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Growing up in a children's home: the perceptions and experiences of young children living in a children's home in Cape Town, South-Africa.

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Abstract

During the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the experiences and perceptions of young children. Yet, young children are among the ones often left unheard. Young children who are living in children's homes have many decisions made for them, decisions that could possibly be better fitting in the best interest of the child if the child's perspective was listened to and given due weight. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to learn more about the perceptions and experiences of young children who are growing up in a children's home.

The 9 young non-orphaned children, between 4 and 6 years of age that were part of this research are experts regarding their own perceptions and experiences. This line of thinking is shaped by the research field of Childhood Studies. Childhood Studies, together with a rights-oriented approach and elements of developmental psychology create the theoretical framework on which the methods, methodology and analysis have been based. Through methods such as drawings, interviews, mapping, ranking and play, it has been attempted to gain an understanding of how they experience life in the children's home.

The children's home of this particular study is located in Cape Town, South-Africa. It is a home for children from birth till the age of 6. To gain knowledge about the perceptions and experiences of children, it has been important to gain a better understanding of institutionalized life. In the first analysis chapter 'institutionalized life', the words of the children will be used to exemplify the impacts this has on children who grow up in the home. This chapter is based on the theory of total institutions as described by Goffman (1961a). It highlights aspects such as restriction in space, time, activity and privacy.

In the second analysis, the focus will be on the ways that children cope with their daily lives and adapt to their new 'normal'. This chapter is based on theory by Boyden & Mann (2005). Additionally, it includes elements and theories from developmental psychology. This originates from a belief that Childhood Studies allows for children to be heard and valued; for a child's perspective to be added, whereas developmental psychology can help to gain a better understanding of these perspectives. By applying different coping strategies and relying on social connections, the children learn to cope, as part of their everyday agency (Payne, 2012).

The third analysis dives into the theory of agency and tries to examine the different thickeners and thinners of the experiences of agency of the children in the children's home (Klocker, 2007). It is argued that social connections are a thicker in a situation in which agency is considered thin. This highlights the importance of interdependence, both in the African context and for young children in general.

The hope for this thesis is that it will contribute to the growing body of Childhood Studies research, by adding the experiences of these young children. Additionally, it aims to emphasize the importance of the perspectives of young children and the need to include them in research.

Table of content

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	iii
Table of content	v
Introduction - Young children's perspectives	1
Research perspectives	2
The importance of children's voices	3
The voices of children in care	4
Research question and aim of study	5
Outline of this thesis	6
Background - a turbulent past and the current situation	9
South-Africa during colonial times	10
Apartheid	10
Post-Apartheid	11
Colored community	12
A South-African childhood	13
Poverty	16
Substance abuse	17
Violence against children	17
South-African laws	18
History of children's homes	20
Summary	20
<i>Theory - dominant frameworks</i>	21
Childhood Studies perspective	21
Actor approach	24
Agency	24
Types of agency	25
Coping strategies	27
Rights-oriented approach	28

Institutionalization _____	31
Summary _____	34
Methods chapter - methodology, methods and ethics _____	35
Research with children _____	35
Qualitative research _____	37
Research setting, access and gatekeepers _____	37
Participants _____	39
Consent _____	39
Confidentiality _____	40
Privacy _____	41
Validity and reliability _____	41
Research role _____	42
Research approaches _____	43
Research setting _____	44
Multiple methods _____	44
Methods _____	45
Observation _____	47
Defining _____	47
Drawings _____	48
Mapping _____	49
Ranking _____	50
Play _____	51
Visual stimulus interviews _____	52
Interviews with adults _____	53
Ethical considerations _____	54
Unfamiliarity _____	54
Representation _____	54
Analysis _____	55
Building rapport and research role _____	55
Power imbalance _____	58
Reciprocity _____	60
Leaving the children _____	61
Summary _____	62
<i>Analysis 1 - Everyday life in the children's home</i> _____	63
Introduction _____	63
The rights for children in vulnerable situations _____	63
Institutional care _____	65
Space and authority _____	66
<i>The Children's home</i> _____	66

<i>Spaces</i>	68
<i>Supervision</i>	69
<i>Child supervisors</i>	71
Surrounded by peers	71
<i>Individual attention by people</i>	73
<i>Individual attention through things</i>	75
<i>Peer-relations</i>	76
<i>Collectivism & individualism</i>	77
Daily routines	78
<i>Daily Routines in the children's home</i>	79
<i>Routines</i>	80
Aims and perspectives of institutional care	81
<i>Provision, protection, participation</i>	82
<i>Best interest of the child</i>	83
Summary	86
Analysis 2 - coping with their new 'normal'	89
Introduction	89
Vulnerable, capable, 'normal life'	89
Coping in their everyday life	91
Making sense of the experience	91
<i>Reason to live at the children's home</i>	92
<i>Arriving at the home</i>	94
<i>Knowing this is not 'normal'</i>	95
Processing the emotions	95
<i>Grief/sadness</i>	96
<i>Anger</i>	98
<i>Fears</i>	99
Social relationships	100
<i>Siblings</i>	100
<i>Friendships</i>	102
Remaining hopeful	103
Everyday agency	104
Summary	104
Analysis 3 - through thick and thin	105
Structures	106
Context	107
Social relationships	109
Thickers, thinners and legal frameworks	110

Summary	112
Conclusion - a colorful patchwork	113
Summary of key findings	113
Policy and research recommendation	117
Reference list	119
Appendix	131
Consent form for the children	131
Consent form for the gatekeepers	132
Ethical report	134
Interview guideline adult interviews	135

Introduction - *Young children's perspectives*

'In my home I live with my mommy and daddy.

Now I live alone and other children live with their mommy and daddy.'

- Josh (5 years)

This is a quote given by Josh, a 5 year old boy who has been living in the children's home for half a year. He was placed in the home because his parents were heavily addicted to substances. He was exposed to this world in such a degree that when he talked about his family, he talked about the different drug dealers and users in the neighborhood. By explaining his conception of his nuclear family, the boy reminds me of the importance of listening to the voices of young children. Their voices give insight into their experiences, feelings and perspectives. These children have been removed from their homes and families because it was perceived to be in the best interest of the child. Yet, children experience the world differently than adults; adults take children away from their parents to protect them, they have their best interest at heart, yet children might experience this removal from their home and family as a cruel punishment. Childhood Studies, the perspective from which this thesis has been written, believes in active children that deserve to be studied in their own right and have their voices heard. 'We have to take seriously what children think is important and meaningful even though this may conflict with what we adults think is 'good for children'. Before we can judge what is 'good for children' we have to know their standpoints [...] on their premises' (Nilsen, 1990 p. 47). This led to a curiosity about children's experiences on their lives in a children's home.

During my bachelor in Developmental psychology, children in children's homes were often discussed, compared and analyzed. During this process, the focus lay on the development and attachment of these children. Instead, I felt a growing curiosity to the experiences and feelings of the children and discovered that there was little research being done in which the children themselves were consulted, asked and listened to, especially the younger children. Therefore my aim has been to listen to young children, and how they experience their lives. In order to do this, I spent two months in a children's home in Cape Town, South-Africa. Here I spent my days with children between zero and six years of age. For this thesis, I decided to focus on the oldest group

in the children's home, those between four and six years of age. Nearly all children in my research have two living parents, this means that the children are not considered orphans. Therefore I have chosen to use the name 'children's home' ('kindertehuis' in Afrikaans). This name is used by the staff, therefore it seems like an appropriate term to use. It does not put a negative emphasis on the word nor makes it sound like a cold and impersonal space.

As a result of the apartheid regime, the country is still, unofficially, divided into racial groups; white, colored, black, Asian. These distinctions were not looked negatively upon by the people I have met during fieldwork, instead, people tended to identify themselves by the racial group that they are part of (Adhikari, 2005). This will be further explained in the background chapter. I mention it here because the children's home that I conducted my fieldwork at was in a Colored neighborhood and run by Colored people. Most children in the home came from Colored backgrounds as well. Therefore this thesis focused on the experiences and perceptions of young Colored children in Cape Town.

Research perspectives

In addition to the Childhood Studies perspectives, this thesis is also written from a right-oriented approach. This entails that children are seen as subjects of rights. These rights are documented on a variation of local and international levels. The most widely internationally ratified document is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC (The United Nations, 1989)¹. The UNCRC states that '*the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth*' (UNCRC, 1989, preamble). The 54 articles in the UNCRC are written and ratified to offer this extra safeguard and care and these are perceived as the universal children's rights. However, it can be argued that these rights are not universal but that they instead represent a Western ideology. It is suggested that it is the modern form of western imperialism (Whitworth, 2010). A Western ideology shines through in various articles when talking about the definition of childhood, the activities fitting for a child and the best situation for a child to grow up. These views on children and the lives of children are not always fitting to each culture and each situation (Wang, 2010).

¹ From now on referenced to as the (UNCRC, 1989).

The rights mentioned in the UNCRC remain, however, from my perspective, a necessary need for all children and a goal that should be universally aimed for. Therefore, I will be aware of my Western-biased view when it comes to children's rights, but I will also use these rights to analyze and discuss childhood and the children's home. Additionally, I will use the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child - ACRWC (Organization of African Unity, 1990)² and the South-African Children's act 38 (2005) to gain insight in continental and national laws and perspectives on the rights of children. Both these documents take the African culture, traditions and values into consideration.

The importance of children's voices

Children who grow up in residential care have a marginalized position in society, both for being children and for growing up in institutionalized care. This entails that they are fully dependent on the decisions that adults make on their behalf. It is decided for them that their home situation is no longer a suitable place for them to grow up, whether or not they see their parents again, what qualifications the children's home should have and even how they should live their day to day life. Very rarely, a child is asked, in these situations, for their opinion or feelings about matters that affect them. This is concerning since adults' views on children's experiences might differ from the children's actual views and perspectives (Söderbäck, Coyne & Harder, 2011). Söderbäck et al. (2011) describe these different perspectives as the 'child perspective' and the 'child's perspective'. They explain that a child perspective is characterized by the adults' views and perspectives on the conditions, experiences, perceptions and actions of children, keeping the best interest of the child in mind. A child's perspective, on the other hand, looks at the child's insider perspective on the conditions, experiences, perceptions and actions. Professionals should have the best interest of the child as the main goal, by considering and acknowledging the child's perspective. Söderbäck et al. (2011) conclude that *young children's perspectives* are still underexplored in research. Getting an understanding of the views and experiences of young children asks for more sensitivity. Both the child perspective and the child's perspective are needed to get a truly child-centered approach in law, regulations, protocols and other matters that decide about the lives of children.

² From now on referenced to as the (ACRWC, 1990).

The aim of this thesis is to offer the child's perspective on life in a children's home. Young children between 4 and 6 years of age have been asked to tell their experiences, perceptions and feelings about their lives. Such an approach has the potential to offer insight in the 'child's perspective', which can contribute to the decisions professionals make in the best interest of the child.

The voices of children in care

According to the statistics of UNICEF 2017, there are roughly 2.7 million children living in institutionalized care worldwide. With such a high amount of children in children's homes, it is a well-researched topic. Most research has been done in the field of developmental psychology, looking into the development and attachment of these children (Dozier et al., 2012). This is how I first got interested in the topic. I concluded a bachelor in developmental psychology with a main interest in orphans, children's homes and adoption. This is where I learned about the negative consequences of institutionalized care on children's well-being and development:

Children who grew up in orphanages show significantly more insecure attachment and indiscriminate friendliness. These children more often have behavioral problems and score lower on IQ tests (Chisholm, 1998). Children in orphanages also have a high rate of emotional and developmental disorders (Fawzy & Fouad, 2010). Additionally, it is said that institutional care increases the chances of serious illnesses and delayed language development. Research also states that institutionalizing young children 'increases the likelihood that impoverished children will grow into psychiatrically impaired and economically unproductive adults' (Frank et al., 1996 p. 1).

Already during my study, I found myself interested in the perspectives of the children who grew up in such institutions. Developmental psychology was not the right place for such research, whereas Childhood Studies is. Originally, Childhood Studies was a reaction from critics on the dominant representation of childhood in academic studies (Woodhead, 2008). It criticized the biological and universal approach and argued that childhood should be understood as a social construction that is influenced by time and place. There was critique on the future orientation, and the scholars of Childhood studies believed in the value of children in the present, therefore children should not be treated as objects but rather as competent and active beings with agency. Additionally, there was critique on the adult (ethno)centric view, and it was argued that children's

perspectives and voices should be searched for through research, that they are people worthy of being studied in their own right (Prout, 2004).

In my opinion, one does not exclude the other, instead, both approaches can contribute to a better understanding of children and their worlds. Woodhead (2008) talks about the future of Childhood Studies and how it is too easy to disregard the developmental psychology for ‘not listening to children’. He explains that scholars such as Jean Piaget did listen closely to children and that his work was based on a deep respect for children. I think the aim in developmental psychology is different, as this field of research aims to understand the development of body, mind and thought. Whereas the research field of Childhood studies is not necessarily interested in the development of thoughts but rather the current thoughts and experiences of children. The research field of developmental psychology can monitor the development and notice the positive or negative effects of situations on children’s development. These conclusions help adults make decisions from the child perspective, keeping their best interest in mind, the one that does the least harm to their development. But to fully act out of the child’s best interest, one needs to know and understand the child’s perspective. In order to gain the child’s perspective one needs to listen to children and make an effort to understand their worlds, this is best done with the childhood studies approach on children and childhood. This will give insight into the thoughts, experiences, perspectives and worlds of children.

In this thesis, I want to learn more about the child’s perspective and therefore I will use the Childhood Studies approach as leading research theory. But schooled as a pedagogue and an educator I take my previous knowledge and skills with me during my fieldwork and academic process, believing that combining the different approaches will only benefit the overall knowledge and understanding of children and childhood.

Research question and aim of the study

The aim of this thesis is to add the perspective of young children to the growing body of Childhood Studies literature. It is argued that in the research field of Childhood Studies ‘not all children’s voices are being heard’ (McNamee & Seymour, 2013, p166). There has been a strong focus on children between 10 to 12 years of age. Children below 7 years of age are considerably and substantially less included in research (McNamee & Seymour, 2013). Yet, Childhood Studies

could and should include all children, not just those who are convenient to the researcher. Therefore this thesis aims to let the voices of young children to be heard.

Additionally, this thesis aims to get an understanding of these children's perspectives, experiences, feelings and thoughts about their lives, based on what they find important. Therefore, the main research question states:

‘What are the perceptions and experiences of young children living in a children's home in Cape Town, South-Africa?’

There are three sub-questions that aim to contribute to the understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the children:

1. How do the children experience institutionalized life?
2. How do children cope with their everyday lives?
3. Which factors strengthen and weaken children's possibilities in their everyday lives?

To gain an understanding about their perspectives and experiences the first analysis chapter will aim to learn about the characteristics of institutionalized life and the consequences this has for the children living in it. This chapter will conceptualize the children's home as a total institution (Goffman, 1961) and use the words of the children to exemplify the impacts this has on children who grow up in the home. The second analysis chapter will focus on the way that children cope with and adapt to institutional life and the difficult experiences they have faced. This chapter aims to gain knowledge about the ways that young children cope on a daily basis while facing hardship. The third analysis chapter takes a look at the different layers of a child's life; structure, context and social relations. Each aspect will be discussed in regards to their possibilities to expand or constrain the opportunities and possibilities for children.

Outline of this thesis

To understand the perceptions and experiences of children, it is important to understand the context in which the children grow up as well as the perspective from which this thesis is written and the implications this has for the research process.

The second chapter of this thesis, following this one, will be the background chapter in which the context will be explained on a variety of levels; national, historical, racial and situational. South-Africa is a diverse and complex country, this complexity influences the lives of the children and has implications for their current situation. Knowing this background information will not only give a better understanding of the children and how they grow up but will also help to understand what the children had to say about their lives. Chapter three will outline the theoretical approaches of this thesis such as the Childhood Studies perspective, with special emphasis on agency, and the Right-oriented approach, since these approaches lay the basis for the entire research process. Additionally, the theory about 'total institutions' as described by Goffman (1961a) will be explained and discussed. This theory creates the framework for the first analysis chapter. The methodology chapter will be the fourth chapter. In this chapter, the perspectives on children will be elaborated on as well as the sensitivity and protection one has to take in research with children. The different methods that have been used (observation, interviews, drawings, ranking, mapping, visually stimulated interviews and play) in this study will be discussed and ethical considerations that occurred before, during and after the fieldwork will be critically reflected upon. The two analysis chapters follow. As explained above, the first analysis chapter will be guided by the theory of Goffman (1961a). In this chapter, the characteristics of a total institution will be used to describe daily life in the children's home. Through examples given by the children, the effects and consequences of institutional life will be discussed. This discussion is guided by legal frameworks such as the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990) as well as by the acknowledgment of the agency of children. The second analysis chapter is a more descriptive chapter, focusing on the ways that children deal with their daily circumstances. This chapter is inspired by the notions of resilience as described by Boyden and Mann (2005). During this chapter, it will be explained, guided by the experiences of the children, how they make sense of their situation, how they deal with their negative emotions, how they adapt and overcome through social connections and how they remain hopeful. Knowledge from both analysis chapters will be used in the third analysis to learn about the 'thickers' and 'thinners' of agency in the children's daily lives (Klocker, 2007). The conclusion will summarize the findings from the analysis and answer the research aims as provided in this introductory chapter. The concluding remarks will tie the thesis together and end with a final word of advice regarding decisions made on behalf of the child.

Background - *a turbulent past and the current situation*

This chapter will provide contextual information about the location and the topic of this thesis.

Sketching out the background information about the complicated history of the country and the effects of it today, as well as an explanation about the legal and social implications for the current living situation of the children, will create a better understanding of their situation. Therefore, I will start this chapter with general information about South-Africa, followed by a brief history of the apartheid era as well as the current consequences and implications for the inhabitants.

Secondly, matters concerning the specifics of the children's home will be elaborated on. This involves gaining a better understanding of the Colored community, as well as discussing the problems that this community faces and how this resulted in the institutionalization of many of the children in the children's home. Additionally, to gain a better understanding of children's homes and the current status in the South-African society, this chapter will shortly look at the history of children's homes as well as the laws and legislations that create the base for today's children's homes.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Cape Town, the capital of South-Africa. South-Africa is the most southern country on the African continent. It shares borders with Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland and the country of Lesotho, which is placed within South-Africa. Currently, the country has a population of nearly 58 million people, 36 million of whom live in urban areas (Statistics S-A, 2012). Cape Town, the city in which the fieldwork was conducted, has a population of nearly 4.5 million and counts over a million households spread out over nearly 2500 km². More than 10 percent of these households are considered informal settlements and 36% of the people in Cape Town live under the poverty line (Statistics S-A, 2012).

South-Africa is a country with a racially divided past, the effects of which are still present and visible in today's society. In order to get a better understanding of the current state of affairs in the country and the problems that it is facing, it is therefore important to first take a look at the past.

South-Africa during colonial times

Cape Town has a turbulent history of colonization and oppression. To understand the current situation and the influence of the Dutch and British oppressors, we will first discuss the colonial era in South-African history³.

In the 17th century, the European empires started the era of colonization. They viewed themselves as older, purer and morally superior civilizations (Hansen, 2018). After a century of Dutch occupation and a slavery dependent community, the British gained control. Slowly, the slaves were given more freedom by the British government, with a mandatory four-year apprenticeship that led to their freedom in 1838 (Thompson, 2000). The Union of South-Africa was established in 1910 and during this time racial segregation became officially noted in the law (Thompson, 2000). The racial separations were between the Black, Colored and White people. The white Afrikaners believed in white supremacy and the purity of the white race. The national party followed this ideology and in 1948 they won the elections stating: 'In the past we felt like strangers in our own country, but today South-Africa belongs to us once more. For the first time since the Union, South-Africa is our own. May God grant that it always remains our own' (Rand Daily Mail, June 2, 1948 as read in Thompson, 2000, p.186).

Apartheid

The elected government caused further separation and segregation by implementing a series of laws and regulations that were put in place to separate the races in hierarchical order under white rule (Clark & Worger, 2016). In 1950 a legislation was passed that controlled every aspect of a citizen's life based on race. This legislation was called the Population Registration Act of 1950. It stated that every person above the age of 16, should be classified as either white, colored or black (Population register no. 29 of 1950). Each classification came with rights and duties, in which the white people were granted most rights. The black people were precluded from all rights that would normally be associated with those of citizens (Clack & Worger, 2016).

The act of 1950 describes white, colored and black as the following:

³ South-Africa knows racial groups. The 'native African people' are referred to with many different names in books, law and by the people. In this thesis I will be using the word 'Black' since this is, from my experience, the most commonly used word by people of all races in Cape Town.

‘White person means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a colored person.

Colored person means a person who is not a white person or a native. Native means a person who in fact is or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa.’⁴ (Population register no. 29 of 1950).

The classifications decided where a person was allowed to live, what schools they could go to, who they were allowed to marry and how much they could earn. It resulted not only in the segregation of all aspects of life but also in the quality of all these aspects of a person’s life (Thompson, 2000). Schools, hospitals and public transport for the colored and black people were inferior to that of the white people. Additionally, electricity, running water, telephones, sewage systems and parks were rare in the black communities. This resulted in shocking differences in infant mortality rates and life expectancy rates between the different races. Black and colored children were thirteen times more likely to die before the age of four than white children, the main reason for this was inadequate nutrition (Thompson, 2000). Life expectancy for white people was 64.5 for males and 72.3 for females compared to 51.2 for colored males and 58.9 for colored females (Thompson, 2000). The low life expectancies for the colored and black people were caused by diseases as well as poor socioeconomic conditions. Additionally, mental stress and violence were contributing factors, with murder being a frequent cause of death among the colored and black people (Thompson, 2000). The South-African Native National Congress (ANC) was a movement for the black elite and a resistance to the apartheid regime. They started a resistance campaign in which they urged people to break the apartheid laws in the hope that an increase in prisoners would collapse the system (Thompson, 2000). In the years to come, resistance continued and international disagreement with the system became more persistent, simultaneously the country went through economic struggles. In 1989 the South-African government favored a nonracial constitution and made an end to 300 years of White rule (Thompson, 2000).

Post-Apartheid

In 1994 South-Africa had its first democratic elections.

⁴ ‘Asian’ was later added to the races.

The ANC won the elections under the leadership of Nelson Mandela (Joubert, Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2010). When Mandela walked out of prison in 1990, it was a sign of hope for those who had suffered under oppression for 28 years (Barbarin & Richter, 2013). In the years to come, the government increased the spending on social services to reduce poverty and inequality. The main focus lay on education, health, social security and housing (May & Govender, 1998). But the end of apartheid did not mean the end of segregation, discrimination and inequality. The consequences of apartheid can still be seen in nearly every aspect of daily life. According to a recent report of the World Bank (2018), South-Africa is one of the most unequal countries by all measures in the world. In fact, inequality has increased since the end of apartheid in 1994. Many neighborhoods are still segregated, there are high differences in education levels between the races as well as employment rates (Thompson, 2000). Nearly half of the population is classified as chronic poor and race is still the strongest predictor of poverty. Black African people are most at risk, followed by the Colored people, the Asian people and with the white African people at the very bottom (Worldbank, 2018). There is an ongoing struggle for many households to meet their basic needs, sustain their lives and promote children's development (Barbarin & Richter, 2013). Today's children live in the apartheid legacy of racism and inequality. Their livelihood depends largely on the possibilities that their parents get and the abilities of their parents to cope with the strains of life such as inequality, violence and providing the necessary needs. Additionally, the ability to maintain close, nurturing and stable relationships greatly influences their lives. Children who grow up in hardship are exposed to social risks such as the apartheid legacy of inequality and deprivation as well as economic risks. Economic risks are linked to increased exposure to violence (Barbarin & Richter, 2013).

Colored community

The majority of the children in the children's home of my fieldwork came from colored families. The ACRWC (1990) states that '*When considering alternative family care of the child [...] due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious and linguistic background*' (Article 25). The children's home was placed in a colored neighborhood and most members of staff would identify as colored. These aspects are important for a better understanding of the colored community in Cape Town and the way that it influences life for the people.

In large parts of the world, the word ‘colored’ is often used to describe people who are considered non-white in a negative or critical way (Cambridge dictionary). In South-Africa, the term ‘colored’ does not have the exact same implication, it refers to a phenotypically varied social group, with skin color as most important feature, with high social and geographical diversity (Adhikari, 2005). There are nearly five million colored people in South-Africa, therefore this racial group is a minority in the country. Yet, in Cape Town, more than 40% of the people are considered colored, making them the majority in the city (Statistics S. A., 2015; Adhikari, 2005). South-Africa has eleven official languages. In Cape Town, English, Afrikaans and Xhosa are the three most common ones. Most colored people speak Afrikaans, a language that developed from Dutch and influenced by the other languages spoken in South-Africa. Most colored people also speak English, and it is not uncommon that the two languages are combined in an informal local dialect. The dominating religion among the colored population is Christianity, but also Islam is not uncommon (Statistics S-A., 2015).

On a national level, the colored people have always been a minority group without significant political and economic power. In a study by Posel (2001), people of different races were asked about apartheid, and in this study, one-third of the colored people stated that they thought that, despite the abuse, the ideas of apartheid were good ones. To understand this line of thought it is worth noticing that after the end of apartheid poverty rates in all ethnic groups dropped, with the exception of poverty in the colored population. Some feel they gained little after the end of apartheid, especially in the working classes. They have gained more liberty and rights, but also notice the negative consequences of black empowerment initiatives that work against the colored people. A common saying, therefore, is ‘first we were not white enough and now we are not black enough’ (Adhikari, 2004). The rising unemployment rate and social stress, with alcohol and drug abuse as a consequence, results in disproportionate violence and homicide rates among the colored people (Adhikari, 2004).

