

Between Diverging Discourses of the Child:

Juveniles' Self-construction in Coercive Residential Care

Abstract

Based on a qualitative study, this article explores how Norwegian juveniles construct themselves through stories of everyday life in coercive residential care and how this is related to diverging discourses of the child's status in society. The findings reveal two dominant positions of identification: the autonomy position and the responsibility position, which are discussed as made possible by the child-as-citizen discourse. The article argues that juveniles' self-constructions primarily contrasts but also are intervened with the dominant discourse of the vulnerable child in social work. The article concludes that recognizing juveniles' in residential care as citizens implies a critical evaluation of practices inherent in the discourse of the vulnerable child.

Key words:

Children, juveniles, self-construction, discourse, residential care, citizenship

Introduction

As the focus on children as rights-claimers and active citizens has increased in recent years, discussions of children's status in society have become increasingly important (Kjørholt, 2002, 2013; Warming, 2011). In Norway, this discourse was reinforced by the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 and its further incorporation into Norwegian law in 2003 (Kjørholt & Lindén, 2004).

Within the child protection system, questions on the child's status have emerged as the global focus on children's rights and participation has increased, and they have been given more attention in research and policy. However, it has been argued that there is a gap between theory and practice (Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2015). Several researchers have claimed perspectives on the vulnerable child as a dominant knowledge regime within social work practice with regard to children and young people (Amundsen, 2002; Bijleveld et al., 2015; Goodyer, 2013; Hennum, 2010; Reime, forthcoming; Steinsholt, 2002). The diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas of the child in residential care form the context in which children and young people make meaning of their lives and of who they are.

Based on interviews with juveniles placed in coercive residential care governed by the Child Welfare Act § 4-24 "*Placement and retention in an institution without the child's own consent*" (Act of 17 July 1992 no 100), this article explores juveniles' self-construction within residential child care and how this relates to discourses on the child. Children with comprehensive drug or behaviour problems can be placed in a training or treatment institution for up to 12 months without their consent or the consent of those who have parental responsibility for them (Child Welfare Act, 1992). During the last four months of 2014, 184 children were placed in coercive residential care (according to statistics from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs). Decisions on coercive treatment can be made for juveniles up to 18 years of age, and thereby, some juveniles will turn 18 during their

period of treatment. Following the Norwegian Child Welfare Law (paragraph 1-3), juveniles under the age of 23 are given the status of a child if measures are implemented before the age of 18 years and are sustained or replaced by other measures by this law after the day of authority (Stette, 2016). Hence, the oldest group of juveniles in residential care can be perceived as having an unsettled status between “child” in the Child Welfare Law and “adult” according to the International Human Rights Law. In the article, the informants are referred to as juveniles, which is the typical term used within this type of residential care unit. In the analysis and discussion, juveniles are understood as a category of “child”.

The informants in this study were recruited from cooperatives, which is one type of residential care unit in Norway, frequently used for coercive placements. These residential care units represent residential care facilities in which adults and juveniles live (and work) together, and they have a strong emphasis on solidarity and the idea of family in the treatment of juveniles (Jørgensen & Pedersen, 2010; Koltveit, 2013). The cooperatives are open institutions (unlocked), which is the general practice in Norway (Bengtsson & Jakobsen, 2009).

This article explores self-construction from the perspectives of the juveniles by taking departure in the analytical tool of subject positions derived from discourse theory. Subject positions are made possible by the available discourses, and the concept relates to positions or roles with which the subjects can identify (Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis, 2000). In that sense, subject positions allow for an analysis of the interrelatedness between individual self-construction and the discourses they draw on in these meaning-making processes. The article explores the following two research questions: 1) How do juveniles placed in coercive residential child care position themselves when they talk about their everyday life? 2) What discourses of the child are activated through the identified subject positions? This article aims to establish a foundation for reflection on the dynamic relationship between dominant ideas of

the child within social work practice and possibilities for juveniles' self-construction within residential child care.

Citizenship and Agency

Discussions of the child's status in society can be approached by asking about the child's potential for citizenship or agency. Citizenship can be described as a contingent concept, referring to different and sometimes competing ideas of what it means to be a citizen and who can be included as a citizen (Roholt, Hildreth, & Baizerman, 2008). In the classical notion of citizenship dating back to Aristotle, citizenship was associated with political activity; hence women, slaves and children were excluded from holding citizenship status (Everson, 1988). Within the citizenship literature, children have traditionally been defined as citizens "in potentia" (Marshall, 1992) and perceived as lacking the competencies considered necessary to hold citizenship status, such as rationality and independency (Larkins, 2014, p. 8). Other approaches to citizenship have even focused on children as a threat to citizenship and, hence, in need of discipline and training before they can be given the obligations and rights that accompany the status of citizen (Hart, 2009).

