

# CONSTRUCTIONS AND BALANCES OF NORMALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM FOSTER CARE

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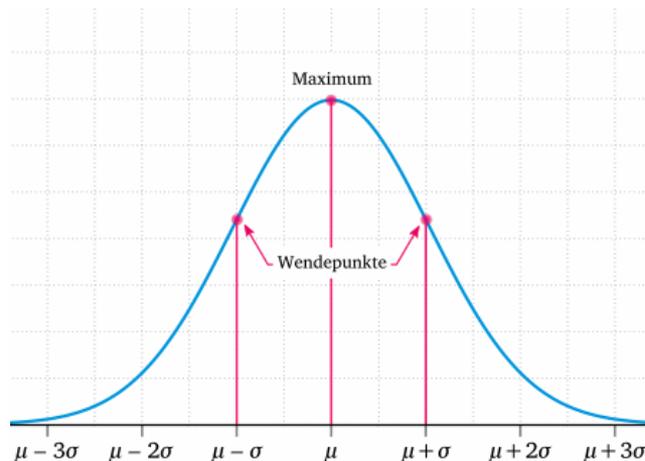


# WHAT IS NORMAL? WHAT IS NORMALITY?

Is that normal?!

Foucault: normalization = standardization

Link: normality is something produced in a society in a field of contrastig contexts  
inbetween a societies norms & normal curve of distribution



# NORMALITY AND IDENTITY

Drawing on identity theories from symbolic interactionism, identity is a balance (work) between expectations from society and self

What does an individual do with the normality expectations from society?

Who wants to be totally normal?

Shame vs. Recognition?

Being taken up in normalities or active appropriation of normalities?

De Certau: Tactics to act in a field which is not your own



# FOSTER CHILDREN'S NORMALITY CONSTRUCTIONS

I am totally normal – just believe it!

I got normal when I entered my foster family

I am normal, but .... – many exceptions  
..... – few exceptions

I got abnormal when I entered foster care

I am abnormal, but it's totally ok, I found my niche

I am abnormal, please treat me very carefully!



# TWO CONTRASTIVE INTERVIEWS

Lena

- Entered foster care at the age of one year
- Considers her foster family like her own family
- Avoids contact with her birth family (since her childhood)
- Has hardly any contacts as a young adult
- Allocates herself completely in her foster family

Marcel

- Came to foster care age 4
- Contact with his birth family was always very important to him
- Had a lot of conflicts with his foster family during adolescence
- Allocates himself in his birth family
- Is still in contact with his foster family

Being taken into care:  
absurd intervention or  
fortune?

Information-  
management:  
Being open or  
hiding?

Family  
without  
biological  
basis: a  
challenge?

Role of the birth  
family?

Experiences with  
„abnormalities“  
before being taken  
into care?

Foster Carer's  
motivation?

Child Protection  
system as a  
representant of  
abnormalities?

Leaving Care

# BEING TAKEN INTO CARE: ABSURD INTERVENTION OR FORTUNE?

Lena: „I was waiting to be given to my foster family“

Marcel: „I never understood what was going on. For years I was waiting to be picked up by my mother“



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# INFORMATIONMANAGEMENT I

„I always took care at primary school, actually i have never told anyone anything about being a foster child. Because I didn't consider it as something necessary. I did not want anyone to think that we are not a true family. I was always afraid that somebody might thing „Yes, but that's not your mum!" and so. But of course that's my mum and my siblings and my dad. It was simply difficult because I wanted avoid that topic. At school it was strange because sometimes when we had new children in foster care and my mum picked me up from school or something (..) "Ha? I thought you have three siblings?" and suddenly there is one more around. And I used to say „Well, I guess you misunderstood" or so, cause I didn't want to say something like „He's just a visitor" or so (.) but yes, it was always like "Oh great, how can I manage this again?" [...]

