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Professional-citizen relations.
Questioning the assumption of functional specificity

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Abstract

In classic theories on professions and professionalism there is a widespread assumption of functional specificity based on the professional’s specialized expertise and knowledge. In other words, the relationship between professionals and citizen-clients is assumed to be confined to the content of the expertise held by the professional (e.g. knowledge on health, law, or education), and a personal relationship is not expected to arise. This conception of a functional specific relationship may, however, be too simplistic and based on the practices of professions with limited and infrequent contact to citizen-clients. In other professions, however, where interactions are much more frequent and take place over a longer period of time, the professional-citizen relationship may take on a different and more personalized meaning for both the professional and for the citizen-client. In this article, I theoretically discuss the assumption of functional specificity, and I empirically explore whether this assumption holds across three Danish professions working in close interaction with citizens. The analyses suggest that even though a professional, knowledge based and functionally specific logic is widespread in the self-images of professionals, equally prevalent is a personal, habitus based and encompassing logic. The integration of these two logics in the self-images of professionals further suggest the contours of a new hybrid, personalized professionalism. The results suggest that we may question the universality of functional specificity and begin to discuss what this means for both professionalism, service ethic and for citizens.
Introduction

Traditionally, professions are seen as occupational groups with autonomy over work tasks and discretions (Freidson 2001, Abbott 1988). Although some argue that this autonomy stems from power relations and collective strategies of closure (Weber 1978, Saks 2010, 2012), many agree that the possession of knowledge in some form is the basis of professional autonomy and discretion, or at least the basis of legitimation of such autonomy and discretion (Freidson 2001; Brante 2010, 2011).

Resultantly, professionals are oftentimes seen as holding a special position vis-à-vis citizens and clients. As argued already by Parsons (1954a: 381) and Freidson (2010), there is an inherent asymmetry in the relationship between professionals and citizen-clients, since professionals command a specialized and legitimate knowledge and expertise with regard to identifying and solving problems that citizen-clients may have. Following this, the relationship between professionals and citizen-clients have typically been discussed as requiring a degree of trust and a certain professional "service ethic" or "professional morality" (Evans 2014, Abbott 1983, Parsons 1954a, 1954b; Beauchamp & Childress 2001, Dige 2014), where professionals balance their knowledge, autonomy and authority with a normative commitment to act in accordance with the needs and wishes of citizen-clients and to treat all citizen-clients equally.

One key assumption underlying this characterization of professional-citizen relations is that it is functionally specific, i.e. that it is confined to elements and discretions within the professionals’ area of expertise. This assumption, however, may be valid only for professionals encountering citizen-clients brief meetings over a relatively short period of time, thus handling so many patients during a week or a month that a personal relationship rarely forms. In other professions (or semi-professions), however, where interaction is much more frequent and takes place over a longer period of time, the professional-client relationship may take on a different and more personalized meaning for both the professional and for the citizen-client, and it may thus involve different dynamics and challenges. More precisely, in professional citizen relations with a certain length and
frequency of interactions, it may be difficult to uphold the functional specificity of the relationship that is assumed in the Parsonian idea of a service ethic.

The present article asks if functional specificity of professional-citizen relations are valid also for professionals working in close and frequent encounters with citizen-clients. First, I develop a theoretical framework focusing on different logics of professionals’ self-images regarding work identities, role conceptions and discretion making, theoretically questioning the assumption of functional specificity. Second, I use this theoretical framework to empirically explore self-images among three groups of Danish professionals: health nurses, child care workers and primary school teachers. The empirical analysis thus focuses on understanding, how professionals themselves see and reason about their relationship to citizen-clients, without assuming that this relationship will necessarily be seen in a professional, knowledge based perspective or as functionally specific. Finally, results are discussed focusing on possible implications for future research.

The article thereby contributes to developing a nuanced and empirically valid understanding of relationships between professionals and citizens. Such an understanding, I will claim, is crucial for further understanding and exploring contemporary dynamics and challenges for professional work.

**Asymmetry and functional specificity of professional-citizen relations**

As mentioned, the literature on professions and professionalism point to a fundamental asymmetry between professionals and citizens. For both Parsons (1939, 1954a, 1954b) and Freidson (2010), this asymmetry is structural in nature, i.e. it is given by the difference in knowledge and expertise inherent in the different roles as either ‘professional’ or ‘client’. Further, the asymmetry is intimately linked to what Parsons calls the functional specificity of the relation. Thus, the asymmetry holds only when it comes to matters within the field or authority of the profession (Parsons 1939: 460).

