

Community Psychology in Norway: Changing Conditions and New Challenges

Hilde Eileen Nafstad, Rolv Mikkil Blakar & Erik Carlquist

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Zusammenfassung

Gemeindepsychologie in Norwegen: Veränderte Bedingungen und neue Herausforderungen

Die Autoren skizzieren in ihrem Artikel auf der Basis des in dem von Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky und Montero 2007 herausgegeben Buch: *International Community Psychology. History and Theories* ausführlich dargestellte Entwicklung der Gemeindepsychologie in Norwegen. Ihre Hauptthese lautet, Gemeindepsychologie ist in Norwegen noch eine unterentwickelte Disziplin, die aber in den nächsten Jahren einen erheblichen Bedeutungszuwachs erfahren wird.

Die Gründe für die bisher eher geringe Verankerung der Gemeindepsychologie als eigenständige (Teil)Disziplin liegen in dem Wohlfahrtssystem des Landes, in dem sich viele gemeindepsychologische Ziele wieder finden. Die Vermeidung sozialer Ungleichheit und die Stärkung des Gemeinschaftsgefühls gehör(t)en spätestens nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg zu den zentralen Dimensionen der Sozialpolitik. Das Umfeld war damit wenig dafür geeignet, dass die Gemeindepsychologie in Norwegen ein eigenes Profil als bedeutsame und kritische psychologische Disziplin entwickeln konnte. Zudem lässt sich der Begriff Community Psychology auch nicht adäquat ins norwegische übersetzen. Trotzdem gibt es eine Reihe von Arbeitsfeldern, in denen sich eine gemeindepsychologische Orientierung rekonstruieren lässt. Dies sind vor allem die Gesundheitsstationen für Kinder und Jugendliche, die schulpsychologischen Angebote, Drogenprävention (mit einer Betonung von auf den Sozialraum bezogenen Präventionsansätzen) sowie gemeindepsychiatrischen Angeboten. An den norwegischen Universitäten lässt sich aktuell - so die Autoren des Artikels - ein Bedeutungsgewinn für die Gemeindepsychologie beobachten. Es sind gemeindepsychologische Master- und Promotionsstudiengänge entstanden. Der Masterstudiengang in Oslo ist eng verknüpft mit einer praktischen Tätigkeit in einem sozialräumlich ausgerichteten Angebot für delinquente Jugendliche. Darin enthalten sind sowohl präventive Ansätze, Ansätze der Konfliktschlichtung an Schulen sowie Angebote der Haftvermeidung durch Ableisten von Sozialstunden und der Teilnahme an sozialen Trainingskursen. Diese Angebote, die insbesondere darauf zielen, "possible selves" und "life purpose" zu unterstützen, werden unter einer gemeindepsychologischen Perspektive evaluiert. Insofern trägt der Masterstudiengang auch dazu bei, die bisherige Schwäche der norwegischen Gemeindepsychologie, nämlich das Fehlen einschlägiger Forschung zur Weiterentwicklung gemeindepsychologischer Ansätze, auszugleichen.

Die Autoren vertreten die These, dass bei wachsender Ungleichheit und einer Stärkung neoliberaler Tendenzen, die Relevanz gemeindepsychologischer Konzepte wächst. Eine Analyse des öffentlichen Diskurses, basierend auf der Auswertung von Tageszeitungen über einen Zeitraum von 22 Jahren belegt eine ideologische Neuorientierung der norwegischen Gesellschaft: Diese wendet sich neoliberalen Werten zu, wodurch die Ungleichheit steigen und Gemeindepsychologie an Bedeutung und Akzeptanz gewinnen wird.

Schlüsselwörter: Gemeindeorientierung, Sozialstaatskonzept, Norwegen, soziale Ungleichheit

Summary

A review of community psychology in Norway is presented. Examples are provided from several spheres of community work, with particular emphasis on a youth organization embedded in a multilevel, multi-actor network which may very well serve as a model for future developments in Norwegian CP. Furthermore,

results from a study of ideological change in Norwegian society relevant to the welfare state and to community psychology are presented. The ideological changes currently ongoing indicate that the Norwegian society is moving away from its traditional welfare state value system of economic and social equality. As CP has a moral obligation to counteract macro arrangements that foster human indignity, injustice and social inequality in society, it is concluded that in the years to come CP should make strong efforts to develop towards a more prominent and critical discipline within Norwegian psychology.

