ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND THE NORWEGIAN WORKFORCE

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW PEOPLE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY BACKGROUND LIVING IN NORWAY EXPERIENCE THEIR JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT
Through the use of focus group interviewing and grounded theory, this study seeks to examine how people with ethnic minority background living in Norway experience their job opportunities in the Norwegian workforce. A total of 21 participants with various ethnic backgrounds were divided into 5 focus groups. From the thematic analysis of focus group data emerged four main themes, which concerned: perception biases, emotions, qualifications and competence, and integration. Negative feelings and experiences seemed to characterize the data, but it could be that these feelings and experiences are stronger for the participants, and were hence discussed more. Although the participants seemed to mostly discuss their negative experiences, they did not necessarily believe those experiences to be caused by discrimination. This seems to be in line with a study where two out of ten respondents with ethnic minority background reported that they had experienced discrimination (Rogstad, 2004). However, the continued unemployment among many of the participants led to loss of hope and motivation for continuing job searching. Although initiatives have been made by the Norwegian government, some of the participants professed a need for more help to get integrated into the Norwegian society. They considered that improving their Norwegian language skills would also increase their chances of gaining employment. Based on previous research results, initiatives both at an individual level and community level are suggested for improving the situation of those who may be disadvantaged in the Norwegian workforce.

Key words: Ethnic minority, immigrants, employment, discrimination, empowerment, well-being
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Mei Ying Ng
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INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethnicity and employment has been a much-debated topic in the media. Many of the newspaper articles tend to have a negative focus on the non-western immigrants’ job opportunities in the Norwegian workforce. The question here is whether the media is presenting a skewed picture of how the job situation in Norway is for people with ethnic minority backgrounds, or not. For example, this is an excerpt from an article published in Aftenposten:

In 2004 Mahamed graduated from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences with a masters degree in food sciences. But despite the higher degree from a Norwegian University, and persistent job seeking, she was not called in for one single interview. (…) [Mahamed said] I even went around to several relevant companies, such as Tine Meierier with CV, educational certificate and application. I asked to work there for free to get experience. But I never heard from anyone. When I called them up again, they would say that they did not have the capacity. (…) Maybe I didn’t get interviews or feedbacks because I have a different name. I don’t know. (Thorgrimsen, 2008, July 21).

There are numerous studies of the job situation for people with ethnic minority background living in Norway. In line with Wiborg (2006, p. 278), I found that many studies explain the job situation for people with ethnic minority background with the focus on their own resources on the one hand, and the “(…) employers’ preference, perceptions and information about the employees’ skills (…)” on the other. The focus for the literature review in this introduction will therefore be on the employee’s resources, and the employers’ preferences and perception about the job seekers with ethnic minority background.

Before continuing, some of the terms and concepts used in this thesis will be clarified, in order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Refugees, sojourners and immigrants (Sonn & Fisher, 2005) are all terms used by various researchers when describing people that do not have national origin in the country they live in. In this thesis the term “people with ethnic minority background”, are used for these groups. However, the term “immigrant” is frequently used in much of the reviewed research, and will thus also be used when applicable. This term will then have the meaning as defined by Statistics Norway (2009a) as a “person who has moved to Norway”, unless explained otherwise. In addition, when
referring to “non-western” immigrant, it will include people who have immigrated from eastern-Europe (countries not part of EU), South and Central America, Asia and Africa, as used by previous studies (Brekke, 2007; Orupabo, Jensen, & Storvik, 2009; Støren, 2008, Wiborg, 2006). At last, the term “ethnic Norwegians” are used when referring to the natives in Norway, while the term “natives” will be used of the native people from countries other than Norway.

**Ethnic diversity in the Norwegian workforce**

Djuve (2006, 2007) argues that the Norwegian workforce is not closed to immigrants, but the jobs that they have are often temporary, poorly paid and do not necessarily require formal education. This argument seem to be at accordance with the results from Statistics Norway (2009b, 2009c), which show that although the unemployment rate among the immigrants in Norway has declined a lot in the past two decades, it is still a lot higher than for the ethnic Norwegians. The unemployment rate among Norwegian-born to immigrant parents on the other hand is much the same as the unemployment rate among ethnic Norwegians (Statistics Norway, 2009a). However, there are differences in the employment rate between the various ethnic groups (Statistics Norway, 2009b; Statistics Norway, 2009c) in addition to differences in income (Brekke, 2007; Pedersen, 2006; Støren, 2008; Wiborg, 2006). For instance, people with African background are much more disadvantaged in the Norwegian job market compared to other ethnic groups (Brekke, 2007; Statistics Norway, 2009b, Statistics Norway, 2009c; Wiborg, 2006). In addition, it seems that there are differences in the unemployment rate between immigrant men and immigrant women (Statistics Norway, 2009c; The Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2007).

Moreover, studies indicate that people with ethnic minority background are often overqualified, in terms of education and competence, for the jobs they hold (Orupabo, 2008, Rogstad, 2000a, 2006; Støren, 2008) and they earn less than ethnic Norwegians (Pedersen, 2006; Wiborg, 2006). According to Støren (2008), non-western immigrants often meet problems in the Norwegian job market which lead to higher risk of employment, they thus take jobs that they are overqualified for. Brekke (2007) further demonstrated that the transition from education to work among graduates with ethnic background is slower compared to that of ethnic Norwegians.

An inquiry to map the scope of discrimination was sent to all government sectors by the Ministry of Labour and Social inclusion in 2007, due to the increased focus on immigrants in
the Norwegian job market. The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud (2008) published the result of this survey in a report. Although it was emphasized in this report that it was not a broad, systematic, objective and complete overview of the discrimination and efforts made, it was considered by the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud as a step towards obtaining a bigger picture of discriminatory attitude and behaviour performed by the governmental sectors. The survey gives the general impression that the work to ensure equal opportunities has not been systematically implemented by the governmental sectors. The report further suggests that the second step is to listen to people with ethnic minority backgrounds who have been affected by discrimination performed by the governmental sectors, and do more research on that.

Interestingly a study found that there were a higher percentage of people with immigrant backgrounds working in the private sectors than in the governmental sectors. One of the reasons is believed to be that the occupations in the governmental sectors often require higher educational degree, while there are more jobs with no educational requirements in the private workforce. This assumes that the immigrants’ educational level is lower than the ethnic Norwegians’. Some uncertainty is connected with this assumption, as there is lack of information of immigrants’ educational level (Olsen, 2009). However, following a recent report from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Norwegian government initiated another measure as to fight discrimination and racism directed to people with immigrant background in the Norwegian workforce. A project of moderate hiring of non-western immigrants on a quota basis in the governmental sectors started January in 2008, and will last till 2010 where the results will be presented in a final report. The total of 12 government offices was chosen to be a part of this project. The results from the halfway evaluation of this practice indicated that although moderate hiring on a quota basis was not systematically implemented, most of the government offices seemed to be positive towards this practice. The results further show that employees in the various offices were not negative towards ethnic diversity in the workplace (Orupabo, Jensen, & Storvik, 2009).

**Factors affecting job opportunities**

As we have seen, studies indicate that people with ethnic minority background seem to be more disadvantaged than ethnic Norwegians in the job market. It is worth noting that many of these studies are based on surveys (e.g. Djuve, 2007; Lødding, 2003; Orupabo, Jensen, &
Storvik, 2009; The Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2006; The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud, 2008) where the employers are asked about their attitudes towards hiring people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Of the reviewed studies, it was only the study by Orupabo (2008) which took the immigrants’ experiences and feelings around their job situation in the Norwegian workforce as a starting point. In addition, there was a study (Djuve, 2007) where the non-western immigrants were interviewed about their experience with The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), which is a department that helps immigrants with the transition from unemployment to work through job placement, also known as “praksisplass” in Norwegian. There are also some studies carried out in an experiment setting (e.g. Cargile, 2000; Cotton, O’Neill, & Griffin, 2008; Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006) where people’s attitudes towards hiring people with ethnic minority backgrounds are tested.

Moreover, much of the reviewed studies on employment and hiring decision concerning people with ethnic minority background have a sociological or a socio economic perspective. In addition, these studies have in common that they try to explain why people with ethnic minority backgrounds are disadvantaged in the job market.

**Employees’ resources**

As mentioned earlier, the reviewed studies suggest that some of the disadvantaged job situation among people with ethnic minority background is due to their resources. The resources mentioned include their job searching behaviour, social network, professional qualifications and language skills.

**Job searching behaviour**

One factor that is believed to have an influence on job opportunities is how people search for jobs (Garcia et al. 2005; Granovetter, 1995; Støren, 2008). There seems to be a difference in the job searching behaviour between the ethnic Norwegians and the non-western immigrants, which Støren (2008) suggests as one possible reason to why the latter is higher at risk for unemployment. While the non-western immigrants are more likely to use formal means such as NAV and various databases (job databases at NAV and on the internet) to find a job, the western immigrants and the ethnic Norwegians are more prone to use direct methods (such as contacting the employer directly without using formal channel of communication). This seems to align with the study by Garcia et al. (2005), which demonstrated that the
immigrants in Spain who had a more active style of job searching were more likely to be employed than those who had a more passive job searching approach.

**Social networks**

Another factor that also seems to be important for employment is the extent of the social network diversity. Having a social network is beneficial as someone you know can function as a reference, which can influence a potential employer’s perception of you as an employee (Granovetter, 1995). In addition, social support networks can give guidance, such as giving job tips and access to information on job opportunities that could not be obtained otherwise (Garcia et al. 2005). The usefulness of a social network was experienced by some of the participants in the study by Orupabo (2008), who believed that it is easier to find work if you have access to social networks, based in their own experiences as immigrant. This is supported by Garcia et al. (2005) that suggest that the larger the social support and network the immigrants had, the more likely they will be employed. In addition, the lack of social networks among people with non-western background is also believed by the employers in some of the governmental offices in Norway to be a factor that influences non-western immigrants’ job opportunities (Orupabo, Jensen, & Storvik, 2009).

Furthermore, it has been argued that not all social networks are useful (Granovetter, 1995; Støren, 2008; Wiberg, 2006). In a case study by Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo (2006), they differed between the “right” and “wrong” social networks. They argued that the right networks leads to good jobs, while the wrong networks do the opposite. The findings did not support the notion that the lack of social networks served to cut people with ethnic minority backgrounds from employment in the company they studied. Due to the diverse settings in the company, they argued that the result could have been markedly different if tested in a less diverse company. They further argued that it is often hard to find the relationships between network, race, and hiring practices due to difficulties in uncovering all the steps that the job seeking process entails. Consistent with this, Peterson, Saporta, and Seidel (2006, p. 416) argue that “the hiring process is currently probably the least understood aspect of the employment relationship”, due to the difficulties in assessing all information about the hiring processes.

**Professional Qualifications**

One of the problems that immigrants face when they try to get into the Norwegian workforce is that they lack relevant qualifications. The working experience and education they have
from their own country is not necessarily relevant, or what the Norwegian workforce is looking for (Djuve & Friberg, 2004; Orupabo, 2008; Støren, 2008). This seems to be in line with Rosholm, Scott, and Husted’s (2006) argument that the immigrants’ disadvantaged situation in the Swedish and the Danish job market could be due to the drastic structural changes in the modern organizations and technological changes in the past few decades. These changes seem to be in favor of the natives, but not for the people with ethnic minority background as they often lack country specific skills that the modern organizations and the technological changes require. Although the analysis is based on statistics from Denmark and Sweden, it is likely that the results apply to the Norwegian society as well because of the close societal proximity the Scandinavian countries have.

