming in the vignette about the collaboration between Lone, the support worker, and her client, Alex.

Well, I'm not immediately thrilled, I would say. I mean, of course, mistakes can happen. I think there should be room for that. [...]. Well, it doesn't sound like an ideal scenario that... Well, that Lone... Now she's had meetings with Lone X times, and... Lone can't figure out what her name is, or what they are called, of course. So that's... And from your description, she also seems a bit bulldozed, or Alex seems bulldozed. Um. (Anna, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote, Anna acknowledges the challenges of adapting to a new name and pronouns and understands that mistakes can occur. However, she appears disappointed that Lone does not use the preferred name and pronouns, expressing that she is not "immediately thrilled", indicating that she is sensitive to the microaggressions misuse of pronouns and deadnaming. Moreover, she described Lone's behaviour toward Alex as "bulldozed", which can be understood as referring to how Lone dismisses the significance of deadnaming and misuse of pronouns towards Alex by saying that it is too difficult (see Appendices 5 or 6, vignette 4). This indicates that Anna is sensitive to the microaggression "negation of identity", where, for instance, nonbinary pronouns can be called difficult. The microaggressions lead her to remark, "it doesn't sound like an ideal scenario", implying a concern about the collaboration between Lone and Alex. Thus, Anna's sensitivity to the misuse of pronouns, deadnaming, and negation of identity causes her to question the collaboration between Lone and Alex.

Likewise, Mikkel emphasized the consequences of microaggressions in the vignette about the collaboration between Lone and Alex:

So, I think she is going to put collaboration with Alex in a very difficult position because she doesn't meet them in the way. [...] Because she is professional in this perspective, you could say, we must adjust to those we work for and with [...]. If I were the advisor, I would expect that of course, you have learned this, and of course, this is how we approach this person. (Mikkel, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

According to Mikkel, Lone is challenging the collaboration between her and Alex by not using Alex's preferred name and pronouns. On the contrary, Mikkel emphasizes that it is essential to acknowledge and use the client's preferred pronouns and names in a good collaboration. Furthermore, Mikkel stresses professionalism is about adapting and expects his colleagues and collaboration partners to do the same. Therefore, his view of professional conduct is the capacity to set aside personal opinions and remain open-minded to meet the client's preferences.

In summary, the participants demonstrated an awareness of microaggressions such as misuse of pronouns, deadnaming, and negation of identity, recognizing their potential negative impact on collaboration with nonbinary clients. Moreover, Mikkel's strategy for professional conduct is to set aside personal opinions and remain open-minded towards clients and their wishes. Overall, the analysis emphasizes the potential impact of microaggressions on collaborative relationships with clients.

5.1.2 Clarifying Names

A microaggression that the participants were sensitive to was deadnaming. Their strategy to avoid committing it was to clarify the client's name when there was confusion about it in the journal. Additionally, some participants knew that a name change could indicate another gender than the one assigned at birth.

In the first vignette, the participants were presented with a case where the previous social worker and other professionals interchangeably used 'Alex' and 'Alexandra' in the journal before they were told that Alexandra preferred to be called Alex. Katrine noticed this and stated that if she were to interact with the client, she would clarify the name and pronouns:

So, I notice that you mention there are two different names described, and I think I'll start by asking the person which name they prefer I call them by. Is there a pronoun I should be aware of when writing the journal, or are there any other considerations? (Katrine, cisgender, she/her, pansexual, age [40-50]).

The quote above exemplifies how Katrine would address the name discrepancy to clarify the correct name. Clarifying a client's preferred name and pronouns illustrates sensitivity towards the microaggression deadnaming and can be interpreted as wanting to respect preferred names. Katrine also said she would ask about pronouns, which demonstrates awareness about different gender identities and how individuals may prefer pronouns different from those assumed. Katrine's quote illustrates how she applies the clarification strategy to prevent committing the microaggressions of deadnaming and misuse of pronouns.

Along with Katrine, Kimie quickly commented on the name shift and connected it to gender identity. Kimie stated:

The first thing I thought of was this with Alexandra and Alex. I just thought because it's something I've also experienced. The thing where there are some different names floating around because, for example, there's some gender identity that's different and maybe not fully aligned with what the young person or the client themselves wants. That was the first thing that came to mind for me. (Kimie, cisgender, she/her, lesbian age [20-30]).

By noting the shifts in names, Kimie also demonstrates sensitivity to the microaggression of deadnaming. She reflects on how the change in names can indicate that the client has a different gender identity than assigned at birth. Kimie explains this reflection as being connected to previous experiences with clients. Hence, Kimie shows awareness of how clients can have another gender identity.

In summary, the analysis illustrates that the participants use strategies to avoid committing the microaggressions of deadnaming. The quotes from Katrine and Kimie show that a strategy is to clarify a client's name when there is confusion in the journal. These quotes also indicate that the participants knew how a name change could be connected to having a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth.

5.1.3 Get the Pronouns Right

Beyond deadnaming, the participants were also sensitive to the misuse of pronouns. To avoid doing it, they had a two-folded strategy. The vignette introduced Alex as Alexandra. However, later in the vignette, it was explained that Alex preferred being called Alex and the pronouns 'they/them/theirs'. Although the participants saw the significance in using Alex's preferred pronouns to show respect, they found it challenging to use in practice:

Louise: How he was feeling? Or, how?

Lærke: They were feeling. Yeah.

Louise: How it?

Lærke: They.

Louise: They were feeling? Really?

Lærke: Yes. (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30]).

The quote above exemplifies Louise's struggle with using the preferred pronouns. Louise initially uses the pronoun 'he' to refer to Alex. Then she says, "Or, how?" which can be interpreted as her attempt to respect the preferred pronouns and her uncertainty about which pronouns to use. Louise's use of 'he' pronouns instead of 'she' demonstrates an understanding that Alex does not identify as female as she initially was presented with Alex as Alexandra, and because of the feminine name, she thought she should use 'she/her' pronouns. It indicates a strategy employed to avoid the microaggression misuse of pronouns may be to use pronouns opposite to the sex assigned at birth within the gender binary. Thus, it suggests Louise has some knowledge about gender identities, such as being a trans man. In the quote above, after asking for help with the preferred pronouns and being corrected to 'they', she carefully tries it out and then questions, "Really?". It indicates a lack of familiarity with pronouns beyond 'he' and 'she' and mirrors a lack of knowledge of gender identities outside the gender binary. Overall, Louise's quote indicates her struggle with using preferred pronouns, and her strategy to use pronouns opposite to the sex assigned at birth shows her sensitivity to the microaggression misuse of pronouns.

Similarly, Mikkel also struggles: "I had asked Alex what they would first think about it. Um... Or what he thinks. Them. It is difficult. What does Alex think about it?" (Mikkel, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]). When referring to Alex, Mikkel uses a mix of pronouns such as 'they', 'he', and 'them'. This mix of different pronouns can be interpreted as an attempt to use the

preferred pronouns, thus emphasizing sensitivity to the microaggression misuse of pronouns. However, the shift between the different pronouns indicates confusion about which pronouns are correct and, thus, the struggle with using the correct ones. Mikkel's use of the 'he' pronoun to refer to Alex indicates that he, like Louise, understands that Alex does not identify as female. It demonstrates that he also uses pronouns opposite to those associated with the sex assigned at birth within the gender binary to avoid the microaggression misuse of pronouns. However, in contrast to Louise, he also uses the pronouns 'they' and 'them', demonstrating knowledge about pronouns for individuals with a gender identity outside the gender binary.

In contrast to Mikkel and Louise, Lars uses a different strategy. Based on his experience working with nonbinary clients, Lars has found that refraining from using pronouns to avoid the microaggression misuse of pronouns works for him:

Lars: I try as much as possible. Um... to speak directly with this client, because it's still difficult for me.

Lærke: Yeah

Lars: To use the correct pronoun. So, I say the person's name. (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

Emphasizing the challenge of using correct pronouns, Lars highlights his strategy of addressing clients directly by name instead of pronouns. By refraining from using pronouns, he avoids potentially committing the microaggression misuse of pronouns. Similarly, Mikkel employs the same tactic:

And at the very least, I intend to call the person Alex. They are them and theirs, I might find that difficult because 'he' and 'she,' and 'they' are 'them' and 'theirs' are plural for me. So, it's just, hey Alex, what does Alex think, what does he prefer? (Mikkel, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

Mikkel emphasizes how he finds Alex's preferred pronouns difficult because they differ from what he is used to linguistically; thus, they have another meaning for him. However, to be respectful and avoid using the wrong pronouns, he would do the same as Lars and choose to use the person's name instead of a pronoun, which highlights that a strategy to avoid committing the microaggression misuse of pronouns is to use the person's name instead of pronouns when referring to a nonbinary client.

In summary, the analysis illustrates that the participants use strategies to avoid committing the microaggression misuse of pronouns. The quotes from Louise and Mikkel showed the strategy of using pronouns opposite to the assigned sex at birth within the gender binary. In contrast, quotes from Lars and Mikkel showed the strategy of referring to the client by their name instead of using pronouns. These strategies underscore that the participants understood the importance of using correct pronouns, as highlighted by Darwin (2017, p. 329), which is significant for nonbinary individuals. As noted by Dodd and Shelton (2021, p. 27), misuse of pronouns can impact nonbinary individuals by, for example, causing distress, underscoring the necessity of understanding diverse gender pronouns to prevent microaggressions and limit harm to nonbinary clients.

5.1.4 Different views on the impact of a microaggression

Although the participants agreed on the importance of respecting pronouns and names, there was a difference of views between support workers and social workers. Maja believed it was more serious if a support worker was committing the microaggressions misuse of pronouns and deadnaming than a social worker.

