Till läsaren

Stort tack till dig som tar dig tid att läsa och kommentera mitt manusutkast! Studien som detta utkast relaterar till är mitt pågående postdok-projekt med titeln "En SiS-ta utväg? En studie av socialsekreterares motivering och legitimering av LVU-placering av ungdomar på Statens institutionsstyrelses (SiS) särskilda ungdomshem". Projektet pågår 2022-2024 och jag är således i analysfasen. Just detta utkast relaterar till den av mina två delstudier där jag har begärt utredningar från socialtjänsten i Göteborg för ungdomar placerade på SiS 2021 (den andra delstudien utgörs av en intervjustudie med socialsekreterare). Precis som titeln på projektet anger syftar delstudien till att undersöka vilka diskursiva förståelser som styr på vilket sätt LVU-placeringar vid SiS motiveras och legitimeras, så som de kommer till uttryck i den dokumentation som ligger till grund för beslut om placering vid SiS särskilda ungdomshem (dvs socialtjänstens utredning primärt).

Empirin i projektet utgörs av utredningar relaterade till totalt 84 ungdomar placerade på SiS 2021, och är således relativt omfattande. Det finns väldigt mycket att hämta i materialet och således många potentiella teman att uppehålla sig vid. Ett tydligt tema är dock ansvariggörandet av både ungdomar och föräldrar. Det framkommer i utredningarna att ungdomarna har varit med om mycket svåra händelser i barndomen. Enligt ett manuskript jag skickat in till tidskrift innehåller över 90% av utredningarna skrivningar som går att relatera till åtminstone en s.k. ACEs-faktor (Adverse Childhood Experiences) och det genomsnittliga antalet ACEs per person är 3-4, vilket är långt över genomsnittet enligt stora populationsstudier från USA och Storbritannien. Trots detta skrivs ungdomarna och deras föräldrar tydligt fram som ansvariga för ungdomens beteende. Det är denna diskurs och hur man legitimerar placering på SiS utifrån denna diskurs som detta manusutkast handlar om. För att förstå varför ungdomarnas individuella problem fokuseras i så stor utsträckning menar jag också att det är viktigt att i texten problematisera den lagstiftning och den brist på insatser och placeringsformer som matchar ungdomarnas komplexa behov som råder i Sverige idag och som i hög grad bidrar till att begränsa socialsekreterares handlingsutrymme.

Manuset skall förstås som i hög grad fortfarande under arbete, med allt vad det innebär, och titeln är kanske inte helt rättvisande. Det jag framför allt skulle behöva hjälp med är den röda tråden och strukturen på manuset generellt, men framför allt findings-delen. Jag vet ungefär vad jag vill säga, men hur kan jag presentera detta på bästa och mest övertygande sätt? Jag använder Faircloughs tredimensionella modell för Kritisk diskursanalys och har ambitionen att använda samtliga dimensioner, men hur gör jag detta utan att det blir rörigt? För övrigt tar jag gärna emot alla möjliga andra tips och inspel som du tycker är relevanta, allt från tips på referenser till justeringar av temana. Det är mycket värdefullt att höra dina tankar!

Stort tack och vi ses i Östersund! 😊 Med vänliga hälsningar, Kajsa

To be a risk or at risk – Discourses and Legitimizing Practices in Child Welfare Assessments of Youths in Secure Institutional Care

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Biographical note

Kajsa Nolbeck is Ph.D. in care sciences and postdoctoral researcher in social work, at Department of social work, University of Gothenburg. Her research focus is on children and youth in secure institutional care, institutional and carceral care environments, the work, and prerequisites of the social services as well as case workers discretion in their work with families and youth.

Introduction

This study focuses on the presentation of youths in child welfare assessments undertaken by the social prior placement in secure institutional care. Language and the use of language in social work, whether spoken or written, is closely interrelated with power through defining, categorizing, and socially constructing what the problem is, who being responsible and what to do about it. Meaning that language and the use of language in the social services have inevitable consequences in social reality. Therefore, it is of crucial interest to study both the use of words and phrases in child welfare assessments and the discursive practices that governs the legitimizing of placements of youth in secure institutions.

Youths in need of "special supervision" – the case of secure care in Sweden

In Sweden, every year about 1100 youths are placed in secure institutional care, about two thirds being boys and the mean age 16 years (The Swedish national Board of Institutional Care, 2022). Placement is undertaken after a court decision due to the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act for youths with behaviors considered destructive by society, such as criminality or substance use. The law stipulates that placement in secure care may be undertaken for young people in need of "special supervision" (§12). Even though the Swedish legislation admit placement according to either conditions in the youths' home, or conditions related to their own behavior, or both, placement in secure care is mainly undertaken due to own norm breaking behavior of the youth. A distinctive feature of secure institutions compared to other institutional child and youth care in Sweden is that restrictive measures such as isolation of the young person may be used according to law (SFS1990:52, 1990).