The lack of relevant qualifications and competences could also be seen in Orupabo’s (2008) study. Many of the participants in this study experienced having a job that they were overqualified for, as their education was either not relevant for the Norwegian workforce, or was outdated. Studies from UK yield similar results, indicating that educational qualifications seem to be an important factor for employment. Having a UK-based qualification is better than a foreign education, demonstrating that the latter is valued less in the job market also in the UK (Leslie & Lindley, 2001). Nevertheless, Wiborg (2006, p. 289) found that “equal qualifications [between ethnic Norwegians and immigrants] from Norwegian Universities do not automatically give equal results and rewards in the working life”. The results from this study further demonstrate that increasing working experience from Norway decreases the income gap between the non-western immigrants and ethnic Norwegians.

It also seems to be a relation between self confidence, professional qualifications and employment status. The more confident the person is about their own skills and qualifications, the more likely it is that the person will be employed. This is also referred to as psychological empowerment, which is believed to have an influence on the employment status to people with ethnic minority backgrounds. In addition, immigrants (in Spain) who attributed their employment status to internal causes for their employment status were more likely to be employed than immigrants who attributed to external causes (Garcia et al., 2005).

**Language Skills**

The demand of Norwegian language skills seems to be another challenge that non-western immigrants have to face in the Norwegian workforce (Djuve, 2007; Orupabo, 2008; Rogstad,
2000b; The Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2006; The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud, 2008). This demand seems to be accepted by the non-western immigrants (Orupabo, 2008). Moreover, the importance of the proficiency in the majority language has on employment opportunities has been demonstrated in various studies (e.g. Cargile, 2000; Hayfron, 2001; Niesing, van Praag, & Veenman; 1994; Peterson et al., 2005; Purkiss et al., 2006). For instance, Niesing et al. (1994) argue that employers in the Netherlands seem to put less value on immigrants with language problems, as it is more difficult to train workers with that kind of background. This aligns with Hayfron (2001) which highlights the importance of understanding, reading, speaking and writing Norwegian in different areas in the workforce. By understanding Norwegian, you will be able to carry out orders at work and be more productive, while speaking proficiency is important because it enables you to communicate correctly. In addition, the importance of reading and writing skills are dependent on the job requirements. There are also studies that indicate that a person’s accent influences the hearers’ responses and their attitude towards the person (Cargile, 2000; Purkiss et al., 2006).

Previous studies have also found a positive connection between language skills and income for immigrants living in countries with similar job market as Norway, such as Wales (Drinkwater & O’Leary, 1997), UK (Leslie & Lindley, 2001) and the Netherlands (Niesing et al., 1994). Hayfron (2001, p. 1971) on the other hand, found that “Norwegian language proficiency has no significant impact on immigrant earnings”. He argues that one possible explanation is that Norwegian language skills is needed in order to get into the Norwegian job market in the first place, and that there are may be other factors that determine income other than proficiency in the Norwegian language.

**Length or residency**

Various studies suggest that the job opportunities of people with ethnic minority background are connected to the length of residency in the host country (Brekke, 2007; Garcia et al. 2005; Hayfron, 2001; Niesing et al., 1994; Storen, 2008; Wiborg, 2006), as this have an influence on language skills, qualifications and competence, which all seem to be important for employment.

**The danger of blaming the victim**

As reviewed, much research concerns the disadvantaged job situation among people with ethnic minority background as to their resources (or the lack there of). Lerner’s theory of
“victim-blaming” (1971) caution to put the blame on the people exposed to discrimination or are disadvantaged in the society, as it could be a hindrance in seeing the bigger picture of the reality (Sonn & Fisher, 2005). The same caution was given by Garcia et al. (2005). Furthermore, it has been argued that although the government has the best intentions, they often end up blaming the people that they are helping for their own disadvantaged situation in the society (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005).

**Employers’ preference and perception**

Another focus in studies of the disadvantaged job situation among people with ethnic minority background is on the employers’ preference and perceptions of employees’ competence. In these studies, the discussion about discrimination seemed inevitable. Stereotyping and prejudice are two closely related concepts that will also be discussed, as these often are the sources to discrimination.

**Discrimination**

The disadvantaged job situation among the non-western immigrants is often explained as a result of discrimination (e.g. Arai & Thoursie, 2007; Brekke, 2007; Djuve & Friberg, 2004; Knocke, 2000; Lødding, 2003; McConahay, 1983; Petersen et. al., 2005; Purkiss et al., 2006; Rogstad, 2000a, Rogstad, 2000b, 2006; Støren, 2008; Wiborg, 2006; The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud, 2008). It has been demonstrated that even with a higher education degree, immigrants are disadvantaged in the Norwegian job market. In accordance with this, Djuve and Friberg (2004) argued that even when immigrants have the same or better qualifications than ethnic Norwegians, they lose in the competition to get work. This disadvantage seems to be a result of the employers’ lack of experience with people with ethnic minority background, leading to a problem in assessing these job seekers’ competencies and predicting how they would function in the workplace (Djuve & Friberg, 2004; Lødding, 2003; Orupabo, Jensen, & Storville, 2009). Nevertheless, given the choice of employing an ethnic Norwegian or a person with an ethnic minority background, employers say that they would primarily choose an ethnic Norwegian applicant as it seems like a safer choice (Djuve, 2007). This lack of employers’ experience in assessing the competencies of people with ethnic minority background is also known as statistical discrimination (Brekke, 2007; Lødding, 2003; Rogstad, 2000a, 2004, 2006; Wiborg, 2006).

In addition, Billig and Tajfel (1973) demonstrated that people have a tendency to favour others that are similar to themselves. This is in line with Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory
which suggests that the group that we think we belong to constitutes a part of our identity (Smith & Bond, 1998), and could contribute to an understanding of why ethnic Norwegian employees are preferred by the employers. Interestingly most of the respondents with immigrant backgrounds answered on a survey that they had not experienced discrimination in Norway, but recognition should be given to the fact that two out of ten of these respondents experienced discrimination (Rogstad, 2004, 2006).

As mentioned before, many of the reviewed studies are based on surveys asking the employers’ about their attitudes towards hiring people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Rogstad (2000a) is sceptical towards the use of surveys to uncover the reasoning behind employers hiring decisions. He argues that as discrimination is considered morally illegitimate in most societies, there is a possibility that employers would profess legitimate reasons to why they do not hire people with ethnic minority backgrounds. In addition, the discrimination law state that discrimination based on ethnicity is illegal. A violation could lead to fines and in serious cases jail (Lovdata, 2008). Based on this it is doubtful that many people would directly express prejudice and discriminate people with ethnic minority backgrounds.

*Stereotyping and prejudice*

Previous studies have also demonstrated a link between negative stereotyping, prejudices, people with ethnic minority backgrounds (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Araya, 2006; Lepore & Brown, 1997) and employers’ hiring preferences (Cargile, 2000; McConahay, 1983). For example, Lepore and Brown (1997) demonstrated through an experiment that ethnic stereotypes are generally negative, independent of the level of prejudice the participants had. Akrami, Ekehammar, and Araya (2006) on the other hand, demonstrated that the participants who scored low on prejudice activated stereotypes to a lesser degree than those who scored high on prejudice.

Arai and Thoursie (2007) suggest that ethnic names seem to be one factor that triggers stereotypes and prejudices and therefore have a negative impact on immigrants’ income and job opportunities. This seems to be in line with the results from the experiment conducted by Purkiss et al. (2006) that demonstrated that when individuals with an ethnic name and accent was combined, the judgments of these applicants were unfavourable. On the other hand, the most favourable judgments were given to applicants with an ethnic name combined with no accent (fluency in the host language). According to the expectancy-violation theory by
Jussim, Coleman and Lerch (1987, p. 537) “Individuals who possess more favourable characteristics than expected should be evaluated even more positively than other with similar characteristics whom we expected to rate positively all along”. Referring to this theory Purkiss et al. (2006, p. 162) propose that as there are “… lower expectations for minorities, and when these expectations are violated in a positive direction (i.e. no accent) evaluation will be in the direction of the violation”.

However, Cotton, O’Neill and Griffin (2008) found some contradicting results. The participants in their study liked the unique name the least and they were more likely to hire someone with a more common name. Nevertheless, when tested on the participants’ hiring behaviour there were no effects of name on hiring decisions. The researchers thought that one reason could be that the name might influence affective reactions, but not behaviour. We should have in mind that an experiment setting does not necessarily show what happens in a real context, as in a real life an employer usually quickly flip through the pile of applications and resumes (for screening) before reading only some of them in depth.

Summary
People with ethnic minority backgrounds seem in general to more disadvantaged in the Norwegian job market compared to ethnic Norwegians. The disadvantaged job situation among people with ethnic minority backgrounds seems to be explained by the researchers as having to do with the resources they have (or do not have), such as their job searching behaviour, social networks, qualifications and competence and language. In addition, it seems that the length of residency in the host country has an impact on these resources. However, researchers have warned that we should avoid blaming people with ethnic minority backgrounds for their disadvantaged situation, as it can block us from seeing the real problem. Other factors used to explain the job situation among people with ethnic minority background is the employers’ perceptions of people with ethnic minority backgrounds and their preferences. Previous studies have demonstrated that stereotyping and prejudgments have an impact on hiring decisions, which is rarely found to benefit people with ethnic minority backgrounds.

Research approach
The discussed review of the literature shows that many studies have had a focus on the employers’ perspectives, with the exception of Orupabo’s (2008) study where the starting
point was the immigrants’ perspectives. Rogstad (2004, p. 267) argues that it is important to focus on those who discriminate as well as those who are exposed to discrimination, as “…it is the everyday experiences that affects whether or not the fellow citizens [Norwegian: “medborger”] feel included, and to what degree they experience their existence as meaningful or not”. In accordance with Rogstad, The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud (2008) have also suggested in listening to those being subject of discrimination. Following these suggestions, this study will have the subjective experiences of people with ethnic minority backgrounds as the starting point. The research questions are as following:

**How do people with ethnic minority background living in Norway experience the process of job seeking and regard the possibility of employment in the Norwegian workforce?**

a) What kind of job seeking experiences in Norway do people with ethnic minority background have?

b) How do people with ethnic minority background feel that their job seeking experiences have affected their job seeking behaviour?

c) How do people with ethnic minority background feel about and experience being part of the Norwegian workforce?

A qualitative approach will be used to answer these research questions. The results of the data analysis will be discussed in relation to conceptual and theoretical frameworks largely drawn from psychology.
METHODS

The focus group interview and grounded theory

The research method used to carry out this study was focus group interviews. Here is the interaction between the participants as important as the discussion of the topic. It further involves organized discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their opinions and experiences of a topic, and is particularly suited if a researcher is interested in obtaining several perspectives about the same topic (Morgan, 1998; Gibbs, 1997).

The analytical method chosen for this study was grounded theory. This enabled me to work thematically with qualitative data collected through the focus group interviews. In addition, this produced a framework of understanding that is grounded directly and explicitly in the experiences of the participants (Strauss, 1987). Furthermore, this method does not only create meaning, but also generates a new theoretical model that enables us to understand and explain the phenomena under investigation (Guvå & Hylander, 2005).

Contrary to other analysis methods where the researchers do not start the analysis before all the data is collected, using grounded theory allows the researcher to start the analysis from the very first focus group interview (Charmaz, 2008; Strauss, 1987). By conducting the interviews at least a week apart (except from the last two that were conducted on the same day), it enabled me to explore the important issues uncovered in the previous interviews more in depth during the later ones.

