Youth behind bars

An ethnographic study of youth confined in secure care institutions in Denmark

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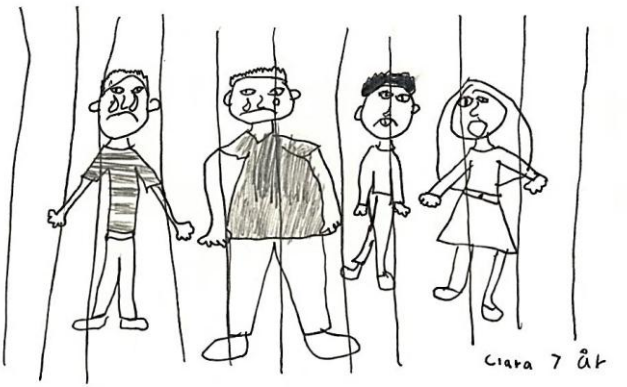

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Til minde om min højt elskede mormor
(In memory of my beloved grandmother)

TABLE OF CONTENS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 5

INTRODUCTION 7

Structure 10

SECTION ONE 12

THEORETICAL INSPIRATION 12
Youth 13
Crime 19
BACKGROUND 25
The rise of secure care 28
Secure care institutions 39
Youth in secure care 46
METHOD 54
The research process 57
Analysing data 61
Ethics 63

SECTION TWO 67

PUBLICATION STATUS 69
PAPER 1: BOREDOM AND ACTION—EXPERIENCES FROM YOUTH CONFINEMENT 70
PAPER 2: LEARNING TO BECOME A 'GANGSTER'? 103
PAPER 3: 'IT'S WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO!' EXPLORING THE ROLE OF HIGH-RISK EDGEWORK AND ADVANCED MARGINALITY IN A YOUNG MAN'S MOTIVATION FOR CRIME 130
PAPER 4: WHAT IS DATA? ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCES WITH YOUNG OFFENDERS 158

EPILOGUE 180

ENGLISH SUMMARY 184
DANISH SUMMARY (DANSK RESUMÉ) 186
APPENDIX A: PHD PROJECT DESCRIPTION 188
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CHECKLIST AND LIST OF INTERVIEWS 194
APPENDIX C: DANISH NEWSPAPERS ARTICLES 197

REFERENCES 218

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INTRODUCTION

> One of the enduring myths of political and social life is the one that sees young people as being the central cause of forms of crime and disorder that strike at the very heart of the stability and prosperity of contemporary social life. It is a convenient myth that both constructs and brings into social being the image of 'criminal youth' (Muncie, 1999) to be feared, distrusted, puzzled over and forever surveyed.
>
> (Mike Presdee, 2000: 107)

Above all, else this thesis is concerned with everyday life and meaning-making of 'criminal youth'. It examines the way in which young people locked up in secure care institutions for young offenders in Denmark make sense of their everyday life both on the inside and the outside. The thesis focuses on how apparently senseless actions and situations are constructed socially by the young people when they are bringing together meanings in their everyday practices. Everyday life is the continuous creation of reality taking place in relations, practice and interaction day after day. I choose to study everyday life because I have an abiding concern for the ordinary procedures and routines that make every-day experiences sensible, understandable, accountable and orderly – allowing us to understand that which superficially appears to be senseless and thus meaningless.

Since the rise of the concept of the teenager in the 20th century, young people have been perceived as a threat to the dominant social order and their actions seen as senseless and irrational. Consequently, the myth of criminal youth also continues to thrive as 'moral panics' and the demonization of young people and their cultural lives continue to stress adult society (Cohen, 1978). Numerous classical studies have shown how young people in the creation of their own unique subcultures and style have caused panic and fear of anomie (see Cohen, 2005[1972]; Cohen, 1978; Hall & Jefferson, 2006[1975]; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977). However, the creation of young people as what Stanley Cohen in 1978 termed 'folk devils' in the UK is not a historical tale, but is a reality in contemporary Danish society, leading to an intensified struggle of effectively controlling young people's everyday lives.

Recent Danish studies have shown how young men, especially those of immigrant descent and from poor neighbourhoods are being demonised as the dangerous 'other' (Jensen, 2007; Mørck, 1996; Røgils, 1995; Vitus,

2005). These dangerous 'criminal youths' create their own distinct subcultures, driven by the thrill of their own transgression, the reaction it creates, and the attention it receives. They see themselves as 'gangsters', rebelling against a society preaching inclusion but (from their perspective) practising exclusion. Excitement-seeking and rebelling through crime becomes a strategy of opposition to the experience of marginalisation and rejection (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008).

There is an attempt to avoid and repress young peoples' acts of rebellion and delinquency through politics of discipline through which children are made responsible for their own actions at an earlier and earlier age. Not only is the age of moral and legal responsibility for one's actions being lowered across Western countries, but the state increasingly acts in *loco parentis* when young people do not live up to the given responsibility. The innocence of childhood is being replaced with adult expectations of maturity and control that are manifested not only at an individual level but integrated into the caring welfare state. On the one hand young people are given more and more freedom to create their own lives; on the other, control mechanisms restricting this freedom are intensified if the young people do not use this freedom as dictated by adult society.

In his work on the central characteristics of the modern welfare state, British criminologist Jock Young (1999) stresses that the modern welfare state is based on the ideals of inclusion and assimilation of the deviant. 'To this end' writes Young (1999: 5), 'a corpus of experts builds up, skilled in the use of the therapeutic language of social work, of counselling, of clinical psychology and allied positivistic disciplines'. In the modern welfare state, the dangerous 'other' is not seen as an alien or an enemy, but as one who lacks civilisation, socialisation and sensibilities – someone who can be changed to be like 'us' and thus be fully included through modern control mechanisms (see also Egelund, 1997).

A look at secure care as one of the control mechanisms directed at controlling young people reveals a striking expansion in Danish society's use of control and regulation. By the beginning of the 21st century Denmark – like most other western countries – was experiencing a 'punitive turn', focusing on being 'hard on crime' (Balvig, 2004; see also Muncie, 2008). The belief that simple social remedies exist for controlling young people has

come to be widely socially and politically acknowledged. As a result, secure care is now often seen as a central solution in 'the fight against youth crime' (VK Regeringen (Liberal-Conservative Government), 2003: 8) (my translation), with a huge increase in the number of placements over the past 15 years.

Professionals from the secure care institutions but also many politicians stress time and again that secure care is not punishment but treatment. These statements clearly refer to both the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' and the Danish justice system's core ideal of inclusion through rehabilitation. Given the aim of rehabilitation and in light of the political aim of making secure care the solution to the problem with youth crime, one might expect it to be part of long-term a social treatment programme. However, most placements are under police custody awaiting trial (85% of all placements) (Danske Regioner (Danish Regions), 2011), with no fixed time-frame and no requirement for social assessment or demand of a plan for help or treatment.

Ideally, secure care is a mechanism aiming at inclusion and treatment, which in practice is sought through exclusion from the young person's everyday life their everyday relations with parents, family and friends. Young people aged from 12 to 18 can be remanded to secure care and on average they spend two months there. Despite the social aims of providing inclusion and treatment, secure care carries many of the same characteristics as prisons, including that of punishment. In their study of secure accommodation in the UK Harris and Timms (1993: 4) write: 'Secure accommodation is both incarceration and an alternative to incarceration, a form of control imposed in order that care can be provided'. They thus point to secure care as a fundamentally ambiguous construction serving the different and often contradictory goals of treatment and punishment. As sixteen–year–old Brian, one of the young people I met in secure care, said: 'They want us to think it is not a prison and in some ways that makes it all the worse'.

In many ways these circumstances are perfect for creating the ideal 'total institution' as described by Goffman (1991) in 1961 in his famous work, *Asylums*. Goffman (1991: 17) writes: 'Their encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside

and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forests or moors'. Young people entering the institutions are disconnected from the outside world, are forced to establish an institutional everyday life, and are later released to an outside world that is disconnected from that institutional life. A key characteristic of secure care is that the young people enter it from an existing culture, an everyday home world, a way of life in which they take most activities for granted until they are taken into custody. Everyday life in the secure care institution does not exist for the young people apart from the meaning of 'getting out' or from their life on the outside. For these young people there exists an ever–present tension between their home world and the institutional world that strongly influences everyday life within secure care institutions.

Despite the continuing political and public interest in 'criminal youth', very little appears to be known about their everyday lives, their cultures and thus their meaning-making, whether inside or outside secure care. Research focus has long been on rehabilitation programmes and treatment, as well as on statistical reports and evaluations. Yet few ask questions about the young people – who they are, what they think and how they relate. The risk is that the myth of 'criminal youth', along with society's control mechanisms, may be strengthened if the reproduction of knowledge continues to overlook the young people themselves. Through a sociological conceptualisation of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in secure care institutions, this thesis seeks to demystify and define aspects of the everyday lives of detained 'criminal youth'.

Structure

The thesis is organised in two sections. Section One frames contemporary concepts, theories, and ideas on 'criminal youth' and documents the background of the study and its ethnographic methodology. Section Two crystallises the thinking presented in Section One, in the form of four papers: 'Boredom and Action: Experiences from youth confinement'; 'Learning to become a gangster?'; '"It's what you have to do!" Exploring the role of high-

risk edgework and advanced marginality in a young man's motivation for crime'; and 'What is data? Ethnographic experiences with young offenders'.

The four papers in Section Two have been written to stand by themselves and can be read independently. However, each focuses on a different aspect of the same issue: the everyday life of young people confined in secure care. While some repetition across the papers is thus to be expected, each one approaches the issue from a different vantage point, drawing on different sources in the broad fields of sociology and criminology, with little direct relation to the other papers. Writing the thesis in the form of papers thus allows me to pursue the main theme of each paper analytically past the point that would be possible in chapters of an integrated book. The papers in Section Two serve to crystallise the concepts, theories and ideas presented in Section One, thereby creating a meaningful and coherent, but not exhaustive, interpretation of the everyday life of confined young people.

SECTION ONE

THEORETICAL INSPIRATION

In this chapter I wish to briefly present and discuss the theories which both inspired and informed this study. This presentation is not exhaustive of the theories used in the thesis. The papers in Section Two are informed by a plethora of sociological and criminological theories selected on the basis of relevance. When looking at the theoretical frameworks in isolation, these may contain contradictions; however. in the analytical process I have looked more at the analytical potential of the theories, allowing me to more freely use my 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]).

My ambition has been to undertake theory-informed ethnography, and therefore I here wish to more explicitly introduce the theoretical inspirations guiding the analyses than is possible in the four papers. This should not lead the reader to the conclusion that theory has been the starting point of the study or that I have aimed at conducting a deductive study. Neither did I aim at carrying out an inductive study. Rather, throughout the research process I have tried to keep an open mind and draw inspiration from a variety of theoretical questions, some of which I outlined in the initial project description (see appendix 1), some of which I discovered while conducting fieldwork or which appeared during reading, and some in discussions of my findings. Thus, the empirical findings of the study are conditioned by the theoretical insights, but at the same time those theoretical insights cannot be separated from the empirical findings. I believe this dialectic relationship between theory and data marks some of the best ethnographic studies of the everyday workings of social life.

Ethnographic studies are by nature oriented towards the micro-processes forming social life in specific social situations. Macro-level explanations are, however, not deemed irrelevant, as ethnography must include examination into how relationships and interactions are shaped and constrained by the structures shaping the situation. With the focus on the everyday workings of social life, this study is greatly influenced by the interactionist tradition where the meaning of things is not seen as inherent

but as created, learned, used and revised in social interaction (Blumer, 1969; see also Mead, 1934).

In highlighting the creation and conflicts of meaning that consistently animate youth and crime, it is my ambition to strengthen the insight that the social world consists of interactions and unfolding relations rather than substances (things, beings, essences) (Emirbayer, 1997). Things derive their meaning from the purposes and perspectives assigned to them as a result of their relations to other things. Meaning is created through interpretation and interaction in continuous processes on the basis of material and conceptual resources as well as being conditioned by social and physical constraints (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

In the following, I will focus on two different but overlapping theoretical traditions informing the thesis: youth and crime. Within both traditions I will mainly focus on studies and theories drawing on cultural and interactional understandings. First, I will discuss understandings of youth and youth culture focusing on the British youth studies tradition. Second, I will look into crime and how it is intertwined with culture and meaning, drawing on studies within the field of 'Cultural Criminology'.

Youth

The divisions between childhood, youth (young people) and adulthood are not clear. When does a child become a young person and when does a young person become an adult? Can a young person also be a child and an adult? And is the meaning of these categories fixed or context dependent? Questions like these show that children, youth and adult are terms that gloss over considerable complexity that is not easily captured by either of the terms if divorced from their social context and broader discursive meaning. As a result, youth is understood as a contingent social and cultural construction, always under meaningful re-construction in specific social situations.

'Cultural investments in the idea of childhood as a state of innocence can be contrasted with notions of youth as difficult, "out of control" and potentially dangerous – a symbol of what is wrong with the neighbourhood or the country more generally' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008: 7). In particular,

when looking at crime the picture of 'the innocent child' cannot be upheld and the term 'youth' becomes relevant as it removes the child from childhood into another stage with room for transgression, deviance and wickedness. Replacing the idealised stage of 'childhood' with that of 'youth' makes it possible to increasingly punish and demonise those children who break with the dominant perception of children's behaviour. Punishment becomes more accessible as these children are *not* categorised as innocent children, but as 'undisciplined', 'disrespectful' and 'evil' youth (see also Scraton, 2007). Youth becomes largely defined in negative teams or by what is lacking; by what it is *not* rather than what it is (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

Contemporary understandings of childhood and youth are not static or universal but socially produced constructions that vary across time and place. An example of this can be seen in the area of child protection. Those children whose parents cannot care for them properly are seen as 'children in danger' in need of support and care (love), while those who cannot adapt and obey are seen as 'dangerous children' in need of correction and discipline. This inherent division between 'children in danger' and 'dangerous children' runs through the legislation and is tightly connected to the movement from childhood to youth. The individual child can easily with age move from a 'child in danger' to being 'a dangerous child' and thus from being the one needing protection to the one society needs protection from. The opposite movement from 'dangerous child' to 'child in danger' is almost as impossible as it is to be both a 'child in danger' and a 'dangerous child' at the same time (for a more detailed debate see Goldson, 2000; Harris & Timms, 1993; McGhee & Waterhouse, 2007). Constructions of childhood and youth thus carry with them great discursive power and control mechanisms shaping the lived lives of both children and young people.

The tradition of studying young people and youth cultures has been marked by the post-war work of UK researchers at Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). These studies focus on the ways in which young people's cultural expressions in the form of style, attitude and self-expression could be understood as forms of *resistance through ritual* (Hall & Jefferson, 2006 [1977]). Drawing on ethnographic methods and Gramscian-inspired theory, these studies suggest that young people in their creation of new subcultures critically comment on the culture

of their parents as well as the socio-political context of their lives (Hall & Jefferson, 2006 [1977]). Hall and Jefferson argue that the subcultures of working-class youths are formed as a 'double articulation', first against their parents' culture and second against the broader culture of post-war capitalism. Critical and occasionally angry expressions through clothes, music and style form these new subcultures and their creative forms and expressions come to be understood as creative rebellion against the dominant culture. Subculture becomes the young people's way of imaginatively reframing their lives. Youth subcultures should, however, not merely be read as rebellion, but as an active attempt by young people to address social change and question the social structures of capitalist society. From this perspective, youth subcultures are purposeful social formations imbued with meaning.

Stan Cohen's (1978) famous study *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* sets out to understand the subcultures of the mods and rockers and the media's reaction to these subcultures and their conflict. He pointed to the missing sense of creative energy and collective intensity that animated the conflict and showed how the spreading 'moral panic' was the result of spiralling events involving young people, the media, police and the public. Cohen actively showed that youth subcultures are not formed in isolation but in complex relationships with their surroundings, this being other subcultures, parents, media, politicians or control agents. However, as pointed out by Richard Jenkins (cited in Griffin, 2011: 248), subcultures may have a marginal relevance in understanding the majority of working-class youth who did not identify as part of any specific subculture. Their positions and experiences were not captured in the intense focus on spectacular youth subcultures.

With their focus on the spectacular and creative aspects of subculture, the CCCS marked a turn in subcultural studies. Earlier studies on subcultures mainly stemming from the late Chicago school focused on explaining subcultural formations and deviant behaviours commonly assumed to be simply irrational and unproductive (such as Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Goffman, 1991; Sykes, 1956). The researchers from CCCS found great inspirations in these studies, as both traditions viewed subcultural formations as meaningful responses to the dominant culture. In his classic work

Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang Albert Cohen (1955) shows that delinquency is not about mindless mischievousness but closely connected to the social structure and experience of 'growing up in a class system'. At school, children are judged by middle-class values which lower-class children are hard-pressed to meet. The experience of status deprivation and humiliation are for these children the core problem to which the formation of deviant subcultures becomes the answer. By negating and inverting middle-class values collectively, the boys can react to this experience of deprivation and humiliation and through their rebellion create subcultural status.

Later, this focus on domination and rebellion was taken up by Paul Willis, who was connected to but not actually part of the CCCS, in his book *Learning to Labour* (1977). Willis identified how working-class boys in school where asked to measure up to middle-class standards for which their background ill prepared them. They were expected to achieve academic qualifications irrelevant to their future jobs. Willis found that the boys culturally 'solved' the problem by playing up in the classroom and rejecting the teacher's discipline. At the same time, the boys developed a subculture that rewarded manliness and physical toughness with high status. In a short text about *doing nothing*, Corrigan (1975) convincingly describes how working class youth are passing time in the streets searching for action and thus end up displaying their manliness and toughness through fighting.

In the 1990s UK studies of youth cultures were influenced by post-modern theory and developed a strong critique of the post-Marxist perspectives of the earlier subcultural studies (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004; Redhead, 1997; Thornton, 1996). Focus moved from domination and suppression to the significance of global media cultures and patterns of consumption as key elements in young people's cultural formations. In contrast to the focus of earlier studies on the creation of unified subcultures, this new generation of youth studies argues that youth culture today is best understood as fragmented and ephemeral groupings that can easily be formed and easily dissolved.

Sarah Thornton's influential text *Club Cultures* (1996), studying the cultural and political significance of electronic dance music culture in the UK, was an attempt to break with the CCCS understanding of subculture. She focuses on three overlapping cultural hierarchies within the electronic

dance scene: 'authentic' vs. 'fake; 'hip' vs. 'mainstream'; 'underground' vs. 'media'. Being 'authentic', 'hip' and 'underground' and thus well integrated in the dance scene is not based on class background, but on subcultural capital which in turn is based on a youthful will to be classless.

This dispensation of class as a determining factor in the study of youth cultures has led to a new terminology within youth studies trying to describe the connections young people make: 'scenes', 'tribes', 'lifestyle', and 'neo-tribes' are some of the terms more widely used. While 'scenes', as in Thornton's study, explores musical collectives, 'tribes' and 'neo-tribes' draw upon the work of Michel Maffesoli (1989) to describe loose groups of young people whose tastes and lifestyles come together during moments of shared interests. Maffesoli argues that patterns of consumption enable individuals to create moments of sociality. 'Tribe' describes a loose structure which is not necessarily class-bound or subcultural. Common to these studies is a tendency to produce rich and aesthetically pleasing accounts of youth cultures as free and playful formations at the expense of the critical examining class, economic restraints and social change (see Bennett, 1999; Bennett, 2005; Blackman, 2005; Greener & Hollands, 2006; Griffin, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Holland, Reynolds, & Weller, 2007 for detailed contributions to the debate).

Instead of focusing on young people's cultural expressions, another line of youth research has focused on their transition to adulthood. Seeking to understand young people's management of transitions from school to work, this tradition has focused on the structural arrangements shaping their lives. Transition studies have shown that economic conditions play a significant role in young people's movement into adulthood. Furthermore, they have mapped out the general patterns of exclusion facing young people. Studies of youth transitions have been critiqued for employing a mechanical and almost linear understanding of young people's lives that cannot capture the complexity and unpredictability of lived transitions. However, a number of newer studies have to some extent recognised the need to expand the study of youth cultures, as they again point to the continuing relevance of class and structural constraints in understanding young people's cultural expressions (France, 2007; Greener & Hollands, 2006; Hodkinson, 2002; Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; Nayak & Kehily, 2008; Winlow & Hall, 2006). They

argue that there is little evidence that class should have disappeared as a major structuralising principle in modern society. Post-modern inspired studies thus overlook the continuing significance of class in their quest to show that many cultural expressions and forms involve young people from a range of class locations (Blackman, 2005; Griffin, 2011).

Robert MacDonald (MacDonald & Marsh, 2001; MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005) argues that there may be unexplored strengths in the transition approach as it has potential for uncovering the complex relationship between agency and structural restrains in young people's lives (see also France, 2007; MacDonald & Marsh, 2001; Roberts, 2011). Arguing for the continued relevance of the work of the CCCS, Griffin (2011) stresses that youth cultures and young people's lives continue to be created in multiple subordinations that cannot be fully understood if class is continuously to be ignored.

Class, however, is not to be seen as the only - and maybe not even the most significant - structuring principle in the formation of young people's cultural expressions. The social relations formed around the intersections of gender, ethnicity, place, sexuality and social class are highly significant to understanding the broader social formations of youth (see also Nayak & Kehily, 2008). Greener and Hollands (2006) convincingly argue that the way to overcome the division between the subculture and post-subculture traditions may be to acknowledge that there is not one theoretical framework that can capture the full complexity of lived youth life. Instead of having theory as a starting point, they suggest a renewed focus on the findings of empirical studies.

My own approach to the study of 'youth' recognises the contribution of the different perspectives discussed above. In line with Greener and Hollands (2006), I have focused on the empirical findings as a guideline for the theoretical relevance which has been integrated in the analyses. I have not aimed at creating a 'third way' in the study of youth, but I suggest that the existing theory of subculture needs reworking to better capture the empirical complexity. In Paper Two 'Learning to become a gangster?' I argue that to understand the subcultural expressions of a group of young people in secure care, both the CCCS linking of class and subculture as well as the post-subculture dismissal of class are needed. I here follow the recent

developments in the youth study tradition by suggesting that youth subcultures are best understood as social formations based on specific intersections of class, gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, drawing on the legacy of the CCCS, I argue that relations of dominance and resistance are central in the formation of young people's subculture. In the paper I thus suggest that youth subculture is best understood as a social subgroup that through the intersection of social categories is distinct from but related to mainstream society and formed in opposition to specific experiences of difference and domination.

Crime

Criminology is a broad discipline with many different theoretical schools. Here I will only focus on social and cultural explanations and understandings of crime. According to these, crime and its consequences must be analysed as symbolic displays of transgression and control asking not just what crime is but also how it is meaningfully constructed. By removing focus from *what* crime is to *how* crime is, the linking of culture and crime opens up for asking questions about the symbolic meanings and the identity of crime. Culture is not simply the product of social class, gender and ethnicity but is also symbolic environments created by individual and group interaction. Crime is therefore intertwined with cultural meaning and it is by examining this meaning that crime can become understandable as more than individual deviancy and a lack of morals. Within this overall focus on cultural aspects of crime, this study is inspired by the newer paradigm of 'Cultural Criminology' developed by Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward and Jock Young (2008), but also by older studies from critical criminology of labelling theory and imprisonment (such as Becker, 1963; Clemmer, 1958) and newer studies on gangs and drugs (such as Collison, 1996; Sandberg, 2009) as well as the role of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008). In the following I will present these different approaches and studies chronologically.

As discussed above in relation to Albert Cohen's (1955) study of delinquent boys, deviancy is closely linked to the norms and values of broader society. This line of thinking was taken up by a number of other researchers at the Chicago School in what came to be known as *labelling*

theory. Labelling theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act, but rather a collective process of human creation where majorities negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms (Becker, 1963). Public and media generation of fear, suspicion and hatred labels the 'other' as deviant and in the process creates stigmatisation and alienation (Scraton, 2007). The self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies and stereotyping. In his work *Outsiders* (1963), Howard Becker uses the term 'outsider' to describe a labelled rule-breaker or deviant who accepts the label attached to him or her and views him- or herself as different from 'mainstream' society. In studying the process of *becoming a marijuana user*, Becker (1953) shows how deviancy has to be learned and requires certain skills. In developing skills to become a marijuana user, the individual gradually learns how to appreciate the drug and thus deviance: the rejection of conventional values is not inherent in the user but has to be learned through social interaction.

In 1957 Gresham Stykes and David Matza (1957) argued that offenders and delinquents were aware of conventional values and understood that their offending was wrong. They described five *techniques of neutralisation*: denial of responsibility; denial of injury; denial of victims; condemnation of condemners; and appeal to higher loyalties. The argument was that delinquents did not reject mainstream moral values but neutralised them in order to commit delinquent actions. David Matza (1964) further argued that delinquents *drifted* between criminal and conventional action from situation to situation. The rigid separation of the criminal and non-criminal were called into question and supported by the fact that most delinquents 'grow out of' crime because they were not seriously committed to it in the first place (Matza, 1964).

Neutralisation theory has later been greatly criticised for being too focused on adaption and shared norm acceptance. When it comes to hard-core offenders such as gang members, the theory has little value as such offenders often neutralise being good rather than being bad to keep the identity as a 'gangster' (Topalli, 2005). In the US inner-city street cultures, the *search for respect* through 'badness' offers an alternative room for personal dignity and can be seen as a reaction to the inequalities the residents

suffer in mainstream society (Bourgois, 2003). Going 'bad' or 'mad' cannot alone, however, be seen as simple responses to poverty and marginalisation but as on-going attempts to create a position of being somebody rather than nobody (Collison, 1996). Hyper-masculine values of toughness, fearlessness and heterosexual sexiness are celebrated in the search for respect in these street cultures across countries (see Bourgois, 1996; Comack, 2008; Connell, 2002; Copes & Hochstetler, 2003; Jensen, 2010; Nayak, 2006).

The division between good and bad is also a central theme in Elijah Anderson's (1999) study on the *code of the street* where he also describes how people in the US inner cities switch between the code of the 'street' and the code of 'decency' and how the code of the 'street' infiltrates families trying to be 'decent'. Sveinung Sandberg (2009) discusses the usefulness of both theories of neutralisation and subculture in his work on drug dealers in Oslo, and finds that neither can fully capture the their reasoning and self-presentation. Instead, the shift of the drug dealers between different discourses of 'gangster' and 'victim' reveals that their self-presentations are context dependent attempts of meaning-making (Sandberg, 2009).

Work on prisons has demonstrated how the social conditions and cultural meaning-making of imprisonment form a dialectic relationship between the inside and the outside (such as Clemmer, 1958; Comack, 2008; Crewe, 2009; da Cunha, 2008; Earle, 2011; Irwin & Owen, 2005; Jewkes, 2005; Phillips, 2008; Sim, 1994; Wacquant, 2000). In his work on the *pains of imprisonment* Gresham Sykes (1956) finds that while all inmates experience certain pain of imprisonment, the precise extent and nature of this emerge from various intersections of class, gender, age and ethnicity and thus the meanings of their social lives that they bring with them into prison (Ferrell et al., 2008). The particular pain is given meaning in the context of pre-existing and collective expectations that form inmate cultures as they draw on shared understandings and invent new ones trying to *do their time well* in order to survive (Scarce, 2002).(see also Cohen & Taylor, 1972).

In his study of *the high life* Collison (1996) shows how life on the street 'hanging out' with friends and learning the craft of 'doing nothing' becomes meaningful for those young working-class men who abandon school as it abandons them. From their perspective, life beyond the school gate is simply more exciting and real with its seductions and risks (Collison,

1996; see also Muncie, Hughes, & McLaughlin, 2002). Life on the street or 'on the road' becomes liminal space where young people can find a kind of freedom from the constraints they experience in a hostile society and thus a place where they can be sovereign agents (Hallsworth & Silverstone, 2009). The importance of 'place' is also a cornerstone in Loïc Wacquant's (2008) studies of *advanced marginality* in post-industrial societies. Based on a methodical comparison between the 'black American ghetto' and the French working-class 'banlieue', he identifies distinctive spatial properties of advanced marginality: territorial fixation and stigmatisation, spatial alienation and the dissolution of 'place', and the loss of a hinterland. In his work Wacquant (2008; 2009) stresses the importance of including political and structural divisions in the analyses to understand the resurgence of extreme poverty, ethnic divisions and public violence, and their accumulation in distressed urban areas that are the site of exclusionary social closure in advanced societies.

From a different tradition, the criminologist of 'Cultural Criminology' also critically analyses the developments of modern societies and the consequences of late capitalism. They thus focus more on the everyday processes and dynamics through which 'crime' attains meaning. Akin to interactionism, 'Cultural Criminology' explores the multitude of interactions – including the media, the public, rule-breakers and control agents – through which meanings of crime are collectively constructed under late capitalism (Ferrell et al., 2008).

Breaking with the institutional boredom of everyday life through self-made dynamics of engagement and excitement becomes in itself a way to break with the constraints of late capitalism (Ferrell, 2004). In arguing for the relevance of studying everyday life Jeff Ferrell (2004: 289, my emphasis) writes that 'maybe *boredom* can tell us a good bit about crime'. He hereby stresses the role of emotional and existential motives for rule breaking that are at the centre of 'Cultural Criminology'. One of the first to explore the *seductions of crime* was Jack Katz (1988). He maintains that individual emotions, such as excitement, are central to the criminal event. Deviance offers through self-transcendence a way of overcoming the mundaneness, banality and predictability of everyday life. He thus speaks of the thrill of

‘taking it to the limit’ as a way of gaining moments of control and of being seduced by the pleasures of the transgressive act (Katz, 1988).

Continuing this theme of pleasure seeking through transgression is Stephen Lyng’s (1990) work on the *edgework* experience involved in high-risk activities. While not specifically addressing youthful deviant behaviours, his analyses of edgework in dangerous and extreme activities such as sky diving, have clear potential for analysing the expressive character of crime. The concept of edgework captures the spontaneous creative and intrinsically rewarding aspects of self-actualisation that are missing from the routines and regulated ways of modern life: a way of gaining momentary control.

Drawing on the insights of ‘seduction’ and ‘edgework’ Pat O’Malley and Stephen Mugford (1994) argue that a new phenomenology of pleasure is needed in order to recognise crime as transcendence from the mundane. The notion of ‘escape from the routines’ thus becomes an explanation for many forms of urban youth crime as attempts to achieve some control within an otherwise insecure world (O'Malley & Mugford, 1994). Keith Hayward (2004) describes how transgression offers a possibility to take control through a ‘controlled loss of control’. Rules are transgressed because they are there, and increased control risks provoking further transgression rather than conformity. In his book on *the carnival of crime*, Mike Presdee (2000) explores the paradox that as the state attempts to impose a greater regulation over everyday life, it produces not only a greater compliant rationality, but also higher degrees of resistance.

My own approach to the study of ‘crime’ has been greatly inspired by the thoughts presented above and the contribution from Cultural Criminology in particular has moved the analyses forward. Cultural Criminology’s insistence that crime is *also* cultural plays a significant role in the three first papers: ‘Boredom and Action’, ‘Learning to become a gangster’ and ‘It’s what you have to do’. In particular, Stephen Lyng’s theory of *edgework* is used in the analyses, as the young people’s quest for high-risk excitement seeking through crime reappears throughout the data. The ‘edgework’ theory is, however, also critically examined for overlooking structural factors in young people’s engagement in crime, such as their experience of ‘advanced marginality’.

Cultural Criminology's call to recognise the importance of emotions in processes of meaning-creation inspired the analyses. The analyses reveal that *boredom* is not simply an individual experience of confinement, but has broader resonance in the young people's everyday lives outside secure care. *Doing nothing* and *waiting* are defining aspects of boredom that the young people seek to deal with through the generation of risk-taking edgework.

These concepts and many more are integrated into the analyses of the four papers in numerous different ways. My goal, on the basis of the field study, has been to contribute to and develop the existing knowledge about *criminal youth* by uncovering different and new aspects of their everyday life both inside and outside secure care.

BACKGROUND

To speak of secure care institutions for young offenders, extracted from their historical, social, political and cultural context, is of course meaningless. In this part of the thesis I therefore present the background needed to understand what secure care means in Danish society. I will focus both on the actual set-up of secure care and its purpose as a response to developments in Danish society. I include short presentations of the historical and legal developments leading to the present organisation of secure care in Denmark, and I end with a statistical portrait of the young people being remanded to secure care in Denmark.

I have chosen to use the English term *secure care institution* in this thesis because it is close to the Danish words *sikret institution*. In Denmark the secure care institutions are placed within the realm of child protection illustrated by the word 'care'; however, the institutions are primarily used as an alternative to adult prison, illustrated by the word 'secure'. Across countries these types of institutions have many different names: in England, *young offender institution, secure training centres, secure children's home, secure estate for juveniles*; in Scotland, *secure accommodation;* in the US, *juvenile detention center, juvenile correction center, secure facilities*; in Australia, *secure care*; in Sweden, *SiS särskilda ungdomshem*; in Norway, *lukket avdeling*. It appears that in no country do we today call these facilities *child prisons,* although in various countries they often have a number of prison-like characteristics: locked doors, barred windows, surveillance cameras, and high walls and fences as well as in-house treatment. Despite these characteristics, there seems to be an unspoken agreement that secure care institutions are not prisons for children, but something else. What this 'else' is can be hard to pin-point, but it often seems to have more to do with an ideology of child welfare and treatment than with the actual set-up of correctional institutions for children.

As mentioned in the introduction, secure care institutions are what Erving Goffman (1991 [1961]: 11) in 'Asylums' calls a *total institution*, which he defines as, '… a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of

life. Prisons serve as a clear example…' (Goffman 1991 [1961]: 11). The locked doors are not an aspect of all total institutions, but when they are present they become defining for the experience, highlighting the *total* takeover of personal freedom. In his work Goffman identifies four central aspects which characterise the total institution (1991 [1961]:17):

> First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a larger batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to the same things together. Third, all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the official aims of the institution.

All four aspects are central to the secure care institution (see also Section Two, Paper One: 'Boredom and Action') but another central aspect defining secure care is missing, the built in ambiguity pointed to by Robert Harris and Noel Timms (Harris & Timms, 1993) (see also Egelund & Frydensbjerg, 2011; Goldson, 2002; 1993; Muncie, 2008). This fifth aspect runs through the institutions as they serve the dual aim of protecting the children and protecting society against those same children in the same carceral institution. This duality creates immanent contradictions that run all the way through the institutions: are they punishment or treatment? Are the children there in danger or themselves dangerous? Are they practising control over children or control over young people? No simple answers are to be found and the realisation is that secure care institutions are a mixture: they are both punishment and treatment; they are both controlling and caring; they are both serving the state and the individual child. It is, however, this ambiguity between different logics that is at the centre of the logic of the secure care systems.

The ambiguity creates a unique situation for both policy-makers and the front-line professionals with the possibility of actively using both punishment and care in justifying the secure care institutions. Secure care can be seen as a humane form of custody with therapeutic aspirations and providing expert guidance to young people who would otherwise be left to

sort out their problems themselves. At the same time, secure care provides the possibility of signalling that the system cares but is not lenient. The ambiguity of the system thus ends up creating a robust logic for its survival. It is not an inhumane system as it focuses on treatment and help. Neither is it a soft system as it has clear elements of punishment (Harris & Timms, 1993).

As a result, we easily end up with the taken-for-granted assumption that there *must* be secure care institutions (Harris & Timms, 1993), that these institutions fulfil an essential need in society. The inherent righteousness of the system creates a situation in which the individual child comes to be blamed for his/her personal and social misery and crime and where the coexistence of external social forces is ignored: it is the child who is blameworthy and needs to change. This process of change – of disciplining the deviant child – is the primary objective of the secure care institution as it encompasses the power to constantly observe and record the child and also to ensure the child's internalisation of the discipline (Foucault, 1991 [1975]).

Following the work of Michel Foucault (1991[1975]) the techniques of supervision and internalisation are not found in prisons and secure care institutions alone, but have penetrated society to dominate how individuals are constructed as subjects. The aim is to produce a new kind of individual subjected to habits, rules, orders and an authority that is 'exercised continually around him, and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him' (Foucault, 1991 [1975]: 131). To handle the deviant child through the *power of normalisation* operating through the secure care institution is in the discourse of the welfare state seen as the optimal solution. Social control and disciplinary techniques of integration and rehabilitation become natural and legitimate forms of social control as they are not just exercised through the state but through social relations. The secure care institution is thus a product of a particular historical development where social control is not restricted to the state and institutional practices, but to the realms of discursive construction, ideology and the production of meaning (Foucault, 1991).

Secure care derives meaning and logic from the complex forms of social control and the power relationship between the different discourses of *punishment, care* and *childhood*. The concrete form and organisation of secure care in Denmark is the result of specific historical, social, political

and cultural contexts. In many ways this context makes Danish secure care unique; however, as pointed earlier, the aspects, logic and dynamics are not unique to Denmark; there are general dilemmas surrounding the incarceration of children and young people across a number of countries (Abrams & Hyun, 2009 (US); Convery & Moore, 2006 (Northern Ireland); such as Halsey, 2007 (Australia); Harris & Timms, 1993 (UK); Hill, 2005 (Sweden); Pitts & Kuula, 2005 (UK- Finland)).

The rise of secure care

It is not possible to determine when secure care was first introduced in Denmark. In the beginning of the 20th century the first 'Child Act' (Lov om behandling af forbryderiske og forsømte børn fra 1905) was passed and for the first time the state took over responsibility for reforming (primarily poor) children. Throughout history the state had been responsible for punishing children, but now it also saw it as its responsibility to 'care' for children in their lack of manners and education. In the 19th century the task of caring for the poor had primarily been philanthropically undertaken by private charity organisations (Egelund, 1997). The philanthropic organisations continued and still exist as central suppliers in the area of child protection (Bengtsson & Jakobsen, 2009). An optimistic belief that *the child* could be reformed through education and discipline marked the time, and thus the first 'Child Act' (Lov om behandling af forbryderiske og forsømte børn fra 1905) was aimed both at criminal and neglected children. Issues about the general health of the population entered the political agenda with the 'Child Act' focusing on the deviant child and the *reformation* of the child through interventions (Egelund, 1997).

The goal was to protect – protect the child from society and society from the child. Tine Egelund (1997) shows how a number of different developments led to this double-sided focus on protection. First, the discourse of childhood had changed so that the child moved from having a material value (as worker) to having a psychological value (as loved). Second, the philanthropic movement did not have any formal power over families who did not wish to cooperate and change. Only criminal offences could be punished and then only with prison. In the 1840s children below the

age of 10 could no longer be imprisoned, but older children were referred to adult prisons. Third, there was a movement in schools to have deviant and troublesome children removed from community schools. Fourth, science became more dominant, arguing that deviancy could be treated. Fifth, the general public scepticism towards state intervention was diminishing (Egelund, 1997).

With the ambition of moral and hygienic reformation of poor children through treatment, a number of specialised residential institutions (skole- og ungdomshjem, opdragelsesanstalter, ungdomshjem, ungdomsfængsler, lukkede afdelinger) appeared with the goal of educating and reforming deviant children. These institutions became one of the strategies to protect both society and the deviant child by removing it and putting it under adult surveillance. Although the new institutions removed the criminal child from prison, they became themselves prison-like institutions focusing on discipline and punishment and often ignoring the political goals of treatment and education (Egelund, 1997).

