Chapter 11
Becoming '(Ab-)Normal': Normality, Deviance, and Doing Life Course Transitions

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What does it mean to live a 'normal' life? In everyday life, it might mean that you go about whatever you do in a perfectly unremarkable way: you get up, eat, work, eat, sleep, and get up again. Overall, you don't do anything exceptional (except maybe occasionally), you do not make choices beyond what is commonly considered 'everyday' (a normal life as *ordinary*). A 'normal' life may also be described in numbers: your income and spending, number of kids or sex partners, or weight or calorie intake may be within typical statistical parameters (a normal life as *average*). Or, finally, living a normal life may mean you do explicitly not engage in dubious activities like randomly shouting at strangers in public (a normal life as *conventional*).

Another way to look at a 'normal life' is to consider the life course. When assessing if we or others live a "normal, expectable life" (Neugarten, 1969), we may not only look at what they do on an everyday basis, but at what they have done at and during certain times in their lives or at a particular age and in which order, and compare it to some standard version like the "institutionalized life course" (of the global north-west) analyzed by Kohli (1985), or even to models of psychosocial development stages. Levy (1977) introduced the term "normal biography" (*Normalbiografie*) to describe a standardized, ideal-typical life course shared by a social group that is 'normal' in the sense that it applies to most of its members but also fits normative expectations concerning that group. This normal biography is essentially a "status biography": the individual, it is assumed, is moving through a social structure of

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status-role-configurations (p. 31). Such conceptions of normality provide patterns of orientation for individuals and societies, with the flip side of being potentially restricting and coercive.

Broadening the focus of Levy's concept, living a life can be seen as a constant process of moving not only through status positions and social roles but through cultural categories in a wider sense. With Hirschauer (2017b, 2021) and colleagues (Dizdar et al., 2021), a social life can be understood as a constant process of "un/doing differences": of drawing, re-drawing, and suspending or revoking distinctions between kinds of people. Such "human distinctions", like gender, ethnicity, or age, are seen as results of practices of "human categorization". Distinctions comprise a specific set of categories into which individuals are sorted in the course of their life.

The concept of "doing transitions" is closely linked to this, since life course transitions can mark not only passages between phases or stages in life but also between human categories. In the course of their lives, individuals move in and out of categories, move through some, but never leave others. Some transitions are one-way, some go both ways. Some are considered progress, some a setback. With such passages between categories, and along with their categorial affiliations, individuals change who and what they are, in an ongoing process of becoming.

This chapter examines how life course transitions between human categories are culturally observed in terms of their 'normality' or 'deviance'. Particularly, it asks how framings and doings of such transitions as (not) 'normal' are related to those of individuals in transition. After a brief introduction of the concept of human categorization in relation to doing transitions (1.), and some remarks on 'normality' and deviance (2.), the chapter attempts to understand ascriptions of 'normality' as results of affiliations to human categories, their combinations and of doing transitions between them (3.) before concluding by briefly addressing the question: How – and why – does one become '(ab-)normal' (4.)?

A Life in (and Between) Categories: Un/Doing Differences and Doing Life Course Transitions

Human life is a life in categories. Even before we are born, we are observed through categories and sorted into them. When we enter the world as embodied individuals, this process continues and takes our bodily appearance, abilities, or behavior as grounds for further categorizations. We enter institutions that subject us to processes that categorize us by measures like performance, intelligence, etc. Gradually, we progress from being mere objects of such categorizations to becoming classifiers ourselves, not only of others but also of ourselves.

Commonly, affiliations to human categories are seen as qualities or traits of individuals or their bodies. Another way of looking at these traits is to see them as results of an ongoing process of drawing distinctions, constructing categories, and sorting people into them – of *doing and undoing differences* (Hirschauer, 2021): we

do differences by creating and reproducing categories, and by sorting ourselves and others into them. Thus, we become kinds of people – who we are. Conversely, such categories and differences between (kinds of) humans can be suspended or revoked and be temporarily or permanently *undone*.

