

CREATIVITY AND MADNESS: A THIN LINE?

There is only one difference between a madman and me. I am not mad...Salvador Dali

WHAT TO KNOW!

- ❖ The link between madness and creativity became very popular in the 1970s but dates back to the time of Aristotle
- ❖ **Creativity** is defined as the production of something both new and valued; **madness** is defined as self-destructive psychopathological behavior
- ❖ Research has shown that highly creative people have higher rates of psychological disorders than the general population
- ❖ Famous creative figures such as Beethoven, Woolf, Hemingway, Plath, Van Gogh, Newton and Schumann have been thought to have a mental disorder
- ❖ Creativity and mental illness also tend to run in the same family lineage such as the Tennyson family
- ❖ Historically, creative people have had problems with poverty, persecution, social alienation, substance abuse, alcoholism, and high stress; these factors also cause some types of mental disorders
- ❖ Creativity is often the result of early traumatic experiences that may also contribute to depression, withdrawal, and suicidal behavior
- ❖ Depression seems to be the most common symptom among creative people, along with the correlates of alcoholism and suicide
- ❖ Creativity and madness share such common traits as heightened visual and auditory perceptions, defocused attention, flight of ideas, decreased inhibition, openness to experience, and thinking outside the box
- ❖ Creativity and madness seem to be closely related due to the sharing of many characteristics; however, they are not identical and psychopathology actually prevents creative expression
- ❖ Creative people are often unfocused, chaotic, and disconnected which allows them to bring together unrelated information to make a single creation
- ❖ Creative people tend to be more unconventional and nonconformist, seek out novel and unusual experiences, and are overall eccentric
- ❖ Research on creativity indicates that most people are creative when they are in a positive mood and mental illnesses actually decrease creativity
- ❖ People with madness feel less inhibited and may have more powerful emotions leading to daring and bold actions which can be seen as creative
- ❖ People with madness are confused about reality and seem unable to direct their thinking in a productive and effective manner
- ❖ Intellect and memory appear to be the factors that distinguish creative people from people with psychopathology as creative people can channel their rapid thoughts, intense experiences, restlessness, and novel perceptions into creative expressions

WHAT TO DO!

- ❖ If working/relating with creative individuals, be aware of the psychological risks and vulnerabilities of such talent and be supportive
- ❖ Highly creative individuals need to know how to manage potential mood vacillations
- ❖ Self care strategies can be beneficial for creative individuals with mental health issues
- ❖ Seek professional help if you believe that you have destructive mental health problems

WE CAN HELP!

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