Key words: community, ideological change, Norway, social inequality

Introduction

Norway has a population of 4.6 million and is divided into 19 counties and over 400 municipalities (communes). The Norwegian society has been characterized to a large extent by an equitable distribution of wealth, and by socially stable, transparent, small-scale communities. The development of community psychology (CP) reflects this historical and cultural context. Due to this high level of social equality and stability and the generalized role of 'mainstream' psychology, Norwegian CP is not a clearly delineated field (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). Tasks which in other countries are taken care of within the framework of community psychology have in Norway been dealt with within more traditional institutions. Or, as Fryer (2008, S. 100) observed in his review of *International Community Psychology: History and Theories*: "In Norway, community is the dumping ground for deinstitutionalisation."

It has been estimated that 80% of Norwegian psychologists who identify with the 'samfunnspsykologi' ('societal psychology') discipline label in practice do, in fact, attend mostly to the problems of individuals and families, rather than larger-scale systems or communities (Grinde, 2002). The levels of analysis as well as the interventions that are taught and practiced are mainly concerned with the individual and the individual's immediate interpersonal context. Despite the absence of a formally organized discipline of CP taught at universities, and the existence of only very few municipal psychologists in the 400 municipalities, there are approaches which may be described or classified as CP (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). It is particularly within clinical and social psychology that such work can be found.

In this article we will first present some examples of ongoing CP in Norway, traditionally a Scandinavian welfare state. We will focus in particular on the role of a voluntary youth organization, illustrating the interplay between the local community, local and central government, and academia. Thereafter, we will present a study of ideological change in the Norwegian society, which, as we see it, will demand a stronger and more vital community psychology in the years to come.

Community Psychology in Norway

In describing community psychology in Norway, we are facing two related problems: First, in the Norwegian language, there exists no direct translation of 'community psychology'. This is due to the fact that the English concept of 'community' falls somewhere in between the Norwegian terms of 'nærmiljø' (local community in a geographical sense) and 'samfunn' (society). Second, there is no easily identifiable branch of psychology in Norway for which 'community psychology' would be a suitable term. The major reason for this, as mentioned above, is that many of the aims of CP have in fact been ensured or at least aspired towards by the comprehensive Norwegian state welfare system, which has been crucial to the development of Norwegian society at least since WWII. Up to now, psychology in Norway has largely taken this background for granted, and psychologists are working mainly within the conventional service production of the public mental health and educational sectors.

A recent review of community psychology in Norway also concludes that not much CP proper has actually been undertaken (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). Many Norwegian psychologists across a variety of fields integrate and adopt CP principles to a certain extent. However, as mentioned, most of the Norwegian psychologists who fall under the 'samfunnspsykologi' ('societal psychology') discipline label in practice do not engage in larger-scale system or community approaches (Grinde, 2002). CP in Norway may thus appear to be relatively underdeveloped compared to that in other regions so far (cf. Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky & Montero, 2007). Most Norwegian psychologists, moreover, identify themselves as clinicians. To some extent, the welfare state with high social and economic homogeneity and public services available according to the universalistic principle may thus have served as a justification for Norwegian psychology for not taking on the comprehensive task of developing a full-fledged CP (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). Let us now present some examples of Norwegian CP1:

Health stations for infants, children and adolescents

The health stations are part of the municipal health system, and intend to reach all preschool children and their families. Almost all families with young children use the services of the health station (Mathiesen, 1995, Sommerschild & Moe, 2005). More generally, these services have a preventive function. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying at-risk groups, developing support programs and interventions, and informing and referring clients to other, often more specialised, services. The health stations have been obliged by law since 1974 to engage in the prevention of mental health problems. Many stations also play an instrumental role in improving and expanding networks of mothers with little social support (Mathiesen, 1995). Generally, increasing the number of psychologists at the health stations would be fruitful as this would serve to strengthen the role of CP in preventive work (Borge, 2001).

School psychology service

The school psychology service has its origins in the post WWII years. The Special Schools Act of 1951 created a need for differentiating pupils for learning purposes. This requirement increased when a law in 1955 allowed for supportive teaching for pupils with special needs within the regular school system. During this period, a number of local advisory offices were established (Læringssenteret, 2001). The school psychology service in this period was oriented towards psychological testing, a trend that can still be observed. The school psychology service was reformed in 1975, when a new primary school law stated that all municipalities in Norway should provide a local school psychology service ('Pedagogisk-psykologisk tjeneste', PPT). The reformed service was a means to ensure equal educational rights for all pupils, which meant adapting to the needs, wellbeing and situation of each individual pupil (Læringssenteret, 2001).

