



E-ISSN: 2790-068  
P-ISSN: 2790-0673  
IJLJJ 2024; 4(1): 185-190  
Received: 05-01-2024  
Accepted: 09-02-2024

**Mansi Jha**  
Student, Law (B.A. LL.B.  
(Hons.)), Symbiosis Law  
School, Pune, Maharashtra,  
India

## Disabilities and normalization: A perspective through Foucault's lenses

**Mansi Jha**

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.22271/2790-0673.2024.v4.i1c.107>

### Abstract

This article critically examines the application of Michel Foucault's theories of normalization and discipline within the field of disability studies. It traces the historical evolution of the concept of normality and its entanglement with mechanisms of social control and punishment. Foucault's framework is employed to elucidate how the notion of "normal" developed in tandem with the rise of biopower, shifting disciplinary practices from overt legal restrictions to subtler, yet pervasive, standards of normalization. The study explores how educational institutions, guided by Foucault's theories of power and knowledge, sustain and perpetuate inequalities through practices of surveillance, assessment, and hierarchical differentiation. By integrating Foucault's insights, the article underscores the intricate interplay between power, control, and societal norms, advocating for a re-evaluation of contemporary normalization practices in the context of disability.

**Keywords:** Normalization, discipline, disability, Michel Foucault, biopower

### Introduction

The terms "normalization" and "discipline" have drawn more emphasis in disabilities research and ideology, in significant measure because Michel Foucault's works is becoming more popular across the whole of the literature and contemporary disciplines. These philosophical arguments are challenging and crucial to comprehending impairment. This article contains some history on the term normality and its relationship to normalization and punishment, a summary of Foucault's statements regarding normalization and self-control, and a list of the many methods that normalization has been employed by impairment philosophers.

According to Foucault, the contemporary idea of "normal" was solidified, given legitimacy, and took place concurrently with new analytical information and other demographic administration strategies resulting from the emergence of biopower. The norm was able to achieve this growth of authority in various aspects: by allowing discipline to evolve from a simple array of restrictions into a procedure; and by changing the restrictive legal measures into the more empowering normalization standards. Normalization was seen by Foucault as one of the main, if not the main, strategies used by biopower to govern "life." According to Foucault, since the eighteenth century, other authorities like the legislation and custom have been subject to new restrictions as a result of the standard power combining with them.

### Background

By the end of the classical era, normalization, according to Foucault, had grown into one of the main weapons of power. The sciences that were just beginning to form at this time in history helped to define the authority that the standard wielded. A spectrum of doctorates of rationality that concurrently demonstrate participation in a racially homogenous larger society (i.e., an inhabitants) and represent to differentiate among disciplines, distribute them from one another, categorize them in various ways, and position them in a variety of hierarchical structures have progressively augmented, if not supplanted, the measurements of social prestige, prerogative, and identity formation.

Foucault stated in Discipline and Punish that military academies, institutions, and primary schools in the eighteenth century first used normalization as an efficient kind of retribution. Discipline, according to Foucault, is neither an organization nor an equipment but instead a certain kind of authority and a method for exercising it that includes a variety of tools, tactics, steps, levels of execution, and goals. Discipline is a "anatomy" of strength, an innovation of authority that can be adopted by specific establishments in order to accomplish a goal; by authorities who use it as a way to strengthen and reorganize their existing authority mechanisms; by mechanisms that employ it to regulate their manner of operation; or by political establishments whose main purpose is to ensure that discipline reigns.

### Correspondence Author:

**Mansi Jha**  
Student, Law (B.A. LL.B.  
(Hons.)), Symbiosis Law  
School, Pune, Maharashtra,  
India

Disciplined normalization, a technique that enabled the spread of biopower, attempts to generate a body that is "docile," that is, a physique that can be subjugated to, utilized, developed, and altered, by making it more effective and predictable in its acts, motions, attitude, and presentation. In attempting to restrain people, modern discipline gives them the ability to act. According to Foucault, five different normalizing procedures have been brought into play as a result of disciplinary "penalty," or normalization. First, an entirety that is both a field of evaluation, a realm of distinction, and a norm to be implemented is used to refer to specific activities.

