

Making sense of high sensitivity!?

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change perspective

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Sensitivity

derives from the Latin **Sensus**; via the French **Sens**, it became **Sense**

Original meaning: find your way

1400: ability to perceive, interpretation, feelings

1526: referring to external sense organs

1816: referring to extreme physical experiences

1900: overly sensitive

Sensitive

Carl Jung, MD (1875-1961)
psychoanalyst

1913-1914

inherited trait not caused by trauma,
but may cause neurosis

1921

introvert is a person who directs psychic
energy inward, away from objects, as
if they are experienced as too powerful



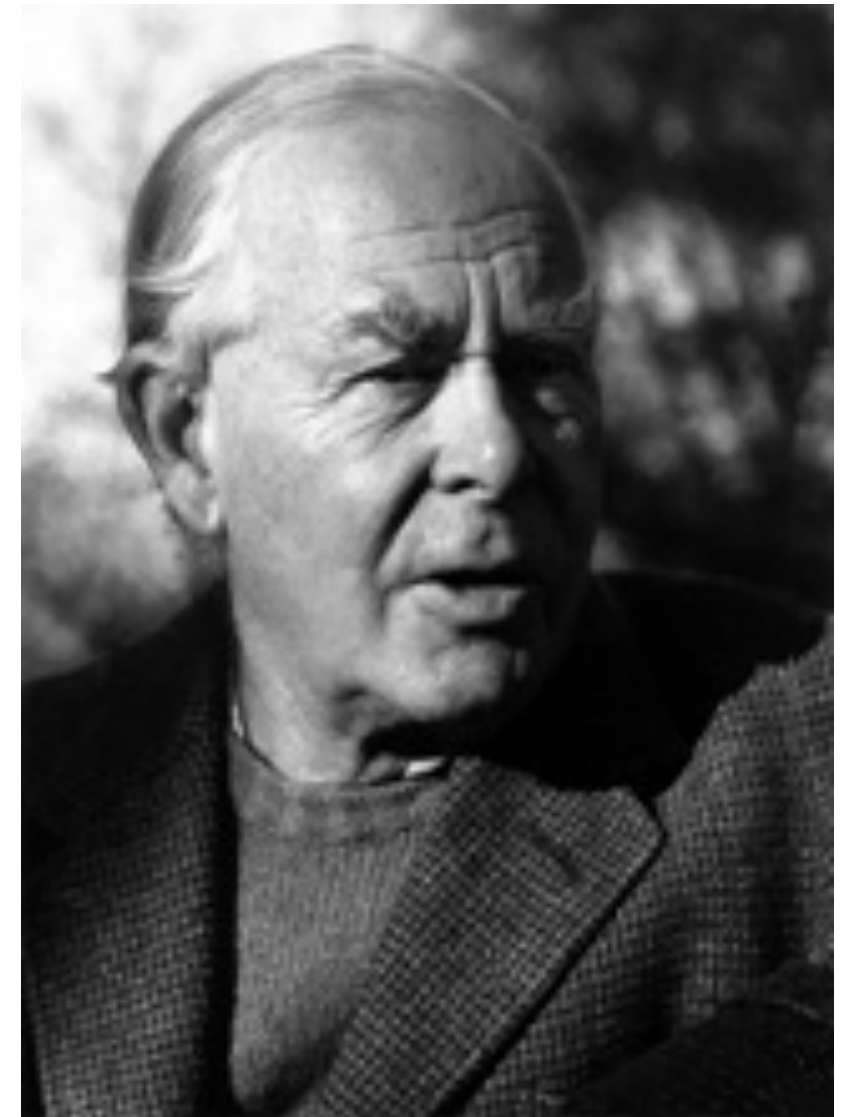
Sensitive environment

John Bowlby, MD (1907-1990)

- Founder of the attachment theory
- Psychoanalyst and Ethologist

1950

WHO asks Bowlby for advice on the mental health of homeless children



Raising a child to a healthy person requires a sensitive caretaker

High Sensitivity

Scientific term: 'Sensory processing sensitivity'



Elaine N. Aron, PhD.

I am easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input.

I seem to be aware of subtleties in my environment.

Other people's moods affect me.

I tend to be very sensitive to pain.

I find myself needing to withdraw during busy days, into bed or into a darkened room or any place where I can have some privacy and relief from stimulation.

I am particularly sensitive to the effects of caffeine.

I am easily overwhelmed by things like bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens close by.

I have a rich, complex inner life.

