Precarious Positions: Encounters with Normalcy

Addressing normalcy, addressing Mr Reasonable: “You are the Reasonable Teacher with your reasonable rules, reasonable exams and reasonable lesson plans. The teacher that believes it is only reasonable to stratify and separate children out from the moment they enter the school grounds; punishing those whom refuse to conform (Davis and Watson, 2001). You are the Reasonable Careers Advisor whose lecture I left […] when she asserted that if we did not ‘speak properly’, dared to utter an ‘erm’ or an ‘um’ in a job interview, we would remain unemployed. You are the Reasonable Academic who told me this was ‘just the way it is’ when I pointed out the ableism of that careers advice. You are the Reasonable Boss that told my Mum she needed to “man up and grow some balls” in order to survive work in the public sector: the workplace will not change to accommodate you, so you must change to accommodate it. You are the Reasonable Landlord, the Reasonable Councillor and the Reasonable Politician that live dogmatically by the reasonable, bureaucratic rules of Western neoliberal individualism (Titchkosky, 2011)"

(Slater 2013: 11)

“Normalcy imagines – ‘sees’ – no other possibility of human life than itself, and thus, ironically, does not ‘see’ itself. The centre understands itself as the only legitimate space of human habitation and, like all spaces, the centre has its causalities.”

(Titchkosky and Michalko, 2009:7)

In 2010, the UK’s Equality Act gave protection, under civic law, to nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex; sexual orientation). While the Act remains in place, in 2012, as part of the coalition's Red Tape Challenge, it became the focus of a series of consultations and reviews which aim to 'simplify' the legislation.

It is, surely, not a coincidence that this comes at a time when, due to global economic uncertainties, much of the world is witnessing rising levels of austerity and, with them, rising levels of fear and concern. Tolerance, it seems, only lasts as long as there is enough room and resources for difference to be accommodated. As soon as room and resources are scarce, similitude re-stakes its claim. Suddenly, being anything other than ‘neoliberally normal’ places you in extremely precarious positions. Whether you are on the sharp end of welfare reforms or face budgets cuts to your local services/provision, being (or at least, passing as) healthy, wealthy and wise seems to be your best bet to survive. However, how sure are we that 'normal' offers the protection it promises? Importantly, amongst all the ‘doom and gloom’ can encounters with abnormality and non-normativity offer us a chance of hope and wonder?

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1 Conference committee includes: Dan Goodley (UoS); Nick Hodge (SHU); Rebecca Mallett (SHU); Cassie Ogden (Univ of Chester); Katherine Runswick-Cole (MMU); Jenny Slater (SHU).
This conference offers spaces to discuss and explore the precarious positions 'normal', and its operating system 'normalcy', create, present us with and, more often than not, force us into. Furthermore, it seeks to 'imagine otherwise' by learning from and through increasingly precarious positions of marginality and non-normativity.

We welcome activists, undergraduate/postgraduate students, practitioners and academics to join us and call for papers which ponder on the following:

- in what ways do 'normal' and 'normalcy' present clear and present dangers to our individual and collective futures?
- in what ways does safeguarding a set of characteristics ensure the continued protection of 'normal'? as begrudging tolerance turns to indifference or fear, is normalcy under threat?
- what can (everyday) encounters with intersectionality, liminality and/or marginalisation reveal about the limits of normalcy?
- is it time we challenged the 'normalcy taboo'? what do the persistence of 'natural' unquestionable norms (e.g. romantic love; bond between mother and child; healthy eating) tell us about the ubiquity and robustness of normalcy?
- are categorisations (e.g. disabled, vulnerable, hardest hit, scroungers, takers and makers) bring used to the fight to define and defend 'normal' ways of life?
- are categorisations (e.g. autism, ADHD, depression) being used (and abused) in the race to export 'normal' Western ways of being?
- multi-nationalism; multi-culturalism; multi-faith; multi-lingual - why does pluralism present such a challenge?
- is contextualising 'normal' (historically, culturally, spatiality) the best (the only?) way to reveal its illusionary nature? what do we gain by doing this, and where do we go from here?
- what is to be gained by interrogating the intersections and attending to the margins? where are the spaces of hope, wonder and possibility to be found?
- what is the role of individual (sometimes inadvertent, often mundane) acts of activism against normalcy? and what are the costs (financial, emotional, etc) to individuals who encounter and/or take on normalcy?
- what ways are there to explore this within and across wider communities? what is the role of academia (learning, teaching and research)?

Abstracts of no more than 200 words (with a short bio) should be submitted by 22nd April 2013 to the conference email address below.

Presenters will be informed of acceptance by 10th May 2013. To secure a place in the conference programme, presenters should have booked a place by 31st July 2013.

In the spirit of an eco-friendly conference, registered delegates will be sent information electronically. Details of accommodation near the venue will also be sent to delegates.

As the conference is FREE, lunch and refreshments will be available for purchase at the University, if you wish. Please let us know if you have any dietary requirements so we can make the catering team aware of delegate requirements.

- For further information please contact normalcy2013@gmail.com
- To book a place please visit http://normalcy2013.eventbrite.co.uk

Keynotes will be announced via the conference page on the Disability Research Forum (DRF) blog: http://disabilityresearchforum.wordpress.com/events/normalcy-2013