Even though most of the youths in secure care are placed due to care needs, about 70 youths are placed due to a sentence in accordance with the Law on Young Offenders (SFS1998:603, 1998). The simultaneous placement of youths according to care and youths placed according to a verdict have been frequently contested in Swedish debate and research recent years, leading researchers to talk about the secure institutions as a "borderland" (Silow Kallenberg, 2016) or a space of conflicting moral and instrumental demands (Nolbeck, 2022; see also Henriksen & Bjerrum Refsgaard, 2020).

The border land state of these institutions is further accentuated through the challenges and needs of the youths, which often describes as characterized by substance use, criminality, school-related problems, and outward behavior (Enell, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2023; Author, 2022; Vogel, 2012). Placement in secure care is seldom a first choice for the social services,

rather both voluntary and involuntary interventions have commonly been tried prior to secure care. Thus, secure institutional care constitutes somewhat a last resort in Swedish childcare; an option for the social services when nothing else seems to work (Emerson, 1981).

In my previous research in secure institutional care the young people I interviewed describes that they perceive the institutional environment as too characterized by security and control, understood as both physical security arrangements and practices of social exclusion. The staff, on the other hand, describe the experience of an everyday life characterized by risks, forcing them to balance between the often-contradicting needs of the youths, and fulfilling simultaneously demands on safety and care. The result leads to, in the perspective of the staff, rational strategies of controlling practices. However, these practices are most often perceived by the youths as exclusionary processes that operate on three different levels at the same time: materially by excluding young people from everyday objects and spaces that can convey a sense of care; relationally through negotiations that characterize the relationship with the staff and make trust in both directions difficult; and individually, where the young people risk being excluded from alternative self-images in contrast to the dangerous youth (Nolbeck m.fl. 2020; Nolbeck 2022; Nolbeck m.fl., 2023; Nolbeck forthcoming).

The processes of exclusion and control, together with enhanced security work at these institutions, risk that young people will be one-sidedly understood as dangerous children, disregarding them as also at the same time being children in danger in need of support and protection (Nolbeck, forthcoming). In such processes, language plays a crucial role; descriptions of the young people, their challenges and family circumstances, affects, and is affected by, the understanding of "youth in secure care". This, in turn, leads to certain actions and measures, and at the same time excludes others. How young people are constructed socially through language thus has consequences in the social reality of young people.

Clientization processes and construction of client hood – the role of language in social work
This study departures from a social constructionist perspective viewing language and the use of language, whether spoken or written, as essential for the construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann). Applied to this study meaning that while child welfare assessments at first glance could appear as objective and neutral descriptions, they rather are to be understood as bearer of norms and values. But the fact that language, and thus text, carries meaning also means that they constitute an asset and an active feature in the welfare institutions' encounter with the individual. The language used when the doctor examines and

diagnoses the patient or when the social worker assesses and makes proposals for decisions over people's lives, does not imply a neutral representation of seemingly factual circumstances. Instead, the language is both created and recreated in the context in which it is used, meaning that people's lives, sufferings, and desires need to be translated into the language of the system, whether being the health care or the social services (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2003).

Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2003) conceptualizes this process as a "clientization process", meaning that translating people's problems into of the institutional system created diagnoses and categories leads to the construction of "problem identities" that "fit" the system's definitions, assumptions, and available measures. In other words, the system creates the client (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2003). This clientization process is not neutral but characterizes of moral impregnated assumptions of "good" or "bad" client hood, as shown by Juhila (2003). Resisting the client role assigned by the system always constitutes a risk of losing status as worthy of help and support (Juhila 2003). Thus, assumptions of what constitutes a "good client" is always present in encounters between professionals and clients in social service organizations, whether it being in face-to-face or in written encounters, such as welfare assessments (Nikander 2003).

Responsibilisation and moral accounting

[Här kommer jag knyta till litteratur och tidigare forskning om ansvariggörande och moral accounts, t.ex. av författare som Juhila, Raitakari, Hall och White, Wästerfors & Åkerström]

Aim of the study

[Kort metatext, rational och bryggmening till syftet]

Hence, language plays an essential role in constructing institutionally manageable identities through describing, defining, categorizing, and making sense of people's lives and problems (Nikander 2003). Therefore, the current study aims to explore what discursive practices that governs the legitimizing of placements of youth at secure institutions, as reflected in child welfare assessments provided by the social services.

Methodology

This study has a discourse analytic approach, which means that language, but also power, is central. Below, the study is first situated in the field of discourse analysis and then Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and three-dimensional model are described.

Discourse analysis

According to Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2017) a discourse is "a certain way of talking about and understanding the world" (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2017, p. 7). Consequently, discourse analysis serves to analyse language and language use to reveal understandings and views of the world and the social reality that lies behind the language (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2017).