After the Second Wold War, the area of child protection was increasingly professionalised with a preference for psychoanalytical ideas moving focus from poverty to problems within the families themselves. The professionalisation of child protection was further strengthened with the passing of a general 'Social Security Act' (Bistandsloven) in 1976. There was, however, a shift from predominantly removing children from their homes to placing interventions within the home directed at the whole family (especially the mothers) (Egelund, 1997). With this law came the foundation of the Danish system of child welfare, where all matters concerning children are held within the same legislation, today called 'Act of Social Service' (Serviceloven). This legislation regulates the whole social area, including child welfare and interventions used in juvenile justices (in collaboration with the 'Criminal Law' (Straffeloven)).

Responsibility for the special treatment institutions dealing with young people were with the passing of the Social Security Act in 1976 moved from state level to the regional level and to the municipalities. The first secure care institution (sikret afdeling) 'Egely' opened in 1966 with room for eight young people. In 1972 two more institutions were established: 'Sølager' with room for eight young people; 'Sønderbro' with room for 10

young people. The basis for establishing these institutions was to detain: 1. Young people who posed a danger to themselves or others; 2. Young people in need of observation and social evaluation to decide on future placement; 3. drug using and/or criminal young people who cannot be detained in jails for adults. In 1988 a fourth secure care institution 'Koglen' opened with room for five young people (Bryderup, 2010).

Placements in secure care were (and still are) considered rather expensive and there was (and maybe still is) an inducement to keep young people in the jails at no cost to the municipalities (Hansen & Zobbe, 2006: 27). In the 1980s the legislation was changed so that the municipalities did not have to pay directly when a young people living within their jurisdiction was referred to secure care. However, in 2010 the legislation was reversed so that today the municipalities again have to pay a high rate (1.25 million Danish kr. per year) (Danske Regioner (Danish Regions), 2010) for every child remanded to secure care. This development may have direct effect on the demand as in 2010, for the first time in 10 years, there was a decrease in the use of secure care (Danske Regioner (Danish Regions), 2011).

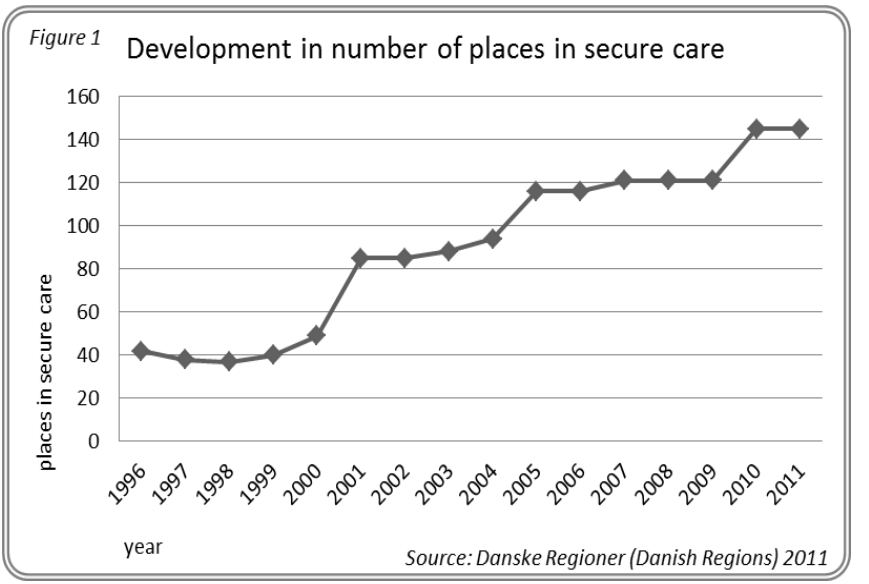
Two laws were introduced in the 1990s lowering tolerance for violent offences and initiating a new line of 'hard on crime' in Danish politics. In 1991 Denmark signed the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' which led to an increase in secure care institutions because young people were no longer to be detained in jails and prisons together with adults. The Convention states that 'every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults' (United Nations, 1989: Article 37). The Convention cemented that in all legal actions concerning children under the age of 18 the 'best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration' (United Nations, 1989: Article 3). It promoted non-custodial sentences and insisted that custody should be a last resort and for minimum periods.

Accession to the Convention and the political movement towards 'hard on crime' led to a dramatic increase in secure care (Hansen & Zobbe, 2006). Secure care moved from almost being almost non-existent into being a significant intervention within child protection and juvenile justices.

In 2001 three new institutions; 'Bakkegården', 'Stevnsfortet' and 'Grenen', were established so that there were now room for 85 young people

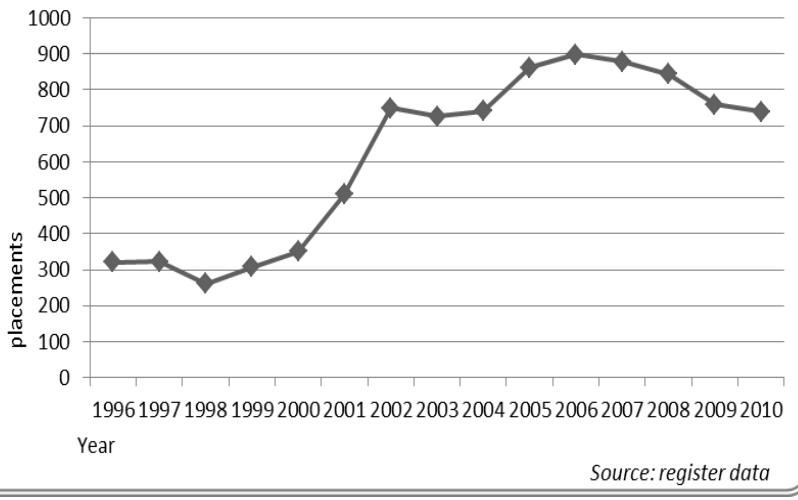
in secure care; see figure 1. This increase has continued so that today the seven secure care institutions have room for 145 young people; see figure 1.

Figure 1



During the same period, the child population age 12 to 18 has increased by almost 20 per cent from 347.748 January 1st 1996 to 422.393 January 1st 2011(Danmarks Statistik (Statistics Denmark), 2011). This increase cannot, however, account alone for the 245 per cent increase in places in secure care in the same period. The number of placements in secure care rose by 130 per cent from 321 placements in 1996 to 740 placements in 2010; see figure 2.

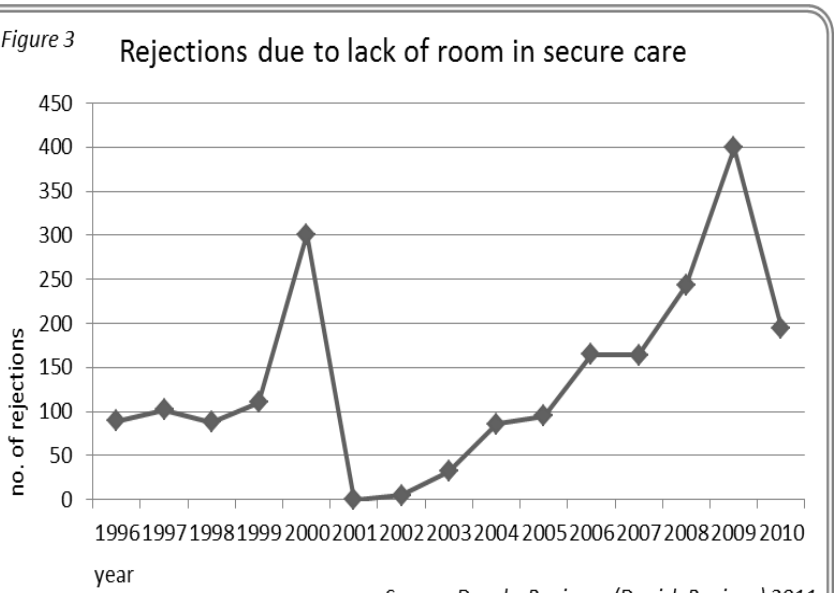
Figure 2



Source: register data

One may have expected that this increase in the number of places and in the number of placements in secure care would have resulted in no children being rejected from secure care and risking ending up in a jail when in police custody. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as figure 3 shows there has been a huge increase in the number of rejections from secure care.

Figure 3



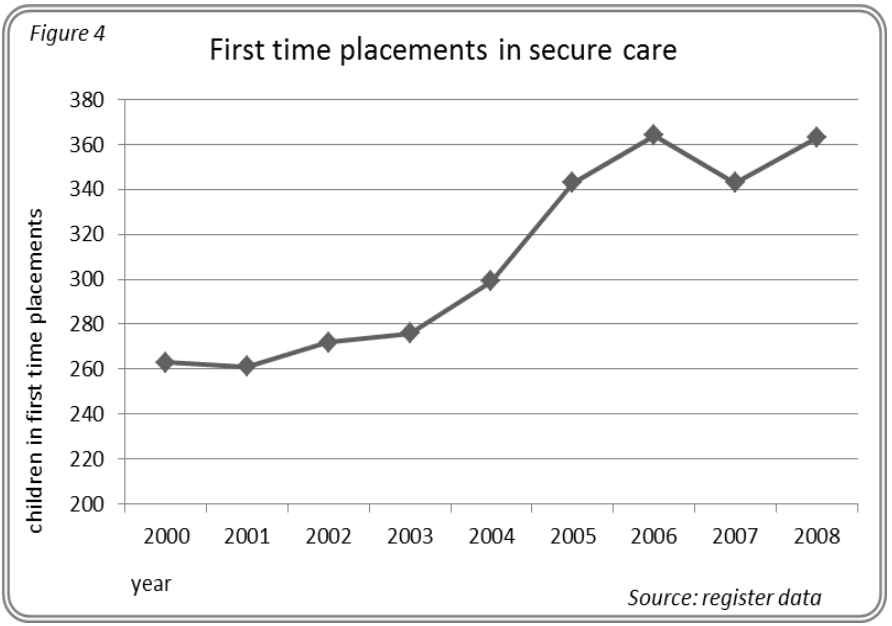
In 2010 the number of rejections fell to 202, and 77 per cent of these resulted in placements in jails. The majority of young people that I met while conducting this study had previous to their placement in secure care been held in jails, some for a few days, others for more than three months. They had most often been held away from adult prisoners and as a result they had been isolated in their cells. Often there would not be other children under the age of 18 detained in the same jail for them to socialise with. So although Denmark signed the 'Conventions on the Rights of the Child' in 1991, the question today is whether we treat children under police custody in our jails 'in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society' (United Nations, 1989: Article 40).

Denmark has not followed the promotion in the 'Conventions on the Rights of the Child' that youth justice should be divided from the formal courts. All convictions of children therefore take place in a regular court presided over by a regular judge without specialisation in children and young people. The Criminal Law (straffeloven) does have special rules applying for

children under the age of 18 so that the sentences as not as strict as those for adults. In 2001 a *special youth sanction* for young people age 15 to 18 was introduced as an alternative to prison sentences stretching between 1 and 18 months. The special youth sanction runs for two years and consists of three phases: 1. two months placement in secure care; 2. a one to one-and-a-half year placement in open residential care or one year in total in secure care; 3. residential after care or supervision by social authorities. The sanction has been widely criticised for being out of proportion with the crimes committed and for being foremost for serving political purposes (Storgaard, 2004; Vestergaard, 2004). In 2009 an evaluation of the youth sanction showed no positive effect on the risk of relapse into crime for young people having been sentenced to it compared with regular sentences (Clausen & Kyvsgaard, 2009).

In 2002 the penalties for simple violence and rate were again increased with reference to the sense of justice in the general population and justice for the victims. At the same time the government promoted a strengthening of the 'hard on crime' line of politics, wishing to signal a break with 'softness on crime'. This line of politics is especially directed young offenders. Together with the changes in legislation in the 1990s directed at criminal youth, these policies have led to a significant increase in the number of young people under the age of 18 being incarcerated (as shown in figure 2). Figure 4 show the increase in first time placements in secure care showing that the increases are not a result of the same young people having multiple placements, but an increase in new young people entering the secure care institutions.

Figure 4



In 2004 The Ministry of Social Affairs put forward an order regulating the use of secure care: 'Order regulation the use of power over children and young people in out of home care' (Bekendtgørelse om magt anvendelse over for børn og unge, der er anbragt uden for hjemmet). This order regulates the use of power over children placed in residential care and it makes clear under which conditions a young person can be placed in secure care. Secure care is serving the requirements of both the social services and the judicial system and the 'Order regulation the use of power over children and young people in out of home care' regulates how the different legislations are to be used in practice. It states that placement in secure care can be realised under the following seven conditions (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 29, 1):

1. The young person poses a danger, either to himself or herself or others
2. Observation and professional assessment
3. Long term professional treatment
4. As an alternative to jail when under police custody awaiting trail
5. Serving a sentence

6. As part of the 'special youth sanction'
7. Foreign young people under the age of 14 without legal residence in Denmark

Criteria 4 to 6 can only be used when the young person is above the age of criminal responsibility. The age of criminal responsibility was lowered on June 1st 2010 from 15 to 14 years of age by the right-wing government. The newly elected (September 2011) left-wing government has put forward a bill to put the age of criminal responsibility back up to 15 (Justitsministeriet (Ministry of Justice), 2011). After the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility in 2010, four children below 14 were placed in secure care; however, 173 young people between the ages of 14 and 15 were placed in secure care after the change compared to just 27 young people under the age of 15 in the whole of 2009 (Danske Regioner (Danish Regions), 2011). The most common reason for placement in secure care is as an alternative to jail, as 85 per cent of all placements fall under this criterion; see table 1.

Table 1

Criteria for placement in secure care in 2010

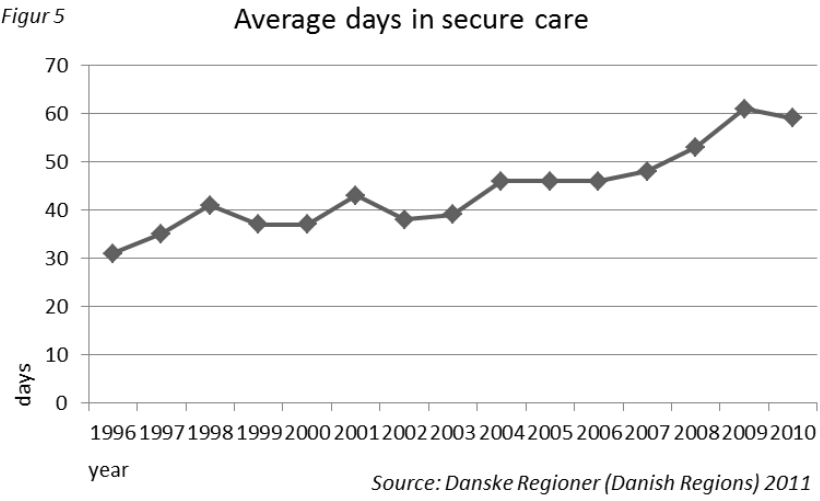
Criteria	*no.*	*%*
1. Danger	8	1
2. Observation	22	3
3. Long term treatment	4	0,5
4. Alternative to jail	628	85
5. Serving a sentence	1	0
6. Youth sanction	70	9,5
7. Foreign youth*	no information	
Other	7	1
Total placements	740	100

* From register data on all placements in secure care it is evident that very few foreign youth are placed in secure care

Source: Danske Regioner (Danish Regions) 2011

Criteria 1 to 3 can be used when the young person is between the ages of 12 and 18, with the possibility of accept placement of children below the age of 12 in special situations. On average the young person spends around 2 months in secure care. As shown in figure 5, the average duration has increased during the past 15 years.

Figur 5



From the above figures we see that no matter how we measure the development in secure care in Denmark, there has been an increase. It is thus safe to say that secure care has increasingly become a central intervention towards young offenders. Closely related to this development, however, are questions about the general development in youth crime. It is not an easy task to measure this because, as described above, the legislation aimed at tackling youth crime has been changed a number of times in the last years, so what one year was considered a minor offence could the next year be sanctioned as a serious offence.

In 2004 'special secure care units' were established and today there are 20 places in these in three secure care institutions. 'Special secure care' is aimed at young people who cannot stay in regular 'secure care' as a result of exceptionally violent behaviour or severe mental health problems or extreme antisocial behaviour (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 39).

In 2007 the right-wing government established a commission to go through initiatives directed at youth crime and on this basis recommend new initiatives to strengthen the efforts against it. To facilitate their work the commission had analyses made of the development in youth crime. These analyses show that there has been no increase in youth crime and in some areas (break-in and theft) there has been a decrease. There has been an increase in reported robbery and violent assault offences, but self-report surveys suggest that this is the result of more violent assaults being reported to the police (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010). Confirming the picture of decreasing youth crime is the latest self-report study demonstrating significant drops in young people reporting that they have been in trouble with the police or have committed a crime (Balvig, 2011). The study furthermore establishes that the group of law-abiding young people has grown from 25 per cent in 1989 to 48 per cent in 2010 (Balvig, 2011: 21).

There thus seems to be a situation now where young people are increasingly becoming law-abiding but where the sanctions towards them are being intensified. There is of cause the possibility that youth crime has dropped because of the stricter sanctions introduced, that young people restrain themselves from committing crimes out of fear of punishment. Looking at other countries with even stricter sanctions shows that this line of reasoning does not hold: if it did there would be no youth crime in the US (see also Muncie, 2008). It is difficult to point to one explanation for this development, and it is beyond the scope of this study, but there seems to be little doubt that there has been an import of new discourses on youth justice into the Danish context (see Vestergaard, 2004) (see also Goldson, 2000; Pitts, 2003 for insight in the UK debate).

Human rights together with the welfare-paternalism, focusing on care, guidance and supervision as the primary goal, used to be the cornerstone in policies directed at youth crime; however, these are now increasingly being challenged. Neo-conservative authoritarianism rationales aiming at protecting the public against 'the dangerous youth' have more and more marked the Danish debate and political agenda. Also, the liberal justice discourse seeing young people as rational actors and regardless of age responsible for their own actions has marked the legislation recently (Balvig,

2004; Storgaard, 2004; Vestergaard, 2004) (see also Goldson & Jamieson, 2002; Muncie, 2009: 347). The recent change to a left-wing government has again opened more room in the political and public debate for the human rights and welfare-paternalism discourses, but the other discourses have become an integrated part of the debate, and no-one on either side of the political spectrum wishes to be labelled as 'soft on crime'. The rise of secure care and its dramatic expansion in Denmark must be seen in light of the different developments and discourses and not as a result of just one of them.

In comparison with other countries such as the US or UK, the Danish system may still appear to be based on tolerance and welfare-paternalism. The development over the past 15 years as described above leaves little doubt, however, that Denmark, together with most of the western world, has been experiencing what John Muncie (2008) calls 'the punitive turn'. Punitive and correctional interventions are increasingly being seen as the solution, and the protection historically afforded to children in Denmark is also dissolving (Balvig, 2004). As Claes Levin (1998) concludes in his study of secure care in Sweden, secure care institutions do not survive because of their success at reintegrating deviant children into society, but because they exclude these children – thus providing the rest of society the illusion of safety.

Secure care institutions

To focus on the broader development of secure care in Denmark does not provide the reader with the full knowledge about what secure care actually constitutes in the country. I therefore wish to shortly describe here the physical traits of secure care in Denmark, as it is markedly different from similar institutions in other countries. Before starting this study I visited the only secure care institution in Norway located in Oslo. I was surprised to find that it was a 'normal' house with very little security to be seen. Pointing to a rope on the grass in the garden, the director explained that the detained young people were not allowed to cross this, as it would be an escape attempt if they did. To my surprise he continued to explain that they had only experienced a few such escape attempts from the institution.

There are great differences in the physical design between Danish secure care institutions, but none of them has a rope on the ground as a marker of the territory detaining the young people. A number of the institutions have been established in the buildings of closed down public institutions, such as a mental hospital ('Bakkegården'), military barracks ('Stevnsfortet'), or jail ('Grenen'). All of them are secured by high fences and different degrees of surveillance. To give the reader an impression of how these institutions can look, I have included three pictures from the secure care institution 'Egely'[1]:

These pictures show that although the high fences and surveillance are an integrated part of the institution's design, they are not the dominant experience. Across the institution visible efforts have been made to give them a 'homely' feel. There are green plants and pictures on the walls as well as games, televisions, music systems, table tennis and table football games, which indicate that this is an institutional setting for children and young

[1] I would like to thank director of 'Egely' Flemming Pommer for giving me permission to use the pictures

people. As can be seen on one of the pictures, the young people have private rooms, where they are allowed to keep their own things such as posters, pictures, clothes and books. In some institutions the young people's rooms have a television and DVD-player. In most, but not all, institutions the doors to the young people's room are locked at night.

The typical unit is home to five young people at a time and there are usually two to three staff members on duty. The staff work in shifts covering both weekdays and weekends. Ideally, most staff should have educational training but people with practical backgrounds, such as as carpenters or electricians, also work in the institutions.

All secure care institutions have access to open air areas with grass where it is possible sit around or to play different games such as football and basketball. Access to the open air areas is controlled by staff. The days are structured by routines. An example of these can be found on the secure care institution 'Sølager's' web-page:

A typical day in a secure care unit:

8:00 am: The students get up

8:30 am: Breakfast. The students can shop from the unit's kiosk

9:00 am: The workshops open and the daytime activities start

12:00 noon: Lunch

1:00 pm: Continuation of daytime activities in the workshops

2:30 pm: Clean up at the workshops and staff reward the students with bonuses

3:00 pm: The students have free time and can use the unit's leisure facilities

6:00 pm: Dinner

10:30 pm: The students must be in their rooms

Friday, Saturday and Sundays and public holidays, the students are allowed to stay up until 11:30 pm

(Sølager.Sikrede afdelinger, 2011) (my translation)

Even though it is not mentioned in the illustration of a 'typical day' at 'Sølager', all secure care institutions have integrated schools. A study of the secure care schools from 2010 finds that the practical teaching is mostly organised on a one-to-one basis, with the consequence being that most young people receive more intensive but also less teaching than their peers in regular schools outside secure care (Jensen, Koudahl, Pio, Petersen, & Boding, 2010).

A number of reports and evaluations of the secure care institutions point to vast differences between the seven institutions, not only in relation to the physical set-up but also to the ideology and practical everyday work with young people (Bonke & Kofoed, 2001; Center for Kvalitetsudvikling, 2011; Hansen & Zobbe, 2006). These differences may, however, be less

significant when looking at the legislation regulating secure care institutions, as all are regulated by the 'Act of Social Service' and 'Order regulation the use of power over children and young people in out of home care' (Lov om social service, Bekendtgørelse om magt anvendelse over for børn og unge, der er anbragt uden for hjemmet). This legislation regulates the use of power in secure care institutions. It states:

- A secure care unit is a unit in a secured residential institution where outside doors and windows are constantly locked. A secure care unit that is locked all or almost all day must be approved by the municipal or regional council which is responsible for establishing and operating the secure residential institution (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 19)
- The use of physical force by restraint if the child's behaviour is a threat to others or itself (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 2)
- Control of the child's communication and correspondence including telephone conversations and letters (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 28)
- The right to search the child's room and belongings and the right to search shared living areas (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 14, § 15)
- The right to lock up the children's room at night (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 19). Nightly lock up is not considered isolation (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2011: § 123)
- Isolation of a young person is a maximum of two hours, or four hours in 'special secure care' (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs), 2010: § 20, § 38)

The seven secure care units all have to follow this legislation, but the organisation, management and educational goals are manifested by the individual directors leading each institution. Inge Brydeup (2010) finds in a study with 14 young people reflecting on their lives with crime and as recipients of social treatment, that their relationship with staff and social

workers are of the utmost significance. Consequently, the organisation and pedagogical treatment at the institution is, according to the young people, significant for their experience of secure care (Bryderup, 2010).

An evaluation from 2010 shows that there are differences in how the young people rate each unit, with a young person able to give one to five stars to the institution (Center for Kvalitetsudvikling, 2011). At the top 'Sønderbro' gets 44 per cent assigning five stars and at the bottom 'Koglen' gets 20 per cent five stars. These are apparently big differences, but when looking at both four and five stars, all secure care institutions have more than 50 per cent of the young people assigning either four or five (the only exception is the special secure care unit at 'Egely') (Center for Kvalitetsudvikling, 2011). If one looks at the comments given by the young people when assigning stars, it becomes evident that not too much value can be assigned to their evaluation. As an example, one young person assigning five stars to 'Sønderbro' writes, 'It is more fun to be here than in Vester Fængsel (Copenhagen jailhouse)' (Center for Kvalitetsudvikling, 2011: 74 (my translation)).

Lisbeth Hansen and Karen Zobbe (2006) have a number of recommendations after conducting a study in 2006 focusing on the use of secure care units in Denmark. First of all they conclude that young people gain limited benefits from their placement in secure care and that their legal rights are not sufficiently secured. Furthermore, they find that the co-operation between different systems (i.e. legal and social) is insufficient. Finally, they find that the treatment and education that young people receive in secure care institutions is incoherent and that there is great diversity between the units. They recommend vast changes on different levels – practical, administrative and legislative – if Danish society is to properly care for young people confined to secure care (Hansen & Zobbe, 2006: 191).

The young people are assigned to the institutions from a waiting list and go to the first unit with room. They are thus assigned to the institutions at random. There are programmes to make the individual institution more specialised towards certain groups of young people (e.g. those with diagnoses of psychiatric problems) and in the past five years there has been more focus on training and educating staff. Nonetheless, the extensive changes suggested by Hansen and Zobbe (2006) have not been realised.

In a qualitative study about residential care in Denmark including secure care, the researchers find that the staff often know very little about the young people when they enter the institutions (Egelund & Frydensbjerg, 2011). The researchers also find that the observed staff categorise the young people, not on their prospects of reintegration in society, but rather on how well they adapt to the norms and expectations of the institution, i.e. of the staff. Acceptance of the young people smoking cigarettes is common practice in most institutions but in some, as in the one described by Tine Egelund and Gitte Frydensbjerg (2011) in their study, there is also an unofficial acceptance of the young people smoking hash. Surprisingly, they also find that violence between the young people is tolerated to a certain degree and that the staffs do not have clear guidelines about how to handle violence and threatening behaviour.

Egelund and Frydensbjerg (2011: 230) concludes that the overall goals for the social work conducted in secure care institutions are unclear and almost non-existent. They furthermore state that staff energy and resources are mainly used to avoid conflicts and that in the institutional set-up there are few possibilities for treatment. In this environment it is difficult or almost impossible to start processes of re-socialisation and re-integration and the ambition of the staff is therefore more modest – to give the young people a good time (Egelund & Frydensbjerg, 2011: 233).

I will end this part on the secure care institution by looking abroad again – this time not to another Scandinavian country, but across the Atlantic to the US. In the past 10 years US social work programmes have had a great influence on Danish social welfare initiatives towards vulnerable children and their families. We are experiencing a development in which evidence-based programmes with standard manuals and methods predominantly stemming from the US are increasingly being introduced within Danish child protection.

In connection to a research visit at a small research institution, the 'Scientific Institute of Social Analysis' near Berkeley in California, I also visited the 'Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center'. The visit was made possible through the 'Seneca Center' which primarily provides social support for vulnerable children and their families, including juvenile offenders. Here,

I experienced an institution very different for Danish secure care units in almost all aspects.

At the time of my visit, the 'Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center' held almost 200 children and young offenders in six units, each with room for 30 young people. The young people were not allowed to wear their own clothes or take any private items into their cells. In their cells there were no windows apart from a small one in the door, and the only furniture was a built-in bed, a built-in table and chair, and a steel toilet and sink. Daily routines were minutely organised by guards and all the young people had to attend school. There was a central control room overlooking the entire centre via cameras. Contrary to the Danish secure care institutions which from the inside most of all reminded me of a normal youth club, the 'Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center' was – with its cells, guards and discipline – a real prison, also on the inside.

Youth in secure care

Not much is known about the background of young people being placed in secure care in Denmark. In this part of the thesis I will first present descriptive details about the young people generated from administrative registers from Danish Regions and Statistics Denmark[2]. The presentation is not exhaustive of the vast possibilities of analyses that the registers hold, but hopefully it will contribute to a more complete picture of the background of the young people going to secure care. This part will end with a short descriptive presentation of key characteristics of the young people I met during the study.

Looking at the central background factors presented in table 2 where young people in secure care aged from 14 to 18 are compared with their peers in open residential care, we see that young people going to secure care are predominantly boys. From the register data it is, however, evident that there has been an increase in the share of girls being remanded to secure care: in 2000 two per cent of the young people were girls and in 2007 this had risen to almost 10 per cent.

[2] I would like to gratefully thank senior researcher Mette Lausten and student Anne Toft Hansen for their help organizing and combining different registers and conducting the analyses.

Table 2

Background factors for youth (age 14-18) in secure care and open residential care 2000-2007

Background factors	*Per cent in secure care**	*Per cent in open residential care*
Gender: boys	93	52
Psychiatric diagnosis	11	26
Criminal record before placement	17	2
Child protection case before placement	49	42
Immigrants	18	10
Immigrant parents	29	4

**If a youth have been to secure care they only appear in this group*

Source: register data

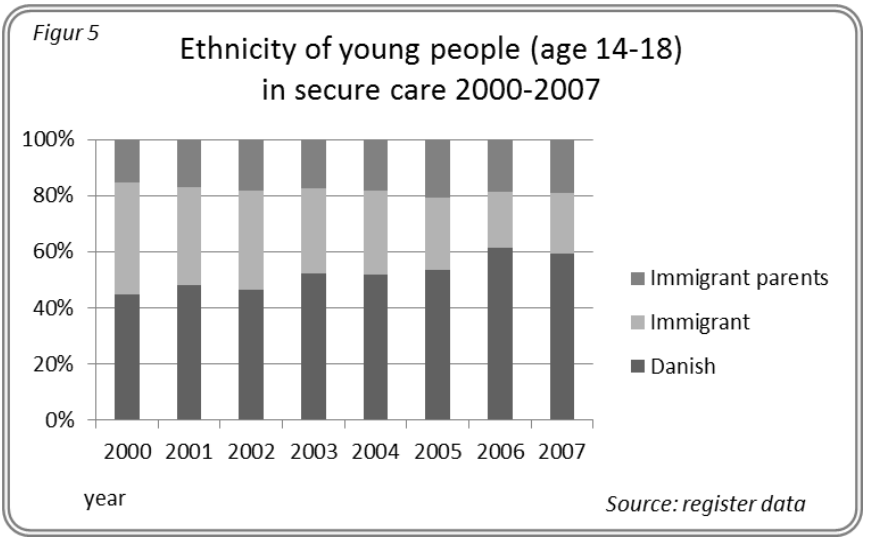
Compared to young people in open residential care, the young people in secure care do not as often have a psychiatric diagnosis. However, Hansen and Zobbe (2006: 46) find in their study that although many of the young people in secure care do not have a psychiatric diagnosis, they are often described by staff and social workers as having psychiatric problems. They find that 26 per cent of the young people in secure care are registered as having a psychiatric diagnosis (i.e. appears in the psychiatric register) (Hansen & Zobbe, 2006: 47). These differences are difficult to explain as there seems to be an increase in the share of young people with a psychiatric diagnosis from 2000 to 2007. In 2000 almost 9 per cent were registered, compared with almost 14 per cent in 2007. The differences between the studies may be due to the fact that Hansen and Zobbe (2006) do not use the official register from Danish Regions (at the time called

Amtsrådsforeningen) but use their own data collection of young people being remanded to secure care.

Looking at the shares in table 2 we see, not surprisingly, that more young people in secure care have a criminal record than those in open residential care. What is a bit of a surprise is that prior to going into secure care, more young people in secure care had contact with the child protection services. Almost half of those young people had thus been known by the child protection system before their placement; see table 2.

From table 2 we also see that the majority of young people being remanded in secure care are Danish. However, it is also evident that the share of the young people with a different ethnicity than Danish is larger than in the population as a whole. Immigrants and young people with immigrant parents constitute 47 per cent of all placements, while the share of young people (age 14-18) being immigrants or having immigrant parents is almost 11 per cent (age 14-18) in 2007 (Danmarks Statistik (Statistics Denmark), 2011). Interestingly, from the numbers in table 2, we can see that young people with a different ethnicity than Danish are less often placed in open residential care, which is especially true for young people with immigrant parents. Despite the over-representation of immigrant young people and young people with immigrant parents in secure care, there has from 2000 to 2007 been a decrease in the share of immigrants and young people with immigrant parents going into secure care; see figure 5.

Figur 5



While the share of young people with immigrant parents throughout the years remains relatively stable at around 16 to 19 per cent, the share of immigrant young people has dropped from 40 per cent in 2000 to 21 per cent in 2007. Consequently, the share of Danish young people has increased from 45 per cent in 2000 to 59 per cent in 2007; see figure 5.

If we look at the background factors for parents of young people in secure care, we see in table 3 that three per cent and five per cent of the fathers have died. Almost two-fifths of the parents have a psychiatric diagnosis and one-fifth of the parents were themselves placed in out-of-home care as children. 35 per cent of the fathers have a criminal record, while the same is true for 10 per cent of the mothers.

Table 3

Background factors for parents of young people (age 14-18) in secure care 2000-2007

Background factors	*Per cent*
Dead before placement, mum	3
Dead before placement, dad	5
Psychiatric diagnosis, mum	20
Psychiatric diagnosis, dad	18
Out of home placement as child, mum	11
Out of home placement as child, dad	7
Criminal record, mum	10
Criminal record, dad	35
No secondary education, mum	46
No secondary education, dad	38
Not in employment, mum	41
Not in employment, dad	29

Source: register data

When looking at the parents' education, in table 3 we see that almost half the mothers have no schooling beyond secondary school, which is true for 38 per cent of the fathers. The mothers are also more often out of employment, 41 per cent, while the same is true for 29 per cent of the fathers. All in all, it is safe to conclude that the parents of young people in secure care less often have higher education and are less often in employment than the general population of Danish parents (age 3-18) (Ottosen, Andersen, Nielsen, Lausten, & Stage, 2011).

From table 4 we see that for a significant share of youth in secure care, the future holds no great promise. One out of four does not have the most basic qualification from secondary school four years after their

placement in secure care, despite the fact that all of them four years later are more than 18 years old and past the age of secondary school. In comparison, 16 per cent of young people in open residential care do not have their secondary school qualification 4 years after their placement. It is well documented that children and young people in out-of-home care suffer from lack of education (Andersen, 2008), and these calculations seem to stress that young people in secure care in particular suffer from lack of education.

Table 4

2008 outcomes for young people (age 14-18) in secure care and open residential care in 2004

Background factors	*Per cent from secure care**	*Per cent from open residential care*
No exam from secondary school	25	16
Criminal record (2005-2007)	69	17
Died	1	1.5

**If a young person has been in secure care they only appear in this group*

Source: register data

From table 4 we also see that 69 per cent of the young people going into secure care in 2004 had a criminal record after having been in secure care (2005 to 2007). It seems that crime continues to be a part of the lives of the majority of young people four years after their placement (see also Clausen & Kyvsgaard, 2009). In comparison, 17 per cent of young people in open residential care had a criminal record four years after their placement. In the general Danish population of males aged from 15 to 20, less than eight per cent have a criminal record (Justitsministeriets Forskningskontor (The Research Office under The Ministry of Justice), 2010).

An unsettling result is that four years after their placement, one per cent of the young people in secure care and 1.5 per cent of those in open

residential care have died. Considering that we are only looking at a four year period and that the young person cannot be older than 22, such a mortality rate is high. From the registers we find that for the population in general the mortality rate for this age group is very low (0.15 per cent). So not only are the majority of young people from secure care facing more challenges in relation to education and employment, they also have a higher risk of dying at a young age.

It is beyond the scope of this study to explain why young people in secure care come from the disadvantaged backgrounds presented here. It is also beyond the study to explain the developments and changes registered here. The backgrounds and development presented do however clearly show that young people in secure care come from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds and that their chances of future success are limited.

I cannot say that the young people I met during my study are representative of young people in secure care in general, but they definitely share many of the characteristics outlined above. All the information I have about them is based on conversations, interviews and interactions with them. I have not accessed their files or discussed them with the staff, their parents, the police or social workers.

I met about 40 young people, one of them a girl. I met six of them outside secure care, one in a jail in a small town, and five in Copenhagen jail. Prior to their placement in secure care, most of the young people had spent time in a jail, from one day to three months.

The young people were 15 to 20 years old and they were all in police custody awaiting trial for real or presumed crimes; they were charged with a number of different crimes such as violent assault, breaking and entering, theft, drug possession and dealing, rape and vandalism. Some were charged with one offence while others faced multiple charges. For some it was their first time in secure care; others had been there several times and had experience of a number of the seven secure care institutions. One boy spent two weeks in secure care, while one of his peers had spent almost a year there.

I met young people with different ethnicities such as Danish, Turkish, Kurdish, Palestinian, Iranian, Romanian, Moroccan, Pakistani and Bosnian, as well as young people with mixed ethnicity such as Moroccan and Danish.

Some of the young people with a different ethnicity than Danish had lived all their lives in Denmark but had immigrant or refugee parents. Others had themselves immigrated or fled to Denmark with their families. One boy had fled without his parents.

Some of the young people lived outside secure care at home with both their parents; others lived at home with one parent while some were in foster care families or residential care. A few also lived on their own. The young people's parents predominantly had unskilled employment, were small shop owners, were on sick benefit, were on unemployment benefit, social benefits or social pensions. I met no young people with parents with a higher education. Some of the young people talked about parents with illnesses and psychological problems, and others of parents with different kind of addictions. A few even let it be known that they had parents in prison.

A little more than half of the young people were either in secondary school, further education or employment; the rest had no regular occupation. Only a few had their final qualification from secondary school, either because they were still attending or because they had dropped out. Many appeared to have a criminal record already.

There is no doubt that the young people's backgrounds and former experiences play a significant role in the overall understanding of their meaning-making. These background characteristics do to a different degree play a role in all the four papers in Section Two. In some analyses they have a more central position than in others, but it is important to know and acknowledge that these young people are not the average young Dane, but a selected group of young boys with marginalised backgrounds.

METHOD

1

The smell of burned toast drifts into the long and wide corridor. It blends with the distinct smell of basement and soap always present and tells me that someone is in the kitchen. I don't know how that can be. I've been sitting in the corridor for more than an hour and haven't seen anyone enter the kitchen. I try to think. Did I go to the bathroom without remembering? Did I fall asleep? No, I decide. I could never fall asleep on this hard chair. But then how could someone have entered the kitchen without me knowing? I get up and move towards the kitchen door; it is locked. I stand for a moment. How can it smell of burned toast when the kitchen is locked?

One of the five blue doors on the other side of the corridor opens and Imran, 16 years old, comes into the corridor. 'Are we having toast?' He looks at me. I shrug my shoulders. 'I don't know', I say, 'the kitchen is locked'. Imran walks over and tries to open the door: 'Yes'. We stand a little while looking at the locked door. 'Don't you have a key?' he asks. I take a deep breath: 'Well, yes, but I don't think I'm allowed to open the kitchen door'. Imran shakes his head a little and then goes back into his room leaving me alone in front of the kitchen door.

I think about going into the office and asking the staff about the burned toast but I don't. I go back to 'my' chair. I look at a magazine sitting on the table next to me. Should I pick it up? I decide not to. I've already read it twice. I look at my watch. It's only two hours since I arrived.

2

It's almost ten o'clock in the evening. Rodez, Allan and Abham, all 16 years old, are sitting in the corridor together with Bryan, one of the staff, and me. Abham gets up to show how easily he can jump over the football table further down the corridor. Bryan gets up but before he finishes telling Abham not to jump, Abham is flying over the table in a long jump. We all laugh, Rodez and Allan cheering. 'Try it' Abham tells them. Bryan gets on his feet: 'No, it's off to bed now'.