Recent approaches to citizenship have begun to address a broader understanding of citizenship that includes both children and marginalized adults (Lister, 2007a, 2008). Based on empirical research, Larkins (2014) launched a new model to analyse children's citizenship that focused on the relational activities of citizenship rather than citizenship as a status. Within this model, four different citizenship activities were described: negotiation of rules and creation of selves, contribution to the social good, contribution to the achievement of individuals' rights and transgression of boundaries (Larkins, 2014, pp. 13-16).

Facilitated by the citizen discourse, the focus on children as agents has increased, and agency has been described as a precondition for participation and rights claims (Valentine,

2011). Polvere (2014, p. 184) defines agency as “the notion that individuals make unique sense of their experiences and intentionally engage, respond and contribute to the sociocultural environment in unique and goal-oriented ways”. Plows (2012) highlights the importance of studying the relational dimension of agency and its practical and contextual expressions. She argues that the dichotomy between being a citizen and becoming a citizen that has been raised within childhood sociology is over-simplifying and reductionist. The relational approach for studying citizenship and agency as put forward by both Larkins (2014) and Plows (2012) has inspired this article.

The Child’s Status within Social Work

The view of children as “citizens-to-become” has been the dominant view of children in the citizenship literature (Warming, 2011), and it is also comparable with the dominant discourse on the child within social work practice (Amundsen, 2002; Bijleveld et al., 2015; Goodyer, 2013; Hennum, 2010; Steinsholt, 2002). Atwool (2006) argues that social work has been characterized by a “welfare” approach that emphasizes children’s needs instead of rights, which has contributed to the disempowerment of the child. Warming (2011) claims that these perspectives on the child have led to practices dominated by discrimination, tokenism and discipline. The relationship between professional’s understandings of the child and the child’s needs and their practices relating to the children’s rights will be discussed in a forthcoming article. The article will highlight the consequences of an identified professional discourse on the child as vulnerable and irresponsible, which opens the possibility of general routines, control and interventions in personal integrity that can be potentially harmful for the child and its rights within residential child care (Reime, forthcoming).

Institutional practices can be perceived as a challenge to people’s agency, relating to the dynamics between power and control that are inherent within the institutional structures

(Polvere, 2014). Coercive residential care further actualizes this tension between agency and control, as the power structures in these institutions are juridical, legitimized and authorized. At the same time, research has shown the importance of agency when people in residential care facilities give accounts of themselves (Goffman, 1961; Polvere, 2014). Polvere (2014) explores the agency experiences among youths in the U.S. institutionalized mainly in residential facilities and inpatient psychiatric hospitals. She found four important themes of agency for juveniles: agency through resistance, agency through compliance, agency through self-advocacy and agency through dialectical thinking (Polvere, 2014, pp. 187-189).

The dynamic relationship between power and resistance is discussed in an article by Franzén (2015) on a behavioural modification programme in a youth detention home for boys in Sweden. She uses the term responsabilization to describe the process through which the boys are to be transferred and ethically reconstructed to self-governing citizens who take the fully responsibility for their lives (Franzén, 2015: 252-253). One of the conclusions in her study relates to how the boys strategically use the institutional rules both to resist responsabilization and to position themselves as responsible subjects.

Although there has recently been an increasing focus on theories of children's citizenship, there has been little empirical research on how children construct themselves and their possibilities within society (Jans, 2004; Lister, Smith, Middleton & Cox, 2003; Warming, 2011). Some studies have explored children's experiences of citizenship in general (Hart, 2009; Lister et al., 2003; Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005), but there is a lack of research on the conceptions of the child that are activated in children's and young people's meaning-making processes. There is also a lack of research on what actually occurs in residential care settings and how children and juveniles in residential care facilities experience and make sense of such placement (Franzén, 2015; Polvere, 2011). This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by taking as its departure juveniles' own meaning-making in the field

of coercive residential care and discussing it in relation to contemporary discourses on the child in society and in social work practice.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

The study was based on qualitative methods and in-depth interviews of 17 juveniles placed in coercive residential care. Informants were initially sought from a variety of residential care units, but problems due to access limited the study to the cooperatives. A broader variation in residential care settings might have generated other stories and everyday experiences.

Simultaneously, the stories from the cooperatives produced a wealth of material that can contribute to providing a general picture of the ideas of the child that are typical for juveniles placed in coercive residential care. Cooperatives have some unique characteristics but also have some general features of coercive residential child care relating to juridical frames and the privileged status of milieu therapy, among others (Hassel, Holt & Ogden, 2011).

The informants were recruited from three cooperatives, which were selected due to practical considerations and accessibility. There are a total of five such units in Norway (Kolltveit, 2013), but according to Norwegian standards they are large, housing between 8 and 30 juveniles. At the present time, these five cooperatives are approved for the placement of 107 juveniles (according to statistics from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs).