There are different discourse analytic approaches and thus methods of analysis, however all of them sharing common features resting on a social constructionist understanding of the world, which could be conceptualized as follows. First, there are no such thing as an objective truth, meaning discourse analysis being critical to self-evident knowledge; second, the social world is constantly changing and under social construction; three, there is a relation between knowledge and social processes and four, between knowledge and social action meaning that social constructions of knowledge and "truth" thus have real social consequences in society and in people's lives (Burr 1995 cf. Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2017).

[Bryggmening Foucault.] In Foucault's notion a discourse is what is what sets limits to what can be thought, meaning that what is perceived as a "truth" is constructed discursively (Foucault XX, Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2017). According to Foucault, power is constructed in the interaction between people, consequently power is not referable to a single person or occupation, but a dynamic and constantly changing feature. Power in Foucault's sense is productive, as in produced constantly in the interaction between people. Thus, power is everywhere since it can originate from anywhere and anyone. Further, power always implicates a dimension of resistance and accordingly the possibility to change power relations (ref). [Kort beskrivning av Foucaults olika typer av makt, ffa disciplinär och repressiv makt men också pastoralmakt och kopplingen till välfärdsinstitutioner. Referenser Foucault 2000, Foucault & Faubion, Dean 1999/2010, Sahlin 2001, Ólafsdóttir]

Further, according to Foucault subject positions are created in discourses and are thus decentered (Foucault, Vetandet arkeologi). Meaning that different discourses are creating different and sometimes contradictory subject positions. Namely, what becomes possible or

not for a subject depends on the subject positions offered by a discourse. At the same time, discourses and thus different subject positions are shaped in interaction between people, pointing to the possibility of changing discourses and power structures (ref). While Foucault views the subject as determined by the structures, Norman Fairclough rather emphasizes that people use discourses as resources which means a focus, not only on the subject positions created through discourses, but also on the ideological effects of discursive practices, i.e., the patterns of power and domination in which one social group is superior to another (Fairclough, Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2017). [Bryggmening]

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Departing from a social constructionist standpoint, Fairclough identifies three dimensions of a discourse: text, interaction, and social context. Correspondingly his three-dimensional analysis model consists of three stages referred to as "description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context" (Fairclough 2015, p. 128). The aim of Fairclough's model is to provide an analytical tool to analyse how texts and discourses are produced, disseminated, and interpreted, and how these texts and ultimately discourses, presents and influence social relations and interactions, and power structures in society.

The first dimension, textual analysis focuses the structure of the text, and linguistic resources used to organize meaning such as for example phrasing, metaphors, active and passive voice. According to Fairclough a critical discourse analysis always starts with analyzing the textual features, to reveal hidden meaning and ideological positions anchored in the text.

The second dimension in Fairclough's three-dimensional model, interaction, refers to how and in what context the text is produced and consumed and what social practices and institutions that surrounds the text. According to his model this dimension is focused on analysing actors involved in the production and dissemination of the text, as well as their roles and influence. Norms as well as various discourse types influencing the text are interesting features for this analysis dimension.

The third dimension aims to explain what political and economic structures of society influencing the text, and how the text relates to social and historical processes. This dimension seeks to reveal power relations and ideologies reproducing or challenging the current social order.

In analysing the text, Fariclough points to the importance of shift between "what is 'there' in the text, and the discourse type(s) which the text is drawing upon" (p. 129). Discourse type refers here "to conventions, norms, codes of practice underlying actual discourse" (Fairclough 2015, p. 112).

[Kort om Fairclough's ten questions for descriptive analysis (Fairclough 2015)]

Material and analysis approach

The empirical data consists of child welfare assessments of young people placed in secure institutional care during the period 2021-01-01 to 2021-12-31 from the second largest municipality in Sweden. In Sweden, the child welfare assessment constitutes the basis for court decision on compulsory care. For this study, all assessments related to all young people from the municipality subjected to a decision on compulsory care and subsequently placed in secure institutional care during the current period, were requested from the social services through a purposive sampling.

Official reports states that 80-120 young people from the municipality are annually placed in secure institutional care (Göteborgs Stad, 2019). For this study, a total of 84 cases applying to the same number of young people was obtained, which means a correspondence with official figures. In several cases, more than one child welfare assessment was obtained, and in some cases other documentation deemed relevant by the social services. These texts involve the associated care plan, written reassessments of placement, or other formal statements from the authorities in equivalence to the assessment. The total number of pages in the empirical data amounts to 2262, with an average number of pages per case being 26-27. However, the scope of the documentation per case varies from a minimum of three to a maximum of 50 pages.

The child welfare assessments are generally structured in line with BBIC (Swe. "Barns Behov I Centrum", Eng. "Children's needs at the centre"), which according to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare is an approach for the social services' work with children and youths implicating a structure for the administration, implementation, and follow-up of the exercise of public authority.

[Kort bakgrundsinformation om de 84 ungdomarna, ref Nolbeck forthcoming]

The overarching research questions related to the overall aim of the study, that guided the analysis were:

- How are the young people, their needs, problems, and family background represented?