Participants

This study included a total of 21 participants, divided into five groups. The target population was people with ethnic minority backgrounds who had job seeking experiences from Norway, in addition to being over 18 years old. Ethnic minority background was not defined, as the intention was that anyone who felt they fell under this category and had valuable experience to share could participate. Most of the participants have held a job in Norway before, with a few exceptions.

As shown in Table 1, the participants in this study had various ethnic minority backgrounds. All participants were immigrants except from one participant who was “Norwegian-born to immigrant parents” (Statistics Norway, 2009a). Although not intended, interestingly all the
participants who showed interest in participating in this study had non-western immigrant background, as explained in the introduction. The participants’ age ranged from 23 years to 47 years, and the job status among them was student, job seeker or full time worker. The information about age, job status and ethnic minority background, were collected prior to the focus groups interviews, either through email or when the subjects enlisted for participation in the study.

Table 1: A simple overview of the participants (N = 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Immigrant background</th>
<th>Job status (at the time of the study)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Full time worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Student/part time worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Full time worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Student/part time worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
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<td>Somalia</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Job seeker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to conducting the focus group interviews a big part of this research consisted of preparation, which included: recruiting participants, designing the information sheet, the informed consent form and the schedule for the focus groups, finding location and insuring that the participants appeared for the focus groups, and ethical preparation.

**Procedure**

**Recruiting strategies**

Following the principles of purposive sample, the participants were recruited according to the purpose and goal of this study (Morgan & Scannel, 1998). The recruitment of each participant was initiated several weeks prior to the focus group interview. Not only did this
allow me to find a location to conduct the focus group interviews, but also to provide the participants with relevant materials connected to the research.

**Social networks, advertising and posters**

Recruiting strategies consisted of using personal social networks, advertising (using email and word of mouth). Posters were in addition put up at the campus of the University of Oslo and in two of the NAV-offices, downtown Oslo and Furuset. Not many responded to the posters, but a few of the participants were recruited through emails that were sent and forwarded

**Job seeking courses**

The participants were also recruited through the job seeking courses offered by the Career Centre at the University of Oslo and Reaktorskolen (a vendor of vocational oriented adult educational services). Many of the participants were recruited through the latter. The employees in charge at Reaktorskolen allowed me to recruit participants through the courses they held, where I was given a few minutes to present my research. Those who were interested in participating contacted me after my presentation.

**Immigrant organizations**

Another recruitment strategy was to send letters with the information sheet about the study to around 20 different immigrant organizations. The contact information to these organizations was found through a list created by Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (n.d.). Approximately ten days after the letters were posted the plan was to make phone calls to the different organizations. Unexpectedly a problem occurred. With one exception, I was unable to get a hold of anyone through the phone calls. There was either no one answering, or the numbers on the list was wrong or disconnected. In the end only one organization demonstrated interest in this research.

**Preparation**

*The information sheet and the consent form*

All the participants received the information sheet prior to the focus group interviews. Those who agreed to participate were also given a consent form to be signed before participation in the focus groups. Due to the topic of this research, I was prepared that some participants might possess poorer Norwegian language skills, and kept that in mind when formulating the information sheet and the informed consent form. The language of the consent form (appendix 1) and the information sheet (appendix 2) is thus simpler than normal. This turned
out to be necessary, as there was a great variation in the Norwegian language competence between the participants.

Confirmation of participation
Most of the information exchange between the participants and me happened by email. They also had the opportunity to contact me by cell phone which some did. With a few exceptions all the participants who desired to and were able to participate received a confirmation letter either by email or by mail prior to the focus group sessions. Some of the participant did not receive confirmation email or letter; this is explained under the heading research ethics. The confirmation letter included a short introduction of the study, what the participants would be asked to do, confirmation of time and date of the focus group interview and a directions to the location. The information sheet and the informed consent form were enclosed in the email or letter to those who had not received them previously.

The focus groups
Location
The location of the focus groups varied. Two of the focus groups were located at a seminar room at the Department of Psychology at the University of Oslo, as it was hard to find other locations. This was not a problem for the participants involved. The other focus group interviews took place at a seminar room located centrally in Oslo. This room belonged to Reaktorskolen, and we were fortunate to have the use of the rooms. This was especially convenient for the participants due to its central location and the participants’ familiarity with the location.

Incentive
Besides serving some light snacks and something to drink during the focus group interviews, no other incentives were given to those who participated. The advantage with not providing any other incentive is that the participation in this study was most likely based on interest rather than the incentive. The disadvantage is that it was more difficult to recruit people for participation.

The group composition and number of focus groups
None of the participants in two of the focus group interviews knew each other as they were recruited through different channels and organized in the various groups as they signed up for the study. The participants in three of the other focus group interviews knew each other, as they were all recruited from the same place.
The number of groups needed could not be determined in advance, as the goal with grounded theory (e.g. Charmaz, 2008) and focus group interviews was to achieve theoretical saturation; that is to reach the point when things said in the groups become repetitive and there is little to be gained doing more groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan & Scanell, 1998). In this study, theoretical saturation seemed to be achieved after five focus group interviews.

The original plan called for six participants in each focus group, but due to various causes, the focus group sizes varied. Examples of causes were withdrawal from participants and the time or place not fitting the schedule of the participants. The study concluded with two groups of four participants, two groups of three participants and one group of seven participants. Having fewer participants in a group seemed to have its advantages (Krueger & Casey, 2000). First, it gave each participant more time to tell their experiences and personal stories, in addition to giving the moderator, the opportunity to pay more attention to each participant’s needs. There was a clear tendency in the group of seven participants that some were more verbal than others, while in the smaller group the distribution of talking were more equal.

The focus group interviews

All the focus group interviews were conducted in Norwegian, then transcribed verbatim and analysed. Through systematic analysis of the scripts using the principles of grounded theory, such as line by line coding, focused coding and memo writing (Charmaz, 2008; Strauss, 1987), initial key categories were developed. These key categories were subject to constant comparison in order to repeatedly test emerging ideas and resolving differences of interpretation.

The quotes and excerpts used in the result section are translated into English. Due to the wish of retaining the characteristics of what the participants said, the English translations of the quotes and excerpts are as close as possible to what the participants said in Norwegian. The translations might therefore not always be grammatical correct, as some of the participants did not speak fluent Norwegian. The challenge with translating quotes is that some of the meanings might be lost in translation. The Norwegian version of these quotes and excerpts are available by request to the researcher.

Moreover, Charmaz (2008, p. 87) argues that constructing interview guides with open ended questions are helpful for novices as it “provides a logical pacing for of topics and questions,
avoids loaded and leading questions, and gives you direction as well as your interview participants”. As a novice researcher myself, the decision was made to follow this suggestion. A similar introduction was given to all the participants before the focus group interview started. This included information about the schedule of the focus group interviews, what the participants were expected to do, and about the purpose of the study. I was the moderator and had an assistant during the first focus group. The assistant’s tasks consisted of assisting me with practical things. This provided me the opportunity to concentrate on the conversation and the discussion. I tried to keep myself in the background and only interfered in the conversation to ask probing questions and assigning the tasks that was prepared in advance, in order to keep the natural flow of the conversation. The first task consisted of handing out transparencies with two contradicting statements printed on it, with a line in between, to the participants. The participants were then asked to make a mark on the line according to how much they agreed to either of the statements (see appendix 3). After this was done, the transparencies were collected and put on top of each other on an overhead in order to compare and see where the markings were. A discussion was then prompted based on how the participants made markings on the transparencies. The same procedure followed with the second task, but with two different contradicting statements.

Furthermore, a tape recorder was used during all the interviews, which did not appear to affect the group discussion. At the end of each interview, all the participants were given the option of receiving a copy of a brief summary of the research findings after the master thesis was submitted. Directly after the sessions, reflections and notes on various observations made during the focus group interviews were written down in order to capture impressions that can not be discovered by the tape recorder (Rabiee, 2004).

**Challenges**

The Norwegian language skills appeared to be high among the participants in the first two focus groups and they seemed to understand the tasks they were asked to perform during the focus group interviews. In the third focus group, there was a great variance in the Norwegian language skills between the participants. Those who had poorer Norwegian skills did not completely understand the tasks that were presented, even though they had given confirmation that they understood by saying yes or nodding. This was discovered when some of the participants were unable to discuss about the theme connected to the task. Several explanations were given before they began to understand the tasks. The participants in the
last two focus group interviews would have similar Norwegian language skills, which were discovered during the recruitment. The decision to change the plan for these interviews was thus made in order to avoid the problem occurred in the third interview. The new plan consisted of excluding the tasks assigned in the previous three focus group interviews; these were instead rephrased as questions. The change of plan was possible as there were at least a week between the different focus group interviews.

Research ethics

First of all, an approval was needed from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) (Appendix 4), as conducting this study included getting information that could possibly identify the participants. As soon as this approval was received, the first focus group interviews were conducted. There are several ethical challenges and dilemmas related to this study that needs to be taken into consideration and discussed.

Informed consent

As previously mentioned, all the participants were required to sign an informed consent form prior to the focus group interviews. The principle of informed consent require that the participants are given sufficient information about the research and any possible risk and benefits from participating, so that the participants can make informed decisions. The informed consent principle also involves voluntary participation from the participants as well as allowing them to withdraw at any time (Kvale, 1996). Cieurizo and Keitel (1999) claim that participants in qualitative research cannot be fully informed about all the potential consequences because changes continually occur as the research process unfolds.

The ethical challenge with the informed consent form was that some of the participants had very poor Norwegian language skills, both speaking and reading. Hence I went thoroughly through the consent form orally, trying to use simple words, before starting the focus group interviews. I attempted to be clear, and emphasized that it was important to let me know if they did not understand the things being said. This was also the reason why some of the participants did not receive a confirmation letter in advance, as it would be more beneficial to explain it to them orally, which I did prior to explaining the consent form.

As most of the participants seemed to be able to have a conversation in the group and were understood by others, there is a high degree of confidence that the information sheet and the consent form were understood. For those who did not participate as much, the question still
remains whether they understood the purpose of the study, and what they are expected to do during the focus group interviews.

**Confidentiality and anonymity**

Important points in the consent form are confidentiality and anonymity, which implies that any data material that can identify the participants involved in the research will not be reported (Kvale, 1996). The participants’ names are replaced by numbers in the transcriptions. In addition, all information that could possibly identify the participants in the quotes and excerpts used in the thesis has been altered. For example pseudonyms are used when the participants’ names are mentioned.

Even though all the participants signed an informed consent form prior to the study that include keeping information obtained in the research confidential, it would not be possible to control what the others in the focus group interviews would do or say after the study is completed. For this reason some participants might not want to join, or talk about their true experiences in the interviews.

**Interpretation and ownership**

The issue of researcher bias and validity of participants’ responses are related to interpreting the findings obtained through the focus group interviews. This means that the researcher’s personal biases can affect the interpretation of data and that the participants can distort or exaggerate their claims (Cieurizo & Keitel, 1999). Regardless the type of research an extent of subjectivity might exist (Rabiee, 2004). Hence, attention was given to this issue when interpreting the data. Readers should be cautioned when evaluating the data and acknowledge that the researcher’s biases on the topic under investigation could influence how the data was analysed and interpreted.

**Storage of the data**

Only my supervisor and I had access to the transcriptions of the data produced in the focus group interviews. The data was stored on my computer, secured by a password, and on a USB stick that was stored securely. All personal information that can identify the participants was destroyed as soon as possible. In addition, the personal information will be deleted when the master thesis is submitted and approved, and the summary of the main findings in this study is sent out.
RESULTS
The results presented below are my interpretation of the experiences shared by the participants and the following discussions in the focus group interviews. The purpose of this qualitative study aims at developing meaning to an event rather than to search for truth (Rabiee, 2004). From the thematic analysis of the focus group data emerged four main themes which will be presented in the following order: (1) perception biases (2) emotions, (3) qualifications and competences, and (4) integration. Each theme and subtheme will be provided with representative quotations from the focus group interviews for illustration, in addition to differing views when present. Although the results will be presented under different main themes it is important to note that all the themes are interrelated, and should not be considered to stand alone.

