Children do not weigh their home life against an outside set of standards. Their home life sets the standards. Whatever they are growing up with is ‘normal’.¹ So assert Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirith, and Paul Meier in Love is Choice, one in a seemingly limitless flood of psychological self-help texts that have for years filled the shelves of American book stores and supermarket displays. In this contribution, the pathology of the moment is co-dependency, and the authors’ goal is to provide advice on how to escape such a condition having once been born into it. For an academic, there is a strong temptation simply to dismiss such works as banal attempts to peddle pabulum to the pathetic. But for two reasons it seems wise to resist that inclination. First, such popular texts are excellent sites at which to see new concepts, new syndromes, and new normativities in the process of their consolidation and dissemination. And second, the complex appropriations and incorporations of such works by the people who read them can not be discounted. They provide narratives through which individuals interpret and perhaps even alter the course of their lives.²

One of the striking aspects of the observation made by Hemfelt, Minirith, and Meier about how the ‘normal’ is constituted in the American family is that they treat with complete nonchalance the idea that each person grows up with his or her own normality. The vision of multiple normalities is not threatening; indeed, the very existence of such a diversity of possibilities is critical to their explanation of how children come to normalize co-dependent relations. In this they reflect a much broader trend; for Americans, anyway, the notion of the normal as a single, well-defined, universal state has been for some time under heavy retreat. There are now different normalities for men and women, straights and gays, hyphenated Americans and white Americans; even conditions characterized as pathological, such as Adult Children of Alcoholics, have their own normalities associated with them. It is not just that the normal has become fragmented, but that it has lost much of its sense of hierarchy as well. Although it is still desirable to be normal, each of these normalcs is now thought to be as good, or as bad, as any of the others. Even white, middle-class, male normality is in certain quarters being rehabilitated; under the relentless demands of relativity, little can remain villainized for long.

I mention what might be called this post-modernist vision of normality, not to criticize or laud it, but to suggest, by the very peculiarity of the notion of a multitude

² For an intriguing exploration of the interplay between popular and academic constructions of pathology, see Ian Hacking (1995).
of normalities, what an extraordinary transformation has been taking place. For the
normal, I will argue, began in American psychology as a quintessentially modernist
concept, by which I mean that psychologists turned to it as a means of writing a kind
of master narrative of order, hierarchy, and unity over a diverse phenomenal realm.3
«Normal» served American psychologists during most of the twentieth century simulta-
extaneously as a point of orientation, means of imposing order on variation, and way of
demarcating the boundary between the socially acceptable and the frowned upon.
Especially within the field of mental measurement, as historian Kurt Danziger has
pointed out, determinations of the capability of the normal intellect became a prime
goal of psychological practice, and constituted the touchstone for investigations into
various kinds of mental abnormalities.4 The actual relations between the normal and
abnormal, however, were more complicated than this story of the normal bringing
clarity to the pathological might suggest. As I will argue in this essay, even within the
field of mental measurement, psychologists’ understanding of the abnormal was at
least as important to their ability to comprehend the normal as vice versa. Indeed, in
many respects the pathological helped to make the normal meaningful within Amer-
ican psychology and to also contribute, much earlier than recent celebrations of post-
modern multiplicity might suggest, to the normal’s fragmentation.

Domesticating the Abnormal

The word «normal» did not exist with anything like its current meaning or cultural
resonance in English until sometime toward the middle of the nineteenth century. In
the pre-modern period, if it was used at all, normal meant «perpendicular»; no more
and no less.5 The philosophers Georges Canguilhem and Ian Hacking have conducted
the most influential scholarly examinations of the development during the nineteenth
century of the modern conception of the normal. In his enormously important study
Le normal et le pathologique, Canguilhem argued that central to the history of the
normal was a shift in ontological status: the normal and the pathological, he contend-
ed, began as descriptors of distinct physical states, and then came over the course of
the nineteenth century to be linked together, with the pathological subsumed by the
normal as a consequence of reinterpreting qualitative difference as quantitative varia-
tion.6 It was a view of the normal and the pathological, Canguilhem argued, that
followed the experimental ideals championed by such French scientists and philoso-
phers as François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, Auguste Comte, and Claude Bernard; in

