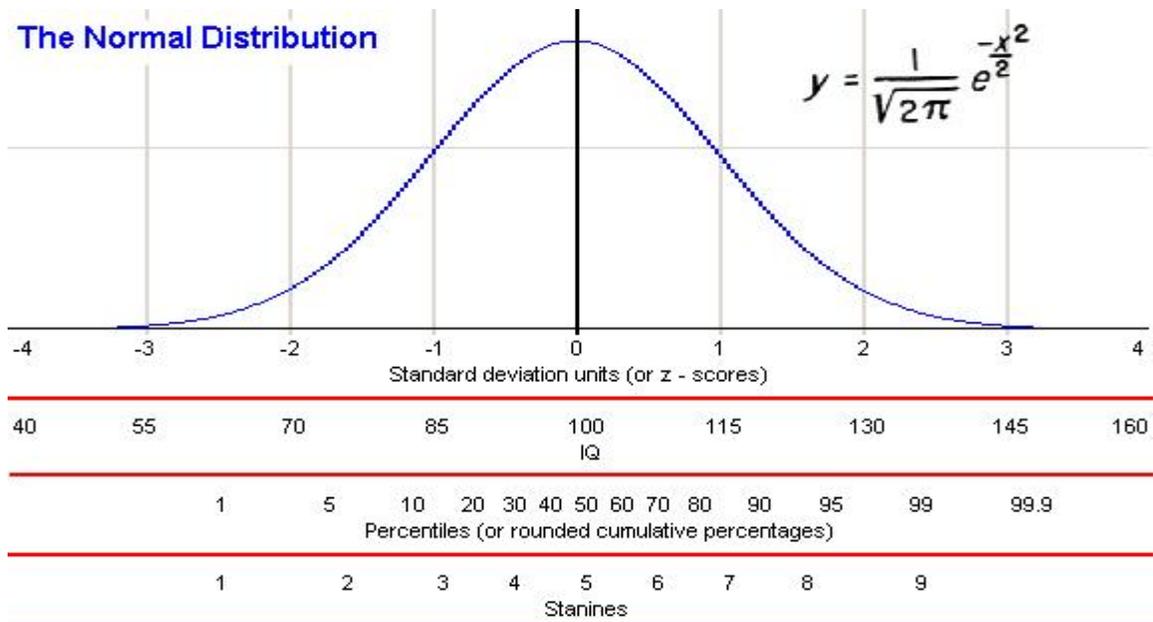


Wayward Americans

normal: usual, ordinary, conventional, widespread, general, universal, world-wide, common, prevailing, current, popular, customary, wonted, accustomed, habitual, regular, routine, repeated, recurrent, established, acknowledged, accepted, average, middle, middling, medium, mean, standardized. *Psychology*: adjusted, well-adjusted, in good shape, healthy, natural, reasonable, sane.

wayward: aberrant, arbitrary, balky, capricious, changeable, contumacious, cross-grained, delinquent, disobedient, disorderly, errant, erratic, fickle, flighty, fractious, forward, headstrong, immoral, inconstant, incorrigible, insubordinate, intractable, mulish, obdurate, obstinate, ornery, perverse, rebellious, recalcitrant, refractory, restive, self-indulgent, self-willed, stubborn, uncompliant, undependable, ungovernable, unpredictable, unruly, unstable, variable, whimsical, willful.



Many natural phenomena that humans observe are distributed evenly around a central value, average, or norm. It is assumed that many human abilities, such as intelligence, are also *normally* distributed. The illustration above shows how the normal distribution is graphed, its algebraic formula, and comparisons of standard deviations with percentage, stanine, and IQ scores.

Course description:

Wayward Americans – *or* – Who’s Normal Anyway? An examination of individuals and groups, those who might be categorized as “wayward” Americans, allows us to explore various normal/abnormal dichotomies within American culture. How do we determine who or what is normal? Do norms remain constant over time and place? How is normalcy measured? And by whom? How important is context – geographic location, social and cultural background, age, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion – when determining normalcy? As we examine groups that have been described as different, weird, deviant, strange, abnormal, disobedient or unnatural, we will seek to understand the historical, sociological and psychological underpinnings of the cultural norms, from which these groups are/were excluded.

Historian Leslie Fiedler has written about “the tyranny of the normal,” describing how American cultural norms pressure people to conform.

A tyranny of the normal ... dominates those who do not fit within the culture’s norms for mental ability, mental health, and acceptable behavior. ... those deviating from mental and/or behavior norms suffer basic social reactions: we expect them to be normalized through drugs and/or other therapies; we use them for entertainments, as the objects of jokes about the retarded or demented or crazy; or we expect them to be removed from sight by being put in jails or mental hospitals. We are often afraid of them, fearing that somehow we might be like them.

