

Pathology or Condition: An exploration

Prof. dr. Anna M.T. Bosman

Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands

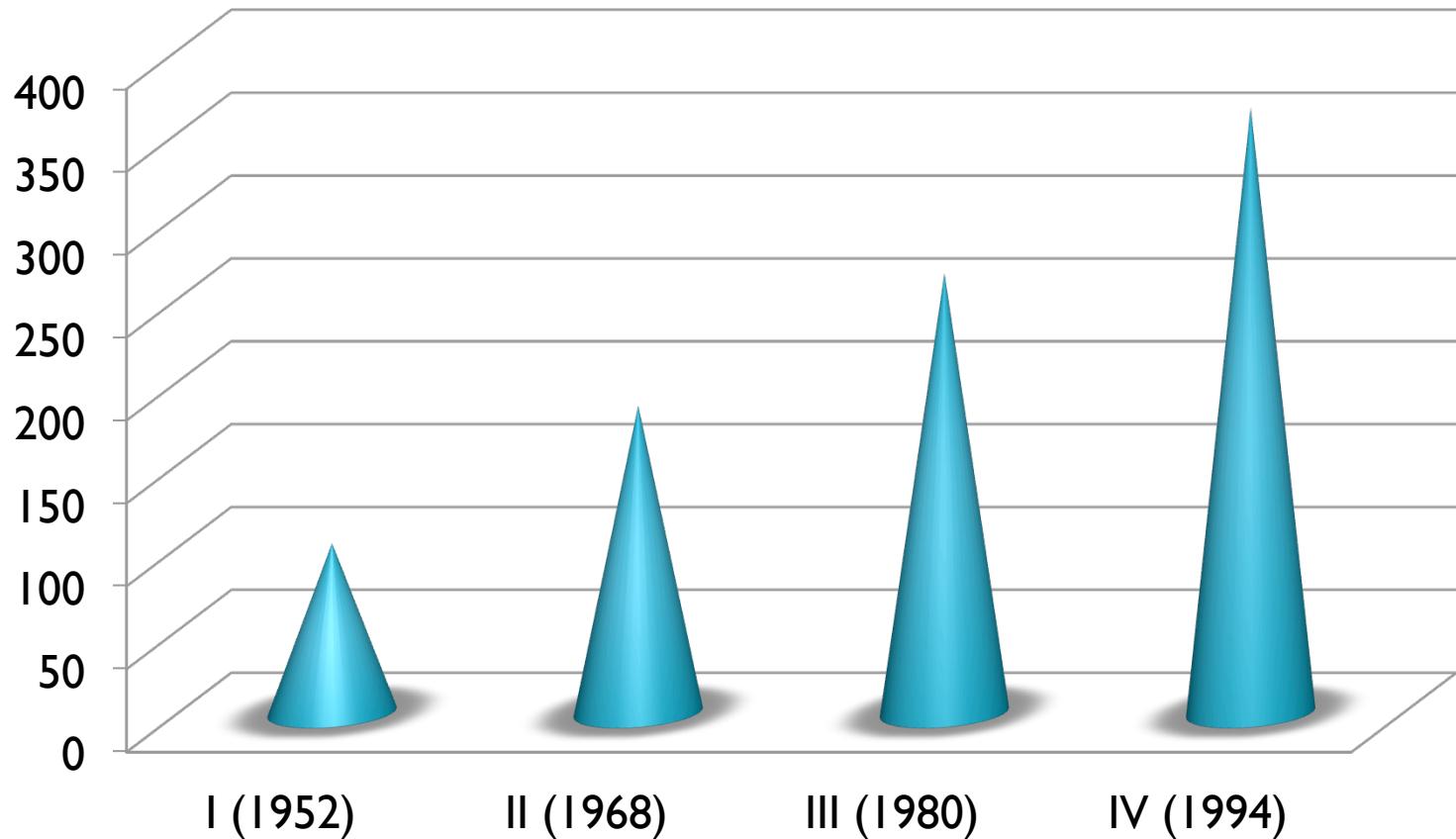
Department of Special Education & Behavioural Science Institute

Symposium ‘Parental Responsibility’

Maastricht University, December 9, 2013

The issue

DSM Diagnoses



A mental disorder is a

- DSM-IV :“... clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress or disability or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom”
- DSM-5:“... syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities”

Disease

Greeks: is a response to the disturbance of natural equilibrium. Disease is qualitatively different from health; it is a different organisation

Modern medicine: enters the organism by means of a pathogenic. It needs to fight the enemy that is usually outside the organism => causes an excess or deficit of something physiological