I am made uncomfortable by loud noises.

I am deeply moved by the arts or music.

My nervous system sometimes feels so frazzled that I just have to go off by myself.

I am conscientious.

I startle easily.

I am annoyed when people try to get me to do too many things at once.

I try hard to avoid making mistakes or forgetting things.

I make a point to avoid violent movies and TV shows.

I become unpleasantly aroused when a lot is going on around me.

Being very hungry creates a strong reaction in me, disrupting my concentration or mood.

Changes in my life shake me up.

I notice and enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, works of art.

I find it unpleasant to have a lot going on at once.

I make it a high priority to arrange my life to avoid upsetting or overwhelming situations.

I am bothered by intense stimuli, like loud noises or chaotic scenes.

When I must compete or be observed while performing a task, I become so nervous or shaky that I do much worse than I would otherwise.

High Sensitivity

Scientific term: 'Sensory processing sensitivity'

refers to a relatively sensitive nervous system

- aware of subtleties in the environment:
 - bodily (physical)
 - emotional (empathy)
 - cognitive (understanding)
- more easily overwhelmed

Source Aron & Aron (1997)



Elaine N. Aron, PhD.

The crisis in Psychological Science

Year	DSM	Number of diagnoses
1952	I	108
1968	II	186
1980 (1987)	III (R)	265
1994 (2000)	IV (R)	365
2013	5	?

