Both sides of the line of normal: Constructing identities in the talk of young clients of a drug treatment unit

The research considers stories of clients of a drug treatment unit for young people and children. The study focuses on the construction of young people's identities in the speech in which they locate their lives and give significance to their use of drugs in their relationships with society, family, friends and authorities. In line with the constructionist view, identity is here understood in terms of self-constructions created in situations of interaction. The methods of discourse analysis are used to study excerpts of talk.

The research material comprises 17 individual interviews of clients aged 14 to 18. Cannabis was the most common drug interviewed young people had used but everybody had also used medicines, opiates or amphetamine or both. Nine of the interviewed were girls and eight were boys. The stories of young clients are studied through different themes in five different articles. These consider the meanings of normal, information production and surprise turns of events in the interviews, drug screening tests and the treatment careers of young drug addicts, peer-relationships and experiences with the authorities. In the summary it is considered the kind of main meanings and identities which were common in all or at least several themes.

The interviewed clients defined their life-experiences and drug using against the kind of lines between normal life and being outside. Drug using was situated in the outside world and not-using inside of the normal life. The interviewed clients identified themselves on the both sides of these lines. Their speaker positions varied partly according whether they spoke about their life in past, present or future terms.

At the conclusion two kinds of different dimensions of diverse identities are described. There can be found a speaker who is conscious about his or her deviance and on the contrast a speaker who has already started to live "normal" life. On the other hand young clients defined their life actions as subordinated to other people or events and as opposite they emphasized their own autonomy. In addition loneliness and the lack of allies were also emphasized in the talk of interviewed clients.

Constructionist research of identity, discourse analytical research of interaction and qualitative drug research have been used as the main sources of information.