



# EVERYDAY RESISTANCE IN MAKING ONESELF VISIBLE: YOUNG ADULTS' NEGOTIATIONS WITH INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL CONTROL IN YOUTH SERVICES

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Article abstract

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## **EVERYDAY RESISTANCE IN MAKING ONESELF VISIBLE: YOUNG ADULTS' NEGOTIATIONS WITH INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL CONTROL IN YOUTH SERVICES**

**Jenni Kallio and Päivi Honkatukia**

**Abstract:** This article concerns young adults' institutional encounters with professionals in the context of youth services. The encounters are analyzed as institutional social control — the practices and mechanisms that steer young people's conduct in accordance with the normative order. We make visible young adults' acts of everyday resistance as they negotiate, problematize, and challenge aspects of institutional social control. The data consist of 17 life-course interviews with young adults aged 18 to 24 who visited youth shelters organized by the Finnish Red Cross. Participants expressed criticism of the normative expectations and the categorizing and controlling practices that they encountered. However, there is a danger that in the institutional encounters, their acts of everyday resistance are not acknowledged as political agency; instead, stereotypical notions strengthen the interpretation of the young adults as problematic or in need of protection. This lack of recognition may contribute to increased vulnerability of the young people in the institutions that are intended to support them.

**Keywords:** citizenship, everyday resistance, institutions, social control, young adults, youth

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The transitions to adulthood have become increasingly uncertain and problematic for young people, especially the transition from school to work. In many contemporary societies, these transitions appear to involve alarming social problems. Brunila and Lundahl (2020) contended that a whole “transition machinery”, consisting of various educational and training measures, has been created to tackle these problems (pp. 2–3).

Young people’s paths to adulthood are shaped by cultural perceptions and normative expectations. In Finland, the ideal of early independence and managing one’s own life has a strong influence on youth (Myllyniemi & Suurpää, 2009); this is supported by the Nordic welfare model with such institutional practices as free education and a social allowance system. In 2019, the average age at which Finnish young people started to live independently was 21.8 years, while the average age in the European Union was 26.2 years (Eurostat, 2019). One of the most significant normative expectations for young people is that they will acquire independence through “labor market citizenship” (Suikkanen & Viinamäki, 1999). This refers to paid work, which, in normative expectations, determines the individual’s possibilities for acting within and attaching to society.

In Finland, the transition machinery forms part of the social services provided for young adults. These services are based on the Nordic welfare model. The central sociopolitical ideal of the model is universalism, where the emphasis is placed on broad and, in principle, equal access to welfare and social services. These are mainly organized by the public sector and maintained with tax resources, but they also foster tight social ties among citizens (Esping-Andersen, 2013). However, in recent decades, the principle of universalism has been challenged and driven toward restrictions by a crisis in the public economy, the political dominance of the middle class, and by citizens’ expectations (Anttonen et al., 2012, p. 187). Hence, the transition machinery is expected to be cost-efficient and to encourage young people to assume responsibility for making choices that will define their futures.

From the perspective of this article, the transition machinery includes services, institutions, and professions that relate broadly to young people’s life courses and operate in areas ranging from education, career counselling, and social and youth work, to subsistence and mental health. In these institutional contexts, youth is often depicted as a preparatory phase on the way to adulthood, during which young people are in need of both guidance and discipline. In this article, we analyze the transition machinery as institutional social control and conceptualize it as the practices and mechanisms that steer young people’s conduct in keeping with the wider normative order (Cohen, 1985; Honkatukia & Keskinen, 2018).

The aim of this study is to document young adults’ interactions and ability to negotiate with the institutional social order. Previous studies have documented challenges that arise in encounters between young people and the services, and they have shown that young people, particularly those in marginalized or stigmatized positions, are often silenced (e.g., Atkinson et al., 2003; Blackman

& Rogers, 2017). Therefore, we examine the nature of the services through the accounts of young adults who have been customers of emergency youth shelters in Finland. Using the concept of everyday resistance, we analyze the dynamics between the young people's agency and the institutional social control that imposes limits on their actions (Johansson & Lalander, 2012, pp. 1085–1086). These dynamics are analyzed in the context of the social and economic structures and ideologies that maintain social order, and that simultaneously tend to create inequalities, normalize marginalization, and create the demand that one take responsibility for one's own life.

First, we review the concept of social control in the institutional context of youth services and discuss how these services guide, and sometimes push, young people toward adulthood and independence in line with normative ideas and expectations. We then present the concept of everyday resistance as a tool for analyzing young adults' negotiations with institutional social control. After describing our data and methods, we present our main findings relating to the forms of everyday resistance we identified in the young adults' accounts of their experiences in diverse institutional settings. In conclusion, we contemplate young adults' possibilities and techniques available to them for acting as citizens.

### ***Transition Machinery as Institutional Social Control***

As an example of the institutional machinery referred to above, this study focuses on services that support young adults' transition toward independence. Such services are organized by both the public and private sectors and include, for instance, institutions of education, social work, employment, and health; mental health services; and the support given by youth shelters. Typically, the social control exercised by these institutions is a mixture of guidance, support, instruction, and compulsion; as such, these services are very different from those serving paying customers, who will choose a service according to their inclination and their ability to pay.

The support services we study here fulfil their societal tasks as part of the service network, and therefore, the issue of power is always present in their practices. One classic interpretation of institutional power and social control is provided by Erving Goffman's (1961) theory regarding "total, or closed, institutions". As he notes, these institutions have different societal functions — education, care, protecting and serving the community, and more — but from the perspective of the inmates or patients, the institutional practices and restrictions can lead to the recipients experiencing a "mortification of the self" (Goffman 1961, pp. 4–5, 43, 46–48), accompanied by a loss of their normal roles and identities.

Although most of the institutions dealt with in this article are not "closed" in the Goffmanian sense, the positions of the young people in them are structured according to diverse expectations and roles and also according to the judicial competence assigned to the service in question. While the youth services support young people, they simultaneously guide them, more or less explicitly, according to normative ideas and expectations about the course their path to adulthood should take. This occurs in institutional encounters where the range of social control extends from the formal sanctions and restrictions provided by legislation to subtle guidance, appeals to public opinion,

and informal, even internalized, social controls (Honkatukia & Keskinen, 2018). The ultimate aim is to produce self-directed, educated, employed young adults who can sustain themselves and their families. In a situation where a young adult refuses to follow this normative model, there is a danger that the institutional machinery will turn into a demanding classification and labelling system (Mäkinen & Halonen, 2017, p. 151).