This means that even though the professional-citizen relation is of course personal in the sense of two people meeting and interacting with each other, it is also universal and role-based in the sense that all professionals are expected to
treat citizen-clients 'the same', i.e. based solely on information relevant for the specific problem in question and not e.g. on personal characteristics:

So far as the decision is taken on technical professional grounds the relevant question do not relate to who the patient is but to what is the matter with him. [...] A patient’s claim on his doctor's time is primarily a matter of the objective features of the “case” regardless of who the patient is [...]. (Parsons 1939: 462)

Finally, both asymmetry and functional specificity is coupled to a certain ethical or moral responsibility (sometimes known as a fiduciary responsibility) for the professional to act disinterested and on behalf of not themselves but of society and the citizen-clients (Parsons 1939, 1954a. See also Sciulli 2010 for a similar but more recent argument).

Surely, the functionalist conception professions and professionalism has been thoroughly criticized, especially by Weberian and Marxist traditions. However, this critique is mainly directed at points about the knowledge base of professional authority, disinterestedness (or altruism) and the service ethic.

Both Larson (2013) and Saks (2010, 2012) for example, raises questions about the knowledge base of professional authority and point towards strategies of social closure and the obtainment of market monopolies as the basis of authority and autonomy.

Further, especially Larson labels the notion of disinterestedness and professional ethics ‘ideological’, and suggest in stead that professionals share a common culture based on their shared work as well as their shared social position, prestige and interests. Seen from this critical perspective, then, professions are far from disinterested, but rather primarily interested in maintaining their own social position. A similar critique has been put forward from a radically different perspective, namely rational choice institutionalism. Here, professions and professionals are also seen as groups trying to serve their own interest by establishing market monopolies and licensing measures (e.g. Friedman 1962; see also Evans 2014, Burau & Andersen 2014).

However, the vast and widespread critique of the functionalist perspective has not been directed at assumptions about asymmetry or functional specificity.
Thus, even though professions and professionals are seen as basically driven by self-interest, and even though professional authority is recognized as based not only on knowledge but also on power strategies, professions are oftentimes still portrayed as holding an asymmetric, powerful and functionally specific relation to citizen-clients. Consequently, it seems as if the functionalist, and not often discussed, assumption about the character of professional-citizen relations as asymmetric and functionally specific is implicitly shared (or at least not questioned) across different theoretical perspectives.

A similar implicit reliance on the Parsonian understanding of professional-citizen relations can be found in theories on professional work and discretion. Abbott's (1988) well known account of professional work delimits the task of professionals as “human problems amenable to expert service” (35), and it is clear that the ability to perform these tasks depend both on the profession’s knowledge and on their ability to construct and defend professional jurisdiction. Consequently, professionals are seen by Abbott as acting both disinterested (based on knowledge) and self-interested (defending their own turf). At the same time, it is also clear that professional work, containing what Abbott explains as diagnosis, inference and treatment, is both asymmetrical (in relation to the citizen-client) and functionally specific.

The asymmetry can be seen in the characterization of the professional as holding general and abstract knowledge, whereas the citizen-clients holds concrete and situational knowledge on their own problem. Also, Abbott clearly states how professionals holds the power and the responsibility for defining the situation on the professional’s terms, not the citizen’s (47). Further, the functional specificity can be seen especially in Abbotts concept of diagnosis, where he distinguishes between colligation and classification. Colligation, he explains, is “the assembly of a picture” consisting of rules declaring “what kinds of evidence are relevant and irrelevant”, whereas classification is “referring the colligated picture to the dictionary of professionally legitimate problems” (Abbott 1988: 41). Thus, although Abbott admits some element of subjectivity and ambiguity in especially colligation, the diagnosis clearly is portrayed as including only functionally specific information and excluding the non-relevant information.
Finally, the implicit functionalist conception of professional-citizen relations can also be found in Lipsky’s (1980/2010) seminal account of the professional as a street-level bureaucrat. Here, the point of departure is not professional knowledge but state authority and the implementation of policies, but the characterization of the relation between the professional (or street-level bureaucrat) and the citizen-client is nevertheless similar. Lipsky does point out that professional discretion is inherent in policy implementation, exactly because street-level bureaucrats has to respond to the “the human dimension of the situation” (Lipsky 2010: 15), and thereby he does point towards the possibility of a more personal relationship between the professional and the citizen client. However, in his account of street-level organizations and street-level work, Lipsky clearly explains how street-level bureaucrats holds power to reorganize and control implementation procedures, and for example install routines and engage in creaming, and client-processing (see also Brodkin 2012, Meyers & Nielsen 2012, Ellis 2011, Hype 2013). Doing this, the street-level bureaucrat is implicitly portrayed as acting self-interested (Evans 2014), but also as acting in an asymmetric position of power vis-à-vis the citizen based on a de facto monopoly of service (Lipsky 1980/2010: 54-56). Furthermore, Lipsky explains how street-level bureaucrats spend a lot of time constructing or securing the functional specificity of the relationship:

