

Confinement and Caring

On sociomaterial practices in secured institutions for youths

Akademisk avhandling

Som för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen vid Sahlgrenska akademien, Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras i hörsal Arvid Carlsson, Academicum, Medicinaregatan 3, Göteborg, den 29 april, klockan 13.00

av **Kajsa Nolbeck**

Fakultetsopponent: Professor David Wästerfors, Lunds Universitet, Sverige.

Avhandlingen baseras på följande delarbeten

- I. Nolbeck, K., Wijk, H., Lindahl, G., Olausson, S. & Thodelius, C. (2022). Criminal activity during institutional youth care: The association between individual and spatial aspects. *In manuscript*.
- II. Nolbeck, K., Wijk, H., Lindahl, G. & Olausson, S. (2022). Claiming and Reclaiming Settings, Objects, and Situations: A Microethnographic Study of the Sociomaterial Practices of Everyday Life at Swedish Youth Homes. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. March 2022. doi:10.1177/08912416221082701
- III. Nolbeck, K., Wijk, H., Lindahl, G. & Olausson, S. (2020) "If you don't behave, you're in real shit, you don't get outside the doors"—a phenomenological hermeneutic study of adolescents' lived experiences of the socio-spatial environment of involuntary institutional care. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*. 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2020.1726559>
- IV. Nolbeck, K., Olausson, S., Lindahl, G., Thodelius, C. & Wijk, H. (2022). Be prepared and do the best you can: A focus group study with staff on the care environment at Swedish special youth homes. *Submitted*.

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Abstract

In special youth homes run by the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care, youths are placed because of involuntary care or a verdict. The legal regulations and conflicting requirements of care, security, and children's rights place high demands on these institutions' care environment. The **overall aim** of this thesis was to investigate and explore the impact of the care environment on youths and staff, and on the interactions between youths and staff in special youth homes. The **methods** used in this study were (I) register and survey based statistical analyses, (II) microethnography, (III) photovoice, and (IV) focus group discussions with staff. The theoretical interpretation of the findings was from the perspectives of caring as a sociomaterial relational practice, and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. **Results:** Study I showed associations between crime during care, and solitary confinement, escaping, alcohol use, and the duration of placement. Criminal activities during care could be interpreted as rational reactions to stressful situations, in such a way that repressive strategies increase the risk of further violence and criminal activity. Study II showed that staff members' control over objects and settings means a corresponding control over the definition of the special youth home, and what happens there. The behaviors required by the staff constitute sociomaterial control practices rather than care practices. In study III, the environment was experienced by the youths as an intertwined social and spatial space distancing them from the staff. The youths strived to present themselves as worthy of increased freedom and negotiating with their behavior, leading to reinforced feelings of social exclusion. In study IV, the staff experienced the care environment as constituting conflicting requirements between the youths' needs and possible achievements given the prerequisites. This constitutes a constant struggle that could be interpreted as conflicting moral and instrumental demands, often resulting in sociomaterial control practices—rather than care practices. The **conclusion** was that the moral requirements for care and security were conflicting, although their unreflected but rational solution was through the environment's security inscription which encouraged controlling and repressive sociomaterial practices among the staff, rather than caring practices. Goffman's concept of decorum can be interpreted as an aspect of sociomateriality. The findings point to the importance of viewing spaces and objects as crucial parts of care practices and highlight the intentions of institutional designs and objects. **Keywords:** Institutional youth care, Care environment, Sociomateriality, Erving Goffman, Quantitative methods, Ethnography, Photovoice, Focus group discussions