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**"Inside/Out" - Resocialisation as a psycho-social process: Methodological notes  
on social exclusion and biographical integration**

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"Inside" and "out" - these terms in the title relate to a powerful institution of social exclusion, namely, the prison. This "total institution" (as Goffman called it) marks a barrier between the "inside" and the "outside." The border is spacial and concrete: inmates are being held "inside" and they are cut off from the "outside." The step from the outside-in entails more than a temporary exclusion from society. It symbolizes a permanent predicament of being stigmatized and marginalized as deviant. This predicament holds even after one is released back into the society, after one is back "out."

Inmates usually experience marginalization long before they are released from prison. Incarceration constitutes a special intervention within this specific life-circumstances which are early shaped by experiences of social disadvantage. In the closed institution, inmates face a basic contradiction. On the one hand, prisons have the task of resocialization and they are meant to support the reintegration back into the society. On the other hand, prisons are meant to punish and to ensure inner security. These contradictory goals of help and support on the one hand and sanctions and control on the other stand at odds with each other. This contradiction structures the relationships and every-day life interactions within the institution. It causes numerous conflicts for prison staff as well as inmates.

Incarceration is a paradoxical institutional intervention into the life-histories and life-concepts of people. It undermines biographically developed potentials of autonomy and places restrictions on people's scope of action. In other words, the skills people need to actively integrate themselves into society are being cut back by the bureaucratic rules and authoritarian modes of interaction in the prison system. Inmates have to grapple with powerlessness, dependency and pressures to conform, even within their own group.

American sociologists such as Gresham Sykes (1958) and Erving Goffman (1961) were among the first researchers in the 1950s and 60s to explore these processes from the perspective of the inmates. Sykes called the experience of imprisonment an "attack on the psyche" and Goffman spoke of the "mortification of the self." Both authors stressed the powerful effects of the prison institution on the sense of self of its inmates. Imprisonment provokes a deep-seated crisis of both autonomy and identity and it thoroughly unsettles an individual's subjectivity.

The terms "inside" and "out" speak to the interdependence of subject and society. "Inside" and "outside" not only refer to the *individual within the institution*, but also to the *institution within the individual*. People internalize institutional settings. But their actions are not linear products of institutional conditions. An individual's adoption of the institutional restriction of his actions is non-linear. It is a multi-layered and conflicted process.

I would like to illustrate this interlinked process between institutional interventions and individual action patterns using the example of imprisonment. How do people cope with their stay in a closed institution? How does the change between "inside" and "outside" affect their sense of self and their behaviors? I will be talking about the experiences of young men in juvenile detention in Germany. The radical form of social exclusion that imprisonment entails for them further increases their general conflicts surrounding integration. These conflicts appear as if under a magnifying glass - they are enlarged and more strongly focused.

The image of the magnifying glass is not only relevant for the gaze of the researcher looking at the field of social control. It is also relevant for the biographical self-interpretations of young marginalized men who are expected to and want to integrate themselves. For them, incarceration brings conflicts of autonomy and adolescent fantasies of grandeur (or so to say: of being grandiose). They have to face their failure and are confronted with obstacles to integration - obstacles that are both internal as well as rooted in the external reality.

Most researchers and experts stress the concrete steps from one social environment to another. They ask, is the young man successful in his reintegration into society? However, the success of integration also depends on the degree to which someone is able to reorganise his own inner world. This two-sided challenge of coping with resocialisation is accompanied by conflicts of transition and adaptation. Therefore, I emphasize that the reintegration following imprisonment is a *psychosocial* process. It involves complex transitions, from outside of the prison walls to the closed prison environment and back again to the outside world. These concrete steps are intertwined with transitions in the subject's inner world. External and internal transitions are not always in accordance with each other. Integration is a conflicted and dynamic process that has multiple layers and occurs on several levels.

My understanding of this process is based on a psychodynamic understanding of subjectivity. I will now discuss this conceptual underpinning. Then I will present a case study (for the whole study being conducted at the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony cp. Bereswill 1999 and Enzmann & Greve 2001 and see [www.kfn.de](http://www.kfn.de)). This case illustrates some of the social and individual conflicts of integration faced by young marginalized men. We will see that this case example raises some basic methodological questions and I will discuss these methodological concerns at the end of my talk.

