## TALKING VIOLENCE, CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

## YOUNG MEN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

## KJERSTIN ANDERSSON



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - SAYING THANK YOU!

Saying Thank You is a 'beginning social skill' (Goldstein, Glick & Gibbs 1998:211), skill no 5, actually. Before that comes Listening, Starting and Having a Conversation, and Asking a Question. By now I have listened, started and had plenty of conversations, and I have asked plenty of questions; all that is left is saying thank you. As a beginner and novice in academia, it might be a good idea to follow the instructions on how to do it correctly.

Step 1. Decide if the other person said or did something that you want to thank him/her for. An abundance of other people have said and done things I want to thank them for – not least the young men and trainers at the youth detention home who allowed me to listen, start and have conversations and ask questions. Thanks guys! Not only have you provided me with the raw material that eventually was turned into this book, but you have also given me memories for years to come.

Step 2. Choose a good time and place to thank the other person. It is noted that, it should be a quiet time and a private place where you are sure you will have the other person's attention. I figure that once you have opened this page of the book I just might have your attention, and a more quiet and private place than a book is hard to find.

Step 3. Thank the other person in a friendly way. Express thanks with words, a gift, a letter, or a return favour. The present thanks is definitely expressed in words, even though I don't think it's enough in some cases. I do still owe a dinner or two to quite a lot of people, which in my opinion is the friendliest way of saying thank you!

Step 4. Tell the other person why you are thanking him/her. In most cases I presume its obvious why I am thanking you, if not I'll do my best to explain myself. So, whom to thank? There are suggestions for different milieus where there might be possible candidates to thank: school, peer group and home, and the reason for thanking them.

Thank teacher for help on a project: Thanks Karin Aronsson, my teacher in academic life. Thanks for letting this project be mine, letting my wild ideas be turned into printable text, and fooling me into thinking that it is a piece of cake to write a dissertation! © Thanks Jeff Hearn for teaching me a thing or two about men that I didn't already know! © Thanks for

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Thank a friend for advice. Thanks Tobias and Lucas, my partners in crime, for all the advice you have given me over the past five years, but also for the advice you have asked of me. We have battled and slain many windmills together, bickered over minute things, as well as, allencompassing, life-altering things. This, of course, also goes for Cissi and Micke! I am still confused whether or not Åtvidaberg exists? I owe thanks to you two, not only for advice, but also for scraping me off the floor when needed, for sharing boring, mundane moments, as well as, exciting moments, such as the final episode of Gay or Straight! © Thanks Åsa, for becoming the nicest and friendliest of all my neighbours! I won't be leaving quite yet. Both you and Johanna have helped revitalise my thought process after three years with the same old faces! © Thanks Paul for helping me turn impossible Swedish slang into semi-readable English, but also for curry and heroes! And thanks Katherine for helping me with these thanks! Camilla, thanks for giving me advice even when it isn't your job anymore! Thanks also for all the advice I have received from everybody else at tema Barn and other teman, in constellations such as Diskursgruppen, Deleuzegruppen, Diskursivpsykologigruppen Soffagruppen, Stickgruppen! Thanks Jenny for putting me up and putting up with me, letting me take advantage of your apartment in the final stage of the work. The same goes for Erica, thanks for being my friend over the past five years, and the thirteen years before that!

Thank mother for fixing shirt. I suppose mom has fixed some shirt at some point in my life? More importantly though, I thank you, mom, for not letting me go to cookery school at age 16! © I thank you for being my biggest inspiration and supporter in life! Wish you were here today! Thank you Karin for fixing my crocodile costume in third grade for the big choir concert! Thanks also for being my big sister, energetically cheering me on even when you have no idea what I'm talking about! © Thanks Jaja, for fixing the jacket to my junior high school graduation! Thanks also for having a place in the woods, by the sea to which I can retreat whenever I

need. And Dad, thanks for letting me fix your overalls! © Now you're not the only doctor in the house anymore! A final thanks to Annika, Erik, Elias, Melker, Hampus and Simon for making my job as an aunt really easy! As far as I know, there's only one thing left to say after saying thanks: *Yatai!* 

Kjerstin

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### YOUNG MEN'S TALK ON VIOLENCE

- So, what are you doing?
- I'm a PhD student, trying to write my dissertation
- Oh, what's it about?
- It's a study of young men and violence.
- Oh, I see, so like why they're fighting and stuff?
- No, not really...
- So, like what to do with them?
- No, more like what it means to them... the fighting... talking about fighting...and...
- What do you mean?

Explaining what a study is about is rather tricky, because it depends on whom you are talking to, the context of the conversation, your own mood that day, and where you are in the research process. Writing the introduction to a dissertation is similarly difficult, as it depends on whom you are writing for, how you want to catch the reader's eye, what mood you want to set for the reader, and where you are in the process when you are writing it.

There are many things I wish to explain to the reader, laying the grounds for the rest of the book, because this dissertation is about a great many things, all related to how young men talk about violence. This study is about identity, gender and masculinity, ethnicity, morality, narratives, and how stories are told; it is about social categorization, criminality and constructing a criminal identity, but also about the treatment programme Aggression Replacement Training (ART). Central to the study are different forms of narratives of violence, and how young men talk about themselves and their own use of violence. In order to investigate this, I decided to seek out young men with a documented history of violence of some kind. The aim of the study is to investigate how young men use talk on violence in constructing identities.

I have, therefore, sought out young men with a documented history of violence to participate in the study, because it is important that the participating young men have experiences of using violence. It is equally important that I have not made that categorization.

Building on a social constructionist epistemology, I am indifferent to whether or not the young men 'actually' have used violence: I do not inquire whether they are lying or telling the truth. Having said this, it was still imperative for the study to approach young men who were considered to be violent, as I have an interest in stories about the use of violence. Had I had an interest in men as victims of violence or in their general attitudes towards violence, then the choice of participants probably could have been more indiscriminate, asking almost any young man to participate.

The young men participating in the study will be described further in the method section, but here I want to briefly give the reader an idea about what it was like to do research with them. All of the young men had at one point or another been charged with assault, but they also had problems with other types of criminality such as theft and drug abuse. Before I began my fieldwork, I was warned by some senior researchers that I had to consider my own safety and be highly aware of what kinds of risks I might be facing, as a young woman, doing the interviews. When I finally sat face to face with these 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old young men, I quickly realized that most of them were more afraid of me than I was of them, but that they were also curious, hesitant and sometimes indifferent towards me, and it became apparent what impact age and the institutional setting had on the interactional situation.

So, now I have briefly introduced the young men, my analytical interest in talk on violence, and the research site of residential care for young people. All of this will of course be further developed in subsequent chapters. Although my voice will still be heard throughout this book, I cannot help quoting Malcolm Ashmore's (1989:xxvi) brilliant introduction to *The Reflexive Thesis*, and hereby introduce my readers to the text:

You're welcome. The text is now yours. (...) The problem, I suspect, is to do with the content.

#### WHY YOUNG MEN AND VIOLENCE?

The content of this study has already been alluded to in the above introduction. This is a study on young men's talk about violence. But before I go into the importance and relevance of talk, I will discuss here why it is interesting to study young men and violence. The first reason is drawn from the statistical discourse on young men's violence, while the

other is based on what previous studies about violence in relation to gender and age have focused on.

### Violence and youth in Sweden

International statistics on violence unanimously agree that men are the most prevalent users of interpersonal violence (e.g. Kimmel 2000; Stanko 2003a), irrespective of the kind of violence involved. However, men are also the most frequent victims of violence, not including sexual violence (Stanko 2003a). According to a self-report study conducted by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health (*Statens folkhälsoinstitut, FHI*), (Statens Folkhälsoinstitut 2007), 5% of men report having been exposed to physical violence, compared with 3% of women, ages 16-84. Among young men, ages 16-29, 11% reported having been exposed to violence. The corresponding figures for older (ages 30-84) women and men are 1 and 4% respectively.

Young men are over-represented in the statistics, both as the most common user of violence and the most common victims (e.g., Svenssson & Ring 2007; Statens Folkhälsoinstitut 2007). According to a self-report study (BRÅ 2005) of ninth graders (15-year-olds) in Sweden, 8% of boys had been exposed to severe violence (that is, requiring medical care) compared to 4% of girls. Also regarding milder forms of violence, 27% of boys reported having been exposed in contrast to 19% of girls. Also, 21% of boys reported having used violence (including carrying a knife) compared to 8% of girls (Svensson & Ring 2007). Based on this self-report and other studies, young men in Sweden are exposed to and use violence on average twice as often as young women. In statistical sources, age and gender can almost be seen to predispose this group of people to violence, both as users and targets of violence.1 This statistical overview makes clear that both gender and age are imperative variables for understanding violence, but also that young men form a group in society that is relevant to study in relation to interpersonal violence.

Statistics and quantitative research on violence are informative in illuminating the prevalence and extent of a phenomenon such as violence, addressing questions of who, where, which kind and against whom. However, a quantitative approach has fundamental shortcomings in providing knowledge about the meaning and importance of violence in people's social relationships and about how violence is negotiated in

relation to identity. Qualitative methods, however, renders it possible to investigate violence from people's own point of view (Messerschmidt 2004; Plummer 2001). Honkatukia, Nyqvist and Pösö (2003) also point to the fact that quantitative victimization research and self-report studies are often based on adult understandings about experiences and definitions of violence, and therefore are far removed from how young people themselves perceive the matter.

#### RESEARCH ON INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

In light of the previous discussion on the statistical discourse, it is not surprising that most research focuses on men's use of violence, most often against women and children (see, for example, Gender & Violence 2005; Stanko 2003a), or on women as victims of men's violence, and on children as victims of adult men's violence. Since the 1990s, victims have become the focus of much research on violence. Sandra Walklate (2001:71) argues that research within criminology and victimology has, due to dualistic thinking, often resulted in a gendered understanding of victims and offenders, rendering 'female victimisation visible and male victimisation invisible' (see also Newburn & Stanko 1994). Recently, some studies have made men relevant as victims of other men's violence (Burcar 2005; Stanko & Hobdell 1993). Veronica Burcar's (2005) study of young men as victims of violence is based on detailed analyses of how the participants talked about their experiences and the complexity involved in the young men's talk about themselves as victims. In her study of prison discourse, Patricia O'Connor (2000) also shows how inmates negotiate their sense of self and identities in narratives on violence, as does Andrea Meyr (2004) in a related study of British prisons. However, unlike Burcar, neither O'Connor nor Meyr acknowledge the impact gender has in talk on violence.

Men's use of violence has also been studied within the family (e.g., Anderson 1997; Dobash & Dobash 1998; Umberson, Anderson, Williams & Chen 2003; Yllö & Bograd 1988). In her study on husbands found guilty of assault against their wives, Margareta Hydén (1992, 1995) interviewed both the man and the woman in the relationship, providing an insight into how men construct narratives of violence. Building on feminist theory, Hydén analyses how the men position themselves in relation to their wives and in relation to the violence itself, sometimes constructing it as a fight between equal parties. Also Jeff Hearn (1998) draws on feminist theorizing

in a study on men's violence against known women. Both Hydén's and Hearn's studies were conducted with adult men, with no extensive discussion specifically on age.

Joyce Canaan (1996) has shown how young men in college talk about drinking and fighting, analysing how they construct masculinity in relation to, among other things, violence. Research with men concerning their own use of violence has also been studied using varying perspectives with sociological and psychoanalytical orientations (e.g., Connell 1989, 1999; Gadd 2000, 2003; Jefferson 1994a, 2002; Anderson & Umberson 2001).