Perception biases
The first main theme concerns the impact an ethnic background has on employment in addition to the participants’ experience of how others perceive them. A common theme was the interaction process between the participants’ self perception and how others perceived them. The discussion about this seemed to revolve around three subthemes: having an ethnic background, stereotypes and prejudice, and foreign sounding names.

Having an ethnic background
The first subtheme is about the participants’ experience of the employers’ hiring preferences. There were differences in opinions with regards to how much the participants thought that an ethnic minority background mattered for gaining employment.

“Ethnic Norwegians and western immigrants are preferred by employers”
There seems to be a common belief among the participants that people with ethnic minority backgrounds are more disadvantaged than others, both ethnic Norwegians and western-immigrants, in an employment situation. One of the participant who experienced this said: “If for example, one person is from for example from the USA and one is from India, let us say so, and both speak equally poorly Norwegian, and both have similar education, same amount of working experience, then they [the employers] choose one who is from a little more like western countries again, I feel, that is what I have experience with anyway”. As we see, this participant experienced that employers preferred people with western immigrant background over those with non-western immigrant background. Furthermore, it also seems
that some of the participants experienced that more is demanded of people with ethnic minority backgrounds compared to that of an ethnic Norwegian. They experienced that they had to work harder in order to be assessed as equally qualified as ethnic Norwegians. As one participant reported: “But you have to work more and you must work harder and have more patient to get what you want, or get what you deserve in a way, and I think that is often the case”.

Nevertheless, there were several participants who expressed the understanding of the employers’ preference of hiring ethnic Norwegians in Norway. One participant gave this comparison: “And then we must not forget first, when for immigrants, when we come here, first must give priority for Norwegians, it’s a little true. For instance in Africa, if come all from countries, we give [job] first this African nationality, yes, people [natives], we must give people first priority, yes”. Based on this and similar accounts, it seems that there is a belief among some of the participants that the preference of hiring natives would be found in other countries as well.

Norwegian-born to immigrant parents

Some of the participants also talked about how advantaged the job situation is for Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, as one participant expressed: “But I feel two things, one is that it depends on where you have grown up. I meant the second generation and the third generation they who, it is just like Norwegian. They [laughs], and have this kind of network, it is not hard for them to find a job, because of there are next generation to, or as children to someone with minority background then”. It seems that there is a belief among some of the participants that those who are Norwegian-born to immigrant-parents are more advantaged in the Norwegian workforce, as they have similar mindsets as Norwegians, in addition to having better networks and the knowledge of the functioning of the Norwegian system. People who are Norwegian-born to immigrant parents were also thought to be attractive to the employers, “as people like others similar to themselves”.

Ambivalent opinions

Another thing that appeared through the discussions was the ambivalent feelings among some of the participants to the experience of having an ethnic minority background. As one participant stated: “I feel that yes, of course if a person with a lot of competence get work anyway, but at the same time I feel that it has something to do with as background so”. Another argument was that the difficulties in finding a job among immigrants, has more to
do with the consequence of having an ethnic minority background, rather than due to discrimination. This was exemplified by one participant who said: “Because it is more, I think it is more the consequence that you come from a minority background that determine, not the minority background it self (...) let us say that they choose not to go to the University (...)”. This participant seems to believe that people with ethnic minority backgrounds might choose a direction that makes it harder for them to get into the job market, such as not getting a higher education degree. Although some of the participants agreed to this suggestion, many of them still believed that they are disadvantaged in a hiring situation due to their ethnic minority backgrounds. They described this disadvantage as closely related to the perception others have of them.

**Stereotyping and Prejudice**

The second subtheme concerns the participants’ feelings and experiences of being stereotyped and the prejudices others has of people with ethnic backgrounds.

*The double disadvantage being a woman*

Several of the female participants experienced that they were double disadvantaged in a hiring situation. Not only did they experience that they were discriminated against due to their ethnic backgrounds, but also as a woman. As one participant reported: “Sometimes one feel maybe I feel like, because I am a mother, and then I am just a [person of] foreign background, therefore not getting the job, this I know. For sure”. Some of the female participants also experienced that some employers had stereotypical view of women from certain countries as having many children, as one participant stated: “I thought maybe they could think, yes, for example many can think that if you come from a country like that, we have a lot of children [laughs]. It could be”. Based on what these participants said, it might seem like they believed that this way of stereotyping could serve to function as a barrier for them to gain employment, as they are ruled out as an attractive employee by the employers.

*Feelings of inferiority*

Several of the participant also experienced being looked upon as inferior by others, as one participant said: “If you take from 'social-money', everyone [think], I think so, I am second class human, because I take from 'social' [referring to the social and welfare office] for example. I can not work. I don’t have work. Everyone would sick, psychological, what is it called? Down, down-go, go down”. This participant seems to believe that people can get
psychological problems, when they have a belief that others look down on them, which several other participants also agreed to.

Furthermore, a few of the participants expressed that going to the social and welfare office to receive money is not by choice. As one of the participants reported: “Yes, we do not want to go to the 'social' and ask for money no”. They further commented that some of the employees at the social and welfare office meet them with scepticism, as it is not understood why healthy people do not work. Receiving money from the social and welfare office is looked upon as a necessity to get by as they can not find a job. One of the participants expressed the hope to find a job, saying: “Maybe, we hope that Norwegians give us a chance to work a little, afterwards we take responsibility”. Several statements similar to this quote seemed to indicate that if the participants were to choose themselves, they would work and make their own living, rather than receiving money from the social and welfare office. However, this is presuming that they were given the opportunity to work.

Religion

Some of the participants had encounters concerning issues around the religion of Islam they belonged to, and the use of hijab. A few of them had the experience of being asked questions concerning their religion in job interviews that they felt were highly unnecessary and irrelevant for the occupation. For example one participant reported being asked about what religion he belonged to: “Your name is Mehmood, you are for certainly Muslim. Yes, I am Muslim”. This participant also shared stories about a friend who experienced an incident that was more extreme, such as: “And then heard a lot from friends about Islam and, like or you practice or, what do you think of Taliban and what do you think about, they asked a lot [talking with a resigned voice] “.

When it comes to the use of hijab, the experiences varied among the participants who used it. One of the participants who had negative experiences said: “And he [employer] said I would give you job, but first you have to take off the head cover and scarf. I said why. Because it fits not, he said”. This participant was really frustrated and mad when being told that she would only get employed if she took off her hijab. She further commented: “I was very angry. Clothes work not one, I work. Anyway if you have big clothing or little clothing you can work”. Nonetheless, there were participants who had more neutral experiences with the use of hijab, as one of them said: “I use hijab when I work in kindergarten and when I work nursing home. I use hijab”.
As seen here, there seems to be some variations in the participants’ experiences concerning aspects of their religion in relation to their encounters with the Norwegian workforce. While some had negative encounters, others did not have such experiences.

Advantages
Although many of the participants experienced that their ethnic backgrounds had a negative impact on employment in Norway, there were some who believed that it could, in some instances, lead to positive results. As one participant said: “Then she [referring to employer] said that it is foreign [people] from Asia, many Asia [people] is good who get to work, and then you can have job, she said right away”. This participant had the experience of being stereotyped as hard working, which led to employment. Another participant who also had positive encounters said: “Therefore yes, for example that one stands out a bit. Right? (…) Yes I have experienced that they [employers] remember my name more easily if one sits in a gathering with lots of people, and that Kamala kind of, then they remember me, one stand out both positive and negative though (…)”. This participant seems to believe that one of the advantages of having an ethnic minority background is that you stand out in the crowd, as you look different, in addition to having an unusual name. However, it seems like standing out in the crowd does not necessarily make a good impression on the employers.

Foreign sounding names
The last subtheme is about the name’s influence on employers’ hiring decisions, which was slightly touched upon in the previous subtheme. As the name is the first thing an employer sees on an application or in a resume, it is experienced by some of the participants to have an impact on employers’ hiring decisions, as one participant said: “First name is written on the note, with big letters, if she [employer] sees learn it, they [employers] don’t need to read CV, not”. Based on the participants’ account, it seems like they believed that foreign names had a negative effect on their job opportunities. They further seem to believe that some employers would just throw their application in the garbage when they see the foreign sounding name on it. To exemplify the extent people with ethnic minority backgrounds believed that foreign sounding names influence employers’ hiring decisions, stories about immigrant families giving their children international names were told. For instance, one participant said: “I know many foreign one, ladies, they call their children with international names, not on own country name. Why I ask. Because to find a job in the future. It is going to be easy to find job in the future for children”. By throwing their application in the garbage without giving it
another glance, some of the participants said that the employers miss out on potential employees with valuable experiences and competence, as one participant expressed: “Not just talk, write out and throw! First she [referring to one of the other participants in the focus group], a person maybe, Fakhira has lots of experience, and then she speaks good English maybe a little Norwegian, afterwards she understands lots of Norwegian”.

Another argument is that the foreign sounding name does not really matter if a person speaks fluent Norwegian and behaves in a Norwegian way. One participant argued: “It shows to employer, like now employer now look at the CV, application, and maybe name, only name they different, but they [referring to individuals who speak fluent Norwegian and behaves in a Norwegian way] know they are Norwegians, so that is not a problem, I feel”. In addition, some of the participants seem to believe that being able to speak fluent Norwegian will lead to a boost in self confidence and thus the ability to do better in job interviews, as one participant stated: “Yes, I think that too if you have self confidence self, that you give a different impression when you feel Norwegian”. Furthermore, there seems to be a different emphasis on the foreign sounding name’s importance for gaining employment. In some of the focus group interviews “the name issue” was barely mentioned, while there was a greater emphasis in others.

**Summary**

The participants experienced that their ethnic minority backgrounds were subject to stereotypical thinking and prejudices, which are often biased. They believed that this could be triggered by the foreign sounding names on their applications. This again could serve to cut them off the job market, as they do not even get as far as to the job interviews. Moreover, some of the participants expressed a belief in the interaction process between their self perception and others’ perceptions of them, which is experienced as influencing their job opportunities. For example, the employers’ stereotyping and prejudices is believed to have a negative impact on the self esteem to some of the participants, and that is why they might do poorly on job interviews. Those who have a higher degree of self confidence and act more similar to ethnic Norwegians, on the other hand, are believed to give employers a better impression of them and therefore do better in job interviews.

**Emotions**

Emotion is the second main theme that emerged from the data analysis. The focus group data that was relating to emotions included both explicit statements and nonverbal cues such as
facial and body language observed during the interviews. In addition, the emotions are related to how the participants experienced various forms of stereotyping and prejudices. Following subthemes were identified: frustration, feeling of sadness and resignation, loss of hope, and motivation and coping.

**Frustration**

Frustration seems to be strongly connected to the participants’ experiences, such as being turned down on job offers and the feeling of being viewed as inferior as seen in the previous subtheme. Moreover, frustration also occurred when some of the participants experienced that they were not able to speak Norwegian the way ethnic Norwegians do, as one participant said: “And of course I am not so sure when I speak Norwegian. Of course I can do mistakes and of course if people want, then people can just point that out and say that no she can not do that job. And then it is very, yes [quiet for a couple of seconds] frustrating sometimes (...).” Some of the participants seem to experience an intensified frustration when others point out that they do not speak good enough Norwegian, even though they were aware of their own spoken Norwegian skills.