There is one child we had ever since he was a baby and the „oh I didn't know your mum was pregnant" (.) „Yes, ah, we didn't meet for long" hm and „yes, ah I told you" [...] Well, I do not see any reason that I should say „listen, I have siblings but they are my foster siblings" Not necessary, isn't it? Well, why? [...] I used to have the assumption or maybe somehow a bit fear that they would say „your family is not a true family"



# INFORMATIONMANAGEMENT II

I: Did it happen to you sometimes that you walked for example in town and you met people your foster parents know and they would say something like „your child looks just like you!“

L: Yes that happened frequently, for example we made a trip with our class from school and my parents brought me to the bus, and the teacher said “Oh you are Lena’s mother! One can see that from a far“ (.) Or something like charisma or your eyes and so on (..) and often we look at each other like „well, if they knew!“ somehow (laughs)



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# WHY ARE THEY FOSTER CARERS?

When I started to look for information about the child care system(..) my foster parents didn't understand as well (.) when I told them what I think about this institution or about certain issues (...) they got a bit annoyed (.) and when I finally told them that they are foster carers just because of money (..) they didn't like either (.) but they never denied (...) they talked around, they were angry (..) how I get ideas like that (,) but actually they never denied () and that's my point (..) (very low voice) because (...) well (,) and these are all things why I (...) can never () accept them as my parents (.) because I know () the financial aspect has something to do with it



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# CHILD PROTECTION

It was only present when we had again these cumbersome visits from administration, I mean the care planning meetings. That might also be interesting [...] That's where they decide if they continue to pay for foster care and if it is still necessary to be in care (..) and then the lady comes and it is also like an interview. And she asks: „everything ok there?“ Well for example, we were talking, because I do not want to move out now, well I do not have a boyfriend to live with and what should I do in an apartment on my own, would be boring I guess. [...] and then we had to find a reason why I do not want to move out. And the lady said, well she is really cooperative, „we need to write something, that you aren't yet mentally ready“ and then we turned it in a way that I still need foster care. Actually it is a laughingstock. (.) She used to say that I am a very unproblematic child. [...] Actually I don't like these meetings. Always defining goals and asking did you reach your goals. (.) I do not know, but maybe many foster children define as their goal something like „I want to stop taking drugs“ or something like that, because it is frequent. Well and I said „I want to get my driver license and find a place to make a period of practical work. And then always „yes I reached my goal“. These meetings are completely annoying.



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# FAMILY WITHOUT BIOLOGICAL FOUDATION = CHALLENGE

„I still remember, when I was a little child, I used to hide under my mum's shirt, and I wanted to be in her belly. That was maybe when I was about four years old. I used to do that [...] but actually I cannot truly believe that I was not, I mean never, really not (.) in my mothers womb and so. Well I am concient, but I do not feel it, that it wasn't like that.



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# BIOLOGICAL FAMILY I

because, of course, visiting contacts always brought along sickness, really, well I was completely flabby, well really, I needed one day to come down. But (..) one cannot do something about. But there, maybe it is the little connection (..) where you can still see it, that it gives me a strange feeling or something, but. Well I cannot exactly say why it is like that. But (.) well, it is still often like that, when I meet my sister it is like friendship, that's normal, but I consider her as a friend and definitely not as sister. But when my biological mother comes for a visit or so or so, then (.) it is still like, I wouldn't really know what to talk about with these people



# BIOLOGICAL FAMILY II

(.) then they turned it somehow that I couldn't have contact with my mum for two years, she wasn't allowed to pick me up or to see me and things like that [...] at that time I said I want to get out of this. Because I never understood what was going on. My grandpa was allowed to pick me up, but my mum wasn't allowed to see me, and then we went for a walk in the forest and she sat behind a tree just to watch me! And afterwards I developed a good relationship with her, during the next year, when she was again allowed to pick me up, it has really tightened and ever since that we have ups and downs, like every normal family, I'd said, I do not let stand anything against my mother.



# CONCLUSION

Children growing up in foster care have to deal with normalities and with a lack of normality

They construct a normality and develop tactics to balance normality. The constructions and balances are interdependent with their previous experiences and the conditions they live in

The tactics bear always risks and chances: the extremer the tactics are, the extremer risks and chances are

They demand a lot of energy from the child!



# QUESTIONS TOWARDS THEORY AND PRACTICE

Which normalities does foster care (as a system) offer to children?

How do we choose foster families?

In which context foster children can talk about their experiences with normality and abnormality?

How can we strengthen other areas of normality for these children?

How does research deal with normativities and normalities?