In recent years, James Messerschmidt (1999, 2000, 2004) has developed qualitative methods for researching young people's experiences of both physical and sexual violence, from their own point of view. Based on life history interviews with both young men and young women, Messerschmidt takes into consideration both how the research participants construct gendered identities and the impact age has, especially in relation to family members and peers but also institutional contexts such as the schools. Messerschmidt (1999:198) argues for the importance of taking the perspective of young offenders themselves in conducting research on violence:

To conceptualize how age, gender, class, and social situation are related to specific type of violence, one must appreciate how adolescent male violent offenders construct and make sense of their particular world, and comprehend the ways in which they interpret their own lives and the world around them. Realistically, how can we begin to understand adolescent male violence if we do not understand what such violence means to the offender himself?

This perspective coincides both with the participants' orientation (or perspective) advocated within discursive studies on interaction and conversation (see, for instance, Potter 2004) and with what is referred to as a child perspective within sociology of children and childhood, to which I will return later on.

#### Children and violence

Research on children and violence consists foremost of studies of children and young people as victims of violence (e.g., Burman, Brown & Batchelor 2003; Gender & Violence 2005; Hazel, Ghate, Creighton, Field & Finch 2003; Renold & Barter 2003), also known as child abuse (Gough 1996).

Research on violence within the family (Ghate 2000) includes children as witnesses of parental violence (Källström-Cater 2004) and fathers' violence against mothers (Eriksson 2002, 2003). Research on children as victims of adults' violence also includes sexual violence, (eg., Tierney & Mccabe 2004) war (eg., Garbarino, Kostelny & Dubrow 1991) and corporal punishment (aga) (Straus & Donnelly 2001; for a discussion on Sweden's corporal puniashmen ban, see Durrant 1999). There is also a burgeoning body of research on children and media violence (Brady 2007; Huges 2002; Kirsh 2006).

The largest body of research on children's own use of violence has entailed a reconceptualization of violence as bullying. Bullying has been studied within pedagogy and educational sciences (eg., Aho 1998; Besag 1989; Björk 1995; Eriksson, Lindberg, Flygare & Danebäck 2002) and criminology (e.g., Andershed, Kerr & Stattin 2001), where much of the research consists of survey studies. In interviews with British schoolboys, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) touch upon the subject of violence in relation to boys' construction of masculinity through toughness. However, in their interviews, the boys discussed other boys' toughness, use of violence and bullying, but not their own. In the study (Frosh et al. 2002), children are not theorized as users of violence, and violence is theorized as part of a masculine identity project, rather than a part of childhood. Similar approaches have been taken by Wayne Martino (1999, 2000), Jane Kenway and Lindsay Fitzclarence (1997), Helen Hatchell (2006) and Emma Renold (2002) in researching boys' (and sometimes girls') use of violence in school.

In a school context, bullying, as a concept, tends to fixate violence in time and space, referring to it as being used by a particular group of people during a particular time in their lives. Renaming children's use of violence as bullying entails a devaluation of violence: Activities that would render an adult liable for a prison sentence are often left without reprimand.

Why are children primarily conceptualized as victims in the research on violence, and why is children's use of violence often reconceptualized as bullying? According to Chris Jenks (1996/2005), it could be due to a discrepancy between the discursive understanding of children as innocent (cf. Honkatukia et al. 2003) and in need of protection, and the perception of children as active users of violence, which creates a conceptual confusion.

The view of children as being in possession of a special and distinctive nature, which is both innocent and vulnerably dependent, is what makes any link between children and violent crime particularly problematic, for the imagery of childhood and that of violent criminality are iconologically irreconcilable. (Jenks 1996/2005:125)

Meyer (2007), however, argues that children are discursively seen as innocent when they are victims of violent crimes, while a discourse of evil is drawn upon when children commit crimes or use violence. A third discourse influencing the perception of children involves seeing children who use violence as innocent, but damaged (Meyer 2007). In her study on the moral rhetoric of children and public perceptions of paedophilia, Meyer (2007) found that the discourse of innocence is closely connected to an understanding of children's innate vulnerability, and the terms innocence and vulnerability are often conflated and used synonymously. Meyer (2007) concludes that issues affecting children become moral issues, and that in rhetoric concerning children, 'the child' becomes an explanation in itself. This could be argued to be one reason for why children's use of violence is highly problematic, both in the public debate and in much of the research. In an article on the media frenzy surrounding the James Bulgar case, Allison James and Chris Jenks (1996:315) argue that 'the innocence of childhood has finally come of age'. Together with the killing of 6-year-old beauty pageant contestant JonBenet Ramsey (Conrad 1999), the murder of 2-year-old Jamie Bulger is on of the most written about cases. However, much research focuses on how the news media have dealt with the issue of child-by-child murders (James & Jenks 1996). Gitta Sereny's (1995, 1998) interview with and investigation into the killings conduced by 12-year-old Mary Bell, are a rare exception, giving voice to a child as an inflictor2 of violence. In a recent South African study, Jenny Parkes (2007) talked to children about their experiences of violence. Analysing children's narratives, Parkes investigated how they make sense of and interpret experiences of violence, and how they create subjectivities in relation to violence. According to Parkes (2007:402) children,

actively strive for agency with respect to their social positions within a constraining and disempowering context characterized by high levels of interpersonal conflict, violent crime and gansterism. They make sense of violence in complex and ambivalent ways and, as they actively strive to position themselves in relation to these multiple meanings, they may at the same time reject and incorporate violence within their own beliefs and practices.

In the study, Parkes (2007) combines a social constructionist perspective with a child perspective, illustrating how violence is both repelling and attractive to children, and how the children negotiate their subject positions in relation to violence. Parkes (2007) also notes that especially the boys connect violence to masculinities.

#### RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

For the past 20 years, studies on children and childhood have undergone a significant transformation. Traditionally, children have been (and still are in some cases) studied via adult caretakers' views and understandings (Christensen & James 2000), based on an *a priori* distinction between children and adults (Christensen & James 2000; Jenks 2000). Jean La Fontaine (1986:20) argues that the term 'child' contrasts with the term 'adult' and: 'the classification of individuals as adults or children affects their ability to assume social roles', their ability to act and speak, i.e. how they are positioned in society. Children's participation in social life is organized through 'a range of relationships, assigned by convention' (La Fontaine 1986:20). Both childhood and adulthood are a matter of social definition, separated by a fuzzy line, specific to cultural and historical contexts.

The approaches of new social studies of childhood (or sociology of childhood) has developed a research tradition based on the understanding that children are agents in their own lives (cf. James, Jenks & Prout 1998; Qvortrup 1990, 2005) including that they should be regarded as research participants in their own right (Mayall 2000), arguing: 'that to carry out research with children does not necessarily entail adopting different or particular methods' (Christensen & James 2000:2), meaning that children are equally competent research participants as adults are. This approach to research with children is an important aspect of the present study as well, as it brings with it a focus on the young men's understanding of their social situation, identity, and what impact violence has had in their lives, rather than caretakers' and professionals' views about them. My interest concerns investigating how the young men understand themselves, and how they construct their identities. This is because I consider it important to investigate the relevance violence has in the young men's worlds, from their

own points of view, and therefore are the research participants' perspectives of primary interest in this study.

It could of course be debated whether the young men in this study should be understood as children, and if it is desirable to do so? Irrespective of how the definition of children is made, age is of importance to this study in several ways. In the narratives, age is a resource the young men use when talking about violence, enabling them to organize their narratives in particular ways. But age is also relevant in the interview situation, and the young men could be seen as generationally positioned (Mayall 2003) in the interviews, enabling them to talk to me, and about violence, in particular ways. Their talk (as well as mine) on violence is both enabled and restricted, because they are positioned as young men, the group in society that most frequently uses violence, of which I am not a member. They would also talk differently with peers of their own age, as would I. Moreover, age is a relevant aspect in the overall institutional context (which is further discussed in the method chapter, 'Analysing talk').

Throughout this study, I use the term young men to refer to the research participants (who are detained), because I seek to avoid increasing any generational gap between them, and myself and the reader.

## TALKING VIOLENCE, VIOLENCE TALK

As indicated by the title and introduction, the focus for this study is on issues connected to identity, gender and narratives, in relation to violence. However, I make a distinction between *violence* as phenomenon, and *talk on violence*. Given my social constructionist perspective, as a researcher, I have a particular interest in talk, and here, I only analyse *talk on violence*. How the young men talk about violence varies depending on whether it is based on experiences, or whether they talk about hypothetical violence. This difference affects whether or not the violence talked about is problematized in the narratives. That is, the narrative status of the violence: whether it is constructed as self-evident, natural, and non-problematic, or whether it is narrated with caution, warranted and troublesome to talk about, as in, for instance, justifying hitting a girl. When based on experience, violence is more problematized in talk than when it is talked about in hypothetical terms.

In writing about the young men's own use of violence, I have chosen to use the term *inflictor* instead of perpetrator or offender.<sup>3</sup> The term

offender is usually restricted to people convicted within the criminal justice system, while perpetrator can be used about someone who may or may not have had contact with the criminal justice system (Hearn, Andersson & Cowburn 2007). Both terms, however, are in my opinion morally charged and associated with criminality. I find it important to avoid categorizing the young men as criminal, or making some moral judgement on their use of violence. I therefore primarily use the term inflictor to refer to the person talked about as using violence. However, it could be argued that the term inflictor merges the subject with the practices of violence, in the same way as perpetrator does. In this study, I rather use inflictor as shorthand for 'the person who inflicts violence on others'. The reformulation does not imply that I condone the use of violence. Rather, in my aspiration to understand how talking about violence is part of constructing masculine identities, I am indifferent to the moral aspect of violence. It interests me more to bring to the foreground the issue of how talking about violence implicates positioning oneself in relation to violence as such: Who am I in relation to violence? Am I the inflictor or the target of violence?

Both in this study and in others (Kvist 2002; Burcar 2005), the term victim also has been proven to be problematic in talking about violence. The term is too closely associated with loss of power, passiveness and weakness to be useful in talking about one's own use of violence. Hence, I use *target* of violence in addition to victim, with the same reservation as the term inflictor that it is shorthand for 'the person who is the target of violence'. In study 1 I further develop the discussion on the notion of victim and perpetrator analytically.

It is important to notice that the young men in this study never use the word 'violence'. They, rather, talk about actions such as hitting and kicking, objects used in fighting such as bottles, chains and knives, and the effects of violence such as blood spill, fainting, falling, thrashed mouths, etc. This talk is also generated by the questions I have posed that explicitly mention violence and fighting, and my request to them to talk about their experiences of violence. Violence can, hence, be seen as an analytical and theoretical term that I use to categorize what they are talking about.

#### OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

This chapter introduced the reader to what the study is about, previous research on violence and the research context it has been developed within.

I have also stated that the study is about talk; and talk is further theorized in the following chapter, which provides definitions of concepts used here. The second chapter is also devoted to teasing out definitions of concepts crucial to the theoretical and analytical perspective used, such as *positioning, narrative, identity, masculinity, and violence*, and specifies the aim of the study based on the theoretical framework developed.

The third chapter presents how the study was conducted and how the analyses were made, detailing the whats, whos, and hows. Descriptions are provided of the assessment ward, the treatment programme ART and the circumstances of how talk was generated. Issues pertaining to research ethics are also discussed in relation to specific stages of the research process.