I stand in the corridor. Bryan and Shaman from the staff are trying to get the five boys to go to bed. 'Now stay in your rooms' Bryan shouts in a friendly tone from the corridor. We can hear Abham shouting out of his window to the other boys. Bryan shakes his head and goes into Abham's room to make him stop. I'm alone in the corridor when Rodez pops his head out of his room looking up and down the corridor. He puts his fingers across his lips signalling for me to be quiet as he quickly sneaks into Allan's room. I smile as I hear the two boys giggle. Shaman comes out of Nick's room. 'All in bed' he states. I don't reply.

3

'Lunch is ready' Linda, one of the staff, calls out. I sit down at the well-laid table. 16 year old Nick comes in and drops down opposite me. He puts four slices of bread on his plate and digs into the many dishes. Allan and Rodez enter and sit down at the opposite end of the table. Linda and Bryan sit down next to me, leaving two seats empty on either side of Nick. Abham and Imran enter. Amham looks at the table 'I'm not sitting next to a pig', he states, looking at the empty seats next to Nick. Bryan interrupts:

> ‘Stop acting like a baby, Abham’. Rodez barges in: ‘But he is a pig, look at all the food he grabbed’. All the boys, except Nick, laugh. Nick picks up his plate and rushes out of the room. Linda gets up to follow him and states: ‘This is no way to behave and you know it!’ Abham and Imran slide onto the chairs next to Nick’s empty seat. ‘Let’s hope he’s not coming back’ Imran snorts.

Puzzlement, tediousness, humour, fear, monotony, sadness and liveliness were just a few of the experiences imprinted in me after conducting the fieldwork. As episode one shows, my position in the field was predominately marked by waiting for something to happen. However, I often found that when something did happen I did not quite understand it. I did not have the information needed to make sense of the burned toast, and in many situations I found myself lacking knowledge. In the beginning I was lacking basic knowledge about the secure care systems; later I was lacking knowledge about decisions made at staff meetings, and at times I lacked knowledge about the young people’s internal disputes. I was therefore often ignorant and also perceived as such by both the young people and the staff. They were mostly helpful and understanding, but most of the time they simply accepted my presence by leaving me to myself. I became someone to talk to or ask questions to if nobody else was there but most often, as in episode three, I was not actively drawn into conversations or episodes, either by the staff or the young people.

Above all the total experience was marked by a feeling of being ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 2003 [1966]:41): I was definitely that which did not belong in the context of the secure care setting. My goal was to undertake a study of the young people’s lives and I therefore did not wish to be seen as one of the staff. My goal was to get close to the young people and their experiences. Positioning myself as staff would inevitability have given me privilege over the young people. I would have had the power to control them and would have had to enforce the institutional rules. In episode two, where the boys are running from room to room at bedtime, my passive position would have been impossible had I taken on the role of staff. At times it was very difficult not to act as a staff member, such as when the young people bullied each another, and a few times I did interfere and correct them. In these situations they would often not listen to me and would continue, and I would leave them to themselves.

Of course, being a young Danish female with a middle-class background, I could never be one of those young people. I therefore faced the challenge of creating a new role in the secure care setting. However, a new role was not easily established because it was not needed in the field from the beginning. I was the only one fully (and at times not even) knowing why I was there. As one of the boys continually asked me: 'Why don't you leave?' When I would try to explain my research he would shake his head: 'You have a key and you could just walk out of that door and never come back'. I could and at times I seriously considered the option, but I never did and it never really became clear to the young people why I was there. With time I came to see myself as having an in-between role of being neither staff nor young person, making it possible to create a subtle trust with the young people.

I did not, however, manage to create as integrated a role as I had anticipated. I continued throughout the field studies to be 'matter out of place'. I came to accept that I would never be a natural part of the field and that my role was to be that of an observer and that I could only momentarily participate actively. I will not analyse here in depth whether this position affected my data, as this is the issue which I address in Paper 4: 'What is data?' However, I will say that, despite the distress this role of non-participation evidently created, this role was the only one available to me and it ended up being full of potential.

The three episodes cited above capture some of the aspects of my being in the field, but the experience itself can never be fully presented. Following the interpretive turn in qualitative methods, there is no right presentation 'out there' for me to go and catch – so my goal has been to try and capture both the young people's and my own interpretations in a meaningful way. My interpretation thus cannot be seen as the elucidation of a pre-existing truth or meaning that objectively exists, but as the contextual creation of meaning by both the participants and me. No interpretation can be objectively 'true', as each must be valued by its contextual meaningfulness. Meaning has thus been re-located from a reality 'out there' to a reality as it is experienced and interpreted socially (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008; Schwandt, 2000).

From this position it becomes evident that I as a researcher cannot (and should not) objectify the field of inquiry by remaining unaffected by and external to the interpretive process. Rather, what I have sought to do by immersing myself in the field is to understand meaning as it is constituted in the field. Meaning, just as with 'truth', cannot be seen as an 'object' out there in the field for me to go and uncover (Schwandt, 2000: 195). Rather, meaning is constructed in an on-going interpretation of 'what is going on' between me, the field, and the academic field of sociology. This means that there is never a finally correct meaning to uncover or be located 'out there' because the 'out there' is in itself my creation of meaning.

Understanding thus becomes a 'practical experience in and of the world that, in part, constitutes the kinds of people that we are in the world. Understanding is "lived" (Schwandt, 2000: 196). It is different aspects of this lived understanding that it has been my goal to present in the following four papers. As the three episodes introducing this part of the thesis elucidate, the goal is through my experience of placing myself in the field to unravel some of the less known meanings of everyday life in secure care in Denmark and thus of the meaning-making of the young people that it holds.

In the remaining part of Section One I will go over the research process and through it explain how the field study came into being. I will then describe who I came to analyse in the data. I will not here address the question in depth of what data are, as the issue is dealt with in Paper 4: 'What is data?' Finally, I will discuss some of the ethical questions arising in the study.

The research process

Starting the study I had a clear idea about what to do: first of all I had to get access to a secure care unit. Fortunately, this happened very easily. The director of the first secure care institution that I contacted was very positive towards the study. She quickly established contact between me and one of the unit managers in the institution. The manager was also very positive towards my ideas and fully accepted my wish to be part of the everyday life of the unit without being part of the staff.

Before beginning the actual field study I presented my project and ideas at a staff meeting. Here, I also stressed my wish not to be part of the

staff which created friendly laughter among the staff and questions such as, "What will you do then?" I explained that I hoped to form a kind of friendship with the young people and through my presence in the unit gradually gain their confidence (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). The staffs were supportive of this idea but also pointed out that they would expect my loyalty if conflicts were to arise and that I would leave the unit if violence occurred. I never had to leave the unit and the staff never questioned my loyalties, not even when I did not reveal to them that the young people were in procession of a smuggled in cell phone.

I had initially planned not to ask for a key to the unit because the key is a strong symbol of power in an institution where people are confined. Carrying a key, I reasoned, would make it more difficult not to be associated as staff. However, both the director and the unit manager insisted that I had my own key, both to secure my safety but also for practical reasons, e.g. I could not go to the lavatory without a key. Having a key proved at times to be a challenge, such as in the first episode introducing this part of the thesis where Imran asks me to unlock the kitchen door. Nevertheless, having a key also had advantages because it made it easier for me to come and go at my own discretion, without being dependent on the staff. Having a key showed this was not the biggest challenge in obtaining the role of friendship with the young people. Rather, these difficulties were connected to other more profound challenges that I discuss in detail in Paper 4: 'What is data?'

I decided to stay in the unit for two and a half months, recognising that my presence was no advantage to the staff and meant extra work for them in spending time introducing me, helping me with practicalities and not least looking after my safety. Altogether, I spent about 300 hours in the unit, often arriving in the morning and leaving at night for several days in a row.

After this first field study I conducted two shorter visits to two other secure care units, one lasting a week and one a day. These visits helped me to check and evaluate my initial analysis from the first field study. I was granted access to both institutions by the directors and was also here met with interest and friendliness from the staff.

I furthermore conducted two visits to jails. As mentioned before, most of the young people I encountered in secure care had been in jail prior to their placement in secure care. Experiences from the jails played a significant

role in many of the young people's conversations, and conflicts stemming from the jails were imported into the secure care institutions. At the same time, the young people had choking stories from the jails and what it was like to be confined there. One boy aged 17 told me how he had spent three months almost in isolation in a jail because there had been no other prisoners below the age of 18 there, and he was not allowed to be with the adult prisoners. Another boy aged 16 told me how he was told to pee in the sink in the cell because the guards did not have the time to take him to the bathroom. These and other stories of degrading conditions made me visit the jails to better understand what the young people had experienced there before being transferred to secure care.

Access to the two jails was first given by The Danish Prison and Probation Services and then by the governors of the jails. I was again met with both interest and kindness from the staff and the visits were enlightening. From these two visits I got an idea about the significance of the experience to the young people and a better understanding of the harshness of their experiences. It made good sense that in comparison secure care appeared like a refuge.

Altogether, I met around 40 young people in the three secure care institutions and two jails. I recorded open-ended interviews with 21 of the young people lasting from 10 minutes to two hours (see Appendix B, interview checklist and list of interviews). All interviews were transcribed. I had initially planned to conduct in-depth interviews with the young people focusing on their experiences in secure care, their life on the outside, their family relations and their upbringing (see Appendix B, list of interviews and interview guidelines). I planned to draw diagrams of their networks during the interviews. But the interviews did not pan out in the way I had planned. For most of the young people, the interview situation was very uncomfortable and it was difficult for them to talk freely about their experiences. I did not give up conducting interviews, but during the study I lowered my expectations to what information the sessions could reveal. The challenges of conducting interviews are further discussed in Paper 4: 'What is data?' where I also look into the possible reasons for my difficulties in conducting the interviews.

I also tried to conduct a focus group interview with five boys. I carried out the interview after a 'youth meeting' where the staff and the young people had discussed issues about how to make everyday life easier. I placed the digital recorder on the table and told the boys that I would like to hear their opinion about things which puzzled me. First, one of the boys asked if he had to participate. I explained that it up to them whether to participate or not, and that they did not have to answer the questions and would be free to leave at any time. The boy crossed his arms and leaned back into his chair, not participating, but staying. When I asked my first question about surveillance, none of the boys replied. While I tried to explain my reasons for asking, one of the boys picked up the digital recorder. He started to talk into the recorder, giving threats: 'I know who you are and I'll find you when I get out'. It was a joke and we all laughed. Afterwards, three of the boys tried to answer a few of my questions before the interview dissolved. Thereafter, I did not attempt to conduct formal focus group interviews, but of course when hanging out in the unit I would often discuss issues with the boys with them being in a group. I would later recall these 'informal' focus group interviews in my field notes.

I did not study the boys' files or discuss the young people with the staff, so all the information in the study is based on what they have told me themselves or what was revealed in conversations in the unit or in the interviews. I chose this design because of my interest in examining the young people's own meaning-making. I feared that others' interpretations would make it difficult for me to keep focus on the young people's own interpretations. In the secure care setting the young people's personalities and actions are evaluated and analysed all the time by the staff, and reports from the police and social services are collected to give an impression of the individual situation. While the young person may or may not recognise – or even know about – the interpretations made in these documents, these are interpretations made by others and thus remove focus from the young person's own interpretations.

Writing field notes while at the unit proved impossible, so I had to write them afterwards. To my surprise I found it quite straightforward to recall most interactions of the day in some detail when they were still fresh in my mind. I noted episodes, interaction and speech as well as details about

the physical setting such as clothes, the position of furniture and other objects. Furthermore, I noted questions and uncertainties about how to understand episodes. I would always keep pen and paper in my pockets to write down direct dialogue while it was fresh in my mind in the privacy of the lavatory. The three episodes introducing this section are taken from my field notes but are shortened and rewritten to fit the style of the thesis. In the four papers the field notes are also rewritten and edited to bring forward the argument and analyses.

The more than 200 pages of field notes thus came to function primarily as a situational record helping to structure episodes, experiences, conversations and feelings, not as precise objective records. The role of field notes in the study is further discussed in Paper 4: 'What is data?' where I also try to show how both interviews and field notes are conditioned by the context of the secure care setting.

The field study proved to be a greater challenge than I had anticipated and afterwards I had difficulties in letting go. I kept thinking about the young people: if they were still in the secure care unit; if they had been to trial; if they had been reunited with their friends and family; if they had gone to prison. A few months after ending the first field study I tried to contact some of the young people to meet them and maybe re-interview them. In the secure care unit they had given me their phone numbers and agreed to meet with me a few months later. It proved impossible to meet with any of them on the outside. Some of the phone numbers no longer existed. I managed to get hold of Nick, but he did not wish to meet with me. I also got in contact with Abham and twice arranged to meet with him, but he never showed up. I tried to contact Rodez, who had been transferred to another secure care unit after being convicted and given a two year sentence, but he did not wish to see me. I then gave up trying to meet the young people again outside the secure care setting.

Analysing data

After ending the field study I found it difficult to read my notes and the interview transcripts. At first I did not know why it was so unpleasant for me to read through the data but I realised that it represented a number of issues

that I had to – but could not – deal with. First of all, the data represented the experience of being locked up in secure care and this experience was far from pleasant and not one I wished to re-immerse myself in regularly through reading the notes and transcripts. Furthermore, the data continuously reminded me of the young people and their often harsh stories; stories with little hope and with no ending as I did not know what had happened to those young people beyond secure care. Third, I had an all-encompassing feeling of not having secured the data that I needed to do the study. I was left with a strong feeling of having no data and thus having nothing to say or write about. The dominant experience that nothing was going on – not in secure care and not in my data – strongly marked the initial analytical work after the first field study.

My solution was to put the data aside. I reassured myself that although I did not reread interviews and field notes over and over again, the experience was still very much present. Instead, I turned to the literature, reading numerous different texts. In this reading I came across the Cultural Criminology tradition and read about their insistence on the mundane. Reading about boredom, my own experience of being bored in secure care stood out. I soon realised that boredom was one of the most profound experience that I had taken with me from my field study. I started to dig into the literature on boredom and the more I read, not only my own experience but also the actions of the young people started to become meaningful. I had no difficulties returning to the interviews and the field notes to see if boredom was also a theme there, and afterwards structuring and organising the data no longer represented a difficulty.

Although, as discussed above, the data did not capture the concrete fieldwork experience, it helped me in trying to remember the sentiments of the entire experience. At no stage of the analytical process did I systematically organise the data; rather, I attempted to follow the synergy between theory and empiricism that I found analysing the role of boredom in the secure care setting in an attempt to reveal new connections in data.

An analytical strategy going back and forth between theory and empiricism in processes like the one just described is neither deductive nor inductive. Rather, it is abductive in attempting to successively develop the empirical area and adjust and refine the applied theory. By focusing on

understanding and exploring underlying patterns through abduction, it has been my goal to create new knowledge in the continuous alternation between theory and empirical facts when reinterpreting both in the light of the other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009: 4-6).

Nonetheless, capturing and explaining this analytical process was a challenge. Not only did I have to formulate the actual analyses in a logical order for the reader to follow, but I also had to write in English and not my mother tongue, Danish. One of the most tangible challenges was that data was collected in Danish but the presentation had to be in English. It was not just a question of translation, as meaning had to be transferred from one language to another, a difficulty that I first became aware of in the process of writing. Complexity increased as meaning and concepts that appeared self-evident and logical in a Danish context were misinterpreted by international reviewers. I realised that writing is actively portraying reality and my use of language to create meaning is not given, but is my active and creative presentation of the empirical material. Thus, rather than trying to build a solid theoretical and empirical ground, I have worked with numerous constructions and interpretations. As Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011: 38) write, 'We must, in a sense, invent the world we are trying to understand'.

Ethics

I have chosen to include ethics as a separate discussion here because a critical ethical question arose when I was conducting the study: the young people could not escape being part of the study. Being confined to secure care there was no way for them to avoid meeting and interacting with me. They could not tell me to leave or not to observe them. Of course they had the illusory option of staying in their rooms and refusing to talk to me, but in reality they had no power to circumvent participating in the study. They had to participate in everyday life in the secure care unit and through this participation they were also forced into my study.

If the ambition is to conduct value-fee ethnography based on codes of ethics this study, or any study, in secure care would have been impossible. First, I could not claim to have all the young people's *informed consent* that

they agreed voluntarily to participate without any physical or psychological coercion (Christians, 2000: 138). Second, I could not guarantee that their agreement to participate was based on *full and open information* (Christians, 2000: 138). Although I was willing to and tried to provide the young people with information about the study, they rarely listened or showed any interest. Third, at times I feared that this lack of information in practice resulted in a *deception* of the young people and that this 'deception' was the only reason that I could stay in the field. Had the young people, or even the staff, fully known my careful registration of their conversations, movements and interactions, they may have felt monitored and perhaps would not have tolerated my presence.

Does this mean that I should not have conducted the study? No, but it did mean that my research ethics became extremely important. I of course knew before starting the study that the young people would not have the possibility of refusing to participate and I therefore made an 'ethical strategy' that they should have the power to refuse to take part as far as possible. They should have the power to ask me not to 'hang out' with them both in their private rooms but also in the common rooms. They should have the power to refuse to be interviewed and they should have the power not to interact with me. Above all, I tried to be attentive to respecting their dismissals even when these were not verbally expressed. For example, if I entered a room and the young people in there all fell silent, I would quickly leave in an attempt to respect their privacy.

All the way through the research process I have tried to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the young people. Their identities have been camouflaged in a number of ways. First, only a few people know which institutions and units I conducted field studies in. Second, all the young people have been given pseudonyms. Third, those pseudonyms change across and sometimes within the same paper. Fourth, places and names of staff, and the young people's family and friends have been changed across the papers. Fifth, key characteristics without relevance to the concrete analyses have been changed, such as crimes, age, ethnicity and family background. These changes have not been made to deceive the reader, but to fully ensure the anonymity of the participating young people.

I wrote my first newspaper article for a Danish newspaper towards the end of my first field study (see appendix C). When it was accepted, I took it to the unit and fortunately one of the boys showed an interest in reading it. While reading he suddenly stopped and with concern he said, 'Do you know that you got us all mixed up in here? It's not just that you give us wrong names, but I'm the one who's been in a jail for three months and Karmal is the one trying to contact his lawyer all the time, we are not the same person'. Of course I knew and I was glad to discover that even one of the boys found it confusing to figure out who was who. He did, however, say that he could tell from the article that I had spent a lot of time with them in the unit.

I wished to humanise the young people by personalising their motivations, actions and choices by applying a social ethic based on a contextual moral obligation towards the young people under study. This moral is rooted in respect for human relationships and the position of the 'other' (Christians, 2000). Undoubtedly, this was a difficult task. Clear rules on how to secure an ethical study would have been a relief, but when ethics become context dependent, there is no other way than to try reflectively integrating ethics into every aspect of the research process.

'Ethnography, like art, is always political' writes Norman Denzin (2000: 915). My ethnography has not had a political goal but it is important to recognise that it is political in its subject, in its framing and in its theorising. It has been political in the ambition to unravel the experiences of those less heard and in my insistence of searching for meaningfulness where no meaning is apparently to be found. In these ambitions I have found great inspiration in the works of the Chicago School ethnographers and their interest in the deviant, the outsider and the poor (such as Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1955; Park, 2005 [1915]; Whyte, 1981[1943]). I am not arguing that I am giving 'voice' to the young people confined in secure care, but rather that I am presenting new interpretations of their everyday lives in secure care and beyond. It is my hope that these interpretations are not only meaningful to me but also to the young people and the readers of this thesis.

In writing the thesis I have shared my thoughts and initial results by participating in the public debate on youth crime in Denmark. I have reacted to what I have at times found to be an unsubtle debate about 'criminal youth' overlooking the experiences and positions of the young people in focus (see

appendix C for the concrete contributions). It is inevitable that partaking in the public debate has influenced not only the interpretations made in the thesis but also my role as an aspiring researcher within the broader field of criminology in Denmark. Having encountered the young people in secure care, I had a strong urge to react and contribute with new perspectives on 'criminal youth'. I fully acknowledge that transforming my interpretations into public form (especially before having handed in the thesis) involved a moral-political commitment from my side. No interpretation is neutral and my goal with participating in the public debate was not neutral, but an active attempt of trying to nuance the debate. My goal was to humanise the young people by not only focusing on them as 'dangerous children' but also as 'children in danger'.

SECTION TWO

Section 2 consists of the four papers in the thesis: 'Boredom and Action—Experiences from Youth Confinement; 'Learning to become a gangster'; '"It's what you have to do!" Exploring the role of high-risk edgework and advanced marginality in a young man's motivation for crime'; 'What is data? Ethnographic experiences with young offenders'. In order to maintain the flow of the research process through the thesis the papers are presented in the sequence that they were written. This sequence is not however a result of the papers illustrating a linear progression in the analyses, and it is possible to read them independently and in any order.

Paper 1 focuses on 'Boredom and Action' as central experiences in the secure care setting. The experience of boredom was not a unique experience to me in conducting the field study in the secure care setting, but also a significant aspect of the lives of the young people confined there. In the paper I analyse how this boredom can be understood as a meaningful response to being confined, but also how it relates to the young people's lives on the outside. I find that boredom is not a new experience and that their crimes can at times be seen as attempts at breaking with the experience of boredom through the generation of action. Also in the secure care setting, the generation of action becomes a way of breaking with the institutionalised boredom for the young people in an attempt to create excitement. At times action takes the form of high-risk edgework, where the young people through their skills seek the thrills of transgression. The analyses, however, also show that breaking with boredom through action is short-lived and followed by renewed boredom.

Paper 2 on 'Learning to become a gangster' shows how three boys teach a new fourth boy how to become what they call 'a real gangster'. The three boys belong to a unique 'gangster' subculture that exists not only in the secure care setting but also in the boys' lives on the outside. In the process of teaching the new boy about their subculture, the three boys reveal the constituents of their subculture and the meaning that it entails for them. Learning to become a gangster in the secure care setting involves a short-term learning process connected to learning the unique gangster language and the specific gangster style. However, outside secure care learning to

become a gangster involves a long-term learning process which is closely connected to the boys' experiences of growing up in 'advanced marginality' in disadvantaged urban areas.

Paper 3 'It's what you have to do!' explores the concept of 'edgework' and how far it can explain a young man's continuous street fighting. As in paper 1 on 'Boredom and Action' I here argue that the young man's engagement in crime involves clear elements of high-risk edgework when he seeks transgression through skilful violence. His behaviour cannot however be fully explained with the concept of edgework and his quest for excitement. His experiences of 'advanced marginality', as discussed in Paper 2 'Learning to become a gangster', must also be addressed to understand his continuous acts of street fighting and thus his motivation for crime.

Paper 4 'What is data? Ethnographic experiences with young offenders' focuses on methodology and questions the ideals of ethnographic data as rich and in the form of written documentation. Discussing three apparent failures to obtain data, I argue that data cannot be reduced to interview transcripts or field notes; rather, it must be analysed relationally within the entire experience of being in the field. I seek to explain my failures by showing how what appeared as no data became data when shifting to the new understanding of it as context-dependent and relationally constructed.

There are clear overlaps between the four papers, both theoretically and empirically. Across the papers I define and reuse the same theoretical concepts from the youth studies tradition and from criminology that I presented in Section One. In particular, the concepts of 'subculture', 'edgework' and 'advanced marginality' are central to the analyses, but also theoretical discussions on 'boredom', 'intersectionality' and 'self-presentation' are significant in a number of the analyses. The theoretical concepts are combined and discussed on the basis of relevance in the papers and therefore not all aspects of the theories are covered. Furthermore, the theories have been drawn in on the basis of relevance in relation to the empirical data and not always on their own premises. I hope that playing with theories and concepts in this way has created new perspectives and insights.

Empirically, the papers overlap by at times referring to the same boys and the same episodes but with different analytical goals. As mentioned in the discussion of 'ethics', the young people's names as well as sites and places have been changed across the papers. I therefore hope that the recognition of the individual young people is reduced. Nevertheless, it is evidently the young people from my long field study in the first secure care institution who are the main informants.

It has been my goal throughout the four papers to show different aspects of young people's everyday lives in secure care keeping an openness to diverse interpretations. I am therefore not arguing that the following four papers present the only possible or meaningful interpretations of the empirical findings. Rather, it is my hope that through the analyses the reader gains new insight about young people and their everyday lives in secure care within a sociological framework.

Publication status

(January 2012)

Paper 1: 'Boredom and Action—Experiences form Youth Confinement' the version presented here is the second re-submission for Journal of Contemporary Ethnography.

Paper 2: 'Learning to become a "gangster"' is accepted for publication in Journal of Youth Studies with minor revisions.

Paper 3: '"It's what you have to do!" Exploring the role of high-risk edgework and advanced marginality in a young man's motivation for crime' is accepted for publication in Criminology and Criminal Justice with minor revisions.

Paper 4: 'What is data? Ethnographic experiences with young offenders" is submitted to Qualitative Inquiry.

PAPER 1: Boredom and Action—Experiences from Youth Confinement[3]

ABSTRACT

Few studies have examined how boredom is a central experience of everyday life. The purpose of this article is to add to the boredom-related literature by examining the role of boredom and boredom-aversion in the everyday life of young people confined in secure care for young offenders. Data are primarily drawn from a two-month ethnographic study in a Danish secure care unit and include both participant observation and interviews with unit residents. Drawing on theories of boredom and young people's creation of action through risk-taking edgework, the article demonstrates how boredom is a key experience in daily life in secure care. Waiting is a defining aspect of the experienced boredom and the young people spent much time "doing nothing," finding it difficult to relate to the unit's daily routines. Analyses show that the young people deal with the experience of boredom through the generation of risk-taking action.

Keywords: Boredom, action, edgework, young people, confinement

[3] Second re-submission for Journal of Contemporary Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

> "Damn, I'm so bored!" Rodez age17 (pseudonym) bangs his head hard against the wall. He looks at me. "This is so boring I could die!" In silence I agree, thinking of the key burning in my pocket and that I can leave and he cannot. Neither of us leaves. We stay being bored for hours on end, hoping for something exciting to happen, but it never really does.

Boredom is neither static nor fixed in time or space. Rodez's banging of his head momentarily broke the feeling of boredom, replacing it with a small hope that something other than boredom might redefine time and space in secure care. He has been placed in police custody on the charge of assaulting and robbing a bus driver and breaking and entering the home of an elderly woman. I am at the secure care unit for a two-month field study, spending entire days studying everyday life in the unit with the aim of capturing key aspects of confinement from the perspective of the incarcerated youth. One of those key aspects is boredom. The purpose of this article is to reveal the role of boredom in the life of confined young people and their attempts to break with boredom through risk-taking action.

That boredom is an experience in the daily life of young people in a setting that in many ways resembles an adult prison is not unexpected, as it carries some of the same functions: confinement and rehabilitation (Harris and Timms 1993). I argue in this paper that boredom in an institutional setting is significant, as it insinuates itself into everyday life, creating both meaninglessness and indifference (Scarce 2002). Moreover, that boredom rarely has been discussed within the social sciences is not surprising because, as Anderson (2004) suggests, in studying boredom one runs the risk of becoming enmeshed in the banality and frustration with which boredom dulls time and space. While some scholars discuss boredom theoretically (Anderson 2004; Barbalet 1999; Conrad 1997; Klapp 1986; Winter 2002) in ways that I will draw upon, none apply the theory to a particular group in a specific context and only to a limited extent by the use of ethnographic field work. Although earlier studies on youth confinement touch upon the experience of boredom (Abrams, Anderson-Nathe, and Aguilar 2008; Halsey 2007; Wästerfors 2011), as do studies of prison life (see Cohen and Taylor

1972; Crewe 2009; Irwin and Owen 2005; Scarce 2002), they do not cover the full significance of this experience for young people. In this paper I highlight boredom as it is experienced in the secure care setting, thus showing how ethnographic field work can uncover an experience that is difficult to capture and communicate.

In the secure care unit, boredom does not merely crop up every now and then; instead, it is a key characteristic of daily life. Boredom "sits in the walls[4]" and manifests in numerous ways in the social practices of those in confinement. Understanding the role of boredom in this institutional setting will therefore help us gain a fuller picture of the meaning and influence of confinement for those young people unfortunate enough to be subjected to it. Thus adding to our understanding of incarceration and the experience of it in the setting of the "total institution" (Goffman 1991 [1961]) as well as contributing to the sociology of everyday life by explicitly focusing on boredom as an everyday practice.

Boredom is not linked only to institutional time or space. Far from being limited to specific situations, being bored is part of common experience (Anderson 2004; Conrad 1997; Klapp 1986; Winter 2002). Cultural revolts against boredom—in the shape of such acts as committing crime or banging one's head against a wall in the hopes of relieving unremitting boredom—can be a strategy for creating moments that involve self-made dynamics of engagement and excitement (Cohen 1955; Ferrell 2004; Hayward 2002; Katz 1988; Matza and Sykes 1961). This strategy of chance-taking action appears to appeal primarily young adult and adolescent boys; girls and women, as well as, older men often apply more subtle and less spectacular strategies (Desmond 2006; Lois 2005; Scarce 2002), especially when it comes to crime (Contreras 2009; Katz 1988; Miller 2005).

To capture how the boys' self-generated action can be an active strategy for escaping boredom, this paper draws on Lyng's conception of risk-taking as "edgework" (see Lyng 1990; Lyng 1993). "Edgework" can be an active way of breaking with institutional constraint, because the spontaneity and excitement of high-risk action creates a momentarily feeling of freedom and power (Lyng 2005). Focusing on the experience of boredom and the boys' attempts at breaking with boredom through edgework is highly

[4] Personal correspondence with professor Tine Egelund

relevant for understanding some of the social dynamics at play for young people under confinement. By analyzing the ethnographical data as relational constructions and by actively integrating knowledge about young people's boredom and edgework and the literature on young people's incarceration, I show how boredom becomes a key experience of youth confinement. The generation of action through risk-taking edgework becomes the boys' way of actively breaking with boredom. I thus argue that this focus on boredom in part explains why these young people engage in risk-taking actions. Moreover, examining their experiences of confinement with a focus on boredom reveals how the young people through risk-taking handle constraints of incarceration.

BOREDOM AND ACTION IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

"Life," says Stengers, "is always lurking in the interstices, in what usually escapes description" (cited in Anderson 2004, 752). Boredom has almost escaped the descriptions and interests of the social sciences, despite its being a common human experience. Boredom, which is hard to grasp, is what Heidegger calls "that which makes all things and other beings and myself fuse into a colourless indifference" (cited in Anderson 2004, 744)—thereby easily evading scholarly attention. Another feature relevant for understanding the lack of studies of boredom is that, given its amorphousness as a social experience, it is hard for scholars to measure. That only few empirical studies of boredom have been conducted is not surprising. Of these, few are primarily based on ethnographic field studies of people's everyday lives (for exceptions, see Ferrell 1996; Hamper 1992; Roy 1959; Scarce 2002).

The literature dealing with boredom generally portrays it as a subjective emotional state to which a number of feelings are linked: anxiety, diffuse anger, and unpleasantness (Anderson 2004; Barbalet 1999; Conrad 1997). Nonetheless, I argue that boredom can also be a highly relevant part of a culturally or institutionally shared experience. To categorize boredom solely as an emotional state is problematic, as doing so limits boredom primarily to individual feelings and sentiments. Yet boredom is often experienced in a group or in an institutional setting, or is conditioned by the structures of a situation, such as time (Flaherty 2003; Scarce 2002). If we are to understand boredom in the life of young people placed in secure care, we

also need to consider boredom as a collective sociality. Scarce (2002, 309) writes on his own experience of "doing time": " The social side of doing time boiled down to respecting that others were doing their own time too and recognizing that time doing was a communal activity." This paper therefore focuses on boredom as a temporal experience including both individual feelings of boredom and collective and interactional factors.

Because the experience of boredom, despite its amorphousness, is deeply connected to the role of the mundane in everyday life, it is also deeply connected to the creation of meaning. As Barbalet (1999, 633) writes, "A sociological focus on boredom thus provides an account of both the mechanisms by which the social sources of meaning come into play and the dynamics of meaning formation." Boredom as an experience becomes linked to the "action" and the "structures" creating situational meaning (or in the case of boredom, creating meaninglessness). In creating meaninglessness, boredom opposes meaning. The experience of boredom, however, connotes more than an opposition to meaning "in that it does not merely register meaninglessness, but it is also an imperative toward meaning" (Barbalet 1999, 633). Seeking to break with boredom constitutes a back door for tackling or avoiding meaninglessness. Boredom therefore carries within it a dynamic element for creating action, as the person or group of persons experiencing boredom will seek a way of escaping it and will create meaning in the attempt to escape (Anderson 2004; Barbalet 1999; Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Where action is, risk-taking or what Goffman (1969) called chance-taking decades ago, is sure to be found, Barbalet (1999, 642) speaks directly to this issue:

> Some phenomena…can be explained in terms both of the social prevalence of boredom and the role boredom-aversion plays in the formation of their sustaining meanings. In particular, key aspects of gambling and risk taking in general, and also intergroup conflict, can be explained when their meaningfulness is set in the context of boredom-aversion.

The role of boredom-aversion through risk-taking likewise appears in crime, as Cohen (1955) shows in his classic work "*Delinquent Boys, Culture of the*

Gang." Matza and Sykes (1961) likewise discuss in their search for "what makes delinquency attractive" (1961, 713) that "many observers have noted that delinquents are deeply immersed in a restless search for excitement, 'thrills,' or 'kicks.'" The creation of excitement is a well-known feature in relation to crime, and while crime is not essential for creating excitement (Katz 1988; Lyng 2005), it has long been recognized that the risk involved when one commits a crime can generate immense excitement. As Matza and Stykes (1961, 713) write, "The fact that an activity involves breaking the law is precisely the fact that often infuses it with an air of excitement."

This line of thought is brought up to date in more recent studies, associated with "cultural criminology," that link boredom-aversion and the creation of action and excitement with elements of risk-taking (Ferrell 2004; Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2008). Lyng (1990; 2005) uses the term "edgework" to theorize a variety of risk-taking behaviors (skydiving, rock climbing, bungee jumping) as a way of exploring the boundary between order and disorder. On the implications of "edgework," Lyng (2005, 6) writes that "groups organized around risk-taking and adventure activities provide a refuge for social actors confronting a formal institutional environment that does not fully meet their needs." As edgework creates a momentary experience of freedom and control, a form of experience absent from other areas of modern life, edgework thus creates a rare opportunity for "creative, skilful, self-determining action" (Lyng 1990, 877). Skills, which are otherwise absent or devalued in other areas of modern life.

Action as a response to boredom appears particularly well suited for analyzing young people's lives, as young people generally occupy a social position defined by uncertainty and a state of becoming, with adolescence itself a period of experimenting and seeking action and waiting for adulthood (Furlong 1997; Miles 2000). As Conrad (1997, 474) writes:

> "Waiting" is often an occasion of potential boredom. By definition, waiting is referenced to the future until what one is waiting for arrives or one's turn comes. In waiting, there may seem to be "nothing going on" except the waiting, surely a recipe for boredom.

The notion of "hanging out doing nothing" with friends as a way of waiting and spending time is closely connected to being young and having an excess of time. "Hanging out" with friends may not disappear with adulthood, but with integration into the labour market and family life it is likely to take other forms (May 2001). At the same time, "hanging out" becomes valued and no longer seen as "doing nothing." However, as a number of studies on street subculture show breaking with life on the street is necessary to escape the experience of "doing nothing" when "hanging out" (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Collison 1996).

In the light of young people's lack of control over their own lives, the experience of "nothing going on" and "doing nothing" is common. Corrigan (1975) describes "doing nothing" as the major activity of street youth life and as a way of fighting general boredom. For less privileged young people, the streets become a place for experiencing free, creative, exciting, and self-directed behaviour; for them, "delinquency may be a form of edgework…" (Miller 2005, 154; see also Bourgois 2003). We should not view young people's edgework simply as cognitive immaturity (Millstein 1993) but, as Lyng (1993) argues, also as an active response to feelings of powerlessness and a loss of personal control. Thus crime may offer "a way of seizing control over one's destiny" (Hayward 2004, 152; see also Martin 2009).

SECURE CARE IN DENMARK

Secure care facilities for young people are a common penal institution in most western societies: for example, in Sweden (Levin 1998; Wästerfors 2011), the U.S. (Abrams and Hyun 2009), the UK (Harris and Timms 1993), and Australia (Halsey 2007). The specific design of such facilities differs among countries, as do the sex, age, and crime of the incarcerated and the national policies that put them there (Bengtsson and Jakobsen 2009; Muncie 2008; Pitts and Kuula 2005; Wikstrom and Svensson 2008). However, as a number of researchers have shown across countries, secure care is "ambiguous," as it simultaneously constitutes treatment, punishment, and incarceration, as well as an alternative to adult prison (ibid).

In Denmark secure care (*sikret institution*) also has an ambiguous function, seeking to serve the requirements of both the social services and the judicial system. It is at the same time both a social and a legal institution,

aiming at both treatment and punishment. While the staff members are not guards, but professionals with backgrounds in social work or education, they perform a number of tasks normally associated with guards: holding the keys and administering punishment. Secure care is what Goffman (1991 [1961]) in *Asylums* calls a "total institution," which he defines as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. Prisons serve as a clear example…" (Goffman 1991 [1961], 11).

Although secure care in Denmark is not a prison in the conventional sense, it has a number of prison-like characteristics (locked doors, barred windows, surveillance cameras, and high walls and fences as well as in-house treatment) holding mainly boys from 12 to 18 years of age—demonstrating that the young people placed there need to be kept under high security. As in most other western countries, Denmark's secure care facilities are designed for young people under the suspicion of real or presumed crimes or other anti-social behavior. Secure care in Denmark, therefore, is also an intervention by which the means of treatment aims at adjusting the boys' criminal behavior.

From administrative register data, I find that 96 percent of the residents are boys, of whom 53 percent are likely to be the children of non-Western immigrants or refugees. Their average stay in secure care is 60 days. The number of places in secure care has been on the rise for the past 10 years, leading to more young people being placed in secure care. As the general crime rate for young people has not increased, the reasons for this increase may well be political (Balvig 2011).

METHOD AND DATA

This study of boredom in a secure care facility draws on data from a larger dataset for my Ph.D. thesis. In total, I conducted 21 formal interviews with youth in secure care, 19 informal interviews with youth in secure care or jail, and approximately three months of fieldwork at two units, and additional visits to two jails and an additional secure care unit. While I do not draw directly on my experiences with later fieldwork, those experiences confirmed my observation from my initial fieldwork that both boredom and action are

relevant for understanding these young people's lives in secure care, as well as their more general life situations. When I entered the second secure care facility, one of the boys asked me about my project and what I found. Seeing his question as a chance to check parts of my beginning analyses on boredom I said, "I found that this place is boring". He stared at me for a while, then said, "Then you really been there." Although I tried to say more to him quickly slipped away. However, I later learned found out that he had mentioned this exchange to the other boys because two of them came up to me asking if "boredom" was really an acceptable finding. I told them that I did not know but that I planned on finding out. They laughed and wished me good luck. Telling the young people about my ideas on boredom led to a faster acceptance in this second secure care facility than in the first, as the young people viewed me much earlier as an insider—not as one of them but as one who understood what it was like to be locked up.

For the remainder of the article I draw specifically on my two-month fieldwork period where I experienced the greatest boredom. The analysis of this particular period, however, will be informed by the totality and variety of the overall fieldwork experience. Through this approach, while I seek to understand the social and cultural meanings of boredom within the secure care setting, I do not claim to represent the experiences of all young people confined to secure care (Slavin, 2004).