The crucial point about living is, obviously, that we move around in and between categories. This is where transitions come in: moving through categories implies transitions between them. *Un/doing differences* and *doing transitions* are closely linked: *Doing* implies that both differences and transitions do not merely exist, but are produced, enacted, and processed in and through social practice. This "doing" transitions (or *a* transition) between human categories is both the practical work of crossing a boundary between them, and of marking this *as* a "transition" and qualifying it in some way. Hence, doing transitions, like un/doing differences, is nothing people do individually or alone; both involve discursive representations, institutional regulations of affiliation, practices of individual identification, and their interrelations (Settersten et al., Chap. 15, in this volume). As much as we move through categories, categorial boundaries can move through us. Doing transition(s), then, can be one way of un/doing differences, as marking something as a transition can imply human categories as points of origin and destination, and thereby (re-)produce them. Part of doing differences, in turn, is determining the categories they comprise and the logic of their relations, which may include a trajectory of moving through them.

In the course of our lives, what and who we are changes over time because our categorial affiliations do. At the risk of sounding a bit new age, life can be seen as a constant *becoming*. This is not meant in a directional, teleological sense, but in the sense that we hardly ever stay the same as we progress in life, be it in micro or macro time (i. e. a situation vs. a life span). This is also not to suggest that humans are in a constant state of flux. Indeed, our everyday experience is different, and the concept of 'identity' claims just the opposite. From an everyday-viewpoint, we stay the same, our self, over time – but what that means changes. The notion of 'becoming' employed in the title of this chapter is not meant to imply actual constant change, but the theoretical assumption that any current state is in principle contingent.[1]

In this process of becoming, of shifting categories and affiliations, not all categories and distinctions are equal. Human distinctions come with different sets of categories, in number (gender: two or more, age: potentially countless, etc.), size (gender: 50/50-ish, class: many poor, few rich, etc.), etc. Also, not all transitions between categories are equal. We move differently through different kinds of categories. Some are sticky and have rigid boundaries, some have revolving doors and slippery floors.

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[1] This thought echoes basic ideas of relational sociology, which does not take fixed substances or entities as a starting point of inquiry, but social relations (for an overview see Dépelteau, 2018). However, my aim here is less to engage in the related ontological discussions, but to highlight un/doing differences and doing transitions as one aspect of how individuals and social groups come into being in cultural practices.

Let us consider some examples: *Age*, understood as *chronological* age,[2] is inherently transitory, and the categories in which a lifetime is socially structured are passageways: We more or less involuntarily move through them. *Gender* is more rigid and static. At least in the Western world, we are sorted into a sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987) at or before birth and, even today, mostly expected to inhabit it for life. However, transitioning is, in principle, possible. Age and gender are probably the oldest classifications in cultural history, and both are key dimensions of social organization (Linton, 1942). Like gender, one is perceived to be born into categories of '*Race*' or *Ethnicity*. Unlike gender, switching categories is not an option (Brubaker, 2016). We are mostly born into categories of *Class*, but there is room for movement – both upwards and downwards. People can be born into the category of *Disability* (that is: sorted into it before birth), but also be thrown into it by illness, injury, or accidents. Once in the category, it is hard to leave. Apart from these 'big five' there are myriad others that belong to specific areas of life (education, employment, sports, sexuality, etc.). They all come with specific parameters for entering, leaving, and moving between them.

In addition, we hardly ever inhabit just one category, let alone are defined by just one distinction. We 'are' not merely our gender, nor 'our' ethnicity, nor 'our' dis/ability.[3] We are the proverbial 'all of the above' – our categorial affiliations are multiple and simultaneous, and we share them with others. However, we are not 'all of the above' at all times or in the same intensity (Hirschauer, 2017a).

Against this backdrop, let us revisit our initial question: What does it mean to live a 'normal life'? A preliminary answer is: It has to do with the interplay of un/doing differences and doing transitions; with the categories we live in, how we inhabit them and how we move through them, as well as how they relate to one another. That is, what living a life is. But what makes it a 'normal' one? And how does that relate to our personal 'normality'?