People come to street-level bureaucracies as unique individuals with different life experiences, personalities, and current circumstances. In their encounters with bureaucracies they are transformed into clients, identifiable located in a very small number of categories, treated as if, and treating themselves as if, they fit standardized definitions of units consigned to specific bureaucratic slots. The processing of people into clients, assigning them to categories for treatment bureaucrats, and treating them in terms of those categories, is a social process. (Lipsky 1980/2010: 59).

We find here a similar characterization of the relationship between professionals and citizen-clients as asymmetric and functionally specific, but at the same time Lipsky underlines how especially the functional specificity is not necessarily given as a structural fact. It has to be established, constructed and learned.
Everyday interactions and meaning making in professional work

Following this last idea of the social construction of professional-client relationships, several scholars have pointed out how interactions between professionals and citizen-clients may result in constructing relationships that are not functionally specific but in stead personal and more encompassing.

First, the literature on representative bureaucracy (e.g. Meier & Capers 2012; Wise 2012; Watkin-Hayes, 2011) presents the notion of ‘active representation’, which assumes that a bureaucracy that is representative of the population in terms of certain characteristics will also be more perceptive and responsive towards the needs of groups with similar characteristics and thus base their decisions and discretions taking special characteristics and needs into account. However, the implication of this understanding is also that when bureaucracies (or professionals) are not representative of citizen-clients, they will not be perceptive to special needs and characteristics of citizen-clients, since such a perceptiveness and responsiveness requires a personal understanding and sharing of personal or social characteristics. Either way, the vast literature on representative bureaucracy demonstrates a need to question the assumption of functional specificity.

Other studies focus directly on the interactions between professionals and citizen-clients. Studying social work in France, Dubois (2010) demonstrates how professional work must be grasped as everyday interactions between professionals and clients, including the conflicts, meaning-making and identity construction that we would normally include in our understanding of everyday life. What Dubois calls bureaucratic encounters, i.e. the meeting of professionals (or street-level bureaucrats) and citizen-clients, cannot, therefore, be described as functionally specific. Such encounters are filled with personal and personalized meetings and interactions, and we need to understand both the social setting and institution, the individuals populating the institutions, and the different contexts and backgrounds they bring with them. Dubois thus shows, how
in their professional practices, the agents practice spontaneous sociology and judgement – on the morality of an individual, the normality of a case, etc. – which consist in activating schemes internalised during their personal experiences, much more than applying institutional standards (Dubois 2010: 92)

In a similar fashion, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) has demonstrated how frontline professionals (such as social workers, teachers and police men) not only work as state agents, following rules and regulations, but also as citizen agents, focusing on the concrete and acute problems of citizens facing them, and their “identities and moral characters” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003: 9). The logic of the citizen agent is not deciding what rule (or knowledge) to apply, but rather “putting a fix on people” (77), in order to decide how to proceed. This is, they claim, an “uncertain process” (83), involving the negotiation of social relations, meanings and moral judgments. Characterizing the relationship between professionals and citizen-clients in this fashion surely opens for an understanding where functional specificity (and even asymmetry) is not necessarily inherent in all cases (see also Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2012, Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2012).