- In what way is placement in secure institutional care argued for and legitimized?

More specifically, the following analytics questions derived from Dahlborg et. al. (2023) and related to the three levels of Fairclough's model have guided the analysis. In relation to the textual level, the analysis has been focused on how the text is constructed linguistically in terms of what words and personal pronouns that are used and how can words, metaphors, and phrases could be understood and interpreted. Concepts that have guided the analysis on this level are modality, transitivity – agency and objectification, and metaphors. Modality is about the degree of certainty and agreement that language inspires the reader. So-called objective modality has a more general character, where it is more unclear who is making the statement. An example of a formulation with a high objective modality is [exempel]. Transitivity on the other hand implicates how events or sequences of events are related to objects and subjects in a sentence or a paragraph. Transitivity could be used as an analytical concept to examine active and passive voice and thus how agency, causality and responsibility are made explicit or implicit in statements. An example of how transitivity could be used is to reveal the transformation of a verb or adjective into a noun, with Fairclough's terminology called nominalization. The wording "assessment is made that" compared to the wording "X assesses that" constitutes such an example and shows how the former indicates generalization and abstraction in comparison with the latter where "X" is presented as an active subject that "assesses". A consequence of transformation of verbs and adjectives into nouns can be that agency and thus responsibility are concealed (Fairclough 2003). Metaphors are analyzed to shed light on underlying intension, intended or unintended associations the text invokes with the reader.

In relation to the second dimension in Fairclough's model the analysis has focused on for what purpose the text(s) was produced, by whom, and under what circumstances, and what the possible consequences of the text would be. Concepts guiding the analysis are alliance with the reader and third-party otherness, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, circumstances of production and consumption of the text. [Förklaring av dessa begrepp]

For the third dimension in Fairclough's model the analysis focuses on how the discourse(s) present in the text(s) are related to social practice. Here, questions on power relations and ideology are of interest. [Kort och koppling Foucault ovan]

[Kodning – beskrivning av tillvägagångssätt analys]

Finally, codes from all three stages were aggregated in broader themes which aims to show how linguistic choices such as words and sentence structure interact with norms, ideologies, and power in society.

Researcher position

[Synliggörande av mig själv och min position, mitt perspektiv]

Findings

In the following, representations of the youths and legitimization of placement in secure care in child welfare assessments are presented through three themes; Establishing urgency and escalation of risk and concern; Presenting evidence and constructing the case; and Establishing youths and parents as accountable – closing the case. Within each theme, both how youths and their parents are constructed discursively and what rhetorical and linguistic legitimation techniques are used, are analysed. Hence the three dimensions in Fairclough's model are all represented within each theme. When quoting, the original language (Swedish) is translated into English.

Establishing urgency and escalation of risk and concern

All assessments begin with a clarification of the state of the situation of the youth, which almost always means presenting an escalation of risks and concerns over time and establishing the present situation as deemed to be urgent. Formulations such as "the norm breaking behavior (…) have escalated during the last year", "Concerns about X have increased" or "the situation is untenable" invokes the sense of the reader that something must be done immediately, calling for the actions of responsible parties. The word choices pointing toward urgency and acceleration serve to convince the reader that if no actions are undertaken immediately, things will end up awfully wrong in a near or distant future. In emphasizing urgency and escalation is implicit the idea that the youth is in danger of being permanently harmed, and that the problems will be irreversible if they not already are as indicated by the following citation.

> "X has been in contact with social services for several years due to concerns about criminality and (his) socializing. He has been the subject of many different interventions from the social services and the more the concern has increased, the more extensive efforts have been made" (Case no 79)

Most of the assessments refer "back in time", to situations and events in the history of the youth and to other previous assessments, giving the impression that most of the young people

10

have a "track record" of problematic and risky behaviors, and socializing. These intertextual actions, where the present assessment is entangled with other previous assessments invokes a sense of detail-rich accuracy (Fairclough). This is established through presenting the date and time of specific conversations with other case workers or the number and date of previous assessments and events as shown below.

> 2013-06-19: assessment initiated after a report from the school about difficulties for X in school. Parental support was granted.
>
> 2015-06-24: assessment initiated after a report from the school about absence and concern about behaviour. A report was also received from the police as X were suspected of assaulting a girl of the same age. Assistance in the form of [XX] was granted.
>
> 2016-05-11: assessment initiated after a report from the school about concerns about X's outward behavior and a lack of communication with parents. The assessment was closed without any action. Several reports were received during the assessment period about concerns that X is also exposing other children to violence
>
> 2017-10-27: assessment initiated after a report from the school about suspicion that X has been under the influence of drugs and that he has been violent at the school. The assessment was closed without any action.
>
> 2020-05-20: assessment initiated after a report from the school that X did not meet the knowledge requirements, suspicion that X uses drugs, (and) behavioral problems. The assessment was closed without any action.
>
> 2020-12-18: assessment initiated when mom contacted the social services and saying that X has smoked cannabis several times, do not listen and has a bad attitude. The assessment was closed without any action.
>
> 2021-07-16: assessment initiated when mom contacted the social services stating she is worried that X uses drugs, is out late at night and does not listen to his parents and misbehaves at school. During the assessment period, two reports of concern were also received from the police.
>
> 2021-10-13: a report is received from the police. When the police are on foot patrol on motorcycle in [geographical area], they see two people, (who needs to be) checked. The two boys then choose to run away from the police. (Case no 34)

