Creativity and Mental Illness

Are creative people more likely to be mentally ill? This basic question has been debated for thousands of years, with the "mad genius" concept advanced by such luminaries as Aristotle. There are many studies that argue the answer is "yes," and several prominent scholars who argue strongly for a connection. There are also those who argue equally strongly that the core studies and scholarship underlying the mad genius myth are fundamentally flawed. This book re-examines the common view that a high level of individual creativity often correlates with a heightened risk of mental illness. It expands conventional wisdom that links creativity with mental illness, arguing that the relationship is complicated; there are some ways in which creativity is associated with mental illness, other ways in which it is associated with positive mental health, and other ways in which the two traits are simply not associated. With contributions from some of the most exciting voices in the fields of psychology, neuroscience, physics, psychiatry, and management, this is a dynamic and cutting-edge volume that will inspire new ideas and studies on this fascinating topic.

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For my brother
David S. Kaufman
(1968–2004)

Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been."
(John Greenleaf Whittier)

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Contributors

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JOHN T. DOMBROWSKI recently completed his thesis and MA in experimental psychology at the College of William and Mary. In the future, he is looking to turn his interest toward education in elementary and secondary schools, and to bridge the gap between laboratory psychology and applied settings in the classroom and through administration.

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Preface

Are creative people more likely to be mentally ill? This basic question has been debated for thousands of years, with the "mad genius" concept advanced by such luminaries as Aristotle (Runco and Albert, 2010). One of the first researchers to study creativity did so as a way of addressing this question (Lombroso, 1894). By the year 1800, according to Simonton (1994), this stereotype had become dogma. Most people today still accept this connection as a truth (Plucker *et al.*, 2004).

Yet is it true? Is creativity associated with mental illness? There are many studies that argue the answer is "yes" (e.g., Andreasen, 1987; Ludwig, 1995; Post, 1994), and several prominent scholars who argue strongly for a connection (Jamison, 1993). There are also those who argue equally strongly that the core studies and scholarship underlying the mad genius myth are fundamentally flawed (Rothenberg, 1990; Schlesinger, 2009).

More recently, researchers have explored exactly what we mean by "creativity" and "mental illness" (Silvia and Kaufman, 2010). New areas of psychology have impacted the eternal debate, as scholars from positive psychology and neuroscience have addressed this key issue. There are numerous recent studies and theories that have advanced this question. Yet most discussions of the creativity–mental illness relationship continue to cite the same decades-old work.

The goal of this book is to collect together some of the most exciting voices in the field to create a dynamic and cutting-edge edited volume that will inspire new ideas and studies on this fascinating topic. In compiling these essays, I realized that the relationship between creativity and mental illness was an international phenomenon. Studies have been conducted all across the globe, and the authors in this book represent eight countries (the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Norway, Spain, Germany, and New Zealand).

Part I of the book begins with four chapters that set up the state of the field. George Becker tracks the history of how creativity and mental illness have been. Next, Dean Keith Simonton highlights the historiometric

approach to studying the topic. Melanie Beaussart, Arielle White, Adam Pullaro, and I then cover more traditionally empirical studies. Finally, Judith Schlesinger offers an important cautionary chapter about flaws in classic papers.

Part II offers cognitive and neuroscientific perspectives on the issue. Anna Abraham discusses underlying neurocognitive mechanisms of creativity, based on studies of mental illness. Aaron Kozbelt, Scott Barry Kaufman, Deborah Walder, Luz Ospina, and Joseph Kim take an evolutionary genetics viewpoint, and then James Swain and John Swain analyze the creativity–mental illness connection using concepts from physics and brain research. Finally, Mark Papworth uses an approach based on principles from cognitive behavioral therapy.

Essays that cover the wide spectrum of mental illness comprise Part III of the book. Neus Barrantes-Vidal presents a sweeping review of creativity's relationship to both clinical and subclinical disorders. Geir Kaufmann and Astrid Kaufmann analyze the complex relationship that creativity has with mood (both positive and negative), and then Dione Healey writes about the connection creativity may have with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Part IV examines possible commonalities that creativity and mental illness may share beyond a straightforward causal relationship. Shelley Carson begins with a chapter on her shared vulnerability model. Maja Djikic and Keith Oatley discuss the "precarious triad" that may end up harming artists. Finally, Dennis Kinney and Ruth Richards review evidence from many studies for increased creativity as compensatory advantage to genes that increase liability for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. This creative advantage may help keep liability genes in the population, with practical implications for therapists and teachers, and patients and their families.

In Part V, research from the alternate perspective is presented – that creativity may be linked with positive mental health. Marie Forgeard, Anne Mecklenburg, Justin Lacasse, and Eranda Jayawickreme cover the growing area of creativity and posttraumatic growth. Todd Thrash, Emil Moldovan, Amanda Fuller, and John Dombrowski discuss the role of inspiration in the creative process, and then Michael Lowis uses the concept of psychoneuroimmunology to analyze how coping, humor, and creativity are linked.

In Part VI, Emily Nusbaum, Roger Beaty, and Paul Silvia integrate the many voices and perspectives in this volume as they offer a rumination on creativity and mental illness. Finally, I offer my own last thoughts on this issue.

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As always, love and gratitude to my family (parents Alan and Nadeen Kaufman, wife Allison, sons Jacob and Asher, and everyone else) and to my circle of friends and colleagues. I submit this manuscript to the publisher as I transition from California State University at San Bernardino to the University of Connecticut. I am thrilled at the adventures to come and grateful for the memories that have been.