The temperaments, grades, and capacities of individual citizens are hierarchically and quantitatively measured, which introduces the restriction of a consonance that must be attained. The limit of distinction, the far side of "t," is then determined in pertaining to this rule, which serves as a negligible criterion, as an estimate, or as an optimum solution towards which individuals must keep moving. These are the five fundamental normalization processes: comparability, distinction, subordination, uniformity, and elimination.

In order to homogenize a community that, by merit of its consistency, can be more efficiently used and changed, the repressive urge that governs normalization compares, distinguishes, hierarchizes, and explicitly exempts. In other words, compulsion, rather than overt suppression or aggression, is what gives the rule its punitive force.

### Michael Foucault

The movements of structuralism and post-structuralism were connected to the French scholar and philosopher Michel Foucault. He has had a significant impact on a variety of humanitarian and interpersonal science fields in addition to philosophy.

He studied social norms and notions as a faculty at the Collège de France starting in 1970, focusing on the "principles of exclusion" (such as the differences distinguishing the rational and the crazy) by which a community defines itself. He proposed that one might investigate the emergence and pervasiveness of power by investigating social views towards establishments like mental health facilities, hospitals, and jails. He emerged as one of the most well-known thinkers of his era because to his works.

Philosophy has traditionally entailed the endeavor of challenging the current body of knowledge. Later, Kant, Locke, and Hume all contributed to the development of a distinctly contemporary conception of philosophy as the criticism of knowledge. Kant made a significant contribution to epistemology by arguing that the same criticism that exposed the boundaries of our knowledge could also show the prerequisites for its use. The spatial as well as chronological characteristics of human cognition's sensory elements, for instance, which first appeared to be just contingent qualities, end up being essential facts. Nevertheless, Foucault says that we should reverse this Kantian action.

He proposes investigating what could be conditional in the seemingly required rather than what is genuinely necessary in the supposedly variable. His inquiries are mostly focused on contemporary evolutionary psychology. In reality, they are frequently only manifestations of an individual society's ethical and political beliefs, despite their pretense to reveal fundamental scientific evidence about human behavior.

Such assertions are refuted by Foucault's descriptive analysis by showing that they are the consequence of historical processes rather than objective facts.

### Histories of Madness and Science

History of Madness in the Classical Era is the result of Foucault's cognitive research for his scholarly research, his employment in a Parisian mental health facility, and his own psychiatric issues. History of Madness is an examination of the development of the current idea of "mental illness" in Europe. It is based on Foucault's considerable archival research as well as his criticism of what he perceived to be the ethical duplicity of contemporary psychology. According to conventional histories, the professional therapy for psychological illness in the nineteenth century was a progressive release for the insane from the darkness and violence of earlier eras.

Nonetheless, for Foucault, the emerging theory that the insane were just unwell and in need of professional therapy was not whatsoever a significant advancement over past theories. He also contended that current medical approaches to treating insanity are not neutral from a scientific standpoint, but rather serve as a front for suppressing ethical dilemmas to bourgeois norm. To put it briefly, Foucault maintained that what was portrayed as an objective, unquestionable scientific advancement (that madness is a form of mental disease) was actually the result of manifestly dubious philosophical and cultural obligations.

The Birth of the Clinic, the following history by Foucault, was published in 1963 and offers an analysis of contemporary clinical medicine. Although there are a few vehement sections, the socio-ethical assessment is generally subdued. This is likely due to a lack of foundation for comprehensive analysis in medical sciences than there is in psychology since there is a far larger body of absolute reality in medical science. The Origin of the Clinic, in the vein of Canguilhem's History of Concepts, is a lot more similar to a conventional evolution of science as a consequence.

