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**Files as Narrations of Deviance?  
Methodological Reflections about the Intertextual Structure of Case Files from  
Residential Care in West Germany 1950 – 1970**

The starting point for the presentation is the specific textuality of the social bureaucratic case file. Selected results of the just finished DFG-study „The Administration of the Case“ (Mechthild Bereswill & Patrik Müller) will be discussed in relation to the following questions: How does the writing and reading of files structure the emergence of deviance and normality? How do files structure processes of social control? Can we read files as a narrative?

The textuality of case files is basic for legitimizing the decision making within institutions of social control and social care. Our analysis of such documents shows a lot of inconsistencies, contradictions, non-plausible actions, turning points and narrative gaps. Instead of the suggestion to read a file as ‘narrating the inmate’ (Zaft) we suggest to characterize case files as a „transtextual“ (Genette) and incomplete narrative that needs the investigation and investment of the reader and the writer for producing common knowledge on deviance and normality. This argument will be underlined by a small case vignette from our broad case comparison in the study.