A South-African childhood

There were three aspects that stood out as part of the South-African culture; family connections seemed to be closer, the contribution of the child was more expected and the children seemed more obedient. The African culture remains to have a closer connection to the (extended) family as well

as the community. Foster (2000) describes that in many African countries the ties to the extended family have weakened over the last decades. Despite this weakening, it continues to remain a predominant caring system throughout Africa. Where it used to be the aunts and uncles who would take care of the children in times of need, it is now more often the grandmother who fosters the children (Foster, 2000). This is consistent with the experiences of the caregiver and the background of many of the children in the children's home as explained to me by the social worker. When the parents are unable to care for the children, due to old age, work, poverty, mental illness, sickness or death, the grandmother may take over the care of the children. Grandfathers are sometimes present, yet they do not seem to actively participate in the caring and raising of the children. Only when the extended family is unable or unwilling to care for the child(ren), alternative care is being looked into, sometimes as a temporary solution during which the extended family is given time to prepare and arrange for the care of an (extra) child.

Next to the role of the family, I found the importance of contribution to family life from the child also noteworthy. Article 31 of the ACRWC (1990) states that *'every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society [...]. The child, subject to his age and ability [...] shall have the duty to work for the cohesion of the family [...] and to assist them in case of need.'* In contradiction to the UNCRC (1989) the ACRWC (1990) talks about the responsibility of children in addition to their rights. This is a representation of the expectations of the people. Children are expected to contribute to family life. The way in which they contribute depends on both the age, gender and birth order of the child. Some of the children explained how they used to care for their younger siblings during the night so the parents could sleep. Others would share how they helped their younger siblings get dressed or how they fed them. This perspective of young children as caregivers or helpers might go against the Western ideology of a 'carefree childhood' yet in South-African culture it is part of a child's responsibility to care for their families and to help their elders, when appropriate according to their age and capabilities (Evans, 2010). The final main aspect of a South-African childhood is obedience. Article 31 of the ACRWC (1990) states that *'The child shall have the duty [...] to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times'*. African children have the responsibility to respect their elders. They are not supposed to challenge adults or question what they have been told (Twum-Danso, 2009). When disrespect or disobedience occurs, South-African parents have the legal right to discipline their children. Article 20 of the ACRWC (1990) states that *'Parents [...] shall have the duty [...] to ensure that domestic*

discipline is administered with humanity and in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of the child.’ This does result in different childhoods and different relations between parents and child. Yet, the South-African aims to change this through ‘*the promotion of positive, non-violent forms of discipline.*’ (Children’s Act 38, 2005, Chapter 4, Act 144 1.b).

Twum-Danso (2009) made similar observations regarding the dynamics between parents and children in Ghana. She called these the three R’s of intergenerational relationships. These R’s are; respect, responsibility and reciprocity. She stated that children learn from a very early age that respect and obedience towards their elders are two of the most important duties they have in society. Additionally, children have responsibilities towards their family, society and State. It is believed that doing and taking part is a way of learning. Both the respect and the responsibilities might evolve, she writes, from reciprocity. When a child helps their parents and is respectful and obedient, it can expect care and maintenance in return as a form of reciprocity (Twum-Danso, 2009).

During the early years of childhood, all children go through rapid changes in physical, mental, social, emotional and moral growth. The experiences that children have during these early years have a big impact on their brain development and therefore have implications for their future life (Lightfoot, Cole & Cole, 2009). During these first few years, children need a safe and stable environment, the social and physical environment in which they grow up has consequences on their current and future development (Unicef, 2007; Statistics S.A., 2012). Unfortunately, not every child gets to grow up in a safe and protective environment. Some children are exposed to situations that are harmful to their well-being, now and in the future. This harm can be caused by circumstances, choices or by the people surrounding the child. Sometimes the home environment is no longer the best place for the child and the decision will be made to remove the child from their family in order to protect their well-being from the harm surrounding them.

With the high amounts of research regarding the ‘orphan-crisis’ or the ‘aids-epidemic’ (Fontes, Hillis, & Wasek, 1998; Henderson, 2006; Abebe, 2010; Oleke, 2006) it is important to note that none of the children in this children’s home are there as a direct result of HIV or AIDS. Nor are any of the children considered orphans in the western sense of the word. The World Health Organization (2003) defines an orphan as a child who has lost one or both parents. With this

definition in mind, only one out of the 9 children would be considered orphaned. The fact is that HIV and AIDS were not direct causes to the child's placement in residential care, it did however influence the lives of many of them. Some of the children are HIV-positive and it can be assumed that some of their parents are as well. This might have resulted in other causes such as an inability to work, resulting in poverty. Indirect causes also can have severe effects on children's lives. The direct causes for the court to place the children into a children's home were abuse, neglect and abandonment. The underlying causes were often financial struggles, substance abuse or violence.

Poverty

As described above, a large part of the colored community lives in poverty. Children from ethnic minorities, such as the colored community in South-Africa, are more likely to experience social exclusion and deprivation (Montgomery, Burr & Woodhead, 2003). Financial problems are one of the reasons, among others, that the children were brought to the children's home. Their parents were not able to care and provide for them. Because poverty has a major effect on children's lives and in this case also on their possibilities to grow up among family or in an institution, the following section will give an overview of the struggles of poverty and the consequences on children.

Poverty in South-Africa is partly caused by the high and rising unemployment rates in the country. Unemployment is when one is not engaged in economic activity, yet wanting to work, able to work and taking steps trying to work (Graham, 2006). A lack of sufficient income can lead to, or continue, a life in poverty. When talking about poverty, there are two types of poverty, absolute and relative. Absolute poverty is when a family lives in a condition of severe deprivation of basic human needs. In this situation they struggle for food, drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information (Montgomery, et al., 2003). Relative poverty looks at the gap between the poorest and the richest in society. But poverty is not solely about the financial aspects. Living in poverty often includes social exclusion, humiliation and emotional stress (Montgomery et al., 2003). Therefore poverty is closely linked to children's standard of living, which in turn affects their well-being (Graham, 2006). Children, and especially young children, rely on adults for their needs, protection and for their physical and psychological well-being, to protect them from day-to-day risks. Yet, when living in poverty, not all parents are able to meet the needs of the child and the duties that are placed upon them by law. Consequently, their rights

are traded off against each other; for children are placed in a children's home, their right to family is dismissed in order to have their other rights, such as nutrition, education, shelter and protection, met (Graham, 2006).

Substance abuse

Financial struggles and poverty are often co-occurring with other risk factors for children. One of these risk factors is substance abuse (Boyden, 2009). Substance abuse is widespread in South-Africa across all ethnicities. In the Western Cape, the province of which Cape Town is a part, alcohol remains the most frequently abused substance, followed by methamphetamine (MA) (Harker et al., 2008). Compared to other provinces, problematic drinking has higher prevalence rates and it has the highest lifetime prevalence across the nation. Higher levels of problem drinking are found among the colored communities compared to the black, white and Asian communities (Harker et al., 2008). Apart from alcohol, MA is the most frequently abused substance, this drug is locally known as 'tik' (Harker et al., 2008; Miles, n.d.). MA is a commonly used drug amongst the colored community, it is associated with increased risks for mental problems and violent behavior (Harker et al., 2008). Substance abuse is particularly high among people of parental age. A link has been found, by Magura and Laudet (1996) between substance abuse and an increased risk for child maltreatment, additionally, parents who are substance abusers show more signs of general parental difficulties. Over three-quarters of the children in foster care have been, at some point, affected by substance abuse in some way, which is said to be the most significant cause for child maltreatment (Miles, n.d.).

Violence against children

Violence against children is defined by the UNCRC (1989) as '*all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.*' (Article 19). The high levels of violence against children cannot be explained with one simple reason. The causes of violence are complex and multilayered. Part of the cause can be found in the apartheid history during which violence was widespread. The high unemployment and poverty rates in combination with the inadequate law enforcement, poor education and high rates of substance abuse are also important factors that maintain the high rates of violence (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

The general patterns in violence against children varies with age. Based on the group of children that took part in this research, it is most useful to look at the violence directed at children in the ages 0-4 since most of the children were placed in the custody of the children's home before their 4th birthday. The most common forms of violence against young children are abandonment, neglect and physical abuse. This often remains unreported and hidden inside the home. The children themselves are too young to report it and fully depend on their parents/caregivers for their needs (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). The South-African law, The Children's act 38 (2005), defines abuse as '*any form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child.*' (Children's Act 38, 2005, Chapter 1 Act 1). This included assault or inflicting the child with an injury, sexual abuse, bullying, exploitation and psychological and emotional harm. Neglect is here defined as '*a failure in the exercise of parental responsibilities to provide for the basic physical, intellectual, emotional or social needs*' (Children's Act 38, 2005, Chapter 1 Act 1). Abandonment is described as '*a child who has obviously been deserted by a parent, guardian or caregiver; or a child who has, for no apparent reason, had no contact with the parent, guardian or caregiver for a period of at least three months.*' (Children's Act 38, 2005, Chapter 1 Act 1). Violence can have long-term effects on children beyond physical injuries and scars. Abuse and neglect in the early stages of childhood can have an impact on the brain development of the child and on the cognitive and psychosocial adjustment (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). Additionally, it affects the attachment of the child which in turn regulates the abilities of the child to regulate their emotions and understand the emotions of others. Finally, children who have experienced abuse can experience psychological consequences (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). When looking at the long-term effects these children have an increased risk of violent and antisocial behavior, they might experience more problem creating interpersonal relationships, it can affect their resilience and it makes them more vulnerable for substance abuse, depression, suicide and anxiety disorders, among others (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

Trying to protect children against this violence, or rather, trying to prevent the continuation of these harmful practices against children, the children are placed in alternative care.

South-African laws

To protect children from possible dangers, there is a need for legal documentation and rights. In South-Africa, there are three main documents that protect and promote the rights and welfare of

the child, that try to protect the children from harmful situations, all of which have been briefly mentioned before. These documents provide a legal framework for how children should be treated and the rights they have. Yet, legal frameworks do not guarantee these rights for children, since governments might not be able (or willing) to follow all of them and individual situations of children might vary excessively. Having a solid legal framework does give an idea of where a country stands with its view on children as well as a goal to aim for.

The first ratified document is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), and additionally, South-Africa has ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990). To give effect to these ratifications and principles, the South-African government implemented the Children's Act 38 (2005). This document was implemented, as stated within the document, to *'To give effect to certain rights of children as contained in the constitution; to set out principles relating to the care and protection of children; to define parental responsibilities and rights [...]'* (Children's act 38, 2005, Chapter 4 Long title)

The principles and rights named in these conventions determine, partly, how children are treated by the State and what decisions, regarding children, are based on.

When looking into the topic of children's homes it is clear that there are complex and serious reasons that children are placed in a children's home, for each of the documents states that children shall not be separated from their parents against their will. Yet, as article 9 from the UNCRC (1989) explains, the exception to this is when separation from the parents is in the child's best interests; *'such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents [...]'*. Article 19 of the UNCRC (1989) explains that State Parties have the duty to *'take all the appropriate [...] measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardians) or any other person who has the care of the child.'* Article 16 of the ACRWC (1990) adds *'all forms of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment'* to the list that children need to be protected from.

The Children's Act 38 explains that when the State decides that it is in the best interest of the child to be separated from his/her family, the child should only be placed in a children's home when another option is not appropriate. It is stated that the court can place the child in care for 2 years at the time, after which the situation will be evaluated again to decide if staying in the children's

home remains in the best interest of the child (Children's act 38, 2005). The children in the children's home have to appear in court every 2 years to get their case reassessed.

The Children's Act creates a practical and clear document which states the procedures that need to be followed and the obligations that children's homes need to fulfill. The country does, however, lack official and statistical information on the numbers and types of residential care facilities for children since not all care facilities are officially registered (UNICEF, 2009). The governmental website of the Western Cape already shows 71 officially registered child and youth residential care centers. Because of the incomplete data, it is not possible to tell how many children in the Western Cape, or across South-Africa, who live in children's homes. Across the world, this number is estimated to be anywhere between the 2.000.000 and 8.000.000 children (Browne, 2009; Save the Children, 2009).

History of children's homes

Dozier et al. (2012) describe the historic change in the Global South regarding the care of orphaned, abandoned and maltreated children. For many centuries these children were cared for through informal kin-care or informal adoption. The treatment of children in such situations was variable, some were treated as just another child in the family, and others were used as servants. The first foundling home originates from Italy in the 14th century as a response to the growing number of orphaned children in the cities. It was often the church who took over the care for the children. Little can be found about the start of institutionalized childcare in South-Africa. It can be expected that this form of care was introduced in Africa during colonial times. Though it is stated in that Children's act 38 (2005) that residential care should be the last option, with family-based approaches as a preferred alternative, it is still a frequently used care facility (UNICEF, n.d.).

Summary

In this chapter, the turbulent past of the nation of South-Africa has been discussed as well as the current problems that the country, and especially the colored community, are facing. These problems include poverty, substance abuse and violence. Due to these problems, among others, children are assigned to alternative care. The rights of children, in such situations, have been briefly discussed. In the following chapter, these rights will be further explained as well as the theory connected to the analysis.

Theory - *dominant frameworks*

In this chapter, the theories that create the framework for the analyses later on in this thesis will be explained. The main theory, that creates the basis for this thesis, is the research perspective of Childhood Studies. To properly explain this, I will first explain how Childhood Studies developed in the 1980s as a reaction to the dominant framework at the time. After this, the most relevant concepts, such as the actor-oriented approach and agency, will be explained and discussed. Following this will be the theory concerning the coping of children. This section is based on ideas from both Childhood Studies as well as Developmental psychology. Another research approach that will be used in the analysis was the children's rights approach. This thesis is rights-oriented, meaning that it is not the main theory, but the legal rights will be considered, mentioned and taken into account throughout the thesis.

Finally, the main theory for the first analysis chapters will be explained. The theory concerns institutional life, based on the theory of 'Total institutions' from Goffman (1961a).

Childhood Studies perspective

The concept of childhood is not a new phenomenon, it has always existed in society. Yet, the place that children and childhood have in society and the way in which childhood is perceived has changed significantly. Aries (1982) describes how there was little to no distinction between children and adults during the middle ages. In the paintings analyzed by Aries, the children are simply portrayed as miniature adults. It took until the 16th century for children to become well-loved subjects in paintings. The focus shifted from miniature adults to children with their own characteristics placed next to adults and mingled in everyday life. The separation between children and adults became even more prominent in the 17th century. In paintings from that time, children can be seen wearing special clothing. From the 18th century on, children became objects of care, with a growing concern for their health and physical well-being (Aries, 1982). In today's society, childhood is acknowledged as a structural phenomenon in society, with its own culture, identity and rights. The change in which childhood and children are perceived has also influenced the perspectives on children in research.

Childhood studies, the research perspective used in this thesis, emerged in the 1980s as a reaction on the dominant view, mainly shaped by developmental psychology and functionalist sociology,

on children and their position in research. This dominant framework was characterized by rationality, naturalness and universality (James & Prout, 2015). Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) describe it as an objective, dispassionate and systematic study of hypothesis testing. This way of research has been criticized for a number of reasons, each of which will be briefly described as they also give a better understanding of the philosophy behind Childhood Studies. These critiques go against naturalism, the adult-centric perspective, universalism and seeing children as becomings instead of beings.

The first point of criticism states that children and childhood should not only be seen as natural and biological but that it should be acknowledged and taking into account that children and childhood are socially, culturally and historically constructed (Goldson, 1997). Children should be seen as 'human beings' instead of 'human becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994). The scholars from Childhood studies believe that children deserve and should be valued in their own right for who they are right now, in the present (Alanen, 2001). Additionally, the adult-centric perspective has been criticized. Children are often looked down upon as immature, incomplete becomings that will eventually grow into mature and wise adults. It is suggested that instead of downgrading children and childhood, children should be recognized in their own value by searching for their perspectives. This entails seeing children as active subjects in their own lives and valuable informants about their lives (Prout & James, 1990). To do this, one has to step away from the common practice of treating children as objects in research. Instead, the aim should be to recognize children as social actors who influence their own lives as well as those of others (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; Prout & James, 1990). Consequently, children should not just be seen as complete individuals but also as people in relational practices with others. Children are impacted by the interaction with others as well as by society (Prout & James, 1990). The last point of criticism focuses on universalism. Universalism is the belief that every child develops equally, without accounting for the space and the time in which a child lives. Childhood Studies argues for the importance of accounting for societal and cultural circumstances and the impact this has on their lives and development (Alanen, 2001).

The points of criticism, as named above, have led to an interdisciplinary research field, Childhood Studies, which now creates a strong alternative research field to the dominant framework. Within Childhood studies, there are three branches that can be seen as the main approaches that

characterize Childhood Studies; the actor-oriented approach, the structural approach and the constructionist approach. The actor approach states that children should be valued as active and competent actors (James & Prout, 1990). The structural approach doesn't concern individual children, but childhood as a phenomenon in society and as a social category (Qvortrup, 1994). The constructionist approach argues that childhood is not a natural construct, but a social construct that is created and changing for children and by children (James & Prout, 2015). These three branches can be combined and sometimes the lines between the branches can be blurred (Alanen, 2001).

Just like the scholars of Childhood Studies criticized the dominant framework, some of the concepts of Childhood Studies are criticized and reflected upon as well (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Childhood Studies emerged from rejection and critiques on the dominant framework regarding children and childhood, which was mainly conceptualized by developmental psychology and functionalist sociology. Yet, it is a biological fact that children experience major changes in physical, mental and emotional development throughout childhood. Therefore, developmental psychology will always remain relevant (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Cordero Arce states, in a conversation between scholars in Childhood Studies (Spyrou, 2018), that Childhood Studies researchers 'have been keeping mainstream developmental psychology at distance, conceiving it more as a foe to be confronted than as an inevitable partner in a much-delayed conversation' (Spyrou, 2018, p. 426).

Developmental psychology and Childhood Studies can not only coexist but can also be combined. Evidence of this can be found in the work of Sommer (2012), who tries to 'enhance our understanding of young children's childhoods, their everyday life, socialization and development in late modern society and culture' (Sommer, 2012, p.2). In his approach, he combines the Childhood Studies perspective with the developmental perspective in order to gain a broader and more complete understanding of children's childhoods. Change and development are a fact of life, but the constant exposure to shifting and changing society and culture, greatly influences the lives of children (Sommer, 2012).

Acknowledging that this master thesis is written to gain a Mphil degree in Childhood Studies, this thesis will be written from a Childhood Studies perspective rather than a combined perspective of both developmental psychology and Childhood Studies, as suggested above. Yet, since I believe in the combination of research fields in order to gain a broader and maybe more complete

understanding of children and childhood, elements of this approach will be used in parts where this seemed to be necessary and helpful to gain a better understanding of the child's perspective. From the field of Childhood Studies the actor-oriented approach will be the focus in the analysis, with the specific concept of agency as a main, recurring theme. Therefore these concepts will now be further explained.

Actor approach

The actor-oriented perspective argues that adults should see and value children as complete human beings who are active in the construction of their own lives and who influence the lives of the people surrounding them and the society in which they live (James, 2009). This does not mean that children are the same as adults, but that they should be valued as equal. Their knowledge, perspectives and experiences, though different from adults, is valuable and worth studying in their own right (James & Prout, 1990). The actor-oriented approach tries to gain an understanding of children's everyday lives, their experiences and practices in diverse contexts. One of the main principles of the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990) is to act in the best interest of the child (Article 3/Article 4)). The actor-oriented perspective argues that before adults can make decisions on their premises and in their best interest, it is important to know the opinions, standpoints and perspectives of the children on these matters. Their thoughts should be valued and be given weight when making a decision that affects their lives (Alanen, 2001).

Agency

The actor perspective, as described above, is often accompanied by the concept of agency. Mayall (2002) explains that an actor is someone who does something and an agent is someone who does something in relation to other people through which they make things happen. Being an actor is about performativity and being an agent is about the relationality which includes intergenerational relationships, influenced by social and cultural contexts (Abebe, 2019). By valuing children as agents, you acknowledge their capability and competence to shape their own lives by making collective and individual choices that possibly affect their current and future lives (Robson, Bell & Klocker, 2007). Simultaneously, you stay aware of the context, social structures and relationships of the children's everyday lives.

The concept of agency has become one of the key ideas of the field of Childhood Studies and one of the main ideas in children's rights discourses. In both fields it is often perceived as something all children should be able to exercise, a universal right. Current agency-related research is being criticized for paying too little attention to the complex contexts and structures that allow for agency to happen (Abebe, 2019; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Additionally, current research has been accused of romanticizing agency, it has been said that agency is perceived as inherently good, yet children do not always use their agency positively. Finally, it is being argued that agency is being taken for granted and that researchers expect to always find it when they look for it (Abebe, 2019; Spyrou, 2018). To move away from the transformative powers of agency and instead of trying to gain an understanding of how agency works, a shift is needed in the way that agency is conceptualized. Instead of focusing on whether or not children have agency and if this agency is active or passive, the focus should rather be on the when, where and how children agency happens (Spyrou, 2018). To gain a better understanding of this, the constraints that often influence and shape the lives of children need to be taken into account, as well as how children navigate these contexts. (Abebe, 2019).

Types of agency

In this thesis, it has been acknowledged that children have agency. Yet, there are multiple ways to theorize agency. The different ways are not exclusive, instead they can complement each other. The ones mentioned below will all be used simultaneously to theorize and explain the data in the analysis. By highlighting different types of agency, more aspects and perspectives can be discussed. The four types of agency that will be used to talk about the data in this thesis are; agency as a continuum, agency as interdependence, thick and thin agency and everyday agency. All four will be briefly explained in this section.

Agency as a continuum: Agency consists out of children's individual capacities, competencies and activities. Children use these to navigate the context and positions of their everyday lives. They use their agency to fulfill expectations as well as achieving both individual and collective choices. These choices and actions influence and transform their daily and future lives (Abebe, 2019). The tension between individual and collective interests makes for a constant negotiation between the child and the people surrounding the child, such as families and communities. Therefore, it can be

concluded that children's experiences of agency depend on the people they are with, where they are located and what they are doing. This can entail that children can experience agency in some areas of their lives while not in others. Tisdall and Punch (2012) argue that there is enough evidence that children are 'potentially competent social actors' but that the limitations they face in their everyday lives should be considered, for sometimes agency is not possible. They argue that children's agency is in some contexts perceived as negative, challenging or problematic. The way that agency is perceived and the cultural expectations of child agency is influenced by the different contexts and experiences that children encounter and the changing amounts of interdependence-dependence (Abebe, 2019).

Agency as interdependence: The context and relationships in a child's life influence the child's experiences of agency. Interdependent agency concerns the intergenerational relationships and how they play out in daily life (Abebe, 2019). The relationships the child influences how they exercise their agency. Examples of these relationships are relationships with siblings, caregivers and peers. Especially in cultures in which the collective is of higher importance than individual needs, children will have a bigger desire to sustain solidarity within their family and an interdependent life, rather than fulfilling individual needs and interests (Abebe, 2019). This is influenced by the cultural and social context in which children grow up. In many African countries, children's agency is shaped by care, obligation and reciprocity. The relationships between children and adults are constantly negotiated and evolving. Children's agency is based on this notion of interdependence, which does not mean that children have no individual agency while being dependent (Abebe, 2019). Instead, there are different values and norms that influence the children's aim for exercising their agency, these values and norms are based on the context in which a child grows up.

Thick and Thin agency: A way of conceptualizing the contextual influences on the child's agency is through 'thick and thin agency'. Klocker (2007) talks about thick and thin agency as a way of understanding children's constrained agency in different contexts. Structures, contexts and relationships can enlarge or constrain children's agency. Thick agency are the children's decisions and actions in an environment in which the children are presented with many choices and options. These choices and possibilities can possibly improve the living conditions for them. Thin agency,

on the other hand, are the decisions and everyday actions of children in highly restricted contexts in which the children's options and possibilities are limited (Klocker, 2007; Abebe, 2019). In the context of thin agency, which includes the children's home, children develop personal strategies. In adverse situations agency is embedded in developing resilience to cope with these difficult situations (Abebe, 2019). This resilience to cope with adversity on a daily basis is called 'everyday agency' (Payne, 2012).

Everyday agency: Children who are not fully provided in their material and emotional needs are considered to face adversity on a daily basis. These children have been and are perceived in different ways in research. When focusing on the rights-based approach for example, these children are perceived as vulnerable and in need of help. With the growing importance of agency in Childhood Studies, the focus has shifted from vulnerable to resilient. Many studies focus on the agency that children express in the face of adversity, where they are seen as survivors and competent actors who fight a daily struggle to exist (Payne, 2012). Payne (2012) describes a form of agency which aims to move beyond the approach that connects agency with coping, resilience and competency; everyday agency. She argues that children see their expressions of agency, in difficult situations, not as something extraordinary but rather as a part of everyday life (Payne, 2012). Everyday agency focuses on the expressions of agency in the children's everyday lives. To understand how children organize and make sense of their daily lives in such stressful circumstances, one has to start with listening to the children. In the second analysis chapter, the everyday agency of the children in the children's home will be further explored. This will be guided by the stories and experiences that these young children shared and the ways in which they seem to make sense of their situations and deal with the constraints of daily life.

Coping strategies

To understand the way that children handle their everyday situations, it can be useful to not only look at their agency but also on the cognitive and behavioral efforts they make to cope with these situations. In order to gain a more profound understanding of the coping of children, it can be helpful to apply concepts of both the research field of Childhood Studies as well as elements of the research field of developmental psychology. By acknowledging their agency and see how they apply their agency through their coping, it allows for a broader understanding.