### Foucault's Theory of Knowledge and Power: Normalization and Discipline

Throughout the middle of the 1970s, Foucault introduced and developed the idea of normalization during presentations at the College de France. However, his most comprehensive documentation of it is found in Part III of *"Surveiller et punir"* or the Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. There, he discusses the emergence of normalizing power as it resulted from the fusion and development of several disciplinary procedures meant to restrain and enhance the potential of every person in the society.

### Foucault and Normalization

Authority and information are central to Foucault's idea of normalization. It depends on the development, administration, and upkeep of standards, in accordance with observational discipline techniques, which foster a sense of responsibility. To put it another way, there must be a set of standards in order to appreciate deviations as well as to recognize any irregularities. This may cause people to believe that the "standard" is more valuable than things that deviate from it. Everyone is urged to adhere to such ideals developed by regular surveillance, inspection, and recording.

According to Foucault, in the quest for obedience and production, the tactics used to punish the few who consistently and methodically transgress from the accepted standards develop inequities. Only skills, information, and behaviors that specifically address the requirements of humanity as a whole are acknowledged or employed. Anything else will probably be penalized or ignored. Power-derived norms are usually focused on being compliant, effective, and non-different. Those who do deviate from the norm are then graded based on the position they lie in a hierarchical structure and mechanisms are set up to rebuild them. The consistent use of sanctions is necessary for the correction of people who stray from these highly regarded standards or norms.

It is discipleship, where those who do not perform are punished and those who embrace are honored with obligation to perform.

According to Foucault, normativity and normalization are independent from the idea of norms. For this purpose, anomalies attempt to be regarded as equally genuine as the standard itself, and the necessity to keep it in check provides another justification for community supervision.

He makes the case that the information we acquire via our schools and society warps us into their own image and forces us to perceive, comprehend, and be familiar with just a limited, prejudiced, personal, single, and distinctive assortment of what there is to know.

### **The Panopticon**

The concepts of power, knowledge, and normalcy put forward by Foucault offer a powerful framework for analyzing the institutional setting in which education has developed. Furthermore, there are intriguing connections between the organization of educational institutions and power. The Panopticon jail serves as an excellent metaphor to comprehend the different mechanisms in which formal education is designed, regulated and administered.

The architectural layout and organizational framework of schools might be linked to earlier social philosophies that sought to increase production via surveillance. Several institutions, including educational institutions, were built using a Panopticon-like framework, which embeds authority to control children's possible behaviors.

### **Foucault and Discipline**

The word "discipline" is applied by Foucault to describe a specific form of control that affects people immediately and may serve as a foundation for various forms of authority. Disputing the conventional theoretical and geopolitical concepts of authority, Foucault drifts beyond the Marxist concepts of creation and revolutionary and the Freudian conception of suppression to feel an authority that is tangible and precise despite needing to be violent. The methods in which people are forced to accept behavioral patterns they mistakenly perceive to be the normal are what Foucault refers to as the "constructive attributes of power," which he emphasizes. Individuals have the perception that they are constantly being watched as a result. Disciplined authority develops people by prescribing their impulses and pressuring them into adopting certain behaviors by continually assessing, evaluating, and analyzing specific beings.

The construction of institutions, including schools, led to the transformation of the person into a subject for manipulation and control in a number of ways, which Foucault

investigates. He supports his claim that the abstraction of a research participant led to the development of disciplinary innovations or procedures for organizing new configurations of authority and expertise. The institutionalization of acts and conduct created a regulatory framework for the management of time, place, work, and numerous other behavioral facets of humans.

Akin to the panopticon hypothesis, individuals are seldom certain whether they are being watched, yet surveillance and regulating systems are constantly in play.