In addition, many of the participants experienced that the education they have from their home country is not evaluated as attractive in Norway. As one participant reported: “I have a bachelor in engineering from Asia (…) but it is so hard for people to know what that is. Because it is so different system in Norway. But mostly they [employers] think it is a good education”. The lack of understanding by the Norwegian employers of what a foreign education entails is experienced by the participants to be one of the factors that influence employers’ hiring decisions. Even though the participants seem to understand the employers’ scepticism towards their education, it did not make them less frustrated.

**Feelings of sadness**

While many of the participants became frustrated because of the continued rejections of employments, others felt sadness, as one said: “Because she thought that most foreign women who have more children. I had very sad on it sometimes (...).” This participant became sad as she believed that she lost one good job opportunity due to her belief that the employer did not want to hire someone who has many children or planning to have many children.

In general, the many negative encounters some of the participants had with the Norwegian workforce (such as continued rejections of employment) appear to lead to frustration,
sadness and resignation. These emotions were not always explicitly uttered by the participants, but were clearly interpreted from the non-verbal cues observed during the focus group interviews such as sighing, the intonation of their voice and their body language.

**Loss of hope**
Several of the participants also talked about loss of hope. “Because when I came here and searched [for] jobs, I’m good and go many places and search [for] jobs. And so I lose maybe, I have answer 10 persons [referring to applying for 10 jobs], maybe not answer. Maybe I lose job, and just sit bankrupt [Norwegian: konkurs] and sit at home. I lost all my hope”, said one of the participants. From the participants’ experience it seems that the hope of gaining employment decreased with the increased frequency of employment rejections.

**Motivation and Coping**
This subtheme concerns the participants’ motivation for continuing job searching and how they cope with unemployment. Several of the participants said they had given up or want to give up on job searching and gaining employment. As one participant said: “It seems yeah that, that many times that I just want to give up. Basically”. Another participant expressed: “You have to find the motivation and that is not everyone who finds the motivation for it”. According to the participants’ accounts, it seems that the frequent employment rejections made it harder for them to find motivation for applying for other jobs.

In order to get these claims confirmed probing questions were asked. Interestingly, when asked whether or not they had given up on gaining employment, the same participants gave different responses. As one of them said: “I, as I said, I think positive all the time, because I in a way get to know the Norwegian society (…) but one has to think positive all the time, or should lose at the end”. From this and other similar experiences the participants had, it appears that they coped with the situation they are in through positive thinking. Moreover, some of the participants expressed that negative thoughts would lead to self fulfilling prophecy.

As mentioned before, some of the participants had the feeling of being attributed as inferior. Removing this uncomfortable feeling also seems to be a motivation to continue job searching, and not giving up. As one participant expressed: “Yes, because when you go to work and you find money yourself, you come a little up, right? Little strong”. Several of the participants experienced to be looked at as inferior, and further believed that this would not
have happened if they had a job and earned money. In addition, having a job was experienced by some of the participants as leading to a better self esteem.

It is important to note that a few of the participants, who also spoke fluent Norwegian, did not have any memorable negative encounters with the Norwegian workforce and therefore had a positive attitude about gaining employment.

**Summary**

The feelings of being rated as inferior, frustration, sadness, loss of hope and resignation seem to be a result of the participants’ various encounters with the Norwegian workforce. Although many of the participants said that they had not given up on gaining employment, their facial and body language seemed to indicate otherwise. One way they seemed to cope with their situation was through positive thinking. Although negative emotions seemed to feature in all focus group interviews, there were a few of the participants who did not express such feelings.

**Qualifications and competences**

The third main theme is about the qualifications and competences the participants experienced as contributing to hiring decisions among the employers. The participants seemed to agree that job opportunities are dependent on the type of job you apply for, the qualifications and competences that you have.

**Proving you skills**

Many of the participants experienced a struggle to prove their skills, knowledge and competences. As one participant said: “Actually I have education, but I have not got job. I have applied many times. And I think they, it is often difficult to show what you can do right away”. According to what some of the participants said, it appear that they did not feel they were able to show their competence immediately and wished to be given a chance to do so. It further seems that many of them felt that they had to prove themselves better than the ethnic Norwegians in order to be assessed as equally competent. “Because you should show you that you are, you can make yourself like a Norwegians, in addition we [referring to the employers] expect that you maybe should be better than a Norwegians in order for you to be qualified”, said another participant. Several of the participants experienced that they had to work harder to and be more qualified than Norwegians in order to be considered by the employers.
Norwegian language skills

A lot of the discussion around Norwegian language skills seemed to revolve around verbal communication, in addition to the participants’ somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the demand of proficiency in the Norwegian language skills in the Norwegian workforce.

Communication

When discussing the need of the Norwegian language skills the participants generally referred to the spoken Norwegian, as many of them experienced that the speaking fluency in Norwegian is important for communication and therefore important for gaining employment. One example was given by a participant who shared a story about a friend who experienced communication problems: “Maybe this lady [patient at a nursing home], old lady, she said take cell phone to me, and then old [referring to an employee with ethnic minority background] can talk not good right? And then she take cup! [laughs a little]”. This excerpt illustrates a miscommunication due to a language barrier. Instead of giving the patient a cup, this employee with poor Norwegian language skills gave the patient the keys instead. Misunderstanding seems to go both ways; you do not understand others and they do not understand you. However, some of the participants said that receptive skills are easier than expressive skills.

Ambivalence towards the demand of language proficiency

Many of the participants seemed to accept the demand of Norwegian language skills in the Norwegian workforce. Some of them were however ambivalent towards it. On the one hand, the participants expressed an understanding of the employers’ choice of hiring the person with the best Norwegian language skills and that they would have made the same choice, as one participant said: “I feel that if they had same (...) competence like other Norwegians, but I think [laughs a little] that if I was an, for example, employer, maybe I give, would give chance to Norwegians then”. On the other hand, they were frustrated that the Norwegian language skills is a qualification demanded by all occupations, even in the cleaning business. “I apply, when I am going to apply I read newspaper they [employer] need a person who speak good Norwegian, I do not apply for that”, said another participant. It seems that they understood their own level of Norwegian language skills and would not have applied for a job that required good Norwegian language skills.
Length of residency
The participants’ various accounts also seemed to indicate that they were concerned with explaining the impact the length of residency had on their language skills. In addition, they expressed that they understand Norwegian well, even though they did not speak fluent Norwegian, as one participant said: “Because one [a person with an ethnic minority background] is not born in Norway, speak perfect Norwegian, but one can and understand”. Several of the participants further expressed that the longer you have lived in Norway the better Norwegian language skills you acquire.

Earlier working experience
The lack of previous working experience from Norway made it difficult for many of the participants to find a job, as one of them reported: “They [employers] asked about me, how you come from and have you education, do you have experience, I said yes, but they said you don’t have experience in Norway. Therefore we cannot give you [a job]”. The demand of previous working experience appears to frustrate the participants. Many of them said that it is impossible to get working experience if no one gives them a chance. However, despite not being employed, the participants experienced the job interviews as nice and pleasant. They further expressed that pleasant interviews do not help them, if they do not gain employment. Moreover, one participant commented that the request of previous working experience does not only apply in Norway, saying: “If you don’t have [previous working] experience in Algeria, you can not work there”. As this quote indicates, the demand of previous working experiences is believed to apply to other countries as well.

Education
Education is another factor that the participants experienced to matter in order to gain employment. One participant commented that all employment seem to require some kind of education, saying: “Some jobs, all jobs [job advertising] there written is, have education right. Yes. They written only cleaning or laundry doesn’t need education, but all jobs need education”. As previously mentioned, some of the participants were frustrated that the education they have from their home country were not rated as attractive as a Norwegian education in the Norwegian job market. Many of them have to start anew on an education when they get to Norway, because they were unable to find a job where they could use the education degree (from abroad) that they had. However, this is believed to matter less where there is a lack of skilled labour, as one participant said: “(...) Yes, I think that it is mostly
there that Norway has the need for, for example on medical employees, so they do everything to get more people who comes from other countries and have the education (…)”. Several participants seemed to agree with this claim.

**Summary**

The qualifications and competences the participants believed to matter were the Norwegian language skills, earlier working experience and education. Some of the participants experienced a struggle to prove their competence immediately and wished they were given a chance to prove so. They were also concerned with explaining the impact the length of residency had on the various qualifications and competences demanded by the Norwegian workforce, which they believed had an influence on their job opportunities.

**Integration**

The last main theme is about the participants’ discussion of how integration matter in order for them to get access to the Norwegian workforce. This revolved around these two subthemes: the availability of help and networking.

**The availability of help**

The necessity of integration for gaining employment was expressed by many of the participants. While some of the participants complained about the lack of help to get integrated by the Norwegian government, others disagreed, praising the government’s efforts to ensure integration.

*Governmental versus private workforce*

Some of the participants experienced the Norwegian government as being very helpful, saying that they do not believe that other countries can measure up with the initiatives taken by the Norwegian government in order to integrate immigrants and help them to find a job. One of the participants gave an example: “For example, have a lot, especially in the beginning, or initiative from, taken from the government, or from politics (…) for example workshops for minority background people (…)”. Other participants experienced that the private sectors were more likely to hire through social networks, as another participant commented: “But think that there are some difficulties (…) like in the counties [Norwegian: “kommune”] and governmental jobs (…) they announce the occupations at least, while in the private [sectors] there, they hire friends and acquaintances or, or friends’ friends”. According
to these kinds of accounts, the participants appear to believe that that the public sectors to a large degree announce more vacant occupations than the private sectors.

Norwegian language courses and proficiency

The participants who were discontent with the government’s effort, complained about the quality of the Norwegian courses. Many of them expressed that that the lack of positive development in their Norwegian language skills were a result of the poor quality of some of the Norwegian courses offered, and limited opportunities to speak Norwegian other than in the classes. As one participant said: “Not just school, maybe we must, we learn school not home, or out we can not use maybe, we are thinking and I speak not so good Norwegian or then we speak other [referring to speaking their own language]”. Some of these participants further explained that they only spoke their mother tongue at home and therefore had limited opportunities of practicing their Norwegian language skills. It was also expressed that having a job could help them improve their spoken Norwegian. “But I don’t have job, I don’t have any, how am I supposed to communicate with, it is not enough just to go to Norwegian courses. If I have gotten job or someone, I can”, said one of the participants who wished to have more opportunities to speak Norwegian. This complaint seemed to be closely related to the participants’ experience of too high demands of Norwegian language skills in the Norwegian workforce, as another participant expressed: “It is mostly that it maybe it demands too high request, and of course you can prove you can Norwegian the same way as you [referring to another participants speaking fluent Norwegian] who have lived here for a long time for example”. Based on the participants’ experiences, it seems that the high demand of proficiency in the Norwegian language served to cut them off the Norwegian workforce as they are not given the opportunity to prove their qualifications and competences.

Norwegians prioritized

As previously mentioned, some of the participants experienced that ethnic Norwegians were preferred by the employers. This preference was also experienced to apply to NAV, for example one participant reported being told that: “You we can not help, because we kind of have to prioritize Norwegians, because yes (…) and we hire you because you think you have the qualifications no one else has”. Another participant was told to change career by NAV, in addition to the experience of being thrown back and forth between NAV and Manpower (a
recruitment company). The experiences these participants had in common were that none of them experienced getting the help they thought they needed and were frustrated about it.