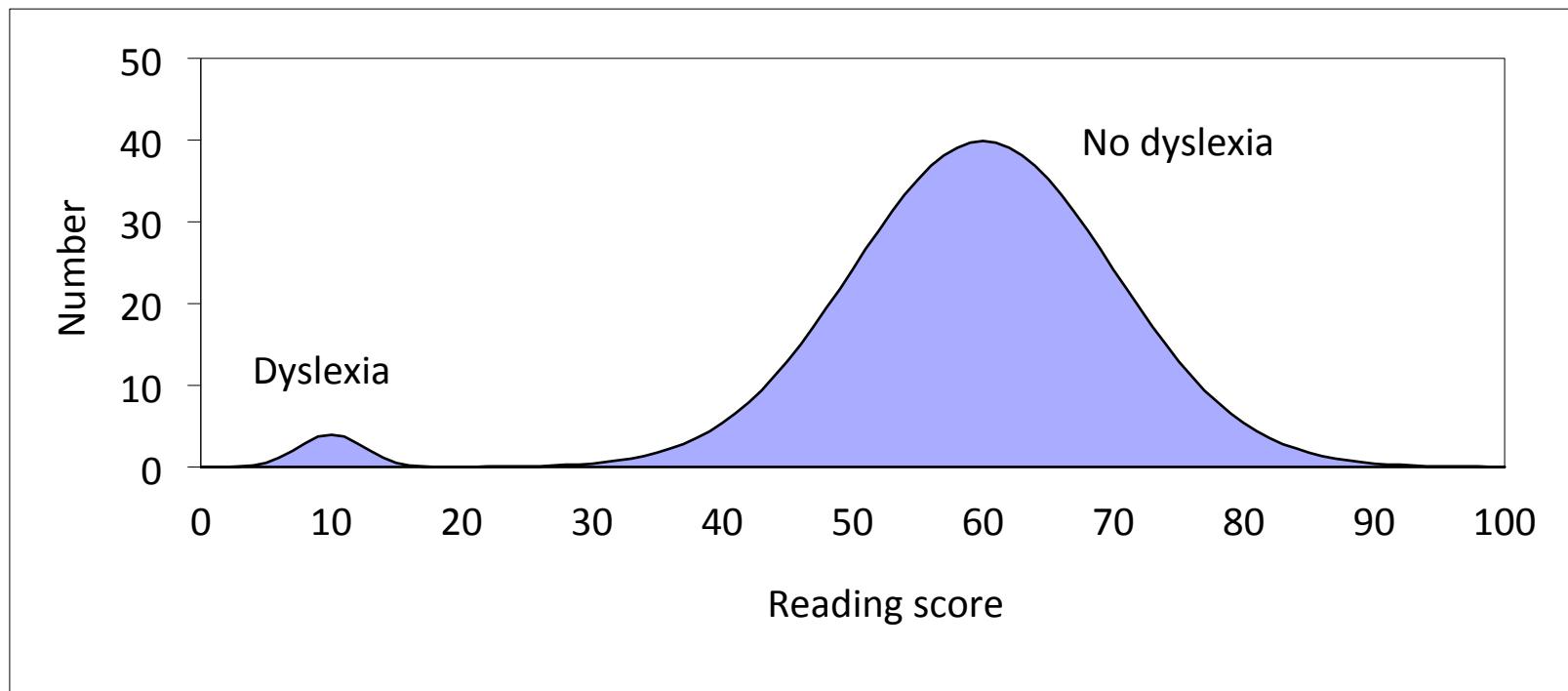
Excess or deficit: Norms

Norm = ‘standard, pattern, model’ (1821) from the Latin **norma** referring to ‘a carpenter’s square*', rule, pattern’ (used since 1670).