Coping is an active and purposeful process for children to handle and soften the effect that facing adversity has on them (Curry & Russ, 1985). Children are, due to their youthfulness, lack of power and dependency, among the most severely affected by adversity (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Often, the children are forced to rely on their own abilities and capacities to cope with their situation (Boyden & Mann, 2005). When this is done effectively, children will be able to adapt to the adversity and the new situation that they find themselves in (Curry & Russ, 1985). When children are able to positively adapt and overcome this adversity, then one speaks of resilience (Skovdal & Daniel, 2012). For now, the focus will be on the way that the children cope and deal with the hardship they have faced and their current situation. Due to the physical and mental limitations of their current situation in the children's home, the children mainly apply cognitive coping strategies. These cognitive coping strategies give insight into the children's thoughts, self-statements and wishes (Curry & Russ, 1985). Additionally, the children make use of social contacts such as their peers, with whom they can develop and experience attitudes, skills and values (Boyden & Mann, 2005). These ways of coping are not only used to cope and adapt, through these strategies children manage stressful situations and defend themselves against painful experiences (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Boyden and Mann (2005) describe that 'dealing with distressing experiences involves making sense of those experiences; assimilating and processing fear, grief, or anger; and finding ways of adapting, overcoming or removing difficulties.' (Boyden & Mann, 2005, p.17). By using their agency to cope with their experiences and to interact with and use the social resources available to them, children can be seen as competent and active 'copers' (Skovdal, 2011).

Rights-oriented approach

There are multiple and different legal frameworks that affect the children, these different frameworks influence and determine the conditions of children's daily circumstances. There are three conventions and laws that apply to these children in particular. Those are the UNCRC (1989), the ACRWC (1990) and the Children's Act 38 (2005). These different rights-documents will be explained in the following section, as well as how they apply and affect the children in the children's home.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and entered into force in 1990 (Verhellen, 1998). The convention is nearly

universally ratified, with the exception of the USA, therefore it is the most ratified convention existing (Beazley et al., 2009). By recognizing the UNCRC, one recognizes the status of children as active right holders, no matter their age, origin, religion, etc. (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013). The need for children's rights was based on a shared belief that children were in need of extra protection (Beazley, et al., 2009). The UNCRC was created both to recognize that children have human rights, as well as adding special rights for children (Sandberg, 2015). The UNCRC consists out of 54 articles. The first 41 articles define the rights of children and the obligations that state parties have to ensure these rights. The final 13 Articles are regarding the procedures and provisions that State Parties should make to ensure the implementation of these rights (Verhallen, 1998). In 1990 the ACRWC (1990) was adopted with the aim to keep the spirit of the UNCRC while adapting with special provisions guided by the specific African context (Ekundayo, 2015). In the preamble of the ACRWC (1990) it states '*noting with concern that the situation of most African children, remains critical due to the unique factors in their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger, and on account of the child's physical and mental immaturity he/she needs special safeguard and care.*'

The ACRWC (1990) can be seen as an adaptation of the UNCRC (1989) to the African continent. In large amount the ACRWC is similar to the UNCRC, but there are also instances where one provides more protection to children than the other. For example when it concerns the best interest of the child, this is *a* primary consideration in the UNCRC and *the* primary consideration in the ACRWC. Additionally, the ACRWC (1990) is more sensitive and explicit about issues distinctive to an African context (Ekundayo, 2015). The African charter challenges traditional African views that are perceived to be in conflict with the rights of the child such as parental obligations towards their children, child marriage and children born out of wedlock. The ACRWC is looser when it comes to the term child, by stating that every child below the age of 18 is considered a child instead of allowing other laws to decide this when a child is considered a child (ACRWC, 1990, Article 2; UNCRC, 1989, Article 1). Additionally, the ACRWC (1989) is stricter when it comes to child soldiers. One of the biggest differences is that the ACRWC expresses the recognition that children have responsibilities towards their family and community, as described in Article 31 of the ACRWC (1990) (Ekundayo, 2015).

Though there are differences, it remains that both the UNCRC and the ACRWC share the key principles of non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, children's participation and the survival and development of the child. These key principles are often used to categorize children's rights, for mainly the UNCRC, into *the three P's*: Provision, protection and participation. The rights to provision include children's rights to goods and services, which does not only include basic necessities such as shelter, water and food, but also education and health care (Habashi, Wright & Hathcoat, 2012). The protection rights are linked to freedom of discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking, labor and armed conflict. The rights to protection are closely linked to the right to provision, meaning that both should be present for children to reach their full potential (Habashi et al., 2012). The final rights include the participation rights, which state that children have a right to participate in decisions that impact their own lives. This right follows from the belief that children are full human beings who have the right to meaningful participation. For participation, children need a safe environment and their participation should not endanger their well-being (Habashi, et al., 2012).

By looking at the provision, protection and participation rights, information can be gained that will give a deeper understanding of the lives of the children, it gives a lens through which one can look at their lives, and it adds a different perspective. Meaning, the agency of children is not only seen as the outcome of active social actors but also by being the subjects of rights (Beazley, et al., 2009). Together the UNCRC, ACRWC and the Children's act 38 of 2005 (see chapter 2), the South-African children's act, create the legal framework in which children grow up. Consulting the different conventions and legislations make a more culturally sensitive rights-oriented approach. A critique to the UNCRC and ACRWC is the little power the Committees have in terms of enforceability (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). The Committees can request reports and information, they can interrogate civil servants and politicians and embarrass governments in the reports, but they have no tools for international enforcement (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Therefore it is important to stay aware of these limitations. Ratifying the Convention is more of a moral obligation and promise of the State Party to take all the necessary steps to improve and ensure the rights of children (Verhellen, 1998). This means that it does not guarantee the children the rights that are stated in the UNCRC but it does mean closer, international, observation and monitoring and the determination of improvement.

In the analysis the rights that concern vulnerable children in particular will be discussed as well as the conflicts between different rights. There is a tension between certain rights that concern these children that face adversity which leaves it up for discussion what the best interest of the child is.

Institutionalization

The aim of this thesis is to understand how children experience their lives in a children's home. Yet, preferably children would not grow up in a children's home in the first place. The UNCRC and the ACRWC state '*Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding*' (UNCRC, 1989, p.1; ACRWC, 1990). Children should, preferably, grow up in their own home with their own family, in a place where they are surrounded by the physical care, love and affection that is given by their parents and other family members (Bailey, 2012). Unfortunately, this is not always possible. When alternative care has to be found for a child, an institution should be the last option according to the Children's Act 38 (2005). Many institutions focus on the material assistance of the children in 'need' rather than the psychosocial support they need after being separated from their parents and the hardship they have experienced previously (Bailey, 2012). Next to physical and psychological care, children also need love, attention and an attachment figure with whom they can develop a secure relationship. Yet, this notion of individual attention and secure relationships is often missing from institutionalized care. Many children who grow up in children's homes experiences difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships later in life because of this lack of individual attention and insecure attachment (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010). Additionally, children who grew up in institutionalized care have a small network of people and little life skills to help them establish a life for themselves (Abebe, 2012). This can possibly be explained by the protected and isolated environment in which they grew up, a place of limited mobility and constant supervision, to secure and protect the children.

This type of environment has been described by Goffman (1961a) as a 'total institution'. He classifies orphan care among the first type of a total institution; institutions that are established to care for people that are felt to be incapable and harmless. Goffman defines a total institution, such as the children's home, in the following way 'A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society

for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.’ (Goffman, 1961a, p. XXI). Goffman (1961b) explains that people usually experience different aspects of life, such as sleep, play and work, on different locations and with a variety of people; children go to school with their classmates, play sports with their teammates, play outside with their friends and eat and sleep at home with their family. In total institutions, the barriers between these different aspects of daily life get blurred. Many, if not all, aspects of daily life happen within the institution, with the same people and under the same authority. Instead of creating barriers between the different aspects of daily life, this creates barriers between life in the institution and the outside world. Often these barriers are quite visible through fences, gates and locked doors (Goffman, 1961b). This is the main difference between the two groups in the total institution, described by Goffman as inmates and staff. The inmates are the managed group who typically live in the institution and are restricted in their access and contact with the world outside of the institution. The supervisory staff usually work their shift after which they continue to go home, where they are socially integrated into society (Goffman, 1961a). These main observations have led to four central characteristics of a total institution

1. ‘All aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority
2. Each phase of the member’s daily activity will be carried out in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together
3. All phases of the day’s activities are tightly scheduled [...]
4. The contents of the various enforced activities are brought together as part of a single overall rational plan [...] to fulfill the official aims of the institution’

Goffman, 1961, p.314

Individually, some of these aspects can be found in other places than total institutions as well. ‘None of these elements... seems entirely exclusive to total institutions, and none seems shared by every one of them. What is shared and unique about total institutions is that each exhibits many items in this family of attributes to an intense degree.’ (Goffman, 1961a). Goffman (1961a) exemplifies how the different individual aspects can be seen in daily life, yet he also explains how this does not qualify as a total institution. He explains that different aspects of life can happen in

the same place, such as workers who have lunch at work in the cafeteria, yet, special care is taken to ensure the ordinary lines of authority do not extend there.

Similar, a stay-at-home parent might spend many hours and many spheres of life in the same surroundings, but is not surrounded by a large batch of similar others during this entire time (Goffman, 1961a). In the opposite, schoolchildren will spend a lot of time in surroundings of their peers following a tight schedule, but not all spheres of their lives will take place at school.

Finally, the bureaucratic and systematic way of handling the needs of many people at the same time is one of the key characteristics of total institutions.

Goffman (1961) describes the limitation in space, the constant supervision, the strict routines, the collectiveness and the official aim as the main characteristics of institutional life. When institutions possess these characteristics Goffman classifies them as total institutions. Goffman's findings and conceptualization of total institutions are widely accepted, but they are also being nuanced. Davies (1989) tries to distinguish the variety and differences between different kinds of institutions. He does this by assessing the degree of closure and the purpose of the institution. The degree of closure is divided into three scales; closed, intermediate and open. This degree of closure depends on the ability to enter voluntarily and to exit freely. The purpose of the institution is also divided into three branches; external task to perform, end in itself and transmogrification. The external task refers to places of work. The end in itself is often to place them away from society in a radically different life. Transmogrification seeks to transform people, for example by educating them (Davies, 1989). Davies (1989) places orphanages between end in itself and transmogrification with an intermediate degree of closure. Based on the young age of the children in the children's home, six years or younger, the closure in this particular children's home could also be seen as fully closed instead of an intermediate degree of closure. Davies (1989) also introduces levels of compliance; Coercive, Normative and Remunerative. Coercive power is power by force and fear. Remunerative power is power by reward such as money or other benefits. Normative power is power through intrinsic rewards (Etzioni, 1975 as described by Lunenburg, 2012). Davies (1989) classified orphanages as under remunerative power. This might be for the reason that children gain an upbringing and a safer situation from being in the home. Yet the power is also, partly, carried out by force, meaning the children have to listen and follow what is being told. Therefore, it seems more fitting to place orphanages between coercive and remunerative power.

Summary

In this chapter, the different theories that create the foundation for the analysis have been explained and discussed. This thesis is written from a Childhood Studies perspective (James & Prout, 1990). From this perspective, the actor-oriented approach, with a special focus on agency, is the most important one for the analysis. The importance of the cultural, social and relational context has been discussed in relation to agency. Agency will be a recurring topic throughout all three analyses. Additionally to the Childhood Studies perspective, the rights-oriented approach is also of importance for the analysis chapters. Both the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990) have been discussed, and compared. The rights of children will be discussed mainly during the first and last analysis chapter. In this section the different perspectives and approaches will be questioned. The final concept that has been brought up is the theory of total institutions as described by Goffman (1961). The main characteristics have been described and will be further explored in the first analysis chapter. The way that the characteristics of total institutions are present in the children's home will be exemplified as well as a discussion about the implication this has on the lives of children.

Methods chapter - *methodology, methods and ethics*

The researchers understanding of childhood and the ideas about status and abilities of children in society has implications for the relationship between the adult researcher and the child participant. It influences methodological consideration, which in turn have influence on the design, methods, analysis and ethics of the research project (Punch, 2002a; Christensen & James, 2008). The conceptualization of children creates therefor, in a way, the base for the further research process. In the following chapter, I will describe my epistemological viewpoint to clarify my process of the chosen approach, methods and methodology.

Research with children

For a long time children were seen as objects in research, in which the adult interpretation of the child created the data for the research. The researcher was seen as the expert on children and on how to research them. Research ought to be an objective science where children's actions, thoughts and interpretations were compared with the 'normal' (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Children were seen by most adults as human-becomings and therefore the main research interest was to learn about their position or stage on their journey of becoming an adult (James et al., 1998). To change the position of children in science and research, the theoretical framework that influences children's representation needed to be re-examined (Christensen, 2004). This re-examination and change of the social status of children happened in the early 1990's, with the arrival of the sociology of Childhood as explained in chapter 3. (James & Prout, 1990). This, what some call, paradigm had implications for the way children were seen and treated in research. For a long time childhood and children's lives were researched through the views and understandings of adult caretakers, the shift involved repositioning children and childhood as subjects or participants in research instead of objects of research (Christensen & James, 2008). When children are seen and treated as social and cultural actors, as active participants in research and when their feelings, perspectives and views are valued as genuine and valid, it has potential to result in significant knowledge gains. It opened-up new lines of research and added new perspectives, the one of children themselves (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; Christensen & James, 2008).

Additionally, listening to children and acknowledging their perspectives, feelings and thoughts about matters concerning them is in their right according to the UNCRC.

Though the UNCRC does not literally state that children have the right to be properly researched, it can be interpreted from a combination of provisions from other articles as well as the implication this has for right-oriented research as explained by Beazley et al., (2009) and Ennew and Plateau (2004, p. 29):

- Article 12: children's opinions and views on matters that affect them should be listened to and given due weight.
 - Their perspectives and opinions should be fundamental to research.
- Article 13: children have the right and freedom to express themselves, in a way of their own choice.
 - The use of methods that suits the children to express themselves.
- Article 36: children have the right to be protected from all types of exploitation that are not addressed in other articles.
 - Children must not be harmed or exploited through research.
- Article: 3.3: children have the right to the highest possible standards when being used in work with children.
 - Research must be done according to the highest scientific and ethical standards and be carefully supervised.

Consequently, treating children as social actors places new responsibilities on the adult researchers. It is their responsibility to enable their social participation according to their interests and ways of communication. Additionally, researchers must acknowledge and reflect on the status and power differences that shape research for children and with children (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

In my research, I talked with young children about their lives at the children's home. My aim was to learn about their own perspectives, stories and views to get a better understanding about the way that children themselves experience growing up in a children's home. By having an interest in how they experience life, I decided to perceive them as experts about their lives, as knowledgeable young people with their own feelings and values.

Qualitative research

Research in the field of Childhood Studies involves mainly, but not exclusively, qualitative research. This is in agreement with the philosophy that children should be heard which is especially important in the actor-oriented approach, which has been explained in the theory chapter. Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) state that ‘Only through listening and hearing what children say and paying attention to the ways in which they communicate with us will progress be made towards conducting research with, rather than simply on, children’ (p.7). Qualitative research is seen as a method that is well suited when studying personal experiences, understanding, reflections and reasoning. This approach is helpful, though not a guarantee, to get a better understanding of the children’s experiences and perceptions about their life in a children’s home. Qualitative research allows the children to tell and explain their own feelings, thoughts and views on their own lives.

Research setting, access and gatekeepers

The research in this study took place in a colored children’s home in a middle-income neighborhood in Cape Town, South-Africa. This neighborhood is considered to be a colored neighborhood. Consequently, all workers in the children’s home were colored and the colored culture was dominant in the children’s home. The home cares for around fifty young children. The children are cared for by caregivers, teachers, social workers, volunteers, cleaning staff and office staff such as the directors and coordinators⁵. The children spend nearly all their time inside the gates of the children’s home, it is both their home, school and crèche.

In order to do research with institutionalized children, one needs to get access. Ennew et al. (2009) describe that it can be more difficult to reach children in children’s homes, because the adults can keep the children under strict control or the children might fear talking.

To reach a children’s home I sent out a handful of requests to homes in different locations on the African continent. All the homes responded, yet some explained that they did not have many children under 6 years of age or that the young children did not speak English yet and a translator would have been necessary. The children’s home in Cape Town responded that they had 50 children under the age of 6 and that all children spoke English. The language that is spoken in the

⁵ The children referred to the staff members by their first name. For the sake of privacy, I will call all members of staff ‘aunties’ in this thesis. A commonly used term in South-Africa.

children's home is Afrikaans, but because of the constant presence of different international volunteers the children are proficient in English. The children's home did, compared to many others that were found online, have all the paperwork in place and visible for everyone, papers such as governmental inspections etc. I found it of high importance that the children's home had this because this meant that they took the paperwork seriously and that the children would have their papers as well. This was essential because it showed that the children were placed at the children's home on court order and that the children's home was officially responsible for the children and therefore in a position to give consent on their parents' behalf.

In order to do research with young children one has to get consent from the gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are adults surrounding the child who give access to a research field (Masson, 2000). They may allow a researcher access to a physical place, giving permission to conduct research in a specific way and often decide whether the children are allowed to be included (Homan, 2001). Gatekeepers, ideally, have a positive and protective function towards the children, they have to protect the children from any harm that a research project might cause them (Masson, 2000). After establishing the first contact with the director, she showed interest in the research topic, asked critical questions and presented the study to the board. The board agreed after I had sent a copy of my passport and a certificate of good behavior. This showed me that they do not let everyone casually enter the home. Upon arrival I had to sign documents on how I could and should behave around the children, a promise to not bring people to the premises as well as an agreement for not taking pictures. Additionally, I spoke to the social worker and director upon arrival, gave them a written explanation about the research and answered any questions they had, these questions mainly regarded practical concerns. Additionally, there was a meeting with the other relevant staff members (such as other teachers and caregivers) to whom I could explain my research, how it would impact them and the position that I would take. All the adults gave me permission and allowed me to do research with the children, an example of the consent form can be found in the appendix. Next to the permission of the director and other adults that care for the children I have contacted the organization that helps the Home with the financial side. They were supporting and wished me good luck.

Participants

The home is divided into different age groups. Based on the topic of my research and the methods I wanted to use, I have chosen to work with the children in the oldest age group, the 4 to 6 year old children. The classes created an already-made distinction between the children, one that I could continue to use and easily explain to the younger children.

The class consisted in the beginning of eight children, six girls and two boys. After two weeks, two more children turned 4 and were transferred to this class, one girl and one boy. The boy that arrived later was new at the children's home, he still felt a bit unease and did not speak English yet, therefore I decided to not include him in the research. To conclude, I had nine participants, seven girls and two boys. The youngest one just turned 4, the oldest one just turned 6. The children had been at the home for a varied length of time, the longest being 4 years, the shortest being 2 months.

Consent

Children in institutionalized care might feel obliged to participate in research. It is important that children participate voluntarily, that they know what the research entails and are aware of the possibility to stop at any time, this is called informed consent (Masson, 2000). When doing social research, informed consent is a standard ethical issue. To gain informed consent, the participants have to be informed about the nature and implications of the research and voluntarily decide to participate (Homan, 2001). When working with very young children it can be a bit more complicated, one must ask if these young children fully understand the demand of the research (Warin, 2011). Some argue that children below the age of 7 years are too young and not competent enough to give consent for research, they argue that consent should only be obtained from the gatekeepers in these cases (Nicholson, 1986). Not all agree; Thompson (1992) argues that the ability to give consent should not be based on the competencies or age of the child but on the context, nature and interaction of the task. Thompson (1992) believes that researchers should explain the research and the role of the child within that research in an age-appropriate way, if that is being done that children are capable of understanding the basic elements of research. Cocks (2006) explains that assent can be used for children who are not fully capable of giving informed consent. Assent is a trust-based relationship between the child participant and the adult researcher. When the child trusts the researcher and accepts the researcher's presence, then assent is present.

This requires the researcher to constantly be sensitive to the child's signals and their actions and reactions towards the researcher (Cocks, 2006). Morrow and Alderson (2011) argue that assent alone is not enough, they believe that all children should be directly informed and asked for their consent. They explain that assent means 'at least not refusing', which does not necessarily mean that they do approve as well.

For my research I agreed with those who believed that consent should be given by small children as well, as described above. I informed the children in an age-appropriate manner about the research verbally by telling them the following: *'I am here to learn about your lives. I want to learn what you like, what you do, who your friends are, those kinds of things. I want to learn that by talking to you, by writing things down, by you making me drawings and by playing different games with you. Do you want to teach me about your lives? You don't have to, only if you would like to.'* I let them repeat it back to me and gave them a simplified consent form on which they signed in their own ways (Ennew et al., 2009). An example of the consent form can be found in the appendix. Additionally, I would remind them of my research aim before each method, explain the method and asked the children if they were still interested in participating.

Considering the age of children, I have used assent to safeguard the process consent. Process consent is described by Warin (2011) as a process in which the researcher checks at each stage if the participants still wants to be part of the research. If children did not longer approve of my presence by continuously physically removing themselves from my presence or by saying so, I would acknowledge and respect their withdrawal of consent. During my fieldwork this did not happen. Children would say that they wanted to return to playing during the data collection or that they did not want to go with me at that time, but the following day they would ask to participate again. Additionally, they continued to approach me and seeking contact. Therefore, I saw their refusal as temporary refusal instead of withdrawal of consent.

Confidentiality

One of the ways of protecting the children is by assuring confidentiality. The children were told that the information they shared with me would not be shared with any of the adults, unless there would have been a reason for concern (Morrow & Alderson, 2011). In normal situations the information shared with the researcher was not be told to anyone else, including the members of staff. The collected data was kept separate, where it could not be accessed by anyone other than

the researcher. It will not be possible to trace information back to a specific child; names have been changed, and very specific details have been left out or slightly altered. A possible dilemma regarding confidentiality is when children tell about abuse or danger that they are experiencing or have experienced. When a researcher suspects abuse or danger, they have a moral obligation to protect the children from serious risks or harm. When such a situation occurs, confidentiality needs to be broken, it is important that the researcher discusses the strategy for this with the child before taking any action (Morrow & Richards, 1996). At one point in my research confidentiality was broken, and it was a situation in which I suspected trauma from sexual abuse. The child in question did not seem distressed but told worrying stories. I asked her if it was ok if I shared this story with the teacher, on which she agreed. I voiced my concerns to the teacher.

Privacy

During this research I asked children about their experiences in their lives prior to their arrival at the children's home and during their time in the children's home. Abebe (2009) explains that he found himself 'treading a fine line between encouraging the children to tell me their stories and yet protecting them from either disclosing something they may not have wished for or damaging their fragile coping mechanisms' (Abebe, 2009, p. 457). There are rights that protect children's privacy and safeguards them from unlawful interference in their personal and family life (Alderson, 2008). A researcher has to strike a balance by respecting their privacy while simultaneously respecting their rights to be heard.

When a child is asked about their family, it is possible that they share personal information from third parties that was told to them in a trust relationship (Homan, 2001). To reduce the chances of the children accidentally sharing sensitive information, I tried to limit my question to their personal experiences that regarded their own lives and their lives in connection to others instead of questioning them about the lives of their families and friends.

Validity and reliability

Punch (2002a) describes that young children are sometimes not thought to be truthful, that it is questioned if they can be believed. She argues that children sometimes lie, as well as adults, for reasons such as fear, shame or to try and impress the researcher. Additionally, children might be less capable of distinguishing reality from fantasy. However, it is argued that this is their

perspective on the world and therefore valid and reliable when this is the goal of the research (Punch, 2002a).

My research is focused on the perspectives and experiences of the children. I am not looking for the 'real truth' but for the truth as they experience it. Therefore, the way that the children describe their experiences and perspectives, even if mixed with fantasy, is the valid and reliable data I am looking for. To gain better understanding of what the children meant I would occasionally ask adults for further explanation. They could give me more situational information which gave me the tools to understand the children better. Children find it sometimes harder to remember the context information or to see the relevance of this.

An aspect that does influence the validity and reliability more for children than it does for adults is the power imbalance between the researcher and participant (Punch, 2002a). Therefore, it is important that the researcher invests in a trust-relationship and makes a deliberate decision on the role that will be taken on.

Research role

An important issue when working with children is the power imbalance that exists between adult researchers and child participants. Morrow and Richards (1996) describe it as the biggest ethical challenge that researchers face when doing research with children. Many researchers have attempted different approaches to deal with this challenge and to reduce the power imbalance. Corsaro (1996) suggests the role of the 'atypical-adult'. He believes that researchers can win the acceptance of children by not acting like an adult. Abebe (2009) discuss the 'friendly' role when establishing a relationship with the child participants. By not exerting authority over the children and by building a trust relationship with the children that could be seen as similar to a friendship, he tried to minimize the power imbalance. He created these relationships by treating the children with respect, avoiding to impose discipline over the children and by expressing positive feelings. Mandell (1991) suggests yet a different approach, the one of the 'least adult' role. She believes that a researcher can change appearance, language and behavior in order to minimize the power imbalance and to become one of the children, to the extent of which this is possible. Finally, Christensen (2004) and Mayall (2000) describe the role of the 'unusual type' of adult. Christensen (2004, p.174) states 'An 'unusual type' of adult [is] one who is seriously interested in understanding how the social worlds looks from children's perspective but without making a

dubious attempt to be a child'. She showed the children her genuine interest by making listening to them a priority, she describes this as the act of looking and listening attentively. She observed the children in their interaction with each other and others, she listened to their conversations and she was determined to not be interrupted or distracted when a child was talking to her. I have chosen to follow the approach of the unusual type of adult as described by Christensen (2004). With a background in education and pedagogy it would be an unnatural, and possibly impossible, transition for me to let go of my adult characteristics and behavior. Yet, I did enter the field with a genuine interest in the children's views and opinions. I established relationships with them that were based on my determination to listen attentively to them, and by making them my priority during my time in the children's home. Simultaneously I tried to avoid the behavior of the typical adults at the home and therefore I tried to not correct them or tell them what to do. The children picked up on this quickly, stating 'you are not like normal teachers and aunties.' I believe that this role helped me create a close relationship with the children.