It would also feel extremely embarrassing, I think. I mean, it would. Especially when you're the one she sees regularly. I mean, she has regular contact. I mean, one thing is that Maria might forget. She doesn't know the client at all, who she's thrown into the task. That's one thing. But the other is having a relationship. Um. With Alex. So, I would find that more embarrassing. In a way. (Maja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

Maja stated that she would be extremely embarrassed if she were the one who had committed the microaggressions deadnaming and misuse of pronouns. However, she then emphasizes that she would feel more embarrassed if she were closer to the client. Maja's perspective suggests that she differentiates between those who commit microaggressions, indicating that she may be less sympathetic if performed by someone less close to the client. From my experience working with § 85 support, I know that social workers often only see their clients once or twice a year, while the support worker sees a client frequently, often weekly. It indicates that Maja perhaps sees it as less problematic when a social worker commits a microaggression than a support worker. Suggesting that

a strategy for social workers to be okay with committing microaggressions is to rationalize that it is acceptable because they are not as closely involved with the client as support workers, who have more frequent interactions. Thus, Maja demonstrates sensitivity and insensitivity to microaggressions as she differentiates the harm based on the relationship dynamics involved.

Maja's differentiation based on the closeness of the relationship aligns with the proposition by Galupo et al. (2014, p.462) that the social or relational context significantly influences how microaggressions are expressed and individuals' capacity to address them. However, there is also a power imbalance in the relationship between a client and a social worker, with the social worker holding authority, which may strengthen the impact of microaggressions performed by social workers. Also, research indicates that nonbinary individuals' experiences of invalidation have a corresponding link with compromised mental health (Johnson et al., 2023, p.1). Thus, whether microaggressions are committed by people who are close or less, they still have an impact. Therefore, it is crucial for all professionals working with nonbinary clients to understand the significance of not committing the microaggression misuse of pronouns or deadnaming by using a client's preferred name and pronouns.

In summary, this analysis found that a strategy for social workers to be okay with committing microaggressions is to rationalize that it is acceptable because they are not closely involved with the client. Thus, they differentiate the impact of the microaggression based on the relationship between the one committing microaggressions and the recipient.

5.1.5 Microaggressions among co-workers

A couple of microaggressions that the participants were both sensitive and insensitive to was denying gender identity and pathologizing – linking a nonbinary gender identity to mental illness and that identifying oneself as nonbinary is a kind of attention-seeking behaviour. A distinction was made between microaggressions among co-workers and directly to nonbinary clients.

Lars demonstrates the distinction with his viewpoint on statements connecting nonbinary to mental illness during a team meeting:

And I don't need to have an opinion regarding Alex's gender. I don't need to have an opinion about how often they show up. I need to decide whether a support worker should be changed or not. That was the question. But with all the other stuff, you can take over a coffee. (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

The quote above highlights Lars' sensitivity to microaggressions like pathologizing and denying gender identity. He expresses that he does not need to have an opinion about Alex's gender identity within a professional discussion, indicating that such discussions are irrelevant to the case. However, he suggests that such conversations could occur over coffee, implying they are more appropriate within informal settings. This reflects a mix of sensitivity and insensitivity, as Lars differentiates between when such statements can be made. His ability to distinguish between professional and personal settings demonstrates his understanding of professional conduct: one should respect a client and discuss relevant matters during work, whereas in an informal or private setting, one is free to express personal opinions. While Lars was sensitive to microaggressions in a professional setting, he found them acceptable for casual conversation, indicating insensitivity.

Although slightly different from Lars, Heidi also makes a distinction between what is considered acceptable in interactions with clients compared to coworkers:

I think a team meeting is a mix of being professional but also being ourselves. It should be a space where we can discuss our different viewpoints. And we can't avoid personal opinions shining through. What's important to maintain is that when we're with a client, we focus on what support they need. It's not about the client's gender. (Heidi, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

In the above quote, Heidi explains how she differentiates the contexts in which statements, such as linking gender identity with mental illness, can be made. Regarding clients, she emphasizes the importance of focusing on their needs rather than their gender. This can be interpreted as finding opinions about a client's gender identity unacceptable when directed directly towards the client, demonstrating her sensitivity to microaggressions in a client setting. However, she also suggests that expressing personal viewpoints is inevitable and permissible at team meetings, implying that such statements are acceptable in that context, thereby also displaying insensitivity by allowing such statements in team meetings. This distinction indicates that Heidi interprets certain viewpoints when they can be expressed based on the context. By emphasizing that you cannot completely avoid personal opinions shining through, it can be interpreted that she finds personal viewpoints unavoidable in a professional context, which leads to connecting gender identity to mental illness. By distinguishing between stating this viewpoint to nonbinary clients versus colleagues, Heidi

demonstrates a mix of sensitivity and insensitivity with the microaggressions. Additionally, it shows that Heidi's strategy for maintaining professionalism is to avoid microaggressions towards clients.

Also, Maja indicated sensitivity to the microaggression of pathologizing by stating that there is no correlation between psychiatric diagnosis and gender identity. However, she believed that such personal opinions could enrich social workers' understanding of nonbinary clients:

Well, I don't know if I'd say they're not okay, because it's actually a good conversation to have, and you get to discuss opinions and how to act on them in relation to your work, because I think we'll encounter it more and more. So, we have to decide how to act in those situations when we encounter it. So, I think it's a good professional discussion to have. (Maja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote, Maja emphasizes that personal opinions expressed during the team meeting may initiate valuable conversations. She implies that being able to discuss personal opinions about nonbinary identities is valid for understanding how to act when dealing with a nonbinary client. She highlights its importance because social workers will likely encounter nonbinary clients more frequently. Her viewpoint can be interpreted as viewing discussing personal opinions about nonbinary clients as an opportunity for learning. Here, learning can be understood as developing strategies to be prepared for handling scenarios with nonbinary clients professionally. Thereby, she shows insensitivity by allowing statements with the microaggressions denying gender identity and pathologizing at team meetings, which indicates that she may prioritize gaining knowledge over sensitivity towards microaggressions, believing that open conversation is crucial for understanding despite potential insensitivity to microaggressions.

In summary, this analysis showed that the participants were selective about what they considered professionally acceptable, depending on the context. The participants illustrated sensitivity to microaggressions like denying gender identity and pathologizing when around clients but showed different viewpoints around colleagues. Whereas Kimie found it unacceptable around colleagues regardless of the context, Lars believed such topics were irrelevant in professional settings like team meetings but viewed them as okay over coffee. On the other hand, Heidi and Maja found it acceptable to discuss them at team meetings as long as nonbinary clients were not present. Lastly, Maja's quote indicated that her lack of knowledge about gender identities made her prioritize gaining knowledge through discussion with microaggressive statements over sensitivity towards

microaggressions, underscoring how education is crucial in preventing microaggressions (Baryeh & Rasool, 2023, p. 587). Although the analysis highlighted different ways of making a distinction regarding when statements like connecting gender identity to mental illness are appropriate, it overall demonstrated that the participants viewed avoiding microaggressions towards clients as a strategy for maintaining professionalism. Thus, it illustrates the genuine wish of the participants to treat their clients respectfully.

5.1.6 Writing the Journal

The microaggressions expressed in heterosexist or transphobic terminology in the vignette prompted the participants to reflect on how a specific language can carry negative connotations. In the vignette, Alex is described as “flamboyant.” The participants recognized that using such language in client journals could influence other professionals' assessments of the client. To avoid this kind of microaggression, they employed two strategies to maintain professional conduct when writing about binary clients in the journals.

I have some image in my head, the description makes me open up to all sorts of things, and then I just get absorbed in the fact that one can describe it so much from the outside in such a somewhat closed and maybe tending towards, what should I say, negative it's not, but maybe more normative in terms of how people should be, right? I mean, can we accept that some are flamboyant? [laughter]. (Mette, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

The quote from Mette exemplifies how descriptions of a client can shape the perception and expectations of the social worker. Mette's contemplation over how she perceives the description, stating that it is not negative, may imply that she does not find it neutral or positive. Thus, it is interpreted that the description leads Mette to make assumptions and preconceptions about Alex. The description makes Mette curious about Alex and leads her to reflect on normativity, where she links her curiosity and reflection to the use of 'flamboyant'. Mette's quote prompts consideration of how words like 'flamboyant' in descriptions of clients can influence professionals' preconceptions. Thus, it reflects the power of language when used by social workers to describe their clients, indicating her sensitivity to the microaggression of heterosexist or transphobic terminology. Therefore, it implies

that Mette would avoid using such language and thereby suggest that a strategy for professional conduct is to avoid using language with certain connotations.

Similarly, Lars also pauses to contemplate the descriptions of Alex: "The way Alexandre is talked about is very different. Whether it is the descriptions from colleagues or therapists. One portrays him as flamboyant and such, while the other is much more positive" (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60]). The quote demonstrates how the use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology, like the word 'flamboyant', can shape perceptions and attitudes towards Alex. Lars remarks on the inconsistency in describing Alex, interpreting 'flamboyant' as contrasting with something positive, suggesting that he perceives 'flamboyant' as having a negative connotation and recognises that it is not a neutral word to use in a description. Thus, it can be understood that Lars is sensitive to the microaggression heterosexist or transphobic terminology. Lars' quote illustrates the significance of whether the words social workers use in descriptions of clients have either neutral, negative, or positive connotations. Lars' reflection, like Mette's, suggests that a strategy for professional conduct is to avoid using language with specific connotations and practice using words with neutral or positive connotations.

Katrine shares a similar sentiment, reflecting on the process of taking over someone else's work:

I think the first thought is that when you take over work from others, you know that what you take over is their professional assessment, but also their subjective assessment. I have always respected the colleagues who have previous evaluations, what has been written, but I also think it is important to meet the person you are facing. (Katrine, cisgender, she/her, pansexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote above, Katrine emphasizes the importance of meeting new clients with an open mind despite subjective descriptions. Thus, Katrine highlights that although assessments are professional, they may still contain subjective judgments of a client. Although Katrine does not mention the word flamboyant, her reflection indicates sensitivity to the microaggression heterosexist or transphobic terminology. Katrine's quote illustrates how previous social workers' assessments can influence a new social worker's preconceptions of a client since the assessments might be biased. Thus, Katrine's perspective indicates that a strategy for social workers to maintain professionalism is to approach a new client with fresh eyes and not rely solely on previous assessments. It emphasizes the importance

of forming impressions and judgments based on direct client interactions rather than relying on written descriptions. Additionally, Katrine's quote emphasizes the power of language, as it can influence how social workers perceive clients. Thus, Katrine's thoughts demonstrate the importance of social workers and other professionals, especially those in positions of power, carefully considering their language in clients' journals.