Both SFI—the Danish National Centre for Social Research and the Sociology Department at University of Copenhagen gave permission to apply the Danish Council for Independent Research. The council provided the funding and through it final permission for the research. The director of each secure care facility allowed me the final access to specific units. Access to the two jails came first from the Danish Prison and Probation Services and then by the jail governors. I conducted two visits to jails because almost all the boys had spent time (from 2 days to 3 months) in jails before being transferred to a secure care unit.

I did not plan to share in on the work of the staffs in the secure care units because I did not want the young people to associate me with them. Consequently, my presence entailed extra work for the staffs who had to introduces me, help me with logistics, and ensure my safety. All the way through the study the staffs was supportive and no conflicts arose between

me and the staff. Before entering the unit we had agreed that if violence would occur or I would get knowledge placing the staff or others at risk I would be loyal to the staff. Fortunately violence never occurred and the staff never questioned my loyalties.

During the two-month fieldwork in the first secure unit, I met with eight boys aged 15-19; two remained throughout the entire period, with the other six either leaving or entering. I did not study the boys' files or discuss the boys with the staff, so all the information I have about them is based on what they told me themselves or what they revealed in conversations in the unit. Two of the eight boys were Danish; the rest were ethnic minorities, either immigrants or children of immigrants from Southeast Asia, Turkey, or Bosnia. Two of the boys attended secondary school, one went to business school, and one had an apprenticeship. The remaining four were not in school and had no occupation outside the secure care unit. All were under remand and police custody, accused of crimes such as breaking and entering, robbery, stealing cars, violent assault, fighting, burglary and possession, and drug dealing. When not in secure care, six of the boys lived at home with one or two parents, one had a room of his own, and one lived in a residential care institution. Pseudonyms are used for participant confidentiality.

Altogether I spent about 300 hours in the first unit, often arriving in the morning and leaving at night for several days in a row. While I spent as much time with the boys as possible, I always asked them if I could join them when they went to each other's rooms (and they usually agreed). I did not attempt to create or promote special activities with them. This research approach positioned me primarily as an observer and an inactive participant, giving me the in-between role of being neither staff nor young person. Most of the time, once the boys realized that I was not a staff member and would not betray their secrets (such as a mobile phone smuggled in by a boy in another unit) the boys appeared to fully accept my presence and even share some secrets with me.

The boys' acceptance of my presence surprised me. Being a young female I had anticipated some difficulties in entering a field dominated by younger boys and, as I soon realized, a strong culture of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) praising not only physical strength and toughness but also male superiority. This culture was

maintained by both the young people and, to some degree, the staff. However, my gender and non-staff position meant that I presented no threat to the boys or their masculine hierarchy. While I did not challenge their culture of hyper-masculinity, neither did I support it (see also Abrams, Anderson-Nathe and Aguilar 2008; Comack 2008; Pascoe 2007). If the boys tried to flirt with or provoke me I played ignorant seeking an identity as "last-gendered" (Pascoe 2007, 175) and after two weeks, they more or less stopped challenging me. Thereafter, they accepted me asking questions, knowing that I was doing research. They even put up with my sometimes "stupid and silly" questions, such as why they did not want to work in the facility's workshops or why they watched television all through the night.

I recorded open-ended interviews with seven of the eight boys (one of the boys chose not to be interviewed). The interviews lasted about one hour and were later transcribed. Writing field notes while at the unit proved impossible so I did them afterwards, finding it easy to recall most of each day's interactions in some detail while they were still fresh in my mind (see also Vail 2001). Not surprisingly, my note-writing attracted the boys' attention, as pen and paper were foreign objects in their daily lives. The daily world of secure care is not one of reading and writing but rather of body and impulse—such as Rodez's banging his head against the wall. Occasionally I would go to the lavatory with pen and paper, to immediately capture fresh dialogue.

The field notes act as a situational record that help structure episodes, experiences, conversations, and feelings, but not as precise objective records. In organizing and analyzing the data I aimed at recalling the feelings and sentiments of the fieldwork experience. Thus, I used a relational approach to identify patterns of meaning structures within data by focusing on the notion that meaning does not derive from the individual but rather from the individuals' *relations* to other individuals (Emirbayer 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 2003). Because this position is relational, it focuses less on "true telling" (that is where the boy's telling the truth?) and more on observing and understanding relational interactions (that is *why* the boys acted and spoke as they did) Gubrium and Holstein 2008).

The significance of boredom in everyday life in the unit arose as a clear pattern of meaning during the field study, manifesting both physically

and intellectually as a daily shared experience between the boys and me as an observer. Drawing on Weber's concept of "Verstehen" (interpretive understanding) Ferrell (1998) argues, "I propose that experiential immersion on the part of field researcher can begin to unravel the lived meanings of both crime and criminal justice." Multiple readings of the more than 200 pages of field notes and the interview transcripts helped me unravel the lived meaning of the boys' experience of boredom as highly relevant and directly related not only to the institutional frame of secure care but also in part to the boys' stories about earlier life experiences.

FINDINGS

I divide my findings into six sections. First, I focus on the role of waiting in understanding boredom in secure care. Second, I explore the distortion of temporality and how what Flaherty (2003) calls "time work" relates to the boys experience of boredom. Third, I describe the routines of the secure care unit and how the boys experience these routines as almost meaningless time markers. Fourth, I focus on "hanging out" and "doing nothing" as central ways for the boys to pass time both within the secure care unit and on the outside. Fifth, I examine institutional edgework as a way of breaking up boredom. Sixth, I look at the role of edgework and crime in the boys' retelling of their lives outside secure care. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion.

Waiting

> I unlock the three locked doors and enter the secure care unit for the first time. In a small office halfway down the dark, empty corridor, I find two staff members and two boys. I enter, introduce myself to all four, and sit down with a cup of coffee. I sit for an hour and a half. The boys move in and out of the office, sitting down and getting up, then returning a little later to sit down again. While boys are allowed in the office with staff's permission it is defined as staff territory. The wide corridor functions as a shared space with computers, video games, a small table with two chairs, and a table top football game. When they are not in the office this is where the boys spent most of their time. I sit down with my coffee in the corner of the office observing, participating in small talk, and waiting for

> something to happen. This position, I soon learn, is how I am to spend most of the time during the two months: observing, making small talk, and waiting.

These two months—although professionally revealing and at times exciting—were characterized by an all-encompassing feeling of boredom. In the beginning I would sit on the same chair, in the same corridor, for hours and hours, day after day, with nothing to do and seemingly very little to observe. Boredom, I soon discovered, formed the core of the experience, as it was one of the central aspects of everyday life in the institution. Thus my boredom was not merely personal, for it is the specific experience that led me to focus on the more general collective experience of institutionalized boredom.

One of my first questions was "why": "Why am I so bored, and what exactly am I waiting for? In principle, I am already experiencing what I am waiting for—observing everyday life—so there is no need for me to be waiting." Looking back, I realize that I was waiting for the boys' wild life of crime and excitement to emerge. But it never really did, and as several scholars suggest, boredom transpires when something expected fails to occur and the disappointment creates a feeling of being cheated and left out (Conrad 1997; Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Spacks 1995). So here I was, on the inside, with a latent expectation of something exciting about to occur with a clear feeling that as long as I was waiting, I was not getting any data. The presence of boredom became the evidence that my expectations of what data was *supposed* to be like were not met, and the result was a clear experience of both having nothing to do and needing to do something to secure some data to save my project (see also Hastrup 1995).

After a few days, however, I realized that I was not the only one waiting. So were the boys. Their waiting situation was in many ways more concrete and real than mine, as they were waiting for their turn—their chance to get out of the institution and into freedom. Yet despite my having a key, I waited with them for hours. The boys often commented on my presence, and early on Imran, age 17, came up to me and asked, "Why are you here?" I started to explain, he interrupted, saying, "So you could just leave?" "Well," I said, "in principle I could just leave, but…." Again, Imran interrupted

eagerly saying, "go, go, nobody who can leave would want to stay!" Before I could formulate a reply, he went away shaking his head.

The boys' waiting time carried some of the amorphousness of general waiting and of not knowing how long they had to wait: None of the eight boys knew when he was to be released, because police custody is an open-ended period that can be prolonged (as it was for a number of them). Therefore, their immediate future was defined by uncertainties influencing many of their daily conversations: "I think maybe I'll be out of here by my birthday next week" or "do you think they will make me stay here longer after the trial?" or "I'm calling my lawyer [again] to hear if he knows when the trial is on." Such conversations between the boys and the staff were common whenever the boys sat in the office "killing time" and waiting for something, anything—the indictment, the trial, news from the police, or even a phone call from a mother or girlfriend—ultimately waiting to get their lives back. Similarly the TV, computers, video games, and the table top football game functions as time-diversion was creating a staff approved form of diversion. In each case, the boy was searching for a bit of excitement that would temporarily push the real purpose of waiting (to get out) into the background.

Temporality

Temporality in the secure care unit is not the same as outside the secure unit. Time moves slowly "inside," and deliberate efforts to manage or control various dimensions of time are reduced by the incarceration and loss of personal freedom (Cohen and Taylor 1972; Scarce 2002). To grasp the character of temporality, Michael G. Flaherty (2003) identifies five dimensions of what he calls "time work": duration, frequency, sequence, timing and allocation. "Time work" is defined "as one's effort to promote or suppress a particular temporal experience" (Flaherty 2003, 19).

All five dimensions of "time work" influenced both the boys' and my strategies for trying to control or customize time in the secure care unit. Our different use of "time work" illustrated the differences in our positions. Because I was not restrained to the unit by anyone else I could more freely manipulate with the five "time work" dimensions: Deciding how long (duration) I wanted to stay, how often I would come (frequency), what time

of the day (sequence), when during the week (timing) and most importantly if I would come at all (allocation). As I gradually changed my expectations and gave up the quest for exciting fieldwork result I also through the freedom of my "time work" regained the experience of control over time. Consequently boredom lost much of its power over me. By contrast, the boys daily faced the challenges of in dealing with temporality, as the following episode shows:

> Mark, 17 years old, is a newcomer in the unit and sits for the first time alone with the other four boys and me in the sitting room watching a popular show on TV. It is quiet as we all watch the screen in silence but when the commercials come on Imran faces Mark saying, "I hope you like the show?". "It's ok", Mark reply without looking at Imran. Imran laughs, "good, it's all there is to do in here… watch stupid TV… and sleep". We all laugh.

Imran's strategy for handling temporality in the unit is an attempt of active "time work" by increasing the *frequency* of activities he likes—even though he knows that he does not like them as much anymore. The boys often share such ironic strategies for dealing with the *duration* of their stay trying to help each other better cope with their lack of power over the *allocation* of their time. As Scarce (2002, 306) writes, "To some extent, inmates have lost control over time, and thus they have lost some control over themselves."

Although the boys seemingly have a lot of "free" time on their hands that the staff did not schedule they were physically confined to the unit, a situation creating a pervasive feeling of frustration (see also Cohen and Taylor 1972). This feeling is made even more overwhelming because the boys have no idea to what to expect of their future, as it is to be decided in court, and for long periods they may not even hae a date for their trial. Uncertainty, just as waiting, feeds boredom which thus becomes a defining feature of daily life in secure care (see also Scarce 2002).

Routines

Crucial to understanding the link between the boys' experience of temporality and that of boredom is the boys' lack of control over daily

routines and thus over both *timing* and *sequence* of events. Experiencing the days in the unit as long and without any feeling of progress is closely linked to the boys' individual experiences of "doing time". As Flaherty (2003) stresses, the very experience of temporality is shaped by one's circumstances. Likewise, my experience of temporality was influenced by my ambition of understanding both the boys' interactions and experiences and how the daily routines structured these.

During the week the boys must be up by eight o'clock for breakfast and work in a metal or wood shop in either the morning or the afternoon for about three hours. A teacher is assigned to the unit, and most of the boys have individual voluntary tutorials once or twice a week. In the afternoons and evenings they have spare time, during which some are allowed to have short visits once or twice a week or make limited phone calls. Others, by police order, cannot have contact with people on the outside, not even their parents. While the boys are not asked to help prepare meals, they are welcome to do so. They must be in bed by ten o'clock during the week and eleven o'clock on weekends.

The daily routine of the unit is both monotonous and artificial, despite the simulation of the routines of normal daily life—a simulation predetermined by others, not easily influenced by the boys' desires. These routines are far from the ones the boys describe having in their everyday lives on the outside, where life, they tell me, is marked by very little routine (especially for those not attending school or having jobs), with impulsivity and freedom being the main characteristics. As the following episode illustrates, the lack of influence creates a monotonous environment where the young people's room for control must be continually negotiated:

> It is ten o'clock and the boys are watching a movie when Susanna, a staff member, enters the common room and says that it is time for bed. The boys argue, trying to convince her that it is only fair that they see the rest of the movie, as she was the one to give them permission to watch it in the first place. Susanna leaves the room without replying. The boys cheer at their success. Five minutes later, Lars, another staff member, comes in. Without a word he turns off the TV. He points at the boys, who are starting to protest, "Off to bed, NOW!" The boys slowly leave the room.

An implicit aspect of this interaction is how victory is transformed into defeat. The initial success over the bed-time routine is undermined by the confirmation of the boys' lack of control—a well-described feature of everyday life in the "total institution" (Goffman 1991 [1961]; Kivett and Warren 2002; Wästerfors 2011). Nonetheless the boys regularly question the rules: "Why do I have to get up?" "Why do I have to clean up?" "I didn't choose to be here!" "Why can't we stay up late?" With such questions they persist their lack of control by attempting to do active "time work" manipulating the forced routines of the "total institution".

As the boys have very little influence on their daily routines, they experience a disconnection from their institutionalized lives, a disconnection that particularly appears in the illusion of normality found in the performance of work. Rodez strongly expressed the boys' view of the workshop when I asked him about their reluctance to go there. He explained, "They pay us next to nothing, and it's just so they know where they've got us—doing stupid metal work. Pretending it's like normal work. That's a big joke!" Rodez states the boys' typical view of working in the metal shop—an illusion of work, not real work. The boys know, and I observe, that the real value of their "work" is that of treatment, training, and keeping them occupied (Bergmark and Oscarsson 1988). The boys do not connect to these latent values because, although work gives them something to do (that is active "time work") it also clearly marks their lack of control over what to do.

The boys sometimes tried to create their own routines, as when Rodez and Omid, age 19, set up a training program for exercising twice a day. Both boys eagerly engaged in the training. After a while the other boys, even though not participating, showed an interest in when and how Rodez and Omid were training. This self-created routine managed to engage the boys' attention—because it constituted *"something to do"*. The training became a means of breaking the immediate boredom; thus in contrast to the enforced institutional routines, the boys' experience their own routines as unrestricted and more meaningful. Nonetheless, their own routines never become meaningful beyond the individual situation, as they are still taking place

within the secure care unit and therefore signal neither progression nor mark the end of their waiting.

"Doing nothing"

"We just hung around doing nothing" was often the boys' reply when, after a few days away, I asked them what they had been doing. If I tried to get more details, they would simply say "Nothing much happened, we're locked up," or they simply left without answering me. What had actually happened during my absence did not matter as it was the same as what happened all the time—nothing. Everyday life in secure care was marked by this "doing nothing" (Corrigan 1975), sitting together in a group small talking, a form of "time work" for the boys to better deal with the unsecure temporality of the secure care setting. It was however not given that one could freely participate in the "hanging out doing nothing", participation had to be negotiated. I would, just as the boys, have to earn a position to participate by not asking too many questions or being too curious. I would then slowly learn through the boy's interactions of "hanging out doing nothing" that something might after all have happened in my absence for examples a new conflict, an indictment, an upcoming trial (see also May 2001; Wästerfors 2008).

"Doing nothing" is how the boys most often characterized what they do when not in the workshop. Two or more boys may sit in the corridor, in the common room, or in their rooms. Even when watching TV or listing to music they would answer any question about their activities by saying that they are "doing nothing." Often they would discuss a show on TV, the latest conflict in the unit, the other boys, their dislike of the staff, their trial, or their life on the outside. Especially during the weekends, these periods of "doing nothing" lasted for hours, with one boy leaving and a new one entering, with someone going for a drink or some food, or with some of the staff joining in. All of those activities took place at a slow pace, with nobody being able to recall what actually went on, beyond "hanging out and doing nothing" (with me as the exception, trying to retain every detail).

The experience of "hanging out, doing nothing" was not new to the boys. When talking about their lives on the outside, the boys often mentioned "just hanging out, doing nothing." When I asked Abham, age 16, how he spent his time outside secure care, he said, "I hang out with my friends in the

local shopping mall. We smoke, talk, look at girls, you know, most of the time it's actually quite boring but more fun than at home." Abham described a familiarity with spending time "doing nothing" but several of the boys also describe how (on the outside) they were almost always waiting for something to happen, something that would disrupt the boredom of "doing nothing." For those boys who did not attend school or go to work on the outside, "doing nothing" appeared particular familiar, as they lacked the routines and natural "time work" that school or work can provide. Both in the interviews and when hanging out together in the unit, the boys described daily lives with an excess of spare time. Mark's solution to his surplus of time was to create his own routines:

> I started to hang out with this buddy of mine every day, a bit like best friends, and we had a regular routine, you know, we did the same stuff every day. It was not that we had to, as with a job, it was just something we did. Every morning when we woke up, we went out and made break-ins until around noon. Then we had time off, or you know what I mean, then we didn't do anything, relaxed and bought clothes with the money we made, until around five or six in the evening. Then we went out to steal some cars until eight or nine in the evening…[later in the interview] We were bored and just cruising around…it's a bit ridiculous…now anyway, when you get convicted for all those cars and all that. Then it is a bit ridiculous….

Mark and his friend's solution to having time on their hands and "doing nothing" was to create their own routines, which in one sense simulated normal daily life: The boys would meet, perform a "job," share some leisure time, and do something exciting in the evening. In another sense, the systemized crime in Mark and his friend's daily lives made those lives anything but normal. Instead, their daily routines become "bizarre" copies of normal everyday lives. As Corrigan (1975) writes, "weird ideas are born out of boredom and the expectation of future and continuing boredom, and this affects the sort of weird ideas that they are." So Mark and his friend tried desperately, with their own daily structure, to create a meaningful daily life with meaningful time markers to fill the time. However, as Mark himself

points out, in the long run their daily lives were not meaningful beyond the situation because they constituted only a way of "killing time," of avoiding the boredom of "doing nothing."

Together with the boys little interest in schooling "doing nothing" creates a situation in which the future appears to hold no great promise for the boys (see also Comac 2008;Levin 1998). Collins (1996, 437), in his study of young "underclass" males in Britain in search of the "high life," has similar findings: "Schooling is a passport to success yet it is repetitively denied young men like these, as they deny it." Not having the skills or inclination for being successful in school and education these boys turn to different areas for success, such as leading the "high life" with excitement generated through crime (Earle 2011; Hallsworth and Silverstone 2009). Through leading the "high life" in the streets, the boy's build up notions of respect and honor connected to a particular form of hyper-masculinity where friendship and loyalty is highly valued. At the same time the boys' hyper-masculinity is also closely connected to violence and struggles of proving oneself as a "real man" while being outside traditional masculine domains of education and employment (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Philips 2008).

Institutional edgework

Not surprisingly, the boys try to break up boredom in a similar way as on the outside. They cannot create the "high life" of the streets but they can create excitement—a strategy for boredom aversion well known in the literature on boredom (Barbalet 1999; Conrad 1997; Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Winter 2002). The real excitement in secure care begins at the moment when the unexpected happens, it can be small signals between the boys: One boy looking at another in particular ways, lifting an eyebrow, nodding their head, or smiling, so that the other boys know they are in on the fun and will support anyone else's attempt to break the routines. If the boys are all in on it they can quickly create a situation of excitement without exchanging a word and, by so doing, momentarily influence routines and speed up their experience of time. Through the generation of excitement the boys could actively influence the experience of *duration*, *sequence* and *timing* of the institutional routines and thus at times gain control. Although I did not

experience their gaining control over physical space (such as stealing a key and leaving the unit), I experienced them gaining control over the routines:

> It is morning. Only substitute staff members are on duty, due to illness among the regulars. At breakfast the boys have been unusually quiet, except Imran who, to the other boys' amusement, has been asking the substitute (Karen) questions about her personal life. After breakfast I go with the boys into Karmal's room, where they smoke and make Karen butt of their jokes. Karen comes into the room, asking what the boys are laughing at. The laughter increases, but no one answers. She leaves. I stay. The boys agree not to go the workshop.
>
> Karen returns with Pete, the workshop manager. He tells the boys to go to the workshop. The boys look indifferent and do not move. Then two of them get up, but as they approach the sofa in the corridor, they sit down to play a video game. Pete and Karen stare in frustration. The two boys look only at the game, not replying to Pete's angry questions. The three other boys stand in the doorway to Karmal's room, laughing. Pete angrily leaves the unit. As soon as he is out of the door, all five boys run to Karmal's window and yell insults at Pete as he cross the courtyard. Karen is left in the unit with the five boys, telling them that they have to go clean their rooms—"now." The boys do not reply as they light cigarettes and blow smoke in her direction. I leave the unit so as not to jeopardize my relationship with the boys.

The boys gained control of the situation by collectively refusing to follow the rules or routines or obey the staff members' attempt to enforce them. For once the morning routine was not defined by boredom. No doubt it was unpleasant for Karen and Pete but certainly not boring. I could easily follow the boys' excitement as they momentarily gained the power to determine the course of events. By sticking together and making a plan, they directly influenced the daily routines over which they normally had very little influence. In this attempt at control the boys relied on the protection that followed from their being in a group and created a situation of "institutional edgework"— exploring the limits of the "total institution" by actively not obeying them.

There was a wild edge to the boys' actions as neither of us knew how the situation would develop or end. For the boys staying in control of the situation demanded them to skillfully read and maneuver in the situation while running risk of facing severe consequences for their actions (such as being moved to another secure care unit or even to jail). Given that such outcomes may greatly influence their future, why do the boys sabotage the rules and routines? The answer is that these actions reassure the boys that they are not completely disconnected from control (see also Wästerfors 2011).

When I later asked Omid about the episode, he said that it happened "because they could" and "it's a way of having some fun and killing time." Breaking with the rules and routines generates the feeling of being in control, a feeling from which the boys are otherwise excluded in the secure care unit. In one short moment they experienced the joy and excitement of "edgework" action and thus momentarily broke out of the boredom of daily life in the unit. Through the active use of their knowledge of institutional life the boys demonstrates skills in challenging the institutions core values of order and obedience. Their institutional "edgework" created thus not only an escape from boredom but also made them gain a little of their lost power over the present. Escape, however, was always short-lived, with success only fleeting. In all such instances, regular staffs quickly regain control and reestablish the institutional routines. Nevertheless, I often observed a hint of rebellion in the boys approach towards institutional rules and routines, as when a boy in an overly sweet voice agreed to do as asked while looking at the ceiling (see also Goffman 1991 [1961], 102).

Edgework and crime

From my hanging out with the boys in the unit I also learned about the boys' view of life outside secure care. The boys would often sit around talking about their lives on the outside, including their criminal activities. One afternoon in the kitchen, Karmal, and Mark, began talking about their experiences stealing cars. The following excerpt shows how the boys actively use crime in their conversation about their daily lives when discussing how to have a good time and "do something fun":

> Karmal is sitting on the window shelf, and Mark is making a sandwich. Karmal says that the police now also accuse him of stealing ten more cars. Marks face lights up as he asks Karmal if he actually stole the cars. Karmal grins and says that he is likely to have stolen a hundred cars or more, so in a way it's lucky they are only charging him with ten. Mark laughs. Karmal laughs with him, saying that he even stole his neighbor's car. Mark asks what kind of car the neighbor had. Karmal says it was a Toyota. Mark acknowledges that a Toyota is hard car to break into but that it goes fast—even a small one. Mark eagerly continues, saying that he once had [stolen] one and had the police chase him. It could go 180 km. an hour, so they didn't catch him. Karmal excitedly jumps down from the window shelf to share his experiences of being chased by the police.
>
> Both boys clearly enjoy the conversation, excited about sharing memories of stealing cars and police chases. They continue in this vein more than half an hour before they leave the kitchen to go and play a car racing video game.

By recalling and sharing the excitement of these high-risk experiences, the two boys generate a new excitement (see also Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2008). For a short time the boys build up a world in which they are in control, cheating the police and being smart, creating a feeling of past "edgework" experiences by sharing them. Whether Karmal actually stole a hundred cars is not relevant; what is important is the shared experience of excitement, momentarily breaking the institutional boredom. In these moments the boys are negotiating the border between order and disorder, both in the situation of stealing and racing the cars and in exploring each other's acceptance of it.

In their sharing, the boys create a form of active "time work" by influencing the experience of *duration*— thus creating short refuge from the institutional boredom. Similarly, I observe that stealing cars appears to constitute a refuge from the experience of "nothing to do" in the boys' everyday life on the outside (see also Comack 2008; Earle 2011; Phillips 2008). Several boys explained that they often did not know what to do with themselves or expect of the future. When I asked about their plans, hopes, and dreams, the boys appeared vague and uncertain as if the future was out

of their hands. When asked directly about their future they all said that they wished to give up crime, as Karmal explained: "I was going to start being an apprentice, becoming a painter, but then the police got me so now I don't know. I have disappointed my parents enough, and it [crime] won't happen again." However, later in the interview, Karmal explains in detail how he was still in control of selling drugs in his neighborhood and how he had no plans to give up this lucrative business. This lack of coherence creates a challenge for Karmal, as well as several of the other boys, as they struggle to combine different discourses and expectations into a coherent identity. As a result, the boys experience a lack of control over their future and a disdain for personal ambition. Thus the boys often focus on the present and immediate enjoyment, not on long term planning involving school or employment.

This focus on the immediate enjoyment also shows in Mark and Karmal's conversation. That they have not planned these car thefts in advance I clear: Instead the boys often talk of their crimes as if they "just happen" to find themselves in situations where crime is a possibility: walking along with some friends seeing a car and deciding to steal it. The boys' retelling of their experiences stealing cars and joyriding appears to create a form of excitement that is creating a hyper-reality, a reality that to them feels more real than everyday reality (see also Katz 1988; Lyng 1990; Presdee 2000). Mark and Karmal's recollection of their edgework crimes gives them a feeling of freedom and control that is otherwise nearly absent in secure care. For once, the two boys (re-)experience a situation in which they are not only creative and skillful (in their criminal activities) but also momentarily in charge of the course of events by an intentional effort to modify their own temporal experience. Both institutional edgework and criminal edgework thus becomes the boys active strategies of gaining momentary feelings of control in situations which otherwise appears to be uncontrollable for the boys.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Boredom does not spare anyone in secure care. Although I found ways of handling the boredom during the fieldwork and even occasionally broke out of it, boredom was the feeling that underlay the entire experience. I was

waiting for *something* exciting to happen but it never really did. So here I was, on the inside, with a clear feeling that as long as I was waiting, I was not obtaining any data. As Conrad (1997, 474) writes, "an unmet expectation, justified or not, is a sure creation of boredom." I gradually changed my expectations, realizing that what I was waiting for was already there—boredom, an inseparable part of everyday life in secure care, not only for me but also, and even more so, for the boys I observed. By focusing on what did *not* take place and on how the boys related to their situation, instead of focusing on events and excitement, I also found meaning in my own experience of boredom. In the ethnographic data a parallel development appeared between my coping with boredom and the boys' coping with it (Hastrup 1995; see also Bourgois 2003).

That the boys stay in secure care is marked by boredom and the meaninglessness that accompanies it is not surprising. The boys do not merely use boredom as an exclamation or a way of feeling sorry for themselves; rather, it is an experience that pervades their lives in secure care. Boredom in the secure care unit springs out of the boys' situation of continuous waiting and thus from a lack of control, not only over physical space but also over time.

As Flaherty (2003: 18) points out time that is experienced internally must be distinguished from that of clocks and calendars, as in some situations large differences occur. Likewise Scarce (2002, 305) from experience states that, "[m]ore than anything else, doing time was about creating completely new meanings for time and developing strategies for fulfilling those new meanings." While the boys constantly do "time work" aimed at creating strategies for handling time, they were less successful in creating "completely new meanings for time" on the inside. Both time and life on the outside fill their conversations and minds, leaving them little motivation for engaging in the artificial of secure care.

Despite the importance of routines in organizing everyday life in the unit, the boys often find it difficult to engage in them. Consequently, everyday interaction is often marked by nonverbal, aggressive and physical communication exhibiting the boys' quest for respect through hyper-masculine performances. The institutional routines signified nothing significant to the boys, such as signs of progression, nor could they control

them; thus they did not find the routines meaningful (see also Irwin and Owen 2005; Kivett and Warren 2002). As Barbalet (1999, 637) observes, "it is not the mere absence of time markers that constitutes boredom but the absence of *meaningful* time markers" (italics mine).

The boys' focus was directed almost entirely towards their lives outside secure care. Although the daily routines and time markers are created partly for giving the boys a structured life that imitates "normal" life in society (Goffman 1991 [1961]), the consequence is often the boy's disconnection from their lives outside secure care. Furthermore, the imitation of a "normal everyday life" (focusing on regularity and the value of work) is often so far removed from the lives that most of the boys lead on the outside that this imitation in itself emphasizes their general position as 'other' (Åkerström 1983). Ultimately, these institutional routines between the boys' past, present, and future, they become meaningless structures.

On the relationship between the past and the future on the inside, Scarce (2002, 318) writes, "We inmates raced toward a future that we attempted to control by, manipulating the past." By recalling and reformulating the past, like Mark and Karmal in their stories of joyriding, the boys attempted to tie together the separate worlds of outside and inside. "These illegal forms of excitement," argues Hayward (2007, 239), "represent a break with the banalities of everyday life and mark an entry into a new world of possibilities and pleasures." Looking at crime as a form of edgework, generating ruptures in daily boredom, makes crime meaningful in the present situation. Important here, however, is that crime becomes meaningful mainly in its immediate context, as in the long run it becomes reduced to isolated experiences of risk-taking disconnected from the boys' daily life and their future (Hayward 2007; Presdee 2000). These edgework pockets of cheerfulness and excitement, although helping the boys to keep up their spirits when "hanging out doing nothing" in the secure care unit, do not change their dominant experience of lacking control over both their daily life and their future.

These boys are not alone in struggling to handle the pressures of daily life and the expectations of the future, nor are they alone in experiencing boredom. Boredom has been characterized not only as a central aspect of being young (Brannen, 2002; Conrad, 1997; Furlong, 1997; Miles, 2000) but

also as a well-documented aspect of adult life, particularly in relation to the monotony of work (Hamper 1992; Roy 1959). However, what stands out in this fieldwork study is how wide-ranging an experience boredom appears to be for these boys both in the secure care unit and in references to their daily lives on the outside. While the boys' stories about outside life initially appear spectacular with excitement and edgework crimes their stories make clear that their reality is often that of "doing nothing and just hanging out".

"Doing nothing" is the boys way of tackling boredom— it is their active time work trying to "do their time well" (Scarce 2002) in secure care, as well as trying to control temporality on the outside (Flaherty 2003). "Doing nothing" is active strategy signaling "I do what I want with my time," and thus "doing nothing" is to counteract boredom. However, "doing nothing" is not (although the boys would like to presented it as such) an active choice— it is also a result of boredom (Corrigan 1975). As the boys see no clear alternatives to the "high life" on the streets other than creating more action through edgework, "doing nothing" becomes their lived embodiment of boredom.

In analyzing both the boys' resistance to institutional rules and their criminal edgework on the outside as responses to an almost ever present boredom I find continuity across settings. Although, the boys resources differs they are actively trying to control temporality through "time work" both on the inside and the outside. Regardless of the setting I find that as soon as the excitement ends, the respite or break from the banalities and boredom of daily life likewise ends, thus creating a situation of "no action" (Goffman 1969). The relationship between action and boredom therefore becomes a vicious circle: Although creating action through edgework activities constitutes a rupture with boredom in the here and now, its fleeting nature also generates future boredom.

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PAPER 2: Learning to become a 'gangster'?[5]

Abstract

This paper analyses the 'gangster' subculture of boys aged 15 to 18 in a secure care unit for young offenders in Denmark. By drawing on a specific case from a two-month field study, the paper demonstrates how three boys teach a new boy to become a 'real gangster'. This learning process not only reveals central elements in what constitutes the 'gangster' subculture in the secure care unit, but also shows constituents of the subculture in which the boys live their everyday lives outside secure care. Learning to be a 'gangster' involves both short- and long-term learning processes. The short-term process is closely linked to learning the specific 'gangster' style. The long-term learning is closely connected to experiences of growing up in areas of 'advanced marginality' and life on the streets celebrating values of respect, loyalty and crime, all subcultural values formed by the intersections of class, ethnicity and gender. The paper suggests that understanding the 'gangster' subculture calls for taking its cultural expressions seriously in terms of the intersection of class, ethnicity and gender formed in everyday practices.

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Introduction

Five teenage boys are hanging out on two sofas watching a horror movie and sharing sweets, crisps and soft drinks. The boys are locked up for real or presumed crimes when I meet them during a two-month field study in a secure care unit in Denmark. To capture key aspects of their everyday lives, I spend entire days with them, watching Allan, the newest boy, struggle to decode the social hierarchy and determine his possibilities for rising within it. Yet on entering the unit, Allan differed from the other 15- to 18-year olds both in appearance and speech, with his long hair, beard and loose faded clothes. While the others also wear loose clothing, theirs have visible designer labels and their hair is short and neat. Moreover, Allan comes from the countryside with a rural pronunciation and a better command of standard Danish. The others come from suburban Copenhagen and use what they call 'street language'.

My immediate assumption that these differences would result in Allan experiencing difficulties soon evaporated, as he became not only well integrated but well-liked: three of the boys took it upon themselves to teach him how to become what they call a 'real gangster'. Consequently, as an eager learner, Allan quickly rose in their social hierarchy. The three boys teaching Allan called themselves 'gangsters' using the English word, but they did not see themselves as part of a particular gang, either inside or outside the secure care setting. 'Gangster' did *not* for the boys refer to being a gang member but was used because it sounded "cool" and created associations to the tough hyper-masculinity of black American rappers. In this paper I have chosen to use their term 'gangster', however, not as the name of the boys' gang but as the name of the deviant subculture that these boys through their interactions create and learn to associate with.

Although deviant learning processes play a central role in a number of sociological studies on which this paper draws, studying these processes and the meaning that participants assign to them remains a challenge. By focusing on the boys' interactions within the unit and on their teaching Allan to become a 'gangster', this paper reveals central elements in what constitutes the boys' 'gangster subculture' – one that forms an important point of reference in their lives both within and outside the institutional frame. This subculture is based on 'distinctive activities, values, certain use

of material artefacts, territorial space etc. that significantly differentiate [it] from the wider culture' (Clarke et al. 1975: 7).

One influential study on deviant learning processes is Howard Becker's (1953) 'Becoming a Marijuana User', in which he details the learning process involved in becoming an integrated marijuana user. Becker shows that marijuana use is learned through three steps and that only by going through all three steps does a person become a regular user. Another well-known but different study on learning processes is Paul Willis' (1977) 'Learning to Labour', in which he analyses the ways in which the school system categorises working class boys and their response to the dominant institutional culture and power. He finds that the rebellion of working class boys against the rules of the schooling system is what directs them into working class jobs.

Willis thus assigns prominence to class position as crucial. However, the 'gangster subculture' of the boys in secure care cannot be understood by their position as working class children alone. Although the boys come mainly from uneducated families with parents who hold low-wage jobs – families that often experience unemployment and illness – and could thus be characterised as 'the new lower class' (Lash and Urry 1994: 160; see also Hollingworth & Williams 2009; MacDonald and Marsh 2001; Fangen 2010), they do not belong to the traditional working class. Instead, their parents are mostly Muslim immigrants or refugees living on council estates in the suburbs of Copenhagen, neighbourhoods with reputations for violence and (relatively) high crime rates (see also Wacquant 2008).

Through studying Allan's learning process within the secure care unit, this paper aims to uncover the unique 'gangster subculture' of these boys, a subculture that must be understood not only by class position but also by ethnicity, gender and their intersections. The paper thus follows a number of newer youth studies where it is argued that an analytical openness to different and not always coherent aspects of young people's lives is necessary to understand transitions to adulthood as well as unique cultural expressions (France 2007; Griffin 2011; Roberts 2011). This paper proposes some new ways of reframing our explanations of class, ethnicity and gender in studies of youth subcultures. Through this refined framework, the paper analyses what characterises the boys' 'gangster subculture' and examines

how the learning of subculture is linked to two learning processes, short and long.

Subcultural learning and its intersections

As subculture theories are central to a plethora of sociological and criminological literature, they heavily influence sociological attempts to explain the formation of social subgroups distinct from but related to the dominant culture. The Chicago School of the 1950s linked subculture closely with deviant culture and with attempts at understanding how deviant subcultures emerge and become meaningful to the individual. The Chicago School thus sought to provide alternative theories on deviant behaviour to the prevailing individualistic theories (Blackman 2005; Colosi 2010; Gelder 2005; Shildrick 2006). As part of the Chicago School tradition, Becker advocates that we must look at the changes in the individual's conception of that behaviour and the experience that behaviour provides. He argues that deviant behaviour must be socially learned via interactions with those who already belong to the deviant subculture (Becker 1953; see also Becker 1963).

This emphasis on the social lies at the core of the Chicago School's studies of subcultures. By the 1970s, this emphasis had also become a premise in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) understanding of the concept of subculture as a means of capturing the life of post-war youth in Britain and their emergent 'spectacular' subcultures belonging to the working class and deriving from that subordinate experience (Blackman 2005; Clarke et al. 1975; Gelder 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005). Paul Willis, connected to but not part of the CCCS, shows in his study of 'how working class kids get working class jobs' the ways in which cultural reproduction not merely concerns individual choice but is also closely connected to the dominant structures of the schooling system and, in turn, capitalist society (Willis 1977). Through their creative rebellion in school, Willis' 'kids' resist domination by a school system based on middle class values. At the same time, however, they actively learn to accept a position outside academic values, i.e. a working class position, thereby unwittingly reproducing their position in the class system (see also Hollingworth & Williams 2009).

The insistence on the role of class in many studies of youth subcultures came under criticism for an 'inability to account for "lived experience"' (Blackman 2005), for being 'empirically unworkable' (Thornton 1995) and for its 'theoretical orthodoxy' (Bennett 1999). Following the post-modern turn in sociology, the critics argue that youth cultures, rather than being 'fixed' in the social structures of class domination, are 'fluid' forms springing from personal choice (see Bennett 1999; Malbon 1998; Miles 2000; Muggleton 2005). Youth cultures or subcultures are thus formed through creative consumption – the remixing of old forms into new expressions – so that young people form individual identities constructed primarily by choice, not by structural or social constraints.

For any study of young people's cultural forms in general, this critique of the strong focus on class in earlier studies of youth culture connected to the CCCS is pertinent. Nonetheless, what some post-subculture positions appear to neglect in their critique is that in developing the concept of 'subculture', these studies and those of the CCCS aimed to analyse the cultural forms of working class youth, not young people's cultural expressions in general (see also Griffin 2011; Hollingworth & Williams 2009). As Hodkinson (2000) argues, it may be incorrect to assume that one theory can be used to explain all youth cultural affiliations. Instead, as argued by Greener and Hollands (2006), we need to pay more attention to empirical cases using the different approaches within youth studies to capture the lived life of young people rather than drawing up false theoretical dualities.