The mandate of institutional social control is based on legislation, international treaties, guidelines, and other normative accounts such as public and institutional discourse. Additionally, in contemporary societies, services are routinely characterized and surrounded by records, forms, and reports that make them seem efficient and accountable (Campbell & Gregor, 2015, p. 36). Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005) claimed that the design of such institutional texts — the diverse records and reports concerning clients, and the provisions, strategies, and efficiency requirements that define employees' work — interlocks them into a highly politicized set of categories, concepts, and frames (Smith, 2005, p. 118). They nearly always imply the exercise of power and control, which Smith referred to as *ruling relations*.

In order for the institutional texts to become lived ruling relations, they have to be activated by the people who process and use them (Smith, 1999, pp. 148–151); that is, they must be exercised in the daily practices and encounters of the institutional machinery. Thus, for young people dealing with the services, the laws and general guidelines are made concrete in their encounters with professionals — the so-called “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980). These will include teachers, social workers, youth workers, and the officials in employment agencies. They, in turn, have power over those who are dependent on their decisions. Their capacity to act derives from the institution and from the social relations they both produce and are produced by (Smith, 2005, p. 18). Their task is to help and support, but it is also to guide the young people in accord with public interest; in addition, they bring their own values to these encounters. Their decisions have concrete, material, and social consequences for the lives of the young people concerned (Mäkinen & Halonen, 2017, pp. 153–154).

Although there may be extreme situations, institutional social control is generally conveyed in mundane encounters and justified in terms of a wider cultural understanding of the youth using the service. Often, the young people are regarded as passive and in need of help, guidance, or control rather than being seen as active citizens: “Their need (and indeed obligation) [is to] become productive workers, responsible parents and law-abiding and ‘contributing’ citizens” (Davies, 2019, p. 6). In their institutional encounters, young people are often interpreted as either deficient or suffering from a lack of capacity, explained by their immaturity, youth, dependence on adults or support services, or lack of economic independence (Lister, 2008; Lister et al., 2003). Young people are expected to adapt to the requirements of the system, but the system is seldom required to be flexible in responding to the needs of the young people.

### *Everyday Resistance*

Our findings suggest that, in institutional encounters, the mechanisms of social control described above can make it less likely that young adults will be related to as individuals and treated with dignity, and increase the likelihood that they will, in turn, contest this situation with varying acts of everyday resistance. Hence, we use the concept “everyday resistance” as a tool by which to understand young adults’ negotiations with institutional social control. In their extensive review, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) identified two core elements of resistance: a sense of action and a sense of opposition, which together indicate that “resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behavior, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical” (p. 538). In addition to being a social action that involves agency, resistance contains an oppositional relation to power. Thus, resistance “occurs in opposition to someone or something else” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 539).

In this article, we build on those studies, such as Johansson and Lalander (2012), that have analyzed young people’s living conditions, lifestyles, and strategies of resistance within their own structural and everyday contexts. We argue that by studying encounters within which resistance occurs, it is possible to make visible and to challenge power relations and societal discourses. We emphasize the significance of institutionalized normative expectations and coercive practices, but we are interested in how they incite everyday resistance rather than in analyzing them as oppressive power relations. In this, we follow Weitz (2001), who argued that “we need to more narrowly define resistance as actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination” (p. 670).

This study contributes to the field of resistance studies by emphasizing the relevance and the political aspects of young people’s everyday resistance as a significant practice through which young adults enact their agency while still being limited by institutional forms of social control. As Scott (1985) argued, powerless or marginalized people seldom have the opportunity or resources to openly oppose their superordinates. Instead, they more commonly engage in mundane and often unacknowledged forms of resistance (Scott, 1985, p. 29). Acts of everyday resistance are unorganized and are not explicitly tied to a broader ideological criticism. On the contrary, everyday resistance originates from direct concerns in daily life (Gilliom & Monahan, 2012, p. 405; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 421). Moreover, Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) interpreted everyday resistance as neither uniquely individual acts nor public confrontations with authorities by formally organized collectives but as “the patterns of practices done by individuals or informal gatherings of groups, in which they engage with power relations or the effects of power in their ordinary lives” (p. 3).

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) have mapped the diversity of the behaviors and settings of resistance. They define acts of resistance as individual or collective, and as local or widespread; the level of conscious coordination in these acts may vary. Nevertheless, they understand resistance as pursuing some form of change, or sometimes even aiming to diminish change. Thus,



it is generally the subordinated or oppressed who are viewed as resisters (pp. 535–536). One of the most fundamental debates about resistance concerns two questions: whether resistance must be recognized by others, and whether it must be intentional (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, pp. 533, 539). According to Scott (2020, xi), it is the social understanding of events in their context that creates an act of everyday resistance. Building on this, in this study intention is regarded as implicit in acts of resistance arising from the actors' opposition to institutional practices that attempt to support, guide, or restrict them (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

In this study, we highlight the perceptions of the actors — in this case, the young adults. Even though their intentions are not consistently evident in their accounts or readily apparent to others, several participants acknowledged their targets, directly and openly. The type of resistance can vary from overt resistance to attempted resistance, in which an actor's intentional act goes unnoticed by both target and observer (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, pp. 544–547). For us, it was important to identify the diverse and also the less obvious forms of resistance in the young adults' narration about their encounters with institutional social control. Hence, we believe that for an act to be seen as resistance, it is not necessary for it to aim for any perceivable goal. However, in the long run, even unpredictable or invisible consequences may follow from the those actions. At the same time, the question of effectiveness as part of the young people's everyday lives is highly relevant since unsuccessful attempts may lead to discouragement and an experience of failure.

According to Weitz (2001), “The problem with using either effectiveness or intent as definitions of resistance leaves us no choice but to try to assess the nature of the act itself” (p. 670). Following this thought, we do not aim to infer the intentions or effectiveness of the participants, but we do try to interpret the young adults' institutional everyday experiences through their own conceptualizations of institutional social control and of their own everyday resistance. The study highlights the manifestations of acts, intentions, and aims, and the accomplishment of everyday resistance in the young adults' narrations that reveal the dimensions of social control within which they claim to have tested boundaries and achieved dignity, and show where this occurs within and between institutional structures and dominant cultural logics. By using the concept of everyday resistance, we wish to draw attention to young adults' mundane strategies, which:

allow them to distance themselves from the system that would subordinate them, to express their dissatisfaction, to identify like-minded others, and to challenge others to think about their own actions and beliefs. Thus, these everyday, apparently trivial, individual acts of resistance offer the potential to spark social change and, in the long run, to shift the balance of power. (Weitz, 2001, p. 670)

Moreover, we relate to everyday resistance as “acts of citizenship”, which are not always rational, goal-oriented, or activist in nature, but which are, perhaps more often, smaller everyday life-related acts (Hiitola et al., 2020). Conceptually, everyday resistance resembles the ideas of everyday citizenship or lived citizenship that have expanded on traditional concepts of citizenship to recognize it in more inclusive and mundane ways (e.g., Kallio et al., 2020; Wood, 2016).