In summary, this analysis suggests that the participants employed two strategies to avoid the microaggression of heterosexist or transphobic terminology and thereby maintain professionalism. The quotes from Mette and Lars indicate that one strategy is to avoid using language with certain connotations, such as 'flamboyant', and practice neutral and positive language. Katrine's quote implies that another strategy for social workers is to approach new clients with fresh eyes and not rely solely on previous descriptions, highlighting the importance of being aware of how descriptions from other professionals might be biased.

5.2 Gender Identity Attitudes

The analysis in Chapter 5.1 demonstrated how the participants navigated the risk of committing microaggressions by applying different strategies. In contrast, the second pattern identified during the data coding revealed the participants' attitudes toward gender identities outside the binary. In the following sections, I will discuss how these attitudes influence the participants' behaviour towards nonbinary clients.

Firstly, I will discuss how the nonbinary gender expressions in the vignettes confused the participants by challenging the gender binary. I will discuss how, despite wanting to respect pronouns, there were also indications of discomfort among the participants about using the pronouns 'they/them/theirs'. I will then discuss the risks of the microaggression pathologizing and argue that it is a kind of othering of nonbinary clients. Additionally, I will explore the participants' lack of understanding of the challenges faced by nonbinary individuals in a binary society. Finally, I will illustrate how, despite differentiating between personal curiosity and professional necessity, the participants would still ask intimate questions about binary clients out of mere curiosity.

5.2.1 Gender Expressions

When presented with a description of Alex's appearance that challenged the gender binary, the participants were initially confused about Alex's gender identity (see Appendices 5 or 6, vignette 2). As they viewed it through a binary lens, Alex's appearance made it difficult for them to interpret the gender identity.

This is illustrated in the following quote from Sonja, in which she reflects on Alex's gender identity based on their appearance. Initially, she viewed it in a binary manner before starting to perceive it as a more fluid expression of gender:

Yeah, initially, I'm a bit surprised because if it's Alexandra, then I would have imagined that she... that she would like to be more feminine. I mean, I think that... Maybe I would actually think, well, maybe he's both. Maybe it doesn't matter so much whether I say man or woman to him. (Sonja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

In the quote, Sonja's uncertainty in interpreting Alex's gender identity from appearance is evident as she struggles to decide whether to use 'he' or 'she' pronouns based on the description of Alex's appearance, leading her to switch between them. Her difficulty in deciding which pronouns to use highlights the reliance on the gender binary when interpreting others' appearances, causing confusion when an individual's appearance does not conform to traditional female or male categories. Towards the end, Sonja reflected that perhaps the specific gender assigned to Alex does not matter, suggesting some knowledge about the fluidity of gender.

In contrast, Louise caught that there might have been something about gender identity, but she thought about gender change, which suggested a more binary framework of either man or woman:

Well, there's something I forgot to mention earlier. The fact that both Alex and Alexandra were mentioned in the journal could suggest that maybe it was someone who... had something to do with identity, like maybe wanting to change gender, right? (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30]).

In the quote, Louise reflected on whether Alex's appearance and name shift might indicate a wish for a gender change. Initially, Louise only thought a little about the change in names in the journal. However, when Alex is described, she connects the dots and suggests that it could indicate something related to gender identity. When reflecting on whether the appearance might indicate something about gender identity, Louise's thoughts turn to gender change, which can be interpreted as considering Alex being a transman or transwoman. Thus, it emphasizes how gender is interpreted within the

gender binary – female or male. Overall, Louise demonstrates some knowledge about gender expressions and identity, although within the confines of the gender binary.

Maja remarked that Alex's appearance deviated from the norm but did not associate it with an expression of a gender identity outside the binary:

Well, it's actually a client who wants to appear neat and presentable but doing so in a somewhat different style of dress and appearance compared to the norm, if I may use that term, but not where I think it falls outside of it. (Maja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote above, Maja noticed how Alex's style did not conform to the norms, where 'the norms' could be interpreted as the binary notions set by heteronormativity. Thus, Maja reflected on how Alex's appearance challenged the binary notions of feminine versus masculine appearance. After stating that the appearance did not conform to the norms, she said, "if I may use that term", reflecting a certain uneasiness about saying "the norm". Although Maja did not mention any reflection about gender identity, her uneasiness about saying that Alex's appearance stood out from the norm might be interpreted as uncertainty about whether it was okay to mention anything related to gender identity. Maja's awareness of trying not to use the term 'the norm' reflects her knowledge of othering. Thus, it shows how Maja, although uncomfortable about it, was aware of not portraying Alex as the 'other'.

Additionally, when Malene was informed that Alex was nonbinary, she stated: "Yes. Nonbinary is probably the word I was missing earlier. It is because one does not have such a great familiarity with it" (Malene, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]). In this quote, Malene acknowledged that she lacked a term to interpret and describe Alex's appearance. By admitting that she was unfamiliar with the term nonbinary, she indicated that she noticed and perceived Alex's clothing as different. Thus, different from the binary notions of appearance set by heteronormativity. Maja also mentioned that she lacked "familiarity with it", where "it" can be interpreted as referring to gender identity outside the gender binary. Thus, it illustrates how a lack of familiarity with different gender identities can confuse interpreting certain gender expressions and gender identities.

Overall, the quotes from Maja, Malene, and Sonja illustrate Barbee and Schrock's (2019, p.578) argument that society typically perceives bodies as either female or male based on factors like clothing and accessories. Thus, the participants' confusion about how to interpret Alex's gender stems from the dominant view that individuals can only be female or male and must adhere

to the dominant perception of gender identity. As a result, nonbinary individuals frequently experience misgendering due to a lack of recognition, as gender is typically viewed through the binary lens. This lack of recognition means that people may not acknowledge nonbinary genders when encountering them, as the participants illustrated. However, Barbee and Schrock (2019, p.579) found that nonbinary individuals actively strive to challenge the binary understanding of gender, whereas Darwin (2017, p.326) discovered that nonbinary individuals sometimes use misgendering as a tool for gender mobility. Thus, the confusion among the participants, as illustrated by the shift between different pronouns to describe Alex, demonstrates how misgendering can lead to some gender mobility. Moreover, it illustrates the previously described concept of invisibility of unintentional bias as microaggressions like misuse of pronouns reproduce the dominant view within heteronormativity that there are only two genders.

In summary, this analysis demonstrated how gender is often perceived within the margins of the gender binary, leading to confusion when interpreting individuals with an appearance that does not conform to the binary notions of female or male.

5.2.2 Discomfort with 'They/Them/Theirs' Pronouns

As discussed in the analysis in Section 5.1, the participants tried to respect nonbinary clients' preferred pronouns. However, they also expressed discomfort about using the pronouns 'they/them/theirs'.

The discomfort is exemplified in Malene's reflection on Alex's preferred pronouns:

I find it a bit difficult because you're sort of on this boundary where you can't quite figure out what to call people, if you're going to start using 'they' and 'them' and things like that. Mm. But one should also take into account the individual client. [...] However, I could imagine feeling a bit conflicted because then you also have to treat people differently. If you catch my drift. (Malene, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

Malene expressed her desire to respect each of her clients but admitted feeling conflicted about using 'they/them' pronouns, which suggests an internal struggle between wanting to honour a client's wishes and feeling hesitant. Her hesitation is evident when she mentions that using 'they/them' pronouns makes it challenging to determine how to address people, implying that she perceives pronouns beyond 'he' and 'she' as complicating her usual way of referring to others. Consequently, Malene is

concerned about navigating societal norms if 'they/them' pronouns become more common as they disturb the gender binary. This discomfort stems from the potential shift in how she interprets people's gender. Therefore, Malene's thoughts suggest that the use of 'they/them' pronouns can influence heteronormativity and alter the way individuals are addressed. While she desires to be respectful, her hesitation reveals a mix of sensitivity and insensitivity towards pronoun use. Ultimately, Malene's reflection indicates that she feels some discomfort with 'they/them' pronouns due to their potential impact on heteronormativity.

Similarly, Mikkel also shows discomfort by resisting using the pronouns 'they/them'. Although the analysis of professional strategies has highlighted Mikkel's approach of using a client's name instead of pronouns to avoid the microaggression misuse of pronouns, this tactic also reveals an underlying resistance:

And at the very least, I intend to call the person Alex. They and them and theirs, I might find that difficult because 'he' and 'she,' and 'they' are 'them' and 'theirs' are plural for me. So, it's just, hey Alex, what does Alex think, what does he prefer? (Mikkel, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

In the quote, Mikkel expresses difficulty with the pronouns 'they/them', stating that 'they' and 'them' are plural for him. This suggests that he perceives the pronouns 'they/them' as incorrect when referring to an individual, indicating that they must align with his language understanding. This reluctance to use the pronouns illustrates the previously described concept of a clash of realities. This clash arises when different interpretations create tensions, generating misunderstandings and microaggressions (Nadal, 2018, p. 42). Mikkel understands that 'they/them' is plural and inappropriate for referring to a single individual, which differs from those who prefer these pronouns.

Additionally, 'they/them' pronouns do not align with heteronormativity, which uses 'he' and 'she'. Therefore, Mikkel's resistance to using these pronouns results in his strategy to avoid them. However, this resistance could indicate that he does not acknowledge, for instance, Alex as someone who prefers 'they/them' pronouns, thus increasing the risk of using the wrong pronoun and committing the microaggression misuse of pronouns. Overall, Mikkel's quote shows resistance to 'they/them' pronouns because they do not fit his understanding of pronouns, primarily because they do not conform to heteronormative standards.

Furthermore, scepticism to the pronouns 'they/them' is seen in the example of Maja:

Lærke: What do you think, or what do you believe Maria thinks about using they/them/their in the conversation and in the journal? Pronouns that are different.

Maja: Well, I would say, I know what I would think. I would think it was very old-fashioned, different compared to the current time.

Lærke: Yes.