The notion of subculture as constituting working class resistance to the dominant culture becomes relevant for understanding the distinct 'gangster' subculture of young people in secure care, because they belong to the new suburban working class of immigrant and refugee families that Wacquant (2008) calls 'urban outcasts'. To focus on material relations, place and class subjectivities are an attempt to look beyond their 'spectacular youth culture' and demonstrate that class continues to be 'embodied in real people and in a real context' (Thompson 1982 [1968]: 8).Thus, while we must take the role of social structures seriously in order to grasp the 'gangster subculture' of these young people, we must modify the strong focus on class in the concept of subculture: as Blackman (2005: 7) stresses, 'social class

remains an important variable ... it is not the determinate one, it is a crucial factor among others' (see also Griffin 2011;Hesmondhalgh 2005; Hollingworth & Williams 2009; Shildrick et al. 2009). Other variables are essential for actually capturing the unique traits of the subculture of young people in the new working class of immigrant and refugee families.

Considering social structures other than class in youth studies is not new, as both Willis (1977) and Hebdige (1979) discuss ethnicity and, as does McRobbie (1977), gender. What newer studies have shown is how the de-industrialisation and shift to post-modernity in the western hemisphere has created new *intersections* of the categories of class, ethnicity and gender in everyday life (Lutz, Vivar & Supik 2011). Anoop Nayak (2006:828) concludes from his study of working class masculinities in North-east England that, 'The symbolic elaboration of class signals is also iterated through complex configurations of gender, race and sexuality…'. He continues: 'it [class] is stitched into codes of respect, accent, dress, music, bodily adornment and comportment', demonstrating that the way different categories of class, ethnicity and gender intersect forms the base of particular youth subcultures – intersections creating complex forms of not only domination and inequality but also of resistance – through which youth subcultures perform their subcultural expression (Hollingworth & Williams 2009).

Combining subcultural theory with the theory of intersectionality, it becomes clear that explaining inequalities through a single framework (e.g. class) does not fully capture the lived everyday life of young marginalised people (see also Greener and Hollands 2006). Rather, we must study how different categories are inseparably entangled in concrete social relationships and situations, such as in having immigrant parents *and* being young male *and* poor in a disadvantaged area (see Crenshaw 1993; Valentine 2007; Daly 1998; Messerschmidt 2000; Miller 1998; for Scandinavian studies looking at intersections of masculinity and ethnicity see Jensen 2010; Lalander 2008; Sandberg and Pedersen 2009). The concept of subculture must be reformulated to better include these intersections of class, ethnicity and gender in order to fully capture the consequences for social relationships and the formations of power in everyday social contexts. A subculture can thus be defined as a social subgroup that through the intersection of social

categories is distinct from but related to mainstream society and formed in opposition to specific experiences of difference and domination. The rest of this paper builds on this definition of subculture in its aim of capturing the 'gangster subculture' of boys' in secure care.

Background and method

The paper grows out of a PhD study on the lives of incarcerated youth in secure care in Denmark, and critical to the following analysis is the secure care setting. A number of studies have uncovered how young people in institutions form their own subcultures in response to the dominant culture represented by staff and the treatment programmes, and how the subculture constitutes a functional response to institutionalisation, especially imprisonment (Clemmer 1958; Polsky 1977; Sykes 1956; Goffman 1991[1961] Irwin and Cressey 1962).

Although secure care in Denmark is not a prison, it has a number of prison-like characteristics – locked doors, barred windows, surveillance cameras, and high walls and fences – demonstrating that the young people inside need to be kept under high security. Being remanded to secure care takes place through either the social services or the criminal justice system. The most common reason for placement is as an alternative to adult prison.

The typical unit is a residence for five people staying an average of two months. From analyses of administrative register data[6] on all young people in secure care, I find that in 2007 90 per cent of the residents are boys and 41 per cent are likely to be the children of non-western immigrants or refugees. While young people can be placed in secure care between the ages 12 to 19, most of them are 15-18 years old. At the time of the placement 14 per cent had been diagnosed with a psychiatric problem. Looking at the register data on young people in secure care in 2004 I find that three years later in 2007, 25 per cent of the young people in secure care had still not completed secondary school, compared to 2 per cent of the general population. Likewise, within three years of their placement, 70 per cent of

[6] The administrative register includes all 14- to 19-year-olds placed in secure care in 2007 (N=343) and in 2004 (N=299). This register has been combined with other administrative registers as well as registers covering the general Danish population through Statistics Denmark. This data set was analysed with the help of senior researcher Mette Lausten from The Danish National Institute for Social Research.

the young people in secure care had been convicted of a crime, as opposed to 3 per cent of the general population. These variables alone show that young people in secure care constitute a marginalised group, not merely because of their placement but also because of the nature of their lives outside secure care.

I conducted ethnographic field study in three secure care units during which I met with 40 young people and interviewed 17 of them. Access to all three secure care units was given by the director of each facility. The duration of my stay was settled on by an agreement between me and the directors. I did not plan to partake in the work of the staff, because I did not want the young people to associate me with them. Consequently, my presence was no advantage to the staff and instead meant extra work for them in terms of spending time introducing me, helping me with practicalities and not least looking after my safety.

This paper draws on a two-week period during which I observed five boys. This period is chosen because the 'gangster subculture' in these two weeks was clearly the dominant culture within the secure care setting superseding alternative cultural expressions. I interviewed four of the boys privately (Imran declined), and conducted a group interview with all five. My interactions and informal daily conversations also constitute a main data source.

When entering the unit the boys spend a lot of time learning about one other and 'hanging out', as there is little else for them to do. Although during the day they attend school and workshops (e.g. metalwork), they have an excess of spare time. I spent as much time with them as possible, often arriving in the morning and leaving at night for several days in a row.

I did not try to create or promote special activities with the boys. This research approach positioned me primarily as an observer and an inactive participant, giving me the in-between role of being neither staff nor young person. Most of the time, the boys appeared to fully accept my presence and even share their secrets with me, once they realised that I was not a staff member and would not betray their secrets (such as a mobile phone smuggled in by a boy in another unit).

The boys' acceptance of my presence surprised me. Being a younger Danish woman, I had anticipated some difficulties in entering a field

dominated by young boys and, as I soon realised, a strong culture of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), praising physical strength and toughness as well as male superiority. However, my gender and position as non-staff meant that I in no way presented a threat to the boys and their masculine hierarchy. I did not challenge their culture of hyper-masculinity but did not support it either (see also Abrams, Anderson-Nathe & Aguilar 2008; Comack 2008). If the boys tried to flirt or provoke me I played ignorant or tried to dismiss them in a sly manner, and after two weeks they accepted my presence without much challenge. Thereafter, they accepted me asking questions, knowing that I was doing research. They even put up with my sometimes 'stupid and silly' questions.

Table I gives an overview of some salient details of the five boys' lives:

Table I: *Details as reported by the five boys themselves*

Name*	Age	Duration of stay in secure care	Domestic situation	Occupation	Ethnicity	Accused crime	Parents' occupation
Nick	15	Unknown (more than two months)	Living in residential care institution in the countryside	Secondary school	Danish	• Breaking and entering • Possession of drugs (marijuana and Ecstasy)	Mother: on early retirement Father: Absent
Allan	16	2 weeks	Living with mother and father and older sister in a house in the countryside	Secondary school	Bosnian	• Robbery	Mother: bus driver Father: shop owner
Rodez	17	Unknown (more than two months)	Living with mother and sister in a flat in a suburb	Apprentice-ship as a painter	Algerian/ Danish	• Breaking and entering • Robbery	Mother: unskilled work Father: living in Algeria
Abham	16	1½ month	Living with mother and father and two brothers in a flat in a suburb	No occupation	Palestinian	• Fighting • Robbery • Threatening a witness	Mother: housewife Father: small shop owner
Imran	17	1 month	Living with mother and father and sister and brother in a flat in a suburb	No occupation	Turkish	• Dealing marijuana • Handling stolen goods	Mother: housewife Father: taxi driver

Note: * All five boys have been given synonyms as to ensure their anonymity

The details in table 1 do not reveal major differences between the boy's life situations. However as the following analyses will show their life situation is very different. Allan is the only one of the boy's with a middleclass background. He is attending secondary school, living at home and with both parents working (the norm in Denmark). The other boys, except Nick, also

live at home but with only one parent working in low income jobs. Nick is an ethnic Dane, Allan is European (Bosnian), and Rodez, Abham and Imran have one or both parents from non-western Muslim countries. I will argue that Allan's having dark hair, being the son of refugees (i.e. non-Danish), and showing a clear interest in the gangster subculture had a direct bearing on his acceptance. In contrast, Nick – the youngest boy – with blond hair, Danish ethnicity, and an inability to decode the gangster style did not and *could not* become accepted.

The following analyses focus on three different but interlinked aspects of Allan and Nick's relationships with the 'gangster' boys. The analysis has three parts: the 'gangster style', subcultural respect and territory, and neighbourhood, and ends with a fourth analysis tying these three parts together by examining the processes involved in learning to become a 'gangster'. Through the analysis I seek to point out central intersections crucial to constituting the 'gangster subculture' as taught to Allan in the specific context of the secure care unit by these particular boys.

'Gangster style'

> All five boys and I are hanging out in Imran's room. They are smoking cigarettes. Abham and Allan are making jokes about Nick's hair, which is growing long. Abham says, 'You know, I could cut it for you'. Nick snorts at him, 'I'm not going to have a *perker* [derogatory Danish slang for darker skinned immigrants] haircut in court!' Angrily, Abham puts his finger in Nick's face, saying, 'You can't get a *perker* haircut. You're no *perker*, are you? You're a pink Danish pig'. The other boys laugh. Allan says, 'I'm really chuffed with my *perker* hair. It's a really good haircut, Abham'. The others agree, except Nick, who leaves the room. 'Remember when you got here,' Abham laughs at Allan, 'looking like a girl with that long hair and that beard?' Imran also laughs, adding, 'Yeah, not much of a gangster about you back then'.
>
> (Episode in secure care unit, March 2009)

Perker is derogatory Danish slang for people with slightly darker skin than the average Dane (and assumed to be non-Danish) and is often, but not

always, used for young males from Pakistan, Turkey and Palestine (see also Jensen 2010 and Vitus 2008 for the use of the term *perker*). While Abham and Imran frequently use *perker* to refer to both themselves and their friends, others – especially ethnic Danes like Nick – use *perker* as a slur. Young people in the 'gangster subculture' in the working class suburbs – and whose parents largely come from Muslim countries – use *perker* self-referentially with pride and apply it towards others like them in either praise or disrespect. Within this group the *perker* hairstyle, short on the sides and the back of the head and long on top, is distinctive. The length of the top hair varies, as do the patterns cut into the sides or back. Although ethnic Danes can sport a *perker* haircut, 'only the wannabe *perker* [as Imran says] would get a *perker* haircut' – and 'wannabes' gain no respect and have little street credit.

At the time of this episode, where Nick actively shows that he does not want to become one of the 'gangster' boys, he was not a 'wannabe perker'. Yet before this episode, and Allan's entry into the unit, Nick had tried to befriend Abham, Imran and Rodez. He had used their slang, e.g. by calling one of the other boys a *perker*, but as Nick was a blond, non-immigrant, non-refugee, he did not have the social standing within the group to do so. When the others tried to set him right, e.g. by telling him not to use the word *perker*, he would start whining and complain to the staff, a behaviour that made the others ridicule him. Consequently, Nick never became accepted.

Similar to Becker's (1953) description of the development of a marijuana user, Allan had to learn that being a *perker* is something positive rather than negative, i.e. being a *perker* is part of the 'gangster' subcultural expression requiring a specific style that he must carefully learn. As a newcomer with a different style, Allan had to hide his ignorance and pretend to already know the style while learning about it through indirect observation and imitation, e.g. getting the *perker* haircut.

Several studies have identified consumption as an indispensable part of youth subcultures (Hebdige 1979; Martin 2009) and, especially for the 'gangster subculture', expensive consumption. Allan soon learned that the *perker* hairstyle alone would not give him the right 'gangster' look: he also needed new clothes. The 'gangster style' calls for '*perker* clothes' (designer hooded sports tops and jackets, tank tops, baseball caps and tracksuit

bottoms, as well as straight-legged denim jeans hanging low on the hips) and heavy gold chains. Allan developed two strategies for obtaining '*perker* clothes'. The first was to borrow or buy clothes from the other boys. The second was, with Abham's help, to write a list of the minimum of new clothes he needed and ask his parents to buy them for him. Allan learns that to be respected is closely connected to having the right look (see also Anderson 1999). Whether Allan's short-term metamorphosis into the 'gangster style' has long-term staying power is a question that I shall return to later.

Expensive consumption plays an important part in the 'gangster subculture', as it constitutes the boys' way of clearly signalling their subcultural membership. To obtain these expensive items, the boys are constantly in need of money, and when 'hanging out' in the unit they often discuss how money is most easily attainable through crime (e.g. drug dealing, burglaries and robberies) (see also Jacobs and Wright 1999). However, the criminal and materialistic aspects of consumption alone are not the only important factors. Equally important is the social symbolism embedded in the goods, as it is through their symbolism that the items come to signify 'gangster' meaning (Hall et al. 2008). Items do not have fixed or stable properties; these emerge in practice (Valentine 2007), i.e. in the boys' concrete use of them in creating the 'gangster style'.

As Hebdige (1979) shows in his study of subculture, the creation of difference through assigning new subcultural meaning to objects becomes a clear signal of distance and rebellion. Thus it is not merely the boys' haircuts, clothes or different ethnic background that creates the 'gangster' subcultural style, but the meaning they assign to these expressions of style in their unique intersection. Via their 'gangster style' the boys actively draw attention to themselves. While they often describe this attention as negative (Whyte 2005 [1949]), they also acknowledge that it gives them the power to stir up situations and provoke responses when meeting not only with other young people or the police, but also with staff in the care unit . Being able to provoke is part of the 'gangster style', and the boys' actively use such provocations in creating the self-aware style (based on extensive and expensive consumption) that is at the centre of the gangster subculture.

Subcultural respect

> Imran, Abham, Allan, Mark (a staff member) and I are sitting around a small table in the unit's wide corridor. Allan had arrived the previous day, and the other boys are asking what crime he has been charged with. Allan, not yet knowing the others, expresses some shame over the robbery: 'I really didn't do it, I was just standing next to the boys who did'. Everybody laughs, and Allan looks puzzled. Mark explains to him, 'That's what you all say. You're all innocent!' Abham stands up, assuming a threatening stance: 'I did it! I smashed his face for testifying against me. So now he knows not to do that again!' Imran nods with approval. Mark tries to convince the boys that beating up others are never the right solution. Both Imran and Abham laugh, saying that on the streets of their neighbourhoods, physical strength is the solution to everything. Allan laughs with them and later shows his interest by asking them what else they are charged with.
> (Episode in secure care unit, March 2009)

Allan displays his eagerness to join the 'gangster subculture' by imitating the other boys' ways of acting and speaking, i.e. learning their linguistic code. The 'gangster style' manifests in the way that the boys talk and use slang in a style of speech that draws on expressions and signs heavily inspired by both the black US 'gangster stereotype' (see also Martin 2009: Jensen 2010) and the languages of their parents (see also Lalander 2008). They thus mix 'gangster rap' language with Arabic to create their own linguistic codes. Although religion is rarely important to the boys, and only Abham describes himself as a religious Muslim, the 'gangster' boys actively use the word 'Koran' to stress the significance and importance of what they are saying, e.g. 'Koran, I mean what I'm saying'. As with the use of *perker,* the boys' use of non-Danish words creates a clear distinction between them and the rest of society (see also Jensen 2010; Lalander 2008).

Violence is another central part of the 'gangster subculture', as Allan sees that both Abham and Imran actively use violence and a threatening attitude as a way of positioning themselves as 'bad guys'. By actively using violence and threats of violence they want to 'discourage disrespect and

attain social status' (Sandberg 2009). Through using violence and showing no regret, Abham demonstrates that he deserves respect and that if he is not given it he knows how to attain it (he is physically fit and exceptionally good at martial arts). Thus Abham has not only secured his position as someone to be respected outside secure care; he has also signalled that he is not to be 'messed with' in the secure care setting (Collison 1996).

A way of earning respect is to have been in jail; the second best is to have been in secure care before. To have spent time in an adult jail and being able to say that 'it was nothing' almost automatically gains the respect of those who have not been there. Abham, Imran and Rodez explain that also outside secure care is it 'cool' to have been incarcerated as it clearly shows that you are a 'bad guy'. They view those of their friends who have not been in jail or had any experience with crime as 'non-gangsters', inferiors to whom they show little respect. Nevertheless, these 'non-gangsters' on the periphery of the 'gangster subculture' are important because they often admire the 'gangster' boys, thereby showing them respect. This peripheral position is the one that Allan occupies as he seeks to decode what constitutes the 'gangster subculture'. However, given Allan's different background and different experiences from life outside secure care, I also observe him having an ironic distance to the 'gangster' boys' pompous displays of 'gangster' respect (see also Abrams, Anderson-Nathe & Aguilar, 2008; Kehily & Nayak 1997).

Nick, also seeking to gain the respect of the 'gangster' boys, does not have the advantage of Allan's middleclass distance, so he tries to gain it through different means. Just like Abham, Nick tries to play on his physical strength, for example by threatening the others with beating them up. However, although physically big, Nick is not muscular, and his inability to perform well in the gym makes the others treat him with little respect. Nick thus does not meet the latent expectations of the 'hegemonic masculinity' that is dominant within the secure care setting for most of the boys but also for most of the staff. Cornell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe the 'hegemonic masculinity' as a particular kind of masculinity where the self is constructed as strong, fearless, in control, aggressive and above all other masculine identities.

The gangster boys' understanding of respect is closely linked to the 'hegemonic masculinity' ideal. Abham's display of fearlessness and willingness to use violence helps him move closer to this ideal and thereby not only gain the respect of the other boys but also of the staff. Although Mark as member of the staff tries to convince Abham that violence is not the solution to solving a conflict, Mark is himself a big physically strong man. He often shares his experiences working as a bouncer in a local disco with the boys emphasising that he can handle most situations without the use of violence. Nevertheless Mark shares the boys 'hegemonic masculinity' ideal as he also emphasises that he could beat up most people and that he is fearless in his jobs, both as a bouncer and also in working with the boys. He thereby partly becomes an 'exemplar of masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 846) and through this gains respect from the 'gangster' boys as he authenticates the boys' perception of the 'right' masculine values (see also Abrams et al. 2008; Mullins and Wright 2003; Nayak 2006).

Territory and neighbourhood

> I enter the unit after having been away for two days. I meet Allan in the corridor. He is wearing a new sweatshirt with a big '7500' on the front and 'HOLSTEBRO' on the back: the postal code and name of his home town. I stop to greet him and ask about the sweatshirt. Allan says that he made it yesterday evening. I ask him about its meaning. He looks bewildered, then says it is 'cool'. I nod, knowing that all the others have similar sweatshirts and have written postal code graffiti on the tables and walls of the unit.
>
> (Episode in secure care unit, March 2009)

Later that day, I conducted a group interview with all five boys, who participated reluctantly. During the interview I asked them about their use of the postal code and what it meant to them. Answering this question proved difficult. To relieve the tension, Abham picked up the digital recorder, stating, 'I do not answer questions without my solicitor being present'. All the boys laughed. Then Rodez explained the postal code: 'It just shows we are proud of where we come from'. Imran added: 'It's different from person

to person. Some want to be a little cool and show that others shouldn't try to mess with them'.

These answers show that the significance of the postal code depends on whether the boys are inside or outside of secure care. While on the inside, it clearly signals to the others that 'I might be on my own right now but on the outside I belong to an important neighbourhood where I have friends, so don't mess with me in here'. On the outside, the postal code symbolises a strong commitment to a neighbourhood and group of friends, i.e. that the boy is part of a distinct place-specific group. For Imran, Abham and Rodez, the postal code becomes a symbol for their local 'gangster subculture', the general street culture and their group identity and loyalty (see also Conquergood 1994; Earle 2011; Garot 2007; Gunter 2010; Wright et al. 2006). The postal code, both inside and outside of secure care, constitutes a symbol of the boys' *belonging*. Cohen writes (2005 [1972]: 92): 'It is through the function of *territoriality* that subculture becomes anchored in the collective reality of the kids who are its bearers, and who in this way become not just its passive support but its conscious agents'.

The 'gangster' boys' neighbourhoods are former working class neighbourhoods that now house mainly poor immigrants, refugees, the unemployed and people on social benefits, neighbourhoods of 'advanced marginality' that Wacquant describes as 'isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands […] where only the refuse of society would agree to dwell' (Wacquant 2008 :237). By their symbolic use of their postal codes, the 'gangster' boys' challenge and attempt to elevate the status now assigned to their neighbourhoods.

Allan kept a low profile during the group interview. Not coming from an area of 'advanced marginality' but rather from the small provincial town of Holstebro, he could not draw on the same notion of territory and *belonging* as the 'gangster' boys. That Allan's neighbourhood was predominantly middle class, with a majority of ethnic Danes, meant that his postal code lacked the appropriate 'gangster' symbolism. By using his postal code, Allan was merely adopting the style of the 'gangster' boys, not carrying the symbolic meaning. While the other boys accepted Allan's use of

his postal code because they liked him, they sometimes teased him about its lack of significance.

Like the other boys, Nick also made a sweatshirt with his postal code; however, unlike Allan, he did not gain the respect of the 'gangster' boys. Having lived in out-of-home care for most of his childhood, Nick did not share the 'gangster' boys' subcultural experience of *belonging* or territoriality and had no neighbourhood or group of friends to call his own. When Nick put the postal code of his residential care institution on his sweatshirt, he once again became the butt of the other boys' ridicule, in turn reinforcing the symbolic power of their postal codes (Conquergood 1994; Cahill 2000; Earle 2011; Ralphs et al. 2009).

Learning to become a 'gangster'?

So does Allan learn to become a 'gangster'? In many ways he does. As Becker (1953) writes:

> If a stable form of new behavior … is to emerge, a transformation of meanings must occur, in which the person develops a new conception…. This happens in a series of communicative acts in which others point out new aspects of his experience to him, present him with new interpretations of events, and help him achieve a new conceptual organization of his world…

Allan learns to perform a new form of behaviour – that of a 'gangster' – and chooses to learn it well. Equally importantly the other boys, especially Abham and Imran, choose to become his mentors, eagerly showing him how to see the world through the eyes of a 'real gangster'. At the same time all the boys accept me and my presence in the learning process, giving them an audience of two interested learners placing them in a leadership role. Allan and I thus both played to their egos with our middle class ignorance of life on the streets.

What we learned from the 'gangster' boys was to redefine '*perker*' as 'cool' and to conceive of crime as necessary to one's positive self-definition. Moreover, Allan learned to reserve his respect for a selective group, understanding that one's neighbourhood is an important signal of one's

belonging, of having friends and connections. In this way Allan and I learned that for Abham, Imran and Rodez, being a 'gangster' constituted an integrated part of their lives both inside and outside of secure care.

As I observed the three boys teach Allan, and through him also me, a clear pattern of who belonged to the 'gangster subculture' and who did not emerged (Valentine 2007). It became evident that Nick had too many outside characteristics (blond, non-immigrant, non-refugee) as well as behavioural failings (not showing respect, not defending his honour and falling to live up to the hegemonic masculine ideal) for the 'gangster' boys to accept and respect him. So although Nick shared the gangster boys' background in coming from a poor disadvantaged family, he did not belong and never would become part of the 'gangster subculture', even in the short term.

Both Allan and Nick's relationships to the 'gangster' boys showed that being a 'gangster' involves more than class affiliation: it also involves style and belonging (Earle 2011). Abham explained this significance as follows: 'It's all about who you are and about being there. You can't run away being scared, just thinking of yourself. If I'd done that, you know, I wouldn't even be here now. We're like a group – no, like family; you just stand up for each other. If not, you have no one'. The 'gangster subculture' gives the boys the opportunity of forming a distinct place-specific group and through it expressing *autonomy, difference and distinction from* the value system of society as a whole, and in turn a feeling of meaningful *being* (Clarke et al. 1975). The experience of class is thus highly significant, but as pointed to by others (Blackman 2005; Hollingworth & Williams 2009; Nayak 2006), so is the experience connected to gender end ethnicity and its intersections with class experiences.

Looking at this wider meaning that the boys assign to the 'gangster subculture' it is clear that in the long run – in everyday life outside secure care – Allan will likely not become a 'real gangster'. For Allan this subculture carried no meaning beyond the everyday life of the secure care unit, something he acknowledged when I asked him whether he thought he would see any of the other boys on the outside. He said, 'I don't think so. I live too far away and anyhow they are quite different from me. I really like them and we have a lot of fun, but I think we are very different in how we

live. You know, I like going to school and want to go to college and so on … but maybe we'll meet up, you never know'.

Even though Allan in a number of ways learned to become a 'gangster' in the unit, his formative experiences outside secure care were different: crime had never been an integrated part of his life, he did not see himself as primarily non-Danish, he did not fully identify with the hegemonic masculine values, nor did he live in a poor suburban immigrant neighbourhood. Thus, while he shared many categorical attributes with the 'gangster' boys – i.e. being young, male and 'non-Danish' (i.e. Bosnian) – his experience of these categories and their intersections was different. Although Allan came to identify with the 'gangster' boys he did not come to share their specific intersections of class, ethnicity and gender. So even though the behavioural changes that Allan underwent in his two-week encounter with Abham, Imran and Rodez and their 'gangster subculture' may appear significant, they were not critical enough to make him a 'real gangster'. Learning to become a 'gangster' instead becomes Allan's strategy for "learning to do time" (Irwin & Cressey 1962).

Unlike Willis' (1977) working class boys 'learning to labour', the 'gangster' boys in their poor suburban neighbourhoods were learning ways of leading 'the high life' (Collison 1996: 438), ways dominated not only by violence, crime and fast consumption, but also by friendship, loyalty and pride. However the boys' gangster subculture was closely linked to their local neighbourhoods and their experiences of growing up in 'advanced marginality'. Growing up, the gangster boys recalled their parents being long term unemployed and living off social benefits, and there were few parental resources in terms of support and education. It also became clear that some parents suffered from serious mental health problems, finding it difficult to engage in their child's development and education. From an early age, a number of the boys had been spending most of their time outside of their homes on the streets of their neighbourhood.

Just as Willis' boys were socially destined for manual labour and unable to change their class position, the 'gangster' boys were likewise unable to change their class position of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant 2008). Like their parents, these boys found themselves excluded from both school and the labour market (see also Hollingworth & Williams 2009;

Shildrick, Blackman & MacDonald 2009). As Abham explained, 'I could never get a decent job or an apprenticeship, even if I wanted to, no one will take me in. Don't think I haven't tried but I've got a criminal record and I'm a *perker*'. Although Abham knew that his future options were restricted, he sees no way of changing – and no need to change – this situation. By having fully learned to become 'gangsters', Abham and the other boys are thus excluded from other paths of (youth) life. The deviant values of the 'code of the street' have trapped them as 'gangsters' in an oppositionist position, with few or no ways out of this entrapment (Wacquant 2008).

The values of the 'gangster subculture' maintained the group's boundaries in creating differentiation and thus signify an '*attempt at a solution*' (Clarke et al. 1975: 35 (italics orginal)) to the limiting position of 'advanced marginality'(Wacquant 2008). However, as with Willis' working class boys in 1977, the 'gangster subculture' of Abham, Imran and Rodez reinforced their class position and thus their marginality.

So for Allan, and me, learning the gangster subculture became a fascinating voyage into ways of creating a meaningful youth life on the margins of society. For Allan the gangster subculture became a temporary style which could easily be changed for his old style or another, once outside secure care. However, for the gangster boys teaching Allan about their subculture and unique style, there was no replacement. For them, the gangster subculture and style was serious; for them it was showing what life was all about: a way of creating meaning in otherwise meaningless situations.

Conclusion

To understand how and why these boys form the 'gangster subculture', we must acknowledge the complex relationship between their class, ethnicity and gender which shows in their everyday interactions, such as in the use of '*perker*'. The 'gangster subculture' is an integrated part of the boys' lives and experiences, and the closed environment of the secure care unit creates opportunities for them to refine and display it. The 'gangster subculture' thus not only constitutes an institutional subculture that the boys perform in interactions *inside* the secure care unit but also actively draws upon the meaning that the boys assign to their experiences of class, ethnicity and

gender *outside* secure care. Of enduring significance is the importance of place, and as creative actors these young men intertwine new and old cultures in creating their unique subculture.

Learning to become a 'gangster' entails the 'gangster' style, showing respect and belonging. In the short term a boy, or an observer like myself, can learn and somewhat master these subcultural elements within secure care. This learning, however, is necessarily short term, as the long-term learning process is intimately linked to the negative intersections of being 'non-Danish'; young, male and relatively poor, and growing up in an disadvantaged area. In this longer learning process, the 'gangster' subculture must be lived out in a distinct place-specific group and as a hegemonic masculine style of life involving violence, crime and coolness plus loyalty, commitment and friendship. Belonging to the 'gangster' subculture thus captivates the boys' specific *experience* of the intersections between their class, ethnicity and gender and forms a response to their general experience of domination and exclusion from mainstream Danish society.

As keenly discussed by a number of researchers in this journal, the concept of class continues to remain relevant in understanding the cultures and subcultural formations of young people. This analysis of the 'gangster subculture' shows that if we as youth researchers want to meaningfully understand the lives of young people on the margins of society, we must take their experiences seriously. In studying their unique experiences of the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity in the formation of their cultural expressions, it becomes clear that youth cultures are closely tied to individual opportunities as well as structural restraints. We must not risk viewing the subcultures of marginalised young people as a costume that can be easily donned or removed, or even changed for another. Subculture is integrated in and actively forms these young people's lives through a protracted learning process based on their lived experiences and exhibits both resistance and exclusion. Thus, understanding the meaning that the young people themselves find in their style, crime and cultural expression may constitute the best way of capturing the positions they try to create for themselves on the margins of society.

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PAPER 3: 'It's what you have to do!' Exploring the role of high-risk edgework and advanced marginality in a young man's motivation for crime[7]

Abstract

By focusing on one young man's self-presentations in a secure care unit for young offenders in Denmark, this article explores how his contradicting and incoherent self-presentations can be analysed as meaningful. Drawing on Stephen Lyng's theory of high-risk edgework and Loïc Wacquant's theory of advanced marginalisation, it is argued that this young man's engagement in youth crime cannot be fully understood by only focusing on the criminal experience itself. Also, specific social and symbolic relations must be integrated into the analysis to understand his engagement in crime. The article argues that although the edgework theory is compelling, it needs further development if it is to capture the full complexity of young people's motivation for crime.

Keywords

crime, youth, edgework, advanced marginality, self-presentation

[7] Accepted for publication in Criminology and Criminal Justice

Introduction

I met 16-year-old Bashaar while conducting field studies in a Danish secure care institution[8] for young offenders. Bashaar was under confinement in police custody for street fighting. In this article I will explore Bashaar's presentation of self (Goffman 1990 [1959]) in the secure care setting focusing on his understanding of reality and his motivation for crime. Bashaar was a keen and very good boxer about to lose a promising boxing career because he would not give up street fighting. I did not understand why Bashaar did not just do his fighting in the ring and not in the streets. After ending the field study, I could not let go of Bashaar's apparently illogical reasoning and this article looks into his meaning making and thus seeks to understand his actions.

Earlier studies have focused on the seductions of crime (Katz 1988), processes of neutralisation (Sykes & Matza 1957), and the search for respect through discourse (Sandberg 2009) as well as crime as high-risk edgework (Lyng 1993). Meeting and interacting with the young people in secure care, I found the insights of these studies and in particular Stephen Lyng's edgework theory on risk-taking highly relevant. The young men's presentations of their crimes reflected many of the elements found in the edgework theory focusing on excitement seeking and exploring personal limitations. When hanging out in the unit, the young men talked eagerly about the excitement and action involved in committing crimes. They discussed the dangers involved and the skills needed. Their descriptions of their crimes fitted the edgework theory by again and again stressing their drive to seek the limits of their own capabilities in an ongoing quest for illicit excitement. Contrary to the other young people, Bashaar had in boxing a clear, legal and appealing alternative to crime. Nonetheless, he had no plans to give up street fighting.

Because of Bashaar's alternative to crime, his self-presentation and situation is ideal to ground the analysis of young men's motivation for crime. At the same time his self-presentation contains the 'oscillations between disillusioned realism and fatalistic oneirism' (Wacquant 1998: 12), showing his difficulties in constructing a meaningful presentation of the self and thus uncovering central elements in his engagement in crime. As pointed to by

[8] In Danish 'sikret institution'

earlier studies, when describing their crimes, people often actively draw on both the discourse of oppression and that of being a tough gangster: both discourses are context dependent (Anderson 1999; Sandberg 2009; Topalli 2005).

I discovered that Bashaar's motivation for crime could not be understood separately from the situation in which it took place, embedded in street subculture and friendships. Furthermore, to focus solely on his motivation for crime as a quest for the edgework experience meant leaving out significant experiences of isolation, marginalisation, and stigmatisation to which his edgework is profoundly linked. Loïc Wacquant (2008; 2009) shows in his work on the increasing social insecurity in modern western societies a development where crime, poverty, and insecurity go hand-in-hand in creating a situation of advanced marginality. He argues that to understand this situation of advanced marginality, not only must the individual experience be included in the analysis, but also the conditions facing the individual (Wacquant 1998; Wacquant 2008). By including both Bashaar's quest for edgework experiences and his general experience of advanced marginality, I wish to demonstrate that his motivation for crime and in particular street fighting is not as illogical or irrational as it first appeared to be.

Youth crime as edgework

Viewing young people's crimes as edgework reveals the cultural sides of crime – the individual experience of the edge separating 'limit' and 'transgression', 'boundary making' and 'boundary breaking', 'control' and 'hedonism', 'rationality' and 'irrationality' (Lyng 1993; Lyng 2004; O'Mally & Mugford 1994; Presdee 2004: 277-278). The concept of edgework was first introduced by Stephen Lyng in 'Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking' (1990) and later modified and readjusted to integrate new theoretical and empirical findings (Lyng 2005c). Overall, the edgework theory seeks to explain risk-taking, such as extreme sports and high-risk occupations, in contemporary western societies, aiming to answer the question: 'Why would anyone risk their lives when there are no material rewards for doing so?' (Lyng 2005a: 5).

The theory shows that the edgework experience in itself can provide sufficient motivation for engaging in high risk activities. The defining sensations of the edgework come from risk-taker being forced to handle and face the demands of the 'edge', the dangerous boundary between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, sanity and insanity. Confronting the edge places the risk-taker on the border between control and non-control, forcing him or her to rely fully on his or her pre-attained skills. Since it is not possible to formulate a reflective response in the edgework situation, the risk-taker is dependent on bodily experience and impulses. It is this confrontation with the edge that risk-takers describe as self-actualising, self-determining, authentically real and creatively satisfying (Lyng 1990; Lyng 2005a; Young 2003).

Although crime was not a central theme in the original work on edgework, it has later inspired studies associated with "cultural criminology" focusing on crime (Ferrell et al. 2001; Halsey & Young 2006; Hayward 2002; Hayward 2007; Miller 2005). Focusing on the phenomenology of crime and the experience of crime, this body of research demonstrates the relevance of the exciting, sensual and dynamic sides of crime. This research has shown how the experience of crime cannot fully be understood through rational choice theory, and has convincingly demonstrated that crime in itself does not necessarily constitute a reaction to latent conditions or a means beyond itself. Rather, the criminal experience carries both motivation and meaning (Ferrell, Milovanovic, & Lyng 2001; Katz 1988; Lyng 1993; Lyng 2004; Sandberg 2009). In developing the concept of edgework to analyse the criminal experience as edgework, Lyng emphasises the importance of the disciplined body and an innate 'survival skill'. With references to Katz's (1988) earlier work on the seductions of crime, Lyng (2004: 368, emphasis in the original) writes:

Once the hardman succeeds in taking the situation close to the edge, the disciplined body dissolves into a 'becoming-body' this is unpredictable and beyond control of the ego. In accepting the inevitable inversion of the disciplined body into a 'becoming body' that cannot *control* chaos but rather is *transfigured* by chaos, these edgeworkers achieve transcendence.

Lyng shows how the criminal act transfigures the body and makes transcendence possible, thus arguing that the very experience becomes the

drive for committing a wide range of crimes. Such aspects as 'getting away with it', 'surviving it', and 'having the skills' add to the edgework experience of transcendence only obtained through bodily control (Lyng 2004). Thus, linking the experience of edgework crime to the individual's experience and creating a theory where the edgework experience is primarily dependent on individual competence and skill.

The edgework theory does however not only seek to capture the individual experiences 'but also an understanding of the relationship between this experience and broader social structural conditions of modern American life' (Lyng 1993). What underlies the hunt for edgework is the development of the structures of modern society through a rationalisation of systems and human interaction. In short, by creating a sense of alienation from systems and structures of society, this development has led to a loss of meaning for the actors. To survive within these constraining structures, actors find different ways of challenging them and attempt to create new meanings as ways of escaping the mundane realities of everyday life. Risk-taking becomes a way of trying to break free of the rationalisation of modern society, with edgework representing the most extreme way of setting oneself free, by showing that one controls the uncontrollable, namely risk (Lyng 1993; Lyng 2005b). As risk has become a defining feature of modern 'risk society' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990), so have risk-management and risk-control. Risk avoidance has become more than a response to central imperatives of modern society: it has itself become a key structural principle of modernity. Lyng (2005a) posits the relevance of seeing voluntary risk-taking as a meaningful response to the alienation of modern society, as it allows actors to break free of social restraints and create a meaning based not on rationality but on creativity.

It is, however, necessary to distinguish legal and illegal edgework as there are clear differences (Lyng 1993). Legal edgeworkers are not inclined to generate disorder in personal relationships, and they generally respect normative proscriptions against doing harm. This normative constraint, however, does not exist to the same extent for edgeworkers engaged in criminal edgework, where the consequences often involve someone else being hurt or humiliated (Lyng 1993). This differentiation between legal and illegal edgework, however, does not explain potential differences in the

structural conditions of the legal and illegal edgewoker and the influence these differences may have on the edgework experience. Other scholars have shown that the rationalisation process and the creation of new risks in modern society do not have the same consequences for all social groups (Bauman 2001; Beck 1992; Desmond 2006; Young 1999). The rationalisation processes of advanced capitalist western societies, argues Wacquant (2008: 229), is closely linked to the development of areas of advanced marginality and is directly linked to the intersection of poverty, racial division, and urban decline as persistent joblessness, social deprivation and ethnic tension. This development across western societies has guided a number of young men to a violent life on the streets of their deprived areas and to their creation of local street subcultures, which are characterised by values of loyalty and honour towards their friends and a strong sense of local belonging, but at the same time alienated from the norms and values of mainstream society (Earle 2011; Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009; Sandberg 2009; Young 1999). This development indicates that to better understand the drive of these young people towards criminal edgework, structural differences play a central role that should not be overlooked.

In this article I explore the role of the edgework experience in a context of advanced marginality by looking at Bashaar's different aspects of his self-presentation in the secure care unit. First, I briefly present the background and method of the study. Then I draw out four central aspects of Bashaar's self-presentation in the analyses. The first is the role of street fighting and boxing. The second is that of friends, subcultures and street fighting. The third is the social and symbolic relations in advanced marginality. The fourth aspect is that of advanced marginality and the consequences of criminal edgework. The article ends with a discussion and conclusion.

Background and Method

In this section I will outline the background and method for the study on young people's life in secure care. Through new government politics of incarceration, young people in Denmark have in the past 10 years increasingly been placed in both jail and secure care (Danske Regioner (Danish Regions) 2010). During the same period, the overall crime rate for

young people has dropped (Justitsministeriet (The Danish Ministry of Justice) 2009), and Danish youth today are generally more law-abiding than in earlier generations (Balvig 2011). The increase in the number of incarcerations of young people may well be a result of the Liberal-Conservative Danish government's crime policy of 'no tolerance' (VK Regeringen (Liberal-Conservative Government) 2003).