Let me begin with my understanding of subjectivity:

### **A complex interplay between internal and external factors**

When I say that people internalize social conditions, I must stress the individual uniqueness of this process. Assuming that this process is conflicted means I base

myself on a psychoanalytical approach to subjectivity.

Expressions of individual subjectivity result from a two-fold, interlocking process: first of all, subjectivity is based on intersubjectivity. This means it rests on relations of mutual exchange *between* people. This mutual exchange is not restricted to early mother-child relations. It is a lifelong process. Secondly, subjectivity is an expression of *intrasubjectivity*. This means it also rests on the unique dynamic processes *within* the subject. "In psychoanalytic terms, the subject is a complex and conflicted being. Conscious and unconscious identifications and introjections intersect with internalizations of extra-personal experiences gained in the outside world. This means internal and external conditions can overlap, but they can also be at odds with each other." (Bereswill & Ehlert, 1996:25)

The subjective appropriation of institutional conditions is very dynamic. Unconscious and conscious conflicts of the subject clash and intersect with contradictory societal expectations. Viewing the relationship between internal and external and between subjective and societal factors as dynamic, complex and interdependent, I follow a tradition of thought dating back to Theodor W. Adorno (1955). He views the psychodynamic structure of subjects as an illustration of societal conflicts. Yet he also emphasizes that societal tensions and tensions within the subject are not identical. In other words: the interface between subject and society is not symmetrical. It is not a straight line and it does not have the same surface, texture or consistency throughout. The interface between external and internal reality has gaps and frictions. It entails patches, double edges, knots and worn out spots.

How to apply this image to the agency of people that grew and developed over their life course? How can we make sense of such patterns that are unique and shaped by society? An exploration of the relationship between internal and external dynamic processes involves methodological challenges. One has to pay attention to the cracks, knots and smooth surfaces of the connection between inner and outer realities. In other words: Biographical patterns of behavior are investigated as patterns of conflict. And the deeper structure of these conflicts are not immediately accessible to us.

The biographical life-concept of an individual constitutes a creative way of coping with conflict. Biographically acquired patterns can be transformed. Such transformation depends on the extent to which new coping mechanisms can be found and past experiences can be newly defined. Such developmental steps follow the modus of regression when past conflicts are repeated and the modus of progression when patterns are transformed. From a psychodynamic perspective, biographies involve a constant shifting between internal and external conditions; between past and current experiences. (These shifts occur in both directions: from the internal to the external and from the external in; from past to current and from current to past. Past experiences are reinterpreted and redefined from the present point of view). From a psychosocial perspective, biographies constitute subjectively designed structures of opportunities. The concrete options given to people in social life create or limit internal options of repeating and managing biographical conflicts. This is particularly relevant during adolescence when psychodynamic developments meet social demands of integration.

The young man whom I will be speaking about in this talk, is in this phase of his life, adolescence. I call him Clemens Dettmer (if you read my text you know him). He is one of thirty participants of the research study that we conducted at the Criminological Research Institutes of Lower Saxony in Hannover, Germany. This study is a longitudinal qualitative study with young men in juvenile detention. These young men were repeatedly interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. In the interviews, participants talk about their prison experiences, their biographical stories, and their life-developments after their release from prison. The interviews reveal insights into their processes of integration over a longer period of time – up to five years. They also allow us to reconstruct the young men's experiences with integration in the context of their lives prior to their incarceration.

With the following case study I will illustrate my process of interpretation and I ask again about the multi-dimensional interdependence between “inside” and “out.” How does Clemens Dettmer experience the prison intervention in his biography? How does he cope with this intervention in the context of his biographical experiences of conflict?

