

Is the difference between ‘human variation’ and ‘illness’ shrinking in the modern age?

How do we know what is pathological, versus what is normal? It seems obvious until you start thinking philosophically, which was the goal of a panel hosted by the [Science and Justice Working Group](#) at University of California, Santa Cruz. The event was titled “‘Fixing’ the Pathological Body,” a pun on how fixing can mean both repairing and immobilizing.

An anthropologist, a philosopher, and a geneticist discussed how simple, everyday practices like using particular words or certain tests define a line between pathology and normalcy. That line has a huge impact on our experience as humans.

[Matthew Wolfmeyer](#), PhD, professor of anthropology at UCSC, used the term “multibiologism” to indicate that pathology can be seen as a form of human variation. There are three kinds of bodies, he says: those that need *no* intervention of social, legal, or medical support to enable a livable life, those that *do* need such intervention (such as a quadriplegic or someone with severe Alzheimer’s), and those that *could have* such intervention (anyone from hyperactive kids or insomniacs to those with PTSD or arthritis). American society currently divides this spectrum such that the “no intervention” category is becoming empty and the “could have intervention” category is growing by leaps and bounds. Despite what he calls our “cure ideology” from our Judeo-Christian heritage, the pathologies we recognize are increasingly incurable, whether it be gluten sensitivity or chronic cancer, and must be treated with ongoing therapies.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full original post: [Genetic testing, autism, and “fixing” the pathological body](#)**