

# Practices of Silence in the Context of Staff Violence in Residential Youth Care

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# Agenda

- point of departure
- research interest
- the case study
- concepts of violence
- theoretical perspectives
- about *silence*
- common data analysis

# Point of departure

- Cases of systematic staff violence in residential youth care institutions are silenced over years.
- The phenomenon is described with terms referring to silence such as e.g. “cartels of silence” or the aim of “breaking the silence”.
- Analytical explorations of silence as a phenomenon and the power aspects of silence are still lacking - especially in social work and educational sciences.

(cf. Heitymeyer/Andresen 2012; Wolff 2012; Geiss/Magyar-Haas 2015)

# Research Interest

How are silence practices constituted in cases of staff violence in residential youth care institutions?

Sub-questions:

- On which informal and implicit logics of action and structure are respective silence practices based on?
- Which specific knowledge do the involved actors express by keeping silently?
- To which extent does the meaningful use of artefacts, such as modern ICT in residential care institutions, produce certain silence practices?

# Overview of the Case Study

- Field: groups in a residential youth care institution for children who got a psychiatric diagnose.
- Staff of three groups acted violently for years.
- Actions were concealed from the public and legitimized within the team by a therapeutic concept.
- Team's self-understanding and self-representation as "therapists": video recordings of everyday life in the groups.
- 2008-2010: Public Disclosure of the violent constellation.
- Since 2013: Research project by the University of Duisburg-Essen, PhD project as a secondary analysis - both projects are supervised by Prof. Dr. Fabian Kessl.

# Current Theoretical Sampling

- 18 narrative Interviews and three expert-interviews with staff of the institution and the public youth office.
- Different documents: concepts, protocols, e-mails, reports and the team documentation of the residential groups from the time of the violent constellation.
- Ethnographic observations of the daily practices in the institution today.

# Concept of *Violence*

- The perception of an action as *violent* is context-dependent: perceptions of violence are embedded in historical, political, social and institutional frameworks and power relations (cf. Honig 1986; Brückner 2001).
- Violence is brought up in an institutional context and legitimized by framing it as “therapy”.
- Therefore: data based reconstruction of the perceptions of violence in the institution, extended understanding of violence that includes different forms and levels.

# Theoretical Perspectives

## 1. Social Practice Theory (Reckwitz 2002, 2003)

- Social practices are repetitive, part of a daily routine, based on implicit knowledge.
- Implicit knowledge in the team of how, where and against whom one mentioned or did not mention the violent acts.
- Meaningful use of artefacts such as a specific use of the documentation programs in residential youth care.

## 2. “Total” and “Greedy” Institutions (Goffman 1961; Coser 1974)

- Silence practices are brought up and formed out in an institutional setting with specific power structures.
- Institutional power relations and speaking positions enable certain silence practices.

# Silence is...

ambivalent

intentional?

an attribution

needs an auditorium

related to power structures

empirically unobservable.

(cf. Geiss/Magyar-Haas 2015; Markewitz 2013; von Sass 2012)

# Researching Silence? Silence in the context of the violent constellation showed up as...

*implicit rules how to communicate about the violence*

*silencing one another*

*speechlessness*

*Keeping back information*

*silence in speaking and writing*

*euphemism*

*explicitly demanded silence*

*resistant silence as a precondition for speaking*

# Common Data Analysis with the Workshop Participants...

# Literature

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