## **“I will do my own thing” – Autonomy without Attachment: Imprisonment as Reinforcement of Dependency**

Let me start with a quotation from the interview:

I think if they had put me in jail before, as a deterrent, I think I wouldn't be where I'm at today. I would have had a little more time to think before, right.  
(I: Hmhm) I'd be further ahead today. (III: 28)

Clemens Dettmer makes this statement in the second round interview, about a year after he joined the study. Looking back on his life history and his prison experience, he comments on his repeated incarceration. His message is reproachful. He criticizes the institutions of social control: Had “they” sanctioned him earlier, he would not have failed again. With this accusation, Clemens delegates the responsibility for his failing to others and he partakes in a social discourse lamenting the lack of toughness of youth services and judges. They failed to deter him early enough – this is an argument that we hear over and over again in our interviews with young men. The legitimizing character of this toughness-discourse is apparent. It also reveals the adolescent fantasies of being grandiose. It is implied that they are too tough to be influenced by soft measures – a hyper-masculine ideal that is reinforced in the prison environment.

These points are well-taken, but an irritation remains: why does a young man with prison experience argue for even more deterrence? What biographical processes preceded his pleading for a repressive intervention into his own life? What is the latent meaning of the criticism of the people who represent the welfare state? I will now try to trace this latent meaning by looking at Clemens Dettmer's self-experience in prison and by placing it in the context of his earlier biographical experiences of conflict. Towards the end I will return to his call for more deterrence.

How did Clemens experience the impact of incarceration during his first stay in prison? In the first interview during his first incarceration, Clemens views prison as an institution that *forces* him to transform his self-concept. For him, the existential influence of the institution on his development is connected to his abstinence from drugs in prison. The next quotation is taken from this first interview during his first imprisonment:

This is why it is such an advantage that I went to jail ... Outside, I would've taken drugs, probably still certainly ... I wouldn't have gotten clean outside, that's for sure. (I)

Clemens experiences the intervention of imprisonment as an “advantage,” as beneficial. He thus attributes a lot of power to the closed institution. It sobered him up. For him, being incarcerated constitutes a positive “attack on the psyche” (to borrow Sykes' expression). He feels he is undergoing an existential change. Clemens Dettmer views his incarceration as his last chance to change for the better. With this existential invocation he refers to his repeated failures in the past.

He is a different person in prison. This feeling corresponds with his abstinence from drug use – an experience he describes as a radical change. Clemens strongly identifies with the institutional goals of resocialization and he distances himself from the ideals and subculture of some of the other inmates. By saying, “a discussion is more interesting than a fight,” for example, he adopts the socio-pedagogical language of juvenile detention. At the same time, by presenting himself as articulate and sensible, he distances himself from his own past which was dominated by drugs and violence. He notes:

Because I was a different person, before I got to jail, really. (I: Hmhm) A fucked-up type, one could say. (I)

From his point of view, it is only up to him whether his radical change will be successful in the future. He says, “I will do my own thing.” (I) Several times in this first interview, he points out that he does not want to rely on anybody's support, especially referring to social workers. Clemens strictly rejects their

involvement when he says, “I know myself, nobody has to hold my hand and tell me

what to do, right.” (I, 31)

For Clemens Dettmer, his first imprisonment provokes an intense struggle for independence, combined with an idealization of absolute autonomy. Dependence and independence are mutually exclusive. Clemens’ ideal of autonomy stands in contrast to his earlier experiences of dependence – not only with regards to drugs. It also refers to an earlier lack of self-determination and his relationships to institutions. There is a gap between his idealization of autonomy and his lived experiences of dependency. This gap is indicative of his lack of ties to other people. His biological mother is the only person whom Clemens assigns a role in his life. He idealizes her as needing protection and positions himself as protector of her honor. He says:

If anyone would do something to her ... she can count on me, right. So, no one treats her badly. (II, 74)

He also hopes that he will be able to stay with her when he is released from prison until he has found his own apartment.

What actually happened after his release from prison? In his longitudinal interview I quoted from in the beginning, Clemens depicts the very day of his release as a direct return to his former habits. First, he got drunk with his mother’s family and then he consumed cocaine with an old buddy. In the second interview he explains this return to former habits – which were soon accompanied by violent conflicts that resulted in being reported to the police – as follows:

“Well, you really are provoked outside when you actually have become more peaceful ...compared to previous times. Well, and I just couldn’t cope with that.” (III, 1)

Clemens describes the transitional conflict between “inside” and “outside” as a confrontation with difference. He is different from the others, and this causes him trouble. He can feel the discrepancy between his state of being (“more peaceful”) and the expectations of others which overwhelm him. His ideal of autonomy collapses into an encompassing dependency on the expectations of his new environment.