The job searching process

Some of the participants were also confused about the job searching process in Norway, saying that it is different from what they are used to, as one participant expressed: “We don’t have this kind of system [referring to writing and sending applications] in Croatia for example, and it is a little hard for me to understand what I am supposed to do”. Moreover, many of the participants experienced that they did not receive feedback on why they did not get the job. One of the participants who were really confused about this said: “And then I took the phone right away and called. Why? [Asking why he did not get the job] She [employer] said that I can not say anything”. Some of the participants further wondered how they are supposed to do better in job interviews in the future if they did not know what to improve.

Social networks

Social networks were another factor that many of the participants experienced as being important for gaining employment. For example one of the participants believed that Norwegians are more advantaged in the job market as they had a larger social network: “Those Norwegians have heard much in the network. They got job finally through network, we have fewer networks, therefore we get, we have problems in getting jobs. I think myself”. In addition, it seems that some of the participants did not have as much contact with ethnic Norwegians. They explained it as a result of their poor Norwegians language skills, as one participant said: “I think it because immigrants we can not get jobs, we just go to Norwegian courses, when we get back home we speak mother tongue, we can not communicate with others, it is hard for us”. Based this and similar accounts, it seems that the participants’ insecurity in speaking the Norwegian language made them avoidant of making contact with the ethnic Norwegians. This further seems to create a greater distance between them and the ethnic Norwegians, in addition to hinder the acquisition of an extended social network. Several participants told stories about how social networks contributed to employment, either from their own experiences or acquaintance’s. They further expressed that they are more dependent on their own effort to get a job compared to an ethnic Norwegian.
Summary
The participants seemed to be concerned with the importance of integration for increased job opportunities. Better Norwegian language courses and more arrangements made by the Norwegian government for integration were called for by some of the participants. They experienced that this had an impact on the acquisition of an extended social network, which again influenced their chances of gaining employment. The view that there is a lack of effort from the government is not shared by all, as some believed that the Norwegian government does a lot more for the people with ethnic minority backgrounds than in other countries.
DISCUSSION
The lack of studies, concerning job seeking experiences, where the perspectives of people with ethnic minority backgrounds are taken into account is the main reason this study was conducted. Much of the previous studies in the field of ethnicity and employment have been based on surveys on employers’ attitudes towards hiring people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Although there seems to be an agreement that a change in employers’ attitudes is needed, the question is more on how to do it. One of the problems is the difficulties in uncovering the motives behind discriminatory actions (Rogstad, 2004). This study on the other hand, takes the perspectives of people with ethnic minority backgrounds as the starting point. The purpose is to try to give an insight into how people with ethnic minority backgrounds feel and experience their job opportunities in the Norwegian workforce, and what they found challenging.

As seen in the result section, the data that emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews revolved around four main themes. The first main theme that was identified is the participants’ concerns around the impact perception biases had for their job opportunities. The second main theme concerned the emotions the participants expressed related to their various experiences with the Norwegian workforce. The third main theme revolved around the participants’ experiences with how their qualifications and competences had influenced the employers’ hiring decisions. The fourth main theme centred around discussion among the participants about the importance of integration in the Norwegian society in order to enable them to gain employment.

Methodological issues
Advantages of focus group interviewing
One of the advantages in using focus group interviewing is that it yields an overview opinions and experiences that the participants have. In addition, it “enable[s] people [with an ethnic minority background] to ponder, reflect, and listen to experiences and opinions of others. This interaction helps participants compare their own personal reality to that of others” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 17). Attending focus group interviews can also be empowering for some participants as they have the opportunity to be heard and to be valued as experts (Gibbs, 1997), in addition to a possible “sense of group membership and cohesiveness” (Sim, 1998, p. 2).
Furthermore, when there is a clear power differential between the participants and the decisions maker there is also an advantage in using focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). For this study, the participants are the job seekers with an ethnic minority background, while the decision makers could be both the employers and/or the government. By using focus group interviews in this study, an insight and understanding of how the participants experience and feel about their job opportunities in the Norwegian workforce has been gained. This could be a powerful way of exposing to the employers and the government, and other decision makers the reality of how the job situation is experienced by people with ethnic minority backgrounds. The decisions makers could for example then use the information acquired from the focus group interviews to change their hiring practices (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

**The limited control of the data produced in the focus group interviews and the interaction process between the participants**

One of the weaknesses with focus group interviews is that the moderator has limited control over the data produced. The reason is that focus group interviewing is by nature open ended and cannot be completely predetermined (Krueger & Casey, 2000), although in this study a preconceived interview guide (appendix 3) was used. Other than generally keeping the participants focused on the topic and using questions strategically, I had limited control over the interaction.

**The risk of negative/positive loaded questions on the participants’ responses**

Kvale (1996) argues that during an interview the responses are influenced by the interaction between the interviewer and the participants. Caution is further given concerning the use of questions that have negatively or positively loadings, as this can lead responses from participants. Throughout the focus group interviews in the current study, probing questions were asked in order to follow up the participants’ responses. Because of Kvale’s caution and the awareness of the negative presentation of the immigrants’ job opportunities in the media (e.g. Thorgrimsen, 2008, July 21), an extra effort was made in order to avoid leading and/or loaded questions.

As mentioned earlier, the level of Norwegian language skills were lower in some of the focus group interviews. In these groups, probing questions were more frequently used. This poses the question of whether some of these questions functioned as leading the participants’ responses, although this was not intentional. For instance, the participants could have
interpreted the probing questions from the moderator as a request to talk more of an issue as it is the “right answer”. This did not appear to happen in the current study, as the participants within each of the focus group interviews gave varied perspectives on how they experienced and felt about their job- opportunities and situation in the Norwegian workforce. Although the participants did not only have negative encounters with the Norwegian workforce, it was the negative feelings and experiences that appeared to characterize the results. It is possible that negative feelings and experiences are often felt as stronger than the positive ones, hence more emphasized and discussed by the participants rather than due to the probing questions.

The issue of the group’s influence on the participants’ responses

As the participants in the focus group interviews were discussing in a specific context it might be difficult to clearly identify an individual message. Krueger and Casey (2000) caution researchers to assume that the participants in focus group interviews are expressing their own individual view. However, this could be avoided if the moderator manages to generate a wide range of discussions which encourages people to share different points of view (Morgan, 1998).

Moreover, the information exchange between the participants in the focus group interviews might lead to conformity, in other words, when the participants are influenced by the group’s opinions. However, it has been argued that in order for conformity to happen, the majority of the people in a group have to be unanimous (Asch, 1951 in Bond, 2005), which was not the case in this study. The results from this study demonstrate that the participants had different opinions. They did not seem to fear to voice their opinions even though it differed from the majority’s view. It is therefore reasonably to believe that they were comfortable with each other and with the moderator, and therefore not afraid of expressing their views and opinions. Both in the three focus group interviews where the participants were acquainted with each other and the two interviews where the participants where unfamiliar to each other, contradictory remarks were made. Based on observation and the data collected through the focus group interviews, there is a belief that conformity did not occur at a large scale in this study.

Level of education and the participants’ gender

The participants in this study had different levels of education and most of the participants were women (see Table 1). Incidentally, some of the focus group interviews only consisted of participants with higher level of education (University level), and some groups consisted
only of participants with lower level of education (high school level or lower), in addition to
the mixed groups. The information about the participants’ level of education was acquired
during the focus group interviews. Apart from the fact that the participants who had higher
level of education spoke better Norwegian than the participants who had lower level of
education, the discussions in the various groups revolved around the same issues although
with different emphasis. It could be argued whether higher level of education and gender has
an impact on the issues discussed in the focus group interviews. However, when comparing
the results from this study with the results from Orupabo’s (2008) study, it does not seem to
be the case. Contrary to the current study, the respondents in Orupabo’s study were mainly
men and all of them had a higher level of education. Nevertheless, there were similarities in
the concerns among the participants in both studies.

Challenges connected to the entrance into the Norwegian workforce
In the current study, many of the participants experienced various challenges in the attempt
to enter the Norwegian workforce. Much of the participants’ accounts are in accordance with
previous findings.

Perception biases and decision-making
There was a common belief among many of the participants that stereotyping and prejudices
of people with ethnic minority background are one of the reasons to why they are
disadvantaged in the Norwegian workforce. They expressed that people in general have
negative stereotypical perception of them, which leads to prejudices, hence the hesitation
among the employers to hire someone with ethnic minority background. This can be seen in
line with studies which have demonstrated that ethnic stereotypes are in general more
negative than positive (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Aray, 2006; Lepore & Brown, 1997).
Furthermore, McConahay (1983) found in a context of simulated hiring decisions, that
people who scored high on the Modern racism Scale were more likely to hire an ethnic white
person. These results seem to be consistent with the assumptions of the participants in the
current study, concerning some employers’ negative ethnic stereotyping. Although there is a
difference in how people with ethnic minority backgrounds are perceived by others, the
ethnic stereotypes are in general negative. Based on this, there is a reason to believe that
people with ethnic minority background are more disadvantaged in the Norwegian
workforce.
Ethnic Norwegian employees preferred

Another challenge that many of the participants in the current study experienced is the employers’ preference of hiring ethnic Norwegians. The participants believed that point as well. This seems to align with previous findings (Brekke, 2007; Djuve, 2007; Lødding, 2003; Rogstad, 2000a, 2004, 2006; Wiborg, 2006), which indicated that employers preferred hiring an ethnic Norwegian rather than a person with ethnic minority background. The reason is that they often do not have enough knowledge to assess the competence to the latter, also known as statistical discrimination (ibid.). Furthermore, it has previously been demonstrated that people have a tendency to favour others that are more similar to themselves. This is termed the in-group bias. Those who differ from the group that we think we belong to (in-group) are termed the out-group and have a tendency to be discriminated against (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). This is related to Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory, which proposes that parts of our identity are derived from the group that we belong to. In order to maintain a positive social identity people are motivated to see their in-group in a more favourable light than the out-group (Smith & Bond, 1998). Drawing upon these finding one can assume that the job seekers with ethnic minority background could be discriminated against by the employers, as they are looked upon by the employers are belonging to the out-group due to the different ethnic background.

Is it a disadvantage to have a foreign name?

A great emphasis was put on the influence foreign sounding names have on hiring decisions by some of the participants in the various focus group interviews. These participants believed that they are sometimes cut off from job opportunities as early as the point when the employers see their name on the application. This assumption is partially supported. Purkiss et al. (2006) found that an ethnic name and accent combined gave the most unfavourable judgment on the applicants in their experiment. In addition, Arai and Thoursie (2007) found that immigrants in Sweden, who changed to a more Swedish sounding name, had a higher income than those who kept their foreign sounding name. Arai and Thoursie further believed that this higher income among immigrants who changed their names could be due to the fact that they are more likely to be called in for a job interview and therefore more likely to get hired, thus achieved higher income. Consistent with this, some of the participants in the current study told stories about friends who gave their children more international names as they were concerned with their children’s job opportunities in the future. However, although Cotton et al. (2008) found that the participants in their study were prone to hire people with
more common names, they did not find significant relation between the participants’ hiring decisions and the applicants’ unusual name in their experiment. One of the limitations with this study is that it was carried out in an experimental setting, and that this might differ from a real context where the employers quickly flip through a pile of applications.

**Hijab and dress code rules**

For some of the participants in this study another hinder for job opportunities is the use of hijab. One of the participants did not understand why there is a problem with wearing hijab for a cleaning position. However, not all the participants who wore hijab, experienced that as a problem for gaining employment. According to Lødding (2003), employers have argued that the hijab problem arises when it when it clashes with company dress code. The hijab has to yield when it is not at accordance with the dress code rules. Some Norwegian companies mention that they try to be as forthcoming as they can, trying to make adjustment for people with different backgrounds and religions.