Everyday citizenship refers to “the lived reality of placing oneself in community”; that is, it refers to those non-formal means of experiencing and expressing one’s place in society, which include interactions with family and friends and the everyday activities of the community (Harris et al., pp. 22, 26). Thus, the concept of everyday citizenship focuses on the experiences of people who have traditionally been excluded from economic, political, and social esteem (Kallio et al., 2020, p. 2), such as young adults.

Analyzing young adults’ everyday resistance in the context of the transitional machinery means that we understand the process of becoming independent as one in which young adults are supported, guided, and controlled through institutional practices, norms, and processes but in which resistance also occurs. Welfare services were significant everyday institutions for most of the young adults who took part in this study. For many, their life courses had included experiences of the services since early childhood, and the services continued to have a substantial impact in their early adulthood as they were now seeking to become independent. We ask: What are the young adults’ possibilities for negotiating their positions and for participating in the services in a way that will support them in their path to independence? How do they perceive space for their own agency under institutional policies? What kinds of acts of everyday resistance do they use to challenge and change the practices of governance within those institutions?

### **Data and Methods**

The data were gathered from five youth shelters, run by the Finnish Red Cross<sup>1</sup>, where young people under the age of 25 can find support, someone to talk to, and a temporary overnight bed if needed. Their worries may concern family issues, social relationships, education, housing, or other aspects of independent living. In Finland, youth shelters offer free-of-charge services for young people in the bigger cities. In 2020, the five youth shelters helped 6,134 young people with supportive relationships, either in the shelters or online (Finnish Red Cross, 2021, p. 30). The young people applied to the shelter themselves or they were met in youth spaces and shopping malls, and sometimes their parents were also supported.

The data consists of 17 semi-structured life-course interviews conducted in spring 2019 with young adults aged 18 to 24. Eleven of the participants identified as young women and four as young men. Two were in the process of gender transitioning. The informants had a variety of backgrounds, ranging from middle-class families to fragile circumstances involving neglect, abuse, and substance abuse, which included experiences of being taken into care. Because the participants were asked to talk freely about their life courses in the interviews, the discussion about their everyday lives in relation to institutional encounters involved just one participant and an interviewer. The interviews took between one and almost two hours to complete. They were audiotaped and transcribed in full (268 pages in total).

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.redcross.fi/our-work/youth-shelters/contact-information/>



The aim of the life-course interviews was to explore the young adults' lives holistically. Moreover, we were interested in the "critical moments" that structured the life courses of the young people and played a role in forming their identities (Thomson et al., 2002). At the beginning of the interview, each interviewee drew a line that illustrated their life course. Based on these drawings, we discussed the significant events in their lives, the people who had been involved in them, and how different relationships and forms of social support had enabled them to belong in their social communities. We also asked about their experiences of institutional encounters; the kinds of support they needed, both in the past and in their current life situation; and their thoughts and hopes about the future. Despite these partly predetermined themes, we strove to keep the interviews free-form and to proceed flexibly with the interviewee's report, respecting the themes and emphases raised by each individual. Our guiding principles in conducting the interviews were to provide intensive listening and appreciation for the young people's participation and life stories.

Our request for interviewees was conveyed to the young adults by staff from the youth shelters, allowing the shelter workers to consider which clients would be willing and able to talk about their life journeys. The participants were acquainted in advance with the research component, and had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, after which they gave their consent to participate. To express our gratitude and to acknowledge them as persons, we gave them each a 20-euro gift card after the interview (Head, 2009, p. 337). The research plan, interview guideline, consent procedure, and other relevant documents were reviewed by the Ethics Committee of Tampere University before the data collection.

Those young adults who agreed to be interviewed were confident in sharing their life stories, and spoke vividly about their experiences. Despite this, our data-gathering method had its limitations. For example, almost two-thirds of the participants were young women, even though roughly half of the clients in the shelters were male. According to our understanding, the staff made every effort to motivate young men to participate, but many declined. Due to the low number of young men, it is difficult to assess the significance of gender in our findings. However, the stories did not really differ by gender. Criticism of the normative lifestyle, experiences of worthlessness, and attempts to make one's own voice heard were highlighted in the reports of all genders. The only exception was the experience of institutional control of sexuality, which was reported only by the women. However, our data provide very few opportunities to examine the importance of gender in institutional social control and expressions of everyday resistance, and this should be examined further. Moreover, even though the study managed to reach young adults who do not often participate in studies, it is unclear to what extent the life stories of young adults experiencing particular issues such as social anxiety are represented.

Our approach offered a deep insight into the institutional everyday lives of the young adults, both in the local everyday setting where they lived and experienced life, and in the translocal settings outside the boundaries of their everyday experiences (Campbell & Gregor, 2015, p. 29). We attempted to identify and analyze the processes and practices that determined their social relations as grounded in their everyday lives, and thus to understand the complex interactions

occurring in the context of the institutional relations of power from the young adults' perspective. With regard to everyday resistance, we had to contemplate which version of reality to study: that of the ruling or that of the subordinated. In other words, was our focus to be on power relations and elements of control, or was it to be on individual competence and skills (Campbell & Gregor, 2015, pp. 48–50)? As youth studies scholars, we committed ourselves to “taking the side” of the young people and to analyzing how social control became visible in their lived experiences and in their institutional encounters.

Our main aim in the analysis of the young adults' stories was to identify resistance toward institutional social control. Our informants' accounts of their institutional everyday lives were rich and diverse, making it easy to discern accounts of explicit or implicit resistance. Only two interviewees seemed to lack a recognizable history of resistance, and only one felt she had mainly been positively identified by the services. At the other extreme, some felt powerless and were discouraged from acts of resistance by factors such as extreme bodily social control and ubiquitous racism. We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to categorize the data. The analysis started by identifying the most frequently and intensely discussed institutions in the young adults' accounts, which were those relating to education, working life, subsistence, housing, and social work. In the second phase, we examined the data to identify the young people's experiences in relation to dimensions of social control. Institutions had had significant effects on the life courses of most of the young adults, and many criticized treatments they had been subjected to as coercive, oppressive, and even dysfunctional. Moreover, they often described their own reactions toward this kind of institutional social control. This observation encouraged us to proceed with the conceptual framework of everyday resistance and to identify more implicit forms of resistance.