This rupture in his experience of self illustrates a continuity: his actions are guided by external demands and he adjusts to the different contexts. This is his way of solving conflicts which he cannot endure. In the case of Clemens Dettmer, adaptation equals the reorganizing of his inner world in correspondence with a changing environment. Instead of undergoing an internal process of transition, he feels determined by outside circumstances.

He thus reveals two very different modes of coping. On the one hand, Clemens seems completely permeable by and amenable to the demands of other people. His actions are determined by external factors. On the other hand he wants to draw a clear line between himself and others. His actions ought to be completely self-determined. There are no transitions or bridges between these extremes of adjustment and distancing. He does not have an internal space where he can weigh the conflicts and balance his ambivalent feelings. Neither does an intersubjective in-between-space exist where he can negotiate and work on his conflicts with significant others. Instead, Clemens solves his inner tensions with unquestioning adaptation or strict distancing, even from his own biography. These polar coping patterns illustrate a biographical conflict surrounding dependence. This conflict extends beyond the material realm, into conflicts surrounding autonomy and emotional ties in his biography more generally.

At the core of these conflicts are his ways of coping with biographical ruptures and associated, contradictory relationship experiences. These conflicts are reenacted and made concrete during incarceration. Imprisonment and release constitute abrupt changes between “inside” and “out.” They actually constitute non-transitional ruptures which need to be mended in the internal world of the subjects. In the case of Clemens Dettmer, the rigid external structure of the institution fosters a sense of inner structure which does not hold at beyond the point of release. Clemens conducts the abrupt shift from “inside” to the “outside” without being able to fall back on an internal space of transition or inter-subjective offers of support and structuring. He copes with the resulting strain by readjusting once again and numbing his senses.

How can we understand this pattern in the context of his biographical experiences? The most obvious parallel between his coping with prison and his life story is the high level of discontinuity in his biography. He experienced discontinuity with regards to housing and relationships as exemplified by the often changing modes of these relationships. He underwent a lot of changes without access to transitional spaces – Clemens' biography is shaped by permanent ruptures and a continuous, existential necessity to adapt to new and different environments. Looking at his behaviour over the course of the research process, we first see him identify with the official goals of the institution. Then he conforms to his old social milieu. Previously he had conformed to different models of youth care institutions: two foster families, residential care, living abroad or in a farm project. At the same time, his peer group activities were characterised by drifting through very different subcultures and ending up in the company of drug users. Assimilating to changing environments and expectations is a crucial skill he had to learn early on in life.

The only person he assigns an important position in this changing social and personal environment, is his mother. His idealization of her as someone who would do everything for him stands in stark contrast to his actual experiences with her which were more erratic. He never lived in the same household with her for any length of time. And he sees himself less as a son than as a member of his mother's peer group which is being held together by alcohol consumption. He expresses a strong sense of connection to her when he describes running away from several institutions where he was placed by the youth services. When running away, he says, "yeah, and I felt drawn to my mother over and over again." (II) He is referring to his life between the ages of 13 and 20, when he moved at least ten times back and forth between his mother's household and the institutional placements.

From the day of Clemens' birth, the relationship between mother and son is strongly influenced by institutions of social control. According to him, this is due to the young age of his mother as well as to her continuing drinking habits.

Clemens identifies with his mother and sees the two of them as victims of the youth welfare office. He was given to a foster family in a very early age. He says: "Once you are in the clutches of the youth welfare office, it is very difficult to get out " indicating his mother's helplessness when dealing with this authority. The fact that his second foster mother maltreated him during the nine years that he stayed with her only strengthens his alliance to his mother as a fellow victim.

