CREATIVITY AND MADNESS

UDC 159.954:159.972
Essay

Summary

The belief that creativity and madness are somehow linked goes way back to the time of Aristotle. Centuries later, this belief was developed and expanded by various psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and psychologists. Even though this belief was challenged by humanistic psychologists, the prevailing view appears to be that madness, i.e., mental disorders, and creativity are positively associated. Plenty of research were conducted linking the creativity and mental disorders. According to current knowledge, creativity can be connected with some major mental disorders including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Furthermore, several studies support the belief that mental disorders can aid in the creativity.

Key words: Creativity; Mental disorder; Bipolar disorder; schizophrenia; major depressive disorder; anxiety disorders; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

1. Introduction

Creativity and madness have been considered to be associated for a long time, based on a Aristotel's claim that 'no great genious has ever existed without a strain of madness' [1]. This belief has become a scientific interest from the nineteenth century on in different scientific areas, from the anthropological point of view to recent genetic and neuroimaging studies [2]. Despite the association of creativity with positive personal features and linkage of creativity with fully functioning personality by humanistic psychologists, the prevailing belief appears to be that creative people suffer form mental illness [3]. As the notion creativity is associated with many definitions [4], there are a lot of psychological tests that measure creativity. The most widely used measure of creativity is the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), that accounts for all of the creative individuals skills [4]. That is why often, as the base of the linkage between creativity and madness, is given as example of some noticeable creative people and their connection with madness. For example, John Forbes Nash, mathematician, Nobel Prize winner and a person diagnosed with schizophrenia once said that he believed that aliens from outer space had recruited him to save the world because this idea came to him the same way that his mathematical ideas did [3]. According to current knowledge, parallels can be drawn to associate creativity and mental disorders which are based upon numerous studies that have demonstrated correlations between creativity and mental disorders [5]. The importance of studies between this correlations is to gain deeper understanding of patient's needs and experiences[1]. Being creative has enormous benefits, for example easier way to manage emotions or reduce stress [6], so it is not suprising that people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder often discontinue medication because of the reported loss of creativity [1].
2. Mental disorders

Mental disorder is in the broadest sense, every brain function disorder that affects thinking, feeling, or a person's ability to communicate with its environment [7]. There are many disorders, with signs and symptoms that vary widely between specific disorders [8]. In the following paragraphs there is a brief description of mental disorders that by the current knowledge, can be connected with creativity by the current knowledge.

Bipolar disorder is a mental disorder characterized by periods of depression and a period of elevated mood, also known as hypomania or mania. The elevated mood is significant and in extreme states of mania the person can hallucinate, hear voices or dissociate entirely and during the hypomania, person can feel energetic, happy or irritable. During the periods of depression, person can be tearful, make poor eye contact with others, and have negative view of life. The risk of suicide amongst the people with bipolar disorder is high [9].

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder which can be identified by abnormal social behavior and failure to understand what is real. The most important symptoms are false beliefs, unclear or confused thinking, hearing the voices that other do not hear, reduced social engagement and emotional expression, and a lack of motivation. These symptoms often come on gradually, they begin in young adulthood and last a long time. Schizophrenia is often connected with additional mental health problems such as anxiety disorders, major depressive illness, or substance use disorders [10].

Major depressive disorder is a mental disorder characterized by at least two weeks of low mood that is present across most situations. Common symptoms include low self-esteem, loss of interest in normally enjoyable activities, low energy, and pain without a clear cause. Occasionally, people with major depressive disorder may also have false beliefs or see or hear things that others cannot. This mental disorder can negatively affect a person's family, work or school life, sleeping or eating habits, and general health [11].

Anxiety disorders are a group of mental disorders that include feelings of anxiety and fear. Anxiety is an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, nervous behavior, somatic complaints, and rumination. It is a worry about future events, while fear is a reaction to a current events. People with anxiety disorders can have physical symptoms, such as a fast heart rate and shakiness [12].

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental disorder characterized by problems in paying attention, excessive activity, or difficulty controlling behavior which is not appropriate for a person's age. People with ADHD begin to develop this symptoms at age six to twelve and have them more than six months. ADHD often perseveres in adulthood causing impairments of social, academic and occupational functioning [13].

3. Creativity and mental illness

As mentioned before, in consonance with current knowledge creativity and mental illness are connected. This issue is addressed in scientific data in three different types of research, historiometric, psychiatric and psychometric. Histiometric research is based on objective and quantitative analysis, for example biographies of creative individuals are systematically analyzed to recognize the presence of symptoms associated with various mental illness. Psychiatric type of research is based on the incidence of clinical diagnosis and therapeutic treatment in samples of creative individuals. In psychometric research standard assessment instruments are applied to creative individuals. Eventhought distinct methodological problems are present in each type of research, the findings all converge on the same general conclusions [14].
Particularly strong links have been identified between creativity and mood disorders, especially bipolar disorder and depressive disorder [5]. In [1] authors have indicated that creative occupations are specifically linked to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder rather than to mental illness alone. Also, authors conclude that linkage between people within creative occupations and mental illness in their relatives is likely. Creative people may carry a risk for bipolar disorder that is greater than that of the general public [3]. There are a lot of notable creative individuals who had some family members mentally ill. For example, Albert Einstein had a son with schizophrenia, Bertrand Russell had a family members with schizophrenia or psychosis, etc. [5].

Abraham, in the paper [15], consider inverted-U relationship between mental illness and creativity using degree of originality and level of top-down control as a parameters of inverted-U function. Level of top-down control is divided into three levels: clinical-severe, clinical-moderate, and subclinical-mild, where clinical-severe is associated with schizophrenia, clinical-moderate with ADHD and subclinical-mild with schizotypal or psychoticism traits. Abraham concluded that while subclinical-mild and clinical-moderate levels of top-down dysfunction can, under specific conditions, confer selective advantages in creative cognition, clinical-severe levels of top-down dysfunction leads to impoverished creative thinking. A minimal level of this function is probably essential to develop the original ideas. In Figure 1. is shown the hypothesized relationship between the capacity to generate original responses during creative thinking (range: low to high) and the degree of functionality in top-down control of information processing (range: normal to impaired).

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 1** The hypothesized relationship between degree of originality and level od top-down control [15]

In paper [16], authors confirmed inverted-U relationship between mental illness and creativity. They have also reported a number of correlations between creative occupations and mental illnesses. For instance, writers had a higher risk of anxiety and bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, unipolar depression, and substance abuse, and were almost twice as likely as the general population to kill themselves. Furthermore, dancers and photographers were also more likely to have bipolar disorder. Glazer in [17] has suggested the importance of universal definition of creativity and it's vitality to fully understand it's association with mental illness. Andreasen in [18] has examined writers and concluded that 80% of writers had some type of mood disorder and 30% of them had bipolar disorder.
4. Conclusion

The presented work suggests that there is a linkage between creativity and mental disorders. This linkage is scientifically investigated in three types of research, historiometric, psychiatric and psychometric, and findings of all three types of research have the same general conclusions. In these scientific researches it is important to universally define the concept of creativity. Generally, researchers suggest that creativity is somehow connected with mental illness, especially with bipolar disorder and other mood disorders. As the risk of suicide amongst the people with bipolar disorder is high, this risk is also present amongst creative individuals. Creative people tend to push the limits and live on the edge, and there are a lot of examples of creative people who committed a suicide. Losing gifted individuals to suicide is a profound tragedy, and clinicians must also be aware of this risk in their treatment planning.

REFERENCES

Creativity and madness

Andrea Farkas