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Bipolar disorder, creativity, and treatment

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There has been a long history and, in recent years, claims in both popular and professional literature for a connection between bipolar illness and creativity. A review of studies supporting this claim reveals serious flaws in sampling, methodology, presentation of results, and conclusions. Although there is, therefore, no evidence for etiological or genetic linkages, it is still necessary to explain interrelationships in those creative persons suffering from the illness. Examples of the work in progress of artists with bipolar disorder, Jackson Pollock and Edvard Munch, illustrate the use of healthy and adaptive creative cognition—Janusian (actively conceiving and using multiple opposites simultaneously) and homospatial (actively conceiving and using two or more entities in the same mental space) processes—in the former's breakthrough conception during an improvement phase in treatment leading to the development of the Abstract Expressionist Movement and in the latter's transformation of an hallucination into his famous artwork "The Scream." Treatment options that do not produce cognitive effects are important for creative persons with bipolar disorder.

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