At first, we identified and thematized the direct and indirect expressions of resistance from the data, which emerged as both intentions and acts of resistance by the young adults (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, pp. 544–547). In analyzing the young adults' stories in terms of everyday resistance, we inevitably had to devise interpretations for their intentions. Some informants explicitly expressed their acts as resistance, such as when they described running away from an institution or keeping silent during appointments. Other accounts, however, were mainly recognized as resistance by the researchers. The young adults did not necessarily identify their own behaviors as resistance: at least, they seldom used the term “resistance” explicitly, even though the connection between the act of resistance and the institutional context was evident to us as researchers. Thus, especially in these cases, we have favored the interpretation made by the researchers over the informant's direct expression of an act's resistance. That is, we as observers acknowledged their acts as resistance based on our interpretation of the power relations in the situations that the young informants described, independent of their own expressed interpretation (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

The following findings are structured around the forms of everyday resistance identified. They are categorized according to the three main forms that we detected in the informants' accounts: *withdrawal*, *breaking the silence*, and *bodily resistance*. Of the rich and extensive data obtained,

we have been able to include only a fraction of it within this article. In each section, we present relevant acts of everyday resistance that we identified in the informants' accounts.

### *Withdrawal*

One of the common means of everyday resistance identified in the data can be described as withdrawal. This is a powerful and visible act compared with many other more subtle forms of resistance identified in the young adults' accounts. Withdrawal may be an act with an intention and goal, or it may involve intentional omission (Clarke, 2010), although from the outside it is often described as passivity or laziness. Because of the hidden nature of the resistance contained in withdrawal, it is crucial to study the motives and intentions relating to those acts, as has been done in this study.

Initially, the young adults' accounts of withdrawal appeared as refusal to comply with the normative expectations of independence and labor market citizenship. The interviewees' accounts powerfully testify to the existence of normative expectations on young people to proceed directly and efficiently through the various transitions to education, work, independent living, and economic independence. They also indicate how these transitions simultaneously become increasingly complex and unpredictable: young adults nowadays are forced to navigate changing conditions that they have no control over and to manage a future that is obscure, uncertain, and precarious (Wyn, 2020, p. 4). Moreover, in the name of activating youth policy, pushing young people through effective transitions and into independent living appears to be one of the main tasks of the institutional machinery. As Whittaker (2010) stated, the "formal structures of recognition", such as grades at school, qualifications, and promotions, are appreciated in the transition to adulthood in societies where independence is highly valued. Those structures are mainly institutionally organized and performed (pp. 78–79). The informants had internalized many of these expectations and had attempted to fulfil them, but the expectations had created enormous pressures for many, and some felt they had been labelled as deviants for failing to meet them.

The most central normative expectation reflected in the informants' accounts was the importance of a successful transition to education and work. During recent decades, the set of young people known as "NEETs" (not in education, employment, or training) have been the subject of policy action, social intervention, and public debate. Additionally, a wide range of risks, such as poverty, poor health, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and homelessness have been associated with young people who are outside of education and working life (Thurlby-Campbell & Bell, 2017, pp. 1, 11). In addition to risk management, highlighting the importance of an adequate level of education and paid work relates to concerns about the young people's attachment to society. The interview data make evident how deeply many of the young adults felt they were surrounded by these institutional texts and political practices and how they had internalized the idea of labor market citizenship as the way to successfully achieve independence, adulthood, and societal membership.

The participants were not criticizing the importance of work as such. Rather, based on their own experiences, they claimed that the centrality of the expectation that all young people should be integrated quickly and efficiently into the labor market pressures them and causes anxieties. They believed that only those who conformed with these expectations were viewed as legitimate citizens. From their perspective, society provides too narrow a path to adulthood, ignoring the multiplicity of young people's lives and individual circumstances that may make it difficult for some of them to follow the expected route from school to working life. They felt that, within the coercive practices of the institutional machinery, they had found no option but to try to comply with the normative path. This was so even for those who felt they were neither able nor ready to fulfil the terms of labor market citizenship. They also explained that, from their perspective, the steering and guidance provided by the institutions was misdirected or ill-timed. This caused them frustration as they experienced failure, official sanction, and "forced new starts". From their own experience and perspective, the institutional machinery would simply refer them to yet another education or job-related practice rather than identifying their personal needs and resources (e.g., health, or family and peer relationships). Instead of being subjected to institutional pushing, the participants wished to be given adequate time and support to reflect on and consider their options:

It is very hard to get excited about some work trial if you are from a family, let me say, that your parents have a drinking problem and you have started substance use yourself. And then somebody from social services or from the social insurance institution says that you must go there, or you won't get any money. That isn't the help the person needs in that particular moment. They should not be forced into work life, but instead they need something totally different.<sup>2</sup> (Viivi<sup>3</sup>, 24)

Eleven of the interviewees stated that, for them, withdrawal was expressed by not going to school. The participants described the requirements and pressures of managing the normative path for completing their studies and getting a "proper" education. For many, the student counselling service and the other supports offered by the school merely offered advice on degrees and degree programs and did not address their personal needs or ease the pressures they faced. This led to exhaustion and frustration and prompted them to either drop out of school or refuse to cooperate with the school and its services.

Linnea's story is a good example of this. At 20, she felt that she had drifted deeper and deeper into her problems without any real support. She described the enormous pressure of trying to cope with the normative training path and make the right choices regarding advanced education. As a pupil, she had achieved excellent success at school, but now, she felt left out and invisible, without adequate support. She would have liked counselling to help clarify her future alternatives, but, above all, she needed time and space to reflect on her choices without pressure. Linnea had also suffered from broken social relationships while at school. All this had resulted in depression and

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<sup>2</sup>All participant statements were translated from Finnish by the authors.