Research approaches

Following the choices of valuing children as active participants in research, as social actors in their own right and making the decision to use qualitative methods, there remains a difference on how a researcher thinks children should be approached and treated in research. This has to do with the status the child is given by the researcher regarding methods and methodological choices. Some researchers such as Solberg (2002) believe that 'ignorance of age' is important when doing research with children. Assumptions about the age or status of children should be avoided in order to get a clear understanding of these aspects and to gain knowledge about the shaping of childhood in society (Solberg, 2002). Researchers that follow this school of thought usually employ the same methods and approaches as they would have with adults (Punch, 2002a).

Other researchers, such as James (2001) believe that a different behavior and set of ethics is preferred when working with children. These researchers often prefer ethnographic research, often in the form of participatory observation, although this type of research is also practiced by researchers with different thoughts on children's abilities and status. James (2001) explains that ethnography allows to see the children as competent interpreters of the social world, engage with their own views and let their perceptions be accessible to the researcher.

A third view that researchers take is that research with children is similar to research with adults but that they possess different competencies that should be taken into account (James et al., 1998). Researchers who follow this school of thought often use ‘child-friendly’ methods, methods based on the children’s capacities, interests and context (Punch, 2002a). Punch (2002a) describes that innovative approaches such as task-based methods are more sensitive to children’s competencies and interests and therefore enables a better relation between the child participant and the adult researcher.

In my research, I have used the final approach. Punch (2002a) explains that using ‘child-friendly’ methods can be particularly useful for research with younger children, that may have very different characteristics from adults. Based on the age and the status of children in the particular setting of my research, I have decided that this approach would be the best suited one.

Research setting

To further ensure the minimization of power imbalances and the pressure for children to give the ‘correct’ answer, the researcher has to consider the implications of the research setting (Punch, 2002a). The children’s home is an adult dominated place in which the children have less control. The children have a strict schedule that they have to follow. During each moment of the day the children are expected to listen and behave, all under the constant supervision of the adults in charge. When conducting research in a room that is adult controlled the children might feel uncomfortable. At the same time they might not like the researcher to invade their own spaces either (Punch, 2002a). In order to make the children feel comfortable in the setting, I let them decide where they wanted to go, most of the time. This gave them power to decide and ensured that research was conducted in a place that made them feel comfortable.

Multiple methods

When a research is based on task-based approaches, it can be beneficial to use multiple methods. It is not only a way to set the weaknesses of one method against the strengths of others, it is also a way to manage the children’s different abilities and preferences, a way to prevent boredom and keep the children interested, to prevent bias from over relying on one method and a way to triangulate (Abebe, 2009; Punch, 2002b; Punch, 2002a).

Clark (2001) developed a framework to listen to very young children using all the principles stated in the epistemological viewpoint given in this chapter. This framework is called the Mosaic approach. This approach is designed for children under 5 years of age and describes the principles of the activity of listening to young children (Clark, 2001). Morrow and Alderson (2011) summarized this approach into 5 key principles

Multi-methods; to recognize the different voices of children

Participatory; valuing children as the experts of their own lives

Reflexive; including the children and adults in the reflection of the data

Adaptable; can be used in a variety of settings

Focused; on the experiences and views of children themselves

For my research, I have followed this approach, to the extent to which it was possible. I have used multiple methods with visual stimuli in order to get an understanding of the children's views and voices. Ennew et al. (2009) describe that visual methods can explore the way that children see the world and the place that they live in, it creates a possibility for them to express themselves as a response to a picture, drawing or other type of visual aid. They continue that visual methods can be particularly useful when engaging in research with young children and sensitive topics. During the process I have valued the children as experts about and in their lives and therefore used a participatory approach. I entered the field with an interest to learn about their lives and checked which methods would be appropriate to use. I reflected on the drawings they made and other activities with the children by asking them open questions and encouraging them to elaborate. Adults are the meaning-makers, but they have to make sense or interpret what the child might have said by listening, understanding, discussing and reflecting with the child (Clack, 2001). By reflecting with the children, there was room for adaptation; adaptation of my interpretation, the use of the methods, the visual stimuli, location etc. During the entire process the focus lay on the children, their views, their perspectives and their stories.

Methods

The children that were part of my research are considered vulnerable children. Some researchers define all children as vulnerable, based on their lack of social, physical and economic power. Additionally, some children are exposed to situations that increase their vulnerability, these are

children that are in need of extra protection (Ennew et al., 2009; Sandberg, 2015). Due to the situation that these children are in and their specific vulnerabilities, they have to rely for a greater extent on others for protection and provision (Sandberg, 2015). Questions about their past or current lives can cause the children distress, embarrassment or other negative emotions (Morrow & Alderson, 2012). Simultaneously, their vulnerability caused by the situation they are in makes them capable actors in their own lives, they know their situation from within and the challenges that come along with it (Sandberg, 2015). Their vulnerabilities and capabilities were taken into consideration when deciding on the methods.

In research, speech is the dominant means of communication between the researcher and participants (Horgan, 2016). It is important to be aware of the differences in language between children of a young age and an adult researcher. Children may have a more limited vocabulary or may use different words than adults do (Punch, 2002a). Especially taking into consideration that English, the language of communication in this research project, is not the mother-tongue for neither the participants nor the researcher. Visual methods can reduce the risk of researchers missing or misunderstanding certain points and can result into new perspectives. Moreover, it is important to stay aware of the cultural and linguistic differences in meaning or the different interpretation by the researcher and participant of the same image (Ennew et al., 2009). Beneficially, visual stimuli can make the communication with the adult more concrete and understandable for children than verbal communication alone can (Scott, 2001). Another aspect to keep in mind when choosing methods suitable for young children is the lack of experience that most children, and vulnerable children in particular, have with adults valuing their views and showing an interest in their opinions and views. Additionally, young children may have a more limited attention span and they tend to prefer visual tasks out of familiarity and because they can more easily relate to an image than to verbal expressions (Punch, 2002a; Lahikainen, Kirmanen & Taimalu, 2003).

With these challenges in mind, and the determination to reduce them, while simultaneously gaining the children's views and perspectives in the most comfortable way for them, I have adapted some methods during the process and decided to leave some out as well. One of the methods that I decided to leave out was the guided tour through the children's home. After trying it out with two of the most talkative children, I did not get any other response than the official name for each

room. E.g. when asked if they could tell me something about the dining hall and how they felt there, the answers were among the lines of 'no, we just eat there, that's all I can tell you about it'. The following methods have been used; observation (Tudge and Hogan, 2005), defining, drawing (Angell et al., 2015), mapping (Ennew et al., 2009), ranking (Ennew et al., 2009), play (Ennew et al., 2009) and visual stimulated interviews (Ennew et al., 2009). Additionally, I conducted interviews with the caregivers of the children (Rapley, 2001).

Most of the methods were done with individual children, with the exception of the play method. Punch (2002b) found in her research that children in residential care often prefer individual interviews over group interviews. They appreciate that there was more privacy when there were no other children present. Additionally, children in institutions often have more experience of speaking one-on-one with an unfamiliar adult than children living at home. Therefore children in a children's home might feel more comfortable individually than in groups. In my fieldwork I experienced this as well. In groups, the children are expected to listen and be quiet, individually the children are more expected to be listened to and gain the individual attention that they are unable to get in groups.

Observation

Tudge and Hogan (2005), state that through observation one can learn more about the way that children behave in relation to other people and their environment. The way that young children experience their environment is influenced by the historic time and culture that they grow up in. Observations allows researchers to experience this over time with the children themselves. Emond (2005) explains that field diaries include the thoughts, feelings and interpretations of the researcher, it is also a place for the researcher to write down any theoretical idea. I made notes during the day and wrote a report at the end of the day about the day, my interpretations, ethical considerations that I came across and ideas. I did not use standard observation sheets, instead I used a form of participatory observation by being part of their everyday activities, such as the class time, birthdays, playtime etc.

Defining

The defining of concepts can be seen as a form of open-end interviews. Before I started with any of the other methods, I wanted to have a clear understanding of the way that children define the

concepts of home, family and friends. I believe that it is important to understand the definition of commonly used concepts in research, since children's definitions of this might be very different from the researcher's definition of this concept. I sat down with them and asked, 'what is a family/home/friend'. The children gave very explicit answers and showed to have a clear concept in their minds that did not always meet my concepts or expectations, therefore I think it has been a good starting point.

Drawings

There are many visual and creative research tools, the most common one in research is the drawing tool, and perhaps this is because of the simplicity and availability (Angell et al., 2015). The benefits from drawings are that they can be a non-threatening way to talk about subjects that might be a bit more difficult to discuss. This is because it creates some distance from the subject as well as from the researcher (Angell et al., 2005). When drawing, children have the time to think about what they want to share and the ability to adapt and explain it, the pressure of the adult power relations are therefore less with drawings than for example interviews (Punch, 2002a). Children might not feel the pressure to immediately respond to the research question, it reduces eye-contact between the participant and researcher and the children can express their own views and perspectives. Additionally, drawings are often seen as a creative and fun way to get children more actively involved in research, something that the children enjoy doing (Punch, 2002a; Angell et al., 2005; Ennew et al., 2009). Yet, not all children like drawing and some might feel insecure about their creative abilities (Punch, 2002a). Another difficulty with drawings are the interpretations, the researcher might interpret an image in a very different way than the participant intended it. Therefore, it is always important to let the children explain and ask for clarification, even when it seems self-explanatory (Ennew et al., 2009).

Drawings can be used in research in different ways. Drawings can be used in an exploratory manner, to find out what children find important. It can also be used as a warm-up, an easy way for the children to get used to the researcher before the more difficult activities (Punch, 2002a). Drawings can also be used as part of the methods, described as 'draw, write and tell' by Angell, Alexander and Hunt (2015). In this method children make a drawing, they write about their drawing and then present it to the researcher. The researcher can ask questions for clarification (Angell et al., 2015).

For my own research, I used a combination of the approaches named above. I asked the children to draw the children's home, a fairly open task to explore what they found important and what stood out to them. Additionally, I let them tell me about their drawings and based on the drawings and the children's explanations, I asked follow-up questions.

With the drawings I faced three challenges of significance. The first was that the children loved to draw, but preferred to draw what they wanted instead of drawing what I had asked them to draw. I told the children that if they first drew what I had asked them, then they could draw one for themselves afterwards. During the second drawing the children were often quickly done with it, therefore it was better to start with the one I needed. A second challenge was that all the children wanted to put their names on the picture, due to anonymity this was not possible, I suggested to write it on the back or afterwards, to the dissatisfaction of some. A third challenge I faced was that some children could not or did not want to explain their drawings. They often used words to clarify what everything was on the picture but failed to give an explanation. I could make a guess about what happens on each picture, but that vision would be clouded by my western and adult perspective, as well as being an outsider and therefore not knowing the real intentions. I tried asking the children questions to get a better understanding, if that did not work I would share my vision and check to see if that was correct, they would correct me if I was wrong. I noticed that the drawings made the children feel secure and was a good conversation starter with most children. The children showed pride in their work and later joyfully showed it to the staff members.

Mapping

Mapping was used to get an understanding of the children's views, feelings and experiences in the children's home. Mapping is a way to get a better understanding of how the children feel about the different places, to explore their ideas about daily activities and to comprehend how they use the different areas in space and time in their daily lives (Ennew et al., 2009).

Many rooms were being used or cleaned during the day and therefore it was not practical to walk through the children's home to do the mapping. In order to make the place visual and understandable for young children, I took and printed a picture of each room and lay it out on the floor. Because I was interested in the emotions that children experience in the children's home I asked them to place different emotion cards in a room. The emotions were: happy, angry, sad, excited, scared and loved. I made sure that the emotions was clear and that the children could relate

with the cartoon pictured on the card, I did this by asking them to name the emotions before starting the method.



To minimize negative feelings for the children, I switched between positive and negative emotions. During the method I realized that the positive emotions were sometimes more distressing for the children than the negative ones. For example, when I asked the child where and when he/she felt happy and they could not think of a happy moment. The method often ended with a drawing, to ensure that the children left the room with a happy feeling. During the first data collections, I used more emotion cards but I noticed that the children lost interest half way through. To keep the children interested, I prioritized the emotions that I was most interested in. Similar to the drawing exercise, some children had trouble explaining their choice. I would help them by rephrasing the question and explain the emotion cards again, but would not press the matter if this did not help. One of the girls refused to this method all together, I asked her if she wanted to talk about it instead of mapping her emotions, she agreed to this.

Ranking

Ranking is way to identify the priorities and preferences of children. It is a method for with reading or writing skills are not required and it is often an enjoyable way of organizing a topic (Ennew et al., 2009).

My aim for this method was to get a better understanding of which people the children considered close to them and which not. In order to do this, I printed a picture of all the adults working and volunteering in the children's home as well as all the children from the three oldest groups and siblings in the baby groups (since the children are otherwise not in contact with babies). I placed the picture of the child in the middle and asked them to place the people they like most close to them and those they don't like far away. I did not ask them to rank it in order nor did I call the

⁶ Found on: <https://www.etsy.com/listing/530745468/emotion-cards>

method ranking in their presence, yet some started doing that by themselves. During and after the ranking I asked them to explain why they had placed people at the place they did. When using this method, I was cautious to clearly explain this method to the adults and let them know that the intention of this method was not for them to pick favorites. My interest was in who they felt close with; caregivers, teacher, other children, volunteers etc. I was aware of the, maybe western or adult, sensitivity of this method, it might come across as unnecessarily pressuring the children in showing/voicing preferences. The ranking of people is often not approved of or seen as an embarrassing/awkward task. Yet, in my experience, children seem to have no trouble with it, they simply feel closer to some people than to others and they do not feel shy to voice this. The challenge I experienced with this method was that some of the children did not recognize their teacher in the picture. To avoid drawing special attention to the teacher, I went over almost all the adults with the children before starting the ranking.

Play

Play is a joyful method that triggers the imagination of children and lets them have fun (Alderson, 2008). It is believed that play is a way to reduce the power imbalances. Alderson (2008) describes an example of how children gave more open and honest answers when talking to a teddy bear because they did not feel the same need for politeness and correctness as they do towards adults. I let the children play with doll, in groups of two. The children had access to each their own doll and some clothes and baby products like bottles. I was interested in the role that the children would take upon themselves as well as the 'interaction' they would have with the dolls and their reaction to crying etc. The children also expressed that they really enjoyed this method, I think this has multiple reasons. First of all, play is something that children generally enjoy. Second because they did not often get the chance to play with the dolls, they are in a separate room and there are only two of them. Finally, because an adult took the time to play with them and follow their lead in the imaginative play. They repeatedly asked when they could play there again. The joy of the children is a very positive aspect, yet because they enjoy it so much it is possible that they or a no longer actively aware that they are taking part of a research which could be seen as deceiving. I believe it does not undermine the play method but it is something to stay aware of as research and take appropriate measures when using the play method. I did this by stepping out of the play at certain moments to visibly take notes in my notebook.

I guided the play by introducing it to the children as well as asking questions and playing along. I decided to not grab a doll myself, but let the children lead 'the story' and involving me when they wanted. The playing method has not been the method that has given me most data, but it did show a very different side of their views and stories, their actions became more practical and they took roles upon them that were not necessarily in line with my previous expectations.

Visual stimulus interviews

Ennew et al. (2009) describe interviews as a conversation with purpose. They explain that unstructured interviews are usually done with individual children. The researcher is free to ask any questions as long as the questions follow the theme of the conversation. Unstructured interviews give children more control over the conversation, it allows children to share their views in their own way (Ennew et al., 2009). Winstone et al. (2013) describe that interviewing children can cause difficulties on three levels; a communication level in which children simply not respond to the question or quickly say 'I don't know', a social level on which the power imbalance has a negative effect and on a cognitive level where it is stated that some children are too young for interviews due to cognitive and attention deficits. To overcome these difficulties the interviewing method can be adapted, and in this research that has been done by using visual stimulus. Younger children often find it easier to relate to images than to verbal conversation (Lahikainen et al., 2003). Images can therefore be used as a tool during interviews to stimulate conversation. This is especially beneficial for shy children and when discussing sensitive topics (Ennew et al., 2009). In general, children are not as likely as adults to give long answers, by having a visual stimulus children can be encouraged to expand their response (Punch, 2002b).

Visual stimulus has many of the same benefits as drawings, especially because the drawings of the children were used as the visual stimulus. The benefits of this tool are that children have more control over the conversation, the children have a way of avoiding eye contact, the drawings can be used to support and explain their story and most of the children consider it more fun than 'normal' interviews (Punch, 2002b; Winstone et al., 2013; Lahikainen et al., 2003).

One of the downsides of this methods is that it's more time consuming than standard interviews. Before using this activity the researcher has to be aware to put the attention on the interview and not on the content drawn by the child, that is in this case not the primary source of data (Winstone et al., 2013).

When I did the visual stimulus interviews with the children, I drew a line on a piece of paper and asked the children to draw themselves happy on one side and sad on the other. This created the stepping stone for the rest of the conversation. Based on their drawings I talked with them about moments in which they felt happy and moments in which they felt sad. During the interview the children continued to draw, edit and add things to their drawings, not all related to the conversation. The drawings started as conversation starter and turned into an occupation during the data collection, something to keep the children focused on the topic and the talking and less distracted by other objects and sounds around them. This kept them interested and focused for a longer time, it also seemed like they felt they could talk more freely.



Interviews with adults

I concluded my research by doing interviews with different adults in the children's home. The interviews were semi-structured open-ended interview (Rapley, 2001) in which the teacher, a caregiver and a social worker were independently asked about the emotions of the children. They were asked questions that I had also asked the children; when do you think the children are happy? I was curious what the adult view on this would be. These adults spend many hours per week with the children and experience the children's emotions in a different way than the children themselves do, therefore I found it a valuable additional perspective. The interviews with adults contained different challenges than those with children. The adults wanted to provide me with valuable information and continuously checked if their answer was sufficient, this might be caused by the power imbalance. The power imbalance was complicated, where I was the one asking the

⁷ Example of a drawing made during the interviews. The child was asked to draw herself happy and sad.

questions and entering the children's home as a researcher, the adults in question were older than me, had more work experience and knew more about the particular children than I did. This also created good conversation which led to interesting insights for me.

Ethical considerations

Unfamiliarity

During my fieldwork, I experienced both being the 'outsider' and 'insider' in the different aspects of my research. 'Cross-cultural studies and those where there is a clash of social class often involve participants from very different backgrounds where the researcher cannot be an 'Insider' to all' (Gregory & Ruby, 2011, p. 163). Being an insider or an outsider can take place on different levels. To the culture and the children I was an outsider due to my limited knowledge of the culture, the customs and most everyday activities. Quite easily one can wrongly assume to have an understanding and rightful interpretation (Gregory & Ruby, 2011). To get a better understanding of the knowledge, cultural insights and practices, one needs to use the interpretations and expertise of an insider. I did this by asking the children and the staff to explain things to me. Instead of assuming and interpreting by myself, I tried to use the knowledge of the insiders.

I did find myself to be an insider to the teaching profession. This came with its own complications. I was asked by teachers to give my opinions and advice as a fellow teacher, yet this would feel as betrayal to the children and breaking with my research role. It was, at times, difficult to strike a balance between my former role as teacher and my current role as researcher. At the same time my teaching experiences made me familiar with interaction with children and how to talk to them.

Representation

After conducting the data with the children, it is up to the researcher to analyze the data and write the rapport. During this task, the interpretations and analysis can be clouded by the perspective of the adult researcher. Adults have a tendency to process children's words through their own view of the world (Punch, 2002a).

I do not see a solution for this problem, which will also take part during my research, for I am an adult analyzing the words of children as well as having a clear 'agenda' by entering from a Childhood Studies perspective with a rights-oriented approach. Therefore it is important that I

stayed aware of my position and limitations during the fieldwork and when representing these children in this thesis.

Analysis

The aim of this thesis is to gain knowledge of the child's perspective regarding life in a children's home. The child's perspective looks at children's insider perspectives on their conditions, experiences, perceptions and action. Yet, during the analysis, their perspectives are interpreted and analyzed by the researcher. In order to create a trustworthy interpretation of the child's perspective the researcher needs to be sensitive to the context and the actual situation. Additionally, the researcher must stay aware of their own understanding and child perspective (Söderbäck et al., 2011).

To limit my influence as a researcher on the data I let the data guide the analysis. I did not enter the field, nor the writing process with a clear direction, only the will and aim to learn about how the children experience life in the children's home. In order to give meaning to their experiences and perceptions I read and re-read all their stories and perspectives until they give me an impression of what life in the children's home is like and how they deal with this on a daily basis. The main theories were searched for after the fieldwork had finished in order to ensure that the theory was fitted to and guided by the data. The experiences of the children combined with the interviews of the caregivers and my observations give an idea of what institutional life is like and how this influences the children. Based, nearly solemnly on their shared experiences, is how the children handled this life and how they cope with it on a daily basis. To give voice to the children, without overanalysing it, the second analysis chapter is more descriptive, letting the children explain how their deal with the daily hardship they face. The expressions and experiences of the children are being put in context to give a better understanding and a more trustworthy interpretation. It will not be possible to take the adult voice out of it completely, but I aim, throughout the thesis, to let the data guide the theory, analysis and understanding, instead of the other way around.

Building rapport and research role

As described in the chapter of the research role, I had taken the role of the unusual type of adult upon me as described by Christensen (2004). The unusual type of adult is a role in which the

researcher has a genuine interest in learning how the social world looks from children's perspectives, without making an attempt of being a child. The researcher will then be a social person first before being a professional with a purpose. Compared to the role and approach of Christensen, I had a more active and interfering role during my research project, while still remaining an unusual adult in the eyes of the children and staff. My more active role as researcher emerges from three positions; my own background, the position I was given by other adults and the position I was given by the children. I will briefly describe these different aspects. Ennew et al. (2009) state that respecting children starts by not teaching or commenting on the behavior of participants. They continue that only by not correcting children's mistakes, the researcher can treat them with dignity and respect. I believe that respect is not a matter of agreement. Respect lays for me in the way that the researcher treats the children and when a mistake is seen, to offer them help and explanation. This view on the relationship between adults and children most likely finds its origins in my educational and pedagogy background. Having a history of teaching and caring for young children, my understandings and approaches might slightly differ from those who are used to a research approach towards children. Though I would not treat participants in the same matter as the children I teach and care for, it does make me a more active researcher.

Another aspect that contributed to my more active role was the position that was given to me by the adults in the children's home. The adults are to be treated with respect and authority, this does not only apply to the regular staff, and they expect the same behavior to the volunteers. I explained my position as researcher in the beginning and throughout the research but the approach in the home was not in correspondence with the approach I would have liked to take, though it came with the best intentions. When I entered the class I was introduced with the words *'This is Nianne, she is going to do a research with you. You have to listen to her the same way you listen to me. Now stand up one by one and tell her your name'*. I tried to alter this introduction by explaining that I would like to learn about their lives but only if they wanted to and that they do not always have to listen, that they were free to just say what they liked. There are other factors that have possibly influenced their decision to participate as well. The children might feel pressured by the teacher, want to avoid other activities, enjoy getting individual attention, feel like they have to give something back etc. Another example of this is when I asked one of the children if they would like to come with me to make a drawing. When the children responded that she preferred to stay in the

class to play, the teacher told her that she had to go with me. I explained that this was not the case, if she did not want to, there was not need, and it was her own choice. Additionally, there were moments during which it was expected of me to help with the caring of the children. During most moments I could modify my adult behavior and find a balance in helping while not being an authoritative adult. There were also moments during which this was not possible. Examples of these moments are when I had to watch the boys while the girls were given a bath or when I had to watch the class when the teacher had to go somewhere. During these moments it could be very challenging to keep my role towards the children while fulfilling the expectations of the staff.

Finally, my role as researcher was influenced by the behavior of the children. The children were used to a strict and authoritative behavior from the teachers, by northern European standards. It is important to stay aware of the fact that all children in my research were between the age of 4 and 6 and therefore do not always oversee their actions and the negative consequences these might have. An example of this is when children started hitting each other because of a small dispute. During such situations I would help them to resolve the conflict by talking to each other. The children also tried to find my boundaries, both in regards to their behavior towards each other and their behavior towards me. An example of them finding my boundaries is an incident with one of the girls. She got upset when I would tell her no, for example if she would try to push one of the children off my lap and I would tell her she shouldn't do that, if she waits a little bit she can sit there. In return she hit me in my face and tell me that no one tells her no. In situations such as those, I had to take a more adult-role to explain to her that she now overstepped my boundaries that I have no problem with disagreement but that I do not approve of the way she acted towards me. Incidents such as this made that I was a more active researcher who would correct or help children when the situations asked for it.

My more active research role did not mean that there was no trust relationship between the children and myself. I tried to create this trust relationship in a different way and by still acting as a *unusual type of adult*, especially in their context. My approach in this was to give individual attention to each child and taking my time for the children, to let them know I cared for them more than just as data in my research. I established routines during the day, starting with the morning. I made sure to greet each child with a hug and ask them about their day and take the time to listen. During lunch I would sit with one or two children at the time and take my time to help them, sing songs

and have fun. When the children went to bed for their nap I would go by each child, with each one I had my own goodnight ritual. Some wanted to be tickled, other wanted a hug, some pretend they were not there so I had to find them and some wanted a kiss on the cheek. I tucked them in and always told them when I would be back again. If I would help during bath time I would have to keep up with the pace of the work but tried to add some joy. For example, letting the children swim in the bath for a short moment. When I had to watch the children I often sang Frozen⁸ songs with them or we played games. The singing turned into a recurring event, some didn't want to start a method before singing a song.