Finally, studying health nurses, child care workers and teachers, Harrits and Møller (2014) demonstrate how professional discretions regarding preventive interventions towards children and families use categories founded within both a professional, knowledge-based logic and a personal, common sense and value based logic. Furthermore, Harrits and Møller show how the social distance (i.e. non-representativeness) between professionals and families has an impact on the content of discretion in the sense that professionals worry more about, and intervene more towards families and children that are socially distant (and different) from themselves. These results, they claim, can be understood as professional discretion being not solely guided by professional knowledge and norms but also by professionals’ social habitus and by their social conditions (Bourdieu 1990, 1984).

In sum, research from different traditions and theoretical perspectives point towards result questioning especially the assumption of functional specificity in
the relationship between professionals and citizens. In the following analysis, I therefore explore this relationship more closely, using the data also used in Harrits and Møller (2014). More specifically, I explore how professionals from three different professions (health nurses, child care workers and teachers) themselves characterize their relationship to citizen-clients, and how they themselves see this relations as relevant for their professional work and roles as professionals. First, however, I present the basic theoretical framework for the analysis as well as the methodological design and analytical strategies.

**Professional self-images**

The analysis focuses on exploring professionals’ self-images looking for a predominance of a professional, knowledge based and functionally specific logic or a personal, habitus-based and encompassing logic. I operationalize professional self-images as containing three dimension: work identities, role perceptions and understandings of discretions. Work identities has to do with the constructed meaning of and emotional attachment to work presented by the professionals, whereas role perceptions are the more stable, generalized and institutionalized set of expectations related to a specific task or a specific position or function in society carried by the professionals, e.g. the set of expectations a teacher may have to his own tasks and functions as well as to the tasks and functions of his colleagues (see e.g. Dubois 2010, Jenkins 2008). Exploring the professional self-images, I thus explore both how professionals describe what they are good at and what they like about their work (work identity), and what they see as their specific tasks and roles in society (role perception). Finally, I also explore how FLPs themselves understand the discretions they carry out, i.e. how they reach their specific judgments.

Within these three dimensions, I specifically explore the extent to which professionals are dominated by a professional, knowledge based and functionally specific logic, or a personal, habitus based and encompassing logic in the ways they describe relations to citizen-clients. In a Bourdieusian perspective (e.g. Bourdieu 1984, 2000, 2005), this is the same as exploring if professional self-images are dominated by doxa in a functionally differentiated field of
professional work, or by habitus founded in the social conditions and everyday life of professionals.

As Bourdieu explains, specific fields may establish a specific and differentiated doxa guiding the practices of that field, i.e. establish a functional closure and specificity of the field. For example, the field of journalism may include a set of specific understandings of and norms for what constitutes a good story, and this doxa will, then, most likely guide journalists in their professional practice. Or at least, the field doxa will condition and shape the mechanism of habitus. However, not all fields are functionally closed, Bourdieu states, and we may therefore expect variations across fields (and professions) in the extent to which the professional perspective (doxa) dominates habitus, and the extent to which functional specificity is obtained. Figure 1 visualizes this theoretical framework.

[figure 1 about here]

Data and method

As explained, the analysis explores professional self-images, i.e. the ways in which professionals themselves describe their work. Consequently, I draw on qualitative interview data from semi-structured interviews, where discourses and arguments are accessible, and where practices can be represented in a narrative but also condensed form (e.g. Kvale and Brinkmann 2008, Charmaz 2006).

Interviewees have been selected theoretically in several steps. First, three professional groups are included: health nurses, child care workers and teachers. These professionals are quite similar with regard to degree of professionalization and the way in which they perform their tasks and interact with citizens in informal settings (the home, the day-care center and the classroom). Second, in order to reach a minimum degree of analytical inference, interviews are performed in two local areas within four municipalities (i.e. eight areas in total). The specific areas are selected with the purpose of testing a hypothesis of impact of areas homogeneity on preventive welfare polices, which is not explored further in this article. Within local areas, institutions and
interviewees have been selected by criteria of convenience and accessibility. A total number of 58 interviews (teachers: 22, pedagogues: 20, home nurses: 16) have been collected, by two interviewers, lasting between appr. 1 hour and 3 hours.¹

All interviews are semi-structured, focusing on interviewees’ spontaneous discourses and reasoning. Approximately one third into the interview, interviewees are presented with two vignettes describing the situation of a child and a family. Again, this design is intended to test a hypothesis not dealt with in this paper, i.e. the impact of the social distance between professionals and citizen-clients (see Harrits & Møller 2014). Instead, I draw mainly on other parts of the interviews, primarily the parts where professionals tell about their practices and everyday work, as well as how they see themselves and their roles vis-a-vis both citizen-clients and society (see appendix).