Permission to ask for informants in the three units was obtained from the managers, and recruitment of informants was performed by the researcher in a formal meeting with the juveniles and the staff, which took place in the different cooperatives. In this meeting information was given about the project and the juveniles' rights as participants in the study. The juveniles who wished to participate in the interview were asked to contact the researcher

at the end of the meeting. The juveniles were informed that they would receive a compensation as a gesture of gratitude for their contribution to the research project. The form of the compensation (individual gift card, gift card for common activities or cash) was discussed with the managers of each cooperative based on an amount of 250 NOK per juvenile. All juveniles present in the three cooperatives at the time of the interview whose placements were governed by paragraph 4-24 in the Child Welfare Act were willing to participate in the study. The informants' age and gender thus reflected the actual variance in the residential child care units at that point of time. Ten girls and seven boys, ages 16 to 18, participated in the study.

In the interview, the juveniles were asked to discuss everyday life in residential care. These stories were further elaborated on using pre-defined themes that aimed at investigating how the juveniles gave meaning to themselves and their possibilities within residential care. The themes were developed based on broad categories that stimulated the juveniles to reflect upon several aspects of their life in residential care (for example, participation in everyday life and treatment, experiences of coercion and protection of individual rights). The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Analysis

The analysis was inspired by post-structural discourse theory (Griggs & Howarth, 2013; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) in combination with an interpretative methodology (Haavind, 2000). According to discourse theory, discourses organize how we understand reality, and the ideas and understandings that are included or excluded when one gives meaning to the social world (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). Society is understood as contingent and dependent on shifting and competing discourses, which provides for possible contradictory understandings of the world (Griggs & Howarth, 2013; Howarth et.al, 2000). Discourse theory, therefore, was

selected as a fruitful approach to understanding the tensions and ambiguities inherent within discussions of the child's status within social work.

The aim of the analysis was to show the positions that were most dominating when the informants spoke about their life in residential care, rather than to analyse individual or institutional characters. An individual can hold a number of subject positions and move between different positions (Griggs & Howarth, 2013); hence the analytical unit is meaning-making operationalized as position and discourses, and not the individuals.

The analysis was organized in two rounds. First, the material was organized according to themes in the interview guide. Further interpretation of meaning in these categories led to the identification of new analytical categories that illustrated the patterns in the informants' descriptions. At this stage, subject positions were used as an analytical tool (Griggs & Howarth, 2013), allowing for an analysis of the positions available for identification when the juveniles discussed their everyday lives within residential care.

Within discourse theory, language is perceived as being the "machine" that constructs the social world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence, by analysing language in use, one can access meaning-making processes. In the analysis, subject positions were identified by scrutinizing the stories that the informants told and the words they used in these descriptions. Stories that were interpreted as having the same meaning content were grouped together, and several positions for the juveniles' identifications were noted. Each individual juvenile in this study typically moved between different positions during the interview.

In this article, the focus is on the two positions that across the data were most commonly in use within the juveniles' stories: the autonomy position and the responsibility position (see table 1). The autonomy position was found in use in utterances from 15 of the 17 juveniles that took part in the study. The responsibility position was found in use in utterances

from five of the ten girls that took part in the study, but was not found within the boys' stories. This finding made gender become an interesting analytical category.

The autonomy position addresses two types of stories in data: stories about resistance and stories in which images of freedom were constructed. In both types of stories, the juveniles constructed themselves as self-determining individuals in spite of mandatory tasks, rules and regulations. Due to the way autonomy is used in literature, referring to (among others) independence and self-governance (see, e.g., Steinberg & Silverberg 1986), the label 'autonomy' was found fruitful for describing the position identified in these stories. The responsibility position addresses stories about care, social contribution and attention to the well-being of others. The juveniles' own use of words such as responsibility and care inspired the labelling of this position as the responsibility position.

The study's findings should not be perceived as objective or general. However, it contributes to knowledge of the process of meaning-making in a coercive institutional setting. Thus, the study provides possibilities for reflecting upon the status of the child in coercive residential care and the dynamic relationship among self-constructions and diverging discourses of the child in social work practice.

Table 1: Informants, gender and identified positions

Informant	Subject position	
	Autonomy	Responsibility
1 Dina	x	
2 Rita		x
3 Sara	x	
4 Simon	x	
5 Lisa	x	x
6 Tom	x	
7 Phillip		
8 Leah	x	x
9 Jon	x	
10 Inga	x	x
11 Jenny	x	
12 Sandra	x	x
13 Helen	x	
14 Alex	x	
15 Anne	x	
16 Ivan	x	
17 Paul	x	

Ethical Considerations

Due to the informants' status as clients in the child protection system, questions can be raised as to whether it is ethical to involve children and vulnerable informants in research and whether they have the ability to provide an informed consent. Simultaneously, to include the voices of vulnerable people and children in research is important, and to be invited to participate in research can also contribute to experiences of inclusion and recognition (Lightfoot & Sloper, 2003; Ward, Skuse & Munro, 2005; Jansen, 2011). It is thus important to ensure that participation is voluntary and to consider the eventual harm caused by research participation. In this study, it was considered important that request for participation be done by the researcher and not professionals. In the initial information to the juveniles, it was underscored that research participation was voluntary and had nothing to do with the

treatment programme. The juveniles were also assured that there would be no questions about their personal history in the interview.