<sup>3</sup>All names are pseudonyms.

anxiety. Finally, in the ninth grade, she had retreated to her home, and after three years away from education, she was only now starting to study online for senior high school:

Well, in the ninth grade I stopped going to school. I managed to go there for one course, but then, before Christmas, I was sick, and then I couldn't go there any more... And, at the same time, I should have been able to reflect on my future choices. And somehow, even though my grades were nines or tens [scale from 4 to 10], I felt I wasn't doing enough, that I had no reason to do that [to study]. And then I just studied and didn't know how to keep things in perspective, how to know what would be enough. (Linnea, 20)

As Scott (2018) emphasized, refusal can be expressed by “saying no” — either with that exact word, or implicitly through acts — or by “not saying”, and thus declining to speak at all. Linnea's account of her decision — “then I couldn't go there any more” — seems to be a silent withdrawal rather than an explicit refusal. These silent protests constitute a strategy of passive resistance to requests, demands, and expectations (Scott, 2018, pp. 13–14). Hence, Linnea's silent withdrawal from the institutional encounter she was describing can be understood as an act of resistance.

In the participants' accounts, withdrawal as silence was evident mainly in therapeutic relationships, in clinical practice, and in treatment discussions, in all of which the participants felt left out, outsiders in their own affairs. In institutional encounters, the evaluation is often mediated in textual form (evaluations, reports, etc.), which set aside the needs and personalities of the young adults and objectify them as patients or clients, causing them to feel invisible and neglected. Consequently, they are unmotivated to comply with the rules and practices of the institution.

When discussing her silence, Pinja, 20, described her withdrawal from institutional encounters more explicitly. She was disappointed at the lack of any possibility to influence her own treatment and felt a deep distrust of the system. In consequence, she stopped talking almost completely. Additionally, she spoke of attending “pseudo-hearings” where her opinion was ignored or replaced by the views of a health professional or a consultation with her parents, presumably under the assumption that she was problematic and passive and did not want to participate:

I don't recall that much because I wasn't really talking to anybody at that time. But I remember, when I read some of my old documents, that my parents had gone to see some nurse when I should have also been there, and then the nurse had recorded that, “It seems that she is not even to be asked if she would like to participate”. So they just assumed that I wouldn't come. (Pinja, 20)

From the institution's perspective, withdrawal appears to express insubordination, passivity, or pathology on the part of the young adult. However, we suggest that withdrawal is just one means of everyday resistance, relating particularly to disagreement, distrust, and lack of confidence caused by the ruling relations, and more broadly to the institutional social control enacted by the authorities and by the whole of society. In addition, defining young adults as passive or difficult,

or as people who “do nothing”, may conceal their “small actions” (Honkasalo, 2013), such as waiting, forgiving, or processing feelings of bitterness. These small actions are significant as they enable the participants to protect themselves even though they are under the ruling relations, either by adapting or by strengthening their resources and abilities.

### ***Breaking the Silence Against Institutional Neglect***

In addition to hidden, indirect, and ambiguous resistance, the participants also talked about situations in which they had acted in more overt ways. These acts can be considered the young adults’ means of “breaking the silence”, through which they wished to emphasize their subordinate position, criticize the institutional machinery, or suggest how the system could be altered. According to scholars of critical citizenship, the intention of such everyday acts is political; through them, “subjects become citizens as claimants of justice, rights, and responsibilities” (Isin, 2008, p. 18). Accordingly, we interpret acts of breaking the silence as politically motivated, overt, everyday resistance, though not individually unique nor politically organized. In breaking the silence, the young adults aim to counter their experiences of institutional neglect, feeling strongly that these restrict their position and rights in their institutional everyday lives as citizens.

The participants talked about how they had often experienced being evaluated and categorized to enable the authorities to decide whether to include them in or exclude them from the service criteria. This had occurred through formal documentation, reports, and written evaluations; in other words, through institutional texts (Smith, 1999, pp. 148–151; Smith, 2005, p. 118). Hence, so-called “text-mediated decision making” ensures that the decisions will reflect organizational interests such as efficiency, economy, and order of priority rather than the interests of the young adults themselves. Moreover, it also prevents officials from using their discretion and being guided by experience, ethics of care, or shared silent knowledge. Instead, they begin to think about their work in the terms they are presented with (Campbell & Gregor, 2015, pp. 20, 37). We argue that this risks leading to practice-based failures, which, from the young people’s perspective, amounts to institutional neglect.

From the young adults’ accounts, institutional neglect can be divided into three types. First, their accounts related to situations in which they did not fit into the categories or service definitions: they were either too old, too young, or were not seen to occupy a particular status that would entitle them to the support they needed. As a result, the services did not recognize their needs, or the division of responsibilities between services remained ill-defined. Consequently, the young were at risk of “falling between” the services, and their problems were thus prolonged, accumulated, and exacerbated. For example, Veera, 20, talked about her experiences of being defined out of mental health services partly because of her age and partly due to her substance use:

I had been in youth psychiatry since eighth grade, but it’s limited to young people under 18 years, so I had to decide where to go next. The option was a therapy sponsored by Kela [social insurance institution of Finland], but at that time, I was



still smoking dope, so I couldn't get there. Because you have to be three months sober. (Veera, 20)

Second, institutional neglect was evident in situations where the young people's own view of the support they needed was ignored or remained unidentified. Some interviewees described their disappointment at how, as young persons, they felt that their opinions did not matter, even when they had attempted to voice them. The institutional encounters became struggles of expertise in which acts of everyday resistance were used. From the young adults' perspective, their agency was invalidated by those above them in the institutional hierarchy. This could occur when the institutional process was followed literally, with no attempt to relate empathetically to the young person.

Anni's story provides an example of this. Anni was a 22-year-old woman with a history of serious disease since childhood. She described how she had managed to get the treatment she needed only by receiving support, both financial and psychological, from her mother. She feels strongly that her own position was subordinated within the hierarchical system of health care:

Many times as I left the doctor's appointment, I felt shitty vibes or something; I didn't get what I needed and wanted. And somehow, I always felt that the doctor and I were on opposite sides, but then it was, however, the doctor, and I was just a young girl. So then, every time, I just left there and thought that OK, everything is not fine with me. And then I would call my mom, crying and saying that I didn't know what to do. (Anni, 22)

Third, it became clear that labelling young people with a certain status or diagnosis positioned them in a compartment that was convenient for the service system but invalidated their resistance. The experts' statements enabled even more stringent restrictions and administrative practices, as a result of which the young people were defined in ever more stigmatizing ways and pushed even more to the margins. Having the young adults verbalize all this in the research interviews can be regarded as their breaking the silence, and in this way, expressing a form of everyday resistance.