Maja: But I would have full respect for it. Yes. (Maja, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote above, Maja articulates that using 'they/them' pronouns seems old-fashioned and out of step with the current time, which can be understood as her alluding to a past time in Denmark when 'they/them' pronouns were used to indicate distance and respect. By stating "different compared to the current time", she contrasts it with the present time, where we no longer use this distancing. Maja's connection of Alex's preferred pronouns to a past time may be interpreted as scepticism about the preferred pronouns. It suggests that she views them through the lens of past social conventions rather than as an expression of gender identity outside the binary, indicating a sense of scepticism. Thus, Maja's interpretation of 'they/them' pronouns also illustrates the concept of the clash of realities, as her understanding of the pronouns belonging to the past clashes with how nonbinary individuals who prefer these pronouns interpret them. Thus, the contrasting interpretations can potentially lead to both misunderstandings and the microaggression misuse of pronouns. However, Maja emphasizes respecting the preferred pronouns, although sceptical, thus demonstrating a blend of sensitivity and insensitivity to the microaggression misuse of pronouns.

The clash of realities can also be seen in Lars' experience with a nonbinary client preferring 'they/them' pronouns:

Lars: We can say 'they' and 'them', but then they also have to say 'them' to me. At that time, I was at a point where 'they' and 'them' were a formal way to show mutual respect. [...]. Until I delved deeper and could see that it wasn't 'they' and 'them' and 'their' with capital letters. It was 'they' and 'them' and 'their' with small letters. (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60]).

In the quote, Lars explained how when he first encountered a nonbinary client who preferred the pronouns 'they/them', he interpreted it the same way as Maja. He saw it as a formal way to show mutual respect. Therefore, if Lars were to use those pronouns to refer to the nonbinary client, they should also use them to refer to him. This demand indicates resistance to using the pronouns, as he wants the same respect in return before using them, illustrating how the clash of realities creates misunderstandings, as Lars interpreted 'they/them' differently than the nonbinary client. However, in the quote, Lars also explained how he later realized he had misunderstood the nonbinary client's perception of 'they/them' pronouns. Thus, Lars's experience underscores how the clash of realities can create misunderstandings and how knowledge can help prevent the clash of realities.

In summary, the participants expressed various emotions such as scepticism, discomfort, and resistance towards the pronouns 'they/them', which I interpret as an overall sense of discomfort. The analysis indicates that this discomfort arises from two things. First, because 'they/them' pronouns stand in contrast to the dominant pronouns 'he' and 'she', thus challenging heteronormativity. Secondly, because the participants and nonbinary individuals have different interpretations and understandings of 'they/them', illustrating the concept of a clash of realities.

5.2.3 Pathologizing

During the coding of the collected data, it became evident that the microaggression pathologizing was an expression of an othering of nonbinary clients. For instance, Louise pathologized Alex as she suggested that there might be a correlation between mental illness and gender identity:

I think it's unfortunate to compare it like that. I'm not sure if there might be something to the fact that people with mental disorders often tend to have, not just gender confusion, but also identity issues. I actually think there might be something to that. But it's not something I know enough about to speak on at such a team meeting, at least not at this point. (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30]).

In the quote, Louise initially demonstrates sensitivity to the microaggression pathologizing by stating that gender identity should not be linked to mental illness. However, she then expresses uncertainty about whether there might be some connection, thus displaying insensitivity to the microaggression pathologizing. Linking gender identity with mental health as a way of explaining gender identities

outside the binary contributes to the alienation of nonbinary individuals. Alienating nonbinary clients is part of the process of othering them, as they are marginalized for being in contrast to the norm.

In Danni's quote, the same kind of othering is seen as he suggested asking a nonbinary client's doctor whether the client's gender identity has something to do with mental illness:

Now, I think this is indeed legitimate, and if anything, if one was in doubt about whether it was legitimate or not, one could always consult the individual's own doctor, or again, get some elaboration from psychiatry if needed, if there was a need for some more of a healthcare perspective on this if that's what it came down to. (Danni, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

In the quote, although Danni did not explicitly state the nature of consulting a nonbinary client's doctor, it may be interpreted as related to their gender identity, implying that the doctor might explain whether there is a correlation between mental illness and gender identity outside the binary. By insinuating that the client's gender identity could be medically explained, Danni commits the microaggression pathologizing, thus demonstrating insensitivity to it. Furthermore, Danni's suggestion implies that gender identity outside the binary is only valid if medical authority can validate it not being connected to mental illness. This further alienates nonbinary individuals from their own experiences and self-identification, thereby creating a division between nonbinary individuals and the rest of society, reinforcing the notion that they are somehow different or "other". Thus, Danni's comments contribute to the othering by reinforcing the idea that there is a correlation between gender identities outside the binary and mental illness, as well as the notion that they need validation from a medical authority.

In summary, this section illustrated how the microaggression pathologizing contributes to the othering of nonbinary individuals.

5.2.4 Understanding Being Nonbinary in a Binary Society

When discussing the vignette, it was obvious that the participants struggled to understand the difficulties of being nonbinary in a binary society.

In one of the vignettes, Alex's experiences of being nonbinary in a binary society are not acknowledged by Lone, who thinks that it should not occupy Alex's mind so much and therefore wants to work on it not to occupy that much space (see Appendices 5 or 6, vignette 6). Not

acknowledging the experience of being nonbinary in a binary society reflects the microaggression denying societal transphobia. Anna did not see any issue with Lone's statement, although she emphasized that she would want to focus on what Alex wants:

I'm not sure. I actually think it's fine that Lone brings it up. And in that case, I would probably ask Alex if that was also their experience. Yeah, and ask a bit about whether it's something that weighs on their mind? Is it a goal? And how they think we could work on it perhaps. (Anna, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote, Anna appreciates Lone's initiative in identifying a potential new goal to work with Alex. However, she emphasizes ensuring these goals align with Alex's preferences, which indicates that Anna wants to be mindful and respects the client's agency. However, Anna shows insensitivity to the microaggression of denying societal transphobia, as Anna does not express any issue with Lone's statement that Alex's experience of being nonbinary in a binary society should not occupy that much space. Not commenting on Lone's comment suggests that Anna may agree with Lone's statement that the nonbinary experience in a binary society should not occupy space. Not acknowledging the experience of being nonbinary in a binary society and, for example, experiencing microaggressions can potentially make nonbinary individuals feel alienated, thus contributing to their othering by not recognizing their experiences. Therefore, the microaggression denying societal transphobia highlights the power imbalance between the dominant group and the minority group, with cisgender individuals often disregarding the impact of microaggressions on gender identities outside of the binary. Overall, the quote from Anna indicates that cisgender individuals lack understanding of being nonbinary in a binary society and experiencing microaggressions.

The lack of understanding of the experiences of being nonbinary in a binary society can also be viewed through whether the participants thought they should intervene when a nonbinary client experienced microaggressions. For instance, Lars expressed ambivalence about whether he should act when a nonbinary client experienced microaggressions like misuse of pronouns and deadnaming:

Perhaps a tiny bit bad for Alex's sake. But at the same time, it's not up to me to fight Alex's battles. It's what Alex wants, a different pronoun. And it's also true that it's Alex's

battle to take. And therefore, of course, I can help when I think about it. (Lars, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [50-60])

In the quote, Lars acknowledges feeling bad for Alex because they experience microaggressions, misuse of pronouns and deadnaming. However, he said it was Alex's battle because they wanted different pronouns, and Lars then realised he could help. The quote indicates that Lars experienced some ambivalence about whether he should intervene. Stating that using the pronouns 'they/them' is Alex's own choice suggests a lack of understanding of identifying as nonbinary, indicating that it is a choice to be nonbinary. It implies that because it is their own choice, they 'deserve' to experience microaggressions, thus contributing to the othering of nonbinary individuals as they are seen as different and less deserving of respect.

Similarly to Lars, Mette didn't think she should intervene: "No, I don't think so. No. Yeah. The world is as it is. And it unfolds right before your eyes all the time. You can't correct that. What should one do, right?" (Mette, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [50-60]). Here, Mette emphasises that things happen, and one can't change that. Stating that she should not intervene because "the world is as it is" implies that being nonbinary in a binary society means experiencing microaggressions like misuse of pronouns, and that is how it is. Thus, it underscores the same point as the above section with Lars, which is that nonbinary clients 'deserve' to experience microaggressions, as Mette indicates that addressing microaggressions falls on the individual themselves. Mette and Lars view that nonbinary's struggles of being nonbinary in a binary society are solely their own, placing nonbinary individuals in a position of isolation; therefore, not wanting to intervene when nonbinary clients experience microaggressions contribute to othering them.

Summarising, the participants indicated a lack of understanding of the experiences of being nonbinary in a binary society. This lack of understanding meant that they didn't recognise microaggressions like denying societal transphobia, potentially making nonbinary clients feel alienated and contributing to othering them. Additionally, the lack of understanding of being nonbinary in binary society and the othering of nonbinary clients meant that the participants didn't think it was necessary to intervene if they saw nonbinary clients experiencing microaggressions like misuse of pronouns or deadnaming, as they see it as their own choice. Thus, this contributes to nonbinary clients being further marginalised and othered.

5.2.5 Personal Curiosity versus Professional Necessity

A microaggression the participants were sensitive to was the invasion of bodily privacy. The vignettes exemplified a situation where the social worker Maria asked Alex about their interest in top surgery, which involves surgical removal of breast tissue (see Appendices 5 or 6, vignette 5) (Hilden, 2023). The participants recognized that asking such intimate questions would be inappropriate:

Danni: Actually, I feel like it's none of our business. It's not Maria's business either. It's like, whether Alex has those piercings that were mentioned earlier, or whether there are tattoos or whether it's one thing or another with top surgery or extending it to genitalia or anything else. It's none of our business. And I think that's completely irrelevant to the discussion of whether he needs this support, or requires this support, or desires this support, and so on. (Danni, cisgender, he/his, heterosexual, age [30-40]).

In the quote, Danni highlights that asking a nonbinary client about gender-affirming surgeries is irrelevant to social workers' support. Stating that such inquiries are irrelevant to the support Alex needs highlights that a client's gender identity should not be conflated with their needs for social services. Danni's quote highlights the importance of professionalism by avoiding intimate questions, such as inquiries about top surgery. Thus, Danni's quote indicates sensitivity to the microaggression of invading bodily privacy. However, despite the participants' sensitivity to this microaggression and recognition that such questions are inappropriate, they still acknowledged the possibility of asking clients intimate questions out of personal curiosity, as shown in the following section.