Although secure care for young offenders in Denmark is not a prison, it has a number of prison-like characteristics – locked doors, barred windows, surveillance cameras, and high walls and fences. Being remanded to secure care takes place through either the social services or the criminal justice system. Administrative register data from 2001 to 2008 covering all placements in secure care show that the most common reason for placement is under police custody as an alternative to adult jail. The typical secure care unit is a residence for five people staying for an average of two months.

Furthermore, analysis on register data from 2007 shows that 90 per cent of the residents are young men, 40 per cent of whom are likely to be the children of non-western immigrants or refugees. While young people can be placed in secure care between the ages of 12 to 19, most of them are 15-18 years old. Prior to their placement 51 per cent had been placed in out-of-home care. At the time of the placement 30 per cent had been diagnosed with a psychiatric problem, in comparison with 5 per cent of the general population. Three years after their placement in 2004, 25 per cent of the young people in secure care had not completed secondary school, compared to 2 per cent of the general population. Likewise, within three years of their placement, 70 per cent of the young people in secure care were convicted of a new crime, as opposed to 3 per cent of the general population. This basic descriptive analysis conducted on administrative register data alone shows that young people in secure care constitute a marginalised group, not merely because of their placement, but also because of the nature of their lives outside secure care.

The main data source in this article is an ethnographic field study I conducted in two secure care units for two and a half months (approximately 350 hours), during which I met with 35 young people and interviewed 17 of them. On average, the interviews lasted about an hour. In the unit I spent time with the young people, learning about them and their interaction when

'hanging out' with them. 'Hanging out' and talking occupied a lot of time, as there was little else to do. Although during the day the young people attend school and workshops (e.g. metalwork), there is an excess of spare time. I spent as much time with them as possible, often arriving in the morning and leaving at night for several days in a row. I always asked them if I could join them when they went to each other's rooms (they usually agreed). Being a white younger woman it surprised me that most of the time the young men appeared to fully accept my presence. I believe that the boys saw me as harmless as I did not challenge their culture of hyper-masculinity, nor did I provoke them or confront them by being judgemental of their crimes and extreme lifestyles.

This paper draws on the specific story of one young man, Bashaar, who I met in one secure care unit over a two-month period. Bashaar's was held in police custody being accused of violence and for threatening a witness and it was his third time being detained in secure care. Bashaar was generally popular with the four other residents in the secure care unit but at times they found him too ostentatious, questioning his stories and self-presentations. The names of all young people and particular venues have been changed to secure the anonymity of participants.

I have chosen Bashaar's story because it is both emblematic and represents much of the complexity involved in the reasoning and motivation of young people for their crimes, enabling theoretical exposition. Bashaar's struggles in creating a meaningful presentation of self (Goffman 1990 [1959]) was exemplary of how the young people in secure care presented their criminal actions and general life situation in meaningful ways, both to themselves and each other. Relevant to Bashaar's presentations of self is therefore not only the general social context of his everyday life and social conditions, but also the social context of the secure care unit in which I encountered his presentations. Bashaar addressed his presentations to a specific audience, being the other young people, the staff, me, or a group of us. As an audience we influenced his presentations, leading him to draw on different discourses and create different, and at times contradictory, self-presentations. However, as shown by Goffman (1990 [1959]), all presentations of the self are created and regulated socially and must make sense within the social context if they are to be tolerated. So although there

were clear elements of oneirism and inconsistency in Bashaar's presentations, they had to be meaningful both to him and us, otherwise they would have been failed presentations and this was clearly not the case. In the analysis I actively draw on these differences in Bashaar's self-presentations seeking to make them an analytical advantage for understanding the importance of the context in which they are re-told as well as the context of life on the outside that Bashaar referred when he was speaking (see also Gadd & Farrall 2004).

The analysis of Bashaar's self-presentations is informed by the totality and variety of the overall fieldwork that occurred within this particular timeframe and beyond. I did encounter other young men with similar stories to Bashaar's and similar self-presentations and in many ways Bashaar came to act as an ideal type (Weber 2003 [1902]) of a young man to be found in Danish secure care. In selecting his presentation of self I do not, however, claim to represent the experiences of all other young people involved in crime. Rather, I seek to understand the cultural and social characteristics of his presentations of self and the particular embedded meanings that constitute these. This understanding may then bring forward the criminological field's general understanding of what motivates young men to violence (see also Gadd & Farrall 2004; Treadwell & Garland 2011; Winlow & Hall 2009).

Boxing vs. street fighting

In the following I examine Bashaar's presentations of the role that street fighting and boxing carries in his life. By using the insights of the edgework theory, I seek to unravel how and why street fighting and boxing represent two very different experiences to him.

I am sitting in the wide hallway of the secure care unit with three young men and a member of staff, talking about boxing. Bashaar is a keen and very good boxer, with police permission to take boxing classes twice a week outside the unit under staff supervision. The following exchange takes place:

> Staff to Bashaar: You know, you are very lucky to get out and box, so maybe you should start appreciating it a bit more.

> Bashaar: Appreciate, appreciate, what a joke! You know what I'll appreciate, getting out doing some real fighting.
>
> Allan (another young man): What do you mean by real fighting, like a match or something?
>
> Bashaar (laughing): No man, real fighting, you know, in the streets, like some fucking racist or people getting in me and my friends' way. A lot of bad asses to fight out there.
>
> Staff: You know that's the wrong attitude, Bashaar. You're a good boxer. Do your fighting in the ring.
>
> Bashaar (laughing): You're such a sissy; you don't know what it's like to fight for real. You feel great, you're on top … you have all your friends behind you, defending your honour, that's what it's all about, man.

At first I also found it hard to understand why Bashaar would keep on fighting in the streets when he was so good at boxing and could do all the fighting he wanted in the ring. It seemed illogical for him to keep up street fighting as both boxing and street fighting demanded physical strength, bodily discipline and fighting skills. However, it soon became clear that to Bashaar they were two very different experiences. Boxing in the ring was fun and he liked it, but to him it could not meaningfully be compared to fighting in the streets—'fighting in the streets is for real'. The boxing experience could not replace that of street fighting. Even though street fighting threatens to ruin his boxing career, because his boxing club banned him in response to his actions, Bashaar clearly had no plan to give it up.

Using the edgework theory explains in part Bashaar's behaviour. Street fighting carried greater risks than boxing for him and therefore became more an edgework experience: street fighting brought him to the edge, to the boundary between life and death (not merely between consciousness and unconsciousness) as it had no rules and there was no one in control. Bashaar therefore had to fully rely on his skills not only as a good fighter, but also his

capability to read the situation right. He explained how you had to try and stay on top of the situation all the time, knowing who entered the fight, who fled, where your friends were and how they were doing. To be in a street fight was to Bashaar much more demanding of his skills and capabilities than being in the ring. In a later conversation, he explained further:

> Of course boxing is great fun, but when you fight in the street there are no rules and you have to be really good or have many friends with you… It's like you just have to do it or else you have nothing. It's exciting and you never know what will happen, but of course when I'm there we always win, you know…. I can fight all right [laughing].

Bashaar had great confidence in his own skills as a street fighter but at times he also referred to situations of not making it or being out-numbered in a fight. He quickly explained these situations as insignificant and that if they happened today he and his friends would easily win. These episodes of losing were, however, significant in turning street fighting into an edgework experience because if there was no risk losing, there would be no excitement in winning and surviving. Furthermore, the risk of losing on the street would have far greater consequences than losing in the ring, involving the risk of humiliation (Katz 1988; Winlow & Hall 2009), of losing respect (Bourgois 2003), and status in the street subculture (Topalli 2005), thus making the experience more intense and thrilling.

In the street fighting Bashaar risked more than being beaten up or losing, because what was at stake was his very right to exist in his everyday social context, making this an edgework experience. The fighting is illicit, thrilling and becomes part of the context defining the experience (Katz 1988). Unlike high-risk leisure and occupational activities, such as boxing, criminal edgework often finds its drive and energy in the risk of being caught (Lyng 2005b). Bashaar's presentations show that the fighting experience becomes more intense and extreme in street fighting because he is mastering the art of controlling the uncontrollable: he never knows what will happen but at the same time he is (so far) mastering the game by 'always winning'. He has still to experience the victimisation and the subsequent feeling of

humiliation that Simon Winlow and Steve Hall (2006) describes in their study of urban violence.

No doubt Bashaar's continuous engagement in street fighting was dependent on his competences and skills as a fighter, but as his self-presentations revealed over and over, it was not just the use of these competences and skills along which made street fighting into an edgework experience. Had street fighting not been illegal, had he not had his honour, the respect of his friends, and his status to defend (and had he not been good at fighting) Bashaar would most likely not have described his fighting in the streets as an experience of edgework, controlling the uncontrollable. He would, as the staff member wished, 'do his fighting in the ring'.

Friends, subculture and street fighting

To fully understand Bashaar's drive towards repeated acts of street fighting, we cannot solely focus on the isolated experience of fighting. Although the bodily experience of losing control played an active role in Bashaar's engagement in street fighting, the social reality of being in the streets with his friends also had a direct impact on his experience of the fight. Different elements which were not part of the isolated fighting episode played a significant role, especially being with his friends, defending them and their honour, gaining their respect and showing them loyalty (see also Earle 2011; Gunter 2010; Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009; Jensen 2010; Pitts 2008). In Bashaar's presentation of street fighting, the excitement of the actual fighting was inseparably linked to the role of his friends and their appraisal. As Bashaar explained in an interview, you have to have friends:

> Bashaar: It's not like I plan to fight. We don't set it up like, 'let's meet there and fight'. It's more like something that just happens, you know…
>
> Me: Well, not really. I mean, I don't think I've ever been in a real fight. But it just happens, when you meet someone you don't like, or…?
>
> Bashaar: Well, no… a lot of things going on, you know… people who threatened you or your friends or who have taken one of our girls or you

know something like that… I don't know really, it's just the way it is, you end up fighting.

Me: Everybody ends up fighting?

Bashaar: If you don't fight and stick up for your friends, you're out.

Me: Out?

Bashaar: No life anymore.

Me: No life… so what?

Bashaar: I mean, like my older brother, he just sits at home reading, doing homework and stuff. He never goes out, he's got no life, I'm telling you. I said, 'come with me. I'll take care of you', but no. He's got no real friends, no life, man.

For Bashaar to have a life worth living is to have a life on the streets with his friends. He feels sorry for his brother for not being part of the unique friendship of the street. For Bashaar being with his friends, 'hanging out and doing nothing' (Corrigan 1975) is what life is all about and his street fighting is inseparably linked to his life on the streets. In attempting to explain and make sense of his actions, Bashaar's presentations again and again referred to the importance of his friends and their distinct street subculture, which is based on risk-taking and excitement but also on loyalty and feelings of respect and honour. However, also more negative feelings of frustration, rage, fear and shame played a central role in these young men's subcultures in shaping their codes of conduct (Treadwell and Garland 2011; Winlow and Hall 2009). These codes of conduct not only played a significant role in the young men's everyday interaction in the secure care unit, but were imported from their lives on the streets on the outside (see also Earle 2011; Phillips 2008).

Earlier research on crime as edgework has also paid attention to the collective construction of edgework experiences focusing on the role of

subcultures in forming the edgework experience (Ferrell, Milovanovic, & Lyng 2001; Halsey & Young 2006; Lyng 2004). What differs however is that in these studies, a specific subculture has been formed around the edgework experience, placing it in the centre of the subculture (e.g. BASE jumping or sky-diving subcultures). This is not the case for Bashaar, because although he and his friends can be said to belong to a specific street subculture, this does not have street fighting as its main point of reference. Street fighting and other forms of crimes become part of his and his friends' subculture but are not essential for its existence. Their subculture builds not only on sharing criminal edgework experiences, but also on sharing the same space and social conditions (Earle 2011; Gunter 2010; Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009). Edgework experiences become part of the subculture creating excitement and breaks in everyday experiences of boredom for the individual as well as the group; they do not, however, constitute the group.

Seeing edgework experiences as one element in forming a particular street subculture rather than the essential element in a subculture is highly relevant. The edgework experience thus no longer becomes the primary goal of engaging in illicit activities, but rather a thrilling consequence. No doubt the edgework experiences linked to street fighting are motivating but for Bashaar the main motivation is located in the social and symbolic relations he shares with his friends (see also Wacquant 2004; Winlow & Hall 2006).

Social and symbolic relations in advanced marginality

Bashaar's presentation of his engagement in street fighting is indeed woven into the social and symbolic relations of his everyday life, and when I interview him he finds it difficult to further explain his reasons for participating in street fighting:

> Bashaar: It's what you have to do.
>
> Me: Why?
>
> Bashaar: Else you would be beaten up yourself; everyone would think of you as a free ride… it's the way it is […] it's not like I'm trying to kill someone or even hurt him badly…

When Bashaar states that he is not out to hurt or kill it may be a way of neutralising his actions (Sykes & Matza 1957) and trying to make them more acceptable to me, an adult middle class interviewer. It may however also be because for Bashaar, engaging in street fighting is not a reflective process: it is merely something he believes he has to do to live his life. When asked to justify his actions, he has few words to describe or defend them. His actions intuitively make sense to him and thus need no further justification. They have a 'context-dependent practical logic' for him in bodily and non-articulated experiences (Desmond 2006). Bashaar's changing attitude towards street fighting is not a result of his lacking normative constraints or having a deficient sense of morality, but rather that street fighting is an integrated part of a life situation in advanced marginality (Wacquant 2008, see also Gadd & Farrall 2004; Treadwell & Garland 2011; Winlow and Hall 2009).

According to Wacquant, advanced marginality is closely linked to the development of advanced capitalist western societies and is directly linked to the intersection of poverty, racial division, and urban decline as persistent joblessness, social deprivation and ethnic tension (Wacquant 2008: 229). This intersection has created a situation of growing marginality in most modern societies, including Denmark (Hansen 2011), appearing particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods surrounding large European and North American cities (Wacquant 2008). Wacquant (2008: 238-239) writes:

> Even societies that have best resisted the rise of advanced marginality, like the Scandinavian countries, are affected by this phenomenon of territorial stigmatization… Whether or not these areas are in fact dilapidated and dangerous, and their population composed essentially of poor people, minorities and foreigners, matters little in the end: when it becomes widely shared and diffused, the prejudicial belief that they are suffices to set off socially noxious consequences. This is true at the level of the structure and texture of everyday social relations.

Bashaar, the son of Lebanese refugees, was born in Denmark, and grew up in Vollsmose, a disadvantaged area[9] close to the city of Odense (the third largest city in Denmark), where he still lives with his parents and one older brother and a younger sister. Bashaar has travelled to boxing tournaments around Denmark but has never travelled with his family, except for family visits to Sweden and twice to Lebanon.

Bashaar does not see himself as either Danish or Lebanese; he sees himself more as 'nothing really', but he identifies strongly with his neighbourhood Vollsmose and is proud of where he comes from. Bauman (2004) may have a point in stressing that, in times of insecurity and uncertainty, territorialism may provide a mode of finding safety and security in everyday life. Certainly to Bashaar and most of the young men I met in secure care, their home area plays a significant role. The young men printed the postal code of their areas onto t-shirts and graffitied it on tables and walls in the secure care unit. It symbolised their belonging to the street subculture of their neighbourhoods. For Bashaar the postal code came to symbolise status, connections and respect outside secure care (see also Earle 2011; Phillips 2008).

While Bashaar is included in the street subculture of Vollsmose, he is clearly excluded from other areas of life (see also Young 2003). He left school at the age of 12 and has not attended since. He has no ambitions to go back and finish secondary school – 'what for?' As pointed out by Collison (1996: 437) in his study on young 'underclass' males in Britain being in search of the 'high life': 'Schooling is a passport to success yet it is repetitively denied young men like these, as they deny it'.

Bashaar has tried to find unskilled work but either has not succeeded or has been fired shortly after being hired. As he says, 'No one wants to hire an immigrant with a legal record'. He will most likely shift between being included in and excluded from the job market with insecure employment and short-term contracts (MacDonald et al. 2005). Thus, besides receiving a little

[9] Vollsmose is appearing on the Danish government's official 'ghetto list' (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs) 2011). To be on the list a neighbourhood must meet two of the following three criteria: 1) 50 per cent or more of the residents come from non-western countries, 2) 40 per cent or more of the 18- to 64-year-olds have no connection to the labour market (calculated as an average over the past 10 years), and 3) more than 270 people per 10,000 over the age of 18 have been convicted of a crime (calculated as an average over the past 4 years) (Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs) 2011)

pocket money from his mother (who is on sick benefit), he has no legal income.

Both Bashaar and the other young men with a different ethnicity than Danish often talked of experiences of racism and the stigma of being young and dark-skinned and living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Although class identification was not articulated by Bashaar or the other young men, their loyalty and identification with their neighbourhoods was implicit and drew on a class-based solidarity. This intersection of being an immigrant, being male and being poor appeared to be a central source for the young men's' self-presentation and form the basis of their provocative street subculture. At the same time Bashaar's feelings and personal experiences played a central role in his self-presentation as a member of the street subculture. Bashaar expressed a general feeling of being deprived the lives of other young (mainly white) Danes in comparison to whom he feel unfairly neglected both in terms of material resources and future opportunities. He felt justified in making this diffused category of 'other young people' the target of his violence as they came to represent his of feelings of despair, rage and failure. Through his violent acts Bashaar thus regained a feeling of control and of escaping his general feeling of failure and humiliation (see also Treadwell and Garland 2011; Winlow and Hall 2006).

Being part of their deviant street subculture allows Bashaar and the other young men the illusion of escape from - or at least a temporary respite from – their experience of the stigmas of ethnicity, gender and poverty. Seen in this light, Bashaar's street fighting and thus his experiences of edgework are closely interlinked with his being part of a street subculture, not formed on the basis of edgework crime but on the basis of the social and symbolic relations of growing up in advanced marginality. Partaking in the street subculture, however, does not solve Bashaar's experience of stigma and exclusion. Instead, the street subculture with its deviant norms and values becomes yet another stigma adding to the exclusion from mainstream society (Earle 2011; Goffman 1963; Hall & Jefferson 1975; Hallsworth & Silverstone 2009; Pitts 2008).

Advanced marginality and the consequences of criminal edgework

When integrating the perspective of advanced marginality, we see that for young people like Bashaar, the engagement in edgework crimes starts long before the actual crime situation and is inseparably connected to the experience of advanced marginality in everyday life. Thus, since childhood Bashaar's engagement in edgework crime, whether reflective or not, has in everyday life developed dispositions that 'fits' with the experience (Desmond 2006).

The personal realisation of advanced marginalisation does not, as one might have expected, lead to an automatic lack of responsibility (see also Wacquant 1998: 13). Bashaar was at times ready to assume responsibility for his situation. As shown earlier, he willingly admitted and even bragged about his crimes, but in interviews he also willingly explained his failure to conform to the expectations of his parents, teachers and society in general: he said he had an excess of energy, that he can never sit still and is incapable of discipline. So although elements of neutralisation are at play, when I interviewed him his reflections about his future also showed the dilemmas he is facing in connection to his street fighting:

> Bashaar: I could never get a decent job or an apprenticeship, even if I wanted to, no one will take me in. Don't think I haven't tried, but I've got a criminal record and I'm an immigrant.
>
> Me: What if you gave up crime?
>
> Bashaar: I'm going to give up crime. No more time for me in here, that's for sure.
>
> Me: So no more street fighting then?
>
> [Long silence]
>
> Bashaar: Ahh, that's different, you know.
>
> Me: How?

> Bashaar: I can't give that up … but really it's no crime, you know. Basically it's just defending me and my friends, yeah…. You got to do that where I come from.
>
> Me: So it's not because it is fun… or, you know, exciting…?
>
> Bashaar: Well, no, it has nothing to do with that … and if they [young people from other neighbourhoods] would just leave us alone I wouldn't fight at all … or maybe just for fun with my friends, you know.

Bashaar clearly does not want to return to secure care and wishes to give up crime, but on the other hand he does not believe he can actually give up street fighting (see also Sandberg 2009). For him street fighting and hence his crimes are closely connected to his everyday life and coping with life on the streets and his self-presentation as 'heroic' and his actions as unavoidable (see also Treadwell and Garland 2011).

Bashaar report that even if he gave up crime, he would not get a job because of his criminal record and his being a young male of immigrant descent. Furthermore, I observed Bashaar in the unit's school and his abilities in schooling were very poor as he could barely read and write. He is split between the desire to escape advanced marginality and the limited possibilities available for this escape (see also Gunter 2010; Pitts 2008; Wacquant 2001; Young 1999). Bashaar's experiences fit well with James Treadwell and Jon Garland (2011) observations that feelings of disadvantage and marginalisation are manifested through hostility, resentment and fury. It is therefore not only the edgework experience connected to street fighting which is relevant for his drive towards the activity, but also the experience of being locked in a position of advanced marginality with no alternatives.

People engaged in legal edgework activities (extreme sports or high-risk occupations) may well be able keep the edgework experience separate from their everyday lives, i.e. to use edgework as an escape from the rational and mundane world of everyday life. However, young people such as Bashaar engaging in edgework crime cannot isolate the experience. Edgework crime is not merely something to do on the weekend to 'get away

from it all', it is an integrated part of everyday life from which there is little or no escape. Although some types of crime (such as street fighting) are self-actualising, self-determining, authentically real or creatively satisfying, they are nonetheless inseparable from everyday life because their consequences have implications beyond the situation. For Bashaar being excluded from boxing or having a criminal record influences his everyday life as well as his future possibilities. Thus edgework crimes have consequences beyond the edgework situation, and therefore they cannot in the same way as legal edgework activities be understood as restricted to the limited period of the actual activity.

Bashaar's criminal edgework activities are interwoven with his everyday practices and life situation and as a consequence the edgework activity has a different temporality reaching beyond the edgework experience itself. Simon Winlow and Steve Hall (2009) show, how the absence of meaningful codes, rituals and institutions within broader society creates a general experience of marginalisation, subordination and humiliation for disadvantaged young men, leading to random, diffuse and unpredictable acts of violence. Furthermore, these acts of violence adds to the general sense of fear and trepidation that often dominates disadvantaged neighbourhoods. For some young men, like Bashaar, it makes sense to invest heavily in violence to avoid intimidation and to be the dominator rather than the dominated (Winlow and Hall 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

The article began by me being puzzled by Bashaar's continuous drive towards street fighting when he could fight legally through boxing. From my point of view as a white middle class younger woman, it seemed irrational and illogical for him to continue to fight in the streets when he had the opportunity to do his fighting in the ring instead. To try and solve this puzzle I focused on Bashaar's self-presentations in the secure care setting, and although they were complex and often incoherent, they also carried their own logic depending on the situation in which he was performing. The secure care setting and the interaction with staff and the other young people gave room for different presentations and discourses of both toughness and oppression, as did the interview situation. I have sought to make sense of

these differences in Bashaar's self-presentations by drawing attention to different aspects of them. These different aspects carry some of the explanations for his drive towards repeated acts of street fighting, but they are not exhaustive and clearly they interlink in complex ways.

A central aspect in his presentations was that of the importance of street fighting and the excitement connected to it. What soon became clear from talking and spending time with Bashaar in the secure care unit was that street fighting carries a special meaning for him. The act of fighting was in itself important and the bodily feeling of fighting was an important incentive. His presentations of the fighting show that the actual act of fighting has a unique value that cannot be replaced and it soon became clear that he assigns street fighting a different meaning than boxing. For Bashaar it is not a question of fighting but of the *right* kind of fighting. He actively seeks the chaos of street fighting and the feeling of invincibility, making street fighting the ultimate edgework experience. Through fighting in the streets he seeks to control the uncontrollable and thus through the fighting create a more fundamental feeling of control and of being on top of things. For Bashaar street fighting is an edgework experience where risks become manageable through his fighting skills. Street fighting becomes a way for him of gaining control in a life situation marked by lacking control. By mastering fighting in the streets Bashaar experiences moments of invulnerability and of being in control of his life, a feeling absent in other areas of his life. Street fighting momentarily gives him a feeling of freedom in a life situation in advanced marginality which at its core is uncontrollable and, from Bashaar's perspective, inescapable.

However, I soon learned from his presentations that street fighting is not just about the concrete situation of the fight alone or the quest for the edgework action. Had that been the case, he could just as well get the edgework fighting experience from boxing in the ring. Two interlinked aspects have been pointed out in the analysis to understand why boxing was not a solution for Bashaar: first the role of his friends and their street subculture, and second his experience of growing up in advanced marginality. He repeatedly referred to his friends and his affinity to their street subculture, which is marked by an indifference towards the general norms of society and a strong engagement in crime. In Bashaar's

presentations the significance of his friends and their relationship is more important than anything else; to earn respect and have status within the group means almost everything to him. As a consequence he is willing to give up boxing in order to continue street fighting and thus secure his position with his friends. Because of his strong identification with the street culture, its life style of crime and violence cannot alone be given up for the prospects of a career in boxing.

The other central aspect that showed relevance from Bashaar's presentations was his experience of growing up in advanced marginality in a disadvantaged area. This experience meant that for Bashaar fighting in the streets was not something exotic: 'it's what you had to do' to survive in the streets. Fighting in the disadvantaged area of his childhood was the norm, not the deviation, and for Bashaar fighting to defend yourself and your friends' territory and honour was not a reflective practice but simply part of everyday life in the streets. Fighting and hence other forms of crime became part of the social and symbolic relations of growing up in advanced marginality that Bashaar shared with his friends: social and symbolic relations that were not reflective but an integrated part of everyday life.

The consequences of not fighting and not engaging in crimes would mean not being part of the street subculture of the neighbourhood. Bashaar saw this alternative in his brother but to him his brother represented a situation of 'no life'. Giving up life in the streets and focusing on studying or working was not an attractive alternative to Bashaar, as he would be giving up street life and with it the status and position he worked hard to earn. Furthermore, he did not see a clear alternative to giving up life on the street partly because of his experiences of discrimination but also because he did not have the skills needed. Nonetheless, Bashaars violent behaviour tends to lead to further social exclusion and marginalisation within broader Danish society.

For Bashaar engaging in street fighting is an attempt to escape from the restraints of advanced marginality, a way of using his skills and doing what he is good at. His street fighting has long term consequences of exclusion from mainstream society and continuous marginalisation. However, street fighting is here and now edgework and becomes an escape

from his situation of advanced marginality and thus in its own way Bashaar's attempt to gain control over his life.

These different aspects appearing in Bashaar's self-presentations cannot be understood in isolation, as one is dependent on and a result of the others. Thus, Bashaar would not be engaging in street fighting if it was not an integrated part of the street subculture he belongs to, and he most likely would not belong to this street culture if he had not grown up with experiences of advanced marginality. In his attempt to rise beyond the experience of advanced marginality by gaining control through his acts street fighting Bashaar is in fact reinforcing the social order and power relations that he is trying to rebel against. For me it was unfolding this complexity that revealed that Bashaar's action of street fighting is not as irrational as it first appeared. By looking at his experience of street fighting as edgework and placing this experience in his everyday context of life on the streets in an area of advanced marginality his continuous drive towards street fighting carries its own meaning.

What Bashaar's presentations of self reveals are that it is not simple to meaningfully understand young people's incentive towards violence and crime. However, if we as researchers try and dig deeper into the young people's own presentations and explanations for their criminal actions patterns of meaning can appear. As Bashaar's presentations clearly illustrate, these patterns may not be coherent or at first encounter logical, but if seen over time and in connection with the general life situation and struggles facing young people engaged in crime, a sense of meaningfulness is revealed.

Furthermore, Bashaar's self-presentations show that the academic concept of edgework needs further elaboration if it is to fully capture the complexity of youth crime. The edgework concept's strong focus on the experience in itself means that other aspects *influencing* the edgework experience are neglected or overlooked. To view youth crime as edgework is appealing as many young people, both in the present study and in other studies, refer to their crimes in terms fitting the edgework experience. They are, however, also referring to other more fundamental aspects of a life in advanced marginality when presenting their reasons and motivations. It is these structural aspects connected to poverty, lack of schooling, joblessness

and experiences of discrimination in the young people's general life situation that the concept of edgework crimes needs to integrate to represent a more comprehensive understanding of youth crime.

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PAPER 4: What is data? Ethnographic experiences with young offenders[10]

Abstract

Much recent constructionist ethnographic literature explicitly deals with the role of the researcher in data collection, as well as the need for analyzing how social realities are constructed through language. Focusing on the researcher as an integrated part of the research process, this body of research reveals the challenges to and prospects of uncovering *why* certain meaning structures appear. Despite this emphasis on the role of the researcher, however, data remains tied to language and ideals of richness and written documentation, creating a situation where valuable sources of knowledge risk being overlooked. Drawing on a recent field study in a secure care institution for young offenders, the paper analyzes how an apparent failure to obtain data was based on preestablished ideals of what ethnographic data *is*. Shifting to a new understanding of data as *context*-dependent and *relationally* constructed presented a plethora of data and made more coherent and complex analyses possible.

[10] Submitted to Qualitative Inquiry

Introduction

The past two decades have seen an increase in ethnographic research stressing the importance of the researcher (such as Anderson, 2006; Carter, 2002; Davies, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Hemer, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996; Røgils, 2006). This development in ethnographic research is linked to a number of broader developments in the social sciences, leading to an intensified focus on method and the production of ethnographic knowledge. Moreover, postmodern skepticism towards knowledge as general and universal has created self-reflexive ethnographic work in which scientific and artistic genres are blurred. The literature on qualitative methodology has increasingly been inspired by a broad range of constructionist approaches to the unique role of the researcher in data collection.

Focusing on the analytical role of the researcher in the production of ethnography is not new. Within the field of sociology the Chicago School represents one of the strongest ethnographic traditions, with its close descriptions of urban life in the expanding city of Chicago in the early- and mid-20th century (such as the works of Park, 2005[1915]; Whyte, 1981[1943]) and the everyday life of the delinquent and the deviant outsider (such as the works of Cohen, 1955; Becker, 1963). Although both early and late Chicago School ethnographers were often personally connected to their fields, they often hid that connection in their texts (Anderson, 2006). Many of the Chicago School ethnographers were interested in the research subject or "problem," not in their personal connection to research participants or sites. Their naturalistic goal was to understand social reality on its own premises, through rich descriptions of people as they existed and unfolded in their natural habitats. Method, primarily considered a tool for data collection, was consequently treated as relatively unproblematic in itself, a point made clear by Atkinson and Coffey (2001) in their discussion of Becker and Geer's (1957) paper "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison." Qualitative method today, argues Atkinson and Coffey (2001), is based on the premise that the complexity of social life cannot be understood through clear distinctions: Becker and Geer's (1957) distinction between "what people do" and "what people say" becomes superfluous when

both are seen as forms of social action narrated and reported by the researcher.

What people say and do are not fixed "things" to be observed but rather social action created in interaction with, and interlinked with, meaning and power in complex ways that the researcher inevitably becomes part of. The traditional assumption that the ethnographer should remain distant from the participants in the name of objectivity is being replaced by the recognition that the ethnographer is an integrated part of the research process (Sherif, 2001; Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). As Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2001: 676) suggest, "it might be useful to shift from a concentration on observation as a 'method' per se to a perspective that emphasizes observation as a context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration."

For a number of constructionist researchers, however, this movement from method to context has also involved a movement from action to language. The elimination of the distinction between "what people do" and "what people say" has created a new situation where the researcher focuses not as much on *what* social reality is (action) but rather on *how* social realities are produced, assembled, and maintained (as language) (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 374-375). Holstein and Gubrium (2008: 275) argue that "constructionist ethnography becomes the study of what people 'do with words'" and stress the need for detailed reports of interaction as even more important for constructionist researchers. Nonetheless, I argue that this continuous focus on detailed and rich data is counterproductive for constructionist thinking, as it places both the *how* and the action of the researcher in the center of data collection and thus risks overlooking the *what*.

The constructionist shift in ethnography to look at "words" has not altered previous ideals of how ethnographic data is to be documented. As a result, there persists a strong focus on documenting rich data—most often in the form of detailed field notes written by the ethnographer and in-depth interviews conducted by the ethnographer as part of closely documenting the "words" that construct social reality. The details of the field notes and the depth of interviews have come to serve as standards for good data. Consequently, data is often seen as the concrete production of text in the

field, pushing other aspects of the field study into the background because they could not be documented as *words*.

While the goal of much constructionist ethnography remains the understanding of the making of culture, less recognized is that culture is created through relational processes where more than words (and thus language) are relevant. Culture, argues Emirbayer (1997: 300), is "not individual attitudes or values…but rather bundles of communication, relations, or transactions. Relational methodologies come into play when analyzing the meaning structures that order or organize these patterns." Thus meaning structures not only can be captured by the researcher's documentation of words or language in the field but must also be seen in relation to the researcher and the research process, even if these relations are initially not captured as words. Nonetheless, the classical ideals of rich data as the base for quality ethnographic analysis appear to remain an unquestionable "universal" –a "universal" that I seek to challenge here.

In starting my ethnographic research on the youth life of young offenders aged 12 to 18 in secure care institutions in Denmark (in the U.S. "juvenile detention centers"), I was strongly inspired by constructionist insights into both the researcher's integrated role in constructing the field and the ideals of obtaining rich data. My ambition was, through participation, to obtain rich ethnographic data by being an active member in the field and by conducting in-depth interviews with the young offenders. In this I failed.

This paper examines this apparent failure to obtain rich data by focusing on three aspects of the data collection; participating (and membership), writing field notes, and conducting in-depth interviews. I discuss how I overcame these failures by broadening my understanding of what ethnographic data is. By integrating insights from constructionist ethnography with those from relational sociology, I argue that ethnographic data is a direct product of the researcher's relationships and experiences in the field and cannot always be reduced to the words of field reports or interview transcripts. I example how a new understanding of what data *is* made possible the analyses of the lives of boys in secure care. This discussion is divided into three areas: s*ituational aspects of data, locating "true" data,* and *"silent data."* The paper concludes with a discussion of how to understand ethnographic data.

Participation and membership

My project started through my interest in the dominant discourse in the social welfare system about "children in danger," the dominant discourse of the juvenile justice system about "dangerous children," and the reclassification of some children from "in danger" to "dangerous" (see also Goldson, 2002; Muncie, 2006; Scraton, 2008). I found that much research focused on interventions and sanctions, with little focus on the everyday lives of the children and how they created meaning in their own lives. My goal was to learn more about these children's meaning-making by getting to know their everyday lives. Secure care is the strictest intervention for minor offenders in Danish society, confining them from broader society. A secure care institution therefore appeared the ideal site for meeting with these "dangerous children" and capturing their reflections on their everyday lives both in confinement and on the outside. The majority of young people in secure care are in police custody, awaiting trial. Most are boys who stay for an average of two months. Each institutional living unit contains five young people.

Both when preparing the field study and on entering the institution, I was strongly inspired by the auto-ethnographic tradition and its focus on closeness, participation, and the prominent position of the researcher. I knew that as a young educated middle class woman I could never become what Anderson (2006) calls a "CMR" (complete member researcher): I would never be one of the young people. Moreover, I had no desire to try to become one of the staff. My research interest was to explore the young people's everyday lives and meaning-making in confinement. Nonetheless, my goal was to become a member of the research setting by creating a friendship with the young people through seeking and securing their confidence (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). My professional training and previous experience with younger children who were not in secure care inflated my expectations. Having worked well with children who enjoyed my company and appreciated the company of a non-parent, non-teacher adult, I felt confident that I would easily find a way to bring these otherwise abandoned boys into my confidence.

Before entering the field, I made a plan of how to proceed: to spend as much time with the boys as possible, to be attentive not only to them but also to their needs and expressions, and not to act like a staff member. In other words, I wanted to participate in everyday life in the secure care unit without adopting any of the roles already present within the field.

I soon realized the difficulties inherent in establishing such a position. The first time I entered the unit was on a Sunday afternoon. For my own safety I had been handed a key so that I could come and go as I pleased. To my surprise, I felt nervous when I used the key for the first time. I entered a long corridor with many doors and little light. I paused and listened but heard nothing. I wondered—maybe no one was there? But where else should they be? They were locked up, I reminded myself, and there was nowhere for them to go. I cleared my throat and said "Hello." I listened. No one answered. I had visited the unit once before, and I tried to remember which door led to the staff office. After trying two doors, I opened a door hiding a small office and two members of staff. I introduced myself. They nicely asked me to sit down and handed me a cup of coffee, then returned to their conversation.

After a while I asked them about the whereabouts of the five boys confined in the unit. They answered that they were in their rooms sleeping, watching TV, or doing "whatever." I started waiting, thinking that at some point they would appear and something would happen. After two hours two boys, Alban (age 16) and Pete (age 15), appeared in the doorway, asking whether they could watch a movie. I got up and greeted them, shaking their hands and introducing myself. The boys were clearly more interested in the movie than in me. As a special treat, because it was Sunday, they were allowed to watch a horror movie in the afternoon before dinner. Both boys looked pleased as they left the office to watch the movie in the common room.

Although I really don't like horror movies, I went to the common room to watch the movie with them. When I entered the room all laughing stopped and both the boys fell silent. I asked if I could join them. They looked at each other. "OK," Alban said, without looking at me. There were two sofas, with a boy lying on each so there was no room for me to sit. I moved to the longer sofa, asking Pete if could sit at the end. He looked at me,

then moved to the other sofa, leaving me alone on the larger sofa. Five minutes passed in silence then Alban got up and left. Shortly afterwards Pete also left, and I was left in the sitting room, watching the horror movie on my own.

A big sign saying "no data" began blinking in my head as I returned to the staff office, where I was offered more coffee. They told me not to worry, that the boys would reappear for dinner. However, what had become very clear to me was that participating in the boys' everyday life and spending time with them would not be easily accomplished, and for me to gain their trust appeared impossible.

Over the next teen weeks I spend long hours in the unit following everyday life at a distance. I saw the boys during meals and in the metal workshop and while they were playing football or basketball in the afternoon. Most of the time they showed little interest in me, and when they did, that interest was very short-lived. A few asked me about my project, but when I started to explain it they quickly drifted away. During the more than 300 hours I spent in the unit, I never became a member of the field; and although I came to know the boys well, I never became their friend or confidante in the way that I had planned.

Writing field notes

Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2001; 674) write that "the production of a convincing narrative report of the research has most often served as de facto validation, even if the only thing it validates is the ethnographer's writing skill and not his or her observational capacities." While in theory I agree with this position, in practice field notes are still the most concrete thing that we as ethnographers take with us from the field. Field notes are physical. Ideally they should be long and detailed, holding much of the information that is invaluable for making the analyses work. Field notes offer the ethnographer a form of insurance that although the notes may look like a jumble of experiences, feelings, and interpretations, these notes will act as an extended (even objective) memory. Field notes also document for other fellow researchers that serious data collection has been undertaken and documented. Therefore, while field notes in theory may be little more than "a

convincing narrative report of the research," in practice they often become *the* documentation (Brekhus, Galliher, & Gubrium, 2005).

Writing field notes was an integrated part of my initial research plan. I had planned to document in detail all concrete interactions, power relations, analytical inspirations, and routines and rhythms of what Goffman (1991 [1961]) calls the "total institution," as well as to keep a report of my personal thoughts and feelings. Although I arrived at the unit with notebooks, I soon learned that carrying a notebook was not a good idea. As the boys—perhaps also the staff—found it strange that I would voluntarily spend entire days in the unit with no apparent purpose, my starting to write made me appear even stranger. My next plan was to write my notes in the staff office, where the boys were not allowed without permission. But I soon realized that I would end up spending too much time away from the boys. Moreover, as being in the office was a staff privilege I also risked falling into the category of "staff."