The list gives the reader the feeling that the problems have been recurring over time and that various authorities have tried to take the necessary measures while the young person's behavior has continued. The list invokes the sense of amount and prevalence of the problems and thus constitutes a rhetorical technique for persuasion (Fairclough). Sometimes more concise summaries are made for the same purpose, such as: "the number of reports of concern

received where X is in destructive contexts" (case no. 56). Where the use of the word "number" indicates not one or two reports of concerns, but several.

Reinforcing words and metaphors further underlining the sense of urgency and escalation are present throughout the material. Examples here are formulations such a situation or condition must be "interrupted", "stopped", or that the youth must be "held". More explicitly drastic expressions are also used, such as in the below citations:

> "The placement at [open institution] could not be carried out. The care there crashes almost immediately. [The open institution] assess that they cannot offer sufficient protection for X to prevent him from exposing himself and others to risks." (Case no 6)

> "She has been relocated several times due to collapse in care and that the placement could not meet her needs." (Case no 69)

The expressions and word choices in the above citations serve to convince the reader that the situation is urgent and that actions must be undertaken immediately; situations that "crash" or "collapse" recalls something that is in danger of breaking, which further gives the feeling that something must be done to prevent this.

Another common feature to establish the sense on an inevitably urgent situation is to present the extensive efforts that have been made by society, especially by the social services, over a long period of time. Formulations such as "for example" followed by a list of previous assessments and problematic behaviors indicate that these are only a few examples of what can be understood as a pattern of either recurrent assessments or behavioral problems. Listing previous measures taken by the social services at an early stage in the text also serves as a linguistic bridge to the following presentation of the situation and behavior of the youth and invokes the sense that the problems and risks are not new, however recently have been transformed into direct emergencies (Fairclough; Wästerfors & Åkerström). Hence, this listing can be understood as a rhetoric technique that, together with specific word choices indicating urgency, gives the reader the feeling that the problems have been going on for a long time and that the point has been reached when something drastic must be done (Fairclough), as shown below.

> "Despite several attempts of interventions aimed at preventing X from getting stuck or coming to terms with his addiction, this has not succeeded under involuntary terms" (Case no 7)

Formulations such as the above citation invoke the sense that the social services repeatedly have tried to present and get through with various measures, however without the youth showing any change, leaving the reader with the sense that an endpoint has been reached. But not only are young people presented as immune in whole or in part to society's efforts, but parents are also often described as the subject of repeated interventions but without success, as shown in the below citation from the same case.

> "The parents have previously declined parental support measures despite the social
> service's assessment that there is a need as they have not been able to set adequate
> boundaries for X and keep him away from destructive environments" (Case no 7)

In the above citation the parents are presented as ignoring their own shortcomings and recommendations from the social services. In this way, the social services are indirectly presented as an authority that tries to point out needs that the parents are unwilling or unable to meet. Phrases such as "despite the social service's assessment that there is a need" and the parents "have not been able to" meet these "needs" and that the parents are not "able to", presents what is put forward as something indisputably true. Such formulations exclude or hides other alternative explanations for why the parents have declined parental support, for example lack of information or trust in the social services.

Citations such the ones presented in the above text also serve as an overture to, and moral account for, the subsequent description of risks to which the youth expose themselves and others (Fairclough, Wästerfors och Åkerström). In short, the choices of words and expressions indicating urgency and escalation legitimizes highly intrusive measures, such as involuntary placement in secure institutional care. But it is not sufficient to establish urgency and escalation of risks, evidence to support this initial assessment needs to be obtained and structured; evidence is needed to construct the case.