The concept of disease

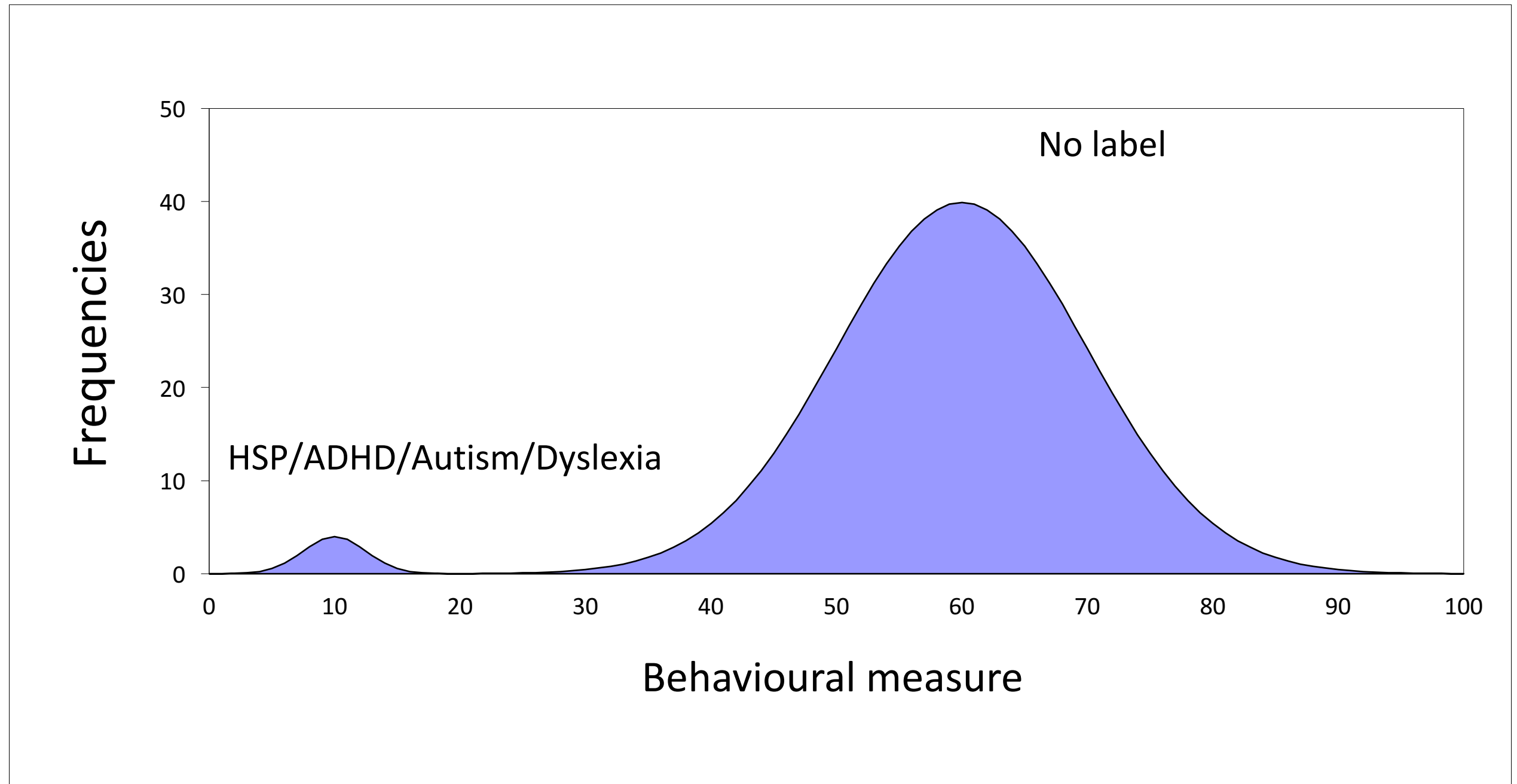
The ancient Greek

Disease is a response to a disturbance of a natural equilibrium. Disease is qualitatively different from health. It is a different *organisation or order*

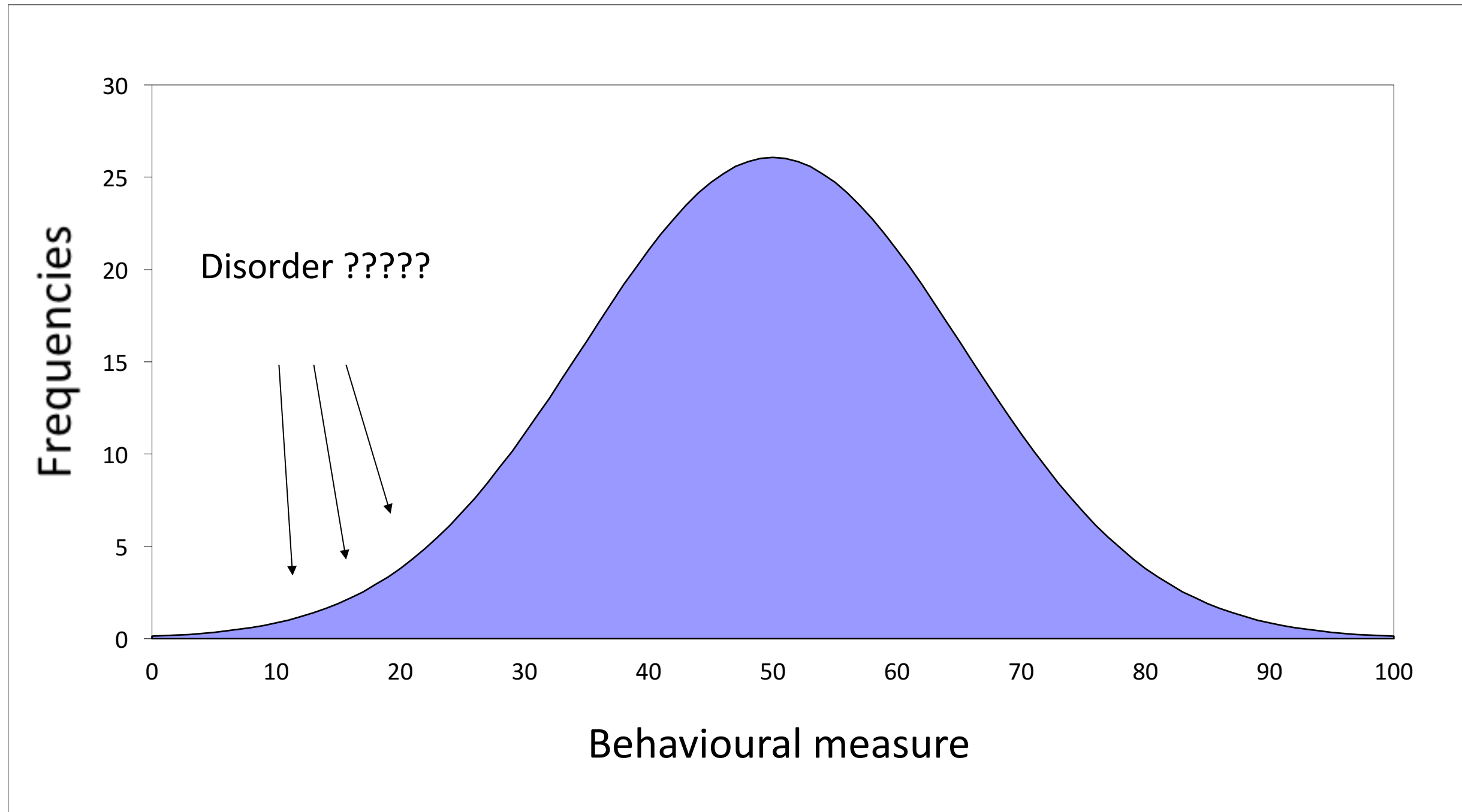
Modern medicine (19th century)