It became a relationship of joy and trust in which I deeply cared for the children. I saw trust by the way they turned to me when they were hurt or needed help and their enthusiastic greetings the children gave me in the mornings made me feel welcome in their lives.

Power imbalance

Gallagher (2008) describes that some researchers see power as a commodity that is possessed by a dominant group and not by their subordinates. In the case of child research, based on the role of adults and children in society, the adult researcher forms the dominant group and the children the subordinate group (Punch, 2002a; Gallagher, 2008). Yet, when there is a relationship of trust, children try to negotiate these power imbalances and sometimes even switch them (Christensen, 2004; Punch, 2002a). This creates a sense of fluidity in the power relationship.

When I worked with the young children in the children's home, there was a smooth transition. In the beginning the children clearly acted upon the power imbalance by constantly asking for confirmation and approval. Slowly the children gained more confidence and started to negotiate the power. The first signs of negotiation were with the frequent question of toilet visits and ordering me to go with them, resulting in me nearly spending as much time at the bathroom as at the research room. The children became aware that it was up to them when breaks were being taken and that they could decide my actions during these breaks. Once the children became a little bolder they would also ask me if they could go to the bathroom during class-time or when outside. During the moments I would tell them to ask an auntie instead of me, some children would continue

⁸ Popular Disney movie at the time

asking until they were crying, even when an auntie was right next to them telling them it was fine, they wanted an answer from me.

From early on in the research the children also started using me to gain advantage over other children. Gallacher & Gallagher (2008) describe how one of the authors' lap became a subject of ownership struggles, how the children would organize the use of her lap amongst them. Similar to their experience, my lap and presence also became subject of ownership; who could sit on my lap, who could hold my hand, who I would help during lunch/dinner. Half of the time this went without struggle, the other half of the time it resulted into fights and jealousy. Children would hit, kick and pull each other to get closer to me. In these moments I often decided to step out the situation to get me, the subject of jealousy, out of the situation. It is said that such moments give insight into the children's ways of exercising power and negotiating social relationships (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). It taught me that the children had a need for attention and that this need overtook the ability to negotiate, instead it resulted into physical battle in which I became the pawn. In such situations, the children would not listen to me or my request to let me get up. Therefore, I decided that leaving was in such cases the best solution, for me, the children, but also for my role as researcher since I did not want to act in an authoritative manner towards them.

During the data collection, the children steadily became more aware of their power to change the games and the rules. During the ranking method one of the girls refused to rank, instead she wanted to check my knowledge of the children in the children's home by quizzing me about the names of each child. She would hold up the picture and ask me to name them. Other children changed the game to something they liked better, for example organizing the pictures in clusters of girls, boys, caregivers etc.

Similar to the situation described by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008), where children were fascinated by her notebook and used her pen to draw in it, the children in my research also enjoyed looking through the book and writing in it themselves. During one of the final interviews one of the girls, Samantha (6 years), switched the power balance by taking my notebook and pen. She decided where we would sit and told me that today she would ask the questions and that she was now called Nianne and I was called Samantha. She continued to ask questions similar to the ones I had asked over the past few weeks; '*where do you live? What do you like to do?*'. She also enjoyed asking questions from which she could check the answers; '*are you big or small? Do you have yellow or brown hair?*' She would write the answers down in the notebook. The children felt

comfortable to change the power imbalance, to tell me when they did not want to participate in my method today, to say they wanted to go back when they got tired of it and to change my methods when they had something else in mind. The children appreciated individual time and had a desire to use it in the best way possible. The last week nearly did not result in any data, but it did give me a lot of one-on-one time with the children.

Reciprocity

Research is a process of receiving and giving. The researcher cannot go to a place and only take, in the form of data, something has to be given back as well, and the community has to gain from the research process (Abebe, 2009).

In my research, both the adults and the children invested their time, in return I compensated with my time and help. For the adults this meant that I helped them with the daily work; helping the children get dressed, help during meals and watch the children if the teachers or caregivers had to be somewhere else for a short time. For the children this meant that I got to spend one-on-one time with them and play games. The children value individual attention and by being an extra person during the day, I was able to give them this individual attention, not only during data collection but also during class time, meals and when they were going to bed. Additionally, I was asked to join one of the caregivers to her college to give a lecture on Dutch education to early childhood workers. Not only was this a very valuable and joyful experience, it was also a great moment of knowledge exchange from which both parties gained new perspectives, as well as a way for me to contribute to the community. I helped the home by giving tours to the tourists that visited the home. When there were groups with Dutch tourists I would show them the home so that the other people could continue their work and the tourist could get a tour in their native language. For the children I wished to create a fun moment as a way of saying thank you for their time, their openness and their kindness. I organized an ice-cream party for the two oldest groups. It was a very joyful and happy moment for the children.

Long-term reciprocity goes beyond gifts and services, it is about the impact that the research can have to improve the lives of the researched group by communicating the findings to the participants and policy makers (Abebe, 2009). I will send the final version of the thesis to the children's home and a file is included in the children's documents which states that they took part in this research and who to contact if they ever wish to read it.

Leaving the children

In research with children, the researcher tries to create a trust relationship with the children in which the children dare to open up and share their stories with the researchers. After some time of closely working together and creating a place where children feel safe and listen to, the researcher leaves the children again. This can be especially challenging with children in a children's home, who have said many goodbyes in their lives already. Something that prepared the children for this was the constant turnover of volunteers that the children's home works with.

Voelkl (2012) wrote a case study about the relation between children in children's homes and short-term volunteers. She observed that the children quickly got attached to the volunteers and liked to be picked up and given attention to. The children would say that they loved the volunteers and didn't want them to go. She learned that the children do not get genuinely emotionally attached to the short-term volunteers, rather they developed a strategy to only get superficially attached because of the high turnover of volunteers. The children did get genuinely emotionally attached to the staff and long-term volunteers who participated in all their routines and daily life. The children's home where I did my research worked with many international volunteers, staying between 3 months and a year. The amount of days per week that the volunteers were present varied. There were also long-term South-African volunteers who would come set evenings a week to read to the children. The children are used to a quick turnover and unfamiliar faces. The children were, similar to the description in the case study, quickly attached to new people. They tried to get individual attention and wanted to be held and sit on the lap of volunteers. This happened to me as well, they were eager to tell me about their days, wanted to sit with me and play. Towards the end one of the girls, Kelly (5 years), came up to me and said '*I want to come with you. I want you to be my mommy. Can me and my sister fly with you and live with you?*' Another girl, Elle (4 years) started crying when I told her that I was leaving in two days and she would not let go of my hand for the rest of the day. Though I tried to reduce the harm and risk for the children, it would be naïve to think that my presence and relationship with the children did not add any harm. Alderson and Morrow (2009) state 'Harm' is often invisible and elusive, complicated by different estimations, different viewpoints – researchers', children's or caregivers' – and differences between short- and longer-term outcomes' (p. 2).

By creating a trusting and complex relationship with the children, a researcher can add negative consequences for the children when leaving. This impact is bigger when the children flourished as

a result of the relationship (Cocks, 2006). I believe that by creating a close relationship with the children, and by emphasizing my presence, I possibly and unintentionally made my departure more difficult for some children. This can be considered ethical dubious because I purposely created a relationship of trust and friendship with children who have already experienced many separations from people close to them (Cocks, 2006). To minimize this impact the children should be informed about the fact that the researcher is leaving again before and throughout the study. Though I told the children at the start that I would only stay two months, that is a long time to oversee for young children. Therefore, I made it a habit to inform the children at the end of each day about the next time I would see them again. During my last week I would add the amount of days that I would be there before flying home. The hope is that this helped the children get adjusted to the idea that I would leave, however, it could also have put extra emphasis on my being present instead of preparing for leaving.

To reduce any negative feelings during the day itself I planned it in a way that was fun and light for the children. I spend all day with them, tucked them into bed for their nap and woke them again. After the ice-cream activity we went upstairs, and I explained them that I would leave in a little while. We took some pictures and gave some hugs then I continued to sit with them for a while during the movie. Halfway through I stood up, announced I would fly home now, waved goodbye and left. The children looked up, waved back and continued their movie. Cocks (2006) describes that leaving when children are engaged in an activity or surrounded by other adults, the sense of abandonment might reduce.

Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to give an overview of the different methods that have been used for the data collection; observation, defining, drawings, mapping, ranking, play, visual stimulus interviews and interviews with adults. Throughout this chapter I have discussed the different considerations that were made beforehand as well as the ethical dilemmas and challenges that arose during the fieldwork. These discussions were accompanied by reflections on my behavior and actions towards these challenges.

Analysis 1 - *Everyday life in the children's home*

Introduction

The children in the children's home grow up in a difficult situation, they are separated from their family and cared for by childcare workers, while constantly surrounded by their peers. Institutional life has many implications in the lives of children. By listening to their experiences and perceptions, as well as my own observations during the two months in the children's home, I learned about the different aspects and difficulties of institutional life. Goffman's (1961) theory of total institutions will be used to conceptualize, emphasize and explain some aspects of institutional life and what this means for the lives of children. In the following analysis I will first discuss the implication of the UNCRC and the ACRWC and how the best interest of the child, when it comes to institutional care, might differ from the approach that is currently taken. Furthermore, I will talk about the four characteristics of a total institution. I will discuss how these characteristics can be seen in the children's home, what this means for the children and how children experience these different aspects of their daily lives.

The rights of children in vulnerable situations

The children in the children's home are considered vulnerable children, both because of the difficulties they have faced in the past and because of the situation that they are currently in. By ratifying the UNCRC vulnerable children were no longer a humanitarian or charitable concern, but these children and their well-being became a responsibility of the State Parties (Panter-Brick, 2002). With the adoption of the UNCRC, and later the ACRWC, the approach to children who face adversity 'moved significantly from highlighting the needs of vulnerable children to defending their rights as citizens.' (Panter-Brick, 2002, p.155). One of the guiding principles of the UNCRC is Article 3 (Similar to Article 4 of the ACRWC, 1990): '*In all actions concerning children [...] the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.*' (UNCRC, 1989). This states that it is in a child's right for adults to have their best interest in mind and that this is a/the primary consideration when choices have to be made that affect them. Yet, it can be difficult to decide what the best interest of a child is. Whether the best interest of the child should be *a* or *the* primary consideration depends on whether the UNCRC or ACRWC is consulted. The best

interest of the child is a concept that is strongly depended on individual and cultural interpretation as well as assumptions about the ideal childhood (Carpenter, 2015). The rights in the UNCRC and the ACRWC are all interconnected and of equal importance, unfortunately, in difficult situations these rights come into conflict and it becomes inevitable to prioritize one over the other. In these cases, a choice has to be made and this choice of prioritization is based on individual and culture specific values (Carpenter, 2015).

The children living in the children's home faced a critical situation in which certain rights had to be prioritized over others. Their rights to safety, water, nutrition and shelter were prioritized over their right to live with their parents. Article 19.1 of the UNCRC (1989) gives children the right to safety and protection, it states *'States Parties shall take all appropriate[...] measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse [...]'*. Article 27.1 of the UNCRC (1989) gives children the right to be provided in their basic needs, it states *'States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.'* These two articles give children the right to grow up in a safe environment, protected from harm. Additionally, they have the right to be met in their daily needs, for adequate development. Both these rights have often been the reason for children to be taken away from parental care. Many of the children in the children's home had one of these rights violated by growing up in either, or both, poverty, violence or (substance) abuse. Therefore, it has been decided for them that growing up within their own family is no longer in their best interest. Article 19.1 of the ACRWC (1990) states *'Every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection and shall, whenever possible, have the right to reside with his or her parents. No child shall be separated from his parents against his will, except when a judicial authority determines in accordance with the appropriate law, that such separation is in the best interest of the child.'* The UNCRC (1989) additionally states in article 9.1 *'Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents.'* Removing children from their parents in such difficult situations may sound reasonable and appropriate and it is often made with the best interest of the child at heart. Their home is no longer considered to be a safe environment for them to grow up in or does not provide them with the necessary provisions for them to adequately develop. Yet, when talking to children, they do not always seem to agree that this choice has been made in their best interest. They feel deprived of

their right to have a home and to grow up with their family. As Samantha (6 years) put it into words *'My social worker stole me. She took me away from my mommy and daddy and left me here.'*

This example might illustrate how two perspectives, that of an adults and that of a child, sometimes cause tension. This can be associated with the difference between the child perspective and the child's perspective, between what adults think to be in the best interest of the child and what the child considers to be the best (Söderbäck et al., 2011). How what adults think to be in the best interest of the child, is not always seen as the best solution by the child itself. It can be argued that some children would have preferred life in poverty over life in institutionalized care. Different rights are prioritized by someone's concept of an ideal childhood (Carpenter, 2015). This ideal childhood consists of different understandings and values for children than it does for adults. Many young children's main concern is the proximity of a parent. Adult's main concern is the development and well-being of these young children. These differences in perspectives should be acknowledged and taken into account when making a decision in the best interest of a child.

Institutional care

In order to get a better understanding of the situation that the children grow up in, this chapter will take an analytical look at life in an institution. The theory of total institutions, as described by Goffman (1961b), creates the backbone of this analysis chapter. Goffman (1961b) characterized care for orphans as a form of a total institution. Though the children in the children's home are not orphaned, it has a similar aim. As mentioned in the theory chapter, Goffman (1961b) defined four characteristics of total institutions;

1. Everything happens in the same place under the same authority
2. All activities and aspects of life happen surrounded by many similar others. All of whom are treated the same and do the same thing at the same time.
3. All aspects of life are tightly scheduled, creating a strict routine.
4. Every activity aims to fulfill the aim of the institution

All four of these characteristics will be individually described and discussed based on the observation and data collections made at the children's home. The aim is to give insight into how these different aspects can be seen in the children's home and how this influences the lives of

young children. This will be accompanied by observations from the researcher, interpretations of the staff members and experiences of the children themselves.

Space and authority

The first characteristic of a total institution, as described by Goffman (1961a) is that all aspects of the children's lives happen in the same space and under the same authority. He describes how usually people sleep, work and play in different places and under different forms of authority such as parents, teachers, or grandparents. In total institutions, these barriers that separate these different spheres of life are broken down. Every aspect of a person's life takes place within the same space and under the same authority. This space is symbolized by a barrier with the outside world. This barrier is often clearly visible through locked doors, high fences and gates. Throughout the day they find themselves under the same authority, the supervisory staff (Goffman, 1961a). In the following sections these aspects of institutional life will be analyzed. This includes the aspects of space and supervision. But before we can begin to analyze it, it is helpful to have a general understanding of the places in the children's home and the role these places have in the children's life.

The Children's home

The children's home, as described earlier the children's home is situated in a Colored neighborhood in the city of Cape Town, South-Africa. It is a well maintained and high standard children's home, compared to many other homes in and around the city. The home consists of two floors, on the first-floor one can find the classrooms for the older children, the sleeping facilities for the babies, the kitchen, the dining hall and the offices. The classrooms are filled with many learning materials and each child has their own place at the large table to work. The dining hall is fairly simple, there are 6 large tables with 4 colorful plastic chairs on each one. Outside there is a large playground with many options for play, including bikes, trampolines, swings and balls. Behind the children's home there is another outside play area. This seemed to not be used very often, but this could be due to the winter weather. On the second floor are the bedrooms for the 'older' children, as well as the bathrooms, therapy/playrooms and the living room. The children share a bedroom with 1 to 4 other children, siblings often share a room. Each child has his or her own bed, but they do change rooms quite often. Some of the rooms have single beds and others

have bunk beds. The girls have Disney princesses on their bedding and the boys have Lightning McQueen Cars. Each child also has his or her own wardrobe with their own clothing. The wardrobes are decorated with their names and a drawing. The living room is very practical, it contains two big couches and a TV. When all the children are in the living room, they are not allowed on the couches, to avoid fights. The couches are also used by the staff during the night shift. There are two different bathrooms for the different age groups. The bathroom for the oldest group contains 2 bathtubs, a row of sinks and a row of toilets.

Additionally, the children's home contains sleeping quarters for the staff members, a meeting room, a laundry room and some additional rooms to care for the babies. These rooms were of little relevance for me or the children.



The children's home cares for approximately 50 children all below the age of 6. There are teachers, caregivers, social workers, office workers, cooks, cleaners, maintenance workers, and volunteers. The children always have the same teacher during the day and there is a small group of caregivers that take care of the children in the afternoon, evenings and weekends to keep the turnover to a minimum. The staff members seem to have affection for the children. Also, the people who are

⁹ The pictures show the living room, the girls' bedroom, the bathroom and the classroom in the children's home.

not directly in contact with the children seem happy when the children walk into their office or kitchen. The social worker explained that the children can always walk into her office to call their parents (when possible) or to ask if their parents have called.

The people who care for the children are strict with them, they have rules and they expect these rules to be followed. After talking with the different staff members it showed that they want the best for the children and that they care for them. Yet, they are in charge of multiple children, meaning that they have to act in certain ways to make sure that everyone listens that everything happens in time and the way it is supposed to and that the fights and jealousy are kept to a minimum. But as the teacher stated 'it is not just a job for me, I put all my love and energy in it' and that is visible.

Spaces

Children are placed in a children's home with the idea that this is in the best interest of the child. The children's home is seen as a place of rescue and protection for children who are vulnerable and in need (Moss & Petrie, 2005). To protect the children, they are placed in a fenced area safe from the dangers of the neighborhood. The place is protected with fences, locks and surveillance cameras, to keep strangers out and to keep the children in. Inside, the children are in a 'place for children', designed by adults and created to accommodate children (Rasmussen, 2004). These places for children are supposed to keep children off the streets and other open areas and limit them to the places that are designed for them, protected by walls and fences (Qvortrup, 2000). Inside the fences everything is 'childproof'. In the theory chapter it was discussed how Davies (1989) classified children's homes as place of intermediate closure, which refers to the ability of the children to enter voluntarily and exit freely. Yet, because of the involuntary aspect of entry and the 'need' for protection due to the young age of the children, the children's home should be considered as closed. All aspects of the children's life take place within these walls; sleeping, eating, leisure, schooling, celebrations etc. With the exception of the occasional excursion or weekend spent with (host) parents, the children spend all their time inside the children's home. This means that the children do not get to experience the daily activities that children living outside of residential care usually get. For example; walking through the streets, playing in the parks, grocery shopping, visiting someone, etc.

Inside the children are restricted from certain areas as well. There are locked doors and gates, but also mental restrictions. In these instances, the children have physical access, but they know that this is not a place for them to enter, such as the kitchen or their bedroom during the day. This restriction in movement and the limitation to child-friendly places is accompanied by constant adult supervision to ensure care, protection and control (Gilliam, 2013). Yet, it also limits children's experiences. Goffman (1961) is critical on this aspect as well, he states 'the orphan comes to be socialized into the outside world by some process of cultural osmosis even while this world is being systematically denied him' (Goffman, 1961, p.13). The ultimate aim of the children's home is to reunite children with their parents or extended family, when the circumstances allow it (website of the children's home). Ideally, this means that children would go back to their communities and families and be part of daily life again, yet, during their time in the children's home, they gain little knowledge and skills to deal with life outside of the home.

By never visiting a grocery store or spending time in the kitchen, the children do not experience and learn these aspects of life. Simple moments such as grocery shopping and cooking are moments during which young children can express their agency and participate, for example by choosing something they would like to eat or by helping to prepare the meal. It is a way for young children to learn about daily life and to contribute to it. By restricting children from such moments you may reduce their knowledge about the outside world and limit their chances of agency and participation. Goffman (1961a) describes this as 'disculturation', this entails an untraining, which might leave children partly incapable of managing certain aspects of daily life outside of the total institution once they get back to it. Limiting children's space is not always imposed by adults with the goal to restrict their agency and participation. In case of the children's home they do not have the intention to disculturalize children, they aim for them to return to society. Yet, it is often a practical way to protect and care for a large group of children, especially in a risky neighborhood.

Supervision

The limitation that children in the children's home have in space and time means that they are almost constantly under adult supervision. They have activities they are supposed to do in a designated place at the right time. With this comes expected behavior. Due to the routines (which will be described in one of the following sections), certain behavior is expected of the children at each given moment. The children are aware of the expectations and the constant supervision.

Where this can give children a sense of security, because they know what is expected of them, it can also give them tension. They know their behavior is constantly being monitored and that going against this will probably have consequences. Soraya (4 years) explains *'The teachers get angry because children get naughty.'* The members of staff are not there solemnly for guidance or periodic inspection, but for surveillance and making sure that everyone does what they are supposed to be doing (Goffman, 1961a). When children are not behaving in the expected way, this can result in a punishment. These punishments can be a verbal correction, being restricted from play (with certain people/at a certain time/ with a certain toy, etc), time-outs, no snack, early bedtime etc. An example of punishment given by Maggie (4 years) *'In our bedroom they yell if we don't listen, then the light has to be off'*. Knowing that 'acting out' can have negative consequences for them changes their behavior and alters the way in which they express their agency. For they will probably be less likely to do exactly as they wish/feel to avoid a negative outcome, instead they choose to act as expected to remain the peace. An example of this is given by Samantha (6 years) who made a drawing in which she drew herself in a happy moment:



'This girl has colorful hair full of my favorite colors. She has pompoms, I had to put them back in cause she made her hair loose, she was naughty.'

¹⁰ Drawing by Samantha, 6 years old, drawing of a girl with colorful hair with pom-poms.

The children in the children's home get their hair braided every few weeks, in between they are supposed to leave it the way it is. The girl is aware of this and knows that taking it out is considered naughty. She does seem to be tempted by the thought but instead chooses to show 'good behavior' by telling that she put the pompoms back in and classifying the girl as naughty.

One of the main critiques on total institutions is that misbehavior in one sphere of life can be held against the child in another sphere of life. Meaning that the children cannot escape from the rules and constraints lay upon them. This way of supervision and consequences can lead to a constant desire to stay out of trouble and remain positive relationships with the staff (Goffman, 1961). Yet, making choices to avoid getting in trouble and breaking the rules is not necessarily a sign of reduced agency. It can instead be seen as a form of agency in which the child decides to act a certain way to avoid trouble and to remain a positive relationship. Children's agency is not only visible when they show resistance or resourcefulness (Abebe, 2019)

Child supervisors

Goffman (1961a) explains that total institutions put children in a position in which they have to sympathize and communicate with each other, yet, this does not always lead to high group morale and solidarity. The children live under a set of rules and are very aware of what the other children are doing and if they are following the rules. Peter (5 years) tells *'Two boys from my class are playing, they are sad because they hit each other. The boys are being naughty and they don't listen.'* Not only do they observe each other and conclude if something is either good or bad, but it also influences their relationship with this person. Josh (5 years) states *'I don't like the girls from my class, they don't listen.'* Many of the children described their likes and dislikes for each other based on how they behaved according to the rules. Though the children are very aware of the behavior of others and judge them for it, they often do not share their observations with the staff. This might come from a desire to sustain group solidarity, since the children spend all moments of the day with each other, which will be further explained in the next section.

Surrounded by peers

The second characteristic of a total institution is that the child is constantly surrounded by peers (Goffman, 1961a). During every moment of every day, the children are surrounded by other children. All these children are supposed to be doing the same activities at the same time in the

same space. Additional to being in the same presence at all times, the children are also treated in a similar way. In fact, the members of staff try to ensure that they treat all children equally and that there are no feelings of favoritism or inequality. Being part of a group in this way, can be seen as being part of the collective. A danger with this is that being part of the collective can be an obstacle to children's individuality and their expression of autonomy (Markström & Halldén, 2009). Yet this notion of individuality can also be seen as a western ideal, in real life the desire to sustain group solidarity often overshadows the desire for individualism (Abebe, 2019).

In the children's home, the children are surrounded by their peers during all aspects of the day and night. They are a member of the group and the group is controlled in space and time by the staff. The teachers explained '*They are always part of a group, this can be difficult because everything is a group decision.*' An example of this is when the children can decide on a movie to watch, the group has to agree over the chosen movie even though individual children might not like it. The same happens when the children can decide on the activity for the night; play games or watch tv. Some children might be excited to play while others want to relax and watch tv. All the moments during which the children have the freedom to choose, the decision has to be made by a group and therefore it does not represent the wishes of an individual child but a constant compromise of the members of the group. Especially since there seems to be little hierarchy between the children of a similar age group. The decisions are group decisions without one child or one group of children taking the lead.

Every activity and decision that is done or made during the day is based on the needs of the collective, leaving little to no room for adaptation to the individual child. All choices are made for the collective child, from the times that he or she has to sleep, to what the child will eat. All activities are decided upon, when to relax and when to actively play. This means that there is little room for individuality, for the child to tell when he or she is tired, to adapt the food to the likes and dislikes of the child, to let the child rest when he or she feels like relaxing and to let them play when they feel like playing. Because of the large group that the children are always part of, some children seem in need of more individual attention and affection. They enjoy moments during which they are separated from the group and be treated as an individual, this can be as simple as running an errand for one of the caregivers. The children also express to enjoy individual attention by the staff members and individuality through material things. Both these aspects make the children

stand out of the group and be their own person for a little bit. Yet, it is also important to stay aware that children in institutions, just like other children, have different personalities and identities and therefore different needs (Sandberg, 2015).

Individual attention by people

The children in the children's home are always a part of the collective. The members of staff try to ensure that the children are being treated equal and that there are no signs of favoritism. By doing so, the individual treatment, time and attention of each particular child is also reduced and restricted. One of the caregivers explained: *'The children feel loved when we compliment them or give them hugs. Or when we talk and listen to them, to give them some special attention. Then they feel loved cause they so badly just want to be listened to.'* It is clear by the conversations with the caregivers as well as through observations and interviews that the children are looking for a listening ear. They are looking for someone they can talk to and someone who gives them attention and affection either by talking to them, playing with them or physical connection such as sitting on the lap, giving a hug, holding their hand, etc. Maggie (4 years) says about this that *'The house is bad because nobody listens'*. The need of the children for attention and affection can be seen throughout the day. Their search for attention shows signs of indiscriminate friendliness (Chisholm, 1998). This means that children show affection and friendly behavior towards all adults, including strangers, without the fear or caution that children usually have. Their behavior towards strangers can almost not be distinguished from their behavior towards their caregivers (Chisholm, 1998). Understanding that this is a concept from developmental psychology, it is still mentioned since it was a characteristic that was clearly visible in the children's relations with others.