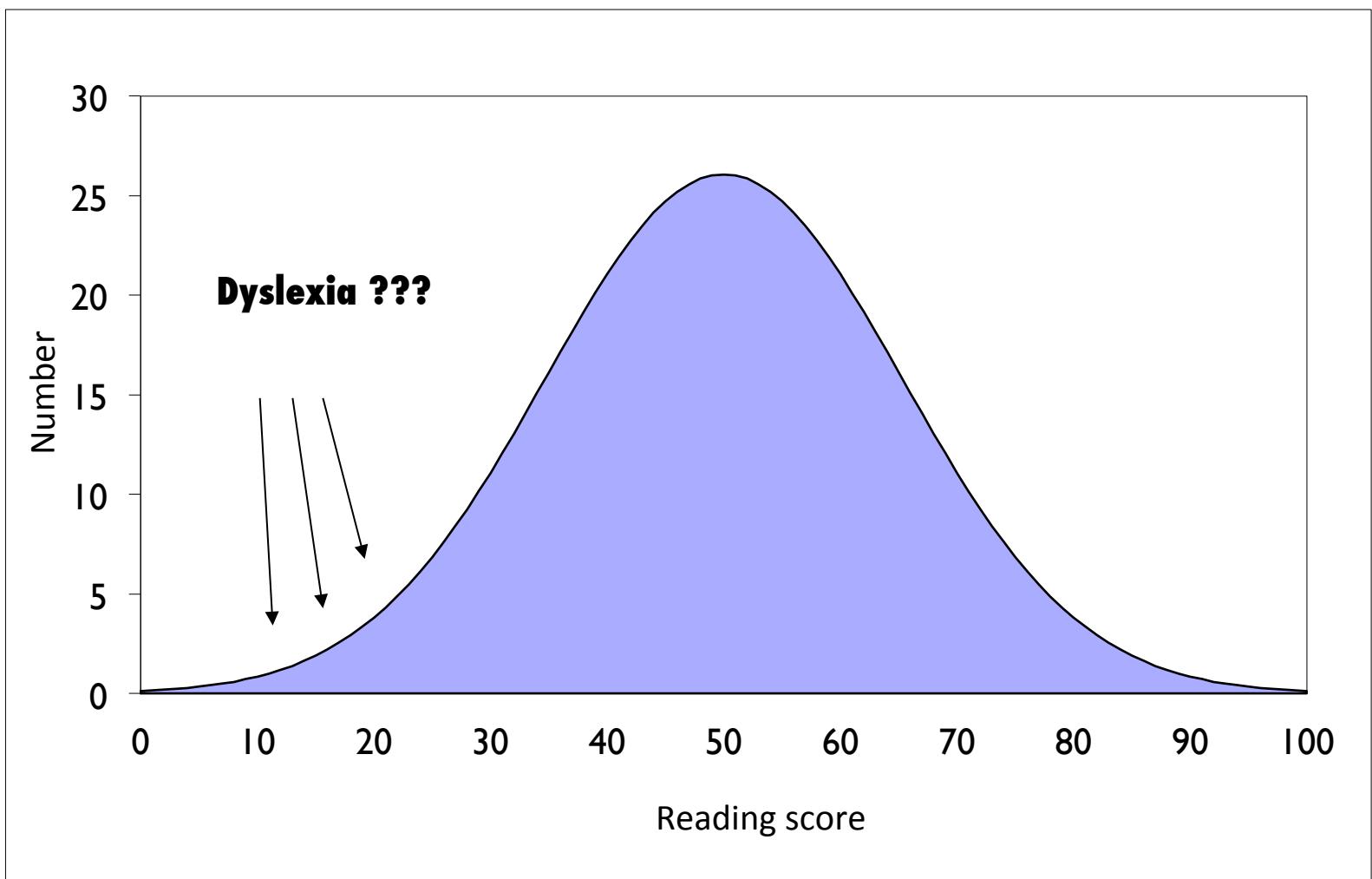
Normal = 'usual state or condition' (1890). In 1894 it was used in the sense of 'normal person or thing'.

* T-square is not a natural thing.....

Bimodal distribution (fictitious)



Unimodal distribution (reality)



Again norms

- Statistical norms do not have a natural criterion
- Deviations from statistical averages may:
 - never lead to problems
 - lead to problems in some but not in others
 - lead to problems in some contexts but not in others

Georges Canguilhem (1904-1995)

Medical doctor and philosopher
Tutor of Michel Foucault

Canguilhem, G. (1943/1991). *The normal and the pathological*. New York: Zone Books.

Canguilhem, G. (1980). What is psychology.
Ideology & Consciousness, 7, 37-50.

Life

is capable of error (Foucault, 1991)

may ‘go wrong’ (Margree, 2002)

is a normative activity enabling the organism

- to follow existing rules / norms
- create new norms
- change and impose new norms

Health

Leriche (1936): 'Health is life lived in the silence of the organs'

Canguilhem (1943/1991): 'The state of health is a state of unawareness where the subject and his body are one'

Health = capacity to flexibly adapt to one's environment

Pathology

Pathology = diminishing capacity to adapt that results in an alternative order.

In the extreme, a pathology is a condition that leads to death.

Pathology \leftrightarrow Health

Pathology \leftrightarrow Normativity (biological, social)

Normal \leftrightarrow Abnormal (statistical)

Normal, abnormal, pathological?

- Three arms
- ADHD
- Conversieverschijnsel
- Albert Einstein and Asperger
- Vincent van Gogh and Bipolar disorder
- Temple Grandin & Baron-Cohen

Take home messages

Mental or physical pathology

- cannot be established objectively
- has an alternative order
- is fundamentally determined by the environment of the organism
- entails reduced flexibility and suffering
- is inherently social as well as biological
- may be normal or abnormal

Thanks to the works of

Canguilhem, G. (1943/1991). *The normal and the pathological.*
New York: Zone Books.

Margree, V. (2002). Normal and abnormal: Georges
Canguilhem and the question of mental pathology.
Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology, 9, 299-312.

Verhoeff, B. (2010). Normaal of pathologisch? - de visie van
arts en filosoof Georges Canguilhem (1904-1995).
Tijdschrift voor Psychiatrie, 52, 639-647.