The main functions of PPTs include the provision of counselling and interventions for children with special needs, in cooperation with parents, as well as organizational development, the primary users of which are the schools themselves. Recently, a move towards systemic interventions, rather than focusing attention on the individual child, could, in principle, improve the importance of PPT for prevention (SHD 1998; Anthun, 2000; Borge, 2001). However, the emphasis of this approach is limited largely to the school system in isolation, whereas the PPTs historically have given attention to the wider psychosocial situation of the child. The future role for PPT as a first-line provider of services to children and adolescents is therefore unclear. However, the role of the PPT psychologist, both in the past as for the future, draws implicitly on CP principles to guide school psychology work.

Substance abuse and mental health

There have been considerable efforts to deal with substance abuse issues in Norway. For many decades, the field of substance abuse prevention and treatment has been organizationally fragmented. After a major organizational reform took place in 2004, treatment has become a specialist health service similar to somatic and mental health care. Service users now have the status of patients, and consequently enjoy rights on the basis of the Patient Rights Act (www.rustiltak.no). This reform has led to an increasing number of psychologists becoming involved with substance abuse-oriented interventions.

On request from the Norwegian National Directorate for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems, researchers with a community approach have recently developed a plan for a community-based substance abuse prevention project among adolescents and young adults (Skutle, Iversen & Bergan, 2002).

CP or municipal psychologists contribute to strengthening the increasingly decentralized psychiatric services, and participate in and direct multidisciplinary development work (Borge, 2001, Skuterud, 2000). To what extent the municipal psychology service should be modelled on the general practitioner model of somatic health care, and thus constitute a low-threshold public service directly accessible for community members, is currently a key issue being discussed by the Norwegian Psychological Association. The Norwegian Psychological Association has recently started to argue systematically for lowthreshold services, for example psychological services directly available for people with mental problems, for drug addicts directly from the street, etc. Let us conclude by mentioning that the Journal of the Norwegian Psychological Association is currently planning a special issue on community psychology and lowthreshold services.

CP at Norwegian universities

An increasing interest in CP at Norwegian universities can be observed. For example, at the University of Oslo a master course specializing in CP was introduced for the first time through a revision of the master's degree programme in 2007. We will present one aspect of this program in some detail. The course is organized in collaboration with the organization or the program 'Ungdom mot Vold' ('Youth against Violence', UmV). UmV is a voluntary organization established in Oslo in 1994. It is funded by the municipality of Oslo, the (national) Ministry of Family Affairs and the Ministry of Justice. UmV's aim is to reduce and prevent violence, discrimination and crime among children and young persons aged 12-25. In addition to its general role as an influential voluntary organization, UmV is officially recognized as an alternative to incarceration for convicted youths in certain cases known as 'samfunnsstraff' (literally translated, 'societal punishment'). This is an alternative form of sentencing involving community service, thus implying that the convicted youth is required to perform community-relevant work, often within a voluntary organization such as UmV. The organization also offers longer-term follow-up programs beyond the period of punishment. Furthermore, UmV cooperates with the school system and provides assistance for students who have been or are at risk of being expelled from school. UmV members and staff often serve as problem solvers and negotiators in complex, and often violent, conflict situations at schools. The organization offers concrete assistance for youths in issues such as housing, writing job applications, homework, etc. It has developed specialized expertise in the multicultural field, as youths with a migration background are over-represented among its target groups. UmV can be understood as a network organization in the sense that it collaborates closely with various different actors including police, school administrations, rehabilitation services and the Red Cross, to mention some, while remaining close to the everyday lives of the youths. This entails that UmV is actively involved both on an individual (youth) and a systemic/community level. With respect to values, UmV's goal is that the target groups live by the moral code of society, aim for an education, and achieve financial stability by honest means.

Upon launching the new course in CP at the University of Oslo, the UmV immediately offered to serve take in master students a interns. Each spring semester 15 master students are now serving their CP internship by working as assistants in UmV. As a consequence of the students' internship, the whole course structure of the

master's program in Cultural and Societal Psychology has been reorganized around this internship in that all the courses provide a theoretical underpinning for the practice in UmV and try to draw on the students' experiences from their UmV practice. Such a close interplay between community work and university courses is well known in international CP (cf. Ozorak, 2008; Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky & Montero, 2007), but has until now been virtually nonexistent in Norway. However, our expectation is that due to current ideological trends in the Norwegian society (see below), more communitybased collaborations of this kind, involving, among others, citizens, local and central government, and academia will be required. Our expectation is grounded in the observation that community psychology seems to develop and flourish more in societies and regions with wider social inequalities and social tensions (Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky & Montero, 2007).