Prior to the interviews, the juveniles were informed of their rights as participants in the study in both written (informed consent) and oral forms. The juveniles were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the project. All data relating to individual names and characteristics and data relating to institutional characters were anonymized. In the presentation of the findings, the informants are given fictitious names. Data were stored in accordance with ethical guidelines. The study was approved by the Data Protection Official for Research (Norwegian Social Science Data Services [NSD]).

Findings: Positions of Identification

In the following section, through interview excerpts, are empirical examples of how the juveniles in and through conversation positioned themselves as autonomous and responsible subjects.

The Autonomy Position

Talk about resistance and “refusing”

Different strategies for enacting oneself as an autonomous individual were an often-mentioned topic in the juveniles’ stories of their everyday lives in residential care. Several juveniles described how they refused to participate in daily mandatory activities, such as household routines and outside maintenance, or simply decided to stay in their rooms, eventually sleeping, despite the consequences that they knew they would face. The decision not to participate was discussed as a rational decision made by calculating costs and benefits. Non-participation usually led to restrictions in participating in evening activities and

instructions not to leave their room until dinner. By telling these stories, the juveniles positioned themselves as having an influence on their lives in residential care.

One of the boys interviewed, Ivan, expressed a great deal of anger toward the placement, and he did not offer many positive comments about the residential care unit, although he described some of the workers as being nice. He talked about how he strategically decided on which days to get up in time for work: “Typically I just sleep. I can’t stand all the stress (...). In any case, I don’t get up right away, unless there is something happening, like today, there is bowling”. Ivan described himself as being free to decide on which days to get up in time for the mandatory work and which days to sleep in. In the following quotation, he talked about how he decided not to speak with the staff for several days. He also described how he managed to lock the car and sit in it smoking (which is forbidden) for twenty-four hours. By telling this story, Ivan positioned himself as a powerful person:

They asked so much I couldn’t be bothered (...). And then, when I found out that I should stay longer [he had his placement prolonged (author’s comment)], then I was furious. Then, I just refused, got in the car and locked it (...). I sat there for an entire day (...). And then I sat in there, smoked, slept, listened to music and stuff.

When Ivan spoke about his everyday life within the residential care unit, he frequently used the word “refuse”. This word was used by several informants in this study to describe situations of non-obedience. When using the word “refuse”, the juveniles positioned themselves with autonomy, which involved a rational decision to not follow the rules. The same decision to disobey the rules was evident in the interview with Anne. In the interview, Anne talked about how she liked being at the residential care unit and how she appreciated the staff. However, there were some rules that she did not accept: “I eat when I want (...).

Nobody can stop me from eating when I'm hungry (...). I obey all the time, but that I can't obey. That's just how it is". Anne did not accept the rule that prohibited eating and drinking in between the common mealtimes; hence, she broke the rule. In the interview, she positioned herself as being strategic and independent, disobeying the rules that she did not accept.

Talk about freedom and runaways

Another type of story that led to the identification of the autonomy position was one in which the juveniles constructed images of freedom. Although they were placed in coercive treatment, several juveniles created stories of possible ways to escape the coercion. Juveniles talked about how they could run away, or they told stories of successful runaways. In the following quotation, Simon talked about the possibility of escape or acting so badly that treatment would be terminated: "Like to run away (...) I think a whole lot about it (...). Or getting thrown out (...) to find a way to get thrown out (...). I know it's possible". In the interview, Simon spoke as though he were in residential care only temporarily, and he positioned himself as being unaffected by the coercive structures. He described how he had managed to run away before, and he constructed the odds of leaving the residential care unit permanently as being quite good, although formally, he had more than ten months left. The following quotation from the interview with Paul shows how he used a similar strategy to construct himself as a self-governing individual:

For me, I'm here by force, but I don't feel that's by force. Because I can leave whenever I want. Just knowing that there are possibilities. I know that I would be found sooner or later, but I don't experience it as force. In the back of my head, I know that if I want to run, I can go. I know that I can manage out there for many weeks.

In the interview, Paul described going through a turbulent period in which he had run away from the cooperative for three of his five months of placement. The way Paul emphasized the possibility of running away shows how he positioned himself with autonomy (if I want to – I'll go). The reason Paul gave for the importance of this image of running away was related to the coercive structure: "it's not that it's bad here... but I'm forced to be here.... I think it's the force that makes it lame". Following Paul's logic, the knowledge that one is forced into treatment creates a need for freedom. After all, Paul liked the people and found the residential care unit to be a safe and pleasant place. Similar stories of possibilities of escape were identified in the interview with Sara. She described a consequence of breaking the rules, which involved moving the child to a new location (often a remote cottage) for a limited time. The following quotation shows how Sara positioned herself with autonomy in the given situation: "I can also run away.... It is just to leave.... Lots have done it. It's easier there because, here, so many people are watching".