The time he spent in this foster family stands in stark contrast to his idealization of his biological mother. Clemens Dettmer summarizes the years up to his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in a short, bullet-point-like formula. At the beginning of his biographical interview he says, "My childhood was shit. Fuh, what more can I think of? Beatings, no free time." (II, 6) His memories come haltingly, but they are very concrete. They focus on loneliness, violence, humiliation and fear. He was physically and psychologically abused by this foster mother. When probed by the interviewer he describes her as "big, angry ... always in a bad mood" (II, 8). His biological mother on the other hand is presented as a gentle and generous person. He says: "I was allowed everything when I was with her, " (II, 32) and, "she would do everything for me." (II, 74)

Both of these images represent very one-sided relationship modes: violent rigidity and unlimited caring. In the first case, the subjectivity of the child is dominated by an overwhelming power. In the second case, his subjectivity blends in with a non-defined other who does not have clear contours. Both relationship modes have in common that they do not allow for an intersubjective relationship which acknowledges and accepts the other. The necessary intra- and intersubjective balance between self-assertion and acceptance of the other (Benjamin, 1993) is missing. Instead there is only dominance or adjustment through symbiotic merging.

To attribute Clemens' grave conflicts of integration solely to these competing relationship patterns – i.e. to his early mother-child experiences – would not do justice to a biographical research perspective. A biographical approach raises questions about repetitions or transformations of life history conflicts in different contexts and over time.

In the case of Clemens Dettmer, transitory scenarios are repeated which create conflicts with competing modes of intersubjectivity. When he moves from foster family into residential care, this does not only mean a liberation from violence. He describes this step as an irritating experience where he encountered other forms of education and other constellations of relationships. Years later he is still surprised about it:

Yeah, that there were not really any limits, right, you can do what you want.

(I: Hmhm) Even if you get into trouble, those people get you off the hook again. (II, 20)

As I already showed at the beginning of my talk – Clemens knows how to position himself in the discourse on deviant behavior. The term “limit setting” is at the center of public debates about education and deviant behavior. A lack of limit setting in social-pedagogical programs is generally thought to cause youth delinquency. In this sense, the interview sequence can be read as a latent criticism of social pedagogy. It corresponds with a collective discourse among the young inmates as well as with public discourses about the weakness of social work.

Furthermore, the sequence also points to a permanent transitional conflict between rigid and more permeable situations. This conflict repeats itself in the rigid framework of prison where Clemens manages to find a structure. This external structure, however, maintains an internal structure only as long as he remains within the prison walls. Once he is released from prison, it collapses and the biographical experience of rupture is repeated once again. The prison institution did not provide him with an opportunity to address past conflict experiences and resolve them in a different way. Clemens refers to this disappointing experience of repetition when he says, “if someone had put me in jail earlier as a deterrent ... I would be further ahead today.” (III, 28). Not the desire to be punished or deterred is at the forefront of his criticism. It is the desire to find a structuring and supportive environment that would allow him a different form of development. It is also the desire for more consistent experiences with education and with attachment that foster developments and potentials for autonomy which can withstand the changing demands of social integration.

## **Researching biographical discontinuity – a methodological perspective**

This case example focussed on subjective coping with institutionally enforced biographical discontinuity. It illustrates a conflict of integration as it more generally affects young marginalized men whose life histories are shaped by biographical ruptures and dramatic changes. As a result, conflicts recur and increase at the same time, especially in the context of a closed institution. Imprisonment raises biographical constellations of conflict all over again. The closed setting with its regressive style of relating fosters internal leaps back to the unresolved past of one's own life history (Becker-Schmidt, 1993).

In the case I presented we see such conflicts from an unresolved past. These conflicts structure the narrator's actions, but he is not conscious of it. The reproachful wish for an earlier intervention of social control brings suppressed needs from the past back into the present time. These needs are being addressed and reconfigured in light of recent experiences, namely imprisonment and release. The manifest call for deterrence illustrates a latent need to experience continuity, connectedness and inner stability. Such stability is substituted by a rigid prison structure and collapses on the day Clemens has to leave the institution. The irritating call for deterrence represents the coming to consciousness and *simultaneous* defense of unmet wishes for continuity, intersubjective stability and acceptance. The call is closely tied to cultural productions of marginalized masculinity. The general toughness inherent in these cultural constructions of masculinity only barely covers the underlying fragility of male identities (Bereswill, 2003).