3 My notions of the character of «modernity» have been strongly influenced by Michel Fou-
cault (1979) and, to a certain degree, by Peter Galison (1997). For an interesting example of
the application of the notion of a master narrative to issues in history of science, see James J.
4 Danziger, Kurt (1990); (1997).
5 For an eighteenth-century definition of «normal» see N. Bailey (1751). «Normal» is not
included in Samuel Johnson (1983). A recent study of the term «normal» can be found in
their view, the normal was a single, well-defined state, and the pathological a multiplicity of possible distortions of that state.

This situation can be clarified through a visual analogy. Consider the famous normal curve. Perhaps the archetypal representation of the quantitative view of the normal, and itself essentially an artifact of the nineteenth century, the bell curve represents normality as the most concentrated section of the binomial distribution curve. If organs varied solely along one characteristic, this would be an adequate representation of the relations of the normal and the pathological as Canguilhem defined them. But, of course, one of the consequences of the notion that the pathological constitutes «nature’s experiments» is that variation is of interest in all of the organ’s characteristics. And so the normal curve must be rotated around its vertical axis, producing a three-dimensional image looking something like a rubber plane pushed up in the middle. The most salient characteristic of this representation of the relations of the normal and the pathological is that it emphasizes the extremely diffuse nature of the pathological: compared to the normal, the pathological is spread widely through space, with little that could characterize it as a distinct entity or collection thereof.

Ian Hacking’s major contribution to the investigation of the normal, laid out in his essay «The Normal State» from The Taming of Chance, was to draw out certain consequences of Canguilhem’s ideas for the character of the normal. In particular, he argued that by the middle of the nineteenth century the normal contained two features existing in a kind of creative tension with one another. «The normal,» Hacking pointed out,

stands indifferently for what is typical, the unenthusiastic objective average, but it also stands for what has been, good health, and for what shall be, our chosen destiny. That is why the benign and sterile-sounding word «normal» has become one of the most powerful ideological tools of the twentieth century.7

The normal, to elaborate on Hacking’s point, gained its power in western culture because it could refer simultaneously to a statistical tradition – embodied in Adolphe Quetelet’s l’homme moyen, Francis Galton’s eugenics, and the normal curve – and to a clinical tradition – characterized by its relations to nosology, therapeutics, and above all health.8 Such a conjuncture of concepts provided human scientists with a seemingly objective means for rendering the state of health into an assessable characteristic and placed comparison at the very heart of their understanding of normality.

On the surface, Canguilhem’s and Hacking’s models for the evolution of the concept of the normal appear to be directly applicable to the case of American psychology.9 If the ways in which mental philosophers at the beginning of the

7 Hacking, Ian (1990), p. 169.
nineteenth century conceived of human mentality are contrasted with psychologists' understandings of mind by the end of the century, a transformation in notions of the normal similar to that sketched out by Canguilhem and Hacking seems readily apparent. In essence, at the turn of the nineteenth century mental philosophers conceded the existence of four principle types of people: geniuses, idiots, the insane, and everybody else. Whether investigators were experience-oriented associationists and sensationalists or faculty-oriented Scottish Common Sense realists and French eclecticists, all were united on at least one point: their primary interest lay in the workings of the abstract human mind, and deviations from that mind, or in fact real individuals in any sense, were of at best minor concern. Only the increasingly disreputable phrenologists truly attempted during the early nineteenth century to develop a comprehensive theory of mind that encompassed all mental phenomena, and they did so by following Canguilhem’s model to a tee: according to such founders of phrenology as Franz Gall and Johann Spurzheim, human beings were endowed with a range of discrete faculties, and alterations, whether for ill or good, in this original normal endowment were what explained the development of the particular features of a person’s character and even such states as genius or idiocy.