Thereafter, the articles are reproduced<sup>4</sup>. They are ordered according to level of analytical complexity. The first article investigates the elements and organization of violence narratives, and how the organisation makes it possible to talk about using violence while still maintaining a preferred selfpresentation. In the second article, these issues are investigated in narratives about using violence against a girl. Different discursive resources are highlighted, but the narratives are continuously organized to achieve a particular type of self-image. The third article deals with talk on violence generated within the treatment programme ART. The issue of snitching is discussed: whether or not it is possible to report somebody to the police, what type of crime that person has to have committed, and what type of violence the young men would use against that person. Here, knowledge about the criminal community as well as masculine identities is displayed. The final article examines violence in relation to ethnic categorizations and racism, deployed by two young men. Two mirroring but opposing positions are presented: one explicitly non-Swedish and one neo-Nazi position. Both young men can be seen to use the same ethnic and racist categories to achieve different discursive goals, and both describe being the target of violence due to being cast as the Other.

After the articles, a summary of the studies is offered and the book is concluded with a discussion of how talk on violence can be seen to play a role in constructing identity.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Other factors increasing the risk of being exposed to violence are type of occupation, sick leave, economic situation, education and country of birth.
- <sup>2</sup> For a discussion see the section 'Talking violence, violence talk,' page 13.
- <sup>3</sup> David Richards (1986) uses the term *performer* of violence, which here might become a bit confusing because performance here is used as a theoretical concept in relation to identity and subjectivity, further discussed in "Theorizing talk".
- <sup>4</sup> Two of the articles have been published in journals. In those cases the final drafts before publication is reproduced here, together with full references to the journals. The other two articles have been submitted, and the final drafts are reproduced. In all four cases the reference lists have been included in the main reference list found in the back of the book.

#### THEORIZING TALK

This study is based on a theoretical amalgam of social constructionist understandings of identity, narrative, masculinity and violence. However, social constructionism is multifarious (Brickell 2006; see also Hacking 1999), so therefore I will give an account here of how I use the perspective in this particular study. Central to social constructionism is language (cf. Burr 2003; Edley 2001a). Language enables us to understand and construe the social world around us. This is what Derek Edwards (1997:48, italics in original) refers to as epistemic social constructionism, which entails foregrounding 'the constructive nature of descriptions rather than entities that (according to descriptions) exist beyond them'. This means that any attempt to describe the world is made via language (Edley 2001a), and that researching, for instance, violence, using this approach, can only be done through language. According to Nigel Edley (2001a:437), 'it is from an epistemic point of view that we can see language operating as the medium through which we come to understand or know the world' - including violence.

#### DISCOURSES AND POSITIONINGS

The other central element in social constructionism is the concept of discourse. I see discourse as that which makes it possible to talk about things, phenomena, relations and positions; and that which makes it possible or impossible to talk about these issues in particular ways (Foucault 1972). This concerns how people construct their social worlds; it concerns takenfor-granted notions and presuppositions about how life is and about how it should be; how people behave and how they should behave. In this respect, discourses set the parameters for what is regarded as normal, deviant, true, false, right and wrong. Becky Francis (2002:45) describes Foucault's notion of discourse¹ as 'socially and culturally produced patterns of language, belief and practice', developing over time, some being more influential than others in different social groupings and contexts. But, importantly, Foucault's notion recognizes discourses as a social phenomenon and that the production and reproduction of discourses are a collective enterprise.

According to Wendy Hollway (1984/2001), discourses make available positions for people to take up, in relation to other people. Moreover, discourses do not exist independently of their reproduction, they are, rather, continuously negotiated, reiterated, challenged and reworked, by the very subjects that they help produce (Hollway 1984/2001; Brickell 2005). In their classic article on positioning, Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990/2001) continued the development of *position* as a 'conversational phenomenon', opening new paths for a theory of selfhood. According to Davies and Harré (1990/2001:262), position incorporates

both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.

This entails that positioning is a discursive process locating selves in conversation as 'observably and subjectively coherent participants' in collectively produced narratives (Davies & Harré 1990/2001:264). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:102), this entails a critical approach to the idea of 'self-as-entity', conveying a shift in analytical focus to the construction of the self. In this construction of self, language is central, as 'people become fixed in position through the range of linguistic practices available to them to make sense' (Potter & Wetherell 1987:109). Chris Brickell (2005:37) argues that selves are constructed using 'socially available meanings and discourses' as resources. In an interlinked and reciprocal process, selves, or subjects, can be understood as effects, or the outcome of discourses and social practices, which in turn can be investigated and studied (Moore 1994). This approach to subjectivity renders it possible to investigate how identity is constructed in everyday practices and interaction, investigating how is the self constructed in talk, and how meaning about the self is produced? Henrietta Moore (1994:149) argues that:

The advantage of a theory which stresses that at any one time there exist competing, potentially contradictory discourse on gender and sexuality rather than a single discourse, is that we can ask the

question, how is it that people take up a position in one discourse as opposed to another?

This advantage does not just include discourses of gender and sexuality, but the entire theory of discourse sketched above. Seeing discourse as that which enables and restricts talk, and that which makes positions available, also prescribes agency – the ability to choose from possible positions in interaction. Davies and Harré (1990/2001) emphasize that it is a mistake to assume that positioning is an intentional act. Accordingly, agency is often talked about as something people have or do not have, especially when it comes to children, sometimes conflating agency with intentionality. In my view, all people have agency: agency to construct their identity according to the positions available to them. Agency is the continuous choosing of how to present yourself, to talk, act and relate to the social environment, i.e. the process by which individuals construct themselves and the world they inhabit. This process is, however, not necessarily intentional or conscious. According to Moore (1994), the lack of conscious reflection over possible choices is not the same as the absence of choice, or the fact that individuals do select from possible alternatives through social practice. Agency is hence not necessarily something that we are consciously aware of, and should therefore not be confused with intentional decisions. The possibility to choose to act in a multitude of ways, to create different subject positions at different times, is restricted by the understanding of people as unified and discrete subjects.

In this study, I define position as the standpoint<sup>2</sup> from which the narrator is telling his or her story in relation to other people and the issue at hand. But rather than seeing position as fixed in narrating, I see it as a continuous process, arguing that narrators shift their position within the same narrative event to serve discursive purposes; in emphasizing the processual element, and therefore prefer to use *positioning*. Investigating positioning is, according to Karin Aronsson (1998), part of analysing what she refers to as 'identity-in-interaction'.

Equally important as the theoretical application of positioning to the data is what I refer to as preferred self-presentation, which simply means that a person seeks to present himself (or herself) in a 'favourable light' (Potter & Wetherell 1987). When talking about violence, this is an important interactional feature. Talking about one's own use of violence is potentially troublesome to one's self-presentation. Although Stanko

(2003b) argues that violence is not condemned, disapproved of, or punished in all situations, one may risk becoming the target of condemnation in a conversation about one's own use of violence. Therefore, it may be seen as imperative to attempt to achieve *normality* and reinstate a 'proper way of being' (Edley & Wetherell 1997:210) in talk about violence. How this complex rhetorical and discursive language play (Wittgenstein 1992) is achieved in interaction is central to this study.

#### NARRATIVES AND STORYLINES

Kenneth Gergen (1994/2001:247) argues for the advantages of studying the construction of self-presentation (self-conception), not as an individual's personal project, but as socially achieved in discourse, due to 'the performance of languages available in the public sphere'. According to Gergen, who one is – the self – is rendered intelligible in ongoing relationships. This construction of self is possible to research via narratives. According to Gergen (1994/2001:248), lives are narrative events: 'we live by stories – both in telling and the realizing of the self'.

I understand narratives to mean everyday, mundane stories. However, every story is made up of different elements and is organized to achieve discursive and interactional purposes. By identifying these elements and sorting them out, it is possible to understand the organization of the narrative and its interactional goal, what is being achieved and how identity is performed in the narrative. An interactional goal should not necessarily be understood as the result of an intentional act. Important for the organizing and structuring of the narrative is, what I refer to as, the talkedabout-issue. Davies and Harré (1990/2001) describe it as the dilemma around which the story is organized and how the narrator positions him-/herself in relation to this. Here, violence can be understood as a troublesome issue or dilemma to position oneself in relation to. In a similar manner, Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2002) asks who you can be, if you interpret your actions and wishes as unwanted and therefore are unable to identify with the preferred identity category? Being identified as the violent man can in many respects be regarded as a dispreferred identity category. The question then is: How do subjects localize positions within the collective storylines and discourses available to them concerning the issue of violence?

One way to study how people create narrative identities in relation to social discourses is to look at *storylines* (Davies 1989; Georgakopoulou 2005; Søndergaard 2002). A storyline should be understood here as the organization of and use of elements, constructing an easily recognizable story that legitimizes one's own actions. Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2005:165) argues for an intertextual and discursive understanding of storylines as dynamic and open-ended rather than as a 'largely monolithic, personal, past experience, nonshared events story'. Instead storylines are resources for locating, for example, 'men in time and space' (Georgakopoulou 2005:165). Analysing storylines includes studying how different identity categories are produced in talk, by investigating which 'characters' inhabit the story, their function and what kind of relationship they have with the 'main character', who is usually, but not always, the narrator.

#### IDENTITY AND SELF-MAKING

I see identity as that which is produced in talking about (in this case) violence. I see identity as constructed in conversations and narratives (Bruner 1991). When interacting, identity is continuously constructed, in the sense that an image of who I am is construed in talk: what I would like to refer to as narrative self-making or narrative identity. By this I mean that almost irrespective of the topic of conversation, I am telling myself, the present audience, and a future audience who I am. This should be understood as a social identity in that it is achieved in collaboration with interlocutors (Aronsson 1998) and in relation to talked about others. Talking about other people is an important conversational feature in my data. Georgakopoulou (2005) argues that social and moral orders are constructed in descriptions of people and the world, and ascribing identities to talked-about others has implications for the construction of self-identity. Through the practice of describing social relations and reporting social practices, people's social reality is constructed, and social order is displayed and regulated (Stokoe 2003; Kitzinger 2005).

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005:591), identities 'should not be understood as ontologically prior to the discourse that calls them forth'. Interaction can therefore be seen to highlight the most predictable, and preferred, identity. Bucholtz and Hall claim that identities are 'only constituted as socially real through discourse, and especially interaction'

(Bucholtz & Hall 2005:591). Goffman (1956/1959) understands the self as a particular form of accounting for one's perception of one's internal stages; it does not exist outside the social processes nor is it prior to the social. According to Brickell (2005:30), Goffman sees the self as socially constructed and the 'loci of social action', as it involves one's management of self-impressions to other participants in the interaction.

In relation to interviews as a research specific form of interactional Clive Seale (1998) argues for the need to analyse interviews as social events. Regarding interviews as topics, rather than as resources for tapping into 'real facts' about people's lives makes it possible to explore *how* talk can generate different versions of *preferred* self-identities (Seale 1998) and how the production of the self is achieved in discourse (Lapadat 2000).

But identity is also closely related to gender. Gender is hardly ever excluded from descriptions and understandings of self and other, and 'every time a speaker assigns social gender to another human being' a process of identity construction takes place (Bucholtz & Hall 2005:590). Davies (1997:11) has shown how gender is constructed via a 'complex interplay between linguistic structure, cultural storylines and the formation of the inner/outer body with its powerfully embedded patterns of desire', resulting in a socially meaningful system (Bucholtz & Hall 2005), in which gender becomes central to the understanding of identity.