### **Foucault's Theory of Knowledge and Power in Educational Institutions**

Educational institutions were one of the many organizations that adopted and used an all-encompassing system of monitoring and inspection in an attempt to normalize kids. Notwithstanding government rules, initiatives, and attempts to the alternative, educational establishments tend to generate inequities. Disparities are systematically produced by the basic elements of the way that education is organized. A detailed scrutiny of academic procedures in light of Foucault's views makes it clearer how normalization has taken place as well as potential problems in institutions, such as evaluation, teachers, and general academic outcomes.

Illustrations of Foucault's ideas and normalization are provided via a relation to school routines. First, think about school monitoring procedures. In order to keep an eye on students during the academic year, dorms, surveillance programs, discipline, and instructor placement are all set up in schools. With the purpose of facilitating observing techniques, most institutions are built with a panopticon-like mentality. Students are categorized, tiered, or split pursuant to schedules, and they subsequently proceed to their specific location in accordance with that grouping. The design of these diagnostic places and moments enables instructors to get to know each pupil very well and, if necessary, to address any inadequacies they may exhibit.

The development of education as a regulatory technique used by the entire society was largely influenced by the millennia movement from the detrimental to the constructive aspects of regulation. The implementation of new instructional methods, the use of novel forms of micro managing the allocation of period, the monitoring of sexual identity, the exploitation of bodies, the dissemination of directional restrictions, and the creation of innovative academic techniques and relays that allowed for the administration of personal and group disciplines and the regulation of their circumstances, enhancement of their capabilities, and channeling of their consequences are just a few examples.

From as early as three years old, institutions begin systematically evaluating pupils when they first enroll. Furthermore, these evaluation procedures do not just apply to educators and supervisors.

Every pupil has an accumulated database that includes all evaluations, whether they are official or unofficial, as well as assessments made via the use of report cards, individualized instruction programs, behavioral consequences, and other means. Every student who enrolls in institution has a record created for them that is continuous during their time in school.

A type of "ethical orthopedics" was made feasible by the growth of student enrollment in schools and the improved training of a growing number of instructors. This "moral orthopedics" eventually shifted away from accessing

extrinsic retribution and sought personal improvement. Although inconvenient, these early regulatory inclinations also helped to redefine childhood, create a specialized period of instruction, increase new, particularly sexual, fears about infants, restructure individual interactions, and give birth to the notion that instruction is a discipline. The act of attending university had been a regulatory reaction to the requirement of controlling expanding populations; nevertheless, given the increasingly segregated environment of the classroom, the effective management of many students also required new approaches.

As a result, it can be said that institutions rate pupils in accordance to their ability and organize them in educational hierarchical capacities, if necessary, using so-called scientifically conducted tests. It is clear that the outcomes of student assessments are used to pinpoint students who differ from the standard and then to suggest subsequent measures to help those students get closer to the standard. Assessments must always follow a benchmark. In light of this, it is clear how institutions not only foster discrimination but also inequality and exclusion.

### **Analysis: Consequences of Theory of Knowledge and Power**

The concept of normalization has a troubled background in impairment philosophy and investigation because of its unavoidable historical relationship with pathologizing and forced rectification. Several impairment philosophers and academics advocated for normalization as emancipatory, both personally and economically, and as an indication of advancement on both fronts in the latter stages of the previous millennium. Wolf Wolfensberger is most notable for having started a grassroots movement that opposed the institutionalization of "cognitively handicapped persons" under the guise of "normalization." The "normalization movement" sought to incorporate these individuals into the larger society by improving their self, their capacity for self-advocacy, and the social acceptability of their outward looks.

The foundational idea behind the normalization revolution was articulated by Michael Oliver in the following way: "Normalization theory affords handicapped individuals the chance to be granted valuable social positions in an uneven society that values certain roles more than others." In an attempt to emphasize the normativity of normalization, the normalization principle was subsequently called "social role valorization." When normalization concept was rebranded to socialization commoditization, Chris Drinkwater has claimed that the power-knowledge framework that produces a "normal existence" was left unaddressed. The motivating premise underlying these normalizing tactics, according to Drinkwater, is that some individuals find it challenging to understand how to interact "adequately," that is, regularly.