A disease enters the organism as a result of a pathogen (germ). The enemy usually comes from the outside and has to be battled. The pathogen causes a surplus or a deficit of something physiological that can be measured (diabetes: glucose; anemia: red blood cells; HIV: T-helper cells)

Bimodal distribution: the Greek opinion



Unimodal distribution (not necessarily Gaussian, actually unlikely)



Surplus or Deficit: Norms needed

Norm = standard, pattern, model (1821) from Latin

Norma = a carpenter's T-square* (in use since 1670)



Normal = 'usual situation or condition' (1890)

Since 1894 it refers to 'normal person or thing'

* T-square is an artefact.

Surplus or Deficit? Statistics as a solution

Statistics = information about a population from a sample

Statistical information is presented by

- Frequencies
- Mean, modus, median
- Range, standard deviation, variance

Measures and measurement tools required

What is a valid measurement?

- An attribute exists in reality
- Change in attribute causally related to change in tool

} Requires a theory

Real attributes: Temperature, Pressure, Electrical Current, Velocity, etc.....

A kinetic theory on heat

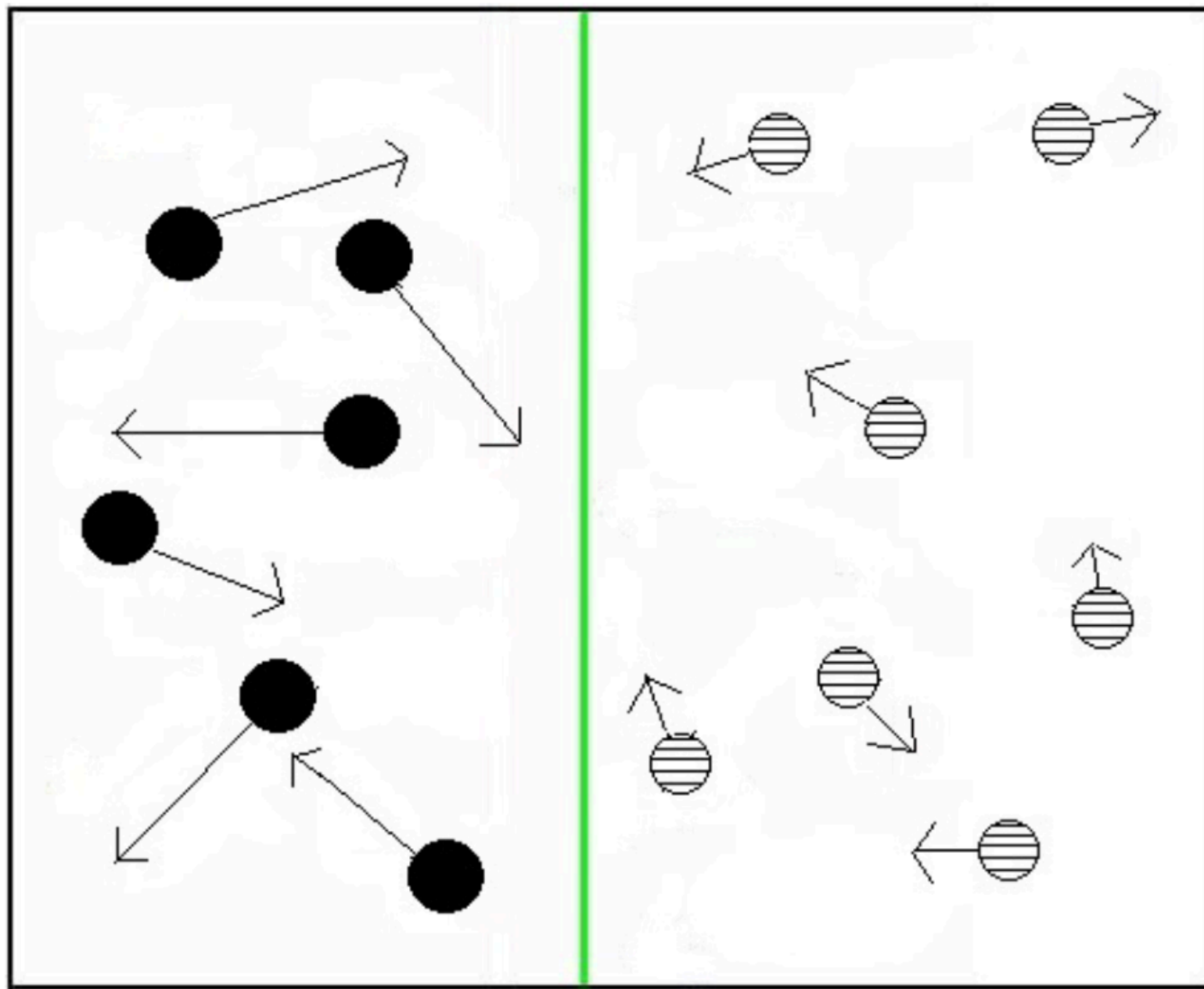


Figure 1. Vibrating molecules in which the right panel is the thermometer and the left one the body to be measured.

Scales

Celsius
Fahrenheit
Kelvin
Réamur
Rankine
Newton
Delisle
Rømer

Types

Alcohol
Water
Bi-metal

What about intelligence tests

1. WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale Children)
2. WAIS (Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale)
3. Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC)
4. Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (SB)
5. WJ-III (Woodcock-Johnson III)
6. SPM (Standard Progressive Matrices)
7. NDT (Nederlandse Differentiatie Test)
8. LDT (Leidse Diagnostische Test)
9. RAKIT (Revisie Amsterdamse Kinder Intelligentietests)
10. SON (Snijders-Oomen non-verbal intelligence test)
11. Etc....

What about tests for reading skill?

1. One-minute test (EMT; Brus & Voeten, 1973)
2. Pseudoword reading test (KLEPEL, van den Bos et al.; 1994)
3. Three-minute test (Verhoeven, 1995)
4. Text-reading test (AVI; Visser et al. 2006)
5. Lexical-decision task (LD) or the cross-out task (van Bon, 2006)