In line with Henrietta Moore (1994) and Stevi Jackson (2006), I use 'men' and 'women' as discrete categories not in a biological sense, but as differentiated categories constructed by discursive effects, stemming from a cultural (and not biological) understanding of men as different from women.

Gender is thus a social division and a cultural distinction, given meaning and substance in the everyday actions, interactions and subjective interpretations through which it is lived. If gender categories have no natural existence they cannot pre-exist the division and distinction through which they are constituted (...). (Jackson 2006:106)

This renders gender a position from which to speak, just as other social parameters such as age, ethnicity, race, class. However, age is an equally important position from which the young men in the present study talk. As noted, the principal research participants are referred to as *young* men. And although *men* usually are the focus of the analysis, the age aspect is also

important with regard to how violence can be talked about, who it can be directed at, how it can be inflicted.

#### DISCOURSES OF MASCULINITY

Many different approaches to masculinity have developed over recent years. Some research on masculinity influenced by feminist theory builds on a distinction between sex and gender, often presuming that biological sex is the stable and unchangeable basis upon which gender is inscribed (Garlick 2003). However, Steve Garlick (2003) questions this assumption, using arguments from within biology, claiming that a distinction between the sexes never existed in nature, but rather that it is projected by scientists (see also Fausto-Sterling 2000). Garlick (2003) argues that rather than seeing sex as essential to understanding 'sexual difference', heterosexuality and gender are founding concepts for modern categorization (see also e.g., Butler 1990; Francis 2002; Hird 2000; Hood-Williams 1996; Kessler & MaKenna 2000; West & Zimmerman 1987). Heterosexuality produces hegemonic masculinity, according to Garlick (2003:159) and referring to Butler, he states: 'Masculinity (and femininity) thus becomes an accomplishment that can be "achieved" only within a heterosexual context'. Also, masculinity and femininity are responses to the need to police heteronormativity, as 'masculinity and femininity are relational concepts – that is, to be masculine is to be not feminine and vice versa' (Garlick 2003:158, italics in original). Building on Foucault, Wayne Martino (1999:256) shows how adolescent boys at a middle-class school in Australia police both themselves and other boys by 'means of marking out the boundaries of a desirable form of hegemonic masculinity', in terms of category-bound maintenance work (also see, Davies 1993).

In a recent article, Brickell (2005) juxtaposes Judith Butler's theory of performativity with Erwing Goffman's theory of performance, noticing the differences, but also pointing to how the two theories can be combined and cross-fertilize each other. According to Brickell (2005:31), 'both authors reject essentialism, agreeing that natural differences do not precede social ones; rather, the idea of natural differences is an effect of social distinctions'. Both authors also foreground social categories, in the sense that they are not seen to be 'expressions of natural differences so much as the means for "the production of that difference itself" (Brickell 2005:31). Social categories produce gender differences as well as other social

demarcation lines such as age, ethnicity, class, disability, etc. According to Brickell (2005:29), 'Butler's performativity usefully suggests that masculinities appear within language and society as effects of norms and power relations rather than presocial biological essences', foregrounding the importance of language and discourse in producing masculinity. Moreover, this production is a collective process and should be seen as a social achievement. Brickell (2005:37) argues that people act against and in concert with each other, 'in ways that express support, cooperation, violence, or appropriation', in every day social life. Simultaneously, structures condition the production of subjects, which should not be understood deterministically, insofar as, 'through their action, these subjects are implicated in reproducing or resisting the structures that require continuous reinforcement to remain stable' (Brickell 2005:37). In relation to masculinity, this entails that performing masculinity comprises both being produced by and producing discourses (Brickell 2005).

Accordingly, Merran Toerien and Kevin Durrheim (2001:36) argue that the 'content of masculinity – necessary for men to be, recognizably, men – is both produced and constrained by our history and our social/cultural settings'. Masculinity is primarily achieved, at a micro level, in social interaction, within which 'versions of masculinity are always open to contestation' (Toerien & Durrheim 2001:37). Toerein and Durrheim (2001:36) refer to this as 'discourses of masculinity', consisting of 'clusters of terms, networks of meanings or systems of statements that provide content to masculinity', offering men different ways of relating to and making sense of the world and themselves. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of narrative in the production of masculinity:

masculinity is also a lifelong project that entails attempts by individuals to develop unified narratives of their gendered selves. This too is an active project that involves developing a historical "life narrative" that constructs a personal coherence out of the multiple and conflicting "voices" that are culturally available. (Toerien & Durrheim 2001:37)

Likewise, Scott Kiesling (2005:697) conceptualizes an understanding of masculinity in terms of cultural discourses available for men to draw on, based on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse as 'culturally shared ways of thinking, doing, making, evaluating, and speaking'. In his article, Kiesling (2005) argues for the importance of combining a macro

understanding of discourse with everyday talk-in-interaction, because subjects are acted upon by discourses, at the same time as they are active participants in the development and reinscription of said discourses. Moreover, discourses of masculinity affect all men, whether they are resisted, ignored or embraced. In relation to Stephen Whitehead (2002), Kiesling demonstrates how identity is constructed in relation to discourses, as both a social achievement and as an enactment by the subject:

In understanding language and gender identity, then, it is essential to understand how acts are recognized as masculine. Because this understanding is done in the context of dominant discourses, the desire of the masculine subject for a masculine self thus becomes the desire to perform successfully the discourses of masculinity. (Kiesling 2005:699)

Kiesling (2005:700), hence, defines masculinity as 'social performances semiotically linking the performing subject to men, and not to women, through cultural discourses'. According to Kiesling, Raewyn Connell's (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985; Connell 1989, 1999, 2000) perspective on masculinity is different from but compatible with this definition, as it also acknowledges the importance of social practices in relation to structures. However, Kiesling (2005:701) is reluctant to use 'hegemonic masculinity' as 'shorthand for the cultural discourses of masculinity', because he does not want to 'lose sight of the diversity and potential contradiction of the discourses that make up a hegemonic masculinity'. Discourses and a discursive approach to masculinity are not foregrounded in Connell's work. Although Connell (2001:7) does not reject a discursive approach, she is critical to a 'discourse-only approach', arguing that 'gender relations are also constituted in, and shape, non-discursive practices'. In light of what was referred to at the beginning of the chapter as the epistemic understanding of social constructions, there are non-discursive, or pre-discursive, practices that constitute gender or masculinity (or other identities, social categories and ways of organizing of social life), because language (and discourse) is the medium through which gender is intelligible (for further discussions and critique of Connell, see e.g., Demetriou 2001; Hearn 2004; Howson 2005; Wetherell & Edley 1999).

In this study, discourses are analysed as used by and drawn upon in everyday interaction as resources in producing identity. Hence, the expression *discourses of masculinity* refers to how it is possible to talk about

men; what they do and should do, how they act and should act. When I refer to *discourses of masculinity*, this is not the same thing as *talk about* men. Rather, discourse sets the perimeters for how should be or not be talked about; how men should or not should act, and what the consequences should be for not acting like a man. In this sense, I do not see masculinity as a behavioural trait, characteristics or attributes, but rather as *the naming of that which is related to a man*, and discourses of masculinity then concern the restraints and possibilities associated with that naming.

In my analyses, this includes searching for when and how gendered categorizations such as 'guy' are used in the young men's talk, but it is also a general point of departure that I, as the analyst, adopt when I look at their talk. This is what I refer to as a *masculine position* or the standpoint from which the narrator (in this case a young man) is telling his story in relation to other people and the issue at hand.

I see masculinity as both a gendered identity achieved in interaction, and as discourses restricting what it entails to be a man, how men are supposed to talk, act, feel, etc. Masculinity (and femininity) is, therefore, not biologically predisposed characteristics, but a continuous doing related more to men than to women. In this study, discursive practises of masculinity are investigated as performed in everyday interaction, in relation to violence, by which discourses of both masculinity and violence are drawn upon and reinscribed. Part of the discursive understanding of how men are assumed to act is the ability or potential to use violence. Following Kiesling (2005), it is possible to argue that violence is a discursive element that affects all men, whether they reject, accept or utilize it. Also, women are discursively affected by violence, although femininity is discursively constructed differently in relation to violence. Women are supposed to talk about, think about and use violence differently from men.

#### DISCOURSES OF VIOLENCE

In this study, the term violence is used in two distinct ways. First of all, violence is used in an everyday manner, in lack of alternative conceptualizations, describing different practices and behaviours conducted by people against other people. This is how violence is understood as that which is talked about in the interviews: practices such as hits, kicks, threats and so on. Second, violence is theorized as discursively and productively used in conversation to achieve rhetorical goals, which I will return to later

on. In an everyday understanding of violence, I am interested in a particular type of violence. The violence talked about in this study is, almost exclusively physical, interpersonal violence. Violence, however, can include anything from physical to structural social violence in the form of starvation (e.g., Kleinman 2000; Connell 2002), and the legitimate use of violence conducted by police and military organizations.

The term 'violence' is rarely challenged, defined or conceptualized in research, the public debate or everyday talk. According to Camilla Kvist (2005), the reason for this is that our understanding of violence is deeply rooted in our cultural epistemology: it has an essentially defined quality to it. This is what David Riches (1986) refers to as the 'folk theories' of violence, describing the universality, intractability and unacceptability of violence. Violence is, in Western cultures, closely related to illegitimate and reprehensible activities (Riches 1986; Kvist 2005), which makes it a sensitive topic to investigate (Lee 1993), and to talk about.

Riches (1986) argues that violence fulfils both instrumental and expressive functions, in that an act of violence would not be performed without an instrumental aim (Riches 1986). Antony Whitehead (2005) specifies that the use of violence may for some men be perceived as functional and part of an idealised understanding of what it entails to be a man. At the same time, acts of violence both offer a statement to and 'transform the social environment in a practical sense' (Riches 1986:25). It is, therefore, imperative to understand violent acts as meaningful (Isdal 2001), especially if the aim is to investigate violence from the point of view of the inflictor. However, the meaning of violence 'is and will always be fluid, not fixed; it is mutable' (Stanko 2003b:3). What interpersonal violence means must therefore be understood through the lives of the people involved, and in relation to the social context within which the violence occurs (Stanko 2003b). Messerschmidt (2004:111) notes that violence is conditioned by the opportunity to use violence, and that,

social settings provide the resources and, therefore, opportunities for committing certain types of violence. (...), one must have the opportunity to engage in violence for violence to actually take place (e.g.., access to a socially defined legitimate potential victim).

Hearn (1998) also points out that violence is not separate from the social relations and contexts within which is occurs, it is mixed up with the rest of life.

Willem Schinkel (2004:9) argues that criminology often fails to engage with violence itself; rather 'instances of violence are the givens upon which research into determining factors of perpetrators is founded'. According to Elisabeth Stanko (2003b), in traditional criminological research, violence is categorized via the legal stature of the constituents involved, such as the offender, the victim, and the witness, despite the fact that these characters are not always easy to separate from each other. Perpetrators are often hard to discriminate from victims and victims, and vice versa. Much research devoted to seeking the causes of perpetrators' use of violence coincides with research on men as users of violence against women (or children), because men outnumber women in the statistics on violent crimes. This conflation results in designating gender and masculinity as explanatory factors in relation to violence (Lövkrona 2005), which brings with it a number of problems. One is how to understand what meaning or significance violence has in understanding violence. Second, it is not helpful to understand women's use of violence (K. Andersson 2007) or the commonalities across men, which use violence, from different social backgrounds (Whitehead 2005).