Presenting evidence and constructing the case

An initial establishment of the feeling of urgency is always followed up by a description of risks and protections in the young person's life. These descriptions can vary in scope and detail, but common to almost all assessments in the material are that the problems and risks are presented through more detailed and extensive accounts than the case with the protective factors. In accordance with the above-mentioned listing of previous assessments, the using of listing as a rhetoric technique continues throughout the assessment to demonstrate the quantity

and prevalence of circumstances, characteristics and events that underline the problems and seriousness of the situation of the youth. Below follows a citation exemplifying this:

> "**Events during the investigation period. Applications, notifications, information:**
>
> 2021-10-19 X does not participate in the scheduled meeting with social services and has since October 3 declined a drug test. Staff [at open institution] state concern that X have been absent during the night.
>
> 2021-10-22 During planned follow-up meeting at [open institution] X refuses to participate in the meeting. When social workers and staff try to motivate X to participate, he becomes angry and threatening.
>
> 2021-10-25 X is suspected to have been out at night and becomes threatening when staff try to wake him up.
>
> 2021-10-30 A report of concern is received from [open institution]. Staff can't motivate X to follow the plan
>
> 2021-11-02 X continues to refuse to submit to a drug test as planned once a week.
>
> 2021-11-11 Received written psychologist statement from psychologist [name] (...): X has shown suspicion and not wanted to answer questions about his well-being or previous experiences in more detail. X does not trust the social services or the health care but believes that if it had not been for the social services, everything would have been fine.
>
> 2021-11-18 X is verbally threatening and abusive towards social workers on the phone.
>
> 2021-12-20 The drug test that X submits on the 10th shows positive for THC and amphetamines and on December 17th it shows positive for THC." (Case no. 14)

The listing and the frequent use of figures continues through the assessment in the form of, for example as shown above, dates, times, and test results, creating a high degree of modality where what is presented appears to be true and indisputable (Fairclough). This listing and use of figures also contributes to the text bearing the characteristics of a legal or police context where "evidence" is lined up to demonstrate a certain scenario, or in this case a certain type of behaviour or character traits, often related to a lack of morale. Recurrent formulations are such as "X has used more drugs than she has stated" (case no. 26), "X denies the fact that he socializes with these people and their activities" (case no. 68), or stating the youth being "guilty" of various behaviours and events (case no. 16), or the below citation:

> "The fact that she told the psychiatrist that she sold her body, while she tried to deny this in conversation with the case worker (...) also shows her lack of insight" (case no. 31).

The use of words such as "deny" and "guilty" are not neutral but carry the meaning of the person in question being held accountable for his or her actions, which in turn implies an

individualized and moralizing understanding of the problems (ref moral accounts). The lining up of evidence not only add to the problems as have been ongoing for a period of time, escalating into an urgent situation, but also serve to convince the reader that the youth (and their parents) possess certain negative character traits showing immorality and deviance from societal norms and values (ref Sahlin).

A specific type of evidence is listing of telephone conversations and meetings that the social services have had with various "experts" such as staff from the school, staff at homes where the young person has been placed, child and adolescent psychiatry or other instances with legitimacy in a specific area, as shown below.

> "**Referees and experts**
>
> Phone call with psychologist [name] at Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 13/8 and 20/8.
>
> Information from [care provider] has been provided by telephone 12 and 14/8.
>
> The police questioned X on 20 and 22/8 and 2/9.
>
> Contact with the Police on 20 and 22/8, 2/9 and 23/9
>
> The police have submitted a drug analysis 23/9.
>
> The police have submitted a memo on 26/9.
>
> Telephone contact with prosecutor [name] on 20, 21, 22, 23/8, 6 and 20/9. In addition to this, email contact has taken place.
>
> Contact with [name], staff at the detention center, has taken place on 27/8 and 9/9.
>
> The main hearing in the District Court has taken place (date) and (date)." (Case no 33)

Here, specificity and detail are used with the help of figures, for example by presenting with precision a particular conversation and the title of the expert. Often followed by a summary of the expert's opinion of the youth, as exemplified below:

> "**Experts' opinion. Data from [school name] dated 2020-08-24. Information from assistant principal:**
>
> (…) 'X was not in phase in terms of knowledge due to his low attendance and the fact that he did not participate in the teaching once he was on site. During the academic year 2019/2020, X had a high number of invalid absences.'" (Case no. 35)

This summarizing and the heading stating "Experts' opinion" followed by the title "assistant principal" sets a not only formal but also an authoritative tone where opinions from "experts" contribute with what is perceived as "truths" about the youth's activities. In this way, a picture is painted of what emerges from the child welfare assessment is not only the social services' opinion of the young person and their situation, but a result of several different expert bodies'

unanimous statements. In other words, the evidence is piling up for the problematic behaviour of the youth. Another way to build authority and make truth claims in the presenting of evidence is referring to "research", as shown in the below citation:

> "Research shows that children who have norm-breaking peers, i.e., with their own risky behaviour, can learn from these friends and develop an even more destructive behavior, which is evident that she has already done given that she is drawn to such environments regardless of where in the country she is" (case no. 9)