Analyses has been done by qualitative content analysis, coded systematically by the author in Nvivo, and afterwards condensed in different displays (Larsen 2012; Miles & Huberman 1994). For the analyses in this article, the coding has focused on professional self-images (see coding frame in figure 2), and the coding frame has been developed after an initial phase of open coding followed by a systematic, focused coding across all 58 interviews. The coding frame thus includes more dimensions (developed inductively) than the theoretical framework presented in figure 1.

Drawing on this design with 58 semi-structured interviews including two vignette cases thus gives the opportunity of combining an interpretive and in-depth analysis of each professionals’ self-images and comparing across three professions. Also, although no statistical inferences can be made, the data here represents data from four municipalities located in very different contexts in Denmark, including large and small municipalities in rural and urban areas, making analytical inferences possible.

[Figure 2 about here]

¹ Interviews have been collected by the author together with Marie Østergaard Møller.
Professional self-images between professionalism and habitus

Focusing, first, on the work identities displayed by professionals answering questions like “what do you like most about your job” and “who are you as a health nurse / child care worker / teacher”, I find elaborate and widespread references to both the use of knowledge and professionalism and to personal relationship to clients. Many health nurses, for example, explain how the relationships they are able to form with families, and especially mothers, when they visit the family homes after a new child has been born, are crucial:

I think one of my forces is that I am good at getting into a relation. Not only establishing contact, but a relationship, which for me is one step further. Because then we can talk about that which is difficult. And they can share with me that which is difficult. (NA02)

I must say, as a Health Nurse, we may have our bags and our computers and our scales. But our most important tool, that is us. As human beings. To reach people. In a relationship. And in a trusting relationship. (ND14).

Many health nurses also emphasize the use of knowledge and expertise on e.g. nursing, nutrition and child development and the way they can use this knowledge to help families, as an important part of their work identity, but for a majority of health nurses the relationship to families and the use of knowledge is intertwined, and the one is almost portrayed as a prerequisite for the other.

Similar patterns are found among child care workers and teachers, with the exception that the relationships emphasized as crucial here are with the children and not with the families:

The way I work, and what I find important, it is the relationships. The things that we share, you and I, including the children. And you can’t help noticing how much you matter for those children, and the other way around. So that is important for my work, or for my work life. (CD20)

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2 I use this notation as a way of referring to each individual interview. The first letter refers to the profession (Nurse, Childcare worker or Teacher). The second letter refers to municipality (A, B, C or D) and the number identifies the individual interviewee within the profession. See appendix for an overview of interviewees.
The thing is, I love those kids. I mean, they are my children. That is definitely the way I feel. They are mine ... and ahm .... The parents get to borrow them sometimes, when school is done. (TA06)

The best thing about my job, I guess that's the children. (TB07)

Also, many child care workers and teachers emphasize the use of knowledge and the professional work they do, highlighting for example the ways in which they can help children develop, and teach them important things. However, here I also find that the personal relationships and the use of knowledge is often combined and presented equally necessary:

I see it this way: If you do not have social wellbeing in a class, then you will not be able to reach a very high academic level (TA02)

Taken together, more than two thirds of the child care workers and teachers presents such a combined understanding of personal relationships and knowledge as being part of their work identity.

Moving on to the role perceptions among professionals I find a somewhat similar picture, although role perceptions emphasizing the state, authority and enforcement of rules is also prevalent here, at least among health nurses.

Among the health nurses, half of the interviewees actually respond that they are “the voice of the child”, when asked directly what kind of voice they represent in their jobs and in society. This seem to indicate that health nurses emphasize the relationship to citizens in their role perceptions. When they further elaborate on this, however, only one health nurse emphasize this aspect. In stead, all health nurses emphasize the use of knowledge as a primary role in society:

I am the guarantee that their child ... grows and is well. That is why we visit. Because in the 30'ies, many children died. That's I why this health nurse service was started. So I come out as some sort of guarantee ... they want me to weigh and measure their child, even though it is obvious that he or she is gaining weight al right. (NA01)