I then planned to write my field notes discretely when nothing else or very little was happening. The boys continued to be very uninterested in me, so there appeared to be ample time for note taking. As I tried to put this new plan into practice, one of the older boys, Murray (age 18) approached me, with the other boys behind him. He asked me what I was writing. When I started to explain, he asked, "Can I have a look?" "No," I replied, explaining that they were my private and confidential notes for remembering what happened in the unit. He stared at me for what felt like a long time, then returned to the other boys. They began whispering and laughing.

Shortly afterwards, Alban approached me, asking, "What have you written about me?" I panicked a little and started flipping through the pages. Not knowing what to say, I mumbled, "Not much, I think." Alban quickly snatched the notebook out of my hands. The boys all cheered and laughed. When I asked for the notebook, Alban threw it to Murray, who started reading. After a little while, he tossed the notebook to another boy, saying, "Naw, it's nothing, she doesn't know a thing." All five boys laughed as the notebook passed from boy to boy. Then Alban read from it and suddenly confronted me, shouting "I'm not short!" Trying to stay calm, I said, "Well, you are a bit shorter than the other boys." The others started roaring with laughter, and Alban shouted at them that he could beat all of them up in no

time. Meanwhile, my notebook ended up on the floor next to Murray. I quietly picked it up and put it on the table. The boys stopped laughing. Murray looked at me, I said nothing. He then turned to the other boys, asking if they should go to his room and smoke. I quietly asked if I could join them. Murray grinned at me: "Yes." I left the notebook on the table.

Thereafter I no longer attempted to write notes in the unit. I had small pieces of paper in my pockets for writing down direct speech in the privacy of the restroom. However, writing field notes was so deeply integrated into my ethnographic training that I could not totally abandon it. I ended up writing notes at night from a combination of memory and the scraps of paper in my pockets. While I could usually recall a great many details, interactions, and situations, these field notes in no way represented the rich data that I had anticipated when outlining my research.

Conducting in-depth interviews

Not being able to create the membership role or the field notes I had planned, I hoped that the interviews would provide more rich data. The boys showed an immediate interest in participating, eagerly asking when I would do the interviews. Although I had planned to conduct them later in the field study, when I knew the boys better, the boys' excitement about being interviewed made clear that I needed to do the interviews within the first week. My plan was to have the boys create diagrams of their connections, everyday interests, and life events.

The first interviewee was Alban, and the interview lasted for 20 minutes. Before the interview I had arranged with the staff to do the interviews in the unit classroom. As soon as we entered the room Alban fell quiet. I took out the digital recorder and asked whether he was comfortable with being interviewed at this time. Alban sank into a chair and said that it was fine but what exactly was I going to ask him? I explained that I was interested in his life and in what it was like to be in secure care. "It sucks," he said. When I turned on the recorder, he stared at it. I asked him if he could explain what "sucks." Alban kept looking at the recorder. "Are you sure you're not from the police?" he asked. I laughed. "Yes, I'm totally sure, and I should know," I tried to joke. Alban leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. Silence: I didn't know what to say next.

Then I started asking about his childhood and his parents. Alban told me a little about his family relationships and then asked, "Why do you want to know?" I reiterated that I was interested in his life and in how he has ended up in secure care. "It has nothing to do with my family, and you know I'm going to get a legitimate job when I get out. I'm done with being in here," Alban said. "OK", I said "do you already have a plan for finding a job?" "No, I'm an immigrant, what's the point?" Alban said dismissively. When I asked him about his desire to get a job, he gave me only short answers. After 15 minutes, he asked whether the interview would be over soon. I thought no but said yes, because the situation was evidently uncomfortable for both of us. Again, I felt that I had no data and that the rich data I had hoped to obtain was entirely out of reach.

Not all interviews were as uncomfortable as the one with Alban. As I came to know life in secure care better I could ask more relevant and detailed questions about the boy's lives and better frame the questions. However, of the 21 interviews I conducted, only a few can be characterized as in-depth. The rest at best contained fragmented information about the boy's life situation and his experiences inside and outside secure care. Another challenge was that what the boys revealed in the interviews would often contradict earlier information that they had given me outside the interview situation in conversations with the other boys, the staff, or even me. For example, in the company of two other boys, Alban later declared that only losers worked and that he planned to continue making his money selling drugs. Stories and explanations would change, and whenever I tried to sort out these confusions to learn the "truth," the boys would try to avoid the conversation.

Situational aspects of data

So what went wrong? One obvious interpretation is that I was not the right person for this study. I was the wrong gender (female), the wrong age (not young enough), the wrong ethnicity (Danish, when about half the boys belonged to an ethnic minority), and the wrong class. Being middle class, I could never speak the language of the "the new lower class" (Lash & Urry, 1994) to which most of the boys belonged. All these characteristics could be interpreted as disadvantages for obtaining rich ethnographic data from

incarcerated young offenders. As Bourdieu (1999) argues, our ability to take part in verbal communication, such as an interview, depends on both our social position and our habitus (see also Järvinen, 2000; Vitus, 2008).

Obviously, to believe that the elimination of these differences (e.g., making an ethnic minority male conduct the field study) would have solved the difficulties is naïve (Vitus, 2008). We all enter into fields with our personalities, social characteristics, research interests, and theoretical reconceptualizations, and these will always influence our data (Järvinen, 2000). As Sherif (2001: 437) argues, the responsibility of the researcher as producer and writer is to create meaning out of ongoing experience, which is continually produced in a historical and social context. In the process of eliminating differences, new differences are inevitably created by the researcher, and the consequent data will be marked by new blind spots and data holes.

Given that the differences between the boys and me run throughout the data, these differences in themselves *become* data and a valuable source of knowledge. These differences should not be analyzed as a problem but as an integrated part of the data. I started to ask questions about *how* this social reality—where membership and participation were almost impossible for an outsider (me)—came about (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). The differences led me to focus more closely on the situational contours of social life in the secure care setting and how these contours influenced the possibilities of social life (or the lack thereof) in the secure care unit.

One aspect of social life in the unit was power relations and the deprivation of liberty. This deprivation formed social life in many ways, one being that only the staff could freely move freely within the entire secure care institution (four units) or leave it at will. Another deprivation was that only staff had the power over everyday routines, and only staff had the power of sanction. A third deprivation was the boys' isolation from their normal everyday life on the outside. In particularly (for some), the separation from parents and girlfriends was a great affliction. A fourth deprivation forming "inside" social life was the lack of personal autonomy, and a fifth uncertainty about their future. All the young people I met in secure care were in police custody awaiting trial, and consequently they did not know when they would be released or on what terms.

Looking back, I see how these factors—similar to what Stykes (1956) calls, the "pains of imprisonment"—created a situational context that made my goal of "membership" through friendship and confidentiality impossible. As Tillmann-Healy (2003: 743) writes about friendship as a research method, "if participants take in researchers not just as visitors but also as friends, their level of risk is increased." Handling the "pains of imprisonment" both for the boys but also for me meant that everyday life was about "doing your time" (Scarce, 2002). Both a sociologist and a former (adult) prison inmate, Scarce (2002) argues that "doing your time" entails both having respect for other people's situations and acknowledging their right to respect as individuals. Interestingly, while the boys in the secure care unit very much demanded respect from everybody else (i.e. their peers, the staff, me), they showed little respect for others. For the boys, "doing your time" meant having a "tough" façade by not losing face or being humiliated or ridiculed. I slowly learned how crucial it was for the boys to maintain their self-respect and why in this process they could not allow themselves to confide in anyone. Friendship with me in the context of the secure care setting would have made them vulnerable—not only to disappointment and pain (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) but also to losing respect and status.

For me, by contrast, "doing your time" was about finding a role that allowed me to become accepted in the field. To do so, I unknowingly copied the boys' strategy of gaining the respect of others by attempting not to lose face or be humiliated or ridiculed. For example, when Alban (in the situation with the field notes described earlier) became the object of ridicule for being described in my field notes as "short," I did nothing to stop the laughter. I learned to keep my mouth shut and intuitively developed a strategy of not entering into any form of conflict. I thus not only created a distinct position as an outsider but also protected myself from being vulnerable. From this observing position I learned a great many details about the boys' social life, as well as intimate details about each of them. This knowledge led to a quiet respect from the boys, allowing me to stay in the field despite their initial resistance.

This connection between the boy's strategies for "doing your time" and my creation of an acceptable role in the field first revealed itself when I took my eyes of the words off the field notes and interviews. Thinking about

why I had entered this role of quiet observation and *why* I did not become the boys' friend or confidante revealed the situational meaning structures of "pains of imprisonment" and "doing your time." My understanding that the constant search for "respect" had been a central strategy for both the boys and me did not arise from close analyses of spoken words but from the relational experience of being in the field negotiating membership and position through interactions. Meaning structures such as these can only be analyzed through viewing data as formed within the complex relationships among the boys and me in the physical and social restraints of the secure care setting.

Locating "true" data

Following this line of thought makes another interpretation of my data collection possible: where the focus shifts from what went wrong to an understanding of data as the product of relations in a specific historical and social context and the need for analysis as such. If I look not at the individual interview or the blank pages of a notebook in isolation but rather, as Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2001) argue, at the context in which they appear, my failed data reveals a great deal about social life in secure care and about the boys meaning-making processes. This line of thinking follows the realization that knowledge is produced in a historical and social context as relational, and that the researcher's knowledge about a field and its relations and power structures cannot be reduced to concrete research material alone.

This realization helped me meet the challenge of the boys' changing stories and the question of finding the "truth" about what really happened or what they really meant. This confusion arose constantly, as when Alban convincingly stated in the interview that he now wanted to give up crime altogether to find a "legitimate" job and then later the same day stated just as convincingly to others that he planned to continue dealing drugs on the outside. When I confronted the boys with these contradictions, they would laugh dismissively and change the subject. As they appeared to "drift" (Matza, 1964) quite easily between different "truths, I realized that it was not for me to judge which of the accounts were actually true. I had to accept that in the concrete situation these accounts, no matter how divergent from past accounts, were often both true and meaningful to the boys themselves. I

realized that in their constructions of meaningful self-presentations, they activated different discourses that were not easily reconciled.

In an analysis of drug dealers' meaning-making in Oslo Sveinung Sandberg (2009) distinguishes between the discourse of "gangster" and that of "victim" and shows how his drug dealers actively drew on both discourses when creating meaning in their self-presentations. Similarly, I found that when "hanging out" together, the boys primarily activated the gangster discourse, which glorifies life on the street as a distinct gangster culture based upon smartness, toughness, excitement seeking, and (to some extent) violence and crime. Thus in these situations the gangster discourse emerged as the boys' true and meaningful self-presentation. I observed that the boys used the gangster discourse around one another but like Sandberg (2009), I also found that they actively used the victim discourse around me and the staff. Confined in an institution for young defenders and surrounded by staff orientated towards rehabilitation and treatment, these boys often defended their crimes and obtained sympathy by drawing on the victim discourse. In so doing they often used what Sykes and Matza (1957) call strategies of neutralization, i.e., seeking to neutralize their crimes through active strategies of denial and "elimination of condemnation"—strategies such as saying, "If you had been there, you would have done the same" or "what I did wasn't *really* illegal." One example was Alban's using discrimination against immigrants (like himself) as a justification for his criminal behavior. Through processes of tuning down their agency and emphasizing their victimization, the boys appealed to staff understanding and sympathy.

Important for me to recognize, however, was that both the gangster and the victim discourse served to protect the boys dignity in different situations. My failed interviews must therefore be seen in the context of the young boy's constant struggle to maintain self-respect through different discourses. Being interviewed at length about their lives while being detained in a secure care made it impossible for the boys to maintain a coherent self-presentation. Given the fresh memory of extensive police interrogations, the interviews did not represent an opportunity for them to maintain their dignity or gain respect.

As the boys predominantly viewed me as a representative of "society" and mainstream values and morals, the victim discourse was the most

dominant in the interviews (see also Vitus, 2008). It even manifested in the more successful interviews, where I would hear tales of difficult childhoods, social problems, educational difficulties, and racism (see also Sandberg, 2009). This pattern was especially noticeable when I had not previously spent time with the interviewed boy. Such interviews ran more smoothly, and the boy appeared more willing to participate. Only later did I realize that my not having overheard this particular boy's tales of excitement, friendship, and the "high life" (Collison, 1996) made it easier for him to create an apparently reliable self-presentation as a victim.

These presentations of different "truths" began making sense when I gave up looking for the "truth," instead accepting that individual accounts must be understood contextually, in their relation to dominant discourses (Emirbayer, 1997). The boys' meaning-making arose not from them as individuals but from their relationships to other individuals and their shared meaning-making. As a result, I as a researcher also had to acknowledge that the research process is conditioned by and embedded in these relations of everyday social lives and that these relations are what conditions the creation of meaningful data. Truth, therefore, came to be synonymous with the boys' context-dependent creation of meaning.

"Silent data"

Focusing on the dominant discourses as a relevant way of analyzing and understanding the complexity of data changed my having "no data" to my having a great deal of it. However, as Holstein and Gubrium (2008: 390) emphasize, "there is the need to consider conditions of interpretation without reifying discursive context in order to document the constructed grounds of everyday life." Having "thin" data without close discursive accounts makes basing analyses on what is said very difficult. As Brekhus, Galliher and Gubrium (2005: 876) write in their argument for "thin descriptions," "Qualitative researchers always know more about the lives, events, and settings they study than appears in their notes and texts." This *knowing* outside the written field notes is what I call "silent data." "Silent data" constitutes both the little details that may never make it to the written page and the larger structural patterns that manifest not in single observations or interviews but in the entire experience. Such data is silent because it does not

appear in the form of words on pages; indeed, it may begin as a felt experience (e.g., as boredom or fear). As Carter (2002 :1185) writes, "I do not feel that the words of my writing can convey adequately what I feel." Yet although physical sensations such as rapid heartbeats or prickling skin are part of the data collection and thus part of data, they are rarely used or considered valid data.

I have elsewhere (author xxxx) used the subjective feeling of boredom as a starting point for an analysis of boredom as a key characteristic of the experience of confinement in secure care. Not only boredom but also other subjective feelings influenced my experience and thus my data. In the study that this paper uses, my anticipation of being locked up with five young offenders created an initial fear. I did everything I could to dispel this fear by trying to focus on the practical and academic aspects of planning the fieldwork. Nonetheless, the fear underlay my preparation, influenced the way in which I entered the field, and at the beginning influenced my interactions with the boys. As the story of their snatching my fieldnotes from me illustrates, I attempted to keep a very low profile and not provoke them in any way.

Although one may interpret my behavior as a deliberate strategy for making the boys feel comfortable in my presence, I know that this passivity initially *resulted* from fear. Looking back, while I cannot pinpoint the exact thoughts connected to this feeling, I remember the physical signals of fear, the small shivers and cold sweat. I remember paying attention to every sound and movement. In the concrete situation I remember thinking, "Keep calm, speak slowly. Don't make yourself vulnerable by showing your fear." As previously discussed, this experience was my way of learning to "do my time" and finding a role that the boys would accept. Part of the process, however, was also to learn how to handle unwanted feelings, such as fear, in such a way that I would not lose face or lose the boys' respect.

As with the experience of boredom, the experience of fear was not unique to me. The boys were also bored and felt afraid. I am not arguing that the boys shared *my* experience but rather that being afraid was part of everyday life in secure care and that being locked up with strangers and losing their freedom led to their feeling fear on many levels. I *know* this fear

to be present not because the boys spoke about their fears or even shared them very much but because fear permetated the secure care environment.

Moreover, I am not arguing that we as qualitative researchers should turn our research into projects of personal disclosure of our private feelings. However, I agree with Finlay (2002: 543) that "reflection on oneself (in action, in relationship) is carried out to gain a new perspective and it is not an aim in itself." The subjective position of the researcher becomes relevant because it can help locate "silent data" that would otherwise be absent from the analyses. This form of "silent data" can help uncover important knowledge not only about the researcher and the research process but also about the construction of the social realities under study. While "silent data" can only to a certain extent be captured in the written form during the research process, that limitation does not diminish its value. Indeed, the researcher's relational experience of interaction is often what creates the most insightful qualitative analyses.

What is data?

The constructionist movement in ethnography has brought many important insights to the discipline. The movement from naturalistic representations to a focus on representation and the construction of social realities has led to critical questions about *how* patterns of meaning are created in concrete situations. This shift, however, has also entailed a strong focus on language in the constructing of field realities in the form of discourses and, as a result, on the social action of "what people say." The interest now lies in what "people do with words;" language is to be captured and documented in field reports and interview transcripts that are a detailed as possible. Consequently, data within the constructionist paradigm needs to be rich data, full of "people's words," because all the ethnographer can meaningfully analyze is discursive productions of social realities.

What is missing is an acknowledgement that social realities, and therefore data, are not constructed through discursive action alone but rather in relational interaction. To better capture the complexity of the social world, we must understand constructionist ethnographic data as a production of the researcher's relational interaction in the research process. We need to view data as the meaning structures arising from the researcher's complex

relationships with the field and dominant cultural discourses not as creations of discourses disconnected from the researcher.

That relations have to be communicated through language and as language imbedded in discourses does not mean that these relations were documented or even experienced as language during the data collection. We must not set aside the knowledge of "silent data" because of its lack of language; instead, we must give it voice by recognizing it as data—and often valuable data. While experience can be captured in the written form only to a certain extent, this limitation does not make experience irrelevant. On the contrary, it is often the relational experience of interaction that creates the most insightful qualitative analyses. Emirbayer (1997) emphasizes that such insights are familiar from the work a number of philosophers and social thinkers—in fields such as Saussurean linguistics and structural anthropology— who show that meaning derives not from the intrinsic properties of things but from the relations between them. This shift in thinking involves a change in focus from the individual to the *relations* between individuals and how both individuals and cultures are formed by their relation to others (Emirbayer, 1997).

To view ethnographic data as relational constructions of social meaning eliminates neither methodology nor the need to document social action. Clearly, the details of field notes and interview transcripts remain valuable as ways of organizing social action and, not least, for remembering and recalling events, situations, and interactions. However, we must keep in mind that what is written down is our data simply because it is what we decided to write down and document. The risk we run is that fieldnotes and interviews unwillingly become objectified as knowledge produced by the researchers individual cognitive process about what *really* happened. Thus, overlooking the constructionist premise that knowledge production is social and that objectivity is a function of social relations (Schwandt, 2000).

Nevertheless, viewing data as relational in no way eliminates the significance of language or discursive practices as important data. Untangling the meaning of the boys' different self-presentations without searching for the "true" one was made possible only through analyses of their discursive practices in different situations. Consequently,

constructionist ethnography can or should not focus only on discourses. As Holstein and Gubrium (2008: 391) argue, "Wherever one chooses to focus, neither the cultural, institutional, or material foundations of discourse nor the constructive dynamics of interaction predetermines the other." A relational view of what data is can help us to see how everyday life forms the research process. My meeting with the boys and my attempts to make them fit into my methodological goals show that research methodologies cannot be separated from the social world under research. Ethnographic methods may have to be adjusted, or even altered or totally given up, to make participation in the social field of interest possible.

In this paper, while the context of secure care and its unique situational factors actively formed the possibilities and impossibilities of relations in the field, insight arose not from my interviews or field notes per se but from the entire fieldwork experience within a broader cultural frame. Viewing data as relational, covering the entirety of the researcher's experience, allows the ethnographer to understand this experience as embedded in the everyday social and cultural processes under study. Being confronted with my failure of obtaining rich ethnographic data made me aware of the ways in which I as a researcher affected the interaction with the boys and how our room for interaction was defined by situational aspects of both their and my situations. Central to using this insight is for ethnographers to recognize these interactional processes and understand them as unique sources of knowledge about social reality—and thus as data.

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EPILOGUE

Throughout the thesis it has been my goal to examine everyday life in secure care institutions through the reduction of complexity. This reduction of complexity has meant that I have been focusing on selected aspects of everyday life while leaving out others in the realisation that no full interpretation of lived life is ever possible. Ideally, this selection to reduce lived complexity has created new and more complex understandings of *criminal youth* and their life in secure care and beyond. In the spirit of Niklas Luhmann, my goal has thus been to reduce the lived complexity of young people's lives in secure care by increasing the internal complexity of my descriptions and analyses. I believe that by further reducing the complexity of the analyses in the form of a coherent conclusion I would risk making the study redundant. Instead, this brief epilogue constitutes my reflections about the wider contributions of this ethnographic study of youth behind bars.

By immersing myself in the everyday life of secure care this criminal youth became humanised in the embodiment of real young people struggling to make sense of being locked up and excluded. I did not form friendships or close relationships with the young people, but they accepted me, and through their acceptance they opened a window into the hidden world of the 'other'. They revealed a life marked by boredom, excitement, hyper-masculinity, insecurity, violence, crime and neglect: a life primarily defined by continuous tensions facing these young people both inside and outside the total institution of secure care.

To focus on the young people and not the secure care system has revealed that secure care does not in itself entail a meaningful state of being. With the danger of stating the obvious, one of the key results of this study is that the young people enter secure care with a history and from a lived life, and it is this life on the outside which entails meaning. Being in secure care is an involuntary break from this outside life and thus becomes a state of precarious waiting, springing from the young people's lack of control over physical space and time. The dominating goal for the young people is to get back out, leading to an ever present tension in the secure care setting between life on the inside and life on the outside.

In the course of passing time in secure care, the young people enter learning processes where they share experiences from their lives on the outside. In the long hours of waiting and hanging out doing nothing, they learn from each other in never-ending discussions about that which they all have in common: their crime and their exclusion from broader society. Just like young people outside secure care, these young people are subjected to group dynamics and group pressures, but in contrast to the outside there is no escape in secure care, no way to avoid the company of the group. In the underground economy of the total institution, special styles and items are assigned high symbolic significance and strictly controlled as they become part of the young people's hierarchy. Domination is thus unavoidable, and those dominating are often the 'hardcore' young people, those accused of the most serious crimes and with repeated experiences from secure care and jails. In secure care, being 'bad' or 'mad' with knowledge of 'the high life' on the street almost automatically leads to respect and a high position in the young people's internal hierarchy.

Also in their lives outside secure care, the young people struggle to gain respect and to control space. Coming primarily from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and/or from families with few resources, these young people learn at an early age that protection and recognition is to be found outside the family. They mark out territories; they gather around particular locations and develop specific rhythms of interaction that only they know the meaning of. They create meaningful rituals around friendship and honour. In many ways these cultural forms are innovative and creative, but they are also at times violent and criminal, without the distinction between right and wrong always being clear to the young people themselves. What they see as a fun game of excitement can easily be perceived as senseless, dangerous and criminal acts by surrounding society.

For some young people, the responsibility and blame for their actions is heavily felt; for others it is just a continuation of a youth life already dominated by both responsibility and blame. Seeking to justify their actions through strategies of neutralisation, the young people try to remove personal responsibility by denying having inflicted pain. However, for most there is a continuous tension between the identification with their deviant life-style and a desire to be morally accepted by mainstream society. This tension shows in

the young people's drifting between contradictory self-presentations through which it becomes evident that for them it is almost impossible to create coherent future identities. While excitement generation and resistance through the creation of deviant subcultures provides an escape from past failures by offering acceptance and integration into the peer group, it is not a long-term solution to their exclusion from school, work and even family life. The future thus appears to hold no great promise for these young people.

While these young people's criminal acts can easily be seen as reactions to their experiences of advanced marginality and lack of hope for the future, their criminal actions also in themselves constitute meaning – as fun, wild and crazy. Acts such as car racing or violent fighting become ways of transgressing the constraints of everyday life by mixing high risk and personal skills. By living in the here and now, on the edge, with little focus on the future, many of their criminal actions appear in the situation as both logical and uncontrollable: the momentary loss of control creates a rush and a unique feeling of being alive. Although they may later find their actions senseless and maybe even regret them, in the situation their actions are meaningful to them as a controlled loss of control. Dangerous acts of crime become a way of reclaiming their dignity, as for once they are experiencing being in control of their own loss of control. In this light, being confined in secure care merely becomes an unfortunate consequence of a deliberate choice to be in control of one's own destiny.

Being excluded in a society preaching inclusion is an intense experience of lacking control. In a society where self-fulfilment, expression and immediacy are paramount values closely linked to personal performance, not performing becomes a question of individual deficits. Exclusion is no longer just a question about material deprivation, but of lacking the potential for realising the individualised dreams of personal realisation defining modern life. The ultimate humiliation is not being poor or lacking resources, but the felt injustice and personal insecurity of not being able to break with poverty as an individual.

The dominating tension is thus that between exclusion and inclusion: young people confined in secure care are at the same time both excluded and included, but always in the wrong ways. Most of them are included in deviant subcultures while excluded from most of mainstream society's

institutions. Ideally, within the ideals of the modern welfare state, secure care would be the way out of exclusion for these young people. Through social work practices of socialisation and normalisation, secure care should facilitate a transformation ultimately removing their deviancy and thus creating full inclusion into mainstream society.

While confining young people to secure care certainly creates an institutional inclusion, the facilitation of a broader inclusion is less certain. Being constituted as one of society's control mechanisms handling both treatment and punishment makes the institutional task of inclusion into mainstream society almost impossible: how can inclusion be accomplished through physical exclusion; and how can existing exclusion be revoked by practising new exclusion? Along with the structural limitations of the secure care system (the uncertainty of how long the young people are staying, a lack of knowledge of their past, and with no contact with the young people after their release), the goal of inclusion appears to be too ambitious. Instead, secure care may be best characterised as Danish society's humanised dustbin, increasingly excluding those young people already in their everyday lives experiencing advanced processes of exclusion. For most young people, being confined in secure care becomes one of many humiliations on their way to an adult life on the margins of society.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Youth behind bars. An ethnographic study of youth confined in secure care institutions in Denmark

Through an ethnographic study, this thesis examines the everyday life and meaning-making of young people locked up in secure care institutions for young offenders in Denmark. The purpose of the thesis is to make sense of their everyday life both inside and the outside the secure care setting, actively drawing on theories of youth and crime. By applying a relational approach founded in interactional sociology, the thesis explores how apparently senseless actions and situations are constructed socially by the young people when they bring together meanings in their everyday practices. Data, including both observation and interviews with the confined young people, is analysed as context-dependent and relationally constructed.

As one of society's containers for the unwanted, secure care reveals unique insights into the lives of those young people who are otherwise sought hidden and avoided but most of all controlled. Analyses show that while boredom and waiting are defining aspects of life inside secure care, they are also familiar experiences in the young people's lives outside secure care. The young people deal with the experience of boredom through the generation of risk-taking action in their on-going creation of deviant subcultures. These subcultures manifest themselves inside secure care as sites of learning processes where the young people teach each other the specific styles and cultural expressions of their subcultures.

Outside secure care, these deviant subcultures are not only connected to style and cultural expressions but also to experiences of growing up in disadvantaged areas and life on the streets celebrating values of respect, loyalty and crime, all subcultural values formed by the intersections of class, ethnicity and gender. While the young people strongly identify with their deviant subcultures, they also at times recognise both their crimes and general life situations on the margins of society as problematic, which leads to contradicting and incoherent self-presentations. However, when integrating the young people's specific social and symbolic relations in the analyses, these diverging self-presentations become meaningful as active

attempts of manoeuvring in a society which from their perspective is defined by experiences of exclusion.

DANISH SUMMARY (DANSK RESUMÉ)

Ungdom bag tremmer. Et etnografisk studie af unge på sikrede institutioner i Danmark

Gennem et etnografisk studie undersøger denne ph.d.-afhandling unges hverdagsliv og meningsskabelse på sikrede institutioner i Danmark. Afhandlingens formål er via teorier om ungdom og kriminalitet at undersøge, hvordan unge indespærret på sikrede institutioner skaber mening i deres hverdagsliv både inden for og uden for institutionen. Med afsæt i en relationel tilgang, funderet i interaktionismen, udforskes det, hvordan de unge i deres hverdagsliv tilskriver tilsyneladende meningsløse handlinger og situationer mening. Data, som omfatter både observationer og interviews med den anbragte unge, analyseres som kontekstafhængig og relationelt konstrueret.

Sikrede institutioner er en af samfundets beholdere for dem, som er uønskede – dem som ønskes gemt, undgået og kontrolleret – og dermed et unikt sted at opnå indblik i netop kriminelle og afvigende unges liv og meningsskabelse. Analyserne viser, at både ventetid og kedsomhed er grundlæggende erfaringer, som de unge får på sikrede institutioner, men også, at netop disse erfaringer er genkendelige fra deres liv uden for den sikrede institution. De unge håndterer oplevelsen af kedsomhed ved at skabe spænding og ved at skabe afvigende subkulturer, som hylder ekstrem spænding i form af kriminalitet, men også venskab og loyalitet. På de sikrede afdelinger viser disse subkulturer sig i form af de unges brug af bestemte stil-udtryk og en dyrkelse af livet på gaden uden for institutionerne.

Uden for de sikrede institutioner er de unges afvigende subkulturer nemlig ikke alene et stilmæssigt valg, men også tæt knyttet til deres erfaring med livet på gaden i udsatte boligområder. De unges subkulturer er således skabt af de unges unikke erfaring af intersektionen mellem klasse, etnicitet og køn i deres hverdagsliv uden for institutionerne. Selvom de unge identificerer sig stærkt med deres afvigende subkulturer, så anser de også til tider deres kriminalitet og generelle livssituation på samfundets kant som problematisk. Disse divergerende perspektiver betyder, at det til tider er svært for de unge at skabe troværdige selvfremstillinger. De unges forsøg på

at skabe troværdige selvfremstillinger bliver imidlertid meningsfulde, når de analyseres som deres aktive forsøg på at begå sig i et samfund, som fra deres perspektiv praktiserer eksklusion.

APPENDIX A: PhD project description

Behind bars – youth life of young people placed in secure care

An increasing number of children and young people in Denmark are placed in secure care and thus locked up - the state's most radical intervention towards an individual. Denmark has no tradition for locking up young people. During the past ten years the number of locked institutions, however has, tripled and in 2006 about 400 children and young people were placed in locked residential care (Hansen & Zobbe 2006; Justitsministeriet 2006, 2007). This development continues as the political debate swings towards further punishment of delinquent youth.

Locked institutions and in particular the young people placed there have been investigated to only a minor degree in Scandinavia (Wiberg 1976; Levin 1998). Despite more international literature on the topic, its main focus has been the treatment of young people and the risk factors for recidivism (e.g. Palmer 1991; Greenwood 1996). Very little is known about those placed in secure care and the lives they live (Levin 1998; Abrams 2006; O'Neill 2001). The perspectives of these young people and their life conditions thus remain almost unexplored especially within the theoretical framework of the sociology of youth.

In this PhD project I not only examine how young people placed in secure care experience and deal with everyday life within the secure institution, but also include the life that the young people lead outside the institutional frame. In so doing I develop a whole perspective on their lives from their own position. I view placement in secure care as an exclusion from mainstream youth life with school, family and friends an exclusion that manifests in the secure settings not only as locked doors and restriction of visitors but also as deprivation of mobile phones and access to the internet.

Based on current sociology about youth, an ethnographic field study with in-depth interviews with locked up young people, and register data on them and their families, the PhD project focuses on three research questions:

1) Who are these locked up young people, and what kind of life do they lead?

2) How do they handle this exclusion from mainstream youth life?
3) What strategies do they develop in the transition process between youth and adult life?

Theoretical foundation of the project

Within the field of youth sociology is a long tradition of research on delinquency and crime (Downs & Rock 2003; France 2007). Recent research on youth does not focus delinquent groups to the same extent as much as on young people and their life in general and on the increasing individualisation resulting from a cultural liberation from traditional social groups and divisions (France 2007; MacDonald 2006). The importance of the media and consumption-lifestyles in the transition from childhood to adulthood has been at the centre of attention in this new research (Miles 2000). Although some researchers still argue that class has a significant influence on the options and style of young people (Furlong & Catmel 1997), the main explanations take their starting point in postmodern theory, which emphasises the new individualistic conditions for youth life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1995). The concept of lifestyle in particular captures young people's self-representation in an individualised culture with wide options and choices (Epstein 1998; Johansson & Miegel 1992; Miles 2000). Instead of a special unified theory on delinquent youth, we have a collection of theoretical understandings of modern society in relation to which delinquent youth must also be understood – as they are subject to the same conditions as other young people.

Although it is evident that young people placed in secure residential care are subject to the same postmodern life conditions as other young people, they meet different challenges in their transition processes from child to adult is clear – and their responses to these postmodern conditions are also clearly different form that of mainstream youth (France 2007). The young people in secure care primarily experience the negative side of lifestyle and individualisation, meaning that lifestyle for them becomes more radicalised, e.g. in an accelerated body fixation (e.g. excessive fitness, bulimia, obesity) or the extreme use of drugs and alcohol. The main options and possibilities within postmodern society becomes for this group non-options, e.g. in the non-choice of education.

Very few studies include the young people's perspectives on the placement in secure care and their lives in general. One telling finding is that some can experience this placement as a relief, either because their basic needs in the form of food, clean clothes etc. are met or because the stay means a break from an otherwise rough life (Wästerfors & Åkerström 2006). While confinement's being attractive to young people may seem paradoxical in relation to the contexts that form the everyday lives of these young people secure care can be perceived as an improvement. These young people talk about lives marked by assault, violence, addiction, crime, broken relations, loneliness, and material and economic privation (Levin 1998; O'Neill 2001; Williamson 1997) and not surprisingly wide-ranging exclusion. In the project use a broad definition of exclusion, referring primarily to non-participation in central life areas such as education, leisure activities, work, family, and friendships (Larsen 2004). Here the processes leading to and surrounding the exclusion become central, as does the significance of time and space (Adelle 2005) – especially in understanding the specific type of exclusion that takes place in secure residential settings.

Furthermore, the concept of exclusion becomes relevant when one looks at who is placed in secure care. Boys, refugees and descendants of immigrants are overrepresented, making questions of both gender and ethnicity important for understanding the latent structures in who is placed in secure care: to what extent does the secure residential setting become another arena illustrating the exclusion and non-participation of young boys from non-Danish backgrounds? (Sernhede 2002; Røgilds 2004).

A central hypothesis I explore springs directly from the use of exclusion - the young peopel placed in secure care are not alone experiencing the negative side of confinement but that they generally experience the negative sides of general postmodern youth life. Altogether these young people are lost in transitions processes between childhood and adulthood, not only between school and work or school and higher education (Furlong & Catmel 1997) but also in the transitions within the private domain e.g. in creating a home and family of their own (Williamson 1997). They often end up marginalised (Mills 2000), as they are excluded from almost all the arenas of adult life (Levin 1998). The question is whether these young people are integrated in marginalised subcultures and builds up commonality around

markers such as ethnicity, sex or crime, and whether through these units create an active resistance of the dominant youth cultures and mainstream society. Or do they experience such an individualised social exclusion that they do not identify with any kind of subculture or group.

Research design

The data are both qualitative and quantitative, with an emphasis on a qualitative field study. This field study will be carried out in two different secure care facilities over four month period and includes both participant observation and in-depth interviews with the young people. The register data will be designed from a register including all placements in secure care in Denmark from 2001 through 2008. This register will be linked with a number of other registers. This statistical data contains information about the young people's ethnicity, care history, schooling, employment, crime record and mental health record, and similar key information about their parents. Two groups matched on age, sex and ethnicity will also be created from register data: one consisting of youngsters placed in open care and one consisting of youngsters from the whole population.

I answer the first research question - who are these locked up young people, and what kind of life do they lead? – not only via the in-depth interviews about the young people's concrete situation, their upbringing, and their thoughts about their future but also via the creation of a statistical portrait of all three groups. This portrait shows whether there is and if so how young people placed in secure care differ from other young people.

For research question two - how do they handle this exclusion from mainstream youth life? – I will use both observations and the in-depth interviews to grasp both the exclusion that secure care creates. I further investigate their possible exclusion from mainstream youth life through the statistical portraits and the possible differences between the group placed in secure care and the other two groups.

For research question three - what strategies do they develop in the transition process between youth and adult life? – I primarily use analysis of the in-depth interviews. I also use observations focusing on what they believe or imagine attributes a desirable adult life.

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APPENDIX B: Interview checklist and list of interviews

Interview checklist

- Experiences from secure care (jail)
  - Relations to other youth (everyday, beyond the institution)
  - Relations to staff
  - Duration of stay
  - Contact to the outside
  - Pass experiences from secure care
  - Reason for being in secure care

- Family
  - Home outside secure care (with parents, kind of housing)
  - Parents and siblings and wider family (possible network diagram)
  - Relationship to family
  - Parents occupation

- Childhood
  - Movements
  - School experience
  - Friendships
  - Contact to social services

- Youth life
  - Friendships (possible network diagram)
  - Romantic relationships
  - Interests/hobbies
  - Music, films, games
  - School/work
  - Crime
  - Alcohol, drug use

- Future
  - Plans
  - Possibilities
  - Dreams

List of interviews

Initials	Institution	Place	Duration	Gender
DA	1st secure care inst.	Room	50 min.	Boy
MA	1st secure care inst.	Room	18 min.	Boy
NI	1st secure care inst.	Room	27 min.	Boy
AB	1st secure care inst.	Class room	39 min.	Boy
AR	1st secure care inst.	Class room	25 min.	Boy
PA	1st secure care inst.	Room	1 hours 20 min.	Boy
SR	1st secure care inst.	Class room	17 min.	Boy
RA	1st secure care inst.	Room	13 min.	Boy
AK	1st secure care inst.	Room	34 min.	Boy
MU	1st secure care inst.	Class room	20 min.	Boy
NJ	1st secure care inst.	Class room	26 min.	Boy
DR	1st secure care inst.	Room	2 hours 13 min.	Boy
Groupe int.	1st secure care inst.	Common room	16 min.	5 boys
TR	Jail	Visiting room	40 min.	Boy
WA	2nd secure care inst.	Room	43 min.	Boy
EM	2nd secure care inst.	Class room	23 min.	Girl
JE	2nd secure care inst.	Common room	31 min.	Boy
ER	2nd secure care inst.	Room	12 min.	Boy
MA	2nd secure care inst.	Room	26 min	Boy
NE	Jail	Common room	14 min.	Boy
NN	Jail	Common room	17 min.	Boy
CA	Jail	Common room	12 min.	Boy

APPENDIX C: Danish newspapers articles

Politiken: Dagbog fra et børnefængsel (Diary from a child prison), *May 2009*

Weekendavisen: AndenG'eres kriminalitet falder (Second generation immigrants crime is falling), *August 2009*

Berlingske: Velkommen i de voksnes rækker (Welcome to adulthood), *June 2010*

Politiken: Børn i fængsel – observationsnoter fra USA (Children in prison – observations from USA), *October 2011*

Kronik bragt i Politiken d. 7. maj 2009

Dagbog fra et børnefængsel

Klokken er 8 om morgen og jeg låser mig ind igennem den første dør til det som jeg efter kort tid valgte at kalde et børnefængsel – formelt kaldet en sikret institution. De tre døre som man skal låse op og i for at komme ind og ud, det høje hegn, tremmerne for vinduerne og alle overvågningskameraerne viser tydeligt, at der her er tale om et fængsel. Et fængsel, hvor de som er indsat med deres 12 til 18 år ifølge FNs børnekonvention er børn – altså er der tale om et børnefængsel.