For example, Ida, 24, recounted that she was stigmatized as a troublemaker at school and was forced to transfer to a special comprehensive school, which she felt was unfair and wrong. She lost all her old school friends and was later heavily bullied at the new school. She described how her entire personality changed due to that transfer. She felt her own agency had been totally suppressed and was still very bitter about what had happened:

I'm bitter. I feel bitter because of their choice to throw me away.... I was placed in another school because of being different, being more talkative than others. Then ... bit by bit, all the cheerfulness shrank away. Sometimes I managed to be cheery, but quite often it was just depressing. Things went the way they did. Just the way I didn't want them to go. (Ida, 24)

Later in the interview, Ida also talked about using her sexuality, for example, to oppose and to show resistance because she had been forced to change schools.

The interviews strongly emphasized the diversity of ways in which the young adults took a societal stand in the kinds of situation described above. Six of the young people highlighted creative ways of breaking the silence, such as drawing and writing to express themselves and their thoughts. In addition, their dreams of building, for example, their own artistic career path, appeared to call into question the school career advice, which they described as conventional and narrow and as guiding them toward safe and stable professions that could be achieved only through formal education. Furthermore, a few had broken the silence by politicizing their personal lives — for example, by acting as volunteers in an NGO; choosing an ecological or activist lifestyle; or becoming a member of a subculture that promoted action against climate change, criticized infringement of animal rights, or protested racism.

Although criticism of institutional social control emerged as a key motivator for these acts of “breaking the silence”, solidarity between young people also emerged strongly in the interviews. They felt that by raising their grievances and submitting proposals for improvement, there was the possibility of protecting other young people from facing the same problems. Yet, as another form of “breaking the silence”, the participants also showed gratitude to the welfare state that had kept them alive, to certain youth services, and even to individual professionals.

As stated above, “breaking the silence” often appeared without its intention being evident. For example, Emilia, 20, wanted to participate in the study to express gratitude to the youth shelters. She described the restrictive institutional social control she had experienced elsewhere, but in her interview account she wanted to point out that more respectful and holistic support could change young people’s lives. Having received such support herself, she now wanted to break the silence by recounting her own experience in a spirit of solidarity with other young people. Additionally, the study gave her an opportunity for covert resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 544), thus delineating a path for other young people to more easily find the support they needed:

I was wondering if it would be nice to talk somehow about this [the youth shelter]. That, somehow, it has been such a great help to me. So, I wanted to say thanks and bring it out a little. Or something. Then I found it [the invitation to participate in the research] and wanted absolutely to be involved. At least to tell, how it [support given by the youth shelter] has affected my life. (Emilia, 20)

The findings suggest that young adults also try to negotiate with institutional social control from within official channels. They had filed complaints and malpractice notices and had provided statements and completed forms to get justice or to get their cases to progress. These means of formal communication with institutions were based on the specific formats of the institutional texts. Through these formats, the participants submitted themselves to the logic of the ruling

relations. For many, their experience had been that they were made invisible in the process of their complaint and were misinterpreted as persons.

One example of this came from Nikki, 19. They grew up with violent parents who also used a lot of alcohol. The control and restrictions over the children in the family had been so strict that Nikki was prevented from enjoying a social life or establishing independence. Asking for help or support from the school or from the authorities had been strictly forbidden by the parents. When Nikki was still a minor, the situation deteriorated so badly that they dared to search for help by filling out a child protection notification their own behalf. However, the mechanism of institutional rules and categories excluded them from the support they were desperately needing, and also increased the experience of invisibility and neglect they had been submitted to throughout life:

I was still under 18, so I thought I would get help from the child protection, where there were already several notifications about us. I don't know how we avoided them, but anyhow more than one child protection notification had been filed in recent years. I filed a notification for myself because I found my dad very aggressive towards me.... From child protection, they answered, interestingly, that they couldn't help me. So, that wasn't their business then, I guess. When I reported that I didn't have any of my belongings and I was afraid to go home and I would like to have my stuff, so, what could I do? They just said that they couldn't do anything. (Nikki, 19)

Based on these findings, we argue that, among other means, young adults do use the procedures offered by the institutional system to exercise their acts of everyday resistance, as Nikki's story reveals. Even though the institutional machinery is often incapable of categorizing young people beyond its service criteria and the definitions embedded in institutional texts, young people do try to use the system to fight normative expectations and being neglected. These attempts may, however, prove fruitless, and hence, the political nature of these acts remains unidentified, as happened in Nikki's experience.

### ***Bodily Resistance***

In the data, multiple restrictions relating to a young person's physical body appear as powerful examples of institutional social control. Being defined as sick or healthy is a concrete indication of ruling relations and one of the most essential dichotomic definitions in the young adults' institutional everyday lives. The participants described their institutional positioning as varying from being "too sick" to being "not sick enough" to fit into the terms and conditions of the institutional machinery. Having the correct diagnosis is a crucial criterion for access to mental health services, for example. In addition, some institutions are legally permitted to apply restrictive and coercive bodily practices, such as giving compulsory treatments. These may have critical consequences, not only physically but mentally, and affect the young person's future expectations and prospects, as is exemplified in Pinja's story. Pinja had been placed in several institutions, including child protection, health care, youth psychiatry, and ultimately a closed psychiatric ward

where she was treated with involuntary electroshock treatments. These led to permanent memory problems that caused her difficulties in studying; when she was interviewed, she was struggling to complete her studies in senior high school:

Well, that being in the [psychiatric] department was pretty horrible. Then that's when they started the electrotherapy ... I went to those treatments for quite a long time, but then their efficiency began to decrease and then finally, well, I still have memory problems. (Pinja, 20)

In addition to mental health issues, three of the participants emphasized institutional physical controversies relating to gender and sexual rights, which are discussed below.

Institutional bodily control is connected with spatial control, as well as control of the time and space of the life course, making the young adults' bodies vulnerable and beyond their own control. From Goffman's (1961) definition of the total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of life-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (p. xiii), the interconnection of space, time, and body becomes evident. Spatial social control involves transferring young people from one space to another, locking them into certain spaces, and excluding them from their everyday social environments (see also Goffman, 1961). Thus, it is an exercise of power that forces young people repeatedly to reconstruct their social position and self-identity.

The most studied expression of resistance is the resisters' use of their own bodies or other material objects in acts of physical resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 535). In the current study, bodily resistance emerged as an important tool for negotiating and challenging bodily, spatially, and temporally restrictive practices, which, by definition, characterize institutions. In the young adults' accounts, bodily resistance appeared both as an expression of autonomous agency under stifling conditions and as a means of signalling a need for help and support.