The data also displays a third role salient in the self-images of especially the health nurses, namely the role as a state agent (Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2003). This role is not directly based in the use of specialized knowledge, but
rather in the enforcement of state authority, rules and regulations. As explained e.g. by Lipsky (2010) this role as a stage agent also assumes functional specificity in a degree similar to the role of the knowledge based professional

Asked directly, many health nurses explain how they use laws and regulations actively in their daily routines. Also, they explain how the see such regulations as supportive for doing their jobs. A few health nurses express unease with the role as authority and rule enforcer, explaining how it may interfere with the relationship to the families. However, most health nurses are at ease with their the role as state agents, and they see themselves as performing their jobs “on behalf of the state”:

We are there for the sake of the citizens, to weigh and measure the children, but of course we are also there to see the families where things are not okay, and where help is needed. Or something more drastic. And that double role can sometimes be difficult to handle. (NC12)

We catch some problems, which may become … that needs to be taken care of, because it may be a future societal problem. (NA04)

In sum, the health nurses express a role perception emphasizing both knowledge and the role as state authority, and the two dimensions seem to be mutually supporting each other.

For the child care workers and the teachers, role perceptions are somewhat different, though, especially regarding the role as state authorities. For the child care workers it is clear that role perceptions mirror the work identities much more than for the health nurses, meaning that many child care workers express the use of knowledge and professional experience and the establishment of close relationships with the children as their primary roles. Especially the role as professional care givers is very salient among child care workers:

It is a very important part of the child’s upbringing, I think. The time they spend in day care. It is usually said that this is the foundation to build on further on. Even though not everybody understands it, this is really where the foundation is laid for children’s ability to learn in the schools. (PB05)
But this role as a professionals is supplemented by a role perception emphasizing the establishment of relationships to the children, again not necessarily in opposition to but often combined with the use of knowledge:

An adult, who has been ... an adult human being, I think that is important to add that human being. We are human beings who see them as complete human beings, recognizing them as the persons they are. I think that is important for everybody. That we have people in our “back packs”. That we are seen and heard ... (PB08).

Compared to the health nurses, however, the child care workers do not express a strong role perception regarding state authority. A few reflect on their roles as public employees, and some explain how they use laws as regulations in their jobs. This is mostly, however, as a background understanding of the general aims for working in day care institutions, and many child care workers express some distance from their laws and regulations to daily practices:

I will say that many of our everyday activities can easily be put under some headline [of the policy]. But maybe, I mean ... the time for planning is simply not there. So we can’t sit down and say, now we do this because this and that. And that is in line with our learning plans [mandatory according to the law]. There is simply no time for that. (CC11)

A somewhat similar pattern is found among the teachers, with the exception that the conception of the relationship to the children is somewhat different compared to the child care workers. First, it is clear that many teachers see themselves as professional knowledge based experts teaching children the basic prerequisites for them to move on in life:

I think we all have a right to education. So I still think we do a very good job, and present a foundation for children to move on in life. I mean, life really starts in the 0th grade, if you can put it like that. It is important to begin school [primary school, age 5-6] in the 0th grade. (TD18)

But again, this role as professionals is supplemented by a role perception emphasizing the relationship to the children. However, for the teachers the primary aspect is not necessarily establishing an equal relationship to the children, but rather teaching them about values and how to become good human beings:
In some ways I am a contributing factor in raising these children. We spend so many hours together with them over a year. So maybe they have to be raised and disciplined at home, but in some ways we cannot but affect them. And I think one should have respect for that. Because we can affect the children more than a little bit. And we do that among other things with the person that we are (TC12).

For the teachers, then, the primary role is thus to teach children both academic skills and how to become a good person, mixing a professional logic with a more personalized and habitus-based logic. Furthermore, the role as state authority is even weaker among teachers than among child care workers, and no teacher admits to actively use laws and regulations when asked directly. Many explain how laws and regulations are “there” in the background, but a few even rejects the importance altogether:

I: Thinking about the law, what role does that play in your work?

Well, I have always seen my role as protecting the children against the law.

I: What do you mean by that?

Because, I have some children who ... they know very well that they have bad writing and reading skills. They don’t need the system [referring to mandatory national tests] to hit them in the head and say “you suck at Danish”. (TA06)

In sum, both child care workers and teachers express role perception combining a professional and a habitus based logic and to a large degree downplay their role as state authorities.