What Is 'Normal(-ity)'?

Before looking at how the distinction between the 'normal' and 'deviant' relates to human categorizations and doing transitions let us first briefly consider 'normality'. Normality is a complex and fluid concept. 'Normal' is an umbrella term that denotes many and often contradictory things, and there are many different approaches to defining and assessing normality.

In his essay on "normalism" Link (2009) notes that the "normal" is both a platitude in modern societies and a key concept for understanding them. Link's interest lies in theorizing the normal and normalization as fundamental phenomena of

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[2] For a discussion of the various social and subjective meanings of age, see Settersten and Godlewski (2016).

[3] Although especially people who are sorted in some of the mentioned categories are often reduced to this affiliation as a "master status" (Hughes, 1945).

modern Western societies. In this vein, he distinguishes his understanding of normality from other meanings such as aesthetic banality, everyday routine, normativity, and social standardization. For Link, "normalism" is a complex of discourses and practices which (re-)produces normalit*ies* – in the plural – by defining normal zones and their boundaries for various areas of life in specialist discourses and fields like medicine, psychology, sociology, and the like. These normalities are integrated into more general cultural notions of normality which are then, in processes of "normalization", taken up by everyday individuals (or imposed on them) as orientations for their own life (p. 20).

Link's distinctions help grasp the scope of the 'normal' as a concept. However, from a sociological viewpoint, and for our question about normality and the life course, his definition of normality is too narrow. Indeed, normality has been a core interest of Sociology from its beginnings, since one of its main interests is understanding how the orderliness of everyday life is stabilized. When we talk about a 'normal life', the everyday understanding of normality – which does include all the varied things Link explicitly excludes – matters. How can we grasp that?

With Goffman (1977), we can understand the normal as a *frame*, an interpretation pattern and a way for people to organize and make sense of everyday experience. The 'normal' typically lies beneath the threshold of perception: it is so obvious, self-evident and taken for granted that it stays invisible as something remarkable (Zerubavel, 2018). This is possible because, in everyday life, we mostly go by *assumptions* and *fictions* of normality. Rather than actively checking and assuring that everything goes according to standard, we mostly assume that what we encounter will be pretty much as usual, until we have good reason to doubt it. This is what Schütz and Luckmann (1973) refer to as the "natural attitude" towards the everyday lifeworld: to assume its naturalness and unquestioned givenness. As far as other people are concerned, we mostly rely on typified perceptions of them and typically reach a sufficient understanding by assuming their typical motives (pp. 229–242). As Goffman (1971) aptly observes, most of the time, we present and *are* "normal appearances" for each other: "present but of no concern" (p. 257). Sacks (1977), in turn, has shown that a large part of everyday life and of 'being present but of no concern' is the job of "doing being ordinary".

Besides these foundational expectations of normality, about how things will *probably* be, there are more normative expectations of how things (and people) *should* be: ideas about normality carry cultural beliefs about what is wrong or right, desirable or undesirable, obligatory or unthinkable. If these expectations are not met, and sanctions follow, notions of normality become *norms*. As Foucault (1976, 1977) has observed, norms are an integral part of cultural efforts of normalization – of bringing subjects to conform to cultural standards of normality through techniques of discipline. Their prescriptive character also links them to cultural recognition and disdain. Herein lies a source of stigma and cause for discrimination and ostracization, and the feeling of being discreditable (Goffman, 1975).

Whether the 'normal' appears as the given routine of everyday life or a normative rule, what is considered or treated as 'normal' (and what that implies) depends on context (geographical, historical, situational) and changes over time. Expectations

may differ between social milieus, generations, and cultural environments. And finally, expectations and definitions of the 'normal' depend on point of view and perspective. Several, possibly even contradictory versions of normality may co-exist.