While other investigators into the nature of the human intellect also recognized geniuses and idiots and the like as real categories, these non-phrenological researchers most typically deemed such phenomena outside their purview, separate orders of being each defined by its own, category-specific criteria. During the Enlightenment and especially the Romantic period, mental philosophers considered geniuses – paradigmatically represented in the English-speaking world by Isaac Newton – to be almost demi-gods, human perhaps, but certainly little like the common person with which society was replete. As for idiots, mental philosophers viewed them as manifesting that least forgivable of all republican sins, utter dependence on the support of others, and thus supported subjecting such individuals to a host of legal and institutional constraints that emphasized the idiot’s distinctness from the mass of humanity. The juridical definition of idiocy nicely captures this sense of ontologically separate category of human being. Defined in physician Joseph Chitty’s A Practical Treatise on Medical Jurisprudence as »imbecility or sterility of mind,« idiocy was taken in early nineteenth-century Anglo-American common law to refer to a kind of null state, the complete absence of the ability to reason, or to such a low capacity for reason as to have no ability whatsoever to distinguish right from wrong.

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13 Tia DeNora & Hugh Mehan (1994); Joseph F. Kett (1978); Gretchen V. Kreuter (1961); Penelope Murray (1989); Giorgio Tonelli (1973-4); Giorgio Tonelli (1966); Rudolf Wittkower (1973-4); and Richard Yeo (1988).
15 See also Francis Wharton and Moreton Stille (1855); and Rudolph A. Witthaus & Tracy C. Becker (1894-96).
ally, precedent had it that idiocy could be determined by eliciting answers to inquiries of the following type:

it is he who from his birth cannot count or number twenty pence, nor tell who was his mother, nor how old he is; but that if he have sufficient understanding to know and understand his letters, and to read by teaching or information of another man, then he is not an idiot.\(^{16}\)

By the beginning of the next century, both little and much had changed. Little in the sense that experts still asked questions of people whose intellect was in doubt and then categorized those individuals largely on the basis of their responses. «Show me your nose!», «Are you a little boy or a little girl?», «What is your name?» were all queries posed at the first level of perhaps the most famous of all mental tests, the 1916 Stanford-Binet intelligence scale.\(^{17}\) Over the intervening century, however, psychologists had developed new ways of understanding the nature of mind, which enormously transformed the meaning of these questions. For whereas the juridical inquiry sought to determine who was an idiot, with the presumption of sanity unless proof to the contrary, psychologists devised the Stanford-Binet and the numerous other intelligence tests of the early twentieth century to reflect what normal children, explicitly so called, could accomplish. From French psychologist Alfred Binet’s invention of the modern intelligence test in 1905 – the Binet-Simon intelligence scale – through all of its many modifications, revisions, and improvements, one thing remained constant: the essence of the instrument lay in making the intellectual developmental sequence of so-called normal children, however they were to be defined, the standard against which every individual could be assessed.\(^{18}\)

How was this accomplished? When psychologist Lewis M. Terman, for example, created the Stanford-Binet by revising the Binet-Simon scale for an American audience, he developed a set of questions – either newly generated or adapted from Binet –, administered them to a sample population of various ages he believed to be normal, and then arranged the questions in an age-graded scale, so that the questions for any given age would only be those that most normal children of that age, but not of a younger age, had answered successfully.\(^{19}\) Once constructed, test administrators could then apply this graded sequence of normal mental development to anyone, with the final product being a number – either the individual’s mental age or, after Terman, his or her intelligence quotient (I.Q.) – that indicated what the relation was between the mentality of the individual tested and the intelligence of a normal person the same age. The testing technology transformed genius and idiot from defining beings different in kind from the universal mind, as they were in the beginning of the nineteenth century, into areas under a curve, the ubiquitous normal distribution curve, linked to one another and to all other minds by their relations to the center of the curve, the normal. Both theoretically and practically, the vision of normality built