Mette mentioned in the interview that she is curious and, as a result, may sometimes cross the line with her questions:

I'm also a curious type, so sometimes I end up asking, where one might wonder. If I become uncertain, I'll say, oh, I actually don't know. Was it okay for me to ask about that? I often tell people because I know that I'm very curious, so I get very absorbed and then I ask, and it's like, I find it exciting, right? But I also make sure to tell people that just because I'm asking, they don't have to answer. That's what I think one should be aware of when in such a position of power, like she is. I don't know if that Alex person is affected by it, but some people might feel obligated to respond because they're asked. One is allowed to have their things to themselves. (Mette, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [40-50]).

In the quote, Mette acknowledged that she might sometimes cross the line when asking questions to clients out of curiosity. Mette recognized that clients might feel compelled to answer these questions due to the power dynamic between a client and a social worker. Therefore, informing her clients that they don't have to answer anything they are uncomfortable about is a strategy Mette applies to not cross the line. However, even though she makes this clear, asking such questions could still make nonbinary clients like Alex uncomfortable, as it can make them feel alienated and 'othered' by asking questions that one would not ask cisgender individuals.

Furthermore, in addition to the power disparity between social workers and clients that Mette highlights in the quote, there is also a power imbalance between majority and minority groups in society, such as being cisgender like Mette and being nonbinary like Alex. Thus, this power imbalance emphasized the vulnerability inherent in asking such questions and the challenges faced by nonbinary clients in responding to the microaggressions committed by their social workers. Thereby, Mette's quotes illustrate the concept of Catch-22, where the power imbalance may affect a client's likelihood of confronting their social worker about a microaggression. Moreover, Mette's awareness that she might ask inappropriate questions due to her curiosity highlighted how nonbinary clients could experience being othered. When social workers ask intimate questions unrelated to their case to satisfy their curiosity, it can dehumanize them, emphasizing their differences and treating them as objects of curiosity rather than individuals with agency. Overall, Mette demonstrated a mix of sensitivity and insensitivity with the microaggression of invading bodily privacy: insensitivity by admitting she could ask such questions out of curiosity and sensitivity by letting clients know they don't have to answer.

Similarly, Louise also acknowledges that she asks questions out of curiosity and not a necessity:

Lærke: Mhm. Do you think you're curious about it because you want to know something about it? Or because you think there's something in relation to Alex's case where it's relevant?

Louise: Not in relation to the case immediately. Yeah. It's just because I want to know something about it. I often have a feeling that when you're interested in the citizen's life and interests, and ask curious questions, they're also more open in terms of the holistic

picture. So, it's a bit easier to ask about other things. So yeah. (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30])

In the quote, Louise acknowledges how she could ask questions out of curiosity, which is not necessarily relevant to the case, but also to show interest in the client. Louise and Mette recognise that these questions are irrelevant to the case but still desire to ask them. Wanting to ask the question out of curiosity can be interpreted as the microaggression of exoticisation, where LGBTQ+ individuals are dehumanised and treated as objects (Nadal, 2023, p.49). This microaggression contributes to the process of othering nonbinary clients due to the dehumanisation. Louise emphasised how she asked curious questions to clients because she had found that curiosity could make it easier to talk with clients about other topics relevant to their cases. While this was Louise's experience, some questions, such as those about gender-affirming surgeries, are intimate and constitute the microaggression of invasion of bodily privacy. However, Louise also discussed how questions about gender-affirming surgeries sometimes can be relevant for the case of having a support worker:

I have several clients who have sought gender-affirming surgeries, or whatever you call it. Where we've talked about the actual operation, but there have also been cases where I've sensed that they were very open about what actually happens. Yeah. And also, the fact that not everyone can be approved for it. It requires that one has their activities of daily living skills in place³, right? So, we've also talked about, in relation to that, you can't keep getting admitted all the time, because then your mental... Well, things like that. (Louise, cisgender, she/her, heterosexual, age [20-30]).

In the quote, Louise points out that it can be relevant for a support worker if a client desires different forms of gender-affirming surgeries, as these surgeries require the client to have their daily living skills in place. Thus, questions about gender-affirming surgeries can be relevant in some situations. Therefore, Louise points out how intimate questions like asking about gender-affirming surgeries only become the microaggression invasion of bodily privacy when asked out of curiosity and not because it is relevant. However, even though it can be relevant in some situations, one still needs to show sensitivity because questions about gender-affirming surgeries are intimate and private. Overall,

³ In Danish: *almen daglig levevis* or also called *ADL-opgaver*

this analysis indicates that Louise understands the distinction between questions arising from curiosity and professional necessity.

In summary, while the participants demonstrated sensitivity to the microaggression of invading bodily privacy and the ability to differentiate between curiosity and professional necessity, they also acknowledged the possibility of asking intimate questions out of mere curiosity. The fact that they want to ask questions out of curiosity highlights how they could inadvertently commit the microaggression of exoticisation, thereby being part of other nonbinary individuals. Additionally, Louise's quote illustrated how questions about bodily privacy become microaggressions when asked in irrelevant situations, thus constituting the microaggression invasion of bodily privacy.

6 Concluding Discussion

This final chapter of the thesis addresses the research question by summarizing conclusions drawn from the analysis.

6.1 Conclusion

In my analysis, I aimed to illustrate how Danish social workers, as represented by my sample, navigate the risk of committing microaggressions against nonbinary clients. Overall, the analysis indicated that the participants viewed avoiding microaggressions as essential for upholding professionalism and maintaining a respectful relationship with their clients. The analysis showed that the participants employed various strategies to navigate the risk of committing microaggressions towards nonbinary clients and for professional conduct. These strategies were identified using vignettes incorporating microaggressions from the developed Microaggressions Scale for Nonbinary Clients. The strategies include: 1) clarifying a client's name, 2) addressing clients by their names instead of using pronouns, 3) using pronouns opposite to the assigned sex at birth within the gender binary, 4) avoiding language with certain connotations, 5) approaching new clients with fresh eyes instead of relying on previous descriptions, 6) setting aside personal opinions and remaining open-minded toward clients, and 7) rationalizing that committing microaggressions might be more tolerable when not as closely involved with the client as a support worker who sees the client more frequently than a social worker. Most of the strategies address a specific microaggression from the Microaggressions towards Nonbinary Clients scale: strategy 1 targets the microaggression deadnaming, while strategies 2 and 3 focus on preventing the microaggression misuse of pronouns, and strategies 4 and 5 aim to avoid heterosexist or transphobic language, whereas strategy 6 is for professional conduct and strategy 7 for trying to avoid all microaggressions but rationalizing why it is okay if a microaggressions slips.

The strategies demonstrate the participants' sensitivity to microaggressions as they employed the above strategies to avoid microaggressions. However, the participants' comments on the vignettes reveal differing views on the severity of microaggressions and, thus also, insensitivity to microaggressions. For instance, while they were generally sensitive to microaggressions in the presence of nonbinary clients, they might be less so when discussing nonbinary clients with colleagues. Strategy 7 also emphasizes this as a microaggression is perceived as more severe if committed by a support worker who frequently interacts with a nonbinary client compared to one who sees the client less often.

Additionally, although the participants were sensitive to microaggressions toward nonbinary clients, the analysis revealed that they held certain attitudes towards gender identities outside the binary. These attitudes had various consequences, which included: 1) occasional insensitivity to microaggressions due to a lack of understanding about being nonbinary in a binary-dominated society, 2) reluctance to intervene when witnessing potential microaggressions against nonbinary clients, 3) contributing to the othering of nonbinary individuals through microaggressions such as pathologizing, 4) asking intimate questions out of personal curiosity rather than professional necessity, 5) interpreting appearance strictly through the lens of the gender binary, and 6) discomfort with using 'they/them' pronouns.

Overall, the findings of my study contribute to a comprehending understanding of social workers' sensitivity and insensitivity to microaggressions toward nonbinary clients, as well as the strategies Danish social workers use to navigate the risk of committing microaggressions.

6.2 Limitations and the Lack of an Intersectional Perspective

In this final section, I will briefly discuss the consequences of focusing on single identity microaggressions and what could have been achieved if an intersectional approach had been adopted as a framework.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, p. 140) argues that examining intersecting identities is necessary when capturing the unique experience of the combined effect of multiple forms of oppression. Oppression can manifest on multiple levels depending on an individual's social categories (Dominelli, 2002, p. 44). Sterzing et al. (2017, pp. 81-82) contend that microaggressions can trigger both a historical and an individual trauma, and therefore, their impact may increase when experienced by people with intersecting and marginalized identities. Consequently, focusing solely on singular identities neglects other systems of power and oppression (Sterzing et al., 2017, p. 82). The limitation of my thesis is that it examines the collected data only through the lens of microaggression. Thus, it does not fully consider social workers' sensitivity to microaggressions towards nonbinary individuals with multiple intersecting identities. The focus on a single identity may overlook the complexity and combined effects of intersecting microaggressions, which is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the social workers' interactions with nonbinary clients.

Several steps could have been taken to give my study an intersectional approach. Firstly, as the fictitious character Alex in the vignette has multiple identities, the data could have been analyzed more broadly, considering other microaggressions reflected in the participant's comments.

For instance, Alex is biologically female, which might cause microaggressions based on being perceived as a woman initially. However, since I designed the vignettes around microaggressions towards nonbinary clients, this broader analysis would only be possible if participants exhibited microaggressions related to Alex's intersecting identities beyond those of the microaggression scale. However, some intersectionality is present, as Alex is described as diagnosed with an anxious-evasive personality disorder. The analysis discusses how Alex's gender identity, combined with the diagnosis, caused some of the participants to commit the microaggression of pathologizing. Secondly, Alex's identity could have been created as more intersectional, with the vignettes reflecting multiple microaggressions. For instance, Alex's identity could have included belonging to an ethnic minority or identifying with a particular sexuality or religious background. More microaggressions would have required expanding the microaggressions scale by adding microaggressions that reflect the experiences of intersecting identities. Lastly, I could have compared social workers' sensitivity to microaggressions based on whether a person has a single social identity or multiple social identities. This comparison would have required two different vignettes, with the only difference being that Alex would have a single social identity in the one vignette and in the other, Alex would have multiple social identities.