What’s Normal?: Narratives of Mental & Emotional Disorders, Carol Donley & Sheryl Buckley, eds.

Texts:

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*.

Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*.

Additional readings: packet available for purchase in class.

Class requirements and grading:

- > 2 short response papers, 2-3 pages, 10 points each = 20 points
Response papers are due in class *prior* to discussing the readings. Late papers will not be accepted. These are not “opinion” pieces but rather critical analyses of the week’s readings, highlighting issues and key concepts. Papers may be written for any two the following weeks: 10/2; 10/23; 10/30; 11/6; 11/13
- > 2 movie answer sheets (questions provided in class), 10 points each = 20 points
- > final paper (details provided in class) = 60 points

Class participation is crucial to the overall success of this class; students are expected to come to class prepared, having completed the readings and ready to take an active role in discussion/debate.

Class attendance is mandatory. Absences will be excused for extenuating circumstances only. Un-excused absences will lower final grade. More than 2 absences will result in a failing grade.

Schedule of classes:

September 4 Wayward Americans – or – who’s “normal” anyway?
course overview

AMERICAN IDENTITIES: US and THEM

“All the people like us are we. And all the rest are They.”

Rudyard Kipling

September 11 Constructing race and ethnicity in America
VIEW IN CLASS: *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, parts 1&2

September 18 Contextualizing normalcy and deviance in America: historical
psychological, sociological, and anthropological perspectives

READ:

“Perspectives on Abnormal Behavior”

G. Terence Wilson, K. Daniel O’Leary, Peter E. Nathan, Lee Anna Clark,
eds., *Abnormal Psychology: Integrating Perspectives*

“The Meaning of Normal”

What’s Normal?, Carol Donley and Sheryl Buckley, eds.

DUE:

Race: The Power of an Illusion answer sheet

September 25 The American melting pot: outdated concept?

READ:

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

Anne Fadiman

FREE TO BE YOU AND ME

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those
who could not hear the music.”

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

October 2 Taking the test: measuring personality and intelligence

READ:

“The Measurers”

Morton Hunt, *The Story of Psychology*

“Carrie Buck’s Daughter”

Stephen J. Gould, *The Flamingo’s Smile: Reflections on Natural History*

“An Anthropologist on Mars”

Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*

“Uncommon Talents: Gifted Children, Prodigies and Savants”

Ellen Winner, *Scientific American*

“How About Not ‘Curing’ Us, Some Autistics Are Pleading”

Amy Harmon, *The New York Times*

October 9 no class – I will meet with each student on Monday or Tuesday of this week, October 6 or 7 (or by special arrangement) to discuss individual term projects.

October 16 Order and disorder: cultural perceptions of mental illness
VIEW IN CLASS: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*

October 23 Order and disorder (continued)

READ:

“On Being Sane in Insane Places”

David L. Rosenhan, *Science*

“The Yellow Wallpaper”

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

“Panic”

Philip Booth

Three Stories from *Cases in Bioethics*:

“Ain’t Nobody Gonna Cut on My Head”

“The Woman Who Died in a Box”

“Decisions on Behalf of the Incompetent”

Cases in Bioethics, Carol Levine, ed.

DUE:

Cuckoo’s Nest answer sheet

October 30 Hooked on a feeling: addictions

READ:

“Medicalizing the Deviance of Drug Abuse”

Anne Hendershott, *The Politics of Deviance*

“The War on Addiction”
Jonathan Alter, *Newsweek*

“An Anti-Addiction Pill?”
Benoit Denizet-Lewis, *The New York Times Magazine*

November 6 Mad or bad?: crime and punishment

READ:
“The Boys Next Door”
Bernard Lefkowitz, *Sports Illustrated*

“The Executioner’s I.Q. Test”
Margaret Talbot, *The New York Times Magazine*

“The Roots of Evil”
Sharon Begley, *Newsweek*

November 13 The nature/nurture debate: gender and sexuality

READ:
“The True Story of John-Joan”
John Colapinto, *Rolling Stone*

“Trade, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood”
George Chauncy, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940.*

“Can Gays Convert?”
John Leland and Mark Miller, *Time*

AMERICAN IDENTITIES: ME and THEM

The words that move Americans are revealing: "freedom," "mobility," "individualism," "opportunity," "energy," "pragmatism," "progress," "renewal," "competition."

Marc Pachter, director, Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery

November 20 Carry on my wayward son: chasing the American dream

READ:
Into the Wild
Jon Krakauer

November 27 THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

December 4 FINAL PAPER DUE