\(^{16}\) Chitty, Joseph (1836), p. 347.
\(^{17}\) Terman, Lewis M. (1916).
\(^{18}\) See Terman, Lewis M. (1916).
\(^{19}\) For more on how an intelligence test was constructed, see Alfred Binet & Théodore Simon (1916); and Lewis M. Terman (1916).
into the mental test determined who was an idiot and who a genius, as well as allowing for precise demarcations among those even slightly above or below the mean. American psychologists defined the idiot, for example, as an adult of mental age no greater than about 2 years, the imbecile as between 3 and 7 years, and the moron, a term only coined in 1910, as between 8 and 12 years. Through the mediation of an intelligence test, therefore, psychologists could use the language of normal intelligence to tell stories about any human mind, thereby not only connecting the normal with the pathological, but actually subsuming the pathological under the reign of the normal.

Such examples of the ways in which American psychologists’ investigations into the nature of human intellect during the nineteenth century fit the models proposed by Canguilhem and Hacking could be multiplied almost indefinitely. Together they illustrate how the normal became a kind of modernist artifact in the hands of American psychologists: unifying, ordering, and standardizing a diversity of mental states. What I intend to do in the remainder of the article, however, by examining where the normal came from for American psychologists, is to note some of the limitations to the models proposed by Canguilhem and Hacking, and by so doing to explore certain tensions inherent in the modernist project writ large.

**What’s »Normal« Anyway?**

In 1901, Charles A. Mercier, lecturer on insanity at the Westminster Hospital Medical School and the London Medical School for Women, published simultaneously in England and the United States *Psychology: Normal and Morbid*. It was, quite possibly, the first book in English-language psychology to have the word »normal« in its title, certainly the first book to attract any critical attention. Mercier announced the purpose of his monograph in the first lines of the preface:

> It has long been a favourite tenet of mine, and there are now, I think, others who hold it, that Insanity is no exception to the rule which requires a knowledge of the normal as an indispensable preliminary to a knowledge of the abnormal. The reason why the contrary opinion has been maintained with such vigour, and the contrary practice so generally followed, has seemed to me to be the absence of any work in which normal psychological processes are dealt with from the point of view and for the purposes of the alienist.

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20 American Association for the Study of Feeble-Mindedness (1910).
21 Similar visions of the relations of the normal and pathological are also put forward by Norbert Elias in explaining the civilizing process and Erving Goffman in explaining stigmatization. See Norbert Elias (1994); and Erving Goffman (1963).
22 The assertion is based on a search of the catalogues of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine in London.
Judged by the rhetoric, Mercier intended to create just such a book as Canguilhem and Hacking suggested that he should, one in which he would domesticate the abnormal, the pathological, by subsuming it under a proper understanding of the normal. However, and rather strikingly, that was not exactly what Mercier accomplished. For *Psychology: Normal and Morbid* was in actuality two books: one a rather standard account of the psychology of abstract mind, strongly weighted toward explanations in terms of formal logic, and the other a much more lively account of some of the many ways in which the mind could manifest deviations from the normal.

The abnormal dominated in Mercier’s account, not the normal, a phenomenon that was in fact characteristic of the entrance of the normal into many branches of American psychology. The normal did not so much create the abnormal as the reverse; for American psychologists it was often the abnormal that gave definition to the normal. A quick review of prosopography provides some evidence to substantiate this assertion. Not only was Mercier by training an alienist, whose field of expertise was the insane, but virtually all of the pioneers in the field of mental measurement—Alfred Binet, Théodore Simon, Henry Herbert Goddard, Lewis Terman, Edward L. Thorndike, Frederick Kuhlmann, Harry L. and Leta S. Hollingworth, and Robert M. Yerkes—spent a significant portion of their professional lives working with populations deemed to be at one of the extremes of intellectual capability.24