The study of biographical defense mechanisms raises methodological questions: How can we reconstruct biographical processes without smoothing out ruptures, detours and backwards movements? How can we explore the rejections between internal and external discontinuities? These questions tie into the conceptualization of conflicted biographical subjectivity that I mentioned earlier.

In order to find answers to these questions we need to decipher the dynamic developments of biographical subject potentials. Biographical subjectivity is not the result of piled-up experiences and developments as the concept of narratives implies (Dausien, 2000). Its dynamic does not follow a linear relationship between past, present and future. An individual's actions are the result of a multi-layered synthesis; a synthesis of conscious and unconscious impulses and past and present experiences. This back-and-forth movement between present and past is implied in the image of the "unresolved past." It means that people's biographical patterns of behavior are structured by their past experiences. However, current experiences can also lead to the restructuring of past experiences. The re-defined past can then be included into the present.

Regina Becker-Schmidt (1993) discusses this phenomenon using Freud's term "Nachträglichkeit" (deferred action). Her findings in the realm of women's discontinuous biographies also apply to other biographical constellations. I quote, "Creations, impressions, memory traces are reworked in retrospect due to new experiences and because new stages of developments are reached. They acquire a different meaning and a different psychological potency. "Nachträglichkeit" refers to a general psychological power during which memories, perceptions of self and perceptions of others are reinterpreted in a new light. This occurs because the present state of awareness allows for these memories to be integrated into the current constellations of meaning making. ... From the present time, the past is viewed in a different light and such corrections open up new possibilities for the future." (ibid: 173f.).

Such non-linear conceptualization of time requires data collection methods that do not force biographies into a chronological order. Instead, research methods must be open for biographical leaps, contradictions and inconsistencies. The same is true for the analysis of biographical interviews. The analysis has to break free from the logic implied by the specific narrative sequence in the text. One has to read and connect interview parts across the entire material.

From this perspective, a hermeneutic interpretation , “approaches the life history as a whole, but also with an awareness for its rejections or warpings.” (ibid. 175) Sequential conceptualizations involving the systematic reconstruction of the processes of biographies must be combined with psychodynamic dimensions of biographical time-modes. This means departing from certain assumptions put forth by theories of narration. Specifically, it means overcoming the instruction not to destroy the “Gestalt” of the narration (Rosenthal, 1992:215). I believe one has to criss-cross the narrative structure in order to find patterns of conflict that break through the supposedly layered structure of narration. I am thus arguing for a modification of the methodological concept regarding layered biographies and developments of biographical experiences: biographical patterns of conflict do not follow the chronological order of narrative processes. Instead, they emerge from the leaps, the inconsistencies and the gaps in the story which run counter to the chronological order. To identify these, one requires a hermeneutical, that means an interpretative approach to the constellations of conflict that are central to a biography. Such interpretation must also include the unconscious meanings of narratives, which are subject to psychological defense mechanisms.

How can these insights be applied to the concrete analysis of a case? Reconstructing a case offers an excellent opportunity to understand the structure of biographical processes that entail increasing marginalization and self-marginalization. This also holds true for the case example that I presented earlier. Biographical discontinuity emerges as a case-specific structure which strengthens over time. It involves the repeated loss of a sense of belonging. It entails new ties and repeated change from narrow to permeable contexts and relationship modes. The retrospective call for “deterrence” thus illustrates a consolidated pattern of self-marginalization in the context of an institutional career.

My conflict-theoretical reading of the case goes even further and draws attention to the inner co-existence of experiences that are not immediately linked with each other. In light of their structural similarities, an unconscious meaning of the fatalistic call for “deterrence” is revealed.

The retrospective wish for "being held tight" entails a utopian self-concept. It represents the (desired) transformation of one's failures into potentials for autonomy which can bear up against concussions without collapsing right away. This wish for biographical autonomy is also an expression of an implicit knowledge about how much the lack of ties limits this autonomy.

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