Sara and the others quoted in this section illustrate a general tendency in the juveniles' stories about their everyday lives. Independent of their descriptions of being satisfied or unhappy with the residential care unit, they constructed themselves as being autonomous individuals by disobeying the rules or by telling stories of the possibilities of escape and termination of treatment.

The finding of the autonomy position in this study bears similarities to Polvere's study of agency among institutionalized youth, in which she identifies resistance as a theme of agency that evolves as a reaction to experiences of injustice, oppression or developmentally inappropriate practices (Polvere, 2014). However, in this study "refusing" and disobeying the rules was spoken about as a possibility for self-construction facilitated by the coercive structures rather than caused by a dissatisfaction with being in residential care, as when Paul talked about runaways.

The Responsibility Position

Talk about care and responsibility for other residents

The other position identified frequently in the juveniles' stories was the position of the responsible subject. However, this position was found mainly within the girls' stories. The following quotation from Rita shows how she positioned herself with responsibility for the other juveniles' well-being and development: "We have to try to be good role models, in a way. You have to take the lead and push them.... Tell them that we've also been there, and show them we care and see them".

Rita described the importance of paying attention to other juveniles at the residential care unit and pointed to the importance of reacting if you observe that someone is having problems or has violated the rules. She described it as her responsibility to call for other residents' attention in these situations. This is what she referred to as "take the lead". By telling this story, Rita positioned herself as a caring person, who would make an effort to help the other residents (we have to show them that we care).

The responsibility position was a position of identification found available primarily for girls who had progressed to higher levels within the treatment system (the cooperatives in this study had treatment organized in several levels relating to different treatment goals). Leah, who had applied to advance to the next treatment level by the time of the interview, described how she liked thinking of herself as a responsible person and a good role model: "I think it's okay, it's pretty cool because, then, you can show that you're more ... I don't know ... more responsible. I feel more like a role model, if I qualify for the next level". For Leah, the responsibility position was an attractive position that became more available in a higher treatment level. Similar to Leah, another girl, Sandra, also emphasized the potential for responsibility within the institutional structure when she discussed the role of "youth leader", which circulated among the more experienced residents:

We have to take responsibility. We have to wake up the others and lead the meetings.

If a youth asks me if can we go bowling this week, I have to discuss and plan it with the staff leader, and I have to help the staff to clean in the evenings.

In the above excerpt, Sandra emphasized the potential for the “youth leader” role to be a means of taking on more responsibilities, negotiating on behalf of the other juveniles, leading cooperative meetings, and helping the staff with various tasks. The way in which Sandra discussed her positive experiences with the “youth leader” role shows that she used the possibilities offered by the role to position herself as a person who cares for the residential care unit and the other juveniles and contributes to their social environment. Another informant, Lisa, also highlighted the positive effects that one can gain from living in residential care units with many others:

You have to show consideration for so many others, and you don't have a chance to think of yourself. I think there are a lot of positive things you can get out of it. And you notice how different people are ... and you have to adjust.

By making use of the possibilities that are provided by the structures inherent within the cooperative (many people living together), Lisa positioned herself as a considerate person and one with the ability to adjust to other peoples' needs. Inga, another informant, also used the group as a reference when she positioned herself as a helpful person:

Everyone has to help; if there is one that doesn't want to, the group will not work. Then, the group won't move forward. It is always the weakest link that defines the group ... so really, to help yourself, you have to be able to help others.

Following Inga, a precondition for rehabilitation was the capacity to help others. Inga discussed the responsibility involved in living in a cooperative by referring to how they used the group in therapy. She positioned herself as being influential in the outcome of these processes. A general tendency from the empirical examples from Inga and the other girls in this section was the talk of responsibility as a voluntary option and an attractive position within residential care.

Discussion: Self-construction and Discourses of the Child

The discourse of the active citizen

Using subject positions as an analytical tool allowed for the study of the dynamic relationship between self-construction and discourses. Common for the autonomy position and the responsibility position identified in this study were the different means of articulating agency and influence. Agency here refers to the way in which the juveniles discuss how they act within the institutional environment in a goal-oriented, strategic and conscious way, which is consistent with the definition of agency within childhood studies (Valentine, 2011). The emphasis on rationality and independency in the juveniles' self-construction contrasted with the coercive structure of the placement and reflected the tension in the dominant discourse in social work with children, which highlighted the child as being vulnerable, irresponsible and a "citizen-to-become" (Amundsen, 2002; Bijleveld et al., 2015; Espersen, 2010; Goodyer, 2013; Hennem, 2010; Reime, forthcoming; Steinsholt, 2002).