Finally, when asked about how they themselves would describe their discretion making, and more specifically how they reach the judgements that they make in the two case stories during the interview, we also find a quite strong mix of a professional and a habitus based logic, and the pattern here is almost identical across professions. A minority of professionals explain how they use their professional knowledge, expertise and experiences when making discretions in situations like the ones in the two case stories. Also, a few professionals explain how they mainly use their own personal experiences and intuitions. However,
the majority of professionals explain how they do both, and many also explain how those two things cannot be separated:

No, I don't think you can separate those two. Of course it has something to do with ... with ... we have our score schemes, and we have our charts for weight gains and the general development of children, that is what we know, right? But there are also all those human values. What kind of people are we sitting next to? (NC12)

It is simply professionalism and gut feeling. Nothing else. (CD18)

I think it is a combination. I really think that. I think that you cannot study for something that you do not have in you. But you can get to know some professional tools ... I mean theoretically it is linked to the things you do in your everyday work, and you can of course study for very many things. But I also think that there is something about human relations, something you carry with you in you bag pack, a sixth sense and some other things that come into play. So it is a combination (TC13)

This means that when exploring the ways in which professionals themselves conceive of and describe what it is they are doing when making discretions, I find a widespread combination of the use of knowledge, expertise and professional experience with personal experience and intuition, i.e. a combination of professional logic and a habitus based logic. It is also worth noting that the use of rules and regulations is completely absent from professionals explanations about discretion making. This may, however, be due to the way in which the question about discretion making was posed, emphasizing the two options of use of knowledge or use of person experience, possibly priming the respondents to not consider the use of rules.

Summing up the analyses (see figure 3), I find across professions a widespread combination of a professional logic and a habitus based logic when exploring professional self-images and the conception of professionals’ relation to citizen-clients. Only very few professionals (7 of 58) FLPs express a consistent professional, knowledge based self image. This means that even though knowledge does play a huge role in the self-image of professionals, personal relations to citizen-clients, emphasizing this relations as being between 'human beings’ (i.e. not experts and clients), and highlighting values, emotions and
intuitions or common sense knowledge is also very prevalent, questioning the assumption of a functionally specific relationship.

[Figure 3 about here]

Furthermore, the ways in which professionals oftentimes integrate the professional and knowledge based logic with the personal and habitus based logic suggest that these logics are both mutually supportive and difficult to distinguish for professionals themselves. This integration of logics, I suggest, could even be pointing towards a new form of hybrid, personalized professionalism, equivalent to the hybrid professionalism combining professional and organizational logics as suggested by Nordegraaf (2007, 2015).

[figure 4 about here]

Concluding discussion

I started this article by pointing out how the assumption of functional specificity in the relationship between professionals and citizen clients is common across functionalist and Weberian perspectives on professionalism. Also, I demonstrated how recent contributions in the study of frontline professional work question this assumption, and based on this I set out to empirically explore the self-images of professionals in three Danish professions working in close interaction with citizens, i.e. health nurses, child care workers and teachers. The analyses focused in particular on the presence of a professional, knowledge based and functionally specific logic or a personal, habitus based and encompassing logic dominating the relationship to citizen-clients.

The analyses present rather strong and similar results across the three professions, where almost all professional display both a professional, knowledge based and a personal, habitus based logic across all three dimensions of self-images, i.e. regarding both work identity, role perception and understanding of discretion. This means that only few professionals uphold a functionally specific understanding of their own work and of the relationship to
citizen clients, whereas the vast majority emphasis this relationship as also based on values, emotions and ‘being a human being’. Re-analysing the data presented in Harrits and Møller (2014) focusing on professional self-images thus further supports the results of this study demonstrating the presence of both a professional and a habitus based logic in the categories and discretions made.

As mentioned above, data consists of interviews with 58 professionals across three professions in four rather different municipalities. Even though no statistical inferences can be made, the way in which many professionals describe their own work and the relationship to citizen clients in a very similar manner, using almost identical expressions, suggest a saturation of the data and analysis and thus the possibility of analytical inferences. In other words, I suggest that for professions in similar settings as the ones analysed here, i.e. professions working in close contact with citizens-clients, in work focused on health, care or education, organized with a large autonomy for the individual professional, we could expect to see a similar combination of a professional knowledge based logic and a personal habitus based logic in the self-images of professionals and focusing on the relations to citizen clients.