Discursively, naming something as violence implies interpreting a social action, and categorizing it as illegitimate. According to Riches (1986:4), labelling an act as violence also positions the person doing the labelling, including analysts, as the term 'can easily be manoeuvred into an ideological ambiance, coming particularly to symbolize moral impropriety in a range of actions'. However, Riches recommends that the researcher, for convenience sake, call the actions of an inflictor (performer) violence, but urges analysts to focus on the goals people achieve by using violence.

In line with the above-sketched approach to masculinity, I employ what I call *discourses of violence*, meaning that which makes it possible to talk about violence, towards whom it can be directed, and how it should or should not be inflicted. Violence towards women needs to be talked about and described in a different way than violence towards other men. Here gender is key to understand talk about violence. Both discourses (of masculinity and violence) operate at the same time to regulate the discursive space available for young men (and others) to talk about their own use of violence, depending on the interactional context. At times, these two discourses are incongruous and create an interactional dilemma, or an ideological dilemma to use Billig's (1988) terminology.

#### AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate how talk on violence is used as a discursive resource to produce identities. In the study, masculinity is seen as a discourse drawn upon in relation to violence in order to construct preferred self-presentations in interaction. However, gender and masculinity are not the only analytical focus of interest to me, as they intersect with age and ethnicity, but also criminality is analysed as a social dimension that is negotiated and produced in interaction.

Given the theoretical framework presented, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What function does talk on violence have in creating identities, how are narratives of violence organized and how is it possible to talk about violence and construct a preferred self-presentation?

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Foucault is well known for redefining discourse throughout his writing, for a discussion see Mills (1997, 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> I use the term separate from the feminist school of standpoint theory (e.g., Henwood, Griffin & Phoenix 1998; Smith 1990; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis 2002)

#### ANALYZING TALK

This study is based on different kinds of talk, generated in two distinct ways. First, I followed a treatment programme, at a youth detention home, called Aggression Replacement Training (ART). The treatment sessions were video recorded and I also conducted participant observations. Second, individual interviews with the young men participating in the ART programme were made. I specifically chose to approach young men detained in institutional care because they are categorized as having a documented history of violence, and therefore could be expected to have experience of using violence. Also, ART was chosen as a field of research because the programme has an explicit focus on violence and aggression, and I assumed that it would generate data on talk on violence, as well as, afford me the opportunity to get to know the young men before the interviews.

In this chapter, I go through how the fieldwork was conducted, describing the assessment ward, and the ART programme, the data and the analyses. Because issues of research ethics persist throughout all phases of the research process (Peled & Leichtentritt 2002), I have inserted paragraphs discussing ethical concerns in relation to the particular research stage at hand. In order to provide the reader with a background to the instructional context of this study, a description of institutional care for children and young people in Sweden is provided next.

# INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SWEDEN

The present fieldwork was conducted at an assessment ward in a youth detention home, in the southern part of Sweden. The young men taking part in the study were being assessed for different reasons and under different Acts. All were, however, considered by social authorities to be violent and have a documented history of violence.

In 2004, approximately 20,000 children and young people were detained in so-called 'social 24-hour care' (social dygnsvård) (Socialstyrelsen 2006) on any given day of the year, meaning that they are living, for a

longer or shorter period of time, outside their home in a residence arranged by the social services. These detainments differ in character, duration and purpose, depending on the reason for placement. Younger children are usually placed in a family, while adolescents and young people are more commonly placed in different types of institutional care. There are two reasons why a child or young person could be taken into social 'social 24-hour care' i) care problems in the family due to parental neglect, criminality, drug abuse etc.; ii) behavioural problems due to the young person's own criminality, drug abuse etc. (Socialstyrelsen 2007). The first is usually the reason why the social authorities intervene and place children, while the second is more often the reason young people (in most cases teenagers) are detained.

Institutional social care for children and young persons is organized by The National Board of Institutional Care (*Statens Institutionsstyrelse, SiS*). The agency provides residential care in 31 institutions scattered across the country. The agency has been commissioned by the government to both assess young persons' needs and provide residential care and treatment. In 2007, over 1,000 children and young persons were committed to detention homes run by SiS, of which more than 800 were young men. The average age of the detainees was 16.5 years, and the average time spent in an institution was 148 days (Statens institutionsstyrelse 2008).

Three legal acts organize institutional care of children and young persons in Sweden and serve as grounds for detaining a child or young person. First, children and young persons can voluntarily be taken into care by the social authorities according to the Social Services Act (Socialtjänstlagen [2001:453], SOL), which is based on parental consent. The second act is the Care of Young Persons (Special Provision) (Lag [1990:52] med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga, LVU). The Act is the basis for detaining a person under 18 years in institutional care, and can be enacted against the will of parents or guardians. Young people detained under this Act usually have problems with different types of criminality and substance abuse. In 1999, Sweden introduced a new act, Secure Institutional Treatment (Lag [1998:641] om verkställighet av sluten ungdomsvård, LSU) for young offenders found guilty of serious crimes (Palm 2003). The Act was passed in order to avoid putting young people in prison together with adult offenders, in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. The new sanction includes a fixed duration of punishment set by a criminal court and is intended to substitute a prison sentence (Palm 2003). However, there

are also youth wards at prisons for people between 17 and 22 years (Kriminalvården 2008). Under LSU, young offenders are treated at the same detention homes as young people taken into protective care on other grounds (such as SOL and LSU).

#### THE ASSESSMENT WARD

The assessment ward at which I did my fieldwork is a locked facility, with the capacity to house up to 7 young men, ages 15-20, with the purpose of assessing their situation and needs. The assessment is made by collecting a number of formal reports, from psychologists, social workers and the staff members. Every young man has two 'contact persons' (in Swedish: *kontaktperson*) in the staff, assigned to him. These assigned staff members keep in contact with all the different actors involved in the assessment, as well as with the young man's family.

Life at the ward is strictly organized; the young men have duties such as kitchen chores and cleaning every weekday. They also have a tight time schedule to keep. Being late means being blocked out of activities. Activities such as watching TV or leaving the building are a reward and bonus for good behaviour. Not doing one's chores or not being on time means losing a bonus. Like many other youth detention homes, the ward employs a type of reward system called a token economy (in Swedish: teckenekonomi). The longer time a young man has spent at the ward, the more bonuses he will receive, so the organization itself creates a hierarchy among the young men in addition to the in-group social organization. A similar system exists within ART, but the two 'economic systems' are separated. Staying with the programme means being rewarded for attending the lesson and doing a simple 'home-work' assignment every week. ART becomes, for some young men, a break from the daily routine and a chance to get further bonuses.

The ART group is a selected group within the ward and staff members interested in ART receive special training. It is worth mentioning that during my fieldwork the staff members involved in the ART training were all men, estimably in their 30s and 40s. Women also worked at the ward, but were not engaged in ART. The so-called treatment staff (in Swedish: *behandlingsassistens*) at youth detention homes in Sweden rarely have more than two years of education, and often have similar backgrounds as the young men detained, some having spent time in detention homes

themselves when they were younger. In addition, professionals such as psychologists and teachers also worked at the detention home and in the ward. The ART programme employs a pedagogical terminology, hence staff members engaged in ART are referred to as *trainers* (*tränare*) and the young men are called *pupils* (*elev*). The trainers select which young men they believe are suitable for the programme, but participation is voluntary, so in the end it is the pupil who decides if he wants to be in the programme.

#### THE ART PROGRAMME

Increasingly, ART has become a popular treatment programme in institutional care for children and young persons, as well as in schools and prisons in Sweden. In the mid-1980s, Arnold P. Goldstein of Syracuse University started the Aggression Replacement Training Programme (Goldstein, Glick & Gibbs 1998). The programme is directed towards antisocial, aggressive and criminal youth, and is a so-called multimodal programme. The programme is based on developmental psychology, and has a pedagogical approach (also called psycho-educational intervention) towards both the participants and in the design of the programme (Goldstein et al., 1998). During the 1990s, the programme was introduced in Sweden, partly by Goldstein himself, who held workshops and lectures. The programme has been modified to meet Swedish standards primarily by Bengt Daleflod and Martin Lardén (Daleflod & Lardén 2004; Lardén 2002). According to the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen 2006), 37% of Swedish municipalities declare that they offer ART within social services for children and young people, often intended as a preventive intervention.

ART is a combination of three different 'courses': Skillstreaming (also referred to as Skills Training), Anger Control Training, and Moral Reasoning. The first component or course, Skillstreaming, was developed from Goldstein's work with schizophrenic patients (Daleflod & Lardén 2004) and the Structured Learning Programme for the Poor, during the 1970s. The programme is built on Albert Bandura's behaviourist research and social learning theory (Goldstein et al. 1998). Children's behavioural patterns are, according to social learning theory, learned, in intergenerational relationships and continuously repeated, including violence from parents. Bandura argues that people are helped by learning social skills, when they are trained in stages of progressive difficulty.

Initially, alternative modes of responses to everyday social situations are demonstrated by trainers. Secondly, the pupils practice the responses under guidance in different role-play scenarios. Finally, the pupils receive positive feedback in order to generate successful experiences, which are 'almost certain to produce favourable results' (Bandura 1973:253, cited in Goldstein et al. 1998:49).

The second component of the programme is Anger Control Training, and builds on Alexander Luria's (1961) work on cultural-historical psychology, with a strong emphasis on culture and language. It was further developed by Raymond Novaco (1975:17, cited in Goldstein et al. 1998:72), who argued that 'a basic premise is that anger is fomented, maintained, and influenced by the self-statements that are made in provocation situations'. Self-control in children is argued to develop 'as a function of a child's development of [internal] language mechanisms' (Little & Kendall 1979:104, cited in Goldstein et al. 1998:70). Pupils are helped to realize that it is their interpretations (or misinterpretations) of other people's behaviour that is the cause of anger. In the ward where I did my fieldwork, the pupils were only introduced to basic anger control, as according to the trainers it required a longer training period in order to achieve results. However, the groups discussed 'outer and inner triggers', 'anger reducers', and the pupils filled in a 'hassle log' (in Swedish struljournal), describing situations when they had been aggravated.

The third and last component of ART is Moral Reasoning, emanating from Lawrence Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development. It is argued that if young people are trained to reason about moral values, they are more likely to 'choose to use' the social skills and anger reducers they have learnt through the programme (Goldstein et al. 1998). The training in moral reasoning, like in Kohlberg's research, presents the pupils with hypothetical dilemmas, whereupon they are asked morally loaded questions. Based on the discussions between the pupils on these dilemmas, the pupils are categorized as being on one of the four levels of moral developmental maturity (Goldstein et al. 1998). The idea is that pupils on a low level of moral reasoning will advance in their moral development through the process of discussing and being challenged by pupils on a higher moral level. Goldstein et al. (1998) argue that, when working with criminal and asocial youth, it is the combination of these three parts that generates good results.

At the assessment ward, the training focused on moral reasoning and skills training. The staff members had also developed a few exercises on their own. The most frequently used of those was the '18 statements' that I recorded several times. In the exercise the pupils were presented with statements such as, it is OK to steal from people you don't like, and were then asked whether or not they agreed with this. Then they were supposed to try to convince disagreeing participants of their position. The discussions generated from this exercise is analysed in study 2.

#### ENTRANCE TO THE RESEARCH FIELD

Entering a research field is done in several stages. In this case, the choice was made to attempt to enter the field 'from the top', so firstly the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care (*Statens institutionsstyrelse*) was approached with a question about which youth detention home would suite my study. Then the management of the proposed youth detention home was contacted and asked to participate in the study. The staff were informed about the study prior to starting. In relation to recruiting participants, I let the staff members, who met the pupils on a daily basis, make the initial approach. I only met the pupils on the first day of data collection.