As varied as notions of normality are its counterparts. They range from the uncommon, the exceptional and extraordinary, to the deviant and the 'abnormal'. Degrees of deviance are charged with meaning to different degrees and are valued and sanctioned differently. Think, for example, of deviations from what is considered a 'normal' body weight. A little jiggle here and there may be commented on, a considerably higher body weight might be labeled "morbidly obese" and be followed not only by harassment but by medical procedures. Not every deviation from the 'normal' is deemed negative, however; some deviations are normalized themselves and barely perceptible in everyday life (say, intellectual capacities just slightly below or above average), some even celebrated (as "high giftedness"), while others become painfully palpable (as "mental disability" which can be followed by stigmatization and exclusion from the job market etc.). Sanctions depend on the binding quality of the expectations a deviation irritates (cf. Dahrendorf, 1960).

The 'normal' is not a fixed social category, and much less are 'the normal (ones)' a fixed group of people. It is a category whose population is in constant flux. At some point or another, most people will make their way in and out of the normal zone, or rather: will be sorted in and out of it. The (normal) life course may itself be considered a mechanism of normalism in that it prescribes an ideal(-typical) way of and trajectory for living a life which people are oriented towards through socialization. Transitions may then be considered both points and processes of normalization or its counterpart, of staying or getting on track or deviating from it.

Such transitions can occur between life phases, developmental states and stages, social roles etc. As such, they are always also transitions between affiliations to human categories. The following section will investigate how notions of normality and categorizations as 'normal' or 'deviant' are related to un/doing differences and doing transitions.

Un/Doing Differences, Doing Life Course Transitions, and Un/Doing Normality

This section presents three ways in which the distinction of 'normal' and 'deviant' and human distinctions and categories can intersect: (1) categories *as such* can be considered 'the' normal or deviant in a set of categories, (2) affiliations to categories of different human distinctions can be considered normal or deviant in their *combination*, (3) *transitions* between categories of a single distinction can be considered more or less normal. The examples given in this section are not meant to be exhaustive, but a starting point for further examination. Also, they need to be simplified for the sake of illustrating different logics of differentiation. There will always be variations and different perspectives in lived reality.

Categories

Human distinctions are themselves rarely considered normal or deviant. It is mostly the categories they comprise, which are organized by this distinction. Of course, human distinctions can also be neutral with respect to normality, such as the distinction between people with or without their wisdom teeth: it is of no or low social significance and consequence in most of everyday life and it would be considered odd to draw such a distinction at all.

Human distinctions that have greater social significance may be more or less organized by normality and in different ways. Some distinctions entail a clear and dichotomous distinction between what is considered 'normal' and what is not, often with one way to be normal and many ways to be deviant (e.g., the distinction between 'able' vs. 'disabled'); some will envisage the normal and abnormal as poles of a gradient and allow for 'more or less normal' categories (heterosexuality and degrees of sexual 'deviance'); some will designate a 'normal zone or range' in which several of their categories fall (intelligence, height, number of sex partners, …), and the boundaries of that normal zone can be more or less fuzzy. These different logics of normality can also change over time.

When differences entail a normal zone or pole, categories are not merely descriptive but are often endowed with more or less value. Frequently, whatever is considered 'normal' is valued higher. Hence, distinctions of the normal and the deviant often also mark power asymmetries. Although the notion of normality is not per se linked to statistical prominence, oftentimes the category used for a minority is also deemed 'not normal' and functions to stabilize the unmarked 'normal' state of the majority (Zerubavel, 2018). A classic example of this is the distinction between hetero- and homosexuality. Preferring sex partners of 'the other' gender is still considered normal, while being labeled as homosexual is mostly still being labeled as outside of the norm, at least as remarkably different. The organization by the (ab-)normal is not always that obvious. Some differences appear to be purely descriptive at first glance. The distinction between 'men' and 'women' is primarily descriptive, yet the two sides of this distinction are not equal in their consequences for the people in them.