### **A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason**

A revision of Foucault's PhD dissertation, *Madness and Civilization*, conducts a "archaeology" of our structure of psychological diagnosis and care. According to Foucault, psychological diseases are relative; our comprehensive treatment and knowledge of them is a societal construct that is specific to our ideology, or theoretical foundation. Psychological treatment particularly and information broadly cannot be comprehended separately

from all other agencies of punishment and compulsion.

The "Classical" era of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of this contemporary intellectual framework. Midway between *Madness and Civilization*, a story of vapors, humors, restraints, expulsions is a gloomy recitation of the baseless theories and fruitless remedies of the era.

Yet, this narrative is framed by Foucault's startling analysis of two significant chronological divergences: moves behind that appeared to be ahead. With reference to contemporary culture and visual art, particularly the hallucinogenic works of Pieter Bruegel and Matthias Grnewald and the portraits in Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*, Foucault tries to harmonize classical philosophy with mediaeval and Renaissance conceptions of insanity. According to this viewpoint, lunacy is a corrupt condition, a depraved existence, and a replacement for reason. As with enticement and unattainable liberty, lunacy is revered with awe. In comparison, the conventional prescientific paradigm isolates, studies, and externalizes mental illness.

### **Dignity of Risk**

Understanding that people are continuously evolving and changing allows one to understand the dignity of risk. This entails being always on the cutting edge of novel and uncharted experiences. Disappointment is a constant danger, but if we deny this possibility, we also deny the truth as to how we develop and evolve. It reveals how we view an individual when we design a solution or programme to eliminate physiological and interpersonal danger. We form a persuasive opinion on the dignity and prospects of individuals. It conveys to others our expectations. It overemphasizes the conventional considerations to safeguard, reassure, care for, and keep an eye on those who are viewed as less important.

A normal form of security is one that applies to most of population. Overprotective parenting is a different issue. When constraints, medications, and laws wouldn't be accepted in a free society, we have constructed walls, barriers, locks, and other obstacles. To eliminate the majority of the danger, we have reduced the availability of academic opportunities, employment opportunities, and interpersonal and sexual interactions. By doing this, we undermine an individual's dignity by implying that they cannot make mistakes or strive. To ensure that compassion is retained and therefore that individuals are trained to be an active component of this actual reality that includes its risks, brutality, and discoveries, normalization necessitates that risk be built in. Normalization calls for optimum efficiency in community health and maximum pressure in our advancement initiatives, in addition to removing overprotection.

This is crucial for the younger age class so that our inadequate education and resources do not produce additional decades of seriously damaged individuals who are slowed down by their injuries. How many individuals have been unintentionally made disabled by placing restrictions on what the society believes them to be capable of? Life is adaptable; it reacts to difficulties. The results will be restricted if these are. Progress occurs in a logical chronological order. We constantly reject the idea that a person will walk, speak, or be productive since they're merely hindered and require additional patience and assistance.

## Conclusion

Throughout his Collège de France seminars, Foucault connected his assertions on the evolutionary development of biopower as well as its objectives with his orientation to the investigation of governance. Contemporary power, in Foucault's view, manufactures things and causes consequences rather of being purely repressive. Authority is primarily a matter of administration, or the control of behavior, rather than a matter of conflict between enemies. The term "government" was introduced by Foucault to allude to the practice of governance, which is any action that tries to modify, direct, or otherwise influence the behavior of oneself or another. He proposed that the phrase be characterized generally as "the conduct of conduct."

According to Foucault, he chose to use the term "government" in this more inclusive sense since it includes both deliberate actions that set boundaries on one's or others' potential for activity and legally created systems of both geopolitical and socioeconomic servitude. Studies of force interactions that view authority as government, as the manner of behavior, take into account a vast array of practices that were initially hypothesized to be beyond the purview of authority, such as certain methods taken to improve or transform oneself in addition to obviously power-laden practices and guidelines. Innovations of normalization that serve as strategies for the comprehensive objectification of people who are deaf, criminals, and insane which have negative consequences that are disproportionately concentrated along racialized, gendered, and disabled categories.