The point is not a minor one. Canguilhem argued that it was the normal, at least in French physiology, that colonized the abnormal, gave it order, and, in a sense made it into a comprehensible whole. Hacking concurred, seeing the particular mathematical techniques associated with Quetelet and Galton, especially the application of the normal curve to social phenomena, as critical to the definition of the normal. Certainly it was possible that the same approach might have dominated in American studies of the intellect. In the 1880s and 1890s anthropometry—a field dedicated to the quantitative analysis of what would a few years later be called «normal» people—flourished, and as early as the 1860s the first large-scale anthropometric study in America, Benjamin Apthorp Gould’s *Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers*, spoke unselﬁconsciously of determining «the normal dimensions of the classes of men under consideration.»25 But, as historian Michael M. Sokal has pointed out, anthropometry largely disappeared in America by the end of the century, taking with it both its research program and even most of its ﬁndings.26

There were a number of reasons for the failure of anthropometric testing to take hold; one of them may have been the nature of its subject matter: the normal was simply too ill-deﬁned a human type to yield much beyond basic statistical averages for a few physical characteristics. The normal person had never really been an important presence in human psychology; as even Mercier’s text illustrates, abstract mind dominated psychology’s laboratories and conceptualizations. Only in the 1890s did Binet and Victor Henri announce the establishment of a new field in the mental

24 For details on the backgrounds of these individuals, see John Carson (1994).
sciences, individual psychology, whose purpose was to investigate the nature of individual mental differences and thus to define the normal human being. However, by the turn of the century individual psychology was already fragmenting into a host of unrelated research programs into human difference. Unlike normal organs, normal people were hard to spot; they had no agreed upon function the successful performance of which could provide a clear-cut certification of normality. As physician Issac Ray observed in 1838 in his classic *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*:

> Inasmuch, as the greatest possible variety is presented by the mental phenomena in a state of health, it is obvious, that profound study and extensive observation of the moral and intellectual nature of man can alone prevent us, from sometimes confounding them with the effects of disease.

The extremely abnormal, however, were another story. Idiocy and genius constituted fairly well-defined categories long before the word normal had acquired any of its nineteenth-century connotations. And they were characterized by functions, either the virtually complete inability to reason or the ability to reason at the most sublime levels, that made it relatively easy for psychologists and governments to specify who they deemed belonged to which classification, as the whole panoply of regulations and institutions that developed around one of these categories, the idiot, vividly demonstrates.

To resort again to analogy, consider once more the normal curve, with idiocy at one extreme of the curve and genius at the other. For almost any early twentieth-century American psychologist, this would have been the archetypal representation of the relations between the two states, with normality occupying the central position between the extremes. This time, however, imagine rotating the curve, not around the axis of normality, but along the axis connecting the idiot and the genius. The curve that results looks like a symmetrical gourd, narrow at both ends and very wide in the middle. Here the states of idiocy and genius are fairly tightly defined, and it is the bulge in the middle, normality, that seems to be all over the place, with little of the precision characterizing the two extremes.

In many ways, this image captures nicely the situation in which American psychologists found themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They had a very good idea of what an idiot and what a genius were, and became increasingly vague as they moved farther away from those two states. Thus, psychologists most concerned with the abnormal, such as those who developed the mental test, were particularly well situated to construct the normal. In an important sense, it was easier to see normality if approached from its extremes.