Another aspect is how people 'inhabit' their categories. Hirschauer (2017a) speaks of "degrees of purity" of social affiliations. Being in a category not only means to be placed on one side of a distinction but in a "more or less central or peripheral zone within the category" (p. 49): One can be an 'ideal', a 'prototypical', an 'average' or 'marginal' exemplar of a category's population. Classic archetypes of deviance are the 'effeminate man' or the 'infantile adult': They are deemed deviant because they are breaching expectations about the appropriate behavior for membership in a category by filling their category in a way that would be deemed appropriate for a member of another (or *the* other) category. They irritate the logic of differentiation by moving *gradually* between poles that are differentiated *categorically*, they 'lean into' other categories and their prerogatives and duties. Normality and deviation here have less to do with transitions between categories

than with *transgressions* of their boundaries. However, not all transgressions are observed similarly. To what degree a transgression into the "category-bound activities" (Sacks, 1995, p. 241), behavioral styles, or aesthetic expressions of another category will be socially overlooked, tolerated or even celebrated, differs between differences and is an open empirical question.

How does this relate to living a 'normal' life and being a 'normal' person? People who are sorted in one of the categories considered deviant in one distinction tend to be identified (or often identify themselves) with that category. It has often been observed that falling into a deviant category in one respect can lead to being considered not-quite-normal *overall*: Living a 'normal' life and being a 'normal' person, then, is the task of staying out of the wrong categories. In addition, it is about staying within the parameters and boundaries of those categories and inhabiting them in the 'right' way, keeping a good eye on how much one transgresses into other categorial territories and finding the 'right' place within a category. This aspect of combined affiliations to different categories is explored further in the following section.

Combinations

A second way the distinction of the normal and the deviant organizes human categorization is related to combinations of social affiliations. Affiliations to different human categories are connected in different ways.

1. *Hybridity.* A first type of combination is the double membership in categories of the *same* distinction. Examples like androgyny, bisexuality, or intersexuality all combine categorial affiliations that are often deemed mutually exclusive. Such "strong hybrids" (Hirschauer, 2017a, p. 49) do not transition between categories and cross their boundaries but blur the boundary itself. Such cases of ambiguity are often met with scepticism or rejection because they irritate a cultural urge for categorial purity (Bauman, 2007). The framing of their double membership and transgressions is connected to *doing transitions*. Bisexuality is sometimes (disparagingly) considered transitional – 'just a phase'. Here, doing transitions is both a way of de-normalization (in that categorial transgressions are marked) and normalization (because a restoration of categorial order is envisaged). Similarly, intersexuality at birth has until recently been taken as grounds for surgically transitioning individuals to a state of categorial unambiguity. Double affiliation tends to be viewed as an identity of individuals whose personifying categorial ambiguity becomes grounds for their categorization as outside the norm. Ideas about categorial unambiguity are connected to cultural recognition, which, as Nederveen (2001) states, "stretches or revalues social boundaries but does not transgress them" (p. 219). *Becoming (ab-)normal is about crossing and not crossing the right boundaries.*

2. ***Couplings.*** Another case of combinations concerns categories in *different* distinctions. Some categorial affiliations or even entire distinctions are reserved or designated for members of particular categories: *you can only be x once you're y*. A good example is age categories. While age is considered linear and continuous, it is culturally divided into categories. Along with membership in a specific age category come ideas about categorial affiliations in other distinctions: a child is commonly not thought of as hetero- or homosexual but is not supposed to have a 'sexual orientation' at all. Similarly, you likely will only be considered a 'mother' when you are also a 'woman', etc.

Some categorial affiliations are linked to categories of other distinctions: *when you are x you are also expected to be y, but not z*. A common theme here is 'congruence' – the idea that affiliations to some categories go together, and others do not. Its opposite has been described as 'status inconsistency': a situation where a person's social status is different or contradictory in different respects. While some inconsistencies have been normalized (artists can be high in prestige yet low in income and that is just what they are expected to be), others are marked as deviating from the 'normal'. Not always is this about social status in the sense of prestige but in the sense of 'being x'. For example, being in both the categories 'gay' and 'parent' has been unspeakable (yet a reality) historically, is becoming increasingly common today, but is still considered outside the norm, at least not unremarkable.

