



# The fluidity of institutional roles and positions within a CYCC

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## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

- ❑ Young boys who were awaiting trial in a secure care facility in the Western Cape
- ❑ 'Hanging out'
- ❑ WHO are these boys?
- ❑ WHERE do they come from?
- ❑ WHY were they institutionalised?
- ❑ WHAT were their experiences inside the CYCC?

## Main research questions

- ❑ How are institutionalised children perceived in this facility?
- ❑ How do these boys (and staff) function on a daily basis?
- ❑ How do these boys perceive themselves inside and outside the institution?

# Methods

- ❑ Participant observation
- ❑ Interviews
- ❑ Focus group discussions
- ❑ Cameras, movies and enactments

# 'Total Institution'

- ❑ Goffman (1961), *Asylums*
- ❑ A typical characteristic of a total institution:
- ❑ Staff-Inmate split (small supervisory staff and large managed group)

# “Madala and Papa”

## “Madala”

Mid-forties  
Black African  
Physically short  
Quiet and calm  
Assertive

## “Papa”

Mid-forties  
Coloured  
Tall and physically  
strong  
Macho

# **ETHNICITY AND CULTURE**

- ❑ Understandings of ethnicity can deeply influence the interactions and relationships between staff and boys.
- ❑ E.g. Intergenerational interactions
- ❑ These understandings of differences played a role in the expectations of how boys and staff would and should behave



- ❑ Different cultural backgrounds can also shape communication styles that lead to feelings of insecurity and distrust between staff and boys
- ❑ Cultural histories of the boys and staff are acted out in their daily interaction
- ❑ Therefore, a sense of belonging or distance can be created based on the understandings of cultural identity



# **EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DISPOSITIONS**

# *Education*

- ❑ Higher educational level could also be linked to improved communication styles
- ❑ Different approaches to understanding and engaging with the boys
- ❑ The more skilled the staff member, the higher the chances to gain respect and authority

# Personalities

- Personal characteristics of staff and boys influences interaction.
- Madala :  
Encouraged boys, motivated and guided.  
Perceived as an adult.
- Peter :  
Childish, aggressive, playful, unpredictable  
Perceived as less adult like, diminished status

# What can we learn from this case study?

- Highlights the complexities that guide daily interactions between staff and boys
- These characteristics of the individuals are constantly shifting when in different interactions with others
- As a result, staff and boys change the images and characters that they project in different times, spaces and with different people



**The role of gender and  
sexuality in the interaction  
between staff and boys**

# “Heather and the boys”

- ❑ Young staff member
- ❑ ‘Sexualised’ by older boys
- ❑ A silence existed around sexuality

# Gender, age and power

- Male and female staff interact differently with boys
- Men (Authoritative/ strict); Women (nurturing)
- Age overlaps with gender
- E.g. Heather – young, potential girlfriend



- ❑ Boys exerted power over Heather when sexualising her – influenced her daily interaction
- ❑ Heather – Maintained a clinical understanding of the situation
- ❑ Boys needed to be cared for
- ❑ Frequency and intensity of contact between staff and boys also influenced the interaction

# Boys as protectors and carers

- ❑ Boys caring for staff – protecting staff inside and outside of the institution
- ❑ E.g. ‘Home visit’
- ❑ Staff become the ‘cared for’
- ❑ Different positions inside and outside the facility – boys are usually ‘carers’ outside

# Boys caring for boys

- ❑ Role of protector – from staff and boys
- ❑ E.g. Assisted during workshops, reading, legal guidance, social support, communicating rules to new admissions
- ❑ Staff influence the behaviour of boys and vice versa

# Concluding remarks

- ❑ The assumed roles and positions of staff and boys are far more complex.
- ❑ Various ways in which staff and boys interact
- ❑ Positions and roles are fluid, context and situation specific – particular images are played out in particular interactions

- ❑ Blurred presupposed institutional identities
- ❑ Pre-institutional life of the staff and boys influence the interaction inside the facility
- ❑ In the facility, staff and boys act and interact based on cultural understandings, gender... that they also displayed outside of the facility



# Thank you!

For further information, please email

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