Moreover, for the first time a formalized course in CP at the PhDlevel will be offered at the University of Oslo. Under the title '*Liberation and participation: Theory and Method for a Social and Political Community Psychology*', the internationally renowned CPpsychologist Maritza Montero will present generative, participatory and critical community social psychology (CP) as developed in Latin America since the mid-seventies and discuss this liberation theory based approach in relation to the Scandinavian welfare state model in Norway.²

The changes that we can observe in Norway are of course not independent of the increasing interest in CP internationally over the last few years (cf. Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky & Montero, 2007). A series of new or revised textbooks in CP (for example, Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2007) testify to this increasing interest.

Development and flourishing of any discipline or field is dependent on empirical research and theory building. It has been characteristic of the situation of CP in Norway that little community psychology research has been undertaken (cf. Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). There obviously exists a large body of psychological research of relevance to CP, but research with the explicit aim of contributing directly to developing CP, for example evaluative studies of community psychology services, has been sparse (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). However, there are exemptions to this pattern. As an example, the Research Group in Cultural and Societal Psychology at the University of Oslo is now analyzing UmV's services and activities on broad scale. This project is funded by the Ministry of Family Affairs. To systematically investigate UmV is of particular interest because even though the organization is being assigned youths considered to be at very high risk for committing criminal acts again, UmV has according to Stortingsmelding no 37, 2007-8 ('report to the Norwegian Parliament' no 37, 2007-8) been more successful than other organizations in that a markedly higher rate of youths successfully complete their "samfunnsstraff" ('societal punishment') according to the terms than in other organizations. At present the situation is as follows: It is an established fact (even reported to the Storting/Parliament) that this community oriented organization, UmV, is very successful, but the theoretical understanding of why UmV succeeds, is limited indeed.

In the earliest phase of the project UmV was described in detail by 15 participant observers (15 master students serving their internship as assistants in UmV, see above). The organization was described as a system with regard to factors such as communication, conflict and conflict resolution; cooperation with others (police, family, school, etc). In the second (current) phase, young criminals are interviewed when they start serving their 'samfunnsstraff' ('societal punishment' as mentioned above) at the UmV and after they have served their sentence to find out as much as possible about how the young criminals experience UmV's services. The concepts of "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2004) and "life purposes" (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003; Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 2008) are used as analytical concepts to relate individual and system levels in these analyses: To what extent and in what direction does UmV achieve to change "possible selves" and "life purposes" of young criminals.

In this brief presentation of CP at our universities we have focused on the University of Oslo, as the authors are based here. Increasing interest for CP can also be seen at other Norwegian universities, such as the

HEMIL center at the University of Bergen (see Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007).

As shown here, and also demonstrated more systematically in the more comprehensive recent review of CP in Norway (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007), CP within Norwegian psychology is not a strong discipline. Due to ongoing changes within the Norwegian society, however, we contend that in the years to come, CP should strive to develop into a more elaborate and critical discipline. Due to the gradually increasing influence of globalized neoliberalism within the Norwegian society, we assert that the traditional welfare state ideology is being radically weakened. Together with other social and humanistic disciplines, Norwegian CP, therefore, will have to pay increasingly more attention to and argue for the ideals of solidarity and social and economic equality.

Current ideological changes in the Norwegian society paving the ground for more CP

Throughout most of the postwar era, the Norwegian welfare state has valued social equality and social obligations higher than private materialism, selfinterest and social inequality. The value and worth of citizens within the Norwegian political and public arrangements have, therefore, traditionally not been ascribed on the basis of the individuals' purchasing power. Services such as health care, school and university education, extended parental leaves and pension benefits have been equally available to all according to a universalistic principle. The universalistic principle has thus constituted a cornerstone of the traditional Norwegian society (Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). Until recently, the Scandinavian welfare state ideology has been taken for granted as "natural" in Norway: A sense of community, and an acknowledgement of interdependence with others and a willingness to maintain this interdependence, and thus a feeling of being part of a stable structure (Sarason, 1974), has so far been a core value of the Norwegian society. However, this situation is currently undergoing a radical change.