6. Reading technique and reading speed (2001)
7. Reading comprehension (Aarnoutse, 1996)
8. Reading comprehension (de Vos, 2012)
9. Reading comprehension (Cito, 2006)
10. Reading comprehension (A-Vision, 2003)
11. Etc...

Objective versus Normative measures

Speed, 120 km/hour, is an 'objective' measure
normative evaluation with respect to context
too fast on an 80 km max road, avoiding a fine
too slow on a race circuit, wanting to win

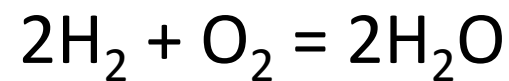
Intelligence, IQ = 70, is a normative measure (relative to other individuals)

Reading, Cito-score C, is a normative measure (relative to other individuals)

Physical Sciences vs. Life Sciences

Sciences of the non-living world

2 is an even number



} Value-free facts

Sciences of the living world

‘Life can go wrong’, and organisms may encounter situations that are either good or bad for their survival, therefore

‘Facts’ in Biology, Psychiatry, (Child)Psychology are value-laden:

- Hygiene is important, it enhances **longevity** (= not a fact, but socially desirable, normative)
- Being able to read or spell is required, you will **earn more money** (= not a fact, but implicitly a goal to strive for, it is a normative judgment)

Pathology

George Canguilhem (1904-1995)
French medical doctor and philosopher:



Pathology is a *reduced capacity* to maintain life (to survive),
determined by the *relationship* between *organism and environment*

'Psychological' pathology

Autism

[Baron-Cohen](#) (2008): is a condition, systematizing rather than empathizing mind

[Grandin](#) (2012): without autism, we would not have technology and computers

Dyslexia

[Elliott & Gibbs](#) (2009): Reading problems exist, but does dyslexia?

Bosman (2015): Reading skill is on a continuum; problems exist, but as a disorder?

ADHD

[Saul](#) (2014): ADHD does not exist

[Tonti](#) (2013). ADHD as a difference in cognition, not a disorder.

NB. Please consult the URLs for thought provoking ideas

Pathology implies suffering

Pathos is 'suffering'

Canguilhem (1966):

“disease is what irritates men in the normal course of their lives and work, and above all, what makes them suffer”

Pathology

- emerges from the relationship between organism and environment
- is an individual norm

Disorder, preferably different order, may be pathological.