One important aspect of my participation in the ART lessons was that it would give me not just entry into the field, but also access. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:55) state that 'access is not simply a matter of physical presence or absence' and point to the fact that different sites are marked by different styles of social interaction. This became apparent during the first ART lesson in which I participated. Midway through the lesson a coffee break was taken. As I figured the break was not related to ART, I turned off the camera. During the entire break, trainers and pupils where literally speaking above my head. I felt them stretching their necks to speak to each other, circumventing me, more so the trainers than the pupils. The main topic during this coffee break was heavy weight lifting and motorcycles. Topics more related to male, working-class social settings than to a female academic one, which I could be seen to represent. At this point, I had entered the research field but had not been given access to it. This exclusion from the conversational setting was not, from my point of view, primarily based on the topics chosen, but rather on the active noninclusion.

Gradually though I was let into the group. I actively tried to approach the pupils, engaging myself in their conversations. I would say that it was easier to access the pupil group than the trainer group, but once I had received the confidence of the trainers, it sustained over time. So when I returned to the same ward two years later, in 2006, I did not experience the same difficulty in gaining access. During the end of my first field period, the staff expressed concern that I would not get enough data, because the ART course had been interrupted several times, and because it had not been completed according to plans. Also during my second period they expressed the same concern. The staff even approached one young man at the ward, who was not in the ART programme, and asked if he wanted to do an interview with me, in an attempt to 'make up' for an interview that was cancelled.

Participating in the ART training gave me access to the social domain of the ART group, which also resulted in the young men and I becoming somewhat acquainted to with each other. This helped during the interviews, and as a principle I conducted the interview after the pupil had taken part in ART for some time, rather than early on in the programme. Often the interviews were conducted close to a pupil's departure from the ward. In this way, it was possible for me to introduce questions or issues in the interview that had previously been raised in ART, often by the pupil himself.

# Issues of research ethics concerning conducting research at a youth detention home

Conducting research at a youth detention home brings up a number of ethical considerations. I understand research ethics to stem from methodological and informed choices (Hearn et al. 2007). In designing the study, I was aware that the situation the young men were in can be seen as precarious, in the sense that they have recently been taken into institutional care, perhaps for the first time. Quite a few of them were suspected of crimes, awaiting trials, on top of being assessed by the institution. The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) (VR 2002) recommends parental consent when doing research with children younger than 15 years of age or if the study might be ethically sensitive. Because of the research participants' detainment, I wanted to make sure to get consent from a guardian or parent. So a parent or guardian was informed by the staff and

received written information about the study, and were asked to sign a consent form. This was sometimes not easily done, as some of the parents had difficulties grasping what it would mean to be interviewed by a researcher and they sometimes thought the interview was to be conducted by a journalist. This was primarily due to language issues, and the fact that the term 'interview' in everyday language is closely connected to journalism and the news media.

Before turning on the video camera, I made sure to get written consent from both pupils and trainers. The participants received both written and oral information about the study, before they signed the form. When I first met the pupils, in the ART lesions, I told them who I was, where I came from, why I was there, and also asked the pupils if they thought it was acceptable to them that I was present at the ART lessons and make video recordings. I also introduced the idea of doing interviews, and emphasized that they were free to decline to participate in the study without it affecting their participation in ART. Of course I also answered their questions, if they had any. Usually the questions came after a couple of weeks and not before agreeing to participate in the study. Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000) have argued that the ethical responsibility of the researcher stretches beyond the initial process of informed consent.

The decision to consent, then, cannot be reduced to a conscious, cognitive process but is a continuing emotional awareness that characterises every interaction. In our view, it is based on a very different theory about how people process information than the one on which the idea of informed consent is based, which emphasises people's capacities to process information and reach a rational and considered decision as an autonomous subject, sealed off from the influences of others. (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:88)

The general impression, when giving the information about the study, was one of initial disinterest. The fact that a doctoral student from a university visited the ward was often a yawn away from 'couldn't care less'. But, after a couple of weeks of my coming every Wednesday, some young men became curious about who I was and why I was there. And I would argue, building on Hollway and Jefferson (2000), that consent has more to do with the social setting than with mere information. Importantly, consent is a process throughout the course of the research rather than an event in the beginning of a study.

#### PARTICIPANTS AND RECORDINGS

I made video recorded participant observations of the ART sessions. A total of 14 young men participated in the study, of whom 13 were in the ART programme, together with 5 staff members. All in all, I have recorded approximately 30 hours of treatment sessions: a total of 15 ART lessons. I also conducted 8 interviews with 7 young men, approximately 5 hours in total.

	ART	Pupils	ART	
year	pupils	interviewed	trainers	year
2004	Per	Per	Dennis	2004
2004	Salim	Salim *	Tom	2004
2004	Jakob	Jakob	Ben	2004, 2006
2004	Nils		Kurt	2004, 2006
2004	Johannes		Caesar	2006
2006		Hassan **		
2006	Emil	Emil		
2006	Roger	Roger		
2006	Felix	Felix		
2006	Janne			
2006	Johan			
2006	Magnus			
2006	Viktor			
2006	Ali ***			

<sup>\*</sup> Salim was interviewed twice

The selection of participants could be regarded as, in a sense, organic. Pupils engaged in the ART programme were asked to participate in the study, including the video recording of the ART sessions, and in the individual interviews. In 2004, Nils absconded from the ward before being interviewed. Also Salim absconded together with Nils, but returned on his own accord, after a couple of weeks. Johannes was moved to another detention home before I had the chance to interview him. The same situation occurred in 2006 with Janne. At that point, the staff suggested that I do an interview with Hassan instead. Also in 2006, Johan, Magnus and Victor entered the ART programme shortly before the end of the fieldwork, so rather than conducting interviews under different

<sup>\*\*</sup> Hassan did not participate in the ART programme.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Ali refused to be video recorded. Field notes were taken

circumstances and without having established rapport, I decided against carrying out any more interviews. Ali only participated in one ART session and refused to be video recorded. He was transferred the next week to another detention home.

I decided to video record the ART lesson, in order to collect data on the interaction taking place, while still being able to take part in the activities myself. Bringing a camera into a room has certain implications for the interaction and, some researchers suggest, on the data produced (Heath 1997). When I made my very first recording, I placed the camera so that it would capture the pupils' faces. This would of course facilitate my job when transcribing the interaction. But it became abundantly clear that the young men were very much aware of the camera, when one of them stopped to ask: Why is there a red light blinking on the camera? From then on, I decided to place the camera differently. Placing the camera behind the young men had at least two advantages. Most of the time it concealed the young men's faces as they were turned away form the camera, increasing anonymity. The new placing also resulted in the camera actually capturing more of what happened in front of and on the white board, which the trainers used quite frequently. However, it did not necessarily make the young men less aware of its presence. Most of them still glanced at it, even if it meant turning around in their chair, stretching backwards.

# Issues of research ethics concerning the recordings

A number of questions arise when conducting a study such as this one, including what happens when I, a rather young, female, academic outsider, enter a residential care facility. First, all of the other participants, trainers and pupils, are men. Second, they live together regulated by a schedule, while I am there once a week. Apart from this, I also have to consider what happens when I sit down with the young men in the interviews. It is imperative to see the meaning-making produced by the interviewee in collaboration with the interviewer (Seale 1998) and not to see the interviewee as the sole producer of meaning in the interview.

During my second fieldwork, in 2006, one young man, Ali, refused to be video recorded. It was his first time in ART, and he had recently arrived at the ward, just 13 years old. He did not mind me participating in the lesson, but he disliked the idea of being recorded, so I did not turn the camera on during the session, but made field notes. A tentative analysis of

this incident would be that the reason for the young man's refusal was not lack of information or distrust in the research as such, but rather dissatisfaction with the entire situation. As a newcomer to the ward, being taken into custody for the first time, the young man could not really decide about anything. Given the opportunity to decide whether or not he would be filmed on camera, he exercised his right to refuse. In every other case, the issue of taking part in the research study and being recorded was not problematized by the young men. Instead, being part of a research project was often a cause for excitement and curiosity, especially when the young men learnt that I was going to write a book about them; a few were disappointed when I explained that I was not going to use their real names. One young man offered to pose for the cover of the book.

#### THE INTERVIEWS

I prepared only two questions before the interviews, besides stating that violence and aggression were my focus of interest. In order to include the young men in the interview process, I started the interviews by asking each young man to give himself an alias that I could use to anonymize. This gave me a chance to talk again about the research process, and to signal a permissive atmosphere. In some cases, this question gave rise to interesting comments on the choice of names. Only one of the young men refused to provide me with an alias. This was the young man who was not part of the ART programme, but with whom I conducted an interview, as proposed by the staff. At the end of the interview, I returned to the question of his alias, but the young man still refused to give himself an alternative name. So, hesitantly, I suggested the name Hassan, which he accepted with the comment that he would not have chosen it himself. On a speculative note, it could be argued that the name Hassan did not suite Hassan's ethnic and cultural background. That was one of the reasons why I wanted the young men themselves to come up with their own alias. It can be noted that some of the young men used their aliases to position themselves (as non-Swedish) in relation to the Swedish majority society. While others had a more playful approach, such as Salim, who initially suggested the alias 'the King'. Thinking he was making a joke, I giggled at the suggestion and he changed his alias to Salim, adding the title 'Prince' Salim.

The second question, which I had prepared before the interview, was an invitation to the young men to introduce themselves. I basically asked:

How would you like to present yourself? This question is very open and can be perceived as 'hard to answer'. My argument for formulating such an open-ended question was to avoid the feeling of interrogation and indicate that the informants, to a certain extent, had control over the situation. Letting the interviewee chose from where to start telling their stories. The different ways of approaching the question are also analytically interesting in relation to the theme of the interview (discussed in study 1). The outcome of this type of interview is highly dependent on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the sense of trust between them, as well as both parties' engagement and involvement in the interview. This became apparent when inspecting all of the interviews; I could conclude that they varied a great deal in length. The shortest was just under half an hour, while the longest were more than twice as long. The reason for this, I would argue, partly depends on how talkative the informant was, but also on how comfortable he felt in the situation. Sometimes the interviewees stopped the interviews and suggested that we should return to the ART lesson, which we then did.

# Issues of research ethics concerning the interviews

Research ethics involves key choices rather than following a set formula, and of primary importance should be the rights of the research participant (Hearn et al. 2007). One such key choice made during the fieldwork was the practical choice of not bringing any type of document or papers to the interviews, containing interview questions or used for taking notes. This choice was based on previous experience working with young people in institutional care. Taking notes or reading from papers could have given the interviewees the impression that I had received information about them from staff or representatives of the institution. I did not ask for any information about the young men before the interviews, and knew little about them other than what I learnt in the ART sessions. This was important for me to relate to the young men, as my primary objective was to gain their trust and establish rapport. Lee (1993) has commented on the importance of establishing rapport in research with inflictors of violence, as it gives the interviewer the possibility to facilitate conversations about sensitive issues. This is, however, a slippery slope, as rapport can easily tip over to collusion. Another choice was not to conduct the interviews with the young men entering the ART programme at the end of my fieldwork, as

I felt that neither I nor the young man would have been prepared to conduct the interview under such circumstances.