In the above citation reference is made to not a specific research study, but to "research" in general terms. The words and phrases indicating generality contrasts with the very specific and detailed outlining of expert opinions and previous assessments as exemplified above. This means that while the opinions of experts give a sense of weight and credibility, young people appear to be presented in more general terms as carriers of risks. This also means that the underlying causes of these "risks" and the young person's behavior are hidden through wordings and phrases indicating generality and thus being disconnected from the specific individual youth. The underlying causes of, for example, an addiction or acting out behavior are described in a general and vague way, either through references to "research", or with words that indicate uncertainty and ambivalence, such as for example: "X has developed a behavior that is probably a symptom of the environment in which she grew up." (case no. 62). The interjected "probably" could be understood with Fairclough's terminology as invoking a low degree of modality; hence, the writer wants us to know that he or she does not know with certainty whether this is the cause of the risky behavior, thus opening for the possibility that the behavior stands on its own, that there is no so-called legitimate reason behind it, but that the youth is simply problematic in itself. The detailed accounts of events and expert opinions on the youth's risky behavior constitutes as "evidence" that appear to be indisputably true, while what has led to the behavior appears fuzzy, unclear, and messy.

As pointed out by Wästerfors and Åkerström (årtal), positive events and characteristics as well as protective factors are presented in brief terms, while long, full, detailed descriptions are reserved for the risks. What is written about protection and more positive periods, events, or situations, or character traits is also related – dialectically linked to – the talk of risks in that it is often formulated as a temporary interruption, or a pause, in the risk-taking. Like Wästerfors and Åkerström, there are also unspecified general formulations that things have "worked well" for a while, without specifying what exactly it is that has worked.

Establishing youths and parents as accountable - closing the case

The texts aim at a certain purpose; namely to argue for placement in secure care – a specific type of placement in Swedish child and youth care, related to judicial circumstances referring to the behavior of the youth. In that, questions on accountability and who being responsible for the current situation of the youth, is central. Like Wästerfors & Åkerström's (XX) notion trouble zooming, the child welfare assessments are zoomed in on troubles, here often expressed in terms of "risks"; both current and future or potential risks that may possibly occur if nothing is done. As was outlined above, the risks are presented in a detailed manner were various types of evidence and expert opinions becomes crucial evidence to "build the case". However, in building the "case" the assessments not only draw on "experts" or "research", but the texts are generally written in such a way that the narrator is silently portrayed as an omniscient authoritarian expert, as exemplified through the below citation:

> "The social services still believe that the best option to meet X's needs is to place her in a foster home on a long-term basis (...). However, the social services see a great risk that X at this time escapes from a voluntary placement again and continues with her socially destructive behaviour, whereupon the social services assess that a placement in a secure institution is the best for X to ensure that her basic needs and schooling are met." (Case no 8)

The above citation could be understood in terms of Fairclough's notion transitivity. The responsibility for the situation is placed on the young person through formulations such as "continue(s) with *her* socially destructive behaviour" (my emphasis), also presenting the youth as someone who lack insight in her troublesome behaviour. Through linguistically connecting the youth to "escapes" and "socially destructive behaviour", while at the same time using phrases as "the social services still believe that" and "the social services assess that", the young person is put in subject position, while representatives of public authorities are both anonymized and exempt from liability. The sentence possesses a high degree of modality and thus the circumstances presented appear as both true in an objective sense and as undisputed. This could be understood in relation to Wästerfors och Åkerström's notion deflecting agency…[utveckla]… (Fairclough, Wästerfors & Åkerström).

The evidence presented to build the case could be understood in terms of proving moral flaws, i.e., young people and parents are held accountable for what is going on and hence implicitly

presented as immoral, to legitimize such an intrusive measure as placement due to behavioral problems in secure care [utveckla].

Expertutlåtanden – presenteras i passiv form:

I utlåtande från SiS ”framkommer oro för att X har ett stundtals hotfullt och utåtagerande beteende. Det framkommer även oro för att X har ett sexuellt beteende som är tvångsmässigt och destruktivt” (ärende nr 13)

”Mini-Maria informerar om att X inte påvisar en motivation till att vilja sluta med droger” (ärende nr 56)

The high degree of modality in the texts are further accentuated through the lives of the youths generally being presented as messy and characterized by risks and failures. In building the case and achieve third-party alliance with the reader, i.e., convince the reader of what is put forward, word choices, phrases and structure of the language become crucial (Fairclough). However, also rhetoric techniques to legitimize a measure as intrusive as involuntary placement in secure care. One such strategy present in the material is what I have chosen to label “transfer of risk”, meaning a rhetoric technique applied through describing the risks the young person himself has been exposed to, for example by parents, as a risk that is now transformed to be driven by the young person himself.

[Två exempel från samma utredning som visar på detta skifte]

In other words, to describe the young person as exposed to risks such as neglect and abuse at a young age, and later in the assessment to shift the focus from these circumstances and their possible impact on the young person, to the young person's "behavior". In this way, a one-sided focus is put on the behavior and thus disconnected from any underlying causes such as traumatic experiences, and structural conditions such as poverty. In building the case of a youth seemingly in need of secure care there are little room for the youth as exposed to risks since exposure to risks mean that the responsibility lies elsewhere, not on the young person himself. The risks, if they are attributable to other people or circumstances need thus to be transferred and reshaped to risks that have affected the youth in such a way that he or she has begun to put himself or herself at risk.