Throughout the past decades Norway, and an increasing number of nations and regions throughout the world, have come face to face with and are likely to be influenced by late capitalist market ideology. This variant of capitalist ideology includes components such as globalization (Cowling & Tomlinson, 2005; Sklair, 2002), neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2005), consumerism (Bauman, 2000) and radical individualism (Bourdieu, 1998). Each of these components can be viewed as ideologies in their own right. As instruments of an overarching ideology of free market capitalism, however, they are means of ever-increasing corporate power, gradually surpassing even that of nation states. Thus, the market is increasingly replacing the state as the principal regulatory force in society (Touraine, 2001). Today, people in Norway find themselves in a world increasingly characterized by a pervasive globalized ideology of competition, self-fulfillment and consumerism, taking place within a so-called free market (Nafstad, 2002, 2005; Nafstad et al, 2009). Moreover, not only material life, but also social life is increasingly conceptualized as a market (Nafstad, 2002; Nafstad et al, 2009).

To illustrate these recent and continuing ideological changes within Norwegian society, we will now present some findings from a study focusing on ideological change over time. The rationale behind this study is that ongoing ideological changes carry strong implications for core values underpinning the welfare state and thus the foundations of community functioning and processes of social identity formation (Nafstad et al, 2007). The study is part of a largescale research program at the University of Oslo mapping out ideological shifts and changes as reflected in language usage in the public discourse.³ Changes and developmental trends in language use in the public discourse are identified and mapped out from 1984, when Norwegian newspapers were first available in searchable electronic databases, until the present. The actual study thus covered a period of more than two decades (22 years).

The shift from a social democratic, carefully regulated welfare state towards a free market ideology requires,

for example, more usage of words accommodating to a "for oneself world" (Nafstad, 2002, 2005, 2006; Nafstad & Blakar, 2002/2006; Nafstad et al, 2006). A strong indication of such a shift is demonstrated by a 44% increase of newspaper articles including either 'jeg' OR 'meg' (I OR me)⁴. On the other hand, the number of articles containing either 'vi' OR 'oss' (we OR us) has remained rather stable. This marked change towards I/me is clearly indicative of an increasingly more radical individualism. 'I', exerting my freedom, presupposes visions of options and the freedom to choose (Schwartz, 2000, 2004; Vetlesen, 2004). Interestingly, the usage of 'valgfri' (optional) increased by 95%, whereas the usage of 'valgfrihet' (freedom to choose) increased by 131% during the last two decades in the public Norwegian discourse.

These ideological shifts towards a more radical individualism are underscored by the fact that individuals are conceptualized increasingly as '*brukere*' (users; consumers); the usage of the word '*brukere*' increased by 43%. Moreover, during the last two decades the usage of the word '*rettighet*' (rights; entitlements) increased by 31% at the same time as the usage of '*plikt*' (duty; obligation) was reduced by 30%. And the usage of the word '*ansvar*' (responsibility) was reduced by 22%.

Our longitudinal analysis of media language also revealed an unequivocal decline in the use of a number of words and concepts connected to the sense of community and interdependence. First and foremost, the usage of the word '*felles*' (common; communality; shared) has decreased by 30%. Moreover, the usage of the words '*samhold*' and '*samhørighet*', both referring to social cohesion and belongingness, declined by 36% and 68%, respectively. Similarly the word '*omtanke*' (thoughtfulness; concern for others) declined by 28%. Add to these findings that the number of newspaper articles containing the word '*solidaritet*' (solidarity) during the same period has been reduced by 60%. These changes accelerated towards the end of the 1990s.

The most thought provoking trend during the same period is that the usage of the word '*velferdssamfunn*' (welfare society) fell by a notable 60%.

As a consequence of the reported changes there is reason to expect that under the influence of the currently predominant variant of neoliberalist capitalist market ideology discourse the universalistic principle of equality, implying that all citizens have the same value, will be under attack, and that people will be increasingly willing to accept larger social differences. Let us therefore look at the usage of the ordinary word '*likhet*' (equality). During the last two decades the frequency of the usage of this word was reduced by 27%.

Taken together, the developmental patterns of the various search words give nuanced and striking descriptions of how the current neoliberalist variant of capitalist ideology is gaining control over the (Norwegian) language. The hegemony of this voice can be detrimental for society and for people's willingness to identify with and defend public and collective interests in the years to come. However, it should be noted that this pronounced voice of current globalization emphasizing neoliberalism, consumerism and radical individualism merges with values from local cultures and diverse ideological trends (glocalization). Within the Oslo Ideology Project we currently map out ideological developments in six different countries (Czech Republic, Ghana, Iran, Turkey and USA in addition to Norway). At present, comparative analyses of Norway versus Ghana have been completed: Developmental trends markedly different from those found in Norway (see above) have been revealed in Ghana (Nafstad et al, 2009), thus demonstrating how sensitivity towards the local society is essential in community psychology.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have presented different aspects of community psychology in Norway. Firstly, we provided examples from several spheres of community work, with particular emphasis on a youth organization embedded in a multi-level, multi-actor network. This organization and its interplay with community psychology may very well serve as an important model for future developments in Norwegian CP. Thereafter,