How links between categorial affiliations affect (attributions of) normality is also indicated by how expectations about *how* to inhabit a category 'correctly' can change with other affiliations. While gender is expected to stay the same over the life course, it is expected to be 'done' differently with age: As a teenager, it is perfectly fine to be obsessed with one's gendered body and gender performance – but not in one's late forties. Here, doing transitions is *part of* doing difference: Part of doing gender 'correctly' is doing age transitions 'correctly'. Other distinctions, in turn, remain untouched – ethnicity and its performance, for example, are not expected to change with age.

Concerning living a 'normal' life and being a 'normal' person, we might say that *becoming (ab-)normal is about coordinating one's memberships in categories as to reach or maintain congruency*.

Transitions

The two aspects addressed so far focused on *being in* categories. However, as stated at the beginning, life is just as much about *moving through* and *between* human categories. Such passages between human categories happen *in the course of* life course transitions and they *are* life course transitions. A third way the distinction of the normal and the deviant organizes human categorization is in these transitions and in how they are 'done', i. e. accomplished and framed. Most human distinctions

come with a specific logic as to how one is to move or not move through the categories they comprise. Becoming '(ab-)normal', then, is a question of sticking to or deviating from this logic.

1. ***To Transition – or Not?*** A first question is whether *transitioning itself* is deemed normal. Depending on the distinction in question, categorial transitions may be considered automatic, obligatory, welcome, optional, undesirable, or even impossible.

    Let us again consider age. Nothing seems more unremarkable as ageing – after all, you age while you read these lines (sorry!) without actively doing anything, really. Yet, while your lifetime count goes up automatically, progressing through age categories is different. While continuous transitions are mostly overlooked *as* transitions and are normalized in their everydayness, transitions across categorial boundaries carry potential for attributions of normality and deviance. Consider adulthood: In Germany, for example, when people celebrate their 18th birthday, they not only move from one category in a questionnaire or dating app to the next – they also transition into a different legal category of citizenship with rights and duties reserved for people in that category and above. That, however, does not imply that they abruptly feel or see themselves as "adults", as a different kind of people, but that they enter a life phase in which they move towards a new identity gradually (cf. Arnett, 2000). While the transition to adulthood is 'done' on a legal, institutional level, it needs to be done on a level of individual behavior, too. This is where normality in a different sense comes into play. As members of a certain age category, individuals are expected to behave in an 'appropriate' manner. Transitions shift expectations, and subsequently, behaving according to these expectations can shift individuals from one category to another: *Doing transitions*, in this case, lies (amongst other things) in the shifting of expectations through discursive or institutional practices, but is also accomplished by *doing being x* in the 'right' way on an individual level. Deviating from this logic can, in turn, be deemed as a failure to transition, and subsequently lead to attributions of being outside of the norm: *Becoming (ab-) normal is about inhabiting a category in the right way.* This has to do with another aspect: *Becoming (ab-)normal is also about progressing through categories in the right order or direction.* People are expected to transition through age categories *in order*: ageing should, up to a certain point, follow a logic of progress and development. In fact, the logic of the transition and the quality of the categories the transition connects, are related: While transitions between 'states' may be considered mere 'change', those between 'stages' are considered 'progress' – and vice versa.