The children would look for attention and affection by any of the adults, including newly-arrived volunteers. The children would run towards new adults and hug them or sit on their lap. They know that the staff members do not allow the children to sit on their lap, since it often results in fighting, therefore they try to sit on the laps of volunteers and visiting adults. When other children try to sit on the lap as well or also want to be listened to, it often results in little fights.

One of the teachers explained *'here in my classroom they are happy and loved. Because there are so little children they can get attention. At the same time, I have to limit this attention because it otherwise results into jealousy and competition.'* The children are aware of this. They know they

can go to the teachers in times of need, but they also know that they will not find much individual attention or love. Samantha (6 years) says *'When I am sad, I go to my teacher, she does not comfort me but she tells me to be good.'* This can be seen as another example that the focus is on the expected behavior, more than on the individual needs of the children.

Due to the limited individual attention, it sometimes feels like the children are competing for attention and they very easily get jealous when other children receive more attention than they do. Yet, when they are the ones receiving the attention and affection they seem to be very happy and joyful. This is a drawing from Kayla (4 years) who drew herself, she states *'The girl on the bottom is me, I am happy because someone is tickling me.'* This is what she drew when she was asked to draw her life in the children's home. She explained this as a moment in which people love each other and how that is visible through laughter. They feel loved and joyful in such little moments of individual attention.



11

When Soraya (4 years) was asked to describe a moment during which she felt loved, she said: *'I feel loved when the teacher holds my hand and she loves me.'* The children seem to long for individual acknowledgment and attention.

¹¹ Drawing by Kayla, 4 years old, drawing of two children tickling each other.

Individual attention through things

One way for the children to feel special and to differentiate themselves from the group is through their clothing. Each child in the children's home has their own clothing and every once in a while they get new clothes and shoes. Being all dressed up in a new outfit makes them feel important and special. Kelly (5 years) drew a drawing of herself stating '*This is me, I live at the children's home. I look sad because I am really sad. But I wear a nice skirt and I have beautiful shoes.*' She spent a long time drawing the clothes and hair and spent time explaining how beautiful the skirt was. She often referred to her clothing during interviews and drawings, stating that they made her happy and that she liked wearing beautiful dresses.



12

Not only the clothing but also the children's hair is important to them. The staff members would do the children's hair every few weeks. The boys would get their hair shaved and the girls got new braids and ponytails. Though the process was not a moment of happiness, since the braiding process hurt, the children did seem very happy and proud afterward. Samantha (6 years) explains '*Here they make my hair beautiful.*' The staff makes the hair of each child different, they have their own individual hairdo, to ensure that even though they are part of the group, the group doesn't look all the same. The staff notices the happiness of the children as well, one of the caregivers

¹² Drawing by Kelly, 5 years old, drawing of herself when being sad.

said: *'They are very happy [...] when they get something new, such as new shoes, clothes or hair, small things can make them very happy.'* The teacher agrees she said *'They can be so happy when they look pretty.'*

Additionally to looks, the children highly enjoy moments that are centered around them. One such moment is their birthday. On their birthday, the child gets a cake, made by a donating bakery, and these cakes are made to fit the child's interests. The child stands by the cake and the other children will sing, after which the cake will be shared with all the children. Josh (5 years) drew his happiest time in the children's home. He said *'I made circles, they are balloons. I like balloons, you get one on your birthday'* Little things like balloons made the boy feel special, special enough to still remember it as the happiest time a few months after his birthday.



13

Peer-relations

Growing up as part of a group is significant for the dynamics between the children. They are not simply classmates or friends, they share their lives and they also share the little amount of adult attention. In some ways, the bond between the children might have more similarities to siblings instead of friends or just peers. The children treat each other as if they are family. They like to play together but can also fight one another. They can care for each other and help the other out,

¹³ Drawing by Josh, 5 years old, drawing of balloons.

yet they can also be completely disinterested in another child. Boyden and Mann (2005) describe that peer-relationships can be an opportunity for children to be themselves. In a way this seems true for the children in the children's home too. The children have many conflicts and are often angry and upset with each other, but this can possibly be explained by the fact that they can only act out and experience these emotions towards each other. This 'love-hate' relationship between the children can also be seen when they talk about their friends. Samantha (6 years) says *'I like being angry in the boys' room, it is very funny'*. This sentence is a perfect example of what I observed in terms of peer relationships. The children are often challenging each other, they provoke other children and don't shy away from conflict. But as this girl states, she enjoys it. Children might seek opportunities to 'act out', to express their anger, sadness or frustration. Knowing that the staff does not appreciate such behavior towards them, they show these emotions towards their peers, creating a complex relationship. Similar complex relationships might also be visible outside of institutionalized care, but it was particularly noticeable in the children's home. Peter (5 years) explains *'My friends make me feel loved but not when they kick me'*. Next to an opportunity to show emotions, friendships also provide the children with an opportunity to express their agency through resistance. An example of the ways in which these children express their agency is by deciding who they want to play with, Ellen (4 years) says *'Sometimes I get angry at my friends if they want to play with me and I want to play with someone else.'* Alisha (4 years) described the other side of this, she states *'My friend makes me happy and sad. When she wants to play with me I am happy, when she doesn't want to play with me I am sad.'*

Corsaro (2005) states that when it comes to peer culture, two themes are consistently occurring; children keep making attempts to gain control over their lives and they attempt to share this control with their peers. They do this in an attempt to deal with their concerns, fears, confusion and conflicts. Additionally, these aspects give children the possibility of power and control (Corsaro, 2005). By making their own decisions and deciding for others, children gain power and control, it is an opportunity for them to express their agency and develop their social identity.

Collectivism & individualism

As described above, the children are constantly surrounded by peers, following a strict routine. This limits their possibilities for agency and one can wonder if it limits their possibilities to develop their own social identity. This starts when the children enter the children's home with a procedure

that Goffman (1961b) describes as the ‘Stripping process’. This entails that the children’s personal possessions and other personal items will be taken away and kept until they leave the institution again at age 6. Their personal possessions are replaced by items provided by the children’s home. These are often similar for each child. To still provide the children with some individuality the children’s home does provide the children with more personal or individual aspects through their hairdo, their clothing and by having them make more individual choices on Fridays during class time.

With the lack of individual choices and personal possessions one can argue that children might not have enough opportunities to develop their own identity. The children have limited chances to discover what they like, what they find important and who they are. On the other side, this necessity for identity development might be a western preoccupation and ideology. In many African countries children and adults are seen as part of the collective, the community and family. The strong emphasis to develop an individual identity is often not as valued or aimed for as in other societies. Other aspects are seen as more important, such as the desire to sustain group solidarity and interdependent living (Abebe, 2019). Additionally, all children grow in relation to others, they learn through interaction and participation in social practices (Abebe, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand that it is not necessarily bad for children to be part of a collective, most children are in a way. The main difference is that these children are continuously part of this collective, with little possibilities to express their individuality. Thus, it can be said that both collectivism and individualism are needed for a child’s full development. Yet, it is important to maintain a balance during which children will both learn by being part of a collective as well as fulfilling their individual needs.

Daily routines

The third characteristic of a total institution is that all phases of daily activity are tightly scheduled (Goffman, 1961a). Before analyzing the routines and activities in the children’s home and the impact they have on the lives of the children, it’s important to get a general understanding of the daily routines during a normal day in the children’s home. With many young children in a house, routines set in quickly, and the routines of a normal weekday for the children that were part of this research will be described in the following section.

Daily Routines in the children's home

During the night there is one caregiver taking care of 30 children. Around 5 o'clock in the morning a second caregiver arrives and together they wake up the children to start the bathing routine. Each child has to use the toilet, get a bath, put moisturizing lotion on and get dressed. The older children change into their clothes by themselves, the younger ones get assistance. When a child is all dressed and ready, he or she goes to the living room where they can usually watch a movie until the other children are finished as well. Around 7 o'clock in the morning, the children go down to the dining hall for breakfast, after which the children proceed to their own classroom to start the day. The younger children are going to the crèche and play there. The older children, between 4 and 6 years of age, are working on the grade R syllabus which can be compared to the preschool curriculum. They work and practice their motoric, verbal, numeric and social skills during the morning. They do this with the assistance of the teacher and volunteers. Next to the volunteers that help out in the classroom, there are speech therapist students, occupational therapist students and social work students who work with the children individually. Additionally, there are long-term volunteers who come on a set day each week to work one-on-one with the children to practice the letters or the numbers with them. Halfway through the morning, the children eat a piece of fruit and drink a glass of water. The children do not have coats, so it depends on the weather and the temperature if the children will play outside for half an hour or continue their classwork until lunch. When the bell rings, the children form a line and walk to the dining hall. They pick a place to sit and when all the children are seated, they pray together. When they get their plate and spoon, the children can start eating. Lunch is always a warm meal, it often contains rice or potatoes, meat and vegetables. The children eat independently, often the slower ones are assisted by the caregivers to help speed up the process. Children ask to be helped, they seem to enjoy the individual attention during lunch. After lunch, the children clean their hands and faces and some children take their medicines. They wait by the door until they get the approval to go upstairs for nap-time. Upstairs, the children take off their shoes, use the bathroom and get into their beds. They sleep in their normal clothes on top of their bedding but under the blanket. The children nap for 2 hours. During the nap-time of the children, the staff members have their breaks. Two hours later the children are woken up by a staff member. Depending on the weather it is decided again whether the children watch a movie in the largest bedroom, or play outside. When it is decided that they watch a movie, the children are seated on the floor against the wall and a Disney movie is put on. Sometimes this

time is used to do the children's hair or have a fun activity, such as painting their nails. When the temperature is good enough to go outside, the children play at the playground for the remaining afternoon. Occasionally, the volunteers will organize some activities during this time. An hour after their break they get a snack, often a nice drink, such as lemonade, with something sweet.

When the bell rings, it is time for the children to go to the dining hall again for dinner. The dinner process is the same as that of lunch. After dinner the children go upstairs again to start the bedtime routine. The boys and girls are separated for bath time. While the girls are getting a bath, the boys watch a movie in the large bedroom and the other way around. The children undress, use the toilet and stand in line for a bath. They get a quick bath after which they are dried off, they apply moisturizing lotion to their skin and then put on their pajamas. When they are done, they join the other group that is watching the movie. This group is often supervised by one of the volunteers. When all the children are bathed and changed into their pajamas, they proceed to the living room where the night shift takes over. For the remaining two hours, the children play games with the caregiver or watch some tv. They have another snack moment, usually a small healthy snack. The caregiver starts putting the youngest children to bed while the older ones stay in the living room. Around eight o'clock it is time for all children to go to their rooms. They crawl into their beds and wait for the caregiver to turn off the lights. This is often followed by one or two more warnings before everyone stops talking and falls asleep. They are woken up at five the next morning to start the routine all over again.

Routines

Goffman (1961b) described institutions as places that control space and time. Earlier, the controlling of space has been described by both the physical and mental limitations in places that children can enter. Time is controlled in the form of daily routines and activities. Routines are present in all aspects of life, in- and outside of institutions. The difference between family routines and institutionalized routines is that these routines do not take the needs and wants of the individual child in consideration, instead the individual child has to adapt to the routines put in place by the institution (Buchbinder et al., 2006). An example of this is given by Josh (5 years) '*I don't like baths. I like the lotion but I don't like taking a bath or to dry or to put clothes on*' He does not enjoy bath-time, which happens twice a day. In individual cases one could decide to listen to his

opinion and reduce the times that he has to take a bath. Yet in institutional care all routines are followed by all. Meaning that he has to bath just as often as the other children, despite his dislikes. Another difference is that family routines may give children the possibility to participate, help in the decision making, having and having sense of control. The routines in institutions are strictly controlled by time and an expectation of obedience. The children know exactly what is expected of them and when. They follow the same routine (as can be read at the beginning of the chapter) every day. In most instances there is little discussion. When the children talk about the children's home they talk about and explain the routines. Ellen (4 years) tells '*This is not my home, or maybe it is. It is where I sleep and wake up and go to the bathroom. In the house you close the curtain, you sleep and then you open the curtain when you wake up. Then your eyes must be wakey. There is a bed, there you sleep. Before you go to sleep you must say goodnight and you must close your eyes.*' In general, children need routines, they find comfort and security in knowing what will be coming next and knowing what will be expected from them. It gives them the security of stability and reliability (Butterfield, 2002). One of the caregivers stated that she notices that some children seem to prefer the children's home over their own home (some children sometimes visit home for a weekend) because of the routines in the home. '*The children know what to expect and they can count on this. For example, they can count on a warm meal for lunch and dinner. At home this is not always the case.*' Yet, there should be possibilities for the child to make their own decisions about how they spend their time as well. By creating time for children to make their own decisions on how they would like to spend their time, the children can exercise agency as well as their need to act as an individual.

Aims and perspectives of institutional care

The fourth characteristic, as described by Goffman (1961) is that the activities serve to reach the official aim of the institution. The aim of the children's home is to create a warm, safe and friendly environment for children to grow up in. Their ultimate goal is to reunite children with their parents or extended family (Website of the children's home). In the following section this aim will be analyzed. The current approach will be discussed, both regarding the legal rights of children as well as the difficult nuances when considering the best interest of the child. First, with the UNCRC (1989) and ACRWC (1990) in mind, the provision, protection and participation rights will be further elaborated on, while staying aware of the contextual and cultural differences. The aim of

the institutions and the rights given to the children in the children's home are important since all aspects of the children's life happen within this place. Finally, the best interest of the child will be discussed including the differences between the UNCRC and the ACRWC as well as the differences between adult and child perspectives.

Provision, protection, participation

The children in the children's home experience all aspects of life inside the children's home, from the moment they enter the home till the moment they leave. The aim and goals of the children's home are of high importance, since they decide the way in which the children grow up. As described earlier in the theory chapter, the rights in the UNCRC (1989) and ACRWC (1990) can be divided into three main areas; provision, protection and participation. The provision rights include provision in essential needs, healthcare, education etc. Protection rights include being protected from violence, exploitation and abduction. Participation rights include letting children have a say in matters that affect them and giving their opinions due to weight (Habashi, Wright & Hathcoat, 2011). Provision and protection are interdependent, all children need protection and provision to have a decent standard of living with access to knowledge and joy. Both provision and protection are needed for children to reach their full potential and to participate in society (Habashi, et al., 2011). The children in the children's home were deprived of the provision and /or protection rights before arriving at the children's home. Therefore, it was decided that it is in their best interest for them to grow up in an institution instead of their family home. The children's home creates a physically safe space for these children. I emphasize physically, since growing up without an attachment figure in institutional care has proved to be mentally harmful to most children.

Taken out of parental care, the institution takes over the responsibility for the children and therefore needs to provide them with all the essentials (Goffman, 1961). Meaning, the children are provided with a warm place, sufficient food, an own bed, hygiene, clothing, healthcare and education. In the children's home the children have their protection and provision rights met, but their participation rights seem to be more difficult to achieve. There are multiple explanations for this, the most understandable one is that there is often too little personnel for all the children to have an opinion and to actively participate. This might also have to do with the fact that adults do not always recognize children's agency and therefore not their ability to influence or have valid

opinions about matters that affect their lives. Yet, in the UNCRC (1989) and ACRWC (1990) all rights are equal, meaning that a child has as much right to participate as he/she has to education for example. Their participation rights entail that children are active human beings who have the right to meaningful participation in society (Habashi, et al., 2011). Where society might be a high aim for such young children in a marginalized position, meaningful participation in the children's home should be a goal within reach. Though it is within reach, it seems neither the practice nor the aim of the children's home to have the children actively participate or to involve them in the decision-making process about matters concerning their own lives. Goffman (1961a) states this as an often recurring aspect of total institutions, the lack of knowledge and participation regarding decisions that affect their lives.

But one can wonder if this desire for participation is a western ideology that is 'enforced' on the majority world through the UNCRC. Twum-Danso (2009) describes, based on her fieldwork in Ghana, how it is expected in many African cultures, that children are respectful and humble toward their elders and obey their orders. This philosophy can be found in the ACRWC (1990) as well, Article 31 states that additionally to rights, children also have responsibilities towards their family and society. Twum-Danso (2009) argues that this high value of respect and obedience has limited the initiative of children, it made them unable to share their views, give their opinions and speak their minds freely.

During my research the children also found it difficult to give me their opinion, they did not seem used to someone asking for their views and perspectives. Instead of sharing their views they would often state the facts such as routines or they would ask me for reassurance. Therefore, the aim might be to give children more opportunities to participate and have a greater say in matters that affect them, but it is a possibility that this clashes with the cultural values that are in place.

The best interest of the child

The best interest of the child is mentioned in both the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990). In the UNCRC under article 3 and in the ACRWC under article 4. Both put a high value on the best interest in the child, though there is a small difference. Where the UNCRC states that the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration, the ACRWC states that the best interest of the child should be *the* primary consideration. General comment number 14 of the UNCRC explains this choice by stating: '*the Committee recognizes the need for a degree of flexibility in its*

application. [...] Potential conflicts between the best interests of a child, considered individually, and those of a group of children or children in general have to be resolved on a case-by-case basis, carefully balancing the interests of all parties and finding a suitable compromise.' (UNCRC, 2013, p. 10).

This means that the ACRWC gives a firmer definition and a higher standard to the article. This difference has practical implications when decisions have to be taken that also concern children (Ekundayo, 2015). The best interest of the child now not only has to be taken into account and given due weight, but it also has to be the primary consideration to make the decision. For this it is beneficial to gain the child's perspective in order to make an informed decision regarding the child's best interest. A critical note made on this regard by Abebe (2019) is that the best interest of the child became central to the acknowledgment of the individual rights of children. It values the importance of children's voices and their participation in life. With this belief, it is assumed that children will always act in their own best interest when they get the opportunity to make a decision, where this is not always the case (Abebe, 2019). Maybe especially with younger children. Therefore, adults tend to take over and make the decisions directly for them.

When talking about the aim of the institution you talk about what people perceive to be in the best interest of the child. Before we have talked about the focus on provision and protection rather than participation. But there are more decisions to be made regarding the aim and the goal of institutions. These decisions are based on the values and opinions of the individuals. The children's home aims to work in the best interest of the child, but what the best interest actually is might differ between individuals and cultures. And sometimes it is unclear what would be in the best interest of the child.

An aspect in which this difference can be seen is when it comes to individual attention, as has been discussed in an earlier chapter. In the children's home they try to treat each child equally and avoiding favoritism. The children spend most of their time in a group setting and do not have one caregiver to fall back on, this causes tension between individual needs and equality among children in the group. The children's home has policies in place to ensure that the connection between a child and a caregiver does not get too close. One of the rules of the children's home is that you are not supposed to pick the children up. They want to avoid the children getting used to this, with the philosophy that once children will get used to it they will ask to be picked up more often and use

it as comfort. But there are not enough hands to hold each child and they do not wish to show favoritism; therefore they prefer to just not let the children get used to it in the first place. They prioritize equality over the individual needs of the children, though they do recognize the needs of children and understand the importance. One of the caregivers describes ‘*Compliments and attention are so important for them, for them to feel noticed. But it can be difficult too, to make sure you don’t show favoritism. They just want to be close to you, then they already feel this love and attention.*’ This discouragement of individual love and attention, in addition to the turnover in staff members, means that children cannot fully attach to a person. Especially in western societies, it is believed that it is of high importance that a child has a secure attachment relationship with a parent or a permanent parent substitute. With this perspective in mind, it can be argued that not showing children individual love and attention is more harmful to them than experiencing inequality. From this point of view it is believed that attachment relationships provide children with the base from which they can learn, explore and grow (Bowlby, 1969). In the African context, the desire to sustain group solidarity is often valued over individual needs (Abebe, 2019). From that perspective it would be better to treat the children in the same ways without showing favoritism by giving individual attention. By doing so, there are fewer chances that the children will become jealous and there will be a better chance that there will be harmony in the group. Therefore, one can question this approach and argue from both sides what is in the child’s best interest (Ansell, 2016).

Another difficult area in which the best interest of the child can be discussed is when it comes to their parents. The ultimate aim of the children’s home is to reunite the children with their families when the situation allows it. The ACRWC (1990) states in the preamble ‘*the child should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding*’. The children’s home tries to arrange reunification when possible, for example if the child has been taken away on the basis of poverty. When the child’s own parents are not a possibility due to abuse or violence, they try to find extended family members who can and are willing to care for the child. To provide the parents with a possibility to see their child and remain a relationship with him/her, the parents are always allowed to visit the children’s home with the condition that they are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Some parents visit regularly whereas others have never visited or called their child on the phone. Though these parents’ visits are very important to maintain the

relationship between parents and children, it also causes trauma to both the child that is visited and the children who are not visited. The child that is visited by their parents often enjoys their time with his or her parents, they are often given candies as well. But after some time their parents have to leave again. The social worker explains *'the separation is not just sad, it is traumatic, they are separated and left again.'* After the visit you can see the children silently return to the rest of the group, sometimes clinging on to the thing that their parents gave them. Peter (5 years) commented *'My mommy makes me sad because she leaves me and she musn't.'* Therefore, one can wonder, especially in a situation in which the chances or reunification are low, if it is in the best interest of the child to undergo this painful separation. On the other side, if there is a possibility for the child to return then this is the ultimate goal and a relationship between the parents and child is then of utmost importance.

Regarding the children who do not get visited on a regular basis or in general it can be painful to witness other children. The teacher describes *'Some are sad because they miss their moms and dads and sometimes theirs don't visit but other children's parents do and this makes them sad.'* Nearly all children in the children's home have the wish or hope that their parents will come back and take them back home. Seeing parents of their peers visit and bringing them sweets and chocolates while they never get a visit can be a painful reminder to their situation.

There is not always a clear answer to what is 'in the best interest of the child' when it comes to difficult situations in which children have faced and are still facing adversity. The approach that adults take when deciding what is in their best interest should therefore be accompanied by the child's perspective. Asking children about their experiences regarding these difficult matters will help adults get an insight into their worlds and help them make more informed choices that are hopefully in the best interest of the child.

Summary

In this analysis chapter I have discussed residential life in a children's home according to the characteristics of a total institution as described by Goffman (1961). These characteristics have been explained through situations and observations in the children's home. Each section has tried to give an overview of the way in which these aspects influence the life of the children. By growing up in a children's home the children grow up differently from children living at home. Additional

to the adversity they have already faced, these children now also have to adjust to new relations and expectations. They are challenged in their agency by being under constant supervision, having to follow a routine, being restricted in time and space and by always being part of a large group. The children use their agency less for resistance and more to be submissive and remain in good relationships. The use of agency in their everyday lives will be further discussed in the second analysis chapter and discussion.

Analysis 2 - *coping with their new 'normal'*

Introduction

The first analysis chapter dove into the characteristics of institutional life and the consequences this has for the children who live in the children's home. The second analysis chapter will focus on the children's own capacity to deal with these difficult circumstances on a daily basis, in a more descriptive manner.

Children who faced adversity are often portrayed as vulnerable, incompetent and powerless; helpless victims of hardship. For a long time there was little recognition for their adaptation, their ability to cope with these difficult situations. Instead of focusing on the problems they have faced and the hardship they experienced, the focus is now also on their ability to cope with these situations and the strategies these children use. By emphasizing the factors that help children cope with difficult situations they are recognized as competent actors of change (Panter-Brick, 2002).

While talking to the children there were noticeable similarities in the ways that they approached sensitive topics and how they dealt with the difficult circumstances that they were faced with. For the analysis these similarities have been clustered into four categories; how the children tried to make sense to the situation they were presented with; how they tried to work through the range of complicated emotions that they were experiencing; how they found ways to adapt and overcome the situation through social relationships; and how they remained a sense of hope throughout it all. Through highlighting these different aspects of how these children stay strong while facing adversity, the focus will shift from how they live in an institution that can be seen as restricting in space, time, activity and privacy to how they make sense of their daily lives. The main aim of this chapter is to explore how children adapt to, and manage, these difficult situations (Payne, 2012).

Vulnerable, capable, 'normal life'

Childhood as a whole is seen as a time of vulnerability, due to children's innocence and lack of competencies and abilities. Due to this perception of childhood children are perceived to need protection and help by adults, society or law (James & James, 2012). Children who grow up in a children's home are seen as especially vulnerable. Deprived of their home and a loving family, they grow up in an institution after having faced adversity from a young age. These children are still facing an extremely difficult situation. Therefore, instead of highlighting their vulnerability

and need for protection, it might be more important to look at their abilities and their expression of agency. By looking at the resilience of children and the way in which they cope with such a situation you acknowledge their agency. Instead of innocent victims who need adult help, they are also competent actors of change who can influence and change the ways in which they experience life. They have the ability to make sense of the harsh world around them and are able to adapt to this new home that has been given to them (Boyden & Mann, 2005). This ability to cope, adapt and stay strong during difficult circumstances and while facing adversity is called resilience (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Therefore '*children's resilience must be acknowledged every bit as much as their vulnerability.*' (Schaffer, 1996, p.47) By looking at the resilience of children, both the negative and the positive aspects are taken into account (James & James, 2012). This is beneficial because focusing on the positive aspects encourages adults to consider the children's agency instead of their weaknesses, vulnerability and dependency (James & James, 2012). Yet, children do often not perceive this agency as extraordinary or unusual. The children in adverse situations are not always aware that they are coping, showing resilience or competencies, instead they see these aspects as part of their everyday lives (Payne, 2012).

