

Are Mania & Bipolar Related to Creativity? | Dr. Andrew Huberman

I'd like to just briefly touch upon this idea that certain occupations are associated with a higher incidence of bipolar depression. And in fact it's been explored at a research level. Really there are data pointing to the fact that certain individuals of certain occupations tend to be more creative and that creativity is associated with. Again associate this isn't causal it's associated or correlated with higher levels or incidents of bipolar depression and maybe even other forms of depression. So this is a study looking at mood disorders in eminent individuals. So these are people that are not just good at what they do but are exceptional at what they do and explored the percentage of people in given professions with either depression or mania. And this was actually a data set gleaned from more than 1020th century Westerners based on their biographies that were reviewed by other people. So it's a bit of an indirect measurement. This isn't you know psychiatrist data this is data or I should say these are data that were compiled from self reports or from reads of self reports and they explored a number of different professions. So for instance they looked at people in the military or people who were professional athletes or natural scientists or social scientists uh people who occupied positions in public office or were musical performers artists nonfiction writers poetry et cetera. There are a lot of professions here. Uh I will post this or I'll post a link to it in the show note captions for you to peruse. But I'll just give you a sense of the extremes on this graph because they're very interesting. Turns out that if you were to look at the profession or I should say among the professions they looked at in this study because they didn't look at all professions those in the military and those who are professional athletes or had jobs in the social or natural sciences had the of those there was a lower percentage of those that had depression or mania. In some cases like those who are professional athletes didn't seem to have there was no incidence of mania at least in this data set. Whereas at the opposite extreme of the graph those that were poets. So these are eminent individuals people that were exceptional poets exceptional fiction writers exceptional artists or non fiction writers. Well they are especially for the poets. You find that as many as 90% of these very successful poets had either depression or mania as high as 90%. That's incredible contrast that with military where it's as few as 10% or professional athletes where it's as few as 20%. And for the

professional athletes as I mentioned before none of them had mania So does this mean that being a poet will make you manic or depressed Well first of all let's look at the poetry category it turns out that 75% of these eminent poets these highly accomplished poets had major depression whereas only about 20% of those poets had manic episodes Ok So again it's not that being a poet is gonna give you mania Certainly we're not saying that it's not that being a poet is gonna give you depression But it turns out that people with depression and people with depression and mania seem to gravitate towards poetry or at least are very successful at poetry Again associative correlative no causal relationship here But it is really striking to see how the creative occupations poetry fiction art nonfiction writing even though non fiction writing is about nonfiction it's still creative music composition theater much higher incidence of things like mania And in fact for the people in theater the actors even though the overall occurrence of depression and mania is lower than that in poets The fraction of those individuals that have mania is exceedingly high It's about 30% of those that they looked at who are actors have mania manic episodes or have full blown mania So I'm referring to these data because first of all I find them incredibly interesting right up until now we've been talking about bipolar disorder and other mood disorders for their maladaptive effects And again they're extremely maladaptive much much higher instance of of suicide et cetera But we'd be wrong to say that certain aspects of manic episodes don't lend themselves well to creativity or that certain aspects of major depression don't lend themselves well to creativity or to the performing arts or to poetry that said in no way shape or form Do I believe that being depressed is a good thing Or that being manic is a good thing Again we return to the basic foundational criteria for bipolar disorder and major depression which is that the pressured speech the not sleeping the incredible increases in energy and the flights of ideas are generally not going to lead or I think it's fair to say are not going to lead to good places in fact often lead to bad places But we would also be wrong if we didn't consider the fact that there is a somewhat inextricable relationship between mania and creativity And it could be that hypomania or brief periods of mania maybe even an hour a day or 30 minutes a day of composing or writing poetry maybe even some of the lows that we feel right some of the sadness some of the grief some of the nostalgia that we feel provided that it's not pathologic and that it's not persistent for the four or seven days that are diagnostic of bipolar two and bipolar one disorder respectively Well then we can start to view emotional states as something that can actually lend themselves to

positive outcomes and maybe even to creativity and to improved occupations So it's important that we have a nuanced view of what sadness versus depression versus major depression are It's important that we distinguish between being erratic being very energized and full blown bipolar disorder And I raise this for another reason as well Nowadays it's very common to hear people saying oh you know that person is O CD Well on the episode about O CD that I did a few weeks back that you can find if you like it Huberman lab dot com In that episode I pointed out that O CD obsessive compulsive disorder is very maladaptive right I think it's number seven as I recall on the list of debilitating diseases all diseases in terms of lost time at work suffering relationships et cetera So it's a really serious condition And yet we often hear oh that person is obsessive and as I pointed out there is obsessive compulsive personality disorder And then there is obsessive compulsive tendencies which actually benefit people but that is distinct from obsessive compulsive disorder as a clinically diagnosed thing Similarly we hear that oh somebody's being bipolar or you know they're all over the place they're bipolar Well that's a very subjective and um kind of label that people give one another in passing more and more often I'm hearing this and yet bipolar disorder whether or not it's BP one or BP two are extremely maladaptive and extremely associated with high suicide risk So while I'm not here to police people I'm not certainly not the word police or the nomenclature police I do think that whether or not you refer to people as O CD or as bipolar et cetera that's up to you All right It's not my place to say But I do think it's important that all of us understand that these psychiatric conditions carry with them tremendous maladaptive weight