The juveniles' own stories of everyday life in residential care in this study pointed to the discourse of the active citizen as the most dominant in the juveniles' self-construction. Juveniles generally did not speak about themselves as vulnerable, at risk or in need of control; rather, the study shows how they constructed themselves as autonomous and responsible subjects. This corresponds to ideas within the child-as-citizen discourse, which emphasizes children as active participators and competent contributors to society (Kjørholt, 2002, 2013.; Larkins, 2014; Lister, 2007c; Warming, 2011).

The finding of the responsibility position and its relation to the child as-as-citizen discourse within this study finds support in Larkin's (2014) extended and relation model of citizenship, in which she described social contributions as one activity of citizenship. For children, this was related to work, educational contributions and acts of caring (Larkins, 2014, p. 14). The idea of relating activities of citizenship to caring evolved primarily from feminist approaches to citizenship studies, some of which have identified caring as an active form of participatory citizenship (Lister, 2007b). This emphasis of care as a feminist strategy of citizenship bears similarities to the tendencies identified in this study, in which the responsibility position was identified through the girls' stories. Several of the girls in this study talked about themselves as caring, responsible and considerate individuals, and they emphasized the possibilities to undertake these activities as a positive part of being in residential care. Engaging in care was even discussed as a precondition for successful treatment.

The finding of the responsibility position in this study and its relation to the child-as-citizen discourse can also be discussed in relation to Franzén's (2015) study of a youth detention home for boys, which pointed to responsabilization as a way of social control aimed at making the boys become responsible and self-governing citizens. Common to both studies was the focus upon responsibility as a subject position within residential child care, but the

content within the subject positions seems to differ and thus does the discourses available for the juveniles in these self-construction processes. While Franzén focused upon responsabilization as a means of social control, which points to a governance discourse, the present study interpreted the responsibility position as made possible by the discourse of the active citizen. The girls' talk of care and responsibility underscored their possibilities for agency and influence.

It can thus be questioned whether the responsibility position identified in this study can contribute to overestimating the juveniles' potential for enacting their agency. An alternative understanding of the responsibility position would be to interpret the girls' talk of caring and responsibility as if they had integrated the societal norms within the institutional structures and behaved (and talked) accordingly. However, the empirical data in this study were limited to describing the positions that dominated in the juvenile's self-construction and the discourses of the child activated in these constructions. An exploration of why the juveniles positioned them as they did was not within the scope of this article but is an interesting question for further research.

Self-construction as an interdependent process

The finding of the active citizen discourse as the most dominant in the juveniles' self-construction also directed attention to elements usually associated with the discourse of the active citizen not emphasized by the juveniles in this study. Following discourse theory, discourses construct social reality by processes of inclusion and exclusion (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Thereby, discourses make some positions for identification available, while excluding others. To explore ideas that are excluded in the juveniles' stories is therefore also relevant when the aim is to identify and discuss discourses on the child in residential care.

Definitions of citizenship typically include notions of participation, rights, negotiations and belonging (Butler & Benoit, 2015; Larkins, 2014). In this study, there were generally few stories with references to such activities. This gap exists even though juveniles were asked concrete questions about their rights and their opportunities for participation in the interviews. Larkins's (2014) description of negotiation as an activity of citizenship can be compared to understandings of citizenship that involve respect, trust and a mutual relationship between the child and the adult (Brembeck, Johansson, & Kampmann, 2004; Juul, 2014; Nielsen, 2002). Except for Sandra, who emphasized negotiation as part of the "youth leader" role, this study produced few examples of negotiations.

Larkins (2014) also described the freedom to enact individuals' own rights as a citizenship activity, referring to activities that enable the achievement of personal benefits or the exercise of freedom to follow self-interests. This focus on individual rights has parallels in the dominant political discourse, which emphasizes the child as competent in his or her own right. However, the findings of this study indicated that the child as a rights-bearer is a less available position within the residential child care units represented in this study.

These findings can be interpreted as related to the dominance of the discourse of the vulnerable child within residential child care practices. It can be argued that an understanding of the child as vulnerable will generate few possibilities in the institutional structure that would make "negotiating" or "right bearer" positions with which the juveniles might identify. This argument finds support in Reime's (forthcoming) article of the relationship between the professional's understandings of the child and the child's needs and their practices relating to children's rights. By also considering the ideas excluded in the juveniles' self-construction, this study contributed to a dynamic and relational understanding of the possibilities of self-construction within residential child care and how this relates to diverging discourses on the child in society.

Conclusion

As a starting point, this article takes the conflicting discourses on how to view the child in residential care: the contemporary political discourse, which highlights the child as a competent and active citizen, and a dominant professional discourse on the child as vulnerable and as a citizen-to-become. By exploring how children in residential care construct themselves and the ideas that they activate in this process, this article aims to contribute to the discussion and stimulate reflections on social work practice. The findings show that the two subject positions, the autonomy position and the responsible position, dominated the juveniles' identifications when they discussed everyday life in residential care.