Inde på afdelingen er drengene ved at stå op og viser sig udenfor deres værelser. Der er kun drenge og under mit 1½ måneds feltarbejde på afdelingen har jeg endnu ikke mødt en pige. Rasmus på 16 år er første dreng oppe. Han står i døren til kontoret. Han har ikke været på afdelingen i mere end en uge og vil gerne vide, om han kan ringe til sin advokat. Pædagogen Anders, som er ansat på afdelingen, siger, at det kan han godt, men at han måske skal vente til efter kl. 9, hvor advokaten vil være på arbejde. Rasmus forklarer, at han skal vide om der er kommet anklageskrift, da det vil fremgår, hvor lang tid han står til og hvor mange af politiets tiltalepunkter der er gået videre til domsafgørelsen. Rasmus fortæller, at hans advokats sidste bud var, at han stod til en dom på 1 til 1½ år ubetinget.

I 2008 var der i alt 843 af børn på sikrede afdelinger. 78 %, af disse anbringelser var af børn, der ligesom Rasmus, var anbragt i varetægtssurrogat. Det betyder, at størstedelen af de børn, som anbringes på de sikrede afdelinger er mistænkt af politi og anklagemyndighed for at have begået alvorlig kriminalitet. 37 % af de anbragte børn ender med en fængselsdom og 26 % med ungdomssanktion[11].

Klokken 9 sidder alle på afdelingen ved morgenbordet. Drengene er forsovede og stille. Pædagogen Anders henvender sig til Karmel på 17 år og spørg om han stadig sover, så stille han er. Karmel ryster på hovedet. Han sov først klokken tre i nat. Så han film? Spørg Anders. Næ, han kunne bare

[11] Kilde til alle faktuelle oplysninger stammer fra Danske Regioners årsstatistik om sikrede institutioner og Teori og Metodecenterets FOKUS på anvendelsen af sikrede afdelinger fra 2006

ikke sove – igen. Karmel siger, at der ikke er noget værre end nætterne på værelset alene. De minder om hans tid i arresten og så kommer tankerne snigende. Karmel har været varetægtsfængslet i 2½ måned, men har kun siddet på afdelingen i 1½ måned. Inden da sad han i et arresthus.

Karmel har tidligere fortalt mig om sine oplevelser i arresten, hvor han næsten havde siddet i isolation i en måned. Størstedelen af den måned han sad i arresten, havde der ikke været andre under 18 år. Han var derfor blevet isoleret, da han – ifølge FN's Konvention om barnets rettigheder - som barn ikke må sidde sammen med voksne indsatte. Han fortalte om, hvordan det var at være låst inde i et lille rum det meste af dagen og hvordan han måtte tisse i sin håndvask, når fængselsbetjentene ikke kom for at tage ham på toilettet. Maden havde været dårlig og han fortalte, at han til sidst ikke længere kunne kende forskel på dag og nat, da han al tiden forsøgte at sove, så tiden kunne gå hurtigere.

Drengene rydder deres egne tallerkner og glas fra morgenmaden til side og går ind på et af værelserne for at ryge. Adam på 15 år følger med de andre ind for at ryge. Han røg ikke før han blev anbragt, men som han sagde aften før, hvad skal man ellers lave her? Han har også fået ny frisure. Hans lange hår er veget for en smart kort frisurer kreeret af Karmel en af Adams første dage på afdelingen. Sammen fortalte de grinende om, hvor kikset Adam havde været, da han først kom på afdelingen. Nu er der klart mere gangster over ham, grinede Karmel.

Efter rygepausen er det tid til at komme på værksted. Drengene udtrykker utilfredshed med den kedelige produktion på værkstedet og spørger, om der ikke kan ske noget andet. Drengene optjener points ved at deltage i produktionen. Points som de senere kan bruge til at lave ting til sig selv fx ringe eller møbler.

Rasmus siger, at han ikke kan gå på værksted, da han skal tale med sin advokat. Han får lov til at ringe til advokaten, som dog ikke svare. Han kan jo forsøge, at ringe igen om eftermiddagen efter værkstedet, siger pædagogen Anders. Ellers kan han spørger Karmel om han vil bytte med værkstedet. Det

er Karmels tur til at blive på afdelingen og hjælpe med oprydningen efter morgenmaden, rengøring og tilberedning af frokost. Rasmus vil ikke bytte, så er det alligevel bedre at komme med på værkstedet.

Vi bliver låst ud og ind igennem syv døre, inden vi endelig er på værkstedet. Jeg husker kort tilbage på den klaustrofobi og angst jeg følte, første gang jeg blev låst ind i den lille sluse mellem afdelingen og gården. Nu er det nærmest blevet til en rutine med de mange låste døre og små rum.

Nede på værkstedet hersker der lidt forvirring om, hvem der skal lave hvad. Rodez på 17 år vil ikke lave produktion, da han også lavede produktion sidst. Han står og hænger lidt ved døren, da han endnu ikke har points nok til at lave noget til sig selv. De andre drenge bliver sat i gang med den produktion, de anser for kedelig, eller med at færdiggøre ting til sig selv.

Det bliver aftalt at Rodez i stedet kan komme til at færdiggøre noget malearbejde, som han tidligere har startet i værkstedets omklædningsrum, som har været overtegnet med graffiti. Det vil Rodez gerne. Jeg går med ham, og han fortæller, at han har været i lærer som maler i 1½ år. Han skulle i gang med en skoleperiode lige inden han blev varetægtsfængslet for to måneder side. Jeg spørger, hvad der vil ske med hans lærerplads nu, hvor han er her. Han ved det ikke. Han har brev og besøgskontrol, og har derfor ikke været i kontakt med sin mester siden han blev fængslet. Han håber, at hans mester stadig vil have ham tilbage, men hvis han skal være i varetægt meget længere er det nok ikke særligt sandsynligt. Rodez forsætter kyndigt malearbejdet, og jeg går ud til de andre drenge, som holder rygepause udenfor.

56 % af de anbragte børn på sikrede afdelinger i gang med et uddannelsesforløb inden anbringelsen.

Klokken 11:30 låses vi igennem de syv døre tilbage på afdelingen, hvor der er lavet frokost med flere forskellige små retter. Rodez og Karmel vil gerne vide om der er svinekød på bordet? Pædagogen Anders fortæller, at der er frikadeller, som er lavet på kalv og flæsk, men også nogen lavet på oksekød.

Rodez vil vide om de er stegt på samme pande. Det er de ikke. Rodez og Karmel sætter sig og skuler til frikadellerne. Svinekød er klamt og skal ikke stå i nærheden af dem.

31 % af de anbragte børn selv er flygtningebørn og at 63 % af de anbragte børn har udenlandske forældre.

Efter frokost går drengene igen ind for at ryge. Adam følger med. Da de har røget sætter to sig til at spille playstation, mens de andre driver rundt. De kommenterer spillet, går lidt ud i køkkenet og kigger i køleskabet m.v. Rodez råber højt, at han keder sig, mens han slår hænderne hårdt ind i væggen. Karmel giver ham ret i kedsomheden. De går sammen ind på Rodezs værelse for at ryge.

Rasmus opsøger personalet. Han vil gerne ringe til sin advokat. Advokaten svarer, at der ikke er kommet et anklageskrift endnu. Det er ikke til at vide, hvornår det kommer. Rasmus siger, at det ikke kan være rigtigt, og at det værste er uvisheden. Hvor længe skal han være der? Hvad skal der ske bagefter? Hvornår kommer han til at se sin mor? Sin kæreste? Og vennerne? Der er ingen, som ved det, og ingen som kan fortælle ham noget. Han må som de andre drenge vente. Vente på politiet, på sagsbehandleren, på dommen, på sit hverdagsliv derhjemme, som forsætter uden ham.

Rasmus går op og ned af gangen. Han råber højt: ”Jeg kan ikke holde kedsomheden ud.” ”Jeg hader det her,” siger han mere stille. Jeg spørger, hvad han lavede udenfor. Ballade, kun ballade. Jeg dur ikke; jeg kan ikke sidde stille eller koncentrere mig.

En fjerdedel af de anbragte børn optræder i psykiatriregisteret og en endnu større andel vurderes at have psykiske problemer.

Timerne går langsomt.

Efter aftenvagterne er mødt, og der har været overlap med dagvagterne, kommer vi alle sammen udenfor. Vi låses igennem tre døre og er ude på

græsset omgivet af høje hegn og mure. Drengene spiller fodbold med personalet. Et par af drengene kommer og sætter sig på bænken sammen med mig. De diskuterer, om det vil være muligt at klatre over hegnet. Hvad skulle der til for at flygte? Det vil måske være lettere fra nogle af de andre afdelinger. Karmel ser på mig og spørger, om man er syg, fordi man gerne vi slippe ud herfra?

Aftensmaden bliver lavet af personalet, mens drengene ryger, hænger ud på deres værelser, ser tv eller spiller Playstation. De, som ikke har besøgs- og brevforbud, taler med deres forældre og kærester.

Ved aftensmaden spiser alle drengene godt af pasta, kødsovs, salat og brød. Karmel siger, at det er ligesom at være på hotel, hvis bare personalet gad servere maden. Der grines rundt om bordet. Rasmus siger grinende til Karmel, at han da bare kan komme tilbage til arresten, så kan han få serveret maden. Karmels øjne bliver mørke. Arresten er det sidste sted, han ønsker at komme hen, så hellere være et år her på afdelingen. Tre af de andre drenge, som også har været i arresthuse inden deres anbringelse på afdelingen nikker bekræftende, og der spises videre i stilhed.

I 2008 var der 243 afvisninger fra de sikrede institutioner som følge af manglende plads, hvilket er en stigning på 79 i forhold til 2007. 183 af de afviste børn blev anbragt i landets fængsler og arresthuse indtil de enten blev frigivet eller der blev plads på en af landets syv sikrede institutioner.

Efter aftensmaden træner de fleste af drengene sammen med en af pædagogerne i afdelingens træningsrum. For to af drengene er det nærmest blevet et projekt at træne. De taler om, hvilke dele af kroppen de nu skal træne og drøfter ivrigt træningsstrategier med personalet. Begge drengene er ikke overraskende meget veltrænede og større, end da jeg mødte dem for første gang for over en måned siden.

Klokken 22:30 skal alle drengene ind på deres værelser for natten. Karmel kan ikke rigtig tage sig sammen og skal opfordres flere gange, før han finder vej til værelset. Han får en film med ind på værelset til at falde i søvn med.

Klokken 23 låser jeg den første dør ud af afdelingen op og tænker, at de, som lige nu ønsker at sætte endnu yngre og flere børn i 'børnefængsel', skulle have muligheden for at opholde sig på afdelingen, opleve drengene og deres uvished, kedsomhed, savn og forvirring samt blive konfronteret med det udsigtsløse overgreb, som indlåsning af børn må betragtes som.

Jeg låser mig igennem den sidste dør og hiver natteluften og friheden ind. Det kommer nok ikke bag på ret mange, at fængsler er ikke for børn. Ikke desto mindre går udviklingen i retning af, at stadig flere danske børn ender i det 'børnefængsel', der eufemistisk betegnes en sikret institution. Der er ingen grund til at tro, at denne udvikling gavner børn som Rasmus, Karmel, Adam, Rodez eller de 121 andre børn, som lige nu sidder i Danmarks børnefængsler.

Kommentar i Weekendavisen d. 7. august 2009

Sammen med Gitte Frydensbjerg

AndenG'eres kriminalitet falder

Sennels bog er primært et udtryk for hans politiske holdninger og har ikke meget at gøre med den virkelighed, som findes på de sikrede institutioner. Heldigvis.

Har man først én gang været på en sikret institution, er det svært ikke at fatte interesse for de unge, som befolker disse særlige, fængselslignende institutioner. Sådan har det i hvert fald været for os. Vi har begge som en del af vores forskningsarbejde gennem måneder fulgt hverdagslivet tæt på fire sikrede institutioner. Vi har observeret og deltaget i hverdagene og har haft mange samtaler med de unge og personalet på institutionerne.

Det var derfor med begejstring, at vi opdagede, at der nu blev sat fokus på netop disse unge med psykolog Nicolai Sennels bog Blandt kriminelle muslimer. Begejstringen aftog imidlertid hurtigt, da vi fik åbnet bogen. Vi kan på ingen måde genkende den sort/hvide karikatur af de unge, som Nicolai Sennels skaber i sin bog.

Sennels overordnede ambition med sin bog er at lave en psykologisk profil af den muslimske kultur baseret på samtaler, han som psykolog på den sikrede institution Sønderbro har haft med de unge. Allerede her begyndte vores undren. Kan man lave en profil af en kultur på baggrund af samtaler med en ganske særlig gruppe, som man selv mener tilhører denne kultur? Tænk, hvis Sennels ambition havde været den anden vej rundt - at lave en psykologisk profil af den danske kultur baseret alene på samtaler med 12-18-årige drenge anbragt som følge af kriminalitet.

Det giver jo slet ikke mening!

Til vores overraskelse påberåber Sennels sig igennem hele bogen at være humanist og at ville hjælpe »de muslimske unge«. I sin version af humanismen

beskriver Sennels to grupper af unge på de sikrede institutioner: muslimerne og danskerne. Muslimerne er »ydrestyret« og mangler refleksivitet, mens danskerne er »indrestyret« og refleksive.

Det betyder, at de danske unge er mere opmærksomme på deres følelser og på, hvordan de bedst muligt udtrykker dem, samtidig med at de i højere grad er refleksive i forhold til deres personlige andel og ansvar i konflikter.

De muslimske unge derimod er præget af en »ydre styring«, der gør, at de oplever, at deres følelsesmæssige problemer skyldes ydre faktorer, som de giver skylden frem for selv at tage et ansvar. De føler sig som ofre for omstændighederne, hvilket ifølge Sennels betyder, at de tillader sig at reagere mere aggressivt, fordi de føler, at deres vrede er »retfærdig«.

Under vores langvarige ophold på de sikrede institutioner har vi ikke mødt særlig mange unge, uanset religiøs eller etnisk baggrund, som var refleksive, kunne styre deres aggressioner eller havde en »indre styring« (hvad det så end er). I stedet mødte vi svigtede og ofte afstumpede unge, som uanset baggrund havde svært ved at indgå i normale sociale sammenhænge. Unge, som ikke alene følte sig stigmatiserede og afviste af samfundet, men også i mange tilfælde reelt var det. Om disse unges baggrund var dansk, pakistansk, polsk, tyrkisk eller en anden, var ikke af afgørende betydning for, hvordan de unge opførte sig, eller - som Sennels påstår - determinerende for deres personlighed. Danske såvel som bosniske unge kunne finde på at ty til vold, hvis de blev presset. Danske såvel som somaliske unge kunne med stor overbevisning fortælle, at for dem var det nu slut med al kriminalitet.

Danske såvel som kurdiske unge havde problemer med at stoppe et ofte omfattende misbrug af stoffer.

Nu findes der jo mange definitioner på humanisme, men den, som Sennels præsenterer i sin bog, ligger langt fra alt, hvad vi almindeligvis forstår ved begrebet. For os handler humanisme og en humanistisk tilgang i socialt og pædagogisk arbejde om at tillægge mennesket værdi i sig selv og at møde det enkelte menneske på netop dette menneskes præmisser. Sennels gør lige præcis

det modsatte. Han sætter alle ind i to kategorier: muslim eller dansker - og forklarer så en række meget komplekse problemstillinger ud fra disse oversimplificerede kategorier. Den enkelte unge forsvinder i Sennels bog og bliver alene til en »muslim«. En muslim, der mangler »indre styring«, forståelse for det danske samfund og for danske værdier. En muslim, der er en hykler i forhold til både islam og det danske samfunds forventninger. En muslim, der i sidste instans udgør en stor fare for det danske samfund.
Som sagt er Sennels påståede humanisme og hans sort/hvide karikatur ikke en, vi kan genkende - hverken fra de unge, men heldigvis heller ikke fra det personale, som arbejder med de unge på de sikrede institutioner. Hos størstedelen af personalet på de sikrede institutioner så vi i stedet det praktiseret, som vi opfatter som humanisme, nemlig at den enkelte unge blev mødt af forståelse og omsorg uden skelnen til etnicitet eller religion.

Religion og kulturelle forskelle er selvfølgelig en naturlig del af det pædagogiske arbejde, men vi har heldigvis ikke på noget tidspunkt oplevet, at det blev determinerende for, hvordan personalet behandlede de unge. De unge bliver overordnet set mødt med respekt for og anerkendelse af, hvem de er som mennesker med alle de mange facetter, der dertil hører.

En af Sennels grundpåstande i bogen er, at kriminaliteten blandt unge muslimske indvandrere er steget markant de senere år. Sennels referer løbende til forskellige statistikker, som skal underbygge denne påstand om, at det er helt ad helvede til, når vi ser på indvandreres (læs muslimers) kriminalitet. Desværre er de statistiske opgørelser overvejende hentet fra dagsbladsartikler og ikke fra primærkilder, samtidig med at Sennels helt ukritisk sætter lighedstegn mellem de indvandrere/efterkommere, der begår kriminalitet, og muslimer. Det er langt fra sikkert, at der eksisterer en sådan sammenhæng.

Det kunne både have styrket og nuanceret Sennels' argument, hvis han havde ulejliget sig med at lave et par simple beregninger på Danmark Statistiks frit tilgængelige tal over kriminalitet og befolkningsudvikling. For selvom man ikke kan kategorisere efter religiøs overbevisning, så kan man frit lave beregninger opdelt på personer med dansk oprindelse, indvandrere og efterkommere af indvandrere - og selvom man forsat ikke kan sige, om der er tale om muslimer

blandt indvandrere og efterkommere, så kan man se, om der skulle være noget om snakken om, at der er sket en stigning i andelen af kriminelle med ikke dansk oprindelse.

Vi har i denne anledning selv kigget lidt på tallene og hurtigt beregnet følgende: Fra 2000 til 2007 er der samlet set sket en stigning i andelen af afgørelser pr. 1000 15-19-årige på cirka 6 procent. Ser vi på personer med dansk oprindelse, er andelen af afgørelser fra 2000 til 2007 steget med 7 procent pr. 1000 15-19-årige. For gruppen af efterkommere er der til gengæld sket et fald på cirka 3 procent i andelen af afgørelser pr. 1000 efterkommere i samme periode - og det på trods af, at antallet af 15-19-årige efterkommere er mere end fordoblet i perioden. Sennels grundantagelse om, at andelen af kriminelle muslimer (som vi her antager er en del af kategorien efterkommere) synes at eksplodere og true selve fundamentet for den danske velfærdsstat, er derfor nok lidt forhastet.

Det er nærliggende - efter at have læst Sennels bog og gennemgået hans argumenter - at mistænke Sennels for at have en anden og mere politisk dagsorden end ønsket om ud fra et humanistisk ståsted at hjælpe de muslimske unge. Mistanken bestyrkes i bogens afsluttende kapitel, hvor Sennels direkte skriver, at den muslimske kultur slet ikke passer til den vestlige, og at vi aldrig vil kunne leve sammen uden at skulle gøre vold på vores egen og hinandens kulturer og værdier.

Det er rigtig ærgerligt, at en bog som kunne have givet et vedkommende indblik i, hvem nogle af Danmarks kriminelle unge er, i realiteten er et politisk projekt i forklædning. Hvis der alene var tale om en akademisk øvelse, betød det måske ikke så meget, men der er langt mere på spil her. At skrive en politisk debatbog forklædt som en fagbog, der hævder at være baseret på professionelle observationer, er at fordreje virkeligheden.

Sennels bog er primært et udtryk for hans politiske holdninger og har ikke meget at gøre med den virkelighed, som findes på de sikrede institutioner. Heldigvis, kan man tilføje, for hvis der virkelig var hold i den deprimerende sort/hvide karikatur, som Sennels fremstiller, ja, så var der ikke meget andet at gøre end at lade alle de muslimske drenge forblive indespærret!

Kronik i Berlingske d. 1. juli 2010

Velkommen i de voksnes rækker!

Kære 14-årige,

I dag sker det! I træder nu i samlet flok ind i de voksnes rækker! I bliver nu ansvarlige borgere, der skal kende konsekvenserne af jeres handlinger. I kan nu blive rigtig kriminelle!

Et af hovedargumenterne bag nedsættelsen af den kriminelle lavalder er, at I er mere modne end generationerne før jer, og derfor er klar til at påtage jer voksenlivets ansvar. Altså, det er når vi taler om kriminalitet, for I er jo *ikke* modne nok til at dyrke sex, drikke alkohol eller ryge. Endvidere har det været fremme, at I begår mere kriminalitet end tidligere generationer – og det selvom betænkningen fra regeringens Ungdomskommission viste, at I faktisk begår mindre og mindre kriminalitet. Et andet af de argumenter, som bruges for at retfærdiggøre nedsættelsen er, at I 14-årige begår langt mere kriminalitet end de 13-årige – og ja, I laver da mere kriminalitet, men de 12-årige laver helt sikkert også mere kriminalitet end de 11-årige og så videre…

En lille gruppe af jer 14-årige vil helt sikkert se nedsættelsen som en gave. Nu bliver det endelig muligt for jer at bevise, at I er rigtige 'gangstere'. I kan klare mosten og sidde i Vestre fængsel. For er der noget mere cool end at kunne fortælle vennerne, at man har været en tur i Vestre? I andre, for hvem et ophold i Vestre Fængsel kan lyde som en tur i helvedes forgård, for jer, er der også håb! For skulle I først ende i Vestre Fængsel eller på en af de sikrede afdelinger (aflåste døgninstitutioner), så kan I der møde netop sådanne nye venner, som forstår værdien af at have siddet inde – og så har I jo dem at hænge ud med, når I kommer ud!

Det har været fremme, at sænkelsen af den kriminelle lavalder skulle medvirke til at fjerne jer fra de kriminelle miljøer, som bidrager til, at I begår kriminalitet. En lidt pudsig forestilling, hvis man først har været i Vestre Fængsel, arresthusene og på de sikrede afdelinger, for man skal nok lede længe efter mere kriminelle miljøer end dem, der findes disse steder – faktisk er de andre indsatte disse steder også potentielt kriminelle!

Argumentet lyder ganske vist, at det ikke er meningen, at I 14-årige skal ende i Vestre Fængsel eller landets arresthuse, som jo er fængsler bygget til voksne fanger, men man vil heller ikke garantere, at I ikke gør det! Heldigvis er man er ved at bygge flere sikrede afdelinger og ingen tvivl: det er meget bedre på de sikrede afdelinger end i Vestre Fængsel eller et arresthus. På de sikrede afdelinger sidder I børn da i det mindste ikke isoleret, sådan som det ofte er tilfældet i Vestre fængsel og arresthusene for at beskytte jer mod voksne fanger. Men bare rolig 14-årige, I skal nok opleve straffens og indespærringens realiteter, de sikrede afdelinger fungerer nemlig under fængselslignende forhold – der er lås på døren, overvågning og høje hegn – så snydt for kontrol- og straffeforanstaltninger bliver I ikke!

At det er godt med konsekvens og en advarsel for livet, når man som barn er ude i noget skidt, er også blevet fremført som et argument for nedsættelsen. Straf og indespærring skulle altså være til for at hjælpe jer! To måneder helt alene indespærret i en celle på ca. 8 kvm med en times gårdtur om dagen – er åbenbart det, der skal hjælpe på psykiske problemer, misbrug og manglende skolegang. Problemer, som vi fra både danske og internationale undersøgelser ved, at de unge der i dag bliver sigtet langt oftere har end andre unge. At det stort set ikke findes en eneste ekspert, som mener, at indespærring og straf bidrager til en positiv udvikling, syntes desværre ikke at spille nogen rolle, hverken i beslutningsprocessen eller udfaldet.

De af jer, der ender med at blive ramt af den nye kriminelle lavalder og ender i Vestre Fængsel, et arresthus eller på en sikret afdeling skal ikke bruge for meget tid på at spekulere over, hvor lang tid I skal være indespærret. Ligesom de fleste 15-17-årige, som sidder på de sikrede afdelinger i dag vil I højst sandsynligvis ikke få at vide, hvor lang tid i skal opholde jer bag lås og slå. I vil være varetægtsfængslet (i surrogat) og sidde og vente på at jeres sag kommer for retten. Måske bliver I kendt skyldige, måske gør I ikke. Men indtil da vil I med stor sandsynlighed opleve, at I hver fjerde uge bliver fristforlænget, hvorefter I efter fire uger igen bliver fristforlænget osv. I er altså ligesom varetægtsfængslede voksne tilbageholdt på ubestemt tid, uden at være dømt skyldige.

Nu er der måske nogle af jer som tænker; 'Hvad med vores rettigheder som børn?' Ja, de står jo nedskrevet i FNs Konvention om Barnets

Rettigheder, og både danske og internationale børneorganisationer fraråder da også med henvisning hertil en nedsættelse af den kriminelle lavalder. Det står lysende klart i konventionen, at alt skal ske 'til barnets bedste'! Desværre, er der tale om fortolkninger, og 'barnets bedste' kan derfor på forunderlig vis her i Danmark nu blive til straf og indespærring. Eftersom I ikke er modne nok til at kunne stemme, så kan I alene bruge jeres rettigheder til at protestere og give jeres mening tilkende. Måske man lytter til jer, men I skal nok ikke have store forhåbninger. Der er jo ikke blevet lyttet til anbefalingerne fra Ungdomskommissionen eller den massive kritik af nedsættelsen af lavalderen, der er kommet fra fængselsansatte, dommere, kriminologer og en mængde andre fagpersoner. Desværre, er vi i dag nået dertil, at det signal som med denne nedsættelse indirekte sendes til jer unge er: Pak børnerettighederne sammen og 'gå direkte i fængsel'!

Hvad er det så, at en kriminalitetsdom betyder? Jo, udover den afmagt, stress og angst, som I vil opleve under varetægtsfængsling og måske afsoning, så betyder en dom også en plettet straffeattest. En attest som sikkert vil betyde, at I ikke kan få fritidsjobbet som flaskedreng/pige, og måske også vil gøre, at den ønskede læreplads bliver svær at finde. Alt dette vil I dog tage højde for, når I står og skal til at begå noget kriminelt. For i modsætning til den kriminalitet som begås af de 15-17-årige, så vil jeres kriminalitet – givet jeres nyvundne modenhed – helt sikkert ikke være impulsiv og situationsbestemt.

Kære 14-årige, efter at have mødt og talt med børn og unge, som allerede opholdte sig i Vestre Fængsel, i arresthusene og på de sikrede afdelinger, er det mit håb, at ingen af jer faktisk kommer til at blive ramt af nedsættelsen af den kriminelle lavalder. Selvom den danske forskning er begrænset, så viser den sammen med international forskning et klart billede af, at de problemer, som unge kriminelle har, oftest er komplekse; De omfatter både familie, venskabsrelationer, skolegang, arbejdsmarkedstilknytning, misbrugsproblemer og de unges fysiske og psykiske helbred – og ikke overraskende kriminalitet. Hvad vi også kan se af forskningen er, at for en betydelig del af disse unge vil problemerne følge med ind i voksenlivet. Der er derfor brug for indsatser, som ikke alene straffer og indespærre kriminelle børn og unge, men som også på lang sigt

hjælper til at løse de komplekse og mangeartede problemer, som vi ved, at disse børn og unge lever med.

Kronik i Politiken d. 3. oktober 2011

Børn i fængsel – observationsnoter fra USA

Klokken er lidt i 10 om formiddage og jeg mødes med tre unge socialarbejdere, der arbejder med løsladte børn og unge, foran 'The Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center' i Californien, USA, som er en institution for børn og unge, som enten er varetægtsfængslet af politiet, har brudt deres 'parole' (prøveløsladelse), eller som venter på at blive flyttet til afsoning. Jeg er her som 'visiting scholar', da jeg er på studieophold i forbindelse med afslutningen af min ph.d. i sociologi om unge i alderen 12-18 år anbragt på danske sikrede (aflåste) institutioner. I Danmark har vi de sidste 10 år set en markant stigning i anbringelser af unge på sikrede afdelinger som følge af en generelt hårdere linje over for kriminalitet. En linje, som i mange år har været praktiseret i USA. Det er imidlertid ikke alene i forhold til synet på kriminalitet, at Danmark lader sig inspirer af USA. Inden for socialt arbejde er USA for tiden meget populær som forløber inden for systematiske programmer og behandlingsmetoder. Jeg er derfor spændt på at få et kig ind i, hvordan de i praksis håndter indespærringen af børn og unge i konflikt med loven.

Bygningen er i lyse sten og minder mig udefra mest af alt om en stor kontorbygning. Jeg tvivler på, at bygningen faktisk rummer en sikret institution for børn og unge. Min tvivl er ubegrundet, for det viser sig, at næsten 200 børn og unge er indespærret i bygningen. Institutionen rummer alle børn fra Alameda County (kommune/amt), som er i politiets eller ungdomsretssystemets varetægt. I Alameda County, hvor der bor ca. 1,5 million mennesker, sidder der næsten *seks* børn per 10.000 børn mellem 0 og 18 år indespærret i The Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center. Til trods for, at antallet af pladser på de danske sikrede afdelinger er steget markant de sidste 10 år, sidder der i Danmark til sammenligning lidt mere end *et* barn per 10.000 danske børn mellem 0 og 18 år indespærret på de sikrede afdelinger, når alle 153 pladser er belagt.

Efter at værre kommet sikkert igennem metaldetektorerne ved indgangen ender vi i en foyer med store glaspartier og marmor. Her mødes vi med Officer Blake. Officer Blake er en venligt udsende stor sort mand, som skal være vores guide rundt i institutionen. Vi begiver os hen til elevatoren

og køre op i bygningen. Jeg tror, vi ender på 1. eller 2. sal, men fra da af mister jeg orienteringen i bygningen.

Det første vi møder, er en skranke med en kvinde, der sidder i et venteområde oplyst af lysstofrør og sodavandsmaskinernes blinken. Bag en skranke sidder en kvinde. Et skilt oplyser, at besøgene må tage maksimalt fire sodavand eller stykker slik med til besøg med indsatte. Bag skranken kan vi kigge igennem glasruden ind i besøgslokalet, hvor små borde står på række med en stol på hver side. Der er besøgstid en time, både lørdag og søndag.

Kvinden bag skranken smiler, da vi går videre igennem den fuldautomatiske jerndør. På den anden side ser vi 'kontroltårnet'. Et rum af glas, hvor der sidder fem mennesker omgivet af skærme. Herfra kan de overvåge hele bygningen og kontrollere låsen på dørene. Vi smiler til dem, mens vi går fordi, på vej hen til lægeklinikken. I lægeklinikken møder vi personalet og en masse fint udstyr. Officer Blake viser stolt apparater frem. Med et af apparaterne har personalet mulighed for at tjekke, om de unge har behov for briller. Hvis de har, modtager får de gratis briller. Faktisk, fortæller Officer Blake, får de unge langt bedre sundhedsbehandling her, end de ville udenfor.

Igennem flere lange hvide gange med lysstofrør og store tunge jerndøre, der åbner og lukker, når vi smiler til kameraerne, kommer vi frem til modtagelsen. Først forstår jeg ikke rigtigt konceptet, da der ikke er sådanne modtagelser på danske sikrede afdelinger, men modtagelsen er den central, hvor de unge først kommer ind i bygningen, også de skal igennem en metaldetektor.

De andre er gået hen til et lille rum. Her får barnet eller den unge både et fysik og psykisk sundhedstjek af en sygeplejerske. Officer Blake forklarer, at hvis de er selvmordstruet, skal de jo kameraovervåges i deres celle. Jeg spørger ind til børnenes alder. Officer Blarke fortæller, at de ældste er 17 år, og at den yngste lige nu er 12 år. Der har været børn på 6 år – der er ingen officiel nedre aldersgrænse. Officer Blake ryster på hovedet, dette er jo ikke et sted for små børn, men hvad skal man gøre, når der ikke er nogen til at hente dem?

Jeg ser de første børn og unge i modtagelsen. De ser ikke på os, men ned i gulvet. En er på vej igennem metaldetektoren. En anden ligger inde i et

helt hvidt rum på en indbygget briks med hovedet ind mod væggen. Væggen ud mod modtagelsen er i glas, så vi kan se ham. Han har været igennem modtagelsen og venter nu på, at en vagt henter ham op til en afdeling. En tredje er ved at få taget fingeraftryk og irisscanning. En fjerde kommer ud fra det rum, hvor de skal aflevere alt deres tøj, som de først får tilbage ved løsladelsen. På institutionstøjet står der med sorte bogstaver The Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center, og på fødderne har børnene og de unge badetøfler i røgfarvet plastik. Børnene og de unge må ingenting have med sig. Jeg spørger Officer Blake, om de unge må ryge. Han ryster på hovedet, det må de ikke – det er jo en offentlig bygning. Jeg tænker på de mange timer, som de unge på de danske sikrede afdelinger bruger på at ryge for at dulme nervøsiteten, samt hvor stor tryghed det giver de danske unge, at de har deres eget tøj, billeder, blade, toiletsager og lignende med sig ind på deres værelser.

Jeg spørger ikke om mere, men følger stille efter de andre ud i endnu en kæmpe hvid gang med linoleum på gulvet og ingenting på væggene udover skyggerne fra de flimrende lysstofrør i loftet. Gangen leder os ned for at se to af de i alt seks afdelinger. Efter at være kommet igennem jerndøren – hvorover det oplyses, at der kan anvendes tåregas i området bag denne dør – kommer vi ind i pigernes afdeling. Ligesom i Danmark er der her langt færre piger i konflikt med loven. Derfor fylder pigerne kun en afdeling ud af seks. Langs to af væggene er der celler i to etager. I øjeblikket huser afdelingen 27 piger, men har plads til 30. På de danske afdelinger er der kun omkring fem unge sammen, og drenge og piger opholder sig på samme afdeling.

I midten af det store rum, som vi kommer ind i, er der fem borde med fastgjorte stole, som er boltet fast i gulvet. Der er også en forhøjning, hvorfra vagterne kan kontrollere låsene til alle cellerne, som er placeret i to etager langs endevæggen. Det eneste andet i det store lokale er en lille reol med bøger. I modsætning til drengenes blå og hvide tøj, har pigerne tøj i lyserøde nuancer. Jeg tænker, at det får dem til at ligne små skolepiger, men – minder jeg mig selv om – det er de jo rent faktisk også.

Vi ser afdelingens gummicelle. Det er en meget lille celle beklædt med lysebrunt gummi og intet andet. Der er en rude i døren, ellers er der intet lys. En rist i gulvet fungerer som toilet. Jeg finder ikke ud af, hvor lang tid et

barn eller en ung kan være låst inde i cellen. I Danmark har jeg aldrig set en tilsvarende form for celle.

Videre af de lange gange til en af drengeafdelingerne. Her ser vi en almindelig celle, og den er – til min overraskelse – ikke meget større end gummicellen. På bagvæggen er der en indstøbt briks, og på sidevæggen er der et lille indstøbt bord med en indstøbt skammel foran. Ved den anden væg længst mod døren er der et ståltoilet og en stålvask. Det er tilladt at have fire bøger i sin celle. Der er intet andet. Eneste vindue er det i døren ud mod gangen.

Her er faste rutiner, som alle afdelinger følger, og alle børn og unge skal følge samme rutine. Der er skolepligt i USA, så alle skal i skole. Børnene og de unge undervises af lærer i særlige skolelokaler. Uden for skolelokalerne overvåger en vagt. Også på de sikrede afdelinger i Danmark er der skolegang, men den er oftest individuel og overvåges ikke af vagter.

Inden vi forlader drengeafdelingen, ser vi afdelingens gård, hvor børnene og de unge er en time om eftermiddagen. Det eneste som viser, at vi nu er udenfor, er den blå himmel over os. Den lille gård med asfalt er omhegnet af fire etagers høje mure uden vinduer. På endevæggen er der øverst oppe et vægmaleri. Det forestiller en tegneseriefigur, som bryder med de dårlige venner (måske banden) og vælger uddannelse (og dermed penge). Officer Blake fortæller stolt, at det er lavet efter, at kunstneren havde talt med nogle af de indsatte piger. Det er det første og eneste maleri eller kunstværk, jeg ser. På vejen ud ser vi frokosten ankomme i store blå plastikkasser på hjul. Vi ved kun, at det er mad, fordi Officer Blake fortæller os det. Jeg tænker igen på de danske unge på de sikrede afdelinger, og den glæde og taknemmelighed de viste den daglige madlavning på afdelingerne.

Da vi skal forlade afdelingen, bliver jerndøren ikke åbnet. Det lyder højt og rungende fra de skjulte højtalere: ”Gangen fri, indsatte passerer”. Vi må ikke opholde os på gangen samtidig med, at de 30 drenge fra Afdeling 4 fragtes tilbage til deres afdeling. Igennem den lille rude i jerndøren ud til gangen ser jeg først vagten, så de mange mørke drengeansigter, der marcherer af sted og til sidst endnu en vagt. Endelig lyder det fra kontroltårnet, at gangen er fri, og det bliver vores tur til at blive lukket ud på gangen. Meddelelserne om flytning af indsatte runger ud i hele bygningen

den næste halve time, mens de unge i geledder fragtes til og fra frokosten på deres afdelinger.

Officer Blake tager os igennem flere gange og døre og viser os til sidst med stolthed et stort udendørsareal med to basketball-baner, græs og mulighed for at grille. Her kan vagterne tage de unge ud ca. en gang om ugen, så de kan se lidt græs og træerne på bjerget over os, forklarer Officer Blake. Det høje hegn rundt om området er sort, så man hverken kan se ud eller ind. Lidt ligesom i den store betonbygning uden vinduer og dagslys.

På et spørgsmål om, hvorfor Officer Blake arbejder her, svarer han, at han gør det, fordi han godt kan lide børnene og de unge. Han tror på, at han gør en positiv forskel, også selvom han umiddelbart efter fortæller, at han netop nu vogter to drenge, hvis fædre han kender, fordi de selv har været indsat her som børn. På vej tilbage til den lyse foyer spørger jeg, hvor lang tid børnene og de unge kan være indespærret. Officer Blake forklarer, at det er meget forskelligt, alt fra tre dage til tre år. De sidder her, mens deres sag efterforskes, og det kan tage lang tid afhængigt af, hvor alvorlig deres formodede forbrydelse eller forbrydelser er.

Det er ikke uden en vis lettelse, efter kun tre timer, at jeg siger farvel til den flinke Officer Blake og træder ud i friheden i den stikkende sol på parkeringspladsen i bjergene over Oakland. Jeg vekslede ikke et ord med et barn eller en ung og så kun deres ansigter som skygger af afmagt og angst. Afmagt og angst var også en del af hverdagen for de unge, jeg mødte på de danske sikrede afdelinger, som følge af selve indespærringen og de unges uafklarede situation. Selve de fysiske rammer og den omsorg og forståelse, som den enkelte unge blev mødt med, fremstod imidlertid langt mere human end her på The Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center.

Det kan vel tænkes, at de amerikanske børn og unge får bedre sundhedstjek og mere skolegang igennem The Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center's standardiserede programmer end børn og unge på de sikrede institutioner i Danmark. Efter mit besøg er min vurdering imidlertid, at den menneskelige omsorg for den enkelte ung forsvinder i al systematikken og ønsket om at straffe disse børn og unge. Når vi i Danmark lader os inspirere af USA's straffende linje og systematiske programmer og metoder, skal vi måske kigge en ekstra gang derover og se på den helhed, som disse programmer indgår i. Et program kan i sig selv lyde fint og flot, men set i sin

kontekst kan det være en del af et fremmedgørende og inhumant system. Et system, hvor fokus primært er på staf, og ikke inkluderer den omsorg for barnet eller den unge, som vi trods alt kender fra Danmark.

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