From the social science perspective, self-harm techniques may be interpreted as a kind of battleground where the person acts out the unique personal self as subjective, and as a self who is socially molded and constrained by the beliefs and practices embedded in society. When a person self-harms, they become thereby the subject of their bodily experience and not simply an object of the other's experience (McAllister, 2003, p. 182). The young adults' accounts suggest that bodily resistance, even to the extent of self-harm, can be a technique used by young adults who are attempting to foster their sense of agency. The implementation will vary from editing their outward appearance and style to cutting themselves, controlling eating, and taking overdoses, and can extend all the way to suicide attempts. Under restricted and controlling institutional circumstances, taking over one's own body may be the only perceived solution by which to challenge coercive practices and to take back the power of decision.

Bodily resistance can also be a reasonable way of expressing the need for help, especially in the context previously described as institutional neglect. In the young people's accounts, getting help could require drastic acts, such as attempting suicide. For example, when describing taking an overdose that led to an urgent surgical operation, Pinja commented, "Nobody expected I would do anything so drastic." After the episode, she received more attention and affection from her family and relatives and was also guided to youth psychiatry. However, the treatment, specified as temporary, lasted only two weeks; after discharge, her situation soon worsened. Thus, self-harm techniques may awaken the social control machinery to respond to a young person's acute situation but provide only temporary relief. Self-harm techniques may also increase the likelihood that the young person will be defined as a problem and considered too difficult to take care of.

Regarding bodily resistance, the data confirmed research findings that show that young women's risky sexual behaviors may be either intentionally or unintentionally directed toward oneself in a self-harming manner (see also Louhela, 2019). So-called internalized sexual violence can be considered a relational act that can violate one's bodily integrity as well as harm one's physical and mental health. Within these sexually risky behavior patterns, young women endanger themselves through exposure to various forms of violence, sexually transmitted infections, criminal involvement, and substance abuse (Louhela, 2019, pp. 83–85). Additionally, based on our data, we suggest that, in the context of institutional social control, those acts can be considered a form of bodily resistance to institutional practices that are experienced as too restrictive or lacking sensitivity to the young person's needs and situation.

The results of a health survey in Finnish schools (Ikonen et al., 2017) indicate that young people in care face more violence than young people living with one or both parents, and have a five-fold greater risk of experiencing sexual violence. The interviews confirmed this vulnerability among young people in custody and in the circle of other support services. However, our findings suggest that the vulnerability intertwines with risky sexual behaviors as bodily and spatial resistance against the coercive practices and restrictions imposed by the institutions. Thus, institutional practices of social control also expose young adults to sexual vulnerability.

In the name of protection, young adults' fundamental need to form social and intimate relationships is often strictly limited by institutional conditions, which in our study are interpreted as institutional spatial and bodily social control. Denying the inherent needs of these young adults leads to a violation of norms, such as running away, as well as to secrecy and shame (see also Louhela, 2019), which can further deepen their difficulties. The story of 19-year-old Aada is an extreme example of multiple forms of institutional neglect where invisibility and the inability of the sectorized services to cooperate combined in a devastating way. Risky sexual behaviors, which can be interpreted as bodily and spatial everyday resistance, played a crucial role in her history. Even though she had an active institutionalized relationship with child protection, a psychiatric department, and the hospital school, when she went missing because she was being held captive and sexually abused, none of these institutions did anything to seek her out. Moreover, her needs for safety and security were neglected later in the criminal process. She was terrified when, after

a police interrogation, she was forced to confront the perpetrator in the courtroom. She felt a lack of empathy from the police and was, on this occasion, neglected both by them and by the court, the two institutions from which she had sought justice and protection:

I was in the adolescent psychiatry department and I went out with a guy I met on Facebook.... And then, well I remembered that he was a criminal, he told me everything he had done, and I feared him. And I didn't dare say anything against him. And then he kept me there for a week and raped me.... Nobody knew for about a half a year. And then things got worse, and I told my best friend, and they filed a crime report to the police. Then I had to see him in court, and he began to send me those threats. And even his mother called me that I should lie in court or otherwise he is going to kill me. So, things worsened a lot. And then there were more suicide attempts and so on. (Aada, 19)

Another form of bodily resistance is resorting to violence. In general, being violent is seldom defined as a social phenomenon; rather, it is viewed from an individual psychological frame that bypasses the variety of social meanings connected to it (Honkatukia et al., 2007). Additionally, violence is socially connected to stigmatized identities (e.g., Goffman, 1963). Thus, being labelled as violent means being socially devalued and negatively stereotyped, which can have negative effects on an individual's perception of self. Similarly, in the context of institutional social control, violence tends not to be identified as a form of resistance but rather is characterized as a negative or pathological trait of an individual. In contrast, the young adults we interviewed who described themselves as violent did not connect the violence with their own personality but rather with those social situations in which they had resorted to violent behavior. For example, 21-year-old Sara said that violence as a self-harm technique had become a tool to help her control her anxiety, but it had also been the means of fighting against school bullying; thus, it was a means of both defending herself and resisting the school's inability to stop the bullying:

Well, I've always been, so to speak, having problems with violence and myself. But then I ... started to direct it [violence] at myself. But then, when they bullied me, I targeted it ... to them. (Sara, 21)

Bodily forms of everyday resistance are also expressed in a more conventional way when one's outward appearance is used as an instrument of self-expression. One's appearance provides an opportunity to separate oneself from others and to challenge the prevailing standards, while at the same time asserting one's membership in a subculture. Subcultural membership bonds and their embodied manifestations simultaneously give the participants a sense of being included and respected, and of creating social and bodily spaces of their own. Sara, for example, found support and protection in the manga culture-oriented peer group she joined, even though the group members were ridiculed for their appearance.



## Conclusions and Discussion

The social norms of everyday life are often invisible and do not require much, if any, conscious thought (Campbell & Gregor, 2015, p. 31). The mechanisms and objectives of institutional social control are exposed mainly when something abnormal occurs. The type of conduct that we have analyzed here as everyday resistance often arises in situations where a young person is labelled a problem. This problem label pushes the young person out of the normative institutional path into the sphere of specific services — for example, child protection or mental health services. However, when the self-determination of the young person contradicts the institutional definitions, this situation may lead to experiences of invisibility and neglect.

This study has documented the meanings that young adults confer on their actions in such situations, especially how they oppose labelling and derogatory treatment. We have identified three main narrative ways through which the young adults delineated themes of everyday resistance in their personal experience: withdrawal, breaking the silence, and bodily resistance.

