What is Normalcy?

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In this video, we'll discuss normalcy within the context of disability, including what normalcy is, what it does, and who it serves.

Normalcy refers to the behaviors, appearances, and ways of processing and communicating that are valued and accepted in a society. Normalcy also devalues individuals who have developed their own strategies for self-regulation, such as flapping one's hands instead of taking deep breaths. Any behaviors that do not adhere to social norms such as maintaining eye contact or outwardly expressing emotions get devalued. Anything that falls outside of nondisabled or neurotypical ways of being and doing is considered abnormal, closely tying disability and neurodivergence to deviance. Normalcy tends to constantly police our appearance and behavior, even when we are alone. It even influences our thoughts. It can be dangerous to give up the privileges associated with being perceived as normal, especially when we consider the consequences which can risk anything from social rejection, to financial instability, to the denial of medical attention. This leads many people to hide their disabilities, even when it puts their health and well-being at risk.

'Normal' is often framed as 'natural.' In this context, nature is referred to as an inevitable state of the world that escapes human morality and responsibility. This raises many dangers. Normalcy is socially constructed; nature isn't. Framing something as natural offloads moral responsibility for the violence of exclusionary and exploitive systems. Normalcy has been curated to produce a society that reflects ablebodied and neurotypical values, along with whiteness, patriarchy, colonialism, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity. It has guided health professions to conflate health with ablebodiedness and illness with disability. As such, normalcy antagonizes the diverse nature of the human body and mind.

For more information on normalcy, please see our expanded discussion.