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27 Alfred Binet & Victor Henri (1895).
28 Ray, Issac (1839), p. 3.
Conclusion: From Abnormal to Normal and Back Again

What were the consequences of psychologists defining the normal on the basis of the pathological? First, constructing the normal in this manner meant that they had to sufficiently simplify, perhaps even standardize, the notion of normality to fit the linear scale suggested by connecting the idiot and the genius. Traditionally mental philosophers had characterized both genius and idiot according to the extreme amounts of intellectual capability that such individuals did, or did not, possess; thus, psychologists had to define the various grades of normality in a similar manner. But, because notions of what constituted normality were so much more diffuse, they found it much harder to stuff the normal under the normal curve. Normal simply connoted too many different attributes. And so throughout the 1910s and 1920s psychologists conducted numerous discussions concerning how someone could both score approximately normal on an intelligence scale, and yet still evidence subnormal morality, or vice versa, and how the various occupations constituting the normal social order could be matched to gradations in intelligence.29

In addition, the 1910s were characterized by what might be termed »the normal wars,« attempts to persuade the psychological community of the superiority of one mental test or another by escalating the number of normal subjects on which the scale had been validated. Henry H. Goddard started the skirmishing, trumpeting his validation of the Binet-Simon scale by announcing first that it had been tested on 400 normal children, and then on 2000, which was actually, and significantly, a bit of hyperbole, as the precise number was 1547.30 Terman followed suit, using first 396 normal children in his validation, then 905, and finally proposing, in a request for money from the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Board, a pre-emptive strike: 10,000 examinees, an enormous number in an era before the existence of computers or even the group mental test.31 The point of these »normal wars« is that although the testers needed normality to anchor and legitimate their scales, they could get only averages. The normal were too diverse a group to use a relatively small sample, as Terman had done when researching his doctoral dissertation, »Genius and Stupidity: A Study of Some of the Intellectual Processes of Seven ›Bright‹ and Seven ›Stupid‹ Boys«.32 Testers became infatuated with ever larger samples in part because, as Hacking has suggested, it allowed them to blur the distinction between average and healthy, and to substitute the one that they could manufacture for the one that would justify their endeavors.

29 Lewis Terman was among those testers most interested in the connections between morality and intelligence. One of his major post-war projects was to rescue genius from the connotations of insanity that it had gathered over the course of the nineteenth century. Because constructing the normal had helped to fuse together concepts of intellectual capability with notions of moral probity, it became essential to show that this homogenization worked up and down the intelligence spectrum.
30 Goddard, Henry H. (1910); and Goddard (1911).
31 Lewis M. Terman & H.G. Childs (1912); Lewis M. Terman, Grace Lyman, George Ordahl, Louise Ordahl, Neva Galbreath & Wilford Talbert (1915); and Lewis M. Terman [1917].
32 Terman, Lewis M. (1906).
A second consequence of building the normal out of the abnormal was that American psychologists never completely allowed the normal to dominate the center of attention, at least during the early decades of the twentieth century. Programmatic statements like Mercier’s notwithstanding, the social realities that had given rise to the categories of idiot and genius in the first place did not disappear with the definition of the normal, and in a way were actually strengthened by it. The issues that most worried social theorists around the turn of the century in America had little to do with normal people, but a great deal with those presumed to be abnormal, and particularly subnormal. It was the heyday of eugenics, when the »menace of the feebleminded« caught the worries of the middle classes throughout the West, and when U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. justified sterilization of a so-called feebleminded woman on the grounds that three generations were enough.33 States and private foundations created new institutions for the feebleminded at an extraordinary rate, and social scientists and social critics routinely turned to abnormal intelligence as an explanation for criminality, prostitution, and a range of other social pathologies.

This near obsession in early twentieth-century American culture with the abnormal was well articulated in H.R. 14798, a bill submitted by Arthur MacDonald, of the United States Bureau of Education, to the House of Representatives in 1902 for a laboratory to study »the abnormal classes.« One of six such plans presented to Congress in that year alone, it envisioned the collection of jurisprudential, sociological, and pathological data, especially as found in institutions for the criminal, pauper, and defective classes and as may be observed in hospitals, schools, and other institutions; also investigation of anarchistic criminals, mob influence, and like phenomena.34