Although an intersectional approach would have been beneficial in understanding social workers' sensitivity to microaggressions towards nonbinary clients with multiple social identities, there were three main reasons for not adopting this approach. Firstly, addressing multiple identities would have made exploring the topic in depth more challenging compared to the more focused approach in my research design. It would have been too broad a topic to manage within the constrained time frame and word count of a master's thesis. Secondly, even if there had been scope for it, microaggressions arising from multiple intersecting identities make it difficult to determine whether a microaggression is related to a singular identity, such as being nonbinary, or to multiple intersecting identities, such as being nonbinary and an ethnic minority (Nadal, 2023, p. 116). Thirdly, as section 2.2 describes previous research in the field, there is a gap in research focusing explicitly on nonbinary individuals. Thus, it can be argued that research on this particular topic was necessary before exploring microaggressions towards nonbinary individuals with multiple identities. Thus, the thesis can be a first step in future research about social workers' sensitivity towards nonbinary clients with multiple identities.

7 Appendix

7.1 References after APA 7th

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7.2 Appendices

7.2.1 Appendix 1: Gender Identity Microaggressions Scale (GIMS)

Type	Description
Denial of gender identity	This, for example, is when a person with a gender nonconforming identity is told that their gender nonconformity is just a phase or that their gender nonconformity or transgender identity makes someone uncomfortable (Nadal, 2019, p.1412).
Misuse of pronouns	Occurs, for example, when others misgender a person by using the wrong personal pronoun (Nadal, 2019, p.1412).
Invasion of bodily privacy	This is, for example, when a person asks personal questions about someone's body, such as whether they have undergone gender reassignment surgery or when they are objectified, and others want to engage in a sexual act based on their gender (Nadal, 2019, p.1412).
Behavioral discomfort	This is, for example, when people avoid being near a person with gender nonconformity at restaurants, libraries, etc., or when people are unfriendly towards them because of their appearance (Nadal, 2019, p.1412).
Denial of societal transphobia	This is, for example, when people tell individuals with gender nonconformity that they complain too much about societal discrimination against gender nonconforming people or how others react to their gender nonconformity (Nadal, 2019, p.1412).

7.2.2 Appendix 2: the Nonbinary Gender Microaggressions Scale (NGMS)

Type	Description
Negation of Identity	Negation of identity encompasses the experiences of nonbinary individuals encountering challenges in having their gender identity acknowledged or being addressed with their preferred pronouns by others (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p.429). This could involve someone close to the nonbinary person refusing to use the pronouns they prefer or expressing difficulty in accepting their identity as nonbinary (Croteau & Morrison, 2023b).
Inauthenticity	Reflects microaggressions that imply the inauthenticity of nonbinary individuals and identities (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p.429), such as being told that nonbinary identities are not genuine gender identities or being suggested that being nonbinary is merely a means to seek extra attention. Other examples include telling a nonbinary person they are 'confused' about their gender identity or asserting that there are only two genders (Croteau & Morrison, 2023b).
Deadnaming	It entails misgendering by employing a nonbinary individual's deadname despite their explicit request to friends and family not to use it (Croteau, & Morrison, 2023a, p.429).
Trans Exclusion	Concerns the experiences of nonbinary individuals being perceived as 'not trans enough' or 'not truly trans' (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p.429). For instance, this may involve difficulties in finding a queer support group that fully embraces nonbinary individuals or facing rejection from within the trans community, where some may assert that nonbinary identities don't align with the broader trans identity (Croteau & Morrison, 2023b).
Misuse of Gendered Terminology	Incorporates instances where nonbinary individuals are subjected to gendered language that contradicts their gender identity (Croteau & Morrison, 2023a, p.429). This encompasses situations where nonbinary individuals advocate for the use of non-gendered language when referring to them, as well as instances where they are dismissed or criticized for being overly sensitive about the use of such language (Croteau & Morrison, 2023b).
Institutional invisibility	Institutional invisibility refers to the systemic oversight or neglect of nonbinary individuals' needs and identities within various societal structures and public spaces. It manifests in numerous ways, such as being compelled to use a men's or women's changing room in a public space or encountering difficulty in finding a gender-neutral washroom in a public setting (Croteau & Morrison, 2023b).

7.2.3 Appendix 3: LGBTQ Microaggressions Taxonomy

The eight subscales	Description
Use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology	Instances where individuals employ derogatory language reflecting heterosexist or transphobic attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, such as the use of terms like ‘dyke’, ‘abnormal’ or ‘she-male’ (Nadal et al., 2010, p.227+229; Nadal, 2023, p.49).
Endorsement of heteronormative or gender normative culture and behaviors	Instances where LGBTQ individuals are pressured to conform to heterosexual norms or expectations can be observed. For instance, when a heterosexual individual advises a queer friend against displaying characteristics deemed ‘flamboyant’, or when a cisgender parent compels their child to adhere to clothing styles associated with their assigned sex at birth (Nadal et al., 2010, p.227+229-230; Nadal, 2023, p.49).
Assumption of universal LGBTQ experience	Instances where heterosexual individuals generalize and assume all LGBTQ individuals to be alike are evident. For example, stereotyping all gay men as having an interest in fashion design (Nadal et al., 2010, p.227+230; Nadal, 2023, p.49).
Exoticisation	Instances where LGBTQ individuals are dehumanized or treated as objects can be observed, such as being sexualized solely due to their gender or sexuality (Nadal et al., 2010, p.227-228+230-231; Nadal, 2023, p.49).
Discomfort of LGBTQ experience	Instances where LGBTQ individuals face disrespect and criticism are prevalent. For instance, when a heterosexual individual tells an LGBTQ person they are ‘going to hell’ or when strangers openly glare at an affectionate lesbian couple (Nadal et al., 2010, p.228+231; Nadal, 2023, p.50).
Denial of the reality of heterosexism or transphobia	Instances where individuals deny the existence of heterosexism and transphobia. For example, when someone tells a nonbinary friend that they are being paranoid for thinking someone is discriminating against them or asking them to stop complaining over misuse of pronouns (Nadal et al., 2010, p.228+231-232; Nadal, 2023, p.50).
Assumption of sexual pathology	Experiences that stigmatize LGBTQ people as hypersexual, sinful, or sexual deviants. For instance, when someone makes a blanket statement implying that all trans women are sex workers (Nadal et al., 2010, p.228+232; Nadal, 2023, p.50).
Denial of individual heterosexism	Statements in which people deny their heterosexist and transgender biases, such as saying, "I am not homophobic, I have a gay friend!" is often used to deflect from acknowledging and addressing personal biases (Nadal et al., 2010, pp.228-229; Nadal, 2023, p.50).

Bliv interviewet på en alternativ måde til speciale på Gender Studies ved Lund Universitet



KÆRE DIG!

Jeg er uddannet socialrådgiver og læser videre på Gender Studies i Lund. Jeg er nu ved mit afsluttende semester, hvor jeg skal skrive speciale og har behov for dig som socialrådgiver til at være informant.

HVAD GØR DETTE INTERVIEW ANDERLEDES END ANDRE?

Du vil blive præsenteret for otte korte historier om en borgersag under cirka en times interview, hvor du skal komme med dine tanker og kommentarer til historierne.

HVAD HANDLER DET OM?

Det er lige det. For ikke at påvirke dataen vil du først få det at vide bagefter. Men gør det ikke det hele mere interessant? Selvfølgelig har du mulighed for at trække dit interview tilbage, men jeg håber, at du synes at sagen og oplevelsen har været så interessant og sjov, at du gerne vil bidrage med dit input til mit speciale.



HVEM KAN DELTAGE?

Alle der er uddannet socialrådgiver og har en times tid til rådighed i løbet af marts 2024 kan deltage.

Interviewet kan foregå online via zoom eller teams eller fysisk i Storkøbenhavn.

NYSGERRIG?

Det kan jeg godt forstå!
Kontakt mig her, på 2034 5158 eller via e-mail på La6381je-s@student.lu.se.