Instead of perceiving the children in the children's home as either vulnerable children, resilient children who are coping, or as children who express their everyday agency, these children will be perceived as all three at the same time. The children in the children's home are vulnerable due to the hardship they have faced and the unusual situation that they experience now, also, they are vulnerable because they are young (between 4 and 6 years of age). Additionally, these children are active agents who are coping with these difficult situations. They are doing this by using their agency; sometimes by being resilient, other times by being submissive. They apply coping mechanisms to make sense of their world and to deal with their emotions. Finally, the agency of these children is used and can be seen on a daily basis. They have integrated and adapted to their new situation, this has become their new normal. Yet, this does not mean that their lives are 'normal', they still live in precarious situations (Payne, 2012). In the following sections this everyday agency (Payne, 2012), the decisions and actions made by children, in a highly restrictive context will be further discussed.

Coping in their everyday life

Many children are highly adaptable and can adjust to new situations, many show great personal resilience when facing hardship (Boyden & Mann, 2005). They do this by applying coping strategies. This is an active and purposeful process that children use to deal with the situation that they are facing (Curry & Russ, 1985). Curry and Russ (1985) divided coping strategies into two main categories; behavioral coping strategies and cognitive coping strategies. The children restriction in space, time and actions work as thinners for their behavioral agency (Klocker, 2007). Therefore their cognitive strategies seem to be most important and most possible for them to apply, yet they also apply some of the behavioral strategies. In order to learn more about the ways in which these young children deal with these life events on a daily basis, it is vital to look into the different aspects that this involves including; children's own perspectives on the adversity they face, their feelings and their beliefs (Boyden & Mann, 2005). For adults to get an understanding of how children experience it and to see it from their perspectives, children need to be given the opportunity to explain and interpret their childhoods (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Therefore, this chapter will be based less on observations and more on the feelings and experiences that the children shared, accompanied by the explanations of the caregivers.

Making sense of the experience

The children in the children's home have been taken away from their familiar surroundings. They have been placed in an unknown place where they are being taken care of by strangers. Not all aspects of this process have been explained to them, sometimes they were too young to remember or to understand. Other times the full explanation is too complex or might just be adding to the harm. Or it has simply not been shared with them because people didn't see a need for this. In order to deal with the distressing experiences they have faced, children first need to make sense of those experiences and the difficulties they faced (Boyden & Mann, 2005). They describe the events from their perspectives and perceptions to understand them and to have an explanation for what happened. The social worker explained '*Some children just accept the fact that they will not get that anymore [go home, go on outings, family visits, etc.]. As a way of dealing with that some make-up stories in their mind to deal with the situation.*' Boyden and Mann (2005) describe that children do not always understand the experiences that they have encountered, but in order to be

able to acknowledge and overcome their stressful situations, children's own perspectives on adversity are vital. Additionally, understanding the child's perspectives on extreme events in their lives can help adults make decisions from the child perspective. In this case that might include the need for 'informing the children'.

The stories in the following text portray the reality from the child's perspective and how they have made sense of the experience. The experiences that will be discussed here are the reasons for living at the home, their arrival at the home and the children's knowledge that this is not a 'normal' living situation.

Reason to live at the children's home

Children's act 38 (2005) contains many rules regarding informing the State and the parents of the removal of the child from the parental home. It states that both the state and the parents should be informed about the reasons behind the decision to remove the children from parental care. Yet, both Children's act 38 (2005) and the ACRWC (1990) do not include any articles regarding informing the children themselves. The UNCRC (1989) touches upon the topic of information in Article 17, stating that children should have access to information from national and international sources. It mainly focuses on the media and does not include personal information. Instead it states that State Parties should '*Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being [...]'*' (UNCRC, 1989, Article 17). From this point of view it could be argued that children should not be informed about the reason why they were taken away from their parents, since this knowledge could be harmful to them. Article 9.4 states '*State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child.'*' (UNCRC, 1989, Article 9). This gives children the possibility to request information on the whereabouts of their family, yet it does not give them the right to request information about the process and the decisions that lead to them no longer living with their family. Meaning that there is no legal framework that allows children to gain knowledge and information about the decisions that are made that highly impact their own lives. Children, therefore, seem to make sense of their experiences in order to understand and deal with it. When Kelly (5 years) was asked why she was at the children's home she responded '*Home is a monster,*

my mommy says that is why I cannot come home' With this she seems to acknowledge that home is not a good place and she seems to apply different strategies to cope with this knowledge. She uses fantasy to give meaning to her experience, and the monster is a recurring concept in her experiences. She seems to be aware of the situation and the reasons behind it, but uses fantasy to process it. By making the monster the problem she seems to use the defensive reappraisal method, through which she attempts to make an adverse situation less impactful (Curry & Russ, 1985). She also thinks of ways in which she could overcome this, she explained *'We will beat the monster, I told him I will cut you with a knife and then it went away.'* By focusing on ways that this can be overcome she is adding positive factors to the situation (Curry & Russ, 1985). Samantha (6 years) also uses fantasy to make the aversive aspects of her situation less painful, she says *'My home is like a snowman, because we can't play with it.'* This is the way she makes sense of the situation and explains it to herself. She refers it to something she likes, the snowman from the Disney movie Frozen. By interpreting the situation in terms of something she enjoys, she can start to perceive the experiences as less painful (Curry & Russ, 1985). Yet, when she starts talking about her family, she is also aware of the reality in her family *'Mommy hit me when I was naughty and I hit my brother when he was naughty. [...] When my brother would cry I would pick him up and hold him. If he wouldn't stop then I would wake up my mommy and daddy and they would get very angry at me because they said I had woken him up. But I didn't.'* She experienced mental and physical abuse by her parents and was responsible for the care of her younger brother, all before the age of 6. With this saying Samantha shows that she is specific and accurate and that she has knowledge about her situation (Curry & Russ, 1985). Maggie (4 years) also explains the reason that she lives at the children's home through the reality-oriented working through strategy by saying *'My mommy did not need me.'* Her parents were alcohol addicted and Maggie experienced violence and abuse during the three years that she lived with her parents. More than the other children, she has taken emotional distance from her family. Instead of creating an explanation that still allows for emotional attachment to their parents, Maggie's explanations show that there is no interdependence between her and her mother anymore. When asking her what family is she says *'Family says 'NO Maggie NO! I am going to hit you and make you dead' and then they hit me really hard.'* When she was telling these stories, she did not seem to have a strong emotional reaction to them anymore. Instead she was playing with the curtains in the room and trying to climb in them. She said *'My family is nowhere.'* By playing in the room and climbing the curtains

she might have attempted to divert her thoughts away from the painful memories (Curry & Russ, 1985).

It is important to note that she had a little sister in the Children's home and an older brother who had left the children's home already. She said '*My brother and my sister are family.*' More about the relationship between siblings and how this contributes to dealing with adversity will be described later in this chapter.

Arriving at the home

The first time that the children arrive in the children's home is an extreme situation for most of them, especially the ones who are old enough to realize what is happening. It is a traumatic experience in which they are separated from their attachment person(s) and start a life in the unknown. The way in which the children experienced this moment varies between the children. Samantha (6 years) starts talking about the day she arrived, she explains '*I first came here on Friday, you were not here. The social worker brought me here. She told me that I would stay here but she would bring me back to my mommy another day. I was happy when I got here because I got a present.*' The girl recognizes the role of the social worker in the process. At this moment she still describes the situation as positive, she seems to apply coping strategies, by focusing on the positive factors (Curry & Russ, 1985). Later, the same girl states '*My social worker stole me. She took me away from my mommy and daddy and left me here.*' Here the girl does not seem to apply any coping strategies. The effect of this is that she sees the same moment through a different perspective. Instead of focusing on the positive, she sees the negative sides. She seems to put the blame on the social worker. This girl has experienced and dealt with several perspectives of the same situation. Other children have not always gone through the same thought process. Ellen (4 years), who only recently arrived at the children's home with 2 of her siblings explained '*One time my grandma came here with me and she talked. Then she had to go and we had to stay. She went to get chocolate.*' Though the girl seems aware of the things that happened, the last sentence shows that she tries to make sense of the reason her grandmother had to leave and why she left them all at the children's home. By interpreting the reason for leaving in her own way she makes the experience a little less painful (Curry & Russ, 1985). Children's try to cope with the experiences they have been through in different ways, yet they all seem to be aware that this is not a normal way of living, this will be further explained in the following section.

Knowing this is not 'normal'

Children in adverse situations do often not see themselves to be in crisis (Payne 2012). They try to make sense of their situation and explain it to themselves. Yet, they do seem to be aware that their situation is not a 'normal' situation and that this is not how it is supposed to be. Many of the children, but certainly not all, have lived with their family for some years. They have been part of a community and are aware of 'normal' life outside of the children's home. Josh (5 years) says *'I live alone and other children live with their mommy and daddy [...] In my home I lived with my mommy and daddy, this is not my home.'* He is aware that this is an unusual situation, that most children live with their families, just like he used to do. Because he is not together with his family he considers his current residency not as a home, neither does he consider the people he lives with to be family since he states that he is all alone. When asking him who his family is, he does answer *'everyone who hugs me is family because it makes me happy.'* This shows his need for affection and love by the people around him. The children in the children's home do not receive many hugs from the caregivers that might be why he still considers himself to live alone.

During one of the methods, Kelly (5 years) was playing with the dolls. Similar to all the other children she chose to be the parent of the doll and gently cared for it. If the babies cried she would comfort the baby doll or see to its needs. Kelly showed how to gently care for a baby just as all the other children did. They talked about how some of their parents would hit the baby, or them, if he or she cried, yet none of the children did use any form of violence against the dolls. At one moment Kelly stopped and said *'Babies must stay with their mommy and not go to a [children's] home.'* With this she expresses that she believes and knows that children are not supposed to grow up apart from their parents, that children should stay with their mother often their main attachment person. This goes against what she sees on a daily basis, where she is surrounded by children and babies who do not live with their parents. Yet, she is aware that this is not normal and that this is not the way in which children are supposed to grow up.

Processing the emotions

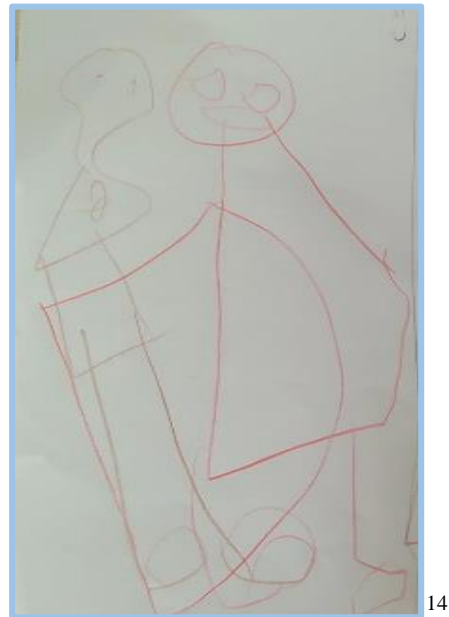
Children who have been through distressing experiences and are still facing hardship on a daily basis have to process their emotions such as fear, grief and anger. How they process this can help them defend themselves against continuously painful experiences (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Yet it is important to stay aware that children are not invulnerable, after being exposed to several stressful

events in their lives, they do have an increased risk of being emotionally and psychologically overwhelmed (Boyden & Mann, 2005). All the children in the children's home have experienced at least one traumatic event, the separation from their family. Many have multiple traumatic experiences, including what they have been through before they entered the children's home. Just like other children, but to a greater extent, they therefore have to deal with negative emotions. The main negative emotions, grief, anger and fear, as described by Boyden and Mann (2005), will be analyzed in the following section. It can be seen how children use coping strategies such as emotion-regulating cognitions to make their negative thought and discomfort affect them less and how they focus on positive emotions instead (Curry & Russ, 1985).

Grief/sadness

Grief and sadness are being put together since their sadness is most often caused by the grief they feel. All the children in the children's home have been separated from their parents, some at birth, other just a few months prior to the research. All the children are aware of what a 'normal' family looks like; children who grow up with their parent(s) or other family members. All these children have experienced a loss. Either a conscious loss of their parents when being separated from them or a loss of their ideal. Even the children who have been at the children's home from birth talk about their parents and how they miss them. The children feel sadness and grief for the loss of their parents or the loss of the idea of a family. Kelly (5 years) says *'The [baby] monster is sad and crying because the daddy monster is gone home, but the daddy monster does love the baby monster a lot.'* Earlier she described the monster as the reason she could not live at home anymore, this time she uses the same metaphor to describe herself and father. She describes the loss she feels and the sadness that comes with this. She copes with these difficult emotions and experiences by focusing on the love she has and the fact that she is being loved in return. By doing this she moderates the negative impact of these heavy emotions. By using metaphors to express her feelings, she might be able to distance her emotions a bit, and to talk about it in a way that affects her a little less. Soraya (4 years) also found a positive way to cope with the grief of the loss of her family. When she was asked what family is, she answered *'Family is a daddy, mommy and brother. (Researcher): Is that every family or your family? (Soraya): That is my family. They are my family because they want me.'* Soraya is talking about her host-parents, people who are trying to gain custody over her and to care for her as their own daughter. Due to paperwork and missing

documents, this process takes time, but she now spends a weekend each month with her host parents and feels loved there. When talking about family, she always refers to this family. She has passed the most negative emotions regarding the loss of her birth family and has instead turned family into something positive again. Yet the grief and sadness is still very much present for other children. Peter (5 years) drew himself on a picture and described ‘*The Boy is sad because he is crying for everybody. [...] I don’t want to do [/draw] the happy one because [...] I am not happy.*’



14

When Peter would talk about his emotions it seemed like he felt them very deeply, yet he was unable to really explain why he felt that way. He often said things like ‘*I am sad because I must*’. His emotions were very close to the surface, but he did not seem to have the means to express himself more clearly or give an underlying reason. It is important to keep in mind that he is still very young. Additionally, explaining emotions and talking about emotions might not have been a part of his upbringing.

Ellen (4 years) seems to be aware of the hardship her family faced. She and her two little sisters were recently brought to the children’s home due to poverty and an unsafe home environment. Her family visits regularly and she talks positively about her parents while missing them very much at the same time. When she was asked what she would wish for she did not say something like: to go

¹⁴ Drawing by Peter, 5 years old, drawing of himself being sad together with another child.

back to my parents. Instead she stated *'My wish is to help my daddy. I don't want to leave my daddy. I will help my daddy'* She seems to be aware that there are reasons for her to live in the children's home and that her dad is the one in charge to change this in order for her and her sisters to come home. Instead of focusing on the loss of her family life and the love and care of her family, she instead thinks of solutions and possibilities for her to contribute. She is coping with her emotions through imagining herself actively helping her father and her family.

These examples show that children deal in different ways with the loss of their families. Some focus on the positive aspects, whereas others are filled with sadness. Some children have let go of their old family and focus on the new one, others are actively trying to return back home. All children are separated from their family, all of them experiences sadness and loss and all of them cope with this differently.

Anger

Many of the children seem to experience anger similar to other children outside of a children's home. The teacher says *'I don't see them angry. And if they are angry I see it just as something normal because they are children.'* Many of the situations during which the children get angry can be seen as appropriate to their age. They get angry at other children for 'not listening' or when they hit each other. They often hit another when they cannot fully express themselves with words, many of the children describe this as the main cause of their anger, also Josh (5 years) *'I get angry at Peter because he hit me'*. In return Peter (5 years) describes later, also using the monster metaphor *'He is angry at the monster because the monster hit him and he musn't.'* The children are aware that they are not supposed to hit and that hitting makes them both upset and angry. Yet, many of the children use hitting to express their feeling to each other; when they really don't want something, when they are upset or angry with another child or when they do not get their way.

Both girls and boys used hitting as a tool to get their way with other children. Additional to conflicts between children, the children also felt angry when they are being told 'no'. As the social worker explains *'They love saying it but hate hearing it.'* Since the children are under constant supervision and need permission for nearly all aspects of life while simultaneously trying to develop their own personality, it might be frustrating for them to not be allowed to do as they want to.

Yet the children also experience anger related to their pasts. Some of the children seem angry at their parents or social workers for leaving them at the children's home. Other children say that they don't get angry any more at the children's home, but they did get angry at home, when people got angry at them. Many of the children tell stories of their parents being angry at them. Samantha (6) shares that her parents got angry when she could not keep her baby brother quiet. Other children express how their family used to yell at them or get angry when they had done something wrong. Describing these moments, the children did not seem to be angry in return, but instead they seemed to feel guilty.

Finally, the children get angry when they cannot put their feelings into words. The teacher describes *'when they are angry there is a need behind that anger.'* This can be a need for attention, a need for love or a need to be comforted or helped. Many children will have sustained trauma from all the hardship they have faced. When they cannot ask for help or don't know how to put their feelings into words, they express this by being angry.

Fears

After all the experiences that the children have had, they possess many fears. Some fears are connected to their lives before the children's home, others are based on their current lives and some are regular fears that all children have. A fear for many of the children, as the social worker describes *'I think new children are scared sleeping alone away from siblings and alone in a bed without family near them.'* Many of the new children were most likely sharing a bed or a room with their sibling(s) or/and their parents. When they arrive in the children's home they find themselves in a foreign place and without the security and comfort of a family member next to them. Instead, they are now sleeping alone in a big bed surrounded by other children. The children's home tries to accommodate siblings in the same room and sometimes lets siblings share a bed if they want to, to reduce the fears.

But as much as a family can give a form of security when they were sleeping, for some it has also been a source of fear. The social worker continues *'With their background they can be scared in their minds that someone will treat them unwell, since this sometimes even happened with close family, they won't trust them again. And sometimes they will even see adults here as possible treats.'* Many of the children were placed in the children's home due to violence and abuse against them. Their home was not a safe place, instead it was a place in which they had to fear the people

that were closest to them. Some of the children have had traumatic experiences with people that were supposed to care for them and love them. Therefore, it can be difficult to accept that the people in the children's home will not harm them. This makes them afraid within the children's home, a place that is now their safe haven.

Other children have fears regarding their homes. Kelly (5) uses monsters to describe the experiences she had during her time with her family. When asked what she was afraid of, she answered '*Maybe the monster will go to oma [grandma] too*'. Oma is part of Kelly's family. She described how some of her sisters are living at oma's house and how they will all live there in the future until their mother comes home (from prison) and brings them all home. She sees her oma's place as a temporary safe haven. Yet, she is afraid that the monster that caused her to live in the children's home, will also find its way to her oma. That the place that she considers safe, will also not be a safe place anymore for her to return to.

Social relationships

One of the ways to adjust to hardship is through meaningful social relationships. The children in the children's home have meaningful relationships with their siblings and their peers. These relationships can help children to adapt and adjust to life in the children's home. Children can use these social relationships to cope with their situations when they use friendships and siblings as a form of support and reassurance (Curry & Russ, 1985). The relationships that children have with their siblings and peers in an interdependent one. Meaning that the personal agency of children is largely dependent on the context, opportunities/constraints and interpersonal relationships of children (Abebe, 2019). Especially since the children are surrounded by the same group of children at all times, their agency is constantly negotiated and renegotiated through interactions with peers and siblings. Through deeper social relationships, children's interdependence on each other increases (Abebe, 2019). This can help children test their boundaries, develop their personalities and feel more secure about themselves (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

Siblings

One of the most important relationships for children is the relationship between siblings. Nearly all children that took part in this research grew up with siblings. More than half of the children have a younger sibling at the children's home. Next to parents, siblings are the strongest

influences in a child's development (Nsamenang, 2011). In the African context, it is not uncommon for older children to (partly) care for their younger siblings. Therefore, sibling relationships are often particularly valued (Nsamenang, 2011).

Before the children entered the children's home they found themselves in a situation of neglect, abandonment or abuse. When there is violence or neglect in a family, it is often a general pattern, rather than a one singled out child. As a result, the older child, often the oldest girl, takes the responsibility upon herself to care for the others (Sanders, 2004). Samantha (6 years) and her brother (3 years) were neglected by her parents, she took the caregiving role upon her. She describes how she would take care of him *'My little brother got very scared at night and then I would pick him up and put him in my bed because my mommy was very tired and didn't want to get out of bed. [...] When my brother would cry I would pick him up and hold him. [...] hen my mommy and daddy went to work I had to keep him quiet, sometimes I would walk outside with him'*. Here she describes how she became the main caregiver to her brother, both night and day. She would comfort him, care for him and keep her brother safe while her parents were away. Siblings can get attached to one another when the older sibling takes over the care usually provided by one of the parents. The younger siblings can show the same happiness and delight when their older sibling returns as a secure attached child would show when their parent returns. Their sibling becomes the secure base from which they explore and a source of sadness when they are away (Howe, 1995). Even when older siblings don't take over the care of their younger siblings, there can be an attachment relationship between siblings. Yet, these attachment relationships should be seen as a social relationship rather than a biological one (Sander, 2004). Because of the special bond between siblings, it is important that siblings are placed together. Children often prefer this themselves, it preserves the family links and it is associated with more successful outcomes (Sander, 2004)

Though siblings will be bickering and taunting, it can still provide the children with a degree of comfort in stressful situations where they find themselves alone in a new situation with new people (Sander, 2004). Samantha (6 years) exemplifies this by saying *'My brother stayed with me when I was sick, he watched me because he didn't want me to be sick. My tummy hurts because my brother pushed me. But he was sorry and he would never do it again.'* Siblings can be both the source of pain while simultaneously also being the source of comfort.

Siblings can help each other cope and overcome difficult situations (Sanders, 2004). An example of this is given by Kelly (5 years) who talks about her little sister Anna (3 years) *'My sister makes me happy. We like to play. My mommy told me to play with my sister. My sister is happy here and she told me to be happy here as well.'* Additionally, siblings can provide the other with comfort in distressing times. Especially the older sibling can often be a source of comfort, reassurance and familiarity to the younger sibling. Kelly explains *'Now my sister cries sometimes and then we give each other a hug'*. Surrounded by adults in the children's home and being placed in different age groups, Kelly and Anna still find each other when they are in need of comfort.

Friendships

Another important social relationship is the relationship between children, friendships.

In the first Analysis chapter peer-relations in the children's home were discussed. In that chapter I talked about the consequences of growing up in a total institution for the relationships that children have with their peers in that institution. Additionally, it was argued that being with their friends was an opportunity for the children to express their agency, by agreeing and disagreeing with other children. The peer-relationships could therefore be seen as a love-hate relationship.

In this chapter we will not focus on the 'agency-battles' or conflicts between the children, instead we will look into the benefits of having friendships for coping, dealing and adapting to difficult situations.

Friendships between children are important for positive well-being. Children who have friends are less likely to be lonely, depressed or victimized. Additionally, having friends is associated with higher levels of happiness (Holder & Coleman, 2015). That friendships increase the happiness of children and are often a source of happiness as well is agreed upon by nearly all children in the children's home. Alisha (4 years) explains *'The girl is happy, she likes to play with me. We play together on the bicycle. Friends make me and the girl happy.'* Having friends and joining these friends in a shared playful activity increases the level of happiness for two children and therefore also their well-being. Friendships can turn into protective factors that give children a sense of competence and belonging (Boyden & Mann, 2005). This sense of belonging can be seen in Kayla's (4 years) explanation as well *'This is a house for the children. We love each other in this house.'*

The Children's home is also a home. I have a friend here, she is my friend because she loved me. Some grown-ups here love me too, they are also a little bit friends.' The children's home feels like a home to her because she feels she is being loved, both by the caregivers as well as her friends. Feeling secure and loved in friendships can give children the opportunity to be themselves and feel good about who they are and this can help them deal with the stress of the negative emotions of the difficult situations they are facing (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Holder & Coleman, 2015). The positive effect of friendships on children's self-esteem and emotions can be seen from something Samantha (6 years) said, she states *'If you like to be happy, you can be happy. I am happy when people like me, we must be happy. People like me in the house, in this home.'* She experiences the feeling of being loved and liked, both by the staff as well as by the other children. This awareness makes her more self-confident. Additionally, it makes her feel happy and deal with the negative emotions because she has positive aspects to focus on. Having friends makes children feel stronger and less alone which is of positive influences for their well-being and happiness.

Remaining hopeful

Nearly all the children in the children's home believe that they will soon return home, even the ones who have never had another home than the children's home. The children would say 'tomorrow I will go home' or 'tomorrow mommy will come and get me'. The day it will get better always remains tomorrow. Kelly (5 years) said during nearly every activity *'Tomorrow we can stay at grandma's house again.'* and Maggie (4 years) believes that her mother did not leave her indefinitely at the children's home, when talking about her mother she says *'She said I'll come back tomorrow'*. They remain hopeful that their situation will change and that they will be able to live in a family again and have a home. Children who are able to remain hopeful about their future while facing hardship show that they are flexible and adaptable (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Kelly (5 years) explains how it will all get better soon *'When I am bigger I will be happy. I am going to be bigger on Saturday. [...] When I am bigger I can say stop to the monster and then I can come home again.'* By being hopeful about the possibilities of the future she is actively trying to take control over her life. By doing so she is likely to be less vulnerable than children who have accepted the adversity they face.

Everyday agency

In the previous sections, the different coping strategies that children use on a daily basis have been discussed and exemplified by the stories and experiences of children. Through social relations and cognitive coping strategies, they try to deal with their new normal. In order to do this they have to make sense of the world around them, they have to process and maybe adapt their negative emotions and they try to remain hopeful (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Curry & Russ, 1985). Yet, children do not experience these actions as expressions of agency during crisis (Payne, 2012). Instead these ways of coping have become part of their everyday lives (Payne, 2012). It is likely that the children are not aware that they are doing some of the things and especially that this is helping them to adjust and cope with their situation. By making sense of their experiences, dealing with their emotions, making social connections and remaining hopeful, the children are not just coping with their situation, they are also adapting and managing a situation in which their parents are absent (Payne, 2012).