    Unlike the supposed naturalness and normalness of transitions between categories of some distinctions such as age, but also phases of educational of professional life, other transitions between categories are culturally marked as unusual or deviant. Rogers Brubaker (2016) compares the two prominent cases of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal whose transitions between categories of gender (Jenner) and *race* (Dolezal) were met with markedly different reactions. While Jenner's coming out as transgender was met with a positive response and

appraisal, Dolezal's outing as being *white* was met with a moral outcry. Brubaker's analysis shows that the acceptance and considered normality of transitions between categories differ between distinctions. While it is increasingly considered normal – or at least 'normally deviant' – to transition between gender categories, there is no such cultural option for ethnicity or *race*. This differential treatment of transitions can itself be considered *doing transitions*: Transitioning between gender (or rather: sex) categories is considered at least possible, while *race* is deemed unchangeable and attempts such as Dolezal's are sometimes even deemed 'unreal'. To deny Dolezal's claim to a specific categorial affiliation is, in a way, to 'undo' her transition in the sense of declaring it impossible. The normality or deviance of transitioning between categories *at all* is related to the quality of the distinction at stake: it affects its openness or resistance to change.

2. ***How to Transition?*** A second question concerns *how* a transition is made. Firstly, the biographical *timing and duration* of transitions may be made relevant with respect to normality. Some transitions are expected to be made at certain points in time (=life), and there are expectations about how long some should take. The case of infant development is striking here: parents, like doctors, like nursery staff, are constantly monitoring whether a child is developing 'normally', that is: at the same speed and at a same or similar age as others. Learning to eat with a spoon at 6 years old and being able to read at 2 years old will both be considered not normal. But other, less obvious cases might also have to do with timing. For example, the supposed behavioral and sexual deviance of LGBT*IQ people might stem from a temporality issue: commonly, puberty is perceived as the phase of life in which an excessive preoccupation with one's gender and sexuality is deemed 'ordinarily abnormal'. In LGBT*IQ people it can be prolonged or postponed due to societal conditions and inhibitions in place when people were younger and of supposedly "appropriate" age for being preoccupied with their sexuality. As Wanka (2020) notes, cases of "transitional deviance" (p. 194) with respect to timing are quite common and do not necessarily lead to negative consequences but are even necessary for stabilizing normativities: ignoring some deviations makes the norm as such less prone to disruption while sanctioning others exemplifies the norm. *Doing transitions* through defining and marking their ideal timing and what are ignorable, tolerable, or inexcusable deviations from it is a way of defining zones of normality and thus of controlling categorial transitions.

Secondly, the *mode of transition* can be made relevant. While some transitions are seen as merely 'occurring', others are seen as something that must be actively and practically *done* – performed or accomplished, maybe even be marked by rites of passage that make a transition accountable. Part of *doing transitions* is determining the parameters for how a transition is to be done. For example, in Western societies, the transition between gender categories cannot just be decided by an individual but must be practically *done* by several parties (through individual behavioral changes, administrative procedures like a name change, medical treatments like hormone-therapy or surgery, etc.). This process is then

also framed *as* a *transition*, i. e. as a process in which an individual changes category but stays essentially the same person. Normality comes into play in different respects: Transitioning between gender categories requires those transitioning to at least temporarily cross the boundary of the normal zone, e. g. by undergoing psychological evaluation and accept ascriptions of a "gender identity disorder". The successful passing as a member of the new gender category is, in a way, also a way of shedding ascriptions of deviance by a kind of 'undoing doing transitions': by covering one's tracks and making transitional efforts unaccountable.

The three ways in which un/doing differences, doing transitions and un/doing normality can intersect presented in this section are, of course, not a finite list. The entries on it are subject to historical change and, as will have become apparent, to specific points of view. Research into these processes and logics of how attributions of '(ab-)normality' are linked to ways of un/doing differences and un/doing transitions, and especially into other forms beyond the ones mentioned here, will shed light on the ever-shifting normative orders of societies.

(Ab-)Normal People in Transition(s)

This chapter started out by asking how we can conceptualize a 'normal life'. It offered reflections on the role of doing life course transitions and affiliations to, combinations of, and transitions between human categories for cultural definitions of normality and deviance. How, finally, is living a 'normal' life related to becoming and being a 'normal' person? I have suggested an understanding of 'becoming (ab-)normal' as an ongoing process of affiliation to human categories and of doing transitions. Part of doing life course transitions as transitions between human categories is determining their (ab-)normality with respect to timing, direction, mode, etc. How, then, do attributions of normality to life course transitions affect those engaged in them? To think about this, it may be helpful to understand individuals or kinds of people as *products of transitions*, rather than *units transitioning*. When and why, we could ask, are individuals or types or kinds of people, as cultural phenomena, produced as co-products of doing transitions?