While it may seem like power is only used for repression, Foucault said that the most effective use of power involves directing potential courses of action and arranging the consequences that could occur. As a result, Foucault's work on normalization and government teaches impairment ideologues and activists to come up with fresh aspects to combat and circumvent the ever-evolving methodologies and processes that authority creates, as well as to transcend the boundaries of interpersonal designs of disadvantage that depend on outmoded and localized notions of authority as profoundly draconian.

## Future Systems

Our healthcare organization have yet to meet the complexity and breadth of our whole-life experiences. We have gradually come to terms with the terrible disintegration that such medical, educational, and humanitarian systems exhibit. Wherever you look, inefficiency, redundancy, are burning holes in the fabric of our society. Considering the complexity of our community health, we are unable to instill a sense of "living unity" as well as satisfaction in someone whose survival relies on the assistance and food of people other than his or her family. Disorder and unrest currently reign. If there is a sea of dehumanization in every aspect, normalization cannot serve as an island haven.

As a result, we must understand the system as a whole. We should start by looking at the local level because here is where the foundation for extensive perpetual normalizing systems of operations is found. We can effectively meet a broad range of requirements by starting at the provincial scale preventing service recipients from feeling fragmented, addressing necessities in a manner that elevates fundamental human rights and prestige, and maximizing economic growth and efficiency.

## References

1. Binswanger L. *Traum und Existenz*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer; c1930.
2. Foucault M. *Maladie mentale et personnalité*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France; c1954.
3. Foucault M. *Maladie mentale et psychologie*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France; 1962. Translated by Sheridan A. *Mental Illness and Psychology*. New York: Harper and Row; c1976.
4. Foucault M. *Folie et déraison*. Paris: Plon; 1961. *L'histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard; 1972. Translated by Khalfa J, Murphy J. *History of Madness*. New York: Routledge; c2006.
5. Foucault M. *Raymond Roussel*. Paris: Gallimard; 1963. Translated by Ruas C. *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday; c1986.
6. Foucault M. *Naissance de la clinique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France; 1963. Translated by Sheridan A. *The Birth of the Clinic*. New York: Pantheon; 1973.
7. Bernauer JW. *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward An Ethics for Thought*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press; c1990.
8. May T. *Philosophy of Foucault*. Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press; c2006.
9. McGushkin E. *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press; c2007.
10. O'Leary T. *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*. London: Continuum; c2002.
11. Rajchman J. *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press; c1985.
12. Paternek MA. *Norms and Normalization: Michel Foucault's Overextended Panoptic Machine*. *Human Studies*. 1987;10(1):97-121. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008990>
13. Gutting G, Oksala J. *Michel Foucault*. In: Zalta EN, Nodelman U, editors. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Internet]. Fall 2022 Edition. Available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/foucault/>
14. Marshall J. *Michel Foucault: Personal Autonomy and Education*. New York: Kluwer; c1996.
15. Meadmore D, Burnett B, O'Brien P, editors. *Understanding Education: Contexts and Agendas for the New Millennium*. Sydney: Prentice Hall; c1999.
16. Melton JvH. *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; c1988.
17. Montaigne M de. *Essays*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1580); c1958.
18. Olssen M. *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education*. London: Bergin and Garvey; c1999.
19. Peters M. *Educational Research: 'games of truth' and the ethics of subjectivity*. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*. 2004;5:50-63.
20. Popkewitz T, Brennan M, editors. *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education*. New York: Teachers College; c1998.
21. Spierenburg P. *The Prison Experience: Disciplinary Institutions and Their Inmates in Early Modern Europe*. London: Rutgers University Press; c1991.