According to the WHO report on conducting research with victims of domestic violence, the study design must include a number of actions aimed at reducing any possible stress to the participants caused by the research (WHO 1999). Some of the young men exhibited more stress during the interviews than others did. This was particularly pertinent when issues concerning illegal activities were brought up. Most stressful seemed to be detailed information about who had done what, and whether they could trust that the information would stay with me, or whether it would be turned over to the staff members or other people of authority. This concern usually came up during the interview. Almost all of the young men stopped the interview at one point or another to ask me what would happen to the information. I had of course already told them in the beginning of the interviews that I would not give any information to the staff or others. But it was not until these issues were brought up in the interviews that it became obvious to the young men that this information could be damaging to them.

In Lawrence Wieder's (1975) study of a half-way house in the US, he found that the reply 'you know I won't snitch' he got in response to some of his questions could be seen as a formulation of the immediate relationship between himself and the resident, and as a reminder that what he, the interviewer, had just done was to encourage the resident to snitch (Wieder 1975). At some point in almost all of my interviews, the participant stopped his narrating and asked about what would happen to his answers, and whether I would I tell the staff, and he would remind me that he really should not be telling me this. One participant even told the staff that I 'knew the truth' about him. These accounts work similarly to the reactions Wieder got in his study; they reminded both me and the participant about the conditions for our conversation and our respective positions.

Malcolm Cowburn (2005) and others, suggests that the researcher should urge the informant not to discuss crimes that are not already known to the police or details about such crimes. This is suggested in order to avoid putting the researcher in a situation where he or she would be obliged to report such details to the authorities. The young men in this study guarded themselves against using any names without me mentioning this. Many of the criminal activities that they described to me were probably not known to the police, but I never received detailed information about any

serious crimes that I knew were unknown to the police. My strategy for alleviating the stress the young men were exposed to was to let them decide when to stop the interview, which many of them did, and to not pursue issues that seemed sensitive.

#### THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

Every form of transcript is a form of construction (Mishler 1991) made by the researcher in order to facilitate the analysis. According to Bucholtz (2007:785), transcriptions are to be regarded as a 'sociocultural practice of representing discourse', and researchers should be aware that transcriptions can never be complete. Bucholtz (2007) shows in her article how the style of transcription can affect what types of analyses are possible to make based on that transcription. The style of transcription depends of course on the analytical interest, but detailed transcriptions of speech may offer the reader the opportunity to discover new things in the data that were not originally presented by the researcher (cf. Have 2002).

I made verbatim transcriptions of the interviews and interaction in ART, including laughs, marking out reported speech, i.e. changing voices in order to portray a character, such as a police officer, friend, a fighting opponent, etc. The Swedish original transcripts were then translated into English, by me, and later corrected by native speakers. I chose to include both the original Swedish transcript and the English translation, side-byside in the articles, for two reasons. First, I want to signal to all readers that the analyses are based on the Swedish original transcripts. I have chosen not to translate several words that the young men use, but rather to make the translation a part of the analyses and discuss the meaning of that specific word and how it is used (for example Kraxelhora, see study 2). In the Swedish transcriptions, I have used standard orthography, in order to facilitate the English translations. Second, I wish to give Swedish-speaking readers the opportunity to verify the translations. Bucholtz (2007) discusses the potential pitfalls of translating transcripts into English, such as translating professionals' speech more formally than laymen's. This is of course a palpable risk in any transcription, and analysts must keep in mind that 'both interaction and transcription are heavily laden with social, cultural, and political meanings' (Bucholtz 2007:802).

In transcribing the interviews, I decided to use word-wrapping as a tool in presenting the young men's style of speaking, and employed lines

and idea units, where each line is made up of one or more idea units and is based on the prosodic rhythm of the language (Gee 1991). Each line is also about one central idea or organizing argument (Gee 1991), sometimes only containing one, or half a word. My transcriptions of the interviews are based on the same premises, but rather than applying Gee's convention, I derived this convention of transcription based on my dissatisfaction with an 'ordinary' block transcription. In my case, the transcription helps me visualize the different elements of the young men's speech. This transcription convention is sometimes used by researchers working with cross-cultural analysis (Lapadat 2000). Basing the transcription on line units, I would argue, also reduces a sense of incoherence. Utterances converted into block transcriptions are more likely to be evaluated in comparison to written text, therefore increasing the risk of stigmatization (Kvale 1997). Basing the transcriptions on line units, utterances appear as 'sound bites' rather than incomplete or faulty sentences, and the transcription is therefore doing the interview 'more justice'.

#### THE ANALYSES

Analyses of the interviews and recorded ART sessions eventually resulted in four articles. This portion of the chapter describes how that process developed. Following Aronsson (1998:83), the focus of the analyses made in this study is not 'the speaker's intentions or "real meaning" of what goes on but rather on what actors can be seen to accomplish in talk and through talk'.

My approach to analysis is primarily eclectic. I have picked elements from different methods of analysis to suite the aim of the study and the approach I strive to have towards the young men's talk. The analyses are an amalgam of elements stemming from Membership Categorisation Analyses (MCA) (for an introduction see Schegloff 2007; Silverman 1998; in relation to gender see Weatherall 2002), positioning theory, storyline analysis and narrative analysis, resulting in what I would like to call an extended interactional analysis <sup>2</sup>. I explicitly want to give quite vivid portraits of the young men, without taking their words at face value. In contrast to a strict Conversation Analytical approach, I strived to analyse identity without distancing the interaction from the speaker, and tried to use analytically multilayered and multicoloured glasses. According to Candace West and Sara Fenstermaker (1995:30), gender, class and race are categories

simultaneously accomplished in interaction, and 'conceiving of these as ongoing accomplishments means that we cannot determine their relevance to social action apart from the context in which they are accomplished'. Therefore, I investigate narratives that construct identity, rather than short extracts of conversation and sequential structures. One of the main analytical questions has been: Who am I in this story? – thus, have I been looking for how the young men position themselves in the narratives, in relation to other characters and the issue of the story.

Several times during my fieldwork something, a piece of conversation, caught my ear in either the interviews or the ART sessions something that awakened my curiosity about why the young man said or did a particular thing. What happened here? My initial reactions were followed up on in the analytical process. The very first piece of talk that stood out to me was the interview with Salim. After the interview, I was full of curiosity and enthusiasm over the interesting stories he had told me, but also - and more importantly - the apparent paradox Salim had created in the interview, initially saying that he was not a violent person, which then was contrasted by the sheer volume of fight stories and the amount of detail in his description. The paradox I found in his narration became the problem I attempted to describe and understand in the first article. Analysis of the interview focuses on how a narrative of violence can be constructed, what ideological dilemmas are present in talk about one's own violence, and different narrative components used in constructing the story. Analytically, I use the concept of storyline as developed by Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2002), and to some extent also Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2005). I also look at how Salim positions himself in relation to other men talked about in the interview.

The second article is a case study of Jakob, who is telling a story about hitting a girl. The case study includes two versions of an incident that Jakob relates in one ART session, and one version related in the interview with me. The main focus of the analysis is on the construction of categories and on how certain categories are constructed in order to make it possible to use violence. The analyses draw on elements from Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) and investigate how categories are used in interaction to make available certain positions, but also how categories are constructed by inferring particular practices. Jakob constructs a type of subcategory of girl, *Kraxelhora*, by relating activities that are not ordinarily connected to the social category girl, activities such as spitting, kicking,

hitting, being drunk and so forth. Constructing the subcategory *Kraxelhora* enables Jakob to talk about hitting the girl while still abiding by the rule that it is not acceptable to hit girls.

The third article is a study of how *snitching* is discussed in two different ART groups. Discussing snitching (reporting someone to the police or similar authorities) becomes a resource for the young men to form alliances and to perform criminal and masculine identities. The issue of what criminal behaviour and violence is acceptable within the category of *men*, and which is not, is at hand in the discussions. This is the article that deals most extensively with the treatment programme ART and the interaction recorded at the sessions. In the discussions, the young men use examples of different types of male characters such as 'the paedophile' and 'the rapist' to distance themselves from particular types of violence and particular types of victims and targets of violence. The violence talked about here is generated by the ART exercises and could be described as hypothetical, and does not relate to personal experiences. It is the conversations between the young men and the trainers that are the foci for analysis here.

The fourth article is a case study of ethnic and racist categorization used in talk about violence. The interviews with Jakob and Roger are used to illustrate mirroring ways of talking about violence, resulting in two opposing positions being constructed. Both young men describe being the target of violence due to identification as the Other, and both use ethnic and racist categorizations to describe their fighting opponents. Both positions are on the brink of deconstruction, and the respective identities are negotiated and questioned.

All four articles can be seen as case studies, not just in the sense that they primarily analyse one interview or focus on one interviewee, but rather in the sense that they are cases of how to talk about violence, highlighting different aspects of violence talk, institutional talk, talk about experienced violence, and talk about hypothetical violence. Running as a main thread through all articles though are the issues of talking violence and constructing identity.

An important element in organizing a narrative is the production of categories: the categorization of the people talked about. I see categorization as a labelling of the 'other', albeit sometimes including oneself, sometimes in opposition or contrast to the self. This labelling is thought to be performative in the sense that it constructs the person talked

about in certain ways, but it also makes available particular positions for the narrator. According to Richard Jenkins (2000), categories are key to understanding social meaning-making. In Member Categorisation Analysis, categories are closely connected to practices. Which doings are related to what categories and which are not? What is possible for a man to do and still be categorized as a man? And how are certain practices exclusively tied to certain categories? Social categories and categorization, together with positioning and the structural organization of narratives, are the main features of the analyses. This was chosen as the analytical focus in order to capture and illustrate the identity work done by the young men, the trainers and myself in the interviews and observations.

# Issues of research ethics concerning transcriptions, analyses and writing

In relation to the analyses and writing the articles, my approach has been to strive not to portray the young men in a negative light, and I have actively tried to emphasize their competences and not give prominence to potential faults or deficiencies. Elisabeth Näsman (1997), as well as Steinar Kvale (1997), has argued that it, at times, is suitable to edit transcripts in order to grant more agency and power to the informant, especially if the informant is a child. I have, however, not edited anything in the transcriptions. Rather, I have tried to show how interaction that at first glance might seem to be based on deficient language use or lack of language skills actually achieves complicated positioning and identity work.

In writing the articles, I have used the aliases that the young men gave themselves and fictitious names for the other pupils and trainers. I have not ascribed any substitute information to the research participants (Kvale 1997), or given different names to the same participant (Jonsson 2007) in order to avoid identification. I believe that this approach would have breached the contract between me and the young men concerning their aliases.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This should not be confused with what is referred to as Verbal Interactional Analysis Techniques in counselling and teaching studies (Fowler & De Vivo 2001)

#### **SUMMARY**

#### Study 1

The first article is based on the interview with Salim, analysing how narratives of violence are constructed, what ideological dilemmas are present in Salim's narratives about his own use of violence, and the different narrative components used in constructing the stories. In the article, a culturally shared storyline is identified as the basis of these narratives. The logic chain Salim constructs in his stories emanates from the proposition that it is never Salim who starts any fights. Instead, he is forced to defend himself or his friends. In addition, he only fights older and larger men, but is competent enough to use minimal force that has the maximal effect. It is argued that the stories are organized so as to construct a preferred self-presentation.

Another strategy to achieve a preferred self-presentation is to establish boundaries for what type of violence to use, whom to fight, where and for what reasons. Salim's use of violence should be understood as typical of the *situation*, not typical of him as a *person*. The violence Salim uses not only appears to be rational and logical, but also morally justifiable, as his opponents for instance break the rule stating that one should never fight somebody physically smaller or younger. The violence exercised by his opponents is cast, in the narratives, as both illegitimate and immoral, as it transgresses the boundaries.