**Qualifications and employment**

Many of the participants in the current study found that they frequently lacked relevant qualifications in order to get into the job market, which aligns with previous research findings (Djuve & Friberg, 2004; Orupabo, 2008; Rosenholm, Scott, and Husted, 2006; Støren, 2008). One specific demand of qualification is to have good Norwegian language skills, which the participants in the current study agrees upon and aligns with the response from the participants in Orupabo’s (2008) study. Several of the participants in the current study further commented that demand on the level of Norwegian language skills should depend on the type of job, and that some employers’ demands are too high at times. This could be seen in line of previous findings that show people generally have a more negative perception of others who speaks with an accent, which is believed to have a negative impact on hiring decisions (Cargile, 2000; Purkiss et al., 2005).

However, not all participants in the current study had negative experience with the Norwegian workforce, some either had neutral or positive experiences. These participants spoke the most fluent Norwegian. This is consistent with Purkiss et al. (2006) study, which demonstrated that when people with an ethnic background with no accent are combined, it triggered the most favourable judgement. Using the expectancy-violence theory by Jussim, Coleman, and Lerch (1987), they argue that people with ethnic minority background who
spoke fluent in the majority language are rated more positive, due to the lower expectations other have towards their language ability to begin with.

**Persistent disappointments in employment and learned helplessness**

Due to the difficulties and lack of control and power over the job situation, many of the participants in the current study felt the loss of hope. This further seems to have an impact on their motivation for continuing job searching. They further expressed a wish for the opportunity to show the employers their ability to work hard and their willingness to learn.

According to Seligman’s (1975) theory of learned helplessness, people who have experienced events that they have no control over will over time learn that their response does not influence the outcome. This further reduces their belief and motivation that they have control over the outcome (Alloy, Abrahamson, Peterson, & Seligman, 1984; Miller & Normann, 1979). There is a reason to believe that this could have happened to some of the participants in this study, as they experienced continued rejections for their applications. They seem to feel that no matter what they did they could not gain employment hence the loss of motivation for continued job searches. However, studies have suggested that a person’s development of learned helplessness is dependent of their attribution style. Those who have an internal attribution of the uncontrollable events were more likely to develop learned helplessness than those who have external attribution (Miller & Norman, 1979). In addition, Alloy et al. (1984) demonstrated that people who attributed global causes (factors that are present in many situations) to the negative outcome of an uncontrollable event showed learned helplessness to both similar and dissimilar situations. For those who attributed it to specific causes, learned helplessness was only seen in other similar situations. In the current study, the participants seem to use both external and internal attribution to why they are unemployed. Some believed that the reason to why they do not get hired was because of discrimination by the employers (external attribution). Others expressed that they understood why employers are not hiring them, as their Norwegian language skills were poor (internal attribution).

It is unfortunate if people after continued rejections develop learned helplessness. This leads them into a vicious circle that could be hard to get out of. Although some participants in the current study seem to show a loss of hope and motivation for employment, some of them said that they are interested in learning more Norwegian, which is as previously seen one of the barriers for entering the Norwegian workforce. Nonetheless, in order to learn more
Norwegian, some of the participants expressed a wish for more help to get integrated into the Norwegian society.

**Interventions for human well being**

As seen from the results in this study, there are some differing views on the governmental efforts to help people with ethnic minority background to enter the Norwegian workforce. While some expressed that the government should take more responsibility in helping people with ethnic minority background to find work, others seemed satisfied with the existing arrangements. However, what are the existing governmental interventions?

**Governmental interventions**

One of the government’s efforts is the ongoing project of moderate (quota based) hiring practices targeted towards individuals with ethnic minority backgrounds. Not all the government offices are positive towards this practice or believe that it is possible. However, they believe that being part of this project make the employers aware of this issue and therefore more likely to hire people with ethnic background in the future. This assumption is based on earlier studies on hiring women on a quota basis. But they caution to draw the same conclusion for this project as there are differences in hiring people with ethnic minority on a quota basis versus that to hire women on a quota basis (Orupabo, Jensen, & Storvik, 2009).

Prior to this project, an initiative had been taken from the Norwegian government to find out more about the different hiring practices in the governmental sectors in order to uncover passive discrimination against hiring people with ethnic minority backgrounds (The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud, 2008).

In addition, there are the NAV offices that help people with ethnic minority backgrounds in the transition from unemployment to work through job replacements. By surveying the various workplaces which previously had people on job replacements through NAV and those (unemployed non-western immigrants) who received assistance from NAV, Djuve (2007) found that there were mixed attitudes towards NAV. Although some of the workplaces were satisfied with the cooperation, others complained about the lack of following up on the job replacements candidates. While some of the immigrants felt that they did not receive any useful help from NAV, others felt they were very helpful. This is consistent with the results from the current study, where NAV was experienced by the participants as either very helpful to not helpful at all. Several of the participants further
expressed discontent with the lack of government effort to integrate them more into the Norwegian society.

Overall, the government has made several efforts to make it easier for people with ethnic minority background to get into the Norwegian workforce. These appear to have a positive effect (Orupabo, Jensen, & Storvik, 2009). Although the government has the best intentions, one of the weaknesses is that they often end up of blaming the people that they are helping for their own situation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

**Community participation, empowerment and human well being**

There was an emphasis on the poor quality of the Norwegian language courses offered, especially in one of the focus group interviews. The participants complained about the lack of arrangements by the Norwegian government to help them learn and practice Norwegian. They missed the opportunity to participate more in the Norwegian society, believing that is the best way to learn more Norwegian and hence increase their job opportunities. The question here is: Who is to blame for the immigrants’ lack of participation in the Norwegian society?

As seen in the introduction, much research tries to explain the disadvantaged job situation among immigrants as to their lack of resources. However, caution should be made on blaming the people for their disadvantaged situation (Garcia et al. 2005; Sonn & Fisher, 2005). It is argued that an emphasis should rather be on detecting environmental factors that function as barrier for participation in the community. In addition, solutions should be made to reduce these barriers, both on an individual level and on a community level (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002). This, together with human well being and empowerment is the core in the empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

It has been demonstrated that psychological empowerment increases with greater participation in the community activities, leading to human well-being (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1998). Moreover, people who believe in themselves and their abilities often experience psychological empowerment, which is linked to increased well being and the chances of being employed (Garcia et al. 2005). In addition, the lack of participation in the community is often due to multiple barriers, rather than lack of interest (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002), which the results from the current study are also indicating. Many of the participants wished they had more opportunities to learn more Norwegian by socializing with ethnic Norwegians, but due to their poor Norwegian language skills, they withdrew from it
instead. By refraining from socializing with the Norwegians they miss the chance to extend their social network, which is also suggested to have an influence on job opportunities (Garcia et al. 2005; Granovetter, 1995; Orupabo, 2008; Støren, 2008; Wiberg, 2006). It also appears that many of the participants in this study believed that having a job could increase their Norwegian language skills, as they could have the opportunity to practice Norwegian by speaking to their Norwegian colleagues. However, they need to gain employment first.

Although poor Norwegian language skills are an obstacle at an individual level, it is suggested that things could be done from a community level to improve the situation. This can be done by providing support and make community participation easier for everyone. For example, one of the suggestions is that people who need to improve their language skills could be the ”access to translators so they can participate in their communities in whatever ways they choose” (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002, p. 405). Providing support is important because it leads to meaningful community participation, which is the road to individual well being and empowerment, in addition to giving a sense of efficacy and control. Communities are therefore proposed to promote integration (ibid.). However, Garcia et al. (2005) argue that one of the problems is to enhance psychological empowerment factors before employment, which is believed to increase the chances of getting hired. They referred to a model funded by the European Union that tries to reach this goal, this model have already been implemented in several European countries.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this research are relevant, as there are few studies where immigrants’ points of view have been taken into consideration. The importance of listening to those who are disadvantaged in society is stressed in several studies (e.g. Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002; Rogstad, 2004; The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud, 2008). As discussed, the results from this study have clear similarities with previous research results. For instance, many of the factors that previous studies have demonstrated as having an influence on the immigrants’ job opportunities are similar to the challenges that many of the participants in the current study experienced when entering the Norwegian workforce. Norwegian language skills, previous working experience, social networks, stereotypes and prejudice are some of the factors that the participants in this study experienced as having an influence on their job opportunities.
Moreover, similar to the results from Djuve’s (2007) study, the participants in this study were also somewhat split in their opinions about NAV. In addition, the participants in the current study were also split in their opinions and experiences about the other initiatives made by the Norwegian government. They further expressed the wish to communicate more with ethnic Norwegians as that is believed to help improving their Norwegian language skills. However, they experienced this as difficult and wished the circumstances were more organized for them to socialize with Norwegians. For this to happen, barriers have to be reduced both at the community level and the individual level (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002). Based on the experiences and accounts of the participants in the current study and results from previous studies, a suggestion for the Norwegian government is to create interventions that seek to improve and increase the empowerment among the people with ethnic minority backgrounds as a supplement to the existing interventions. The purpose is to increase immigrants’ employment opportunities in the Norwegian job market.

**Suggestions for further research**

As previously mentioned, Statistics Norway (2009b, 2009c) have demonstrated a difference in the unemployment rate between people with different ethnic minority background in the Norwegian workforce. It would therefore be interesting to conduct more focus groups where the participants are organized into various groups based on their ethnic minority backgrounds, and then compare the results across the groups. Alternatively, the focus groups could be organized around participants with various educational levels (and maybe with the same ethnic minority backgrounds) and then compared. The issues that could be investigated more in depth could be the impact of their experiences with the Norwegian workforce.

Focus group interviewing in this study has yielded a range of opinions, but each participant had limited time to share their experiences within a 60 minute limit. It would therefore also be interesting to conduct in-depth interviews (e.g. Kvale, 1996) with people with ethnic minority backgrounds and try to investigate how they experience the Norwegian workforce, as each respondent will have more time to share their experiences. Further issues to be investigated could be the various challenges that the participants in the current study has experienced. In addition, it would be useful to get an insight into how their experiences have had an impact on them. The results from these interviews can also be used to design a questionnaire, in order to survey a bigger population and get more representative results.
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Betydningen av jobbkompetanse, sosiale nettverk og diskriminering for inntekt. 
Sosiologisk tidskrift, 14 (3), 276-297.

APPENDIX 1 – The consent form

Samtykeskjema

Forskningsstudiet om etnisitet og ansettelser utføres av Mei Ying Ng, masterstudent i kultur – og samfunnspsykologi ved Psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo. Veileder er førsteanamuesis Katrina Røn, Psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo.

For å kunne delta i dette studiet, er det nødvendig å gir ditt informerte samtykke. Ved å skrive under på dette skjemaet viser du at forstår hva dette studiet går ut på, din rolle i dette studiet og at du samtykker i å delta i dette studiet. Vær snill og tenk over følgende punkter før du skriver under på skjemaet:

• Jeg forstår at jeg skal snakke om etnisitet og ansettelser i en gruppe.
• Jeg forstår at gruppemøter vil bli tatt opp på lydopptak, og at disse opptakene vil bli skrevet ned etterpå.
• Jeg forstår at lydopptakene og det som blir skrevet ned, vil bli brukt av forskeren og hennes veileder for å skrive en masteravhandling om temaet.
• Jeg forstår at mitt navn ikke vil være knyttet til noe av det som blir skrevet i masteravhandlingen.
• Jeg forstår at jeg skal holde all informasjon som jeg får vite om de andre deltakerne i gruppemøter, hemmelig.
• Jeg forstår at deltakelse i dette studiet er frivillig, og at jeg kan velge å trekke meg fra dette studiet.
• Jeg forstår at all personlig informasjon om meg vil bli ødelagt når forskeren har levert inn masteravhandlingen i mai/juni 2009.

