CREATIVITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS

EMILIE ROUX
TOULOUSE PURPAN MEDICAL SCHOOL
25/03/11

OVERVIEW

• Data
• Disturbed artists: examples
• The cult of the tortured artist
• Creativity: consequence of a mental disorder
• Bipolar disorder
• Bipolar disorder: example of Robert Schumann
• Schizophrenia
• Discussion

DATA

• Highly creative people: psychiatric illness
• Bipolar disorder: 0.8% in the general population
  7% among eminent creative people
• Creative people - bipolar patients
  Personality traits in common
• Poets: 20 times more of:
  - mood disorders
  - suicide
  - institutionalisation

Mental illness

Art

Mental illness

Art

or

Mental illness

THE CULT OF THE TORTURED ARTIST (1)

• Seneca: « There is no great genius without a tincture of madness »
• Plato: « Madness comes from God »
• Attraction for the suffering mad artist

DISTURBED ARTISTS: EXAMPLES

BIPOLAR DISORDER

SCHIZOPHRENIA

BIPOLAR DISORDER SCHIZOPHRENIA
THE CULT OF THE TORTURED ARTIST (2)
- Poverty
- Persecution
- High stress
- Social isolation
- Substance abuse

MENTAL ILLNESS
- Source of inspiration

Creativity

CREATIVITY: CONSEQUENCE OF A MENTAL DISORDER
Psychological disease
- Changes in brain function:
  - hyperactivity in frontal lobe
  - changes in neurotransmitters’ levels
- Unusual connections between ideas
- Ability to be creative

BIPOLAR DISORDER
Mania-hypomania:
- High levels of norepinephrin and serotonin
- Excitability
- Inspiration
- Confidence
- Physical alertness
- Social inhibition
- Bizarre ideas

Depression:
- Low levels of norepinephrin and serotonin
- Creative work as a cure of depression

BIPOLAR DISORDER AND CREATIVITY: EXAMPLE OF ROBERT SCHUMANN

SCHIZOPHRENIA
Swedish study (June 2010): brains of healthy highly creative people and schizophrenic patients
- Psychological tests
- PET Scan

DISCUSSION
- Many other artists with sane, emotionally stable lives:
  Shakespeare, Einstein, Duke Ellington, Henri Poincare...
  - Stereotype of the mad genius!
- Posthumous diagnoses of mental disease (no possible verification)
- Dramatic lives ➞ biographies
- No treatment: fear of a ➞ in the creativity
TAKE HOME MESSAGE

• More mental illnesses among artists

• 2 explanations:
  - cult of the tortured artist: factors in an artist’s life providing madness
  - mental disease => unusual brain function (frontal lobe hyperactivity, changes in neurotransmitter levels)

• Particularly true in bipolar disorder and schizophrenia

• But... stereotype!!! (several sane artists, posthumous diagnoses, no treatment)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

• http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/11/art-and-mental-illness/
• http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-healing-art/200901/art-and-mental-illness-stop-the-insanity
• http://cafechauca.canalblog.com
• http://www.angelfire.com/home/bphoenix1/creativity.html
• http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-healing-art/200901/art-and-mental-illness-stop-the-insanity
• http://www.the-perfect-artist.com
• http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creativity_and_mental_illness
• http://ki.se/ki/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=100727&d=2637&l=en&newsdep=2637
• http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/22538726/ns/today-today_entertainment
• http://www.bkneuroland.fr/articles.php?lng=fr&pg=1244