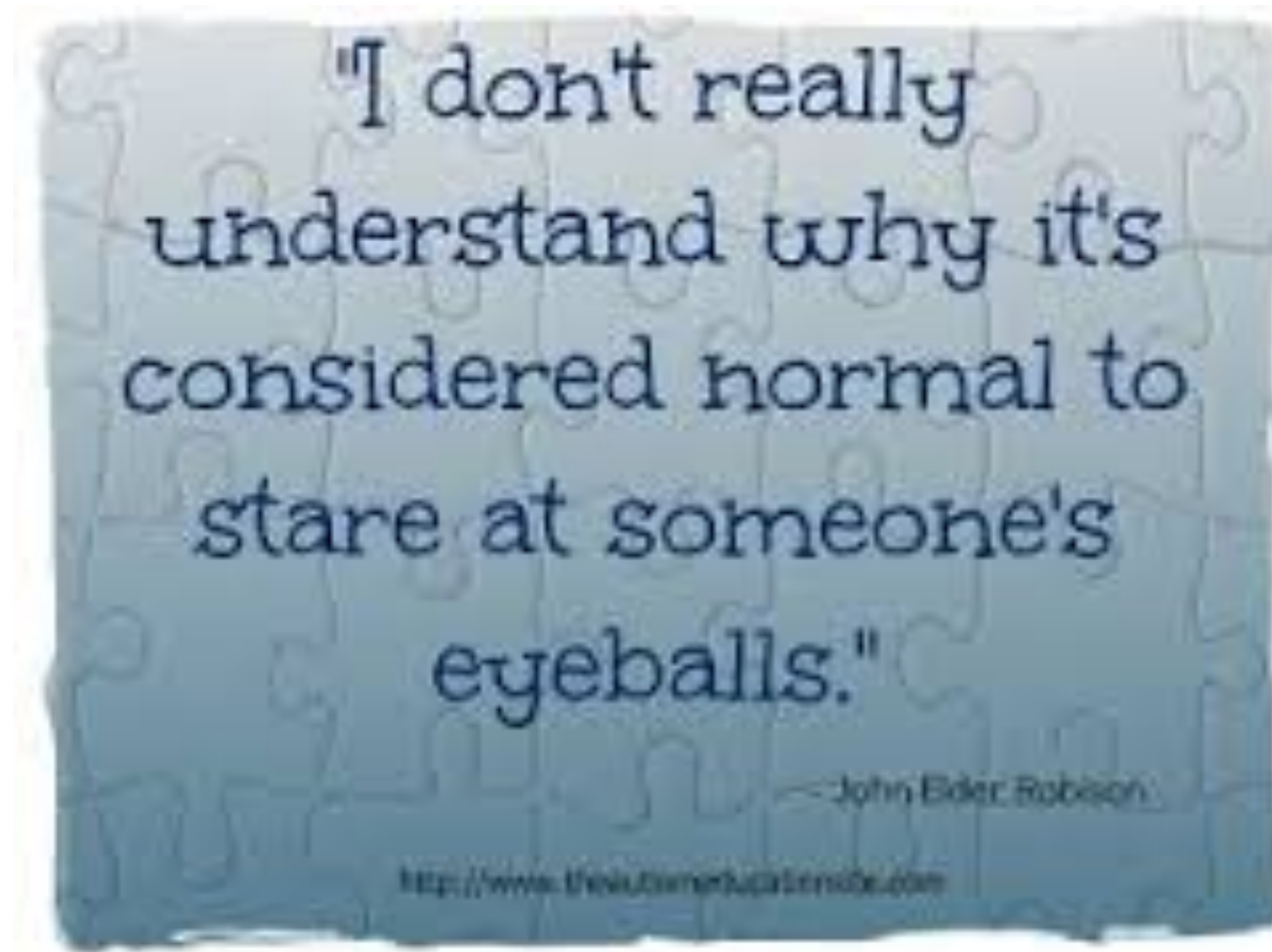
A person with a different order may also just be different

ADHD

**I HAVE MORE
THOUGHTS
BEFORE
BREAKFAST THAN
MOST PEOPLE
HAVE ALL DAY**




Autism or....



Anti-social behavior
is a trait of intelligence
in a world full of
conformists.

-Nikola Tesla

A photograph of Nikola Tesla, a man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a dark suit. He is holding a glowing incandescent lightbulb in his right hand, which is illuminated. His left hand is raised to his face, with his fingers near his temple, in a contemplative or thoughtful pose. The background is dark and out of focus.

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