The identified positions point to the importance of enacting oneself as an agentic and influential individual and were discussed as made possible by ideas from the child-as-citizen discourse. Simultaneously, it is notable that negotiations, participation and individual rights, which account for important elements within the child-as-citizen discourse and which have gained an increased attention in policy, were more or less rendered silent in the interviews. This is discussed as relating to the still-dominant discourse of the vulnerable child in social work practice and shows that juveniles do not construct themselves independently from the social and cultural space in which they live; rather, their self-constructions are negotiated in interdependent relationships between public and professional discourses and institutional structures.

How the child is viewed plays an important role in social work practice and the institutional arrangements that constitute the relational possibilities and challenges for juveniles' own meaning-making. As a point of departure in the juveniles' self-constructions, it is critical to arrange structures in residential child care that enable the enactment of influence and agency. Recognizing children and young people in coercive residential care as citizens involves respect, trust and mutual relationships and also implies a critical evaluation of the

practices of control and discipline inherent in the dominant discourse of social work practice with children.

This article's findings are contextual and based on a study that was conducted within a particular type of residential care unit in Norway. However, this article's findings with regard to the importance for juveniles to enact themselves as agentic and influential individuals also confirm other tendencies in the literature, and it is therefore reasonable to suggest that the findings represent some general tendencies.

References

- Amundsen, H. M. (2002). Det sosialt konstruerte barnet. In S. Sagberg & K. Steinsholt (Eds.), *Barnet. Konstruksjoner av barn og barndom [The child. Constructions of children and childhood]* (pp. 44-63). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Atwool, N. (2006). Participation in decision-making: The experience of New Zealand children in care. *Child Care in Practice, 12*(3), 259-267.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13575270600761727>
- Bengtsson, T. T., & Jakobsen, T.B. (2009). *Institutionsanbringelse af unge i Norden: En komparativ undersøgelse af lovgrundlag, institutionsformer og udviklingstendenser. [Residential care placements for young people in the Nordic countries]*. Copenhagen: SFI-Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd.
- Bijleveld, G. G., Dedding, C. W., & Bunders-Aelen, J. F. (2015). Children's and young people's participation within child welfare and child protection services: a state-of-the-art review. *Child & Family Social Work, 20*(2), 129-138.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12082>

- Brembeck, H., Johansson, B., & Kampmann, J. (Eds)(2004). *Beyond the competent child. Exploring contemporary childhoods in the Nordic welfare societies*. København: Samfunnsforlaget.
- Butler, K., & Benoit, C. (2015). Citizenship practices among youth who have experienced government care. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 40(1), 25-49.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/canajsocicahican.40.1.25>
- Espersen, L. D. (2010). *Bekymrende identiteter: Anbragte børns hverdagsliv på behandlingshjem [Troubled identities: Everyday life for looked-after children in residential care]*. PhD diss., Copenhagen University.
- Everson, S. (1988). *Aristotle. The politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Franzén, A. G. (2015). Responsibilization and discipline subject positioning at a youth detention home. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44(3), 251-279.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891241613520455>
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay Ltd.
- Goodyer, A. (2013). Understanding looked-after childhoods. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18(4), 394-402. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00858.x>
- Griggs, S. & Howarth, D. (2013). *The politics of airport expansion in the United Kingdom: hegemony, policy and the rhetoric of sustainable aviation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Haavind, H. (2000). På jakt etter kjønnede betydninger [Chasing meanings of gender]. In H. Haavind (Ed), *Kjønn og fortolkende metode. Metodiske muligheter i kvalitativ forskning [Gender and interpretative methods]* pp 7-59. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Hart, S. (2009). The ‘problem’ with youth: young people, citizenship and the community. *Citizenship studies*, 13(6), 641-657. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13621020903309656>

- Hassel Kristoffersen, C., Holth, P., & Ogden, T. (2011). *Modeller for rusbehandling. En kunnskapsoversikt*. [Models in drug treatment. A knowledge review]. Oslo: Atferdssenteret [The Norwegian Center for Child Behavioural Development].
- Hennum, N. (2010). Mot en standardisering av voksenhet? Barn som redskap i statens disiplinering av voksne. Towards a standardization of adulthood? [Children as tools in the state disciplining of adults]. *Sosiologi i dag, 1* (57-75).
- Howarth, D. R., Norval, A. J., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000). *Discourse theory and political analysis: Identities, hegemonies and social change*. Manchester: University Press.
- Jans, M. (2004). Children as citizens. Towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood, 11*(1), 27-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568204040182>
- Jansen, A. (2011). *Young people in residential care. Narrative engagement and processes of subjectivation*. PhD diss., Department of Psychology, University of Oslo.
- Juul, J. (2014). *Ditt kompetenta barn: på väg mot nya värderingar för familjen*. Stockholm: Bonnier Fakta.
- Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jørgensen, S., & Pedersen, L. J. T. (2010). Hva er problemet? En problembasert tilnærming til reformene av den norske russektoren [What's the problem? A problem-based approach to the reform of the Norwegian drug rehabilitation sector]. *European Journal of Social Work, 13*(3), 339-357. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691450903403800>
- Kjørholt, A.T., & Lindén, H. (2004). Children and youth as citizens: Symbolic participants or political actors. In H. Brembeck B. Johansson, B. & J.Kampmann (Eds.), *Beyond the competent child. Exploring contemporary childhoods in the Nordic welfare societies*. København: Samfunnsforlaget.