The young adults' accounts of withdrawal arose mainly from their experience that, in encounters in institutions, their needs were interpreted only through the norms of independence and labor market citizenship, while their actual needs for support were left unmet. Their withdrawal reflected their frustration, their distrust of the authorities, and their wider need to contest institutional social control over young people in society. In the stories of the young adults discussed above, the withdrawal manifested itself as nonspeaking, leaving school, or refusing care practices, behaviors that caused them to be labelled passive or problematic, according to the particular institution's interpretation.

Furthermore, young adults “broke the silence” by showing resistance in more overt and political ways, especially when revolting against the institutional neglect they had experienced. They took a societal stand by politicizing their own lifestyle choices, by showing strong solidarity with other young people, or through art and creativity. These acts can also be interpreted as strengthening their experiences as citizens. Young adults' bodily resistance, in turn, is an important means of contesting the institutions' bodily, spatially, and temporally restrictive practices. It is an expression of their autonomous agency but also serves as a tool to search for help and support.

The study's main contributions are twofold. First, it gives validity to the complexity of everyday resistance as based on the young adults' personal stories. The findings reveal that young people's everyday resistance is a complex phenomenon, and is typically defined in the literature as hidden and informal (e.g., Gilliom & Monahan, 2012, p. 405). Acts of everyday resistance may sometimes be discreet, as in young people's silent withdrawal from institutional interaction, but they may also be quite striking, as some of our examples of bodily resistance show. Moreover, young adults can be very articulate about the motives for their actions, but their intention or purpose is not always obvious. As Hollander and Einwohner (2004) put it, the acts are observable, yet not necessarily recognized as resistance by the powerful (p. 540). Accordingly, there may be

unintended consequences that hamper the resister's position: if not recognized as resistance, the young adults' defiant actions may end up supporting the very structures of domination and control that they aimed to resist.

Interpreting young adults' nonconforming conduct as everyday resistance offers them a way of being in charge of their own lives under conditions in which their agency has been restricted or neglected. Therefore, acts of everyday resistance can be interpreted as acts of citizenship. Compared to a more conventional lens, this framework provides a deeper insight into young adults' aspirations to express a political stand in their everyday lives. Some young adults endeavor to foster their sense of agency in order to make a difference in their institutional everyday lives. The study hence challenges the assumption that young people in wounding and fragile circumstances who apply for support from the service network are either passive receivers, unmotivated to improve their lives, or people whose intentions are incorrect, pathological, or destructive.

We regard this interpretation as important, in light not only of theories of citizenship but also those of well-being, according to which the extent of one's participation in decisions and activities that influence one's life is a significant part of well-being and a necessary condition for human development (Allardt, 1993). Honneth (1995), on the other hand, suggested that the conditions of identity formation are dependent on the establishment of mutual recognition in close relationships, on being respected in one's community, and on institutionalized relations that convey universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of other people.

The study's second main contribution relates to the contemporary organization or institutional order of youth services. Young people's accounts revealed how narrowly institutions' societal tasks are sometimes defined. In our view, this narrow understanding has its roots in the neoliberal shift in the management of welfare states that emphasizes economic efficiency to the detriment of the prior principle of universal welfare provision. Austerity, as the main neoliberal policy response, and as an attempt to minimize public services and cut government spending, highlights the responsibility of young people for their own livelihoods. We argue that this shift in welfare state ideology, as discussed by many scholars (e.g., Gough, 2017; Leskošek & Zidar, 2017), contributes to making the institutions incapable of recognizing and responding to the complexity of young adults' everyday lives as a whole. They are unable to consider holistically the young adults' complex life histories and situations, and hence bypass questions of health, social relations, family difficulties, discrimination, disadvantaged positions in housing and labor markets, and economic livelihood, all of which are intertwined in shaping young adults' possibilities for living independent lives. Moreover, the study shows that, from the young adults' perspective, the transition machinery is often seen as a loosely woven network, temporally and spatially fragmented, where their status and social relations vary unpredictably and are beyond their control. Despite not being able to make their voices heard, the normative expectations of independence and labor market citizenship still hold them accountable for their own future success.

From the young adults' perspective, it would be sensible to organize youth services in such a manner that they could respond to the young adults' lives as a whole and in a more far-sighted way. We suggest that adopting the typology of resistance, as presented by Hollander and Einwohner (2004, pp. 544–547), could act as an important tool in this matter. Sensitively used, the concept of everyday resistance has the potential to make visible new dimensions in young people's violations of norms in the institutional context. Their acts can be explored as expressions of critical everyday citizenship with a more or less conscious attempt to promote the realization of their own rights. Applying this interpretation would have the potential to reduce the young adults' current experiences of inferiority and frustration in their institutional encounters. This would require institutions to develop the ability to compromise in various ways, such as relaxing the boundaries of their services and the conditions controlling access to the service, and less strictly adhering to controlling regulations when it is in the best interests of a particular young person to do so.

Additionally, our findings emphasize the importance of informal structures of recognition, and thus acknowledge the need and right of young adults to be confronted, heard, and appreciated holistically for the people they are. In the Finnish context, a model has been proposed (e.g., Aaltonen et al., 2015, p. 130) in which one professional employee would be responsible for a young person's service package and for considering his or her life as a whole. In light of the ruling relations, the prerequisite for such a course of action would be that the employee would have the opportunity to operate flexibly within the institution's daily practices, to get whatever information was needed, and to have her or his work recognized as valuable in a cross-governmental manner. This would require a genuine cross-sectoral construction of services, including in terms of their objectives, resources, and remuneration. The successful implementation of such a model would require a strengthening of the resources available to youth services and a challenging of the neoliberal logic of effectiveness.

At the time of writing this article, we are conducting a follow-up study among the same young adults we interviewed for this study. According to our preliminary findings, during the COVID-19 pandemic their institutional encounters have become even more fragmented, and their risk of institutional neglect has increased. In the face of neoliberal austerity politics and calls for contractions of welfare state services, young people seeking help are even more readily stigmatized and left without the support they need. In future studies, it is therefore crucial to critically examine the institutional system's ability to support young people's well-being. In the current situation, professionals risk facing a loss of control over their work and over their professional autonomy. They may encounter ethical dilemmas in dealing with the pressures of attempting to follow official guidelines while simultaneously honoring their own professional values and commitments (Hughes et al., 2014). This reality facing professionals warrants thorough study to learn more about the structural constraints they experience in supporting young people through increasingly challenging life situations.

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