Formulations such as “his addiction” in the citation further above (Case no. 7) indicates an individualized understanding further accentuating the presentation of the issue “addiction” as a matter of responsibility for primarily the youth himself, not the society. Or at least as

something that requires a quid pro quo in the form of a sense of responsibility on the part of the young person.

Formulations such as "the parents have previously declined" followed by "despite the social service's assessment" and the statement that "there is a need" also point to the parents as responsible. They are presented as being responsible not only for boundary setting or keeping the youth away from destructive environments, but also for declining the offered help.

Hence, these masses of text contribute to portraying the history of the youth as fuzzy, too complex, and non-linear. It's all a mess, in short. And more importantly a problematic mess that the youth and his or her parents are responsible for has led to the risky behavior that the youth exhibit today. However, what is happening "today" (at the time of writing) is not a complete picture of the narrative of young people's lives, but rather occasional frozen images, "freezing slices" (Wästerfors & Åkerström) that are presented as a "documentary reality" (Smith 1974). In doing so, the youth's behavior is disconnected from possible causes, events, and their history... The behavior stands on its own...

Discussion

[Inledande stycke; Through the analysis, a discourse of individualized accountability was identified in the texts…]

Swedish legislation (LVU) makes a distinction between whether the child/young person should be taken into care due to circumstances in the home environment (§2) or due to circumstances related to the young person's own behaviour (§3). Care according to the concurrent §2 and §3 is possible, but measures that match such a complexity of need are deficient in Sweden today: There is a shortage of foster homes, especially qualified ones, and open institutions for young people are generally focused on the young person's own behaviour, although they often work for collaboration with the family. Open institutions and supported housing are not locked and thus place higher demands on the young person's possibility to care for himself, which can be aggravating for the young persons in the empirical material of the current study. This distinguishes the secure institutions with their restrictive measures and locked doors from the open institutions. Although there are intentions to also address the young person's family, this form of placement is largely focused on the young person's behaviour, which is evident from both the legal text and how the authority itself describes its activities. For the "case" of the young person with a "proven" destructive

and problematic behaviour to be successful, i.e., to reach its solution in terms of be granted a placement in secure care, what is required from the social services is to act in line with current legislation and systems. It is also within these that case workers at the social services have their discretion.

The understanding the youths' behaviour as a product of potentially traumatic circumstances and events is not built into the Swedish child welfare legislation and system. There is, so to speak, no recipient of youth who would be defined according to the discourse of the youth as being "at risk" rather than "a risk". For the at risk "case" to be successful, i.e., to reach its solution, it would on the one hand be essential for structural problems such as poverty, health inequalities, etc., were not individualised but taken seriously and was remedied through social policy reforms redistributing resources. On the other hand, integrated forms of care would be required where social, psychiatric, and medical problems are handled in interprofessional highly specialized teams. Such measures are lacking today and thus the discretion of case workers at the social services does not implicate such measures – rather, these are highly dependent on actors at the political and systemic level using *their* discretion in favour of alternative measures meeting the complexity in needs with the youths. This in turn would broaden the discretion of the case workers in the social services in line with an understanding that is helpful for the young people and their families.

With the current legislation and lack of measures meeting the complexity in needs of the youths it is simply not feasible to write about the young people as "too" vulnerable themselves or too much "at risk" in terms of traumas and what other people exposes them to. The discourse youth as "troublemaker" (Wästerfors) or being "a risk" needs thus to be dominant in what is written, to move forward in the system and undertake necessary measures that lies within the discretion of the case workers and the current child welfare system. This, due to a strong demand for action on the part of the social services (handlingsimperativet, ref Lindwall). And certainly, because the concerns from the social services and other instances such as schools, families etc., are most likely both genuine and justified. Thus, the social worker needs to use several linguistic techniques and legitimation strategies to succeed with their case and to prove first and foremost the youths and sometimes the parents' behaviour as being what is problematic, not other structural or home related conditions. Thus, it is intelligibly to present the youth as an active subject, to use temporality in showing urgency and escalation, to point to a variety of "evidence" using "experts", giving detailed statements

which appear to be precise by means of figures and portraying the youth and its life as unruly, diffuse, and muddled.

In the use of these legitimation techniques, several grand discourses are drawn on, such as the legal/police, the psychological, the medical, the child discourse, the protection discourse, etc. However, they all serve to build the case through attributing accountability to the individual youth and their parents; namely the discourse of attributing responsibility is the discourse that emerges most clearly in the material. In line with Fairclough's (år) argument that language, discourses and social practice are closely intertwined, this discourse of individualized accountability can be understood as both constituting and constituting social practices linked to current legislation, the structure of child welfare, and assessment practices in the social services. [Skall utvecklas/stramas upp]

Strengths and limitations

[Skall skrivas]

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