- Kjørholt, A. T. (2002). Small is powerful. Discourses on children and participation in Norway. *Childhood*, 9(1), 63-82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568202009001236>
- Kjørholt, A. T. (2013). Childhood as social investment, rights and the valuing of education. *Children & Society*, 27(4), 245-257. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/chso.12037>
- Koltveit, S. (2013). Felles terapeutiske virkemidler i ruskollektiver for mindreårige [Common therapeutic tool in drug abuse institutions (cooperatives) for minors]. *Tidsskrift for miljøarbeid* (2). University of Stavanger.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Larkins, C. (2014). Enacting children's citizenship: Developing understandings of how children enact themselves as citizens through actions and Acts of citizenship. *Childhood*, 21(1), 7-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568213481815>
- Lightfoot, J., & Sloper, P. (2003). Having a say in health: involving young people with a chronic illness or physical disability in local health services development. *Children & Society*, 17(4), 277-290. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.748>
- Lister, R. (2007a). From object to subject: Including marginalised citizens in policy-making. *Policy & Politics*, 35 (3), 437-455. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/030557307781571579>
- Lister, R. (2007b). Inclusive citizenship: Realizing the potential. *Citizenship studies*, 11(1), 49-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13621020601099856>
- Lister, R. (2007c). Why citizenship: Where, when and how children? *Theoretical inquiries in Law*, 8(2), 693-718. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2202/1565-3404.1165>
- Lister, R. (2008). Inclusive citizenship, gender and poverty: Some implications for education for citizenship. *Citizenship teaching and learning*, 4(1), 3-19.

- Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2003). Young people talk about citizenship: Empirical perspectives on theoretical and political debates. *Citizenship studies*, 7(2), 235-253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1362102032000065991>
- Marshall, T. H. (1992). *Citizenship and social class*. London: Pluto Press.
- Nielsen, M. L. (2002). Barnet som forhandlingspartner [The negotiating child] In S. Sagberg & K. Steinsholt (Eds.), *Barnet. Konstruksjoner av barn og barndom [The child. Constructions of children and childhood]* (pp. 81-100). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Plows, V. (2012). Conflict and coexistence: challenging interactions, expressions of agency and ways of relating in work with young people in the Minority World. *Children's Geographies*, 10:3, 279-291. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2012.693378>
- Polvere, L. (2011). Youth perspectives on restrictive mental health placement: Unearthing a counter narrative. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 26(3), 318-343. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0743558410391257>
- Polvere, L. (2014). Agency in institutionalised youth: A Critical inquiry. *Children & Society*, 28(3), 182-193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/chso.12048>
- Reime, M.A. (Forthcoming). Mellom uansvarlig og kompetent. Forståelser av barnet og rettighetspraksiser blant ansatte i barnevernsinstitusjoner [Between irresponsible and competent. Conceptions of the child and right-practices among social workers in child residential care]. *Tidsskriftet Norges Barnevern*.
- Roholt, R. V., Hildreth, R., & Baizerman, M. (2008). The "Citizen" in Youth Civic Engagement. *Child & Youth Services*, 29:3-4, 107-122. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/j024v29n03_08
- Smith, N., Lister, R., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2005). Young people as real citizens: Towards an inclusionary understanding of citizenship. *Journal of youth studies*, 8(4), 425-443. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676260500431743>

- Steinberg, L., & Silverberg, S. B. (1986). The vicissitudes of autonomy in early adolescence. *Child development*, 841-851. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1130361>
- Steinsholt, K. & Øksnes, M. (2002). "Stop making sense!" Perspektiver på barn og barndom ["Stop making sense!" Perspectives on the child and childhood] In S. Sagberg & K. Steinsholt (Eds.), *Barnet. Konstruksjoner av barn og barndom [The child. Constructions of children and childhood]* (pp. 19-43). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Stette, Ø. (Ed) (2016). *Barnvernloven og forskifter [The Child Welfare Law]*. Oslo: Pedlex as.
- Valentine, K. (2011). Accounting for agency. *Children & Society*, 25(5), 347-358. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2009.00279.x>
- Ward, H., Skuse, T., & Munro, E. R. (2005). 'The Best of Times, the Worst of Times': Young People's Views of Care and Accommodation. *Adoption & Fostering*, 29(1), 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590502900103>
- Warming, H. (2011). Childrens participation and citizenship in a global age. Empowerment, tokenism or discriminatory disciplining? *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 119-134.