

The whole notion of being normal is highly overrated

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Do you feel normal?

I've never felt normal nor have I ever wanted to be. In the 1950s, normal meant being 📍📍📍📍 (I lived in an Italian neighbourhood) and having a mother and father. I was an only child and my father left when I was very young, so it was difficult for me to feel normal under those circumstances. You accept the lot you're given. I had a crazy mother so that was normal to me. By crazy I mean outrageous, outspoken and out of control; she did not have any borders when it came to controlling her anger. She also had several nervous breakdowns. Whatever values she gave me were her values, which I either accepted or did not. She taught me to read Spanish, which was good, and she taught me to stand up for myself, which was also good. But I have no sense of family or of belonging anywhere in particular.

Ultimately for me, it's 📍📍📍📍📍 to be normal. I've always felt uncomfortable around people who are very conservative or normal. These people are usually white (although they don't have to be), Republicans (but not always) and they have a specific view of normality.

As you mature, has time changed what you perceive as "normal"?

I don't think so. Normal has always been subjective for me. It's normal if it's normal for you. It's normal for me to be the way I am. During the 1970s I was a drug addict, so that was normal for me then. Nowadays, it's normal to have an iPhone, which I don't. It's normal for some people to be artists or crazy but for others it is not. To me there's no difference between the two. Being married you settle down, but I'm not sure that is normal. Because of this and my upbringing, I always had an interest and commitment to subcultures, which I always felt part of through the different stages of my life.

You have photographed individuals in various subcultural groups that have at some point clashed with society. How do you perceive their normalities?

I have seen and been among many subculture groups and in those circumstances it is normal for those people to live the way they do. In 1997, when I was working on my series *A History Of Sex* for the Groninger Museum in Holland, I went to a lot of fetish and BDSM parties in Amsterdam and that was normal for those people. What was interesting about those parties was that there was a strict dress code. They were wearing rubber, leather or nothing, and you were considered abnormal unless you dressed accordingly. If you are going in looking for the freaks, you soon realise that you are the freak.

In your photography project Residents of New York, you have portrayed the homeless in New York. How was your experience with them? How would you place them in the context of normality?

My experience with them was normal. I asked them to pose and paid them and they accepted my offer. I have seen the homeless in many cities since then and in some places there are so many people on the streets it almost looks normal.

In many of your works you use organic materials such as meat, milk or bodily fluids. Why do you think some people find it subversive to use something that is so vital, natural and normal?

Because they don't look at much art, otherwise they would realise that it is normal. Most people do not go to galleries or visit museums so they're not used to looking at contemporary art. What passes for normal in the art world can freak out the 📍📍📍📍📍. Normality in a photograph or work of art is the thing that speaks to you, the thing that makes you feel connected and good about yourself. Needless to say, it's different for everyone, although there are things that have mass appeal.

Do you think that the majority is the significant indicator of what normality is?

I think the consensus is that if everyone is doing it, it must be normal. But that isn't always the case. There is a difference between a human being and a tool or a sheep. The whole notion of being normal is highly overrated and in many cases a waste of time. You cannot always fit in nor should you want to. We live in a world where the definition of normal is rapidly changing. For instance, millions of refugees will soon flood Europe and eventually America. These people will come from different

worlds, politically, culturally and economically. Will they be considered normal? By whose standard?

Can you give a reference to a text or a book that reflects your point of view on "normality"? In what ways do you think this text reflects your perspective?

J D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden Caulfield was completely normal. He was a kid being himself.