It is also argued that his narratives are structured so that Salim avoids being categorized as either victim or perpetrator, although both categories are drawn upon. Salim can be seen to draw on discourses of masculinity by categorizing characters such as hero/villain/non-man, in the narratives, as well as in his description of how he uses violence. It is argued, in the article, that narratives of violence are used in negotiating a masculine identity.

# Study 2

In much of the research on young men's violence towards girls, such violence is problematized and linked to sexist attitudes held by young men. In this article, I show that, in discussing violence, violence towards girls is

not generally accepted among young men with a documented history of violent in the study. The article analyses a discussion between Jakob and Salim, and the ART trainers, about whether or not it ever is OK to hit a girl, — a discussion in which Jakob reveals once having hit a girl. In an ensuing interview Jakob retells the event again. In total three versions of the event are presented by Jakob. The main focus of the analysis is on how both Jakob and Salim construct social categories, and in which cases it is possible to use what kind of violence. Both Jakob and Salim create gender categories transcending the boy-girl dichotomy, in Jakob's case the subcategory of *Kraxelhora*, and in Salim's the description of a violent girl as a 'total war machine'. The young men, however, use these different subcategory, Jakob manages to claim that one should not hit girls, while at the same time disclosing that he once did just that. He has hit merely *Kraxelhora*, but never hit a 'girl'.

In the article, I show how a number of categories are made relevant in talking about violence, and how these categories are used to achieve different discursive purposes. It is shown how gendered identities are constructed in interaction, and how violence as an activity can be linked to different gendered categories. Violence used by girls that is directed at boys is evaluated by both Jakob and Salim as accepted but not normal. Despite this, girls' violence does not justify boys retaliating by using physical violence against girls

# Study 3

In the third article, it is shown how the young men draw upon a convict code when discussing *snitching* (reporting someone to the police) as part of an ART exercise. The analysis shows how sticking to the convict code facilitates positioning oneself as knowledgeable within a field of criminality. Perhaps more important, however, is how drawing on the code regulates the relationship to other men, and how it is used to police one's own and others' behaviour. Both the trainers and the young men can be seen to draw on different discourses of masculinity as interactional resources.

The analysed discussions on snitching are instigated by the moral dilemmas presented in ART. The institutional setting of ART thus provides an opportunity for the young men to orient towards a convict code. It is, however, important to keep in mind that this type of discussion among

young men with a criminal background presumably also occurs in settings outside ART. In the article, it is shown how the intent of the ART exercise to alter 'anti-social youths' criminal discourse may instead cement already fixed perceptions and establish criminal alliances between young men. The exercise also reaffirms gendered notions of victims and offenders, and it generates categorizations that determine who should be included in the category of man, and who should not be. By orienting to the category of man, the young men are doing identity work, regulating their masculinity in relation to other gendered categories and in relation to non-acceptable sexual activities. The issue of what criminal behaviour and violence is acceptable within the category of men, and what is not, is also at hand in the discussions. Discussing snitching becomes a resource for the young men to form alliances and to perform criminal and masculine identities.

### Study 4

The fourth article is a case study of ethnic and racist talk about violence. Sweden is increasingly becoming multiethnic, resulting in a rather complex ethnic landscape. The article documents how two young men, Roger and Jakob, talk about ethnic and racist categories in relation to violence, from two distinct but mirroring positions: one explicitly non-Swedish and one former neo-Nazi. Both young men describe being the target of violence due to being identified as the Other, and both use ethnic and racist categorizations to describe their fighting opponents. It is also argued in the article that both men problematize and deconstruct present and previous identities.

The analyses show how ethnic positions are impossible to disentangle from age and gender. The youth category enables the young men to take up particular masculine positions and to construct fight stories in specific ways. In constructing fighting opponents as particular kinds of Others, both Roger and Jakob are able to draw on, for example, discourses of nationalism (ethnically pure Sweden) or racism (the dangerous neo-Nazi) in their identity construction. But Roger and Jakob, importantly, also use ethnic and racist discourse differently in talking about violence and present different reasons legitimizing their involvement in violence.

The detailed analyses make visible how two young men with opposing backgrounds and ideological adherence to some extent use the same ethnic and racist categories, narrative organization and symbolic

representations when talking about incidents of violence. However, the discursive resources are used to achieve different positions in interaction. Drawing from the findings of this article, it is possible to note that what is categorized as racist violence may sometimes be hard to separate from non-racist violence. Importantly, the article also shows that positioning oneself as a racist can be troublesome and might expose an individual to violence.

# CONCLUDING DISCUSSION - TALKING VIOLENCE, CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

I began this book by staging a little scenario in which I tried to explain to somebody what my dissertation is about. I argued that it is difficult to answer the question because a study like this is about many things and it can at times be hard to choose one subject or topic over any other. However, again I would like to cite a more experienced researcher, Kenneth Gergen (1994/2001:247), and argue that:

This, then, is a story about stories – and most particularly, stories of the self.

The overall questions that have guided me here are *how* questions: *How* is violence talked about; *how* are stories about violence organized; *how* is it possible to talk about violence and maintain a preferred self-presentation? The overall research object has been the stories produced by the young men in interviews and ART sessions. The individual articles all seek to tell a story about how storytelling is a part of constructing an identity. Violence here becomes the dilemma that organizes the story, the key ingredient that enables and restricts how the stories can be organized, and how identity can be constructed. But telling a story about violence is restricted and cannot be done in 'any which way'. These restrictions, however, bring to the forefront the young men's agency, and the choices they make in constructing the narratives.

In this study, I argue that *what is talked about* is of importance with regard to, what I would like to call, a positioning-in-narration. Talking about violence makes certain positions possible and others impossible or difficult. It is, for instance, difficult to talk about violence directed towards particular types of victims, such as women and children, if you are a young man, as this threatens your masculine position (cf. Hearn & Whitehead 2006) and is on the very border of the discourse of masculinity that the young men in this study draw upon (see study 2 and 3). This also entails that in another context other types of discourses of masculinity might be drawn on that sanction violence towards girls.

I have found that talk on violence positions the narrator in relation to the person(s) involved, depending on to whom the violence is directed, or who is the target of the violence. Violence is always gendered, in this sense, as it is always inflicted by or directed against a man or a woman. This also entails that violence is structured according to general understandings about gender relations and gender behaviour. As a consequence, certain types of gendered violence are possible to talk about, while other types are more problematic or even impossible to talk about. But talk on violence also varies depending on the age and ethnicity of the person the young men are fighting with. One theme running through the young men's talk is how violence is legitimized and made logical, rational and understandable. Importantly, this is achieved in different ways depending on which position the story is told from, against whom the violence is used and the context surrounding the violent event. This study seeks to contribute knowledge based on the young men's own point of view, knowledge about how they negotiate their identities in relation to violence. My aspiration has been to convey nuances and a complex image of how the young men approach violence.

## PROBLEMATIZING VIOLENCE IN TALK

I have found that when based on experience, violence is more problematized in the narratives (studies 1, 2, and 4) than when it is talked about in hypothetical terms (studies 3, and 4). In the case of Salim's narratives of violence (study 1), the narratives are organized to create a coherent chain of events justifying the use of violence, as well as a coherent self-presentation. Salim can be seen as both constructing a preferred self-presentation and striving to construct a narrative logic to mitigate activities that would otherwise call for explanations. In the narratives, Salim differentiates between other peoples use of violence and his own, hedging his use of violence according to whom it can be directed against, legitimizing circumstances and the type of violence used. The narrating can, in this sense, be seen as morality-in-practice, constructing a morally legitimate use of violence.

In Jakob's narrative about hitting the *Kraxelhora* (study 2), it is shown how troubling or problematic it can be to construct a successful masculine self-identity, while at the same time recount for violence against young women. It is apparent that both Jakob and Salim evaluate violent activities

differently depending on whom they are aimed at and who is producing them. The young men both create a gender-specific nexus of violence, by which violent activities are strictly bound to different gendered categories. Girls are able to hit boys, but boys cannot hit back. It is shown how describing and evaluating other people's use of violence provide ample resources in creating a position essential for constructing a self-identity. Violence as such is not problematic, but who is using violence against whom is the problematic issue at hand.

On the other hand, regarding talk on hypothetical or imagined violence, discussed in study 3, the what-I-would-do-to-this-person-given-acertain-situation talk, the use of violence is unproblematic and straightforward. Evident in the discussions between the young men is that violence is not only gendered, but also structured by sexuality and sexually violent actions. It could be argued that the young men, prototypically, understands sexual violence as directed at women and children, while nonsexual violence occurs between men. The young men also express solidarity with non-sexual male inflictors, while condemning men who use sexual violence against women and children. The discussion on snitching is not just about talk on violence, but also about how sticking to the convict code facilitates positioning oneself as knowledgeable within the field of criminality. In the discussions generated in ART around snitching, one's own use of violence, as such, is not problematized. What is at stake, problematized and under debate is rather the type of violence used by the Other, the paedophile or rapist.

Roger and Jakob (study 4) also do not problematize the use of violence in talk about an ethnic Other. In Roger's case, violence is directly linked to a racist discourse, and the colour of someone's skin is sufficient motivation for inflicting violence. This is a strong explanatory model in which certain actions do not need justification because they are explicated by the racist discourse. When talking about being the target of violence, due to being cast as the Other, neither Jakob nor Roger problematize being exposed to violence.

At stake in all four articles is how to combine masculine identities with narratives of violence. I would, for instance, argue that it is possible to analyse the convict code in relation to discourses of masculinities. The 'manly' way to deal with a sex offender is to chase him, take things into your own hands, and shoot him or crush his skull by hitting it with a brick. I would argue that the convict code in this sense could be understood to

prescribe both activity instead of passivity and solidarity among a particular category of men. It is also evident how drawing on the code regulates the relationship to other men and polices one's own behaviour, as well as that of others. Also, discourses concerning racism and neo-Nazism enable Jakob to talk about being afraid when he is threatened by a group of neo-Nazis. It is possible to combine this with a preferred construction of masculine self-presentation, in contrast to the violence Jakob talks about being exposed to by 'ordinary' Swedes.

#### THE FUNCTION OF VIOLENCE IN TALK

I have identified how discourses of masculinity are used in personal narratives to negotiate problematic positions such as victim and perpetrator, but also the issue of what constitutes violence itself. Moreover, it is shown how narratives of violence are used as interactional resources available to the young men, and how different narrative contexts render different accounts possible. Gendered identity work is accomplished by establishing a position from which one can claim a successful masculine identity.

So, what function does talk on violence have in the young men's identity construction? When talking about violence, they can be seen to regulate social relations to other people, both men and women. But they can also be seen to position themselves in relation to particular discourses of masculinity, based on certain understandings of what it entails to be a man. These discourses call for the man to be in control of the situation, to be able to protect himself and others, and to police other men's sexuality as well as other men's and women's use of violence. Yet the discourses also legitimize the use of violence with respect to other social categorizations such as age, ethnicity or criminal identity. This understanding of what it entails to be a man enables the use of violence.

Antony Whitehead (2005) argues that interventions directed at violent men need to take into account and acknowledge how men understand themselves not only as individuals, but as men. In light of this, it is important to include an understanding of how young men with a documented history of violence construct and understand themselves as men, how they draw on discourses of masculinity and how masculinity is related to violence, also with regard to treatment and interventions.

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