A sort of shopping list of the social pathologies that most worried, and titillated, middle-class Americans at the turn of the century, in H.R. 14798 MacDonald relied on the technology of the normal – statistical procedures and collections of data – to construct a better picture of the abnormal. As such, the bill was part of a cultural obsession with the deviant that stretched from the halls of Congress to the stages of vaudeville, where the notorious and risqué reigned supreme.35

The third major consequence of building the normal out of the abnormal is related to this second point. The pathological was not only of greater social interest in America than the normal, but, perhaps as a result, was never completely subsumed by the normal even after social scientists had begun to provide descriptions of what the normal was. While normality became, once articulated, a point of comparison against which the various kinds of abnormality could then be assessed, these categories of abnormality nonetheless often began to take on lives of their own, independent of their relations to the normal. An example from the history of the term

33 For examples of American fears of the subnormal, see Richard L. Dugdale (1877); and Henry H. Goddard (1921). See also Hamilton Cravens (1978); Carl N. Degler (1991); John Haller (1971); Mark H. Haller (1963); Daniel J. Kevles (1986); and Martin S. Pernick (1996).
35 On vaudeville, see Marybeth Hamilton (1995).
«moron» well illustrates this point. Goddard coined the word in 1910, defining «moron» as an adult of diminished intellectual capacity, one with a Binet mental age of between 8 and 12. To identify a moron, Goddard’s characterization suggested, individual subjects had to be assessed against a scale that represented normal mental development, a scale itself first constructed on the basis of the extreme states of mental ability. Once the category was so constituted, however, psychologists began to investigate morons as a group in their own right, and often deemed the relations of morons to normal people less salient than their relations to each other. Thus by 1914 Goddard was describing a number of the research projects at the Vineland institution for the feebleminded, where he worked, as involving, in one sense or another, analyses of the particular natures of morons as a group. «We are also working,» Goddard noted,

on the problem of determining how close is the parallelism between these feeble-minded children of various mental ages, and the normal children of corresponding ages. We describe a particular child as having the mentality of a normal child of eight years. Does that mean that he is precisely like a normal child of eight?

Goddard, as a matter of fact, would answer this question pretty much in the affirmative, at least in 1914. But as time went on, the various categories of abnormality, defined by the technology of the normal, began to generate their own «special» classes, special institutions, and special specialists, each as concerned with their particular populations, however initially selected, as with the normal that was supposed to constitute the goal toward which their efforts were directed. It is not that normalization was ever fully rejected, but that it became tempered, especially given the widespread belief in early twentieth-century America that mental ability was a product of heredity, and thus little susceptible to manipulation. The act of imposing the normal, rather than solely unifying and ordering the ways in which human beings were understood, in fact helped to further reify distinctions, distinctions that had at least the potential of constituting autonomous categories that could be understood independently of their relations to the normal.

The process of ordering social reality through the technology of the normal thus may contain within it the seeds of its own fragmentation. Post-modernists have been pointing out for some time now that, contra the totalizing vision of modernity painted by commentators like Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish, the act of constructing ordered, universalized systems can induce their own antitheses by generating boundaries whose very existence suggests the possibility of alternative points of view. The history of the concept of the normal in American mental testing seems to bear their objections out. Developed as result of the ability to see clearly the pathological, the normal became a means of comparing all human minds on the same scale, with the normal mind as the point of comparison. The intelligence test not

38 For an example of the non-normal becoming «special,» see Steven A. Gelb (1989).
39 Hacking, Ian (1994).
40 Foucault (1979); Zygmunt Bauman (1997); Judith Butler (1993); and Jacques Derrida (1978).
only then abetted an almost obsessive interest in relating individuals to standards
deemed to represent the normal, but allowed those comparisons to be used to further
reify existing categories, or to constitute new ones, that could develop an autonomy
from the standards that had initially defined them. The story of the normal in
American psychology, like, perhaps, the story of most modernist concepts, was thus
a tale of both standardization and fragmentation, in which the attempt to subsume
all human minds within one master narrative could produce some decidedly un-
normalized results.

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