The analyses has not covered possible effects of or challenges connected to this type of relationship between professionals and citizen clients, nor has a comparison to other types of professionals been made, making it impossible to conclude anything on effects, challenges or the nature or causes of differences across professions. However, based on the analysis as well as the literature on professions and professionalism, some hypothesis for analysis in future research can be suggested.

First, based on the ways in which professionals describe their work and the relationship to clients, focusing on the daily interaction and the establishment of a personal bond, it is reasonable to suggest that the frequency and length of interaction is the cause of difference in professional citizen relations across professions. Professionals that do not interact with citizen-clients frequently or over a long period of time (e.g. specialized medical doctors or lawyers) may not
establish a similar non-functional specific and personal relationship. This question is thus an obvious point for future comparative research.

Second, as mentioned above, the analysis suggest the contours of a new hybrid, personalized professionalism. However, here I demonstrate the presence of such a hybridity only in the self images of professional, and it is uncertain if this is also the case for the performance of professional judgments and discretions. Analysis in Harrits and Møller (2014) suggest the presence of both logics in discretion making, however this analysis does not explore the degree to which the logics are really integrated. Future analyses may thus explore further, if hybridity between a professional and habitus based logic is indeed present also in professional work and discretions.

Third, the analyses presented here take the sole perspective of the professional, and no inferences can be made with regard to a citizen perspective on the professional-citizen relation. Based on the results here, however, one may suggest that the integration and hybridity of different logics, and especially the functional non-specificity of the relationship is also salient from a citizen perspective. It would, I argue, be difficult for professionals to uphold self-images as the ones found in this article if citizen-clients met such self-images with great resistance. Future research may therefore explore, if the existence of a functionally non-specific, personal relations to professionals integrating knowledge, values, emotions and common sense intuitions is also what citizens expect from professionals. Furthermore, it may be explored, how such a personal relationship to professionals affect citizens trust towards professionals, and the professionals’ authority vis-à-vis citizens (Knudsen & Bjerg, this issue).

Fourth, following the citizen perspective, one could also speculate about the boundaries of or limits to the hybrid professionalism. Based solely on the professional perspective, the analyses presented in this article are thus not able to say anything about whether or not the habitus based logic is a two-way-street, i.e. if the demand for intimate, personalized knowledge and emotional commitment can also be presented by citizens towards professionals. Or, to use an example from the data: would it be possible and legitimate for a child in
primary school to say “The thing is, I love those teachers. I mean, they are my parents” (cf. TA06 above)?

Finally, the analyses presented here also raises some normative questions with regard to professional citizen relations. On one hand, the widespread use of a habitus based logic could function as a way of making professional citizen encounters perceptible to citizen needs, as also pointed out by both Lipsky (2010) and Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003). Caring and emphatic nurses, child care workers and teachers willing to get personally involved with the children and families they meet, seems to be a much preferable situation compared to cold experts or strict rule-following bureaucrats.

However, the hybrid professionalism and mixture of a professional and knowledge based logic with a personal and habitus based logic also suggest that professionals may underestimate the asymmetry as well as dimensions of power and inequality involved in citizen encounters. When professionals for example explain how they see the establishment of a personal relationship to the client as crucial for being able to perform their job in the form of “moving citizens” (i.e. changing behaviour) or even for performing the task of controlling citizens, the personal relationship to citizens seem to become somewhat instrumentalized. And, when professionals explain how they see it as part of their job to engage in raising children and explicitly states that they do this on the basis of their own personal values, it could be seen as a personalization of the authority of the position as a professional.

In the traditional understanding of the service ethic, such challenges did not arise, since the asymmetry of the relationship between citizens and professionals were confined by the functional specificity of the relationship, and furthermore founded upon the legitimacy of the professional expertise. However, with a weakening of the functional specificity, professionals may engage in the relationship using far more than their expertise, and the asymmetry (and implicit power dynamics) of the relationship is thus no longer confined. The analysis in this article thus suggest not only further analysis of the professional citizen relationship. It also suggest a discussion of the normative implications of
professional-citizen encounters in the context of hybrid professionalism and the weakening of functional specificity.
Beauchamp, & Childress, (2001)
Friedman, M. (1962),