According to Simmel (1908) individuals emerge at the intersections of social circles. What makes them uniquely themselves is, somewhat ironically, the combination of affiliations to categories they share with others. We could imagine the 'normal' and the 'deviant' as another set of circles, with blurry outlines and of ever-changing size, that form new overlaps with the categories, combinations and transitions underneath, like floating bubbles over the social pattern of multiply overlapping circles, through which some things appear 'normal', and others do not. We could then picture 'normal' and 'deviant' *people* as emerging when normality and deviance are attributed as a quality to categorial affiliations, their combinations, and as part of doing categorial transitions.

Foucault, in his study on the history of sexuality (Foucault, 1977), analyzes how 'the homosexual' was historically constructed both as a *kind of people*, a sexual "species" (p. 47), and as a distinct *kind of individual*. This cultural production of a

'perversion' and a population 'belonging' to it addressed a societal problem: The assumed relational sense of the gender distinction lost plausibility the more men and women were declared to be fundamentally different beings. The restoration of relations between men and women as normal and natural required the marking of relations between men and between women as unnatural, and the "implantation" (p. 41) of this desire in individuals outside the norm(-al). On a much smaller scale, Smith (1978) offers a reconstruction of how the deviance of a single individual is produced in her study on "K" and how she ends up being categorized as "mentally ill" by her college flatmates. K's being labeled as deviant is not only a way for them to make sense of her behavior, but also a way for the teller of K's story to ascertain their own normality.

So, we may say that individuals of a certain 'type' or 'kind' may occur, as *a solution to irritations of expectations of normality and social order*. Concerning doing transitions, it appears that some ways of transitioning between human categories are considered normal, and that extends to the people transitioning. Transitions that are considered normal are seen as status changes of individuals, while 'deviant' transitions further push individuals into a special category for those involved in them, thus (re-)producing them as kinds of people.

Of course, understandings of what it is to be 'normal' and how we value it change over time and with context. Indeed, in late modernity, being outside of the norm might even be considered appealing (Reckwitz, 2017). But again: this does not hold for all kinds of being outside social norms or cultural normalities. Things are more complex. Notions of the 'normal' differ between human distinctions, categories and transitions, and so do valuations of them. Figuratively speaking, even more bubbles are floating into the picture.

With all these iridescent bubbles floating around, it is easy to overlook that many of them will not burst and dissolve into nothing at the slightest touch, but that the game of distinctions addressed in this chapter has very tangible consequences. One is that since those who are classified are always themselves classifiers (Bourdieu, 1984), the arrangement of kinds of people and individuals in a social space that is structured along the axes of normality and value positions individuals and groups in positions of varying recognition and power. Some kinds of people and individuals lose their own rights to participate in the game of establishing normality gradually or completely, while others tend to gain more influence in it.

It may precisely be the underdetermined meaning and value of normality that hints at its cultural function. Since there is no absolute definition of what 'normal' means, it is best to understand the distinction of the normal and deviant as a principle and motor which drives and organizes the un/doing of human distinctions and social affiliations, a kind of *meta difference* that crosscuts other human distinctions. And it might be the undetermined value of the 'normal' that allows for incentivizing or de-incentivizing categorial transitions and change and hence (de-)stabilizing social and normative order.

Tracing the complex interrelationships between definitions of the normal and deviant and valuations and devaluations, as well as further conceptually grasping the relations between normality, human categorization and doing life course

transitions will require a more comprehensive and systematic investigation. This chapter aimed to present some first reflections on these complex relations. Empirical studies of actual cases of co-productions of normality and deviance and kinds of people may both profit from and help elaborate an understanding of these relations and help understand 'becoming (ab-)normal'.

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