By looking at this from a Childhood Studies perspective, the focus lays on the children's agency and abilities and competencies to adjust to difficult situations. By implementing elements of Developmental Psychology in the analysis as well, it allows for a more complex understanding of the way in which the children cope and process. Additionally, it gave insight into how they explain some of their experiences and why this can and should be acknowledged as coping.

Summary

The focus of the second analysis chapter lay on the way that the children dealt and deal with the stressful, difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences they have faced. They use everyday agency to influence their views and perspectives on their daily lives in order to be able to cope with the circumstances they face. Though the children are young and vulnerable, they are also capable and resilient. They apply strategies in order to function in a situation that became their new 'normal'. In this chapter different approaches have been discussed, guided by the stories shared by the children. The resilience of children in their everyday lives has been shown through the process of how they make sense of their experiences, how they process the negative emotions, how social relationships help them adapt and overcome and how they remain hopeful throughout it.

Analysis 3 - *through thick and thin*

Throughout this thesis, the possibilities and restraints regarding the agency of children has been a recurring subject. In the theory chapter, it was established that the agency of children is not only seen as the outcome of being active social actors but also by being subjects of rights (Beazley, et al., 2009). In the two analysis chapter different aspects of life in the children's home have been discussed. The first analysis focused on the main characteristics of life in an institution. By using the characteristics of a total institution as described by Goffman (1961), daily life in the children's home was explained, discussed and exemplified. This chapter showed the influence these aspects have on the lives of the children living in the institution. The second analysis focused on the ways that the children deal with life in the institution and the effects that the characteristics of total institutions have on their lives. The aim of these two chapters was to give insight into the children's perspectives on life in the children's home. This was done both by exploring the physical consequences by focusing on time, space and actions, as well as the mental experiences, but focusing on coping strategies and ways to adapt and overcome the situation. Both are needed for a complete understanding of institutionalized life.

The two analysis chapters have shown the different aspects of life during which children have possibilities to express their agency and during which they seem to be constrained. The two chapters have also aimed to give more insight into the needs of children to express their agency and how they seem to navigate the tension between individual needs and collective choices (Abebe, 2019). Meaning that agency is a continuum, and how children experience agency is dependent on the diverse experiences that children encounter as well as the changing degrees of independence and dependence (Abebe, 2019). This makes that children experience agency in some areas of their lives but not in others (Abebe, 2019). If, where and how much agency children experience during certain moments depends on the thickers and thinners. Social relationships, context and social structures can work as thickers or thinners of agency (Klocker, 2007). Meaning that they either expand (thicker) or constrain (thinner) the availability of choices for children (Klocker, 2007). This means that there is a relationship between the agency of children and the structures and context in which they grow up. Though they are agents of their own lives, they are positively and negatively influenced by these structures, context and social relationships (Bell &

Payne, 2009). By looking at the different aspects that influence life in the children's home, it can be identified which aspects are considered thickers and which are considered thinners. The thickers and thinners of the children's home will be examined by the aspects that influences it, as described by Klocker (2007); structures, context, and social relationships. Meaning that I will zoom in from a macro-level to a micro-level and discuss how different aspects either expand or constrain the agency of children. It is important to note that the general agency of the children is considered thin. Meaning that the children carry out their decisions and everyday decisions in a highly restrictive context, independently from the factors that thinner and thicker their agency within this restrictive context.

Structures

We have established that the children in the children's home show 'everyday agency'. Through actions and ways of thinking the children deal on a daily level with all different aspects of life (Payne, 2012). These aspects are dependent on many factors. On macro-level this includes the position of children in society, which influences how they are perceived. In return, this decides the power children have and their possibilities to express their agency.

According to the UNCRC (1989, Article 1) and the ACRWC (1990, Article 2), every human below the age of 18 is considered a child. Meaning that all children till the age of 18 are part of the phase of life called 'childhood'. Being part of childhood in itself can be many ways to be considered a thinner for children's agency. Though Childhood Studies as a research field recognizes children to be active beings instead of becoming (Qvortrup, 2004), in most contexts childhood is seen as a time of vulnerability, socialization and dependency (James & James, 2012). The view of dependent and vulnerable children often leads to high levels of parental/adult/societal control and little chances for children to escape this control (Qvortrup, 2000). Additional to the limitation in their daily choices compared to adults, children also have limited possibilities to fight for their rights by often lacking the individual or collective power to do so. They are dependent on adults to provide them with rights and to ensure that other adults follow them (Liebel, 2012). Therefore, being part of childhood, as compared to adulthood, is a thinner for children's agency. Not only does it limit their economic and political power, as described by Qvortrup (2000), it also limits their agency in everyday life contexts. Additionally, the children are part of a more vulnerable group than just

‘childhood’, they are considered to be children of the system, taken away from their family through a court order and growing up in an institution. Therefore, they are considered to be vulnerable and in need of protection. Being considered particularly vulnerable and in need of extra safeguard and protection compared to peers sets limits to what children are permitted to do and how their best interests, needs and wishes are understood (James & James, 2012). This means that their position in society as particularly vulnerable children limits their possibility, choices and power and is therefore also considered a thinner.

Context

In the category of the context the focus will be on the children’s home, which is the daily context for the children, and the effects this has on their agency. In the theory chapter we have concluded that the agency is a continuum (Abebe, 2019). Meaning that there are shifting degrees of agency depending on the context that the children are in (Abebe, 2019). The children show everyday agency by the ways that they deal and cope with their daily situations but the moments during which they can express their individual agency, as well as their agency in relation with others, depends among other things, on the structural contexts. All the contextual aspects of the institution have been discussed in the first analysis. There it has been described how the aspects of institutional life influence the children. Now it will be discussed what the effects of this are on the agency of children. The restriction in space, the constant supervision, being part of the collective and having the daily routines will be discussed in terms expanding or constraining agency on a daily basis.

In the first analysis chapter the limitation in space has been explained and discussed. It was mentioned that children are restricted to the ground of the children’s home and have limited or no access to the ‘outside world’. This restriction can both work as a thicker and thinner of their agency. Their limited mobility and freedom of space thinnens their agency. Their possibilities to explore the unknown and their decisions to go to places is restricted and therefore limits their agency. Even within the children’s home the children are kept away from certain places and they can only enter a place during the specific time that they are supposed to enter that place. For example, they can only enter the classroom in the morning, only go to the dining hall during meal times etc. They have no freedom in choosing their place and deciding how to use this place.

Keeping children within these spaces does not only limit them physically but also mentally (Gilliam, 2013). At the same time, the familiarity in both space and expectations within this space makes that children are less dependent on adults for safety. This might give them a bit more confidence and possibilities to make their own decisions.

Children in the children's home are subject to constant supervision. This can lead to a continuously desire to stay out of trouble to remain a positive relationship with the staff and avoid trouble (Goffman, 1961b). Acknowledging that trying to sustain group solidarity is a form of agency, I argue that to some degree autonomous agency is needed as well. Being under constant supervision and being aware of the expectations and consequences thins the possibilities to individual agency.

This same line of reasoning can be adapted to the constant routines that the children are part of. Due to the scheduled activities, the children cannot make their own decisions on their actions, they have to follow the instructions of the supervising staff. This means that instead of making individual choices, the child constantly has to adapt to the routines that are put in place by the institution (Buchbinder et al., 2006). This is a thinner for their agency, since it does not give them the possibility to make their own choices and decisions regarding their actions. At the same time, one can argue that routines can also be seen as a thicker since it provides children with the security of stability and reliability (Butterfield, 2002). In turn, this can provide children with confidence from which they dare to explore and make individual choices, where possible.

The constant supervision can only be seen as a thinner on the other hand. It aims to provide the children with the protection and to safeguard them. Yet, the safeguarding goes hand in hand with the supervision of expected behavior. Meaning that children are always expected to behave in the right ways. Agency can be seen in being subordinate and following the rules set in place to avoid negative consequences (Abebe, 2019). Yet monitoring the children in this way, limits their possibilities to act as they like, to make their own choices without constantly having to be aware of their behavior and the negative consequences 'bad' behavior could have.

The final aspect of a total institution that influences the possibilities and constraints in agency that the children experience is being constantly surrounded by peers. This aspect can also be seen as both a thinner and thicker of agency. It is a thinner because the children are always part of the collective, every choice and decision that needs to be made is a group choice. These choices are based on the needs of the collective rather than the needs of a individual child. Not only does this

mean that the children are not always met in their individual needs, there is also a possibility that it creates an obstacle for children own individuality and their own expressions of autonomy (Markström & Halldén, 2009). Concluding, that it can be a thinner for the children's possibilities to express their agency. The way in which their peers can be a thicker of agency lays in the social interactions and the possibilities to express their agency in relation to their peers. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Social relationships

The final aspect that will be discussed in regards to thinners and thickers of agency is social relationships. Young children are dependent on others by nature, they are dependent on adults to care for them and to protect them. But relationships are also needed for children to express their agency and to gain opportunities to express their agency. Abebe (2019) talk about interdependent agency regarding the intergenerational relationships between adults and children and how they play out in everyday life. Additional to intergenerational relationships, children also experience interdependent relationships with their siblings and peers. This interdependence can be a form of agency, a way for children to support and attract dependency to sustain solidarity and an interdependent life (Abebe, 2019). But children also want and need to express their agency to fulfill individual needs, even when these are overshadowed by collective needs. The possibilities for children to act as they wish are dependent on the web of social relations that they find themselves in (Bell & Payne, 2009). In this section we will look at the different social relationships of children and how these relations work as thinner or thicker the child's possibilities to exercise their agency.

The first relationship that children have is the relationship with their parent(s). During the first years of life, children grow attached to their parents and have an attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969). Due to this relationship children feel secure enough to be separated from their parents for increasingly lengthy periods at the time, to explore the world around them. Yet, due to the situation at home, many children are likely not to have had a secure attachment to their parent(s). Resulting in that they either didn't dare to explore or explore without caring for proximity to their parents, as a result of insecure attachment (Ainsworth, 1979). Now that the children are separated from their parents, they do not have a stable attached basis from which they dare to explore. The inability

for children to grow up with their parents in terms of attachment works as a thinner for their attachment.

If the care was taken over by one person, the children could have had an opportunity to create a new attachment relationship with the caregiver. Yet, due to high turnover and the discouragement of forming attachment relationships, the children do not find a new person that can be their safe haven from which they can explore. The staff members care for the children and provide them with their basic needs and protection. Yet, not all the children are met in their emotional needs. This, in addition to the constant supervision, as described above, means that it is not a safe and secure place from which the children can make their own decisions and choose their own actions. Their position as subordinate to 'powerful' adults or the institutional expression of control makes that children are less likely to act in the ways they choose. Therefore, it is considered a thinner for the children's agency.

Two social relationships that do work as thickers of agency are peer-relations and sibling relations. Both these forms of relationships provide them with a chance to be themselves and feel good about who they are (Boyden & Mann, 2005). This creates a safety from which they dare to explore, both the surroundings and in their choices and decisions. Siblings can have a relationship that is similar to that of attachment to a parent. The older sibling provides the younger siblings with the security to discover. Peer-relations and sibling relations are not only positive, but even if it results in bickering and fighting, it provides children with the possibility to 'act out' to test the boundaries and to disagree. At the same time these relations also provide the children with the possibility to use their agency to sustain group solidarity (Abebe, 2019). Due to the power-balance between friends, which provides children with the security to make their own decisions, and the stability and interdependence between siblings from which they dare to explore, these relationships are considered thickers for children's agency.

Thickers, thinners and legal frameworks

It can be concluded that children have individual agency but that this agency is also interdependent, a continuum and part of their everyday lives. The importance of social resources has been shown throughout the different analysis chapters. It has been discussed that through relationships children are able to negotiate power, they have an opportunity to be themselves and express themselves, and they also find a dependency on social relationships. Relations allow children to feel

empowered, it makes them feel recognized in their respective roles in a way that reflects their everyday life (Abebe, 2019). Yet, this everyday life is subject to change and the continuous negotiation between individual and collective choices (Abebe, 2019).

Though, the different kinds of agency can be seen in the children's home, the general opportunity for agency in the children's home is thin. Not only does society constrain the agency of children, but also the children's home contains many aspects that work as thinners for children's agency. By acknowledging these thinners instead of stating that the children's agency is non-existent, it is possible to acknowledge their difficult circumstances while simultaneously acknowledging their efforts to survive, adapt and overcome the adversity they face (Klocker, 2007). One of the aspects that does work as thicker for children's agency are social relationships. These relationships create a secure base from which children feel safe enough to make their own decisions and explore. Noteworthy is that there is very little mentioned in the UNCRC (1989) regarding the social relationships of children. This is remarkable since this seems to be of high importance for the children and a very prominent aspect of their daily lives. The UNCRC (1989) does mention that *'the child [...] should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'* (UNCRC, 1989, Preamble). In the case of these children, the parents cannot be the ones to provide the child with happiness, love and understanding on a daily basis anymore. But, there are people surrounding the child that can; the caregivers, their friends and siblings. This highlights the importance of interdependence between children and the social connections surrounding them. This acknowledgment of the importance of interdependence is barely mentioned in the UNCRC (1989) in contradiction to the ACRWC (1990). Additional to rights that are mentioned in the UNCRC, the ACRWC has added Article 31, an article focusing on the responsibilities and duties of the child. Article 31 states, among other things, that *'the child [...] shall have the duty to work to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and to contribute to the moral well-being of society'* (ACRWC, 1990, Article 31). This puts emphasis on the importance of social connections and highlights the value of interdependence, which has also been described as an important need for the children. It is argued that within the African context the desire to sustain social solidarity is valued over independent life (Abebe, 2019). Independently from the values of society, it can be argued that children, and young children especially, have a greater need for dependency and interdependence. Through the social relations surrounding them,

children experience opportunities to grow, learn and express themselves. Social relationships are needed under all circumstances, during the good times but also during the difficult or problematic times. They have a need for support, through thick and thin.

Summary

In this chapter the different thickers and thinners have been discussed in regards to the agency of the children in the children's home. There are many aspects that thinner the already thin agency of children. Yet, there are also aspects that thicken their agency; social relationships. Through friendships, meaningful relationships with caregivers and sibling relationships, children have more opportunities to express themselves. Therefore, it is argued that there should be more acknowledgment for the importance of relationships in the UNCRC (1989), something that is already partly present in the ACRWC (1990) through Article 31.

Conclusion - *a colorful patchwork*



15

Summary of key findings

This thesis started with this picture by Samantha (6 years) who stated '*I drew different houses because there are many different homes.*'

The aim of this thesis was to find out more about the perspectives and experiences of young children who grow up in a children's home in Cape Town, South-Africa. The introduction introduced the concept of the child's perspective (Söderbäck et al., 2011); the insiders perspectives on children's expressions, perceptions and understandings, this is the perspective that I tried to capture with this research project. In the background chapter the complex history of South-Africa was presented together with the current problems that the colored population is still facing. These problems are often the reason for the children to live in the children's home. Such reasons are poverty, violence and substance abuse. In the theory chapter the main theories were explained and discussed. This thesis has been written from a Childhood Studies perspective with a rights-oriented approach and elements from developmental psychology. The theory of Goffman (1961) about total institution has been the framework where the first analysis chapter was based on. The framework for the second analysis chapter was created by the experiences of children and focused on a descriptive manner on the ways that the children dealt with life while facing hardship. Due to the

¹⁵ Drawing by Samantha, 6 years old, drawing of the children's home. Same drawing can be found on the front page.

limitations in space, time and action, as described in the first analysis chapter, these ways of dealing are mainly mentally and socially.

To answer the main research question of how children perceive and experience life in a children's home, we will take a look at the outcomes of the two analysis chapters and their aim to discover both life at the home and how to deal with this life.

The aim of the first analysis chapter, was to learn about the characteristics of institutionalized life and the consequences this has for the children living in it. Each of the main characteristics of a total institution, as explained by Goffman (1961a), was discussed in how it applied to the children's home, how it was visible in the children's daily lives and the influence this has on the children. The first characteristic was the limitation in space and the constant authority. In this chapter the confinement of the children to the children's home was explained, as well as how the children were under constant supervision, both by the member of staff as by each other. It was argued that limited space and constant supervision keeps children safe, yet it also limits the children physically and mentally and influenced the way they could and would express their agency. The second part focused on the characteristic that children are always part of a large group of similar peers. This led to a discussion between collectivism versus individualism and the question if individualism can be seen as a Western ideology; the Western individualism versus the African collectivism. The conclusion of this is that both are needed, the children learn from being part of the collective but a need for individual attention as well. The goal is to find a balance in this. The third part explains the daily routines that the children have to follow. It is argued that routines are helpful and necessary for children, yet in institutional life these routines are not adapted to the individual child. Therefore, it would be beneficial to create moments during which children can decide their own activity and have opportunities to make individual choices in how they would like to spend their time. The final characteristic of a total institution was that these institutions act with an aim in mind. In this section it was discussed how the children's home decided to focus on the protection and provision rights of children, with little to no acknowledgment to the participation right of children. The reasoning behind this can be explained by the immediate need of children and the limited possibilities and resources of the children's home. Yet, including opportunities to participation should be within the possibilities of the home. Additionally, the best interest of the child was discussed and how what is perceived as the best interest depends on the individual norms

and values of the person making that decision as well as the wider context. The conclusion states that there is not always a clear answer to what is in the best interest of the child. Yet, it helps to actually ask the children before making a decision on their behalf.

To conclude the first analysis chapter; acknowledging the children's home as a total institution with all the corresponding characteristics is not necessarily a negative aspect. Many children of a young age spend a large part of their time in institutions (think of schools and daycare centers). The importance is that there remains a balance. By maintaining a balance in the aspects described above, children will gain more opportunities to be active agents and they will have more possibilities to actively express their agency.

The aim of the second analysis chapter was to gain knowledge about the ways that young children cope and show resilience on a daily basis while facing hardship. After establishing what daily life in the children's home is like and the influence this has on the children, it was time to gain an understanding of the ways that the children cope with this life and the previous adversity they have endured.

The first section tries to get an understanding of how children make sense of the difficulties they have experienced since children are often not being informed about the reasons behind it. Some children create their own story, sometimes including fantasy, others are very realistic. All children seem to be aware that this is not how a 'normal' childhood is supposed to be. I argue that the reason behind decisions that are made for the children should be explained to them in an age-appropriate manner to help the children understand. The second part aims to understand the negative emotions; sadness/grief, anger and fears. After all the hardships these children have faced and the extraordinary situation that they are still faced with, they experience negative emotions. Many of these emotions are related to their family. The grief for the loss of their family and their attempt to process this. They talk about expressions of anger from their time with their family and get angry when they have a need but not the capabilities to express this. They fear being alone and for other safe spaces to disappear. Still, the children do generally seem to be happy and content. They seem to cope with these emotions, though they are present in the background. The third section focused on the abilities to adapt and overcome through social relations. Friendships help children feel happy and loved. It is good for their well-being and self-esteem. Even more beneficial are the sibling relationships between children. Siblings help each other cope with and overcome difficult

situations. The final chapter highlights how children remain hopeful. They are positive that they will someday (described by them as tomorrow) be reunited with their families and will be able to go home. This makes them more resilient and flexible in the situations they are facing. To conclude the second analysis chapters, the children apply different ways to personally deal with their situation. Though each child has a different approach in how they apply these different aspects, all children remain strong during the hardship they are facing.

The two analysis chapters have given insight into how the children experience life at the children's home, both by how they experience daily life and how they deal with the reality of this daily life. To analyze this knowledge on a more theoretical level, the third analysis chapter part took information from both analysis chapters and used this to explore the thickeners and thinners of agency (Klocker, 2007). This was done on a structural, contextual and social level. It was concluded that structural and contextual aspects mainly work as thinners for the children's experiences of agency. The social relationships, on the other hand, can work as thickeners for children's agency. To thicken children's agency it can be advised to give the children a possibility to attach to a caregiver, to ensure that there are enough other children for the child to form friendships and to keep siblings together. This supports the notion of interdependent agency. The importance of social relations and interdependence is partly a need for young children and partly a context related notion. This can be seen when comparing the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990). The ACRWC includes Article 31, an article focusing on the duties and responsibilities of children. Here the notion of interdependence becomes clear, both between the child and his/her elders as well as between the *members of society*, highlighting that this is highly valued in the African context.

The aim of these three analysis chapters was not to be able to conclude how children experience it, for every one of the children experiences life slightly different. The aim was to gain knowledge about the experiences and perceptions of the different children and to gain an understanding of what life is like in a children's home.

Policy and research recommendation

The findings in this study represent the experiences and perceptions of a group of young children who are growing up in a children's home. Coming back to the houses drawn by Samantha, in many ways these houses serve as an illustration for the different perspectives regarding children's homes. There is only one children's home, yet there is a variety of ways to look at it. Different groups of people have different aims; they can talk about the same institution, yet look at it from another perspective.

With this research, I hope to have represented the first house on Samantha's drawing. A colorful patchwork of experiences and stories. Throughout this thesis, I have tried to give a voice to the children who grow up there. My aim was to learn about the perceptions and experiences of children who grow up in a children's home. I have created a framework around their stories, experiences and perspectives. With this, I have tried to learn about life in a total institution and the consequences this has for the children living in it, as well as the different ways in which children deal with this life and adapt to it. They have shared their different experiences and created a colorful patchwork of stories, whereas I drew the outline surrounding these stories to be able to share them with others. Together they portrait the first house. The colorful house represents the child's perspective, based on the perceptions of 10 young children in the children's home.

The other four houses represent the different perspectives and stakeholders that are also of importance when making decisions regarding the children and the children's home. The second house on the picture is large and heavy, for me, it represents the importance of the legal framework, including the UNCRC (1989), the ACRWC (1990) and Children's Act 38 (2005). The third house represents the staff members. They know the children and are important informants for when decisions have to be made. The fourth house represents the parents of the children, the ones that are still actively visiting or contacting the children and who aim and hope to provide a safe for them in the future. The fifth are the social workers outside of the children's home, the ones that have observed their family situation and concluded it to be an unfit place. They know where the children come from and can assess the possibilities to complete the ultimate goal; to reunite children with their family when this is a possibility.

When making a decision with the best interest of the child in mind, all these perspectives are of importance. Yet, many adults have the tendency to overlook the brightest and most colorful house,

the one filled with experiences, opinions, thoughts, emotions and ideas. Children are often not consulted, especially the young ones, in matters that affect their lives. The child's perspective should be taken into account and given sufficient weight when making decisions that affect the child.

With this thesis, there is a bit more knowledge added from the child's perspective in the growing body of knowledge of children's voices and the research field of Childhood Studies. My hope and advice for future research is that young children, those below 7 years of age, will more often be heard and listened to by researchers, policymakers and all adults that work with children who live in residential care.

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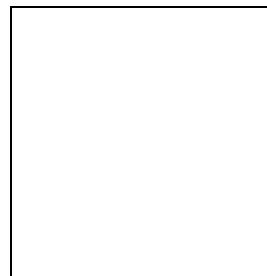
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Appendix

Consent form for the children

Name: _____

Date: _____



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Consent form for the gatekeepers

Title: *Growing up in a Children's home: the perceptions and experiences of young children living in a Children's home in Cape Town, South-Africa*

Introduction

Hello,

This study is in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies that I am pursuing at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. The fieldwork that I will conduct in the Children's Home I part of my master thesis, it is not a funded project. My study will focus on the experiences and perceptions of children between the ages 3 and 6 who are growing up in a Children's Home.

The aim of this study is to get a better understanding of the perceptions of children about their lives in the Home. I hope to get a better understanding of their worries, the joy they experience, the wished for the future and the relational connections.

All the research participants will be between the age of 3 and 6, they have to agree to participate in addition to your permission for participation. The children will be asked to participate in a variety of activities; drawings, conversations and play. Though the conversations will be recorded, and observations will be written down, confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. The names of the children will be changed, and very specific details will be left out, to make sure that it is impossible to trace the data back. The children can keep the drawings they make, a copy will be kept by the researcher. The copies, recordings and field notes will be kept in a safe place, only accessible by the researcher. The data will be coded and transcribed, these transcriptions will only be made available to me and my Norwegian supervisor. All data will be destroyed after transcription is done.

Participating in this study is voluntary and participants can choose to withdrawal from the study at any given time. The children will be read a description, explaining the aim of the study as well as the possible danger and benefits. They are told about the confidentiality and anonymity and additionally, they are made aware of the voluntary aspect of the study. If they agree they are asked to sign a contract as well.

By signing this document, you have understood the aim of the study and you have been made aware of the confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary aspect of the research. Meaning that the

conversation between the researcher and participant will not be shared with anyone, that it will not be able to trace the data back to a specific child and that the child is free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Ethical report

This research has been submitted to the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) and assessed by the special adviser - Data protection services. Due to the absence of personal data in the research project, the NSD did not deem it necessary for the project to seek notification from the NSD.

Instead of NSD approval, the university has guided and supervised the project to ensure ethical standards. This has been done through monitoring, discussion and supervision from Ida Marie Lyså, a postdoctoral fellow at Norwegian Center for Child Research, Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

As described in the methods chapter of this thesis, the information is not traceable to a specific child. The name of the children's home has not been mentioned and all the names of the children have been replaced by pseudonyms. Additionally, most children do no longer live at the home, since it is only for children till the age of 6, they have moved on to either family, foster care or another home. All the experiences and stories that the children shared have been handwritten in a notebook. Names are not mentioned here either. Meaning that neither their voices nor names are to be found anywhere.

Interview guideline adult interviews

During which moments do you think the children feel:

- Happy
- Sad
- Angry
- Scared
- Loved

How do you think the children define:

- Home
- Family
- Friends