we presented some selected results from a study of ideological change in the Norwegian society. The Scandinavian welfare state ideology maintains that a high degree of economic and social equality within society has the effect of being beneficial to all citizens: It is assumed that this kind of equality strongly contributes to lower poverty and unemployment levels, lower crime rates and better access to public services as well as public services of higher quality standards. The findings from the investigation of ongoing ideological shifts and changes within the Norwegian society indicate that the Norwegian society is moving away from this value system of economic and social equality. As CP has a moral obligation to counteract macro arrangements that foster human indignity, injustice and social inequality in society, we will conclude that in the years to come CP should make strong efforts to develop towards a more prominent and critical discipline within Norwegian psychology.

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Notes


1. The following illustrative descriptions of CP work are to a large extent based on the comprehensive review of CP in Norway by Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar (2007).

2. Maritza Montero's PhD course (10 pts ECTS) will be given under the auspices of the Oslo Summer School in Comparative Social Science Studies, July 2009.
<http://www.sv.uio.no/oss/courses2009.html>
3. Nafstad, 2002; Nafstad & Blakar, 2002/2006; Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps & Rand Hendriksen, 2007, 2009; Nafstad, Blakar, Botchway & Rand Hendriksen, 2009; Nafstad, Blakar & Rand Hendriksen, 2009; Nafstad, Carlquist & Blakar, 2007; Nafstad, Carlquist, Aasen & Blakar, 2006; Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps & Rand-Hendriksen, 2006; Nafstad, Phelps, Carlquist & Blakar, 2005.
4. For theoretical background and methodological details of these analyses, see Nafstad, Carlquist & Blakar (2004); Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps & Rand Hendriksen (2007, 2009); Rand Hendriksen (2008).

Authors

Rolv Mikkell Blakar

Department of Psychology
University of Psychology
POBox 1094 Blindern
0317 Oslo, Norway

 r.m.blakar@bitte-keinen-spam-psykologi.uio.no

Rolv Mikkell Blakar is professor of social psychology at the University of Oslo, Norway, specializing in communication and the psychology of language. He has written extensively on power and values in communication and language usage. He has studied power and ideology in various contexts ranging from personal communication to the mass media. For many years he organized a multidisciplinary research program focusing on conflicts in family communication. Lately he has conducted research in the field of ethical dimensions and dilemmas embedded in ideologies, communication and language usage. He has extensive administrative experience (former protector of the University of Oslo) and has served on several editorial boards. Together with Hilde Eileen Nafstad he is organizing the Oslo Ideology Project.

Erik Carlsquist, MSc

Researcher at Psykologisk institutt
Postboks 1094 Blindern
0317 OSLO
Norway

 erikc@bitte-keinen-spam-online.no


Erik Carlquist, M.Sc., is a clinical and social psychologist, and also holds a business management degree. He is currently working as a psychotherapist at the Institute for Clinical Sexology and Therapy in Oslo, and is affiliated with the ideology project at the University of Oslo as a researcher and teacher. His clinical and research interests include language and communication theory, ideology, identity, sexuality and psychodynamic theory and practice. He was previously a senior research officer at the Transport Economics Institute, Oslo, where he was responsible for several cross-disciplinary research projects related to urban planning.

Hilde Eileen Nafstad

Department of Psychology
University of Psychology

POBox 1094 Blindern

0317 Oslo, Norway

 h.e.nafstad@bitte-keinen-spam-psykologi.uio.no

Hilde Eileen Nafstad is associate professor of social and developmental psychology at the University of Oslo, Norway. She is currently a scholar at University of Oslo's Center of Excellence: the *Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature (CSMN)* funded by the *Norwegian Research Council*. She has been affiliated with the University's Ethics Program as a supervisor and in undertaking research on ethics in various professions as well as developing area ethics of psychology and the social sciences. She was formerly a senior research fellow at the Institute of Applied Social Research, Oslo, where she undertook community research on behalf of the Norwegian government. She has published books and articles on quality of life and public policy; ideologies and value systems; minorities; and human development of empathy and altruism. Together with Rolv Mikkjel Blakar she is organizing the Oslo Ideology Project.