Ved å skrive under på dette skjemaer erklærer jeg at jeg er over 18 år, forstår all informasjon som er gitt over, og samtykker i å delta i studiet.

Underskrift: __________________________ Dato: __________________________
(Deltaker)
Fornavn: __________________________ Etternavn: __________________________
(Blokkbokstaver)
APPENDIX 2 – The information sheet

ETNISITET OG ANSETTELSER

Et forskningsstudie om etnisitet og ansettelser

Dette studiet handler om hvilken betydning etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn har for ansettelser i Norge. Deltagerne skal delta i gruppesamtaler, der hovedfokuset vil være å snakke om opplevelser og erfaringer i forbindelse med jobbsøking i Norge.

Etnisitet og ansettelse er et samfunnsaktuelt tema og er mye diskutert i norske medier de siste årene. For å forstå hvilken betydning etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn har for ansettelse, er det viktig å lytte til de som har direkte erfaring med dette. Hensikten med studiet er å øke folks forståelse for hvilke utfordringer folk med etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn møter når de søker på jobber i Norge.

Hvem kan delta?

Du kan delta dersom du:

• er 18 år eller eldre
• har etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn
• har erfaring med å søke på jobber i Norge
• vil snakke om temaet med andre

Hvorfor delta i dette studiet?

• Du får muligheten til å dele dine erfaringer med andre som kan være i samme situasjon som deg. Vi vet at mange føler at de får utbytte av å dele erfaringer med andre i lignende situasjon.
• Bidra til forskning

Hva vil du bli bedt om å gjøre?

Du vil bli bedt å være med i en type gruppeintervju som varer ca. 45 – 60 minutter. Jeg kommer til lede gruppeintervjuene og kommer spesielt til å be deg om å snakke om dine erfaringer med jobbsøking i Norge.

Hva skjer med informasjonen du gir oss?

deltagere har sagt. Analyse av dette materialet vil så bli brukt for å skrive en masteroppgave, der jeg vil prøve å diskutere funnene i relasjon til psykologiske teorier og begreper.

Lydopptakene og det som blir skrevet ned av gruppeintervjuene, vil bli bevart på en trygg plass som bare jeg og min veileder vil ha tilgang til. Ingen navn vil bli knyttet til det som blir skrevet i masteroppgaven. I tillegg vil all personlig informasjon om deg vil bli ødelagt når masteroppgaven min blir levert inn rundt mai/juni 2009.

Om du ønsker å vite hva som kommer ut av studiet, så vil jeg med glede sende deg en kort oppsummering av funnene etter at masteroppgaven er innlevert. Vær snill og gi beskjed dersom du ønsker å få tilsendt denne, slik at jeg er sikker på at den blir sendt til riktig adresse.

Hva skjer om du ombestemmer deg når det gjelder å delta i dette studiet?

Om du skulle ønske å trekke deg fra å delta i dette studiet, enten før eller underveis i gruppeintervjuet, så er det helt greit. Din del av samtalen vil ikke bli brukt om du ikke ønsker det. Det er bare å gi meg beskjed. Det er altså helt frivillig å være med i dette studiet, og du kan når som helst velge å trekke deg. Vi håper likevel at du velger å delta.

Når og Hvor?


Kontaktinformasjon

Jeg heter Mei Ying Ng og er masterstudent i kultur – og samfunnspsykologi ved Psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo. Jeg kommer til å være hovedkontaktpersonen, da det er jeg som skal utføre dette studiet. Veileder for masteroppgaven min er Katrina Røn og hun kan også kontaktes om dere måtte ønske det.

Mei Ying Ng: E-post: mein@student.sv.uio.no. Mobil: 990 40 175
Katrina Røn (Veileder): førstearmanuesis ved Psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo. E-post: katrina.roen@psykologi.uio.no.
## APPENDIX 3 – The focus group interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question type</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Spørsmål</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening</strong> (2 min.)</td>
<td>We can start by saying by telling our ethnic background and job-status.</td>
<td>Vi kan begynne å med å fortelle litt om vår minoritetsbakgrunn og jobbstatus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining task(s)</strong></td>
<td>Now I will come up with several claims. To the first claim, I want you to talk a little about what you think when you hear the claim. There will be task tied to the claims that comes later, in which I will give a closer explanation when we get that far. OK, here comes the first statement:</td>
<td>Nå vil det komme et par påstander. Til den første påstanden vil jeg at dere skal prate litt om hva dere tenker når dere hører om påstanden. Til de andre påstandene som kommer senere, vil det bli knyttet en liten oppgave til som jeg vil forklare litt nærmere når vi kommer så langt. OK, her kommer første påstand:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>“In Norway there is equal opportunity for everyone” What do you think of this claim?</td>
<td>“I Norge er det like jobbmuligheter for alle” Hva tenker dere om denne påstanden?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining task(s)</strong></td>
<td>Now I will give you a small task (handing out the transparencies) – as you can see, there are two claims on the transparencies that you have been handed out (reading out loud the claims). These are two contradicting statements. Now I want you to make a mark on the line, relative to what you think is true. A mark in the middle means that you don’t agree nor disagree with the statements, but a mark closer to the left will for instance mean that you think that an ethnic minority background does matter, whilst a mark closer to the right means that you think that ethnic minority background has little (or nothing) to say for the hiring process.</td>
<td>Nå vil jeg gi dere en liten oppgave (deler ut transparentene) – som dere ser, så er det to påstander på transparentene dere har fått utdel (leser påstandene høyt). Dette er to motsigende påstander. Jeg vil nå at dere skal sette et kryss i forhold hva dere syns stemmer best. Et kryss i midten vil bety at dere ikke verken enig eller uenig med påstandene, men et kryss nærmere mot venstre vil for eksempel bety at etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn spiller en rolle (stor rolle), mens et kryss nærmere høyre vil bety at etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn har mindre å si (ingenting) for ansettelsesprosessen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Task:</strong> transparency</td>
<td><strong>Oppgave:</strong> transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Here I am interested in the participants’</strong></td>
<td>Statements based on attitude: Ethnic minority background matters greatly in the hiring process in Norway. VS</td>
<td>Påstand basert på holdning: Etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn spiller en stor rolle i ansettelsesprosessen i Norge VS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **general opinions about the theme.** | Ethnic minority background has nothing to say in the hiring process in Norway | Etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn har **ingenting å si** for ansettelsesprosessen i Norge  
Tell us why you have put the mark where you have put it.  
Fortell oss hvorfor du har satt et kryss der du har satt den. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining task</strong></td>
<td>I want you to do the same here as you did earlier – reading out the claims loud. Giving the same explanation as earlier.</td>
<td>Her vil jeg at dere skal gjøre det samme som dere gjorde i stad – leser påstandene høyt. Og gir samme forklaring som i stad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
<td><strong>Task: transparency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Oppgave: transparent</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Here I am interested in the participants’ more specific opinions about the theme.** | Statements based on experience:  
It is **easy** to get a job in Norway when if you have an ethnic minority background  
VS  
It is **difficult** to get a job in Norway when if you have an ethnic minority background  
- Tell us why you have put the mark where you have put it.  
- What experiences is it based on?  
- Hvorfor har du satt krysset der du har satt den?  
- Hvilke erfaringer er det basert på?  
- Hvilke fordeler vil dere si at dere har med deres etniske minoritetsbakgrunn, i forhold til jobbsøking i Norge?  
- **Hvis svar er ingen fordeler:** hvorfor tror du ikke det?  
- Hvilke opplevelser har dere fra jobbintervju(er)?  
- Kan du fortelle om ting som du opplevde som var positivt?  
- Hva var det du opplevde som var negativt?  
- Fikk du jobben eller ikke?  
| **Påstand basert på erfaring:**  
Det er **lett** å få jobb om man har en etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn  
VS  
Det er **vanskelig** å få jobb i Norge om man har etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn  
- Hvorfor har du satt krysset der du har satt den?  
- Hvilke erfaringer er det basert på?  
- Hvilke fordeler vil dere si at dere har med deres etniske minoritetsbakgrunn, i forhold til jobbsøking i Norge?  
- **Hvis svar er ingen fordeler:** hvorfor tror du ikke det?  
- Hvilke opplevelser har dere fra jobbintervju(er)?  
- Kan du fortelle om ting som du opplevde som var positivt?  
- Hva var det du opplevde som var negativt?  
- Fikk du jobben eller ikke?  
|
| - Why do you think you got the job or did not get the job? |
| - In what way could the person that interviewed you acted differently so that you wouldn’t feel like you were being treated unjust? |
**Those who answers that they haven’t been on a job-interview:**
What do you think is the reason to why you weren’t called in for a job-interview?
- Why do you think “that” is the reason?

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Do you feel like your job-seeking experience have an impact on you future job-seeking

**If yes:** In what way do you feel like your experience with job-seeking could have influenced on how much effort you put into job-seeking in the future?

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- Hvorfor tror du fikk jobben eller ikke?
- På hvilken måte kunne han/ hun som intervjuet deg oppført seg annerledes slik at du ikke følte at du ble behandlet urettferdig?

**De som svarer at de ikke har vært på jobbintervju(er):**
Hva tror du er årsaken til at du ikke ble innkalt til jobb intervju?
- hvorfor tror du ”det” er årsaken?

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Føler dere at deres erfaringer med jobbsøking har en påvirkning på hvor mye arbeid dere legger i jobbsøking i fremtiden?

**Hvis ja:** På hvilken måte føler dere at deres erfaring med jobbsøking i Norge kan ha påvirket hvor mye arbeid dere legger i å søke på jobber i fremtiden?

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| Ending: Final |
| 1. Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn’t? |
| 2. This is the first focus group I have done. Do you have any advice on how I can improve? |
| 3. Summary of what the participants have said |

| Examples of probing questions - typical spontaneous |
| Would you explain further? |
| Can you give me an example? |
| Would you say more? |
| Please describe what you mean. |

| 1. Er det noe som vi burde ha pratet om, men som vi ikke gjorde? |
| 2. Dette er den første fokus gruppen jeg har hatt, har dere noen tips til forbedring? |
| 3. Oppsummering av det deltagerne har sagt. |

| Kan du forklare nærmere? |
| Kan du gi meg et eksempel? |
| Vil du si mer? |
| Kan du være snill og forklare hva du mener? |
APPENDIX 4 – NSD approval

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Katrina Roen
Psykologisk institutt
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1094 Blindern
0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 01.12.2008
Vår ref: 20372 / 2 / LT
Deres dato: 
Deres ref: 

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 31.10.2008. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

20372
Behandlingsområde
Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste hylde
Daglig ansvarlig
Katrina Roen
Student
Mei Ying Ng

Personvernområdet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsloven. Personvernområdet trekker at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernområdets tilrådende fortsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven./ helseregistreloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.


Personvernområdet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.06.2009, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henriksen
Mei Ying Ng

Kontaktperson: Lia Tenold tlf: 55 58 33 77
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Mei Ying Ng, Bjølsen studentby Hus 3, H0603, 0445 OSLO
Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Personvernombudet finner opplegget for gjennomføringen av prosjektet tilfredsstillende, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger kan hjemles i personopplysningsloven §§ 8 første ledd (samtykke) og 9 a.

Det gis skriftlig informasjon og innhentes skriftlig samtykke for deltagelse.

Det samles inn og registreres sensitive personopplysninger, jf. personopplysningsloven § 2 punkt 8 a).