HÅBEFULDE HILSNER

Lærke Sick Broskov Jensen

7.2.5 Appendix 5: Interview Guide in Danish

<p>Briefing</p>	<p>Interviewet vil tage cirka 1 time og vil blive optaget. Optagelsen vil blive transskriberet, og du vil få mulighed for at modtage og godkende det. Optagelsen af interviewet vil blive slettet efter afleveringen af specialet, som forventes at være den 16. maj 2024, men det kan blive udskudt til slutningen af august 2024.</p> <p>Under interviewet vil du blive præsenteret for 8 små vignetter, der er korte historier af en fiktiv borgersag, hvor jeg vil stille spørgsmål om dine tanker om de enkelte historier. Efter interviewet vil jeg give en mere uddybende forklaring på, hvad jeg har observeret, men dette vil ske efter interviewet for at undgå at påvirke resultaterne. Vignetterne er et etisk alternativ til at foretage observationer. Du vil have mulighed for at trække samtykket tilbage efterfølgende.</p> <p>Interviewet vil blive anonymiseret. Har du et bestemt navn, du ønsker at bruge i anonymiseringen af dig? Jeg har medbragt en samtykkeerklæring, som du skal underskrive. Ønsker du at modtage det transskriberede interview til godkendelse?</p>
<p>Vignette 1: Introduktion</p>	<p>Socialrådgiver Maria sidder ved sit skrivebord og gennemgår en sag inden et opfølgingsmøde om socialpædagogisk støtte i henhold til § 85 i Serviceloven. Hun har overtaget Alexandras sag fra en kollega, der er blevet sygemeldt. Maria skimmer Alexandras journal for at få et hurtigt overblik og bemærker, at der i de forskellige journalnotater og sagsakter skiftes mellem brug af Alexandra og Alex. Alexandra er 26 år og modtager uddannelseshjælp. Den sygemeldte kollega har beskrevet Alexandra som flamboyant. Alexandra er diagnosticeret med ængstelig personlighedsstruktur samt en spiseforstyrrelse. Psykiatrien beskriver Alexandra som overtænkende og med lavt selvværd. I statussen fra Alexandras bostøtte, Lone, beskrives Alexandra som engageret og aktivistisk. Bostøtten skriver, at der fortsat er behov for støtte til påmindelser om aftaler, især i forhold til forløbet vedrørende spiseforstyrrelsen, samt at målet om brug af ugeskemaer skal fortsætte. Det noteres dog, at målet om at tjekke e-boksen én gang om ugen går godt og kan afsluttes. Der tilføjes dog, at et nyt mål kunne være at arbejde med kontakten til offentlige instanser, da Alexandra har en del møder for tiden på Jobcentret. Maria tjekker sin arbejdstelefon og ser en sms fra Lone: ”På vej. 5-10 minutter forsinket. I går bare i gang :-)”</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad tænker du om denne historie? • Hvis du var Maria, er der noget du så ville lægge mærke til i sagen? Hvad og hvorfor? • Hvad er dit førstehåndsindtryk af borgeren?
<p>Vignette 2: Beskrivelse af borgeren</p>	<p>Maria går ud for at hente Alexandra. Alexandras hår er mørkebrunt og krøllet, og det når ned til ørerne med et sidecut i venstre side. Alexandra har en septumpiercing og begge ørerne er fyldt med sølvøreringe. Alexandra er cirka 165 cm høj og kraftig af bygning. Alexandra har sorte, almindelige Dr. Martens-støvler på og har et kraftigt, mørkebrunt sribet jakkesæt på med en matchende vest indenunder. Alexandras øjne er optegnet af en lilla eyeliner, der strækker sig lidt uden for øjet, samt har en mørke lilla læbestift på.</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad er dit førstehåndsindtryk af borgeren?
Vignette 3: Velkomst	<p>Maria går ud for at møde Alexandra. ”Alexandra?” Alexandra træder forsigtigt frem og fortæller Maria, at de helst vil kaldes Alex. ”Ja, jeg kunne også se i din sag, at der blev skiftet lidt imellem begge navne. Velkommen til, Alex. Lone har sagt, at hun er 5-10 minutter forsinket, men at hun har bare bedt os gå i gang. Kom med ind.” Maria følger Alex ind til mødelokalet og beder Alex sætte sig ned. Hun spørger, om Alex vil have en kop kaffe eller vand fra bakken, der står midt på bordet. Alex takker ja til et glas vand. Maria hælder vand op i et glas og skubber det forsigtigt hen til Alex. Maria smiler og spørger Alex, om hun skal notere i journalen, at Alex ikke går under navnet Alexandra, men i stedet Alex. Alex smiler og nikker og siger: ”Ja tak, meget gerne.” Alex kigger på Maria og rømmer sig: ”Jeg foretrækker faktisk brugen af 'de/dem' pronominerne.” Maria ser lidt forvirret ud, men fortæller så, at hun er lidt usikker på, hvordan man gør det, og spørger ind til, hvordan det gøres. Alex forklarer, at i stedet for "hun/hende/hendes" skal man bruge "de/dem/deres". Maria noterer på sin blok og kigger op på Alex ”Okay, jeg vil gøre mit bedste, men det er nyt for mig. Du må endelig sige til, hvis jeg gør det forkert ik? Er der en grund til det?” Alex kigger ned på sit vandglas og så op på Maria: ”Ja. Mhm. Jeg er nonbinær.”</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad tænker du om denne situation? • Hvad tror du Maria tænker om at bruge de/dem/deres i samtalen og i brug i journalen? • Hvad ville du de tænke, hvis du var er i Marias sted?
Vignette 4: Under samtalen 1	<p>Lone kommer ind ad døren, trækker en stol til siden og begynder at lyne sin jakke ned, mens hun siger: ”Hej Maria og Alexandra, beklager forsinkelsen, det trak ud ved min anden borger”. Alex rømmer sig, kigger på Lone og siger: ”Alex”. Lone stopper med at lyne jakken ned og ser på Alex og derefter på Maria. Så breder der sig et smil på Lones ansigt, og hun slår en høj latter op. ”Ja, det er jo rigtigt, Alex, sorry.”. Lone kigger på Maria og så på Alex. ”Ja, jeg lærer jo så meget af hende. Nej vent. Alex, hvad er det nu jeg skal sige?”. Alex bliver rød i hovedet, trækker på skulderen, pruster let ud og siger: ”Dem. Dem i stedet for hende”. ”Nå ja. Jeg prøver virkelig, men det er godt nok svært! Synes du ikke også, Maria?”.</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad tænker du om denne historie? • Hvordan tror du, at Alex har det under samtalen? • Hvordan tror du, at Lone har det med at blive korrigeret? • Hvordan ville du have håndteret denne situation?
Vignette 5: Under samtalen 2	<p>Maria: ”Hvordan er det nu med dit sociale netværk Alex? Jeg kan forstå på statussen fra Lone, at du også er ret engageret i nogle aktivistiske ting?” Lone: ”Ja, Alex er skidedygtig. Alex går meget op i sådan noget drag og make-up og deltager i mange arrangementer i LGBT+ miljøer”. Alex smiler: ”Ja, 'aktivistisk' er vist et forkert ord, men jeg er aktiv i forskellige foreninger inden for LGBTQ. Det synes jeg virkelig fedt at være en del af. Det at have nogen andre at spejle sig i. En af grupperne har jeg mødt gennem Instagram. Vi er alle personer med en kønsidentitet uden for det binære. Det er bare virkeligt</p>

	<p>fedt. Føler mig set i det. De kan ligesom genkende de ting jeg oplever. De har eksempelvis været gennem systemet for top-sugery og sådan noget.” Maria: ”Hvad med dig? Er det også noget, du overvejer?”.</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad tænker du om denne situation? • Hvad synes du om Marias spørgsmål? • Hvordan ville du have det som Alex?
Vignette 6: Under samtalen 3	<p>Maria: ”Okay, vi er ved at være færdige for i dag, men inden skal vi lige have sat mål for den næste tids bostøtte. Vi har allerede talt om at fortsætte målet med at minde om aftaler, samt støtte til møder med Jobcentret og andre offentlige instanser. Er der noget andet der fylder, der kunne være et sidste mål?” Alex trækker på skuldrene: ”Næh”. Lone ser på Alex og så på Maria. ”Jeg synes nu, at noget der fylder hos dig, Alex, er behovet for at tale om de oplevelser, du har. Altså, Alex kan synes det er svært, at hendes forældre stadigvæk kalder hende for Alexandra og bruger de forkerte pronominer. Vi taler meget om, at det ikke skal fylde for meget. Altså, at der ikke er nogen grund til, at det skal fylde så meget i hovedet”.</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad er dine tanker om denne situation? • Hvad bider du mærke? • Hvad ville du have gjort hvis du var Maria?
Vignette 7: Efter mødet	<p>Efter mødet følger Maria, Lone og Alex ud ad døren. Lone kigger på sit armbåndsur, ”Gud, jeg bliver simpelthen nødt til at løbe. Men Alex, vi ses på fredag kl. 10:00. Jeg skal nok sende en sms om det senere i dag.” Alex nikker og smiler svagt. ”Ses, Lone.” Lone travet ud ad døren. Maria vender sig mod Alex. Alex kigger på Maria og siger: ”Mhm.. Maria, jeg tænkte på om det var muligt at skifte bostøtte. Altså det er fordi at jeg har haft Lone i 3 år. Mhm.. og ja. Jeg gad måske godt at have en anden. Måske en lidt yngre?”. Maria er tavs og ser på Alex. ”Det er jeg faktisk lidt usikker på Alex. Må jeg undersøge det og vende tilbage med det?” ”Ja selvfølgelig. Er der et toilet jeg kan låne?” ”Ja, da, kom med.” Maria følger Alex hen ad gangen til toiletterne. Alex bliver stående og kigger lidt omkring. Alex betragter toiletterne og derefter Maria. Der er to toiletdøre, én med et billede af en mand og én med et billede af en kvinde. En kvinde går foran Alex og Maria og ind på toilettet. Maria er ved at sige farvel, men ser, at Alex bliver stående og kigger ned på deres sko. Maria spørger, om alt er okay. Alex ser op på Maria og spørger, om der måske er et handicaptoilet et sted. Maria bliver overrasket og siger så: ”Ja, selvfølgelig, det er bare lige rundt om hjørnet. Lad mig følge dig derhen.”</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad bider du mærke ved i denne situation? • Hvad er dine tanker? • Ville du have reageret anderledes end Maria ift. det med toiletterne?
Vignette 8: Samtale	<p>Maria sidder til teammøde med 3 af hendes kollegaer. Teammødet er en mulighed for at drøfte ens sager med de andre kollegaer. Teamkoordinatoren Jytte: ”Er der nogen der har en sag de gerne vil drøfte</p>

<p>mellem kollegaer</p>	<p>i dag, der er nemlig ikke nogen der har skrevet sig på dagsordenen?” Maria nikker: ”Ja, undskyld, jeg vil gerne drøfte muligheden for skift af bostøtte. Jeg har ikke haft en sag endnu hvor nogen har efterspurgt det, men Alex spurgte mig den anden dag til deres opfølgingsmøde om de må skifte bostøtte”. Jytte: ”Hvem er Alex nu? Hans sag ringer ikke lige en klokke for mig”. Maria: ”Ja, Alex hedder rigtigt Alexandra, men går ved navnet Alex nu. De er biologisk en kvinde, men er nonbinær og går derfor med pronominerne de og dem”. Birgitte: ”Gud, det synes jeg godt min datter har fortalt mig om at en af hendes venner er”. Jytte: ”Undskyld, er det ikke bare en måde at få opmærksomhed på? Lad mig gætte, hun har en tung personlighedsforstyrrelse?” Maria: ”Alex har ængstelig personlighedsstruktur, men det har ikke noget med Alexs kønsidentitet at gøre.” Fadusa afbryder og fortæller, at hun er enig med Maria. Jytte: ”Jeg ved bare, at der findes to køn, mand og kvinde, og det er det”.</p> <p>Spørgsmål:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvad tænker du om denne situation? • Hvad bider du mærke i? • Hvad synes du om de forskellige udtalelser?
<p>Debriefing</p>	<p>Specialet undersøger socialrådgiveres håndtering af kønsidentitet, herunder mikroaggressioner mod nonbinære borgere. Gennem forskellige historier har jeg observeret, hvordan reaktionerne er på forskellige former for mikroaggressioner. Mikroaggressioner sammenlignes ofte med paper cuts. Er der noget, som du mener, vi ikke har berørt, men som du finder relevant eller interessant i forhold til emnet? Må jeg stadigvæk benytte interviewet i mit speciale? Du vil fortsat være anonymiseret. Det er også okay at tænke over det. Så kan jeg vende tilbage om XX dage.</p> <p>Spørgsmål til informanten, hvis de vil deltage stadigvæk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hvordan identificerer du dig? • Hvilken etnisk oprindelse har du? • Hvor er du fra? • Hvor i landet bor du? • Er du uddannet socialrådgiver? • Hvad arbejder ud med? • Hvor gammel er ud? • Hvad er din seksualitet?

7.2.6 Appendix 6: Interview Guide in English

<p>Briefing</p>	<p>The interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be recorded. The recording will be transcribed, and you will have the opportunity to receive and approve it. The recording of the interview will be deleted after the submission of the thesis, which is expected to be on May 16, 2024, but it may be postponed until the end of August 2024. During the interview, you will be presented with 8 small vignettes, which are short stories of a fictional citizen case, where I will ask questions about your thoughts on each story. After the interview, I will provide a more detailed explanation of what I have observed, but this will happen after the interview to avoid influencing the results. The vignettes are an ethical alternative to making observations. You will have the opportunity to withdraw consent afterwards. The interview will be anonymized. Do you have a specific name you would like to use for anonymizing yourself? I have brought a consent form for you to sign. Would you like to receive the transcribed interview for approval?</p>
<p>Vignette 1: Introduction</p>	<p>Social worker Maria sits at her desk and reviews a case before a follow-up meeting on social pedagogical support according to § 85 of the Service Act. She has taken over Alexandra's case from a colleague who is on sick leave. Maria quickly skims through Alexandra's file to get an overview and notices that in the various journal notes and case documents, there is a switch between using Alexandra and Alex. Alexandra is 26 years old and receives uddannelseshjælp. The sick colleague has described Alexandra as flamboyant. Alexandra is diagnosed with an anxious personality structure as well as an eating disorder. Psychiatry describes Alexandra as overthinking and with low self-esteem. In the status report from Alexandra's support worker, Lone, Alexandra is described as engaged and activist. The support worker writes that there is still a need for reminders about appointments, especially regarding the treatment of the eating disorder, and that the goal of using weekly schedules should continue. However, it is noted that the goal of checking Eboks once a week is going well and can be concluded. It is added, though, that a new goal could be to work on contact with public authorities, as Alexandra has a lot of meetings lately at the Job Center. Maria checks her work phone and sees a text message from Lone: "On my way. 5-10 minutes delayed. Just go ahead :-)"</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this story? • If you were Maria, is there anything you would pay attention to in the case? What and why? • What is your impression of the client?
<p>Vignette 2: Description of the client</p>	<p>Maria goes out to pick up Alexandra. Alexandra's hair is dark brown and curly, reaching down to the ears with a sidecut on the left side. Alexandra has a septum piercing, and both ears are filled with silver earrings. Alexandra is approximately 165 cm tall and is robust build. Alexandra is wearing black, regular Dr. Martens boots and a strong, dark brown pinstripe suit with a matching vest underneath. Alexandra eyes are outlined with purple eyeliner, extending slightly beyond the eye, and wearing a dark purple lipstick.</p> <p>Question:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your impression of the client?
Vignette 3: Welcome	<p>Maria goes out to meet Alexandra. "Alexandra?" Alexandra steps forward cautiously and tells Maria that they prefer to be called Alex. "Yes, I also noticed in your journal that there was a bit of switching between both names. Welcome, Alex. Lone said she's running 5-10 minutes late, but she asked us to go ahead. Come on in." Maria follows Alex into the meeting room and asks Alex to take a seat. She asks if Alex would like a cup of coffee or water from the tray on the table. Alex accepts a glass of water. Maria pours water into a glass and gently pushes it over to Alex. Maria smiles and asks Alex if she should note in the journal that Alex does not go by the name Alexandra but instead Alex. Alex smiles and nods, saying, "Yes, please, that would be great." Alex looks at Maria and clears their throat, "Actually, I prefer the use of 'they/them' pronouns." Maria looks a bit confused but then asks how to do it, explaining that she's unsure. Alex explains that instead of "she/her/hers," one should use "they/them/their." Maria takes notes on her pad and looks up at Alex. "Okay, I'll do my best, but it's new to me. Please do tell me if I get it wrong, okay? Is there a reason for it?" Alex looks down at their water glass and then back up at Maria. "Yes. Mhm. I'm nonbinary".</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this situation? • What do you think Maria thinks about using they/them/their in conversation and in use in the journal? • What would you think if you were in Maria's place?
Vignette 4: During the meeting 1	<p>Lone enters through the door, pulls a chair aside, and begins to unzip her jacket, saying, "Hi Maria and Alexandra, sorry for the delay, it dragged on with my other client." Alex clears their throat, looks at Lone, and says, "Alex." Lone stops unzipping her jacket and looks at Alex and then at Maria. Then a smile spreads across Lone's face, and she bursts into laughter. "Well, that's right, Alex, sorry." Lone looks at Maria and then at Alex. "Yes, I'm learning so much from her. No, wait. Alex, what was it I was supposed to say?" Alex blushes, shrugs their shoulders, lets out a light sigh, and says, "Them. Them instead of her." "Oh, right. I'm really trying, but it's really hard! Don't you think so too, Maria?"</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this story? • How do you think Alex feels during the conversation? • How do you think Lone feels about being corrected? • How would you have handled this situation?
Vignette 5: During the meeting 2	<p>Maria: "So, how about your social network, Alex? I can see from Lone's report that you're also quite involved in some activist stuff?"</p> <p>Lone: "Yeah, Alex is really talented. Alex is very into drag and makeup and attends a lot of events in the LGBTQ+ communities."</p> <p>Alex smiles: "Yeah, 'activist' is probably the wrong word, but I'm active in various LGBTQ organizations. I really enjoy being part of that. Having others to relate to. One of the groups I met</p>

	<p>through Instagram. We're all nonbinary folks. It's just really cool. I feel seen in it. They can relate to the things I experience. They've, for example, been through the system for top surgery and stuff."</p> <p>Maria: "And what about you? Is that something you're considering too?"</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this situation? • What do you think of Maria's question? • How would you feel as Alex?
<p>Vignette 6: During the meeting 3</p>	<p>Maria: "Okay, we're almost done for today, but before we finish, let's set some goals for the next period of support. We've already discussed continuing the goal of reminding about appointments, as well as support for meetings with the Job Center and other public institutions. Is there anything else on your mind that could be a final goal?" Alex shrugs: "Nope." Lone looks at Alex and then at Maria. "I think one thing that's on your mind, Alex, is the need to talk about the experiences you've had. I mean, Alex might find it difficult that her parents still call her Alexandra and use the wrong pronouns. We talk a lot about not letting it weigh too heavily. I mean, there's no reason for it to take up so much space in her mind."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your thoughts on this situation? • What do you notice? • What would you have done if you were Maria?
<p>Vignette 7: After the meeting</p>	<p>After the meeting, Maria, Lone, and Alex walk out the door. Lone checks her wristwatch, "God, I really need to run. But Alex, see you on Friday at 10:00. I'll send you a text about it later today." Alex nods and smiles weakly. "See you, Lone." Lone strides out the door. Maria turns to Alex. Alex looks at Maria and says, "Mhm... Maria, I was thinking if it was possible to change bostøtte. I mean, it's because I've had Lone for 3 years. Mhm... and yeah. I might want someone else. Maybe someone a bit younger?" Maria is silent and looks at Alex. "I'm actually not sure, Alex. Can I look into it and get back to you?" "Yes, of course. Is there a restroom I can use?" "Yes, sure, come with me." Maria follows Alex down the hallway to the restrooms. Alex stands still and looks around. Alex gazes at the restrooms and then at Maria. There are two restroom doors, one with a picture of a man and one with a picture of a woman. A woman walks in front of Alex and Maria and into the restroom. Maria is about to say goodbye, but she sees that Alex remains standing and looks down at their shoes. Maria asks if everything is okay. Alex looks up at Maria and asks if there might be a handicap toilet somewhere. Maria is surprised and then says, "Yes, of course, it's just around the corner. Let me take you there."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice in this situation? • What are your thoughts? • Would you have reacted differently than Maria regarding the issue with the restrooms?

<p>Vignette 8:</p> <p>Team meeting</p>	<p>Maria is at a team meeting with three of her colleagues. The team meeting is an opportunity to discuss their cases with the other colleagues. Team coordinator Jytte says, "Does anyone have a case they would like to discuss today? There's no one on the agenda." Maria nods, "Yes, sorry, I would like to discuss the possibility of changing support workers. I haven't had a case yet where someone has requested it, but Alex asked me the other day during their follow-up meeting if they could change bostøtte." Jytte asks, "Who is Alex again? His case doesn't ring a bell for me." Maria responds, "Yes, Alex's real name is Alexandra, but they go by Alex now. They are biologically female, but they are nonbinary and therefore use the pronouns they and them." Birgitte says, "God, I think my daughter has told me about one of her friends being like that." Jytte interrupts, "Excuse me, isn't that just a way to seek attention? Let me guess, she has a heavy personality disorder?" Maria replies, "Alex has an anxious personality structure, but that has nothing to do with Alex's gender identity." Fadusa interrupts and agrees with Maria. Jytte says, "I just know that there are two genders, male and female, and that's it."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this situation? • What do you notice? • What do you think about the different statements?
<p>Debriefing</p>	<p>The thesis examines social workers' handling of gender identity, including microaggressions against nonbinary individuals. Through various stories, I have observed reactions to different forms of microaggressions. Microaggressions are often compared to paper cuts. Is there anything you think we haven't touched upon, but that you find relevant or interesting regarding the topic? Can I still use the interview in my thesis? You will continue to be anonymized. It's also okay to think it over. Then I can come back in XX days.</p> <p>Questions for the informant, if they still wish to participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you identify? • What is your ethnic background? • Where are you from? • Where in the country do you live? • Are you a trained